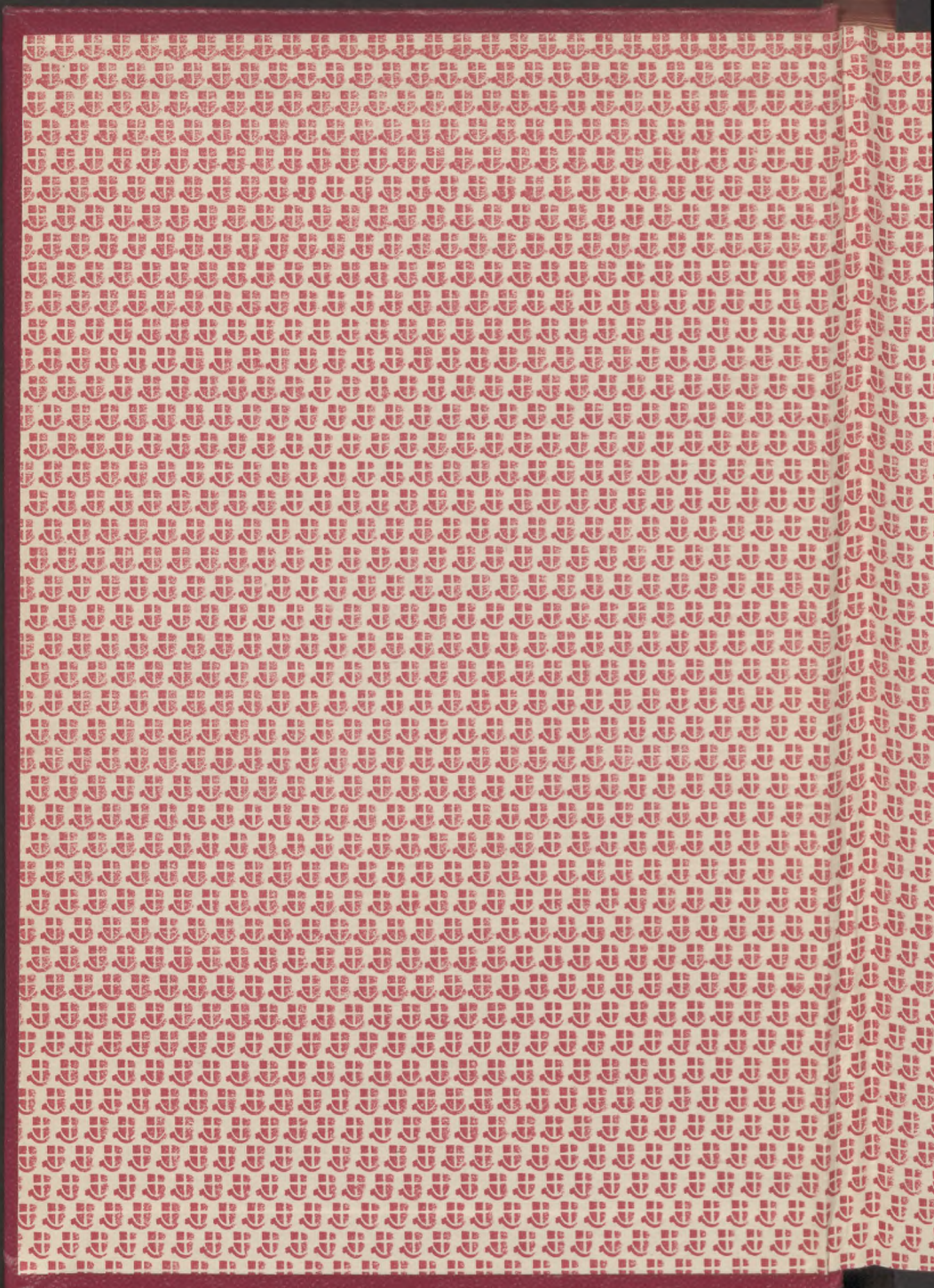
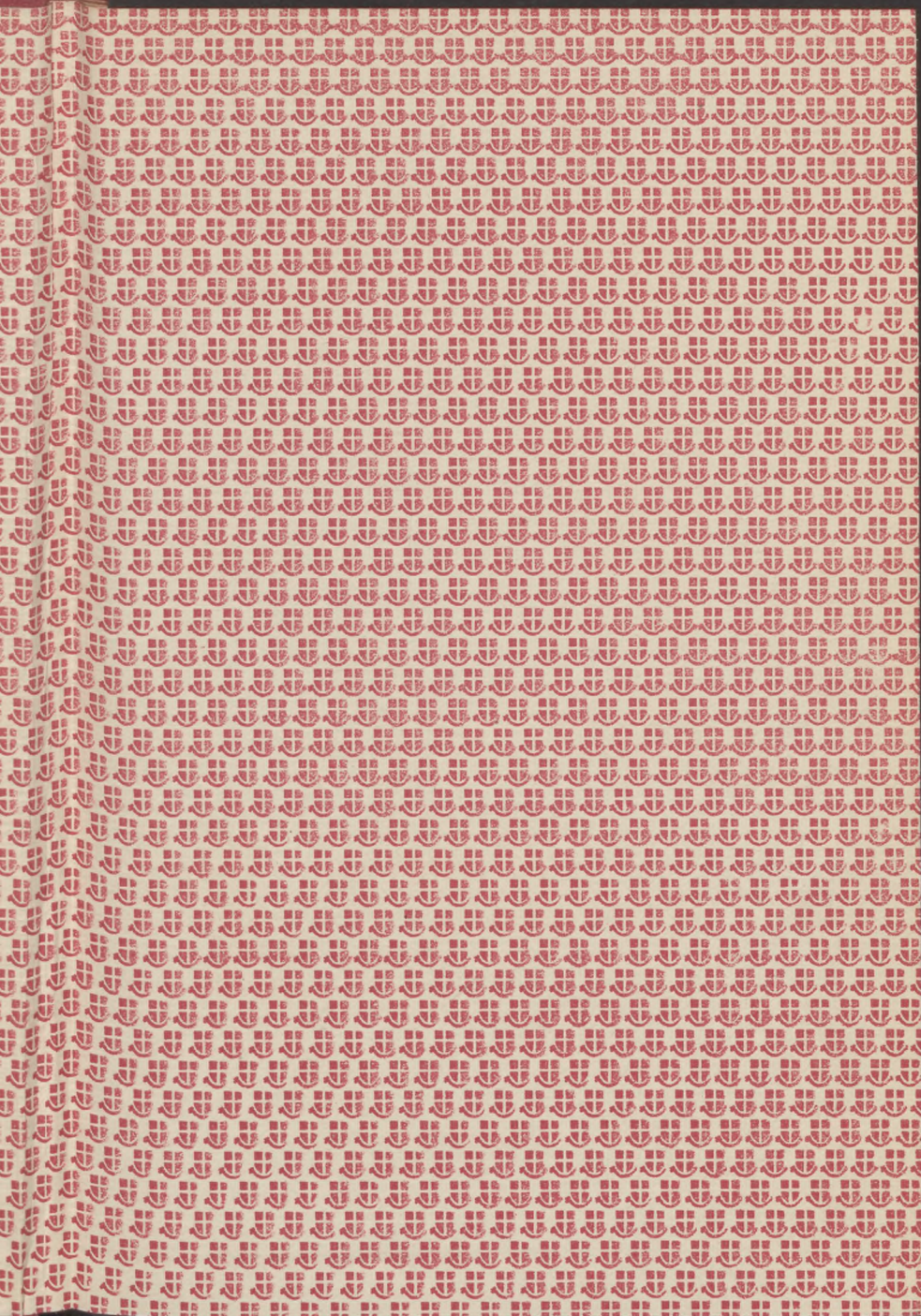


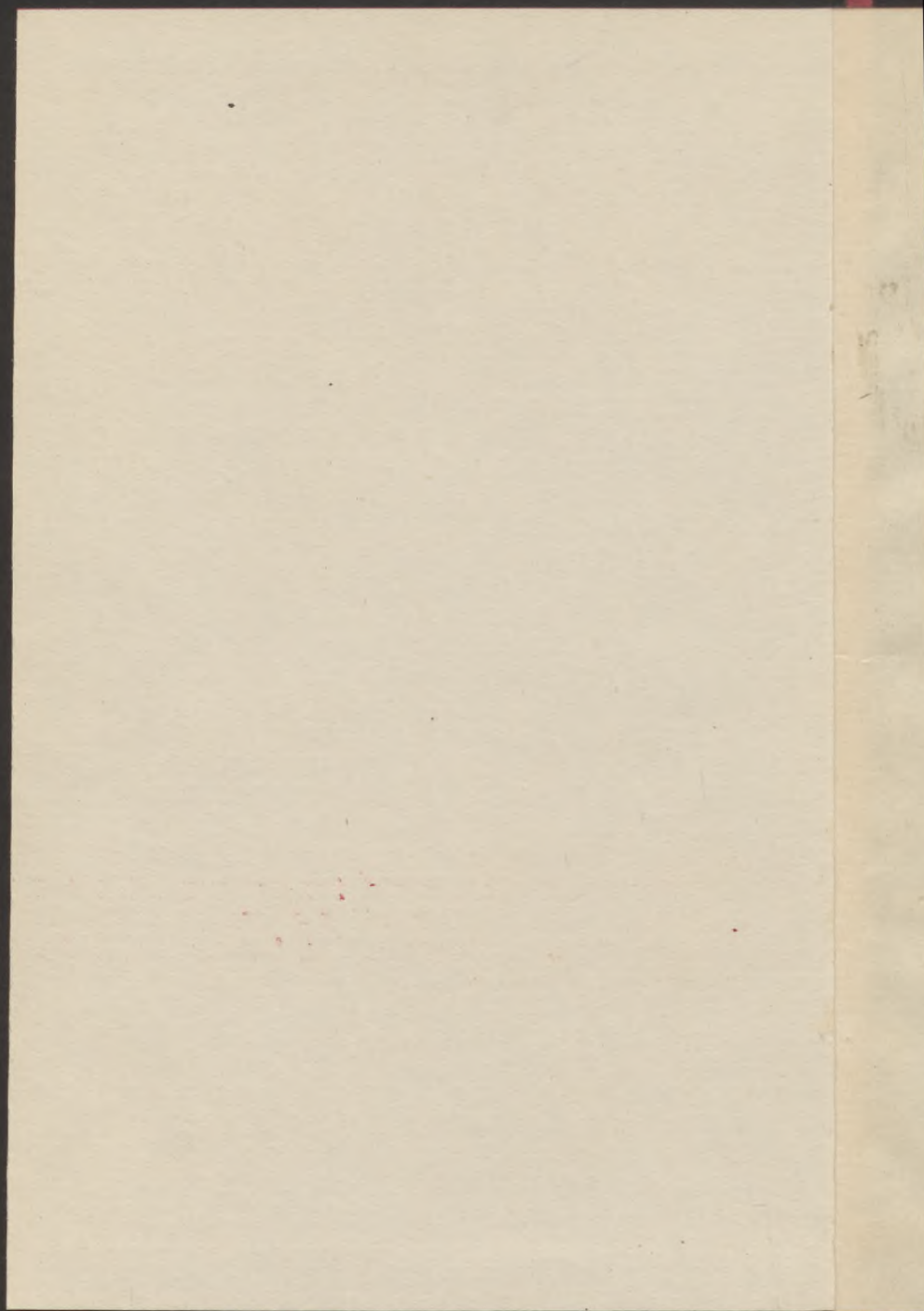
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WONDER MAID

OTHER WORKS

by Dezső Kosztolányi

NERO

by Adam de Hegedus

HUNGARIAN BACKGROUND

DON'T KEEP THE VAN MAN WAITING

REHEARSAL UNDER THE MOON

THE STATE OF THE WORLD

LONGITUDE 74 WEST

Wonder Maid



a novel by

D. KOSZTOLANYI

A STAPLES PUBLICATION



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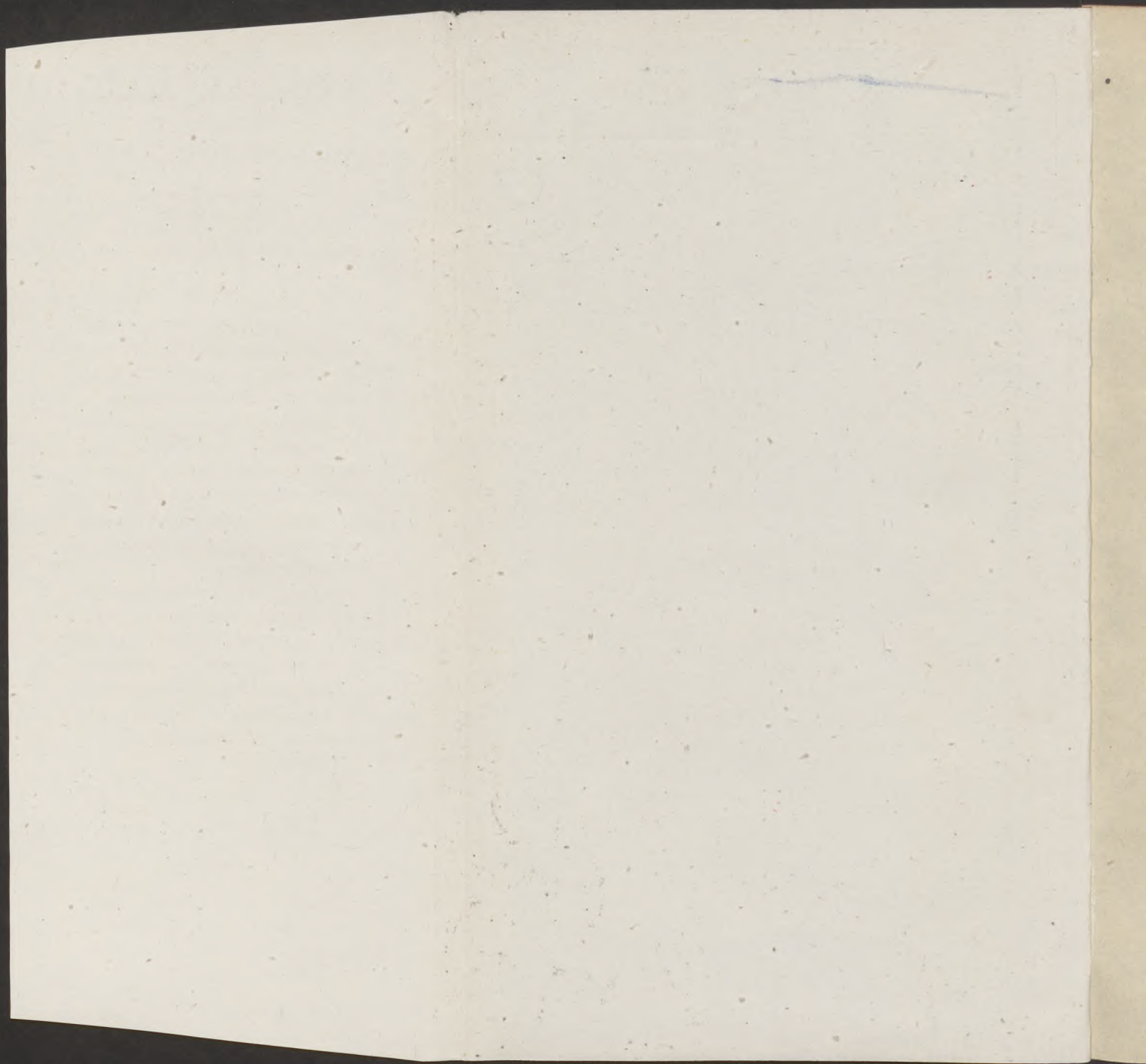
*Translated from
the Hungarian by*

ADAM DE HEGEDUS



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WONDER MAID

A Novel

BY D. KOSZTOLANYI

*Translated
from the Hungarian by*
ADAM DE HEGEDUS



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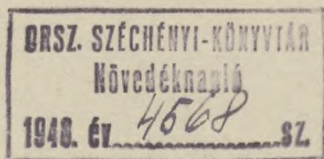


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'Oremus pro fidelibus defunctis. Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis.'

'Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis : Dolores inferni circumdederunt me.'

'Et ne nos inducas in tentationem. Sed libera nos a malo.'

'Ne tradas bestiis animas confidentes tibi. Et animas pauperorum tuorum ne obliviscaris in finem. . . .'

Extract from the Prayer for the Dead.

IT was the day when Bela Kun, the Bolshevik dictator of Hungary, decided that the game was up and fled from Budapest.

About five o'clock in the evening, an aeroplane took off and circled over the Soviet headquarters in the Hotel Hungaria. Then it headed for the Fortress, crossed the Danube, banked steeply, and made off towards the Vermezo.

Its pilot was Bela Kun in person.

His pockets were stuffed with famous Hungarian sweetmeats, and his 'plane with the pick of his loot: priceless necklaces that had graced great ladies, jewelled chalices that had been the treasure of churches. He had so much to carry that heavy golden chains hung from his arms. As his 'plane swung up and disappeared in the distance, one of them fell on the Vermezo and was picked up by a citizen of the Christina district.

Bela Kun flew low at the start of his flight, barely sixty feet above the ground. His face, haggard and unshaven, was plainly visible to the crowd below as he grinned sardonically at them and waved his hand in farewell.

On this same day, the thirty-first day of July 1919, Cornal Viza was lying sprawled on a couch in the study in his flat.

'Katica!' he shouted. 'Katica!'

Katica was standing in the kitchen, admiring herself in a small mirror and dabbing white powder on her fat face. Her figure, equally plump, was reminiscent of a pouter pigeon. It was evidently her evening out, for she was dressed in a pink blouse, white skirt, a black belt, and a new pair of patent-leather shoes.

She could hear Viza shouting; but she took no notice. The electric bells had been out of order for some time. They had gone wrong even before Bela Kun's time, during the régime of Count Michael Karolyi. Since then, anybody in the Viza household who wanted to communicate with the kitchen had to

shout, or else knock on the thin partition that separated it from the study.

Vizy's voice grew angry. Katica took a final glance at herself in the mirror, patted her hair, and waddled along the narrow hall and into the study, with her posterior wobbling as she walked.

The man of about forty who was lying on the couch was so untidy that at first sight he might have been mistaken for a tramp. He was wearing a dirty shirt, a greasy tie, flannel trousers, and a pair of slippers much the worse for wear. Only his voice suggested that he might be a person of more importance than he looked.

He was reading the latest issue of the *Red News*, holding it some distance away from him; for he was long-sighted.

What he read absorbed him so much that, for the moment, he did not notice that the maid for whom he had been shouting had at last put in an appearance. Under the headline, *The Proletariat in Grave Danger*, an article foreshadowed the coming collapse of the Communist revolution.

Katica went over to him.

'Well,' growled Vizy, 'have I got to shout for you all day?'

But at the same time, still sprawling on the couch, he shrugged his shoulders as though by way of taking the sting out of his reprimand.

Katica stared at her toes with studied indifference.

'Oh, all right,' said Vizy. He seemed to be struggling with his feelings. More mildly, though still authoritatively, he went on:

'Shut all the windows.'

Katica moved away to do what she was told.

'And the shutters too, and pull down the blinds,' Vizy added. 'They've been shouting in the street out there. But wait a minute - just let me have another look first'.

He dropped the *Red News* - it fell with a rustle of its straw-pulp paper, so brown that it seemed scorched by the flames of the world's disaster - got up from the couch, and strolled over to the open window, with his hands in his pockets.

A Bolshevik soldier was walking along the street; but he looked so forlorn, so puny, that Vizy could not regard him as a worthy object of hatred. He was a stunted, under-fed

proletarian, and the big rifle over his shoulder dwarfed him to a mere embryo of a man.

Sunset flooded the withered, trampled grass of that historic common, the Vermezo, gilded the Buda hills, the Istenhegy and the Janoshegy, and picked out the crucifix over a distant church in glittering relief.

At the top of the Granite Steps opposite the house huddled a frightened herd of men, like sheep suddenly left without a shepherd. They whispered to one another, as people did in those days, like the deaf and dumb, lip-reading rather than speaking. Otherwise, there was no sign of the change that had taken place.

There was not a cloud in the sky, but the atmosphere hung heavy as a pall, heralding a summer storm. The wind seemed to hold its breath, and all Nature to be enclosed in a gigantic box, in which the trees were toys and people mere dolls.

Amid all this silence, all this immobility, the only thing that stood out and looked alive was a poster. It represented a frenzied sailor, waving a red flag madly, with his lantern jaws wide open as though he were going to swallow the world, and bellowing 'To Arms!'.

Vizy had often passed this poster, but hitherto he had never dared to look it straight in the face. Now, for the first time, he could stare at it without blinking, just as a man is blinded by the sun at its zenith, but can gaze at it when it is setting.

Then, far away along the Christina Boulevard, he heard a lorry pounding its way into town at the speed of a fire-engine. As it came into sight, he saw that it was packed with a load of slum children on their way home from an excursion in the Zugliget, gaily waving their hands and flourishing branches of trees.

From Istenhegy hill came the faint refrain of a rousing chorus:

'This is our last decisive battle
With the International,
The human race will rise again!'

It was a dozen young men, clerks or workmen, singing with all the easy enthusiasm of youth the song which they had been taught: the *Internationale*.

Katica finished drawing the curtains. The picture of the

slum children was shut out from Vizy's eyes, the sound of the revolutionary song from his ears.

He turned towards Katica, with a smile too sweet to be wholesome.

'Well,' he said, softly, somewhat sarcastically, 'well, it's all over.'

The maid showed no sign of interest in what he said. But Vizy had to say it to somebody. His wife was not yet home, so he planted himself in front of Katica.

'Katica,' he repeated, 'Katica, it's all over.'

The maid's only answer was a look of surprise that the master should thus honour her with his confidence.

'Those scum!' Vizy went on. His nostrils dilated as he drank in all the delightful smell of revenge. 'Those scum! Now we'll . . .'

As he spoke, there came a knock at the door. Vizy turned pale. He stared about him as though he were looking for the words that had just escaped him. He waved his hand in the air, as you do when you brush away the smoke from a cigarette, by way of wiping out all trace of it.

Then he pulled himself together, with an air of determination.

'I'll answer it,' he said.

As he crossed the hall towards the door, to face whatever danger might lie on the other side of it, his walk was that of a man prepared for anything on earth.

He wondered whether the Communists might not be finished, after all. Hostage finding, search warrant, court-martial - these words flashed through his mind. He paraded his possible lines of defence: his twenty years of public service; his Marxian 'social consciousness'. He might not agree with every single implication of Communism in practice; but he was certainly for it in theory.

All at once, these reflections reassured him. He ceased to see himself in the light of a martyr on the altar of Communism. On the contrary, he felt more like a victim of the old order, which had never shown him sufficient gratitude.

He felt the outside of his breast-pocket, and was gratified to find that the Trade Union card which the Communist administration had issued him was still there. It was a piece of luck

that he had not thrown it away, as he had thought of doing earlier in the day.

He flung the hall-door open.

A little man stood before him, wearing a red-collared postman's uniform, with the tunic comfortably unfastened at the neck.

'Good evening, *Your Excellency*,' thundered the little man, loud enough for everybody in the house to hear him.

'Oh,' Vizy greeted him, 'so it's you, *Comrade*.'

'Your humble servant, *Your Excellency*.'

'Come in, *Comrade Fichor*.'

They addressed one another with equal deference, with equal politeness, with equal awkwardness.

Cornel Vizy had formerly been a Ministerial Councillor, a high-grade civil servant. It was four months since anybody had called him 'Your Excellency'. He felt rather relieved that it wasn't Communists who had knocked at his door; but at the same time, now that he had made up his mind to welcome them, he was also rather disappointed.

Fichor, on the other hand, in his capacity as part-time caretaker of No. 238 Attila Street, felt somewhat injured that Vizy, who was the owner of the house and lived in one of the flats into which it was divided, should still insist on calling him 'Comrade'.

He came into the hall and held out his hand. Vizy grasped it cordially. He had started shaking hands with Fichor since the Communists came into power. Fichor kept up the custom out of sheer politeness.

'Well,' Fichor cried, panting with excitement, 'they're finished, the scoundrels. They're running away already.'

'Are they, really?' murmured Vizy, as though this was news to him.

'Yes, Sir,' Fichor confirmed. 'The national flag has already been run up over the royal castle. My brother-in-law hoisted it with his own hands.'

Vizy failed to treat this item of information with the respect it deserved.

'The only thing that matters,' he remarked, 'is that somehow we should get peace and order.'

'The lovely red, white and green!' exclaimed Fichor, in an ecstasy of patriotism. He studied Vizy's face furtively; but it was expressionless.

'Now we'll settle them, now we can call the tune!' Fichor went on. 'You'll soon see . . .'

Vizy watched the wretched fellow changing his own tune and doing his best to ingratiate himself. But he kept his feelings to himself and said nothing.

Fichor fell into confusion.

'I came about the bells, Sir,' he stammered. 'Now that I've got some spare time, I thought I might repair them.'

'You'll find the batteries in there,' said Vizy, pointing to the kitchen.

'Oh, of course, I know where they are, Sir,' smirked Fichor. His caretaker's pride was stung by the suggestion that he did not know where the batteries were. 'Might I have the steps, Sir?'

Katica fetched the steps sulkily. She was afraid of spoiling her smart outdoor clothes.

Fichor had some difficulty about getting the steps into position in the kitchen. It was a cramped room and a gloomy one, being lit only from the courtyard and dark even in the daytime. Fichor tried to switch on the electric light; but the bulb had been out of action for months. He asked for a candle.

Then he climbed up the steps, candle in hand. In great detail he explained to Vizy exactly what was wrong. He made the most of the situation, emphasizing how important he was as caretaker and how valuable were his services. But, at the same time, he was careful to address Vizy with the utmost deference. His attitude suggested that he was embarrassed because the job he was doing now gave him a momentary superiority over 'Your Excellency'.

While Katica held the rickety steps for him he set to work with a will, eager to make up for all his deliberate negligence during the past few months. He fumbled with the batteries, took them out one by one, and laid them on the kitchen table. Then he scraped the rusty wires with a knife, put salt into the jars, and poured fresh water into them.

Fichor was still thus engaged when somebody knocked at the hall-door. Katica opened it, and a tall, distinguished-looking woman, dressed in a violet frock and hatless, came into the kitchen.

'I am honoured to see you, Madam,' Fichor greeted her, with his best bow. Then, as he got no answer, he repeated, 'I am deeply honoured, Madam.'

The lady did not respond to his greeting, but turned on her heel and went into the dining-room. Vizy followed her.

He kissed his wife. Then at last he gave free vent to his delight.

'Have you heard the news?' he asked, excitedly.

'I have,' replied Mrs Vizy. 'They say the Rumanians will be in Budapest to-night.'

'I don't believe it,' Vizy said. 'The *Entente* would never let the Rumanians occupy the city by themselves. It's to be an international occupation: Italians, French, British. Gabriel Tatar told me so.'

Mrs Vizy smoothed her amber-coloured hair, and flung herself into a rocking-chair. She stared straight in front of her, absent-mindedly. It was a habit of hers to look through people and things, as though she could see something on the other side of them.

'Where have you been?' asked Vizy. 'I was getting a bit worried about you.'

'I've been rushing round to get this.' Mrs Vizy turned in her chair, opened her white-gloved hand, and pitched a tiny parcel on to the table.

'What is it?' Vizy inquired.

'Butter.' She smiled wryly. 'For three handkerchiefs!'

At this point there was a clatter in the kitchen, as Fichor climbed up the steps again to put the batteries back.

The sound attracted Mrs Vizy's attention. She jerked her head towards the kitchen.

'What's that man doing here?' she asked.

'He came to repair the bells.'

'Why didn't he repair them before? We've been asking him for the last four months at least.'

'Well, he offered to do it now.'

'Why didn't you kick him out?'

'Kick him out?'

'Yes, kick him out. That's what he deserves, the dirty Bolshie!'

'Don't talk so loud. He'll hear you.'

'I don't care if he does hear me. I say he's a Bolshie, a dirty Bolshie. I'll soon show him! . . .'

Vizy was about to advise her not to be hasty; but his wife, with an energy surprising in her, was already on her way to the kitchen to kick Fichor out.

At this moment, however, the sound of an electric bell – that bell which had so long been dead and silent – suddenly rang through the flat. Its sharp, staccato vibration was like a triumphal peal. It created an atmosphere of hope, almost of hilarity. This revived ringing seemed to penetrate into every nook and cranny of the flat, awakening the whole place to consciousness, breathing new life into it.

In the dining-room Vizy listened to the sound entranced. Even his wife was not unaffected by it. Changing her mind about kicking Fichor out, she went in search of Katica; but she found that once again the girl had taken the evening off without telling them.

Fichor closed the door behind him.

'Well, that's all right now,' he said; and he bent down to kiss Mrs Vizy's hand. This time she let him do it.

Fichor put away the steps. Then, as though he felt that he had not done enough by mending the bells and kissing Mrs Vizy's hand, he came back to her. He seemed to be more sure of himself now. He had a conspiratorial air about him. He looked furtive, and almost whispered into her ear.

'Madam,' he said, 'I've got a girl for you.'

'What!' exclaimed Mrs Vizy.

'A maid, I mean,' Fichor explained.

Mrs Vizy wondered whether her ears had deceived her. Could he really have said that? She gazed at the caretaker eagerly, with sparkling eyes. She could not have been more delighted if he had offered her a diamond necklace.

'Where does she come from?' she asked. 'Is she a Budapest girl?'

'Oh no!' Fichor said. 'From Lake Balaton. She's a peasant-girl - a relative of mine.'

Mrs. Vizy felt more excited than ever. She had always dreamed about getting a really good peasant-girl; but such a piece of luck had never come her way.

The idea of talking about such an important subject in such a casual way outraged her sense of propriety. So, with a nod of her head, she beckoned Fichor into the kitchen, and made him sit down at the table. Then, by the flickering light of the candle, just as though she were a priest confessing him, she extracted all she could get out of him. She was so absorbed in discussing the matter in all its details that she forgot all about her husband.

When the interview was at length over, she showed Fichor out in person.

Then she went back to the kitchen. She found one of Katica's handkerchiefs lying about, picked it up in her finger-tips, sniffed at it, and dropped it on the floor in disgust. She proceeded to clear Katica's little mirror out of the way, shut the window, put the kettle on to boil, and started making toast for their evening meal.

Chapter II

SERVANT PROBLEM

THE bell rang. Mrs Vizi opened the hall-door; but there was nobody there. She went into the dining-room.

'What are you doing?' she asked Vizi.

'I was just trying it,' Vizi explained. 'It works all right.'

'So I hear.'

'Fichor seems to have made a good job of it.'

'Apparently.'

'I hope you weren't rude to him, were you?'

'No, I wasn't. Oh, leave it alone!' Mrs Vizi protested, as her husband still kept on pressing the bell-push. 'Can't you stop playing with it? Really, you're just like a child with a new toy.'

'I'm not playing with it,' said Vizi. 'I'm hungry. I want something to eat.'

'But why ring the bell?'

'I'm ringing for Katica.'

'Oh, her ladyship went out long ago.'

'Where's she gone?'

'To amuse herself, as usual, of course.'

'You mean to say she's gone out to-night?'

'She has.'

'But nobody is allowed out-of-doors to-night.'

'That won't worry Katica. That lover of hers, Louis, has turned up again. He got here on a cargo-boat.'

'When will she be back?'

'How should I know?' burst out Mrs Vizy, angrily. 'She didn't tell me. Perhaps at midnight – perhaps not till to-morrow morning.'

'She took the key with her, I suppose?'

'I suppose so.'

'That's nice, I must say. She might bring anybody in with her.'

'Oh, don't be so silly! You talk as though this were the first time it had ever happened. You really are ridiculous.'

Mrs Vizy went out and banged the door behind her, just as Katica always did.

Back in the kitchen, she started making a prodigious clatter with pots and pans. Now and again, she felt as though she had to let off steam like this. Whenever discussion of the endless troubles of their lives with her husband got on her nerves she gave vent to her feelings by such noisy upheavals. They conveyed the impression that these troubles were all her husband's fault.

She set their supper on a tray, and carried it into the dining-room. It consisted of a pot of tea, some toast, and the butter she had bought during the afternoon. Vizy had had nothing for luncheon but a piece of liver and vegetable marrow. He looked askance at the weak grass-green tea and the maize-bread, which even toasting could not make any more appetizing.

'Isn't there anything else?' he asked, with a sour face.

'How could there be anything else?'

'Aren't you going to lay the table?'

'We never do in the evening!'

'Oh, all right, Vizy said, 'it doesn't matter.' He buried his head in his hands, as was his way when anything at home went wrong, and said no more. He yearned for the white table-cloth, the rose-coloured dinner-service, the silver and cut glass of the days when they used to give dinner-parties for their friends in the Civil Service.

'Aren't you going to eat anything to-night?' he asked his wife, a little later.

Mrs Vizy rarely ate anything in the evening. For some time past she had suffered from a nervous gastric complaint, and troubled times had made it worse. She had a constant feeling of acidity in her stomach.

Instead of answering her husband, she opened a little box, stuck out her anaemic tongue, and put three dark-green pills on it. She washed them down with a glass of water, and shivered.

Vizy's appetite made up for his wife's lack of one. He felt really ravenous, and had to appease his hunger as best he could. With all the eagerness of a hungry man, he broke the dry, bitter-sweet pieces of toasted bread and spread the three ounces of butter on them. In the absence of sugar, they had to use saccharine in the tea. But Vizy did not really mind that: it was sweet enough if you stirred it thoroughly.

As he gulped down his tea, he told his wife all about meeting Gabriel Tatar in Uri-street and hearing from him that it was all over at last. 'Social production,' 'revolutionary consciousness' were things of the past. The honest, hard-working middle-class were going to come into their own again.

Vizy hated the reds. He felt that he had every reason to hate them. He had all but starved under the Communists. When they came into power, he had become a white elephant and been dismissed. It was true that they had forgotten to stop his salary; but that did not make much difference, because, owing to the depreciation of the currency, it had lost most of its value.

The war had ruined Vizy. At its outbreak he had invested all his money - about two hundred and fifty thousand gold crowns - in War Loan; for he had a blind faith that the German guns would win victory for the Central Powers. In the end, he

was left with nothing but the house in which he lived, and it brought in a very small income.

He and his wife lived on the first floor, while the two flats on the second floor were let to his family doctor, Nicholas Moviszter, and a young lawyer named Constant Druma.

The house had, of course, been 'communised' by the Reds. They had arrested Constant Druma, and he had spent two months in prison. And they had kept on harrying Moviszter the old doctor, because he was noted for his religious devotion.

On their first visit to the Vizys they had arrested Mrs Vizy. She had shaken a napkin out of the window, and they promptly accused her of making signals to counter-revolutionaries. She was taken to Parliament House, one of the Soviet headquarters, and was not released until midnight, in a state of collapse.

Next morning a young 'commissar' arrived, pulled a cane out of his leggings, waved it about, and pronounced the drawing room and the dining-room 'requisitioned by the Committee.' Thank Heaven, the Communist régime had come to an end before they had time to quarter working-class families on the Vizys!

What had hurt Vizy most of all was his relegation to political oblivion. He was a man of boundless ambition, and during these past few months, when he was a compulsory idler, his brain had revolved in a vacuum like the wings of a mill with nothing to grind.

Hitherto he had always been reserved and secretive, and never taken his wife into his confidence. But now, as they went for long walks in the Buda hills or sat in the flat waiting for the dreaded visitors, he shared his ideas with her. He delivered lectures to her on his political creed, and told her all about the 'worthless lot' who had caused nothing but trouble at the Ministry. It was almost the sole subject he could talk about.

Having finished his supper, he walked up and down the room, recalling the revolution and the counter-revolution. Now that it was all over, you could look back on it as history in the making; but what a relief that it was all over!

'Do you remember?' he kept on asking his wife. 'Do you remember? . . .'

He recalled friends of his who had been hanged; the Civil Servant who had distributed handbills in the churches and was executed in the square in front of Parliament House; the heroic 'Ludovicans', those boys from the Military Academy whom the Communist mob had hunted down as 'counter-revolutionary dogs'.

Then there was the coming of the monitors. It was immensely thrilling as they raced up the Danube under their black bouquets of smoke. Vizy had been shaving when he and his wife heard the monitors firing. For the moment they had thought it was the Communists. Then they had run up to the Tatars and watched the bombardment from an attic window. People swarmed on the embankment like ants. That was the time when Doctor Berend, the famous specialist, was shot.

Then there was the Corpus Christi procession, when a bespectacled Bolshevik on a bicycle spat on the Holy Eucharist, and was lynched by the crowd on the spot. It was a waiter who actually killed him, wasn't it?

But the most interesting incident of all was the real starting-point of the counter-revolution: the rising in Christina Square. The two of them had witnessed the whole thing from start to finish. All at once the square turned white with a mob of people waving handkerchiefs. They stopped the tramcars, and stood bare-headed as they sang the National Anthem. The Red Flag was torn down and burned. Then Red troops had rushed up in lorries and opened fire on the crowd, who fled in panic.

The Vizys had hurried home. Though it was summer, the day was grey and windy. A little girl, carrying an ivory-bound prayer-book, had collapsed just outside their house, overcome by excitement. She lay on the pavement in a dead faint, and Mrs Vizy got a glass of water for her.

What a relief it was to be able to talk openly about all these things!

'Do you remember?' Vizy kept on asking his wife. 'Do you remember? . . .'

But he got no response from Mrs Vizy. She sat staring straight in front of her. Her grey eyes, wide open, were interested in something.

At length she broke her silence.

'She'll be sleepy again to-morrow,' she said.

'Eh?' asked Viza. 'Sleepy? Who'll be sleepy?'

'Katica,' said Mrs Viza. 'She'll stay in bed till nine.'

'Oh, yes, of course, Katica,' Viza wrenched his mind away from the world outside, where history was being made, where Fate was taking shape.

'Why did you let her go out?' he asked. 'Why aren't you more strict with her?'

Mrs Viza jumped at the chance to talk about something worth while.

'Why aren't I more strict with her? Because she'd just give me notice at once, of course. You should have seen the look she gave me, the last time I hinted she shouldn't have every evening off.'

Mrs Viza jumped up and imitated Katica's whining voice.

'"If you object to my going out, I won't come back at all!" That's what she said - the slut! Then she marched off . . like this . . .'

She mimicked Katica's waddling walk.

Viza stared at his wife in amazement as her backside swayed across the room. She was so far carried away by her bad temper that she looked like somebody playing a part on the stage.

'And what did you do?' he asked.

'What did I do? What could I do? Nothing as usual. But I felt like smacking that fat, ugly face of hers.'

Viza felt sorry for her.

'Yes, these girls really are terrible,' he agreed, by way of comforting her.

'All they can do,' his wife went on, bitterly, 'is eat. They're all the same. Any one of them eats enough for two. And they all have lovers. Which reminds me' - she bent and whispered to her husband - 'there's something wrong with Katica!'

'But she's fat,' Viza said.

'Yes, of course - that's just what makes her so fat. Look at those swollen legs of hers. . . Then there's that terrible noisy brute, her brother, the railway guard, always hanging around the house. Really, she turns the place into a pot-house. She

makes me frightened – in my own home. I feel as though I were paying her to spy on us. I wish to God I never had to see her beastly yellow face again!’

‘Well,’ said Vizy philosophically, ‘are any of them any different? One’s as bad as another. It’s a waste of time talking about them.’

Mrs Vizy drew a deep breath. She was on the point of protesting; but she restrained herself.

It was all very well for her husband to say they were all exactly the same. He knew nothing. Katika was the worst so far. She was immoral, indifferent and rude. She waddled about the flat as though she owned it, and had nothing to do with the other people who lived in it.

If Mrs Vizy consulted her in the morning about what they should have for dinner, she turned up her nose and answered superciliously: ‘Oh, it’s all the same to me!’ Did anybody ever hear of such impertinence? She would never queue up for food either. Mrs Vizy herself had to go to Viatorisz, the grocer’s; queue up with other people’s servants, and wait hours for the regulation five ounces of fat, until she nearly collapsed with exhaustion.

Meanwhile Katika was having a good time with her sweetheart, that hateful sailor with his tattooed arm, who spent so much money on her. Nobody knew where he got it from.

Really the girl was a menace. Mrs Vizy had tried every way of handling her. She had been kind to her, she had been strict with her; she had reasoned with her, she had scolded her. Nothing was any good. Whatever she said went in at one of Katika’s ears and out at the other. Katika did not care that her mistress was delicate, and that she had lost a stone in weight standing in the queues. Nothing like that worried Katika. She let Mrs Vizy sweep the floors and work like a slave while she idled about – the good-for-nothing wretch!

Mrs Vizy went on brooding, with her hands in her lap. Her husband had said they were all the same. Had any of her earlier servants really been any better?

The one before Katika was certainly no better. Her name was Louisa Hering. She stole like a magpie. She stole anything she could lay her hands on, but she had a preference for handker-

chiefs. Mrs Vizy had turned her out, and gone without a girl for two months.

These Budapest girls were all terrible thieves. Another of them had stolen the gold watch her mother had left her; and yet another had unpicked her pillows and stolen half a dozen pounds of feathers from them.

Peasant girls like Erzsi Varga were hard-working; but they sent her jam and her spices home to their parents. And how they ate – Heavens, how they ate! They would have eaten her out of house and home if she had let them. Even when they were doing their housework, they were always munching bread.

Sometimes, it was true, she had run into a better sort. But they had been lured away by their sisters or forbidden to remain in service by their parents.

The Germans were clean; but they were unreliable. The Slovaks were industrious; but they were amorous. Caroline she remembered. She had two lovers at one and the same time; a corporal in the Fusiliers, and a well-known novelist past his prime. The Vizys had found her on the couch with the latter one day when they came back from their holidays.

It was curious how they managed to get lovers. There was Lidi, for example, that girl with the funny little plait coiled on top of her head. She was as ugly as sin. How were the Vizys to expect that one morning she would be found in bed with an ashen face, gasping for breath and bathed in blood? She was no longer pregnant; but she had to be taken away in an ambulance. Apparently she had carried on with everybody. She philandered with young men whenever she was sent out shopping; she was the vamp of the Christina errand-boys.

Those who were not immoral were troublesome in other ways. They broke things, or singed Mrs Vizy's clothes when they were ironing. They sang from morning till night, promenaded in Horvath Park, or read theatrical magazines and cherished secret passions for junior leads in the Budapest theatres.

One of them never stopped gossiping. Another was fastidious, did not like vegetables, would eat only the best meat, wanted the same sweets as the Vizys had, and kept on talking about her former place, where she always had the best bacon

for breakfast. That was Margaret. She would touch things only with her finger-tips, as though she were afraid of getting dirty. But she did not mind any amount of dirt around her. She left the furniture thick with dust, never wiped the glasses, and threw knives, forks and spoons into the drawers with the grease still on them. It was a good thing she did not stay very long.

All of them had left before Mrs Vizy could get used to them. None of them had stayed longer than six months. One of them had stayed only two hours. Mrs Vizy had experimented with all sorts. She had even taken a girl out of an orphanage to train, but she had turned out one of the worst of all, one of the most insolent girls she had ever had. Mrs Vizy could not stand her even for three months, and had been glad to get rid of her after a terrible scene.

Then there were Mary, and Victoria, and Helen, and Emma, and Elsie. . . She tried to remember what Elsie looked like. She saw any number of girls before her eyes: blondes, brunettes, thin girls, fat girls, who had come and gone during the twenty years she and her husband had lived in the house. They merged into one another. She found a face to which she could not fit a body, or a body with the face missing.

She searched for some little time in this strange lumber-room, and then she gave it up. What was the good of this inspection? She found no comfort in it. She could not recall one satisfactory servant.

Every one of them had let her down in one way or another. Every time it was the same thing all over again: the eternal hunt for a new girl. It was as though there were a curse on the house. She had to agree with her husband: it was a case of six of one and half a dozen of the other.

She brooded on the subject of Katica. She hated Katica more than any of them. She always hated the servant of the moment more than any of them, because the girl's presence was a constant reminder of her perpetual plight.

Meanwhile her husband was still pacing up and down the room, delivering a lecture to her on the subject of the meeting the next day, at which the Civil Servants were to review the new situation.

Mrs Vizy sat crouched in a far corner of the room like a sick animal, with a frowning face. But suddenly the lines were smoothed away from it. It lit up, just as though it were illuminated from within by one of those little electric lamps that doctors use to inspect the throat.

'I've heard of a new girl!' she exclaimed.

'That's fine,' Vizy said mechanically. His tone annoyed her.

'That's fine,' she mimicked him. 'You're not even listening to what I'm saying.'

'Yes, I am. Who recommended her?'

'Fichor.'

'And when is she coming?'

'She's in another job at the moment.'

'Where?'

'Not far from here. In Arok Street.'

'Whom does she work for?'

'Some people called Bartos.'

'Bartos, Bartos?' mused Vizy. 'Who's Bartos? Wait a moment. . . No, I don't know him.' He seemed surprised.

'Why should you know him?' Mrs Vizy burst out. Her husband was getting on her nerves to-day. 'How can you expect to know everybody? Don't be so silly.'

'And what is this Bartek?'

'I told you the name was Bartos,' his wife corrected him. 'Fichor says he's a Revenue Inspector. Just what does that mean?'

'Oh, it means he has to go about the country inspecting the Inland Revenue Offices.'

'Yes, Fichor said he was away a good deal. He's a widower with two children.'

'And what about the girl? Is she a good servant and likely to suit us?'

'How should I know? You know as much about her as I do. All I know is that Fichor said she was first-rate.'

'Then give Katika notice.'

'And be left without anybody again? No, thank you.'

'All right then, don't give her notice.'

'All Fichor said,' Mrs Vizy emphasised, 'was that perhaps this girl might be willing to come to us.'

'Perhaps we might lure her away. But it's not so easy nowadays, and we might find she was worse than any of the others. You never know.'

Vizy was getting tired of the subject of the new girl, which seemed to keep on going round in a circle.

'Why rely on Fichor?' he asked. 'Why don't you try somebody else? Lots of people have recommended girls to you.'

'Who, for example?'

'Mrs Moviszter.'

'A fat lot of use she is! All she does is say sympathetically: "Really, darling, I'm so sorry for you, having all this trouble with these girls. I must send you one." She's been saying that for the past two years; but all she ever thinks about is first nights and poetry matinees.'

'Well, what about Mrs Druma?'

'Oh, she's jealous of me. She's always glad when I'm in trouble. She comes round here to gloat over Katica's failings. She's very lucky. Her Stefi - even if she is half-witted - does all the work for her, and does it well. She even nurses the children. Then look how lucky the Moviszters are. They've had their Ethel for more than twenty years. She even helps the doctor in his surgery. She gets only half the wages I pay Katica, and the food isn't any better than ours. But still she stays. God knows why. It's all a matter of luck, like everything else. Some people are lucky, and some aren't. We aren't.' Mrs Vizy sighed, and slowly started taking out her tortoiseshell hairpins. 'We never have anything but trouble. I pay high wages, and still I have to worry all the time. Life isn't worth living. . .'

Her gloom affected Vizy. He suggested that they should go to bed. It was about ten o'clock. The light filtered through the closed shutters of the dining-room, and if there was a Red sentry outside he might shoot at their window, as one had done in July.

'Why don't you come to bed?' Vizy repeated. He was already in the bedroom, undressing.

But his wife still lingered in the doorway, staring in front of her.

'What's the matter with you?' Vizy went on. He could not understand her at all. 'Pull yourself together! You are silly,

always worrying about these girls. This eternal problem! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

His wife came into the bedroom to turn down the beds. Then Vizy saw that she was crying.

'Why, Angela!' he exclaimed. As she arranged the pillows, with great tears glittering in her eyes, like a film-star in the big scene, he tried to comfort her.

'These terrible days have got on your nerves, like everybody else's,' he said. 'It's no wonder. You need a rest. But the bad times are over now. We're at the beginning of a new era, and it's going to mean a happy phase in our lives. Don't you feel that we've started living all over again? To-day isn't an ordinary day. This July the thirty-first, nineteen hundred and nineteen, is a historical date.'

Mrs Vizy put on her hair-net.

They got into their twin-beds. For a long time past these beds had served no other purpose but sleep.

The shadowy outlines of the furniture wavered and blended into the walls. Sleep was descending upon them. But suddenly Vizy sat up, startled.

'Gun-fire!' he whispered.

'Was it?' asked his wife, sitting up too.

'I think so,' said Vizy. 'From the Vermezo.'

They listened intently. They could hear motor-cars roaring up the road to the Fortress, which was like a pulse that beat more quickly or more slowly as it registered the country's nervousness in times of political change. They could hear dogs barking; but nothing else.

'Perhaps it was a tyre,' suggested Mrs Vizy. 'Anyhow let's go to sleep.'

During the past few months they had heard the sound of gun-fire so often that they could sleep through it, like soldiers on a battlefield.

But Mrs Vizy had something more to say before she went to sleep.

'I think,' she said, a little later, 'I think we ought to try and get that girl, after all.'

'You think we ought to try?' murmured Vizy, sleepily. 'Well, try if you like. Good-night. Sleep well.'

For a time, they lay flat, side by side, under their thin summer blankets. But soon strange lights came to shine behind their closed eyelids. They stood up, and turned away from one another. They passed the limits of Space and Time, and wandered apart, mysterious masqueraders, on paths unknown even to themselves. The everyday miracle had come to pass: they were asleep and dreaming.

Chapter III

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

CORNEL Vizy slept restlessly. He lay curled up like a hedgehog, in a defensive attitude. Under cover of the bedclothes, he challenged his enemies the Reds to mortal combat and plotted their downfall. He was a political tactician even in his sleep.

When he opened his eyes in the morning, automatically he started brooding over his vanished troubles; for while he was asleep he had forgotten everything that had happened the day before. Then, still lying in bed, he remembered how life had suddenly taken a turn for the better. As reality came back to him, he recaptured all his delight of yesterday. The more he remembered, the more everything seemed newborn, everything seemed exciting.

He stretched himself and jumped out of bed. The glass of water on his bedside table glittered like liquid silver. He dressed and went out without waiting for breakfast.

People who know him by sight turned round and stared after him. His appearance suddenly brought back the happy past. He was dressed like a fashion-plate, in a dove-grey suit and a snow-white shirt. The sunlight, shining on the toe-caps of his squeaky buttoned boots, seemed to diffuse an air of gaiety all over him. As they greeted him right and left, his acquaintances wondered whether this could really be Cornel Vizy.

Mrs Vizy still lay asleep, barely breathing, with her face like wax. Her awakening was very different. A horrid surprise awaited her.

When she had said yesterday that Katica might stay out all night, she had not really believed it. But, when she got up at nine o'clock, she saw that the dirty plates and cups from supper

were still on the dining-room table. She ran into the kitchen. Katika's camp-bed was folded up in the corner, with its cover still over it.

Mrs Viza wandered from room to room, unable to settle down anywhere. Bitterness brought a lump to her throat.

She went into the drawing-room. The piano was pushed into a corner; and on it lay mirrors covered with dust-sheets, as though there were a death in the house. Under the piano were hampers full of clothes. In the dining-room there was a box full of dirty linen; and against one of the doors stood a rickety wardrobe dragged in from the hall to serve as a barricade in case tenants were quartered in the flat. In the morning light, the flat suggested all the horrors of a siege.

For fear of the Reds, Mrs Viza had dismantled the whole place. There was not a curtain or a picture anywhere. The bare walls were adorned with a crucifix, which she had refused to take down, despite all her husband's protests. The only other ornament was a photograph, standing on the sideboard; their only child, Piroška, as she lay dead amid candles and flowers at the age of six.

One April morning Piroška had come home from school complaining of a headache. They had put her to bed. She had scarlet fever; and within six hours, by the time twilight came, she was dead.

Viza was gone. He had gone back to his job, and life was beginning all over again for him.

She knew that her husband was unfaithful to her. After the shock of her little girl's death she had had to go into a sanatorium, and there she stayed for a year or two. It was then that her husband grew indifferent towards her. Since then he had been unfaithful. He behaved discreetly, he always treated her like a gentleman; but that did not alter the fact of his infidelity.

And now that slut had stayed out all night. All Mrs Viza's depression crystallized into her consciousness of Katika's sins.

She dusted the rooms, in the hope that work would help her to forget her worries. Meanwhile she thought out a suitable reception for Katika when she put in an appearance.

Katika turned up about ten o'clock in the morning. She had spent the night at the 'Woman of Trieste' with her sailor lover.

She was sleepy and dishevelled, she had smears of yesterday's rouge transferred from her cheeks to her lips, and she stank of stale wine.

Mrs Vizy was trembling with excitement, but she kept control of herself. Very quietly, she gave the girl notice, and told her she could leave on the fifteenth.

Even for the insolent girl this was a nasty knock. For once, she did not answer back. She accepted her notice as though she were dumb. Then she took the feather-duster out of her mistresses's hand and went on with her work, as though by way of compensating for this terrific blow to her self-respect.

Now that the die was cast and she had actually dismissed her maid, Mrs Vizy, for her part, was aghast at the uncertain prospect that lay before her. She felt as though she were surrounded by a void.

She hurried downstairs to get hold of Fichor.

The caretaker had just taken down the Red Flag from the front of the house, and was busy rolling the flimsy paper-cloth round its pole. Mrs Vizy took him by the arm and led him upstairs.

Even though she was with him, Fichor knocked politely at the door of the flat. He wiped his feet carefully on the mat. A day or two before, he had been an honoured guest at meals in the 'Communal Kitchen' set up in the aristocratic National Club. Now, in the presence of the Vizys, whom he had treated in so superior a fashion, he was ill at ease.

Fichor had much to answer for; and he knew it. He belonged to the party who called themselves 'Old Marxists.' He boasted that he had paid his party subscription for twenty years, and reckoned himself a member of the Red aristocracy. He was prouder of this than many a real aristocrat was of his long lineage. The Red régime had made him 'trustee' of the Vizys' house. He collected the rents, and carried out the orders of the Soviet government. He stuck out his chest, straddled his rickety legs – those legs he had worn out running upstairs and downstairs – and issued solemn warnings to the 'bourgeois' against conspiracy. It was whispered that he had obtained two pairs of brown shoes for himself, and that he was able to get first-class food. The owner of the house, on the other hand,

as a mere 'brain-worker' had to content himself with second-class food.

But Fichor's greatest sin was that, on that memorable day when Mrs Vizy was carried off to Parliament House, he had made himself scarce and put in no appearance until late at night. Vizy had hoped to ask for his patronage on behalf of Mrs Vizy; but the owner of the house had waited in the caretaker's kitchen in vain. The Vizys had made no secret of their intention to get even with Fichor at the earliest opportunity.

Now their opportunity had come. Fichor fingered his neck. Nowadays his head seemed to be worth no more than one of those bruised, battered apples that are so plentiful in the market after a storm.

But Mrs Vizy was charming. She made him sit down. She put her hand on his arm.

'Listen, Fichor,' she said, 'I want you to do something for me. I've just given Katika notice. Send me that girl you told me about. If you do, I'll be eternally grateful to you. Don't fail me.'

The caretaker nodded. He sprang to his feet, and laid his hand on the handle of the door that led to freedom. But Mrs Vizy had not finished with him.

'Didn't you say she'd been in service in Budapest for the past three years?' she asked. 'Then how is it that I've never happened to see her paying a visit to you and your wife in the basement?'

'Because she's like that, Madam. She never goes anywhere. You never see her; you never hear her. She's very a quiet girl.'

'But I hope she's a strong girl, too. Could she cope with these four rooms of ours?'

'What, these four rooms? She could cope with twice as many. She's a country girl.'

'And is she reliable?'

'Just wait till you see her, Madam. That's all I ask. Once you've seen her, I can only say . . .'

Fichor's words failed him.

'Say what?'

'That you'll be very well satisfied with her, Madam.'

At midday Fichor came back, beaming. He had seen the girl, and she was ready to enter the Vizys' service. She would come the next day to make all arrangements with her new mistress.

But she did not come the next day.

What happened that day upset everything. Budapest was occupied – but not, as Gabriel Tatar had told Vizy, by the Allies jointly. It was the Rumanians by themselves, heedless of the orders of the Allied Powers, who crossed the Tisza and occupied the city.

Amid the threadbare, half-starved people of Budapest they swaggered about in brand-new uniforms, looking as though they were dressed up for an historical pageant. Their long trumpets blared deafeningly all day. They seemed trying to remind the cowed, bewildered people of the days of the Emperor Trajan and the Roman legions that conquered the world.

Even in their wildest dreams, neither the Rumanians nor the Hungarians had ever foreseen anything like this. When the Hungarians saw the Rumanian lorries thundering along the streets, they could hardly believe their eyes. Even the Rumanians could scarcely believe theirs either. It was all so incredible that they stared at one another awkwardly, as though they were wondering how it could have happened.

The Rumanians lorded it over the city. The hotels and restaurants were full of their officers, with head-waiters bowing down before them and bell-boys respectfully escorting them. They were rather embarrassed by their stroke of luck. Like people who had strayed into a fairyland where anything they wished would come true, they grasped greedily at prizes that were showy rather than those that were of real value.

Among other things, they requisitioned all the telephones in private flats. The Vizys watched two lorries full of apparatus and wires going along the Christina Boulevard.

They also raided arsenals, factories and even hospitals. At one hospital the requisitioning party was received by an elderly doctor, in an old-fashioned frock-coat. Almost in tears, in broken French he invoked the Allies' ban on the

Rumanian occupation and stammered a timid protest, but, at a sign from the officer in charge, the doors were pushed open, and the patients' beds and bedding were seized by way of reparations.

On the other hand, the Rumanians offered no violence to the citizens, did no damage to private property, and suppressed any attempts at looting.

With the Reds, however, they dealt with a heavy hand. In a series of domiciliary visits, the Red ringleaders were arrested and marched off in handcuffs, pale with anxiety over their fate. The 'tune' that Fichor had talked about to Vizy was being called.

The Vizys' house hummed like a beehive in response to the general excitement of these stirring days. One day Druma the lawyer ran upstairs, with his attaché-case under his arm, waving his free hand and shouting that the moderate Socialist government had been overthrown and a *bourgeois* government was now in power. Another day, Mrs Druma brought her little boy in from a walk crying with fright because they had been caught in a riot. Dr. Moviszter's patients, as they came downstairs, stood outside the Vizys' door talking politics. Ethel, the Moviszters' servant, related how she had seen a Communist nearly lynched. Stefi, the Druma's servant, was so keen a politician that she spent her evenings off attending mass-meetings. One night, flushed with excitement, she hung over the bannisters on the second floor, delivered a rehash of a speech she had heard, and proclaimed at the top of her voice that all Reds ought to be hanged.

Mrs Vizy avoided the hectic staircase as much as she could; but she had to keep in touch with Fichor.

'Tell me,' she asked him one day, 'what is the girl's religion?'

'She's a Catholic, Madam,' Fichor said.

Mrs Vizy was pleased to hear that. Catholic girls were nice and biddable, not pig-headed and stuck-up like Calvinist girls. On the other hand, they were extravagant, given to singing, and they were easily influenced in the wrong direction. If they started going downhill, there was no stopping them. From Heaven they went straight to Hell.

Another day she met the caretaker in Christina Square.

'And where was she born?' she asked.

'She's my sister-in-law's daughter,' Fichor told her. 'She was born at Kajar, in the Balaton district.'

Mrs Vizy was delighted to hear that. Some years ago, before her little daughter died, they had all spent their summer holidays on Lake Balaton. She had happy memories of that holiday made up of childish laughter, lapping waves and gipsy music. Besides, she seemed to remember hearing good reports about Balaton girls.

In the market-place, she ran across Fichor's plump wife.

'By the way,' she asked her, 'what's this girl's name?'

'Oh, didn't my husband tell you, Madam?' said Mrs Fichor, in surprise. 'Her name is Anna.'

'Anna...Anna,' Mrs Vizy repeated. This soft feminine name appealed to her. She had never had a servant named Anna, or a relation either. If she had, it might have been a bad omen. Anna...The name comforted her. It seemed to fall upon her ears as manna fell from heaven. It sounded soft, soothing, virginal.

Fichor was doing everything he could to lure his young relative into the Vizys' service. He had lost no time at the start, and now he and his wife took turns running over to Arok street.

He was well aware what was at stake for him. These were dangerous times for Communists. Every day saw them being thrown out of their jobs. One day a young man passed the Fichors' door dabbing with his handkerchief at his temple, from which a thin trickle of blood was running. Such sights led the caretaker to redouble his efforts. But they did not prove very fruitful.

At the moment Bartos was away, and Fichor could negotiate only with his sister-in-law, Mrs Czifka, who kept house for him. She told Fichor that Bartos would not let Anna go unless Fichor could get him another girl just as good.

Fichor decided he would do better to try and influence Anna herself. But Anna was hesitant. She did not understand why Fichor wanted her to make a change. She was fond of the Bartos children, Andris and Stephen, and did not want to leave them. She promised to come and discuss the matter with

the Fichors; but she never went. When they went to see her, she told them that she was still 'making up her mind.'

Mrs Vizy was full of reproaches.

'Why on earth don't you bring that girl to see me?' she asked him one day. 'I'd like to see her at least.'

'This is her washing-day, Madam,' Fichor said.

'Do you mean to say she does washing too?'

'Oh, yes, she does all the washing, and all the ironing. She's and excellent laundress.'

Another time Fichor's excuse was that Anna was taking one of the children for a walk.

'Which one? Little Andris?' asked Mrs Vizy, who was getting to know all about the Bartos family.

'Yes,' said Fichor, 'little Andris - the one who's just four.'

'Look here, you are not misleading me are you? Tell me the truth. I must know whether I can count on this girl.'

'Certainly you can count on her, Madam,' Fichor assured her, 'and that's the truth.'

For some time afterwards, however, Mrs Vizy saw nothing of the caretaker. He worked overtime at the Post Office, and crept in and out of the house furtively. His wife always told Mrs Vizy that he has 'just gone to see that girl.'

Meanwhile the middle of the month was approaching with startling rapidity. Mrs Vizy wondered whether she should not retain Katica after all. Now that she had given the girl notice, now that she was not chained to her forever, Katica struck her as less objectionable. But Katica had got another job at a chemist's and was going there on the fifteenth.

Mrs Vizy realised that, with the winter coming on and the city in a disturbed state, she was going to be left without a servant.

Her husband would get more peevish than ever. They would not be able to entertain anybody or go anywhere. It would be just like those two terrible months after Louisa Hering left. The memory of that time preyed on her like an evil spirit.

It was beginning to look as though she would have to give up hope of getting Anna. But she was not going to give up hope of getting somebody without a struggle. After all, her father had been a colonel in the Hussars, and both her grand-

fathers had been soldiers too. The blood of her martial ancestors seemed to give her strength for battle.

She made a tour of the city. She tramped the streets all day long. She asked friends whom she had long neglected whether they could help her. Everywhere she was met with a pitying smile. She became familiar with all the stations of this Way of the Cross.

First of all, she went to the police station. But nowadays the police were much engaged otherwise. The 'Black Marias' came and went with rich hauls of Reds. On benches in the courtyard, Communist suspects huddled together, old men, young men, women in rags, women in silk, with their eyes red with weeping, awaiting their fate.

Mrs Vizy sent in her card to the officer in charge of the allotting of servants. He knew what she wanted; but all he could do for her was see her out of turn. He looked at her with a kind of tired sympathy, as neurologists look at incurable patients. The only consolation he could give her was to advise her to try the registry offices.

It was with no high hopes that she set out. They might, at the most, be able to give her some information. Their signs, promising cooks, housemaids, wet-nurses, servants of every kind, proclaimed a copious Canaan that had long since vanished into thin air. They were just like the signs of the cheap restaurants, whose gold lettering proclaimed: 'Hot meals obtainable at all hours, day or night,' when they had nothing at all left to offer; or those of the tobacconists, which boasted 'all brands of Hungarian and foreign tobaccos,' when they were reduced to selling cigarette-holders and flints.

There were no girls to be had, it seemed, in all Budapest. Mrs Vizy went from one registry office to another. At last, in the Francis Town, she found one which actually had some servants to offer.

The agent in charge greeted her with a bow. She had known him for a long time, just as she knew the man in charge of every servants' registry office in the city. He was a pale-faced, foxy-looking little rascal, with his waistcoat adorned with a silver watch chain. He played up to every potential mistress, and made a point of calling every servant, young or

old, a 'girl.' In an ingratiating tone of voice, he offered Mrs Vizy his wares.

The 'girls' were sitting all round the room, like wallflowers at some ghastly ball. They were chattering to one another; but they suddenly stopped talking as Mrs Vizy entered. By way of making a proper impression on her, they tried to assume attitudes in which naturalness blended with aloofness. But they could not keep their eyes off this woman who might prove to be the fate of one of them. They looked down upon her and looked up to her at one and the same time.

Mrs Vizy, for her part, did not need to give them more than a glance. She could tell at once that they were discarded remnants, like the leavings of a clearance sale.

After all, she said to herself, why should any peasants send their daughters to Budapest nowadays, when currency had ceased to be worth anything, whereas the peasants could drown themselves in milk and were getting so rich that they could teach their children to play the piano?

Still, out of sheer curiosity she made one or two trials. One of the girls to whom she spoke was sitting with her legs crossed and did not take the trouble to stand up to answer her. Another of them certainly stood up; but she lost no time in asking Mrs Vizy, with the most brazen insolence, to give her back her reference-book. The rest tittered, nudged one another, and looked at Mrs Vizy askance.

One of them, however, would have been glad to come to her. She was a white haired old cook in her sixties, who looked like a cross between a decayed gentlewoman and a medieval poisoner. The head of the registry-office assured Mrs Vizy that she had been cook in the best provincial restaurants, and that she was quite competent to undertake house-work too. But the old lady seemed very feeble, as though all her strength had run out long ago in restaurant dish-water. Surely, thought Mrs Vizy, she was not yet reduced to this.

She looked round in despair. The room was scarcely enlivened by the fly-blown paper roses which bloomed in a cheap vase on a table in the middle of the room. The atmosphere reeked of perspiration.

When she left, she had a headache. By the evening, this

developed into an attack of the violent pain on one side of her head from which she used to suffer, but which she had not had for a long time past. She tied a damp towel round her forehead and sat down in the dark.

She wondered why she was so depressed. It was not the fiasco of her visit to the registry offices which had depressed her; for she had not expected anything else. What she felt was more like a sense of guilt. She was guilty of disloyalty towards Anna. She had tried to get somebody else; she had tried to betray Anna. Mrs Viza made up her mind to get Anna, cost what it might.

Chapter IV

MINISTRY AND MYSTERY

MRS VIZA fought her battle single-handed at the start. She did not dare to tell her husband that she had given Katica notice.

So it was in secrecy that she went to see Druma at his office. She found it full of the relatives of Communists who were in trouble; for Druma was regarded as one of the most influential counter-revolutionaries, and everybody was eager to obtain his protection.

The young lawyer's face, always red, was still more flushed with self-importance as he greeted Mrs Viza. He would have been delighted to get Fichor five years in jail had that helped Mrs Viza; but the solution of her servant problem struck him as a more complicated matter. In any case he dictated a letter to Bartos on behalf of Mrs. Viza, demanding in the name of the law that he should release Anna from his service.

Viza came home only to bolt his meals in meditative silence. Mrs Viza did not venture to interrupt the train of his thoughts with her own paltry affairs. If she asked him where he had been or where he was going, he murmured the one word: 'Ministry.' He murmured it so enigmatically that it sounded like 'mystery.'

Public life was his whole existence, and anything outside it was a mere trifle, beneath his notice.

Once again the weather-beaten yellow Ministry building hummed with animation in the old familiar way. As soon as Viza crossed its threshold and started going up its staircase

the instinct that makes bees swarm seemed to tickle his senses. A complacent, self-conscious smile appeared on his face, which seemed to say that, though everything in the building might rank as public property, really all this belonged to him, and he to it. He felt more at home there than he did in his own flat.

The door-keeper saluted him, just the same as in the good old days. In the ante-room his smart secretary was already sifting his visitors, who were allowed to see him only after careful selection.

Once a visitor was admitted, Vizi would offer him a seat and apologise for not being able to see him sooner. He had so many things to do, he explained. His favourite expression was that he 'hadn't even time to die.' He played on the battery of bell-pushes on his desk like an energetic pianist. When the telephone rang he answered it with authority. He summoned a clerk and made him bring in a file, ran through its contents, nodded his head, and argued with the clerk in a friendly, but patronising way, in order to show his own importance to the visitor.

When the visitor was duly impressed with his importance, Vizi would turn to him and ask him if he would have a cigar. If the visitor said he would, Vizi fished his keys out of his pocket, unlocked a drawer with due deliberation, took out a box of cigars, threw back its richly-gilt lid, and finally held out the cigars with their gaudy bands. As he supplied a light, replaced the lid, and put the box away again, he reflected that, while he was one cigar the poorer, it might prove a profitable investment on his official career.

Vizi delighted in ceremonial of this kind. He loved the atmosphere of the Ministry too. About noon, the ringing of a bell announced that the Minister had arrived. Then the air of the place became almost as reverential as that of a church. Even the dignified 'Royal Hungarian' trees outside seemed to stand more solemnly erect. There were hushed whispers among Vizi's colleagues. 'Have you seen His Excellency? Is he in a good mood to-day?'

His colleagues were all old friends. Some of them were just back from Vienna or the country, where they had taken

refuge during the Red revolution. All of them were 'right-minded' and well-groomed, exhaling an odour of Eau de Cologne and Egyptian cigarettes.

On their first meeting they embraced Vizy, slapped him on the back, and generally made a fuss of him. They asked him whether it was true that he, as well as his wife, had been taken off to Parliament House. They told him all about their own sufferings and losses at the hands of those scoundrels.

Still, here they all were again, alive and well. It was like the happy reunion of an enormous family. All of them were on the friendliest terms, from the Minister's own Under-Secretary to the junior clerk. For that matter, there was always a pleasant family atmosphere about the Ministry. Everybody was always ready to do one of his colleagues a good turn inside or outside the office. Everybody was always scrupulous about addressing everybody else by his correct style and title. There was a kind of cross between military discipline and voluntary discipline. They knew that they all had the same chance, and that any one of them might some day reach the top rung of the ladder of promotion.

This was Vizy's real home, his whole world, his everything. He was an excellent official, efficient and conscientious. Everybody was agreed about this, his superiors and his subordinates alike. Nor did he lack the spirit of co-operation. If he were asked for help, he was always ready to make approaches in the proper quarter. Occasionally, too, he made sacrifices on his own account to help an orphanage or a hospital. But he did not like being asked for private charity. Charity, according to his way of thinking, was the business of organisations, not of individuals.

He was honest. His official accounts were always in order to the last penny. But he was a great believer in doing services for other people in the hope that they would some day do services for him. He secured contracts of various kinds for manufacturers and merchants who were friends of his. They showed their gratitude by never letting him pay when he bought anything from them. This was against his principles, and he was surprised every time it happened; but he would have been hurt if the expected surprise had failed to materialise.

On his birthday, the twenty-fifth of November, his friends and the shopkeepers sent him presents of all kinds. They included meat, game, cakes and wine and liquers, so that his birthday dinner-table was well stocked with food and drink. Sometimes he received a ring or a silver watch; but he never wore such things, for he prided himself on being a puritan. He put them away, and took them out and looked at them when he felt depressed. These presents might be little in comparison with the services he rendered; but they delighted him because they appealed to his self-esteem and vanity. They shed a faint halo of romance over his life.

Now Vizi was careful to cultivate his friends. He kept in touch with them at his club. He attended committee-meetings, and went to political dinner-parties. He felt that the uncertainty of the time gave him a good chance of climbing the official ladder, on the penultimate step of which he had been held up for the last ten years to his chagrin.

One evening he was asked to dinner by the Under-Secretary of his Ministry.

On such occasions, Vizi became a social asset. He even waxed talkative with his wife while he was dressing. Mrs Vizi seized the opportunity to tell him all about her troubles. Before he left for his dinner-party, she lured him to come with her and see the caretaker in the basement.

Vizi's way of dealing with the situation was very different from his wife's. Regardless of the complications in the case, he talked to Fichor as though he were reprimanding an erring subordinate at the Ministry. His wife gazed at him proudly. After all, it needed a man to take things in hand.

'Well, what about this girl Anna?' Vizi asked Fichor.

'She promised me to come, Sir,' Fichor said.

'If she promised, she must come. It's her duty.'

'She's willing enough, but her master won't let her.'

'What do you mean - won't let her? She's given him notice, hasn't she? The law defines the relations between employer and the employee; and the law must be obeyed.'

'Of course, Sir,' agreed Fichor, impressed by all these legal terms.

'In short,' Vizi wound up, 'don't you try to play the fool

with me. If this girl doesn't come, I shall go to the police. You understand that? I shall go to the police.'

This was too much for Fichor and his wife. They stared at one another, thunder-struck. The shadow of the jail fell across them. They threw up their hands in the air, as though by way of protesting against the charge of neglecting their duty, and warding off an impending doom.

Having done his job, Vizi felt a bit ashamed of bringing all the weight of his prestige to bear on a trifle like this. He glanced round the Fichors' kitchen.

The damp had crept up the walls to a height of about three feet, decorating them with black flowers as big as a hand. A musty, mouldy smell hung about the room, mingling with that of the onions, cooking on the hearth. The window was so low that only the knees of the passers-by were visible.

It was here that he had waited in vain for Fichor, that night when his wife was arrested. He had sat on that small chair for hours.

Now Fichor was dusting the same chair and begging him to sit down, 'just for a moment.' But Vizi refused to sit down. He did not like the looks of the chair, and he was afraid of soiling his dress-clothes.

He seemed to remember that, when he had seen it before, the furniture in the kitchen did not look quite so poverty-stricken. He had almost enjoyed the silence, the Biblical simplicity of the place. There had been a couch; for he had felt like lying down on it. Oh yes, there it was – or at least the remains of it. That must be it: that decrepit piece of furniture which had now collapsed for good, with the seaweed stuffing sticking out of it. In one corner of the room stood a broken jar, and beside it was a bag made out of the mauve-coloured velvet which had once covered the seats of the first-class carriages on the Hungarian State Railways. Since the revolution, it had been put to every kind of use. Some women had even made trousers for their small sons out of it.

Vizi was shocked by the barrenness of the place. He did not like the smell of it either. Holding his handkerchief to his nose, he tried to catch his wife's eye.

But Mrs Vizy was still talking in a woman's haphazard way, instead of sticking to the point as he had done.

'So you will speak to her, won't you, Fichor,' she said. 'Tell her that she must make up her mind. How would it be if you promised her a bit more than her present wages?'

'She doesn't want any more, Madam,' Fichor said. 'She doesn't worry about money.'

'Doesn't she?' Mrs Vizy's eyes lit up. 'Then what does she worry about? Perhaps she has sweethearts, has she?'

'What, Anna?' Fichor forgetful of the reverence due to rank, dug his fat wife in the ribs and burst out laughing. 'Do you hear that?' he asked Mrs Fichor. 'Anna having a lover!'

Mrs Fichor opened her thick-lipped mouth, revealing her yellow horse teeth, and laughed no less uproariously at the idea.

Mrs Vizy wondered what vices Anna could have.

'Perhaps she's greedy,' she suggested.

'She just pecks at her food like a bird.'

'Then what does she like?'

'She likes working, Madam,' said Fichor. 'Work's what she really likes.'

'She's the kind of girl,' added his wife, 'whose hands are worth their weight in gold.' She smiled, as though she could really visualize Anna with golden hands.

Mrs Vizy was not sure which of these two descriptions of Anna had the greater effect on her; the plain, unembroidered statement of the caretaker, free from any exaggeration; or the picture presented by his wife, so simply, but so poetically. Both of them had the advantage of being so general that they did not fetter her imagination but left it free to roam.

Katica was still with her; but Mrs Vizy hardly noticed her presence. She let the girl do just as she liked. She did not even try to make Katica keep the flat tidy. It was almost with pleasure that she noted how litter and dust accumulated as the days went by.

While Katica, sleepy and yawning, waddled to and fro in the kitchen, Mrs Vizy saw the other girl in her place all the time: that other girl who would make up for everything, who would move as lightly and swiftly as a fairy. How wonderful

it would be to have a girl who really liked work – nothing but work!

Mrs Vizy saved up all the hardest jobs for her in her mind, as though they were so many valuable presents for someone whom she would delight to honour.

Whenever she closed her eyes, Anna appeared before her. She expected everything from her. All Mrs Vizy needed to know about her was that her hands were worth their weight in gold. She was the girl with the golden hands. Those hands of solid yellow gold gleamed in the dark and beckoned Mrs Vizy along paths unknown.

Then something else happened.

The Rumanians shifted their quarters to the Christina, right beside the Vizys' house. At first Mrs Vizy was terrified at the sight of them; but very soon she got as much accustomed to seeing them pass beneath her window as though they had always been there, and did not even look at them.

On Sundays their dark, slim, corseted officers, reeking with scent, walked up and down the Bastion Promenade with chorus-girls, or took their temporary sweethearts for picnic-trips to the Istenhegy, where they got the Gipsies to play them Hungarian tunes which they had sung when they were sentimental students in pre-war Transylvania.

The troops, with their lorries and their waggons, pitched their camp on the Vermezo. When their camp-fires were lit in the evening, the servants girls of Budapest, who for long had seen no real soldiers, only a few wretched deserters or anaemic Reds, swarmed around them.

Katica's young man, Louis, had been arrested by the police as a dangerous burglar, who had been 'wanted' for some time. So Katica made friends with a Rumanian soldier, a shepherd-boy from the 'old Kingdom,' barely twenty years of age. This tin-hatted boy had never seen anybody so attractive as Katica. He walked up and down the Vermezo with her, with his arm round her waist and her hand in his, marvelling at her rouged lips and her tinted hair. By signs, he promised to marry her if she would come back to Rumania with him. He waited for her at the door every day with a bunch of flowers. Sometimes he even ventured into the hall.

Everybody was infuriated at Katica's conduct. Ethel refused to have anything more to do with her, on the ground that she was guilty of high treason. Stefi, for her part, denounced her as a Rumanian spy.

Mrs Vizy was equally furious. It was a scandal, a terrible shame on her house; but she dare not do anything about it, for fear of the Rumanian soldiers.

Meanwhile there had been no answer from Bartos to Druma's letter bidding him release Anna. The situation was getting desperate.

At last Mrs Vizy made up her mind to go and reconnoitre the Bartos' house on her own account. She took her parasol with her; but she did not want it. Though it was the middle of the summer, the afternoon turned into dusty grey, like an autumn evening, when darkness falls early and the wind whistles down the chimney.

She stumbled along the uneven slope of the Taban District. The Rumanian sentries on their beat made the familiar landscape of the borough almost unrecognisable.

She had a vague idea where the Bartos' lived. In the course of her conversations with Fichor, he had told her that there was a midwife in the same house, Elizabeth Karvaly, and that her sign-board, a baby being bathed, hung outside. A low gateway led to the house, and the Bartos' front door, with a glass panel, opened on to the courtyard. There was a picture of St. Florian on the wall, with a red lamp burning beneath it.

All the houses in Arok Street were crooked, sunken little buildings which looked exactly alike. Mrs Vizy lost her way among them. Then she found a half-witted old woman sitting outside a tumbledown house. With some difficulty, she got her to understand where she wanted to go. The woman told her that she had come too far, and that she must go a little way back along the street.

Mrs Vizy hurried back, like somebody with a guilty secret. She thought people were looking at her suspiciously, and she was getting frightened; but at last she caught sight of the midwife's sign.

She stole into the gateway. The picture of St. Florian and its twinkling little red lamp seemed to welcome her.

What she wanted to do was to get Anna to come out and speak to her. She meant to lure her away at once if possible. In any case, she was anxious to see what Anna looked like.

She felt in her handbag for some money, with the intention of tipping somebody to take a message in to Anna. But there was not a soul to be seen in Arok Street. The courtyard, which looked cramped and squalid under the leaden sky, was equally deserted.

As she waited irresolutely, she heard voices inside: the voices of a woman and children. She stood stock still, close to the wall.

The door with the glass panel suddenly opened, and a little barefoot boy ran out into the courtyard, followed by a woman.

Mrs Vizy's heart beat fast.

The woman was about her own height, but strong and muscular, with a brownish-yellow complexion, thick, tousled hair, and bushy eyebrows that looked like smudges of charcoal. A faded dress hung about her.

She ran after the boy, who dodged her round the well in the middle of the courtyard. Finally she caught him, and scolded him a bit. Then she picked him up in her arms, kissed him over and over again, and took him inside.

A little later, she came out again with a bucket and filled it at the well. As she turned to go back, she caught sight of Mrs. Vizy, and their eyes met.

Mrs Vizy waved her parasol at her, and then beckoned to her with her hand. But the woman did not seem to understand that she wanted to speak to her. She took no further notice of Mrs Vizy, hurried indoors, and did not reappear.

By now it was getting dark. Mrs Vizy hung about a little longer; but then a man – presumably Bartos – came to the door, doubtless wondering what she was doing there, and she decided she had better go away.

She had not managed to carry out her plan; but she did not regret her little adventure. In any case, she had now seen Anna with her own eyes. She knew that she was a strong, hard-working, kind-hearted girl. She liked her particularly because she was obviously so fond of the little boy. Mrs Vizy's imagination need no longer work *in vacuo*.

'I've seen her!' she told Fichor excitedly when she got home. 'And what do you think of her, Madam?' asked the caretaker.

'She doesn't look too bad.'

'She's a girl in a thousand. You'll soon find that out for yourself, Madam.'

'Perhaps so. But when?'

'Quite soon, Madam. We've found a girl to take her place at the Bartos', and they told us to-day that they would let her go. Don't you worry, Madam.'

Ethel and Stefi, the servants in the flats upstairs, were by now in a position to talk about the Vizy's new maid.

'Her name's Anna,' Ethel said.

'Oh, is it?' Stefi said.

The news about Anna came from Mrs. Druma, who always found out about everything. She was a nondescript, brainless little woman, who had been a nurse during the war. Druma, wounded in the head, had been one of her patients, and she had been attracted by his good looks and got him to marry her. She was forever darting about the hall, like a mouse. She talked like one, too.

'We've heard the news, my dear,' she told Mrs Vizy, as she waylaid her in her tactless, familiar fashion. 'And what are you paying her?'

Mrs Moviszter had heard the news too.

The old doctor's charming wife, wearing a rose-trimmed hat, was on her way to a dress rehearsal to which she had been invited by an actor friend, under the escort of one of the latest literary lions, when she met Mrs Vizy in Kigyo Square. She lost no time in bringing the conversation round to the subject of Anna.

'You don't say so, my dear?' she said. 'She's not with you yet? I was told she came yesterday.'

Mrs Vizy shook her head sorrowfully.

So the days rolled by, and the magic figure of Anna flickered in front of her as though in a mist, seeming ever more and more remote. Sometimes, though she had seen the girl with her own eyes, Mrs Vizy wondered whether she really existed at all, or whether she was simply a dream.

It was the fourteenth of August, a lovely summer day, sunny and warm.

After lunch, Vizy had gone to his club for coffee. His wife, left alone, sat on at table, meditating over the remains of a rice pudding.

Pushing her plate aside, she noted with surprise that there were some grains of rice hidden under it. How had they got there? She could not remember their falling off her plate. She counted them with the point of her fork. There were seven of them. She counted them again to make sure.

The number struck her as suggestive. Why were there exactly seven?

Mrs Vizy believed that everything has a meaning, that even trifles send us a message from the unseen world, and that the most trivial signs may foretell great events. At spiritualist séances she had often seen her little daughter and heard her speak quite clearly. She had no doubt about it at all.

As she put her three pills on her tongue and washed them down with a glass of wine diluted with water, she mused on what might be the good news foretold by the seven grains of rice.

At this moment, there came a timid knock at the door. Before she had time to say a word, Fichor poked his head into the room.

'May we come in, Madam?' he asked.

'Wait a minute, please.'

The head withdrew and the door closed.

Mrs Vizy clutched at the edge of the table. The sudden way in which it was all happening made her feel dizzy.

She had no stockings on, and she was wearing an old purple frock which she had worn out of doors during the revolution, in order to make herself as 'proletarian' as possible.

She hurried into her bedroom, and slipped on a white dress, champagne-coloured stockings, and a pair of brown shoes. She dressed as fast as an actress making a quick change. Then she looked at herself in the mirror. Her face looked tired and drawn. She smiled at her reflection, but the smile seemed

forced. She tried a serious expression instead, but that did not suit her either, so she adopted one midway between the two. Finally she powdered her face lightly, and at the last moment slipped on a gold bracelet.

She tip-toed back into the dining-room.

Her husband's dressing-gown was lying in a heap on the couch. She folded it up, but still the room looked untidy. The table-cloth was crooked, and the rice pudding and the dirty plates had not been cleared away. Some flies were feasting in the sugar-bowl.

She would have liked to tidy up the room, but there was no time. She was afraid to keep the girl waiting too long, in case Katica got hold of her and put her off.

She pulled the tablecloth straight, put the aluminium-headed stopper into the wine-bottle, and sat down at the table, facing the door. She put her elbows on the table, and tried to look as though she had been sitting there all the time, thinking the kind thoughts which ought to occupy the minds of ladies after lunch.

'Come in,' she said, in a low voice.

Fichor came in. For a few moments, nobody followed him. Mrs. Vizy thought he had let her down again.

'And where? . . .' she began.

'It's all right,' the caretaker reassured her. 'Here she is.'

Anna came in.

She walked straight over to Mrs Vizy, bent down, and kissed her hand, as simply and naturally as though she had known her for years.

Mrs Vizy did not draw her hand away. She always liked having her hand kissed. She enjoyed the feel of soft, warm lips on it.

Fichor said something to the girl, but Mrs Vizy did not hear what it was.

She could not hear what it was; for the blood was racing in her head and drumming at her temples. She stared fixedly at the girl, who had retreated to the door and stood there, bare-headed and with downcast eyes, holding her reference-book, in a nice, clean cloth cover, in her hand.

Mrs Vizy's face registered surprise and disappointment.

She put up her lorgnettes.

'Is this Anna?' she asked.

'Yes, Madam,' replied Fichor. He could not make out what she meant. He put his head on one side and looked at her askance. 'This is Anna. Won't she do?'

'Oh, yes,' said Mrs Vizy, in an absent-minded, hesitant kind of way. 'So this is Anna?'

Then it must have been somebody else whom she had seen that afternoon in Arok street. The woman who had run after the little boy was taller than this girl – much taller and much stronger. Her complexion was tawny-brown and her hair and eyebrows black as charcoal. Mrs Vizy was quite certain of that.

She had made a mistake. She had taken somebody else for Anna: perhaps Bartos's sister-in-law, about whom Fichor had told her.

She realised this at once; but still it took her some little time to banish the woman in the red dress whom, in her imagination, she had already engaged and put in Katica's place; the woman whom she had visualised doing the housework; the woman whom she had come to regard as her servant. She could not readily deprive her of all the virtues with which she had adorned her. But now she had to take all her medals from her and give them to their rightful owner, this total stranger, this shy girl who stood before her in a state of stage-fright.

Little by little, however, disappointment and surprise vanished from her face. Her expression softened as she went on looking at Anna.

Anna did not look like a peasant girl. She was not so buxom or so pink-cheeked as Elsie Varga. She was taller and slimmer, her face was oval, she was small-boned and well-proportioned. She was wearing a neat little check gingham frock, through which her childish breasts showed slightly. There was something about Anna which Mrs Vizy could not define; something that partly attracted her, partly repelled her, but in any case interested her.

She put down her lorgnettes.

Now that she was no longer looking at Anna, now that she simply let her impression of Anna sink into her, all at once she

felt that this was the girl for whom she had been searching in vain for years and years. That inner voice, which always prompted her when something important happened in her life, reassured and strengthened her. It told her not to hesitate, but to take this girl and keep her.

Suddenly Mrs Vizy wanted above all things to make Anna stay, to take possession of her. She stretched out her hand, as though she were going to grasp Anna and hold on to her forever.

'You want her reference-book, Madam?' Fichor asked.

'Yes,' said Mrs Vizy, quick to take advantage of this explanation for her impulsive movement, 'let me see her reference-book.'

She raised her eyebrows as she started reading it.

'So her name's Edes?' she said.

Mrs Vizy went on reading, half-aloud.

'Anna Edes, born at Balaton-Fo-Kajar, district of Enying, County Veszprem, Kingdom of Hungary.

'Personal description:

'Year of birth: 1900.

'Religion: Catholic.

'Stature: medium.

'Face: round.

'Eyes: blue.

'Mouth: normal.

'Hair: fair.

'Has he/she been vaccinated? Yes.

'Other identification marks: none.

'Signature: Anna Edes.'

Mrs Vizy smiled – she was not quite sure why. Perhaps it was because Anna's name was Edes, which is the Hungarian for 'Sweet.'

Then she started looking at Anna and back again to her reference-book, checking the girl's appearance with the official description of her. It was quite inadequate. Her thin hair, dragged back from her high forehead, was not fair: it was a shade midway between blonde and chestnut. Her nose, too, was not 'normal.' It was really rather an interesting nose, with its oddly attractive nostrils. Anna was a little over medium



height, but she was thin and undeveloped, still rather boyish-looking. Her lips were pale and chapped, and her hands were the rough hands of a servant, with short finger nails.

'How old are you?' Mrs Vizy asked.

'Nineteen,' Fichor answered for her. He turned to the girl. 'That's right, isn't it?'

Anna said nothing.

'Why don't you speak for yourself?' asked Mrs Vizy, turning to Anna too.

'She's very shy, Madam,' Fichor explained.

Mrs Vizy wanted to see Anna's eyes.

'And why don't you look me straight in the face?' she went on.

'She's frightened, Madam,' Fichor said.

'Frightened?' repeated Mrs Vizy. 'What of? She needn't be frightened of me.'

Anna raised her long lashes for a moment; but she lowered them again before Mrs Vizy could see her eyes.

Mrs Vizy studied her signature instead. It was written in small, scrawling letters, which might have been made by a fly with ink on its feet. She pictured Anna bent over a table in an office, taking a long time to write it.

She went on to read Anna's references.

Anna had come to Budapest in 1916, and since then she had had only two employers. One was a man called Wild, a warehouse manager, and the other was Bartos, the Customs official. She had been about eighteen months in each place.

'Just what was her job in these places?' Mrs Vizy asked Fichor.

'Looking after the children,' Fichor replied.

'You mean she was a nurse-maid?' Mrs Vizy corrected him.

Anna's references seemed quite satisfactory. Her former employers said that she was 'conscientious,' that her moral character was 'irreproachable,' and that she 'left in good health.' Mrs. Wild, however, by way of warning, had written that 'she is not yet quite reliable in her work' and also that 'she is not fully trained.'

'She's not yet fully trained, I see,' said Mrs. Vizy, 'but I suppose ...'

'She'll soon get into her work,' Fichor said in a hurry.

'I was going to say,' Mrs. Vizy went on, 'that it doesn't matter so long as she's willing to learn.'

'Oh, she's industrious enough.'

'Does she know how to cook?'

'A little.' Fichor was modest on Anna's behalf.

'A little?' Mrs Vizy exclaimed. 'I'd rather be told she can't cook at all, and then I should know where I am. They all say the same thing when they come; and then, as soon as they get a saucepan in their hands, it turns out they don't know anything about cooking. You remember Margaret, Fichor? She said she could cook a little. So did Lidi.'

Fichor remembered both of them. He nodded sympathetically.

'Well,' said Mrs Vizy, 'I'll soon get her into the way of it. In any case, she can do housework, I suppose? She can scrub floors and wash up?'

'Of course, Madam,' Fichor said.

'I shall expect her to do everything about the house,' Mrs Vizy went on hurriedly; 'she'll have to go shopping, bring up coal from the cellar, mend socks in her spare time, and so on.'

'She doesn't mind what she does,' said Fichor. 'Do you, Anna?'

'I hope not,' said Mrs Vizy. 'She'll have to work if she comes to me. I've no room for idlers. My flat must be kept spotless.'

Anna was still staring at the floor, so she could not see the lady who was saying all this. She could only hear a voice, like that of a disembodied spirit. She shuffled her feet uneasily.

Ever since she came into the Vizys' flat, she had felt sick and faint, on the verge of collapse. There was a strange, sinister smell about the place, like that of a chemist's shop: a smell that made her feel chilly and almost turned her stomach. It was the camphor which Mrs Vizy put into the piano to keep moths away from the felt hammers.

Anna did not know where the smell of medicine came from. All she knew was that she wanted to run away as fast as she could. If she had obeyed her instinctive impulse, she would have slipped out without saying a word and made her escape, down the stairs, along the streets, and never stopped until she

was back home in the meadows of Kajar. But her uncle was standing beside her, and she dared not move.

Little by little, she raised her eyes. First of all, she could see Mrs Vizy's shoes and stockings. Next, she could see the ebony case of a grandfather clock standing against the wall and ticking away steadily. The clock's tick conveyed to her an impression of elegant repose. She stole a glance into the next room. There she could see a cluster of coloured pictures reflected in a mirror, and a long, low couch covered with a red rug, which glowed like fire in the rays of the setting sun. She had never seen anything so grand as this at the Wilds' or the Bartos'. The room dazzled her. She seemed to have strayed into an enchanted castle.

'Well,' said Mrs Vizy, 'the question is: does she want to stay? Do you like the place?' she asked Anna. The girl made no reply. 'Well?' Mrs Vizy repeated.

Listlessly, almost imperceptibly, Anna shrugged her shoulders.

Everything suddenly seemed to go black before Mrs Vizy's eyes. That little gesture of defiance from a servant – she knew it so well! It threatened to bring her castle in the air, which she had taken such trouble to build, tumbling to the ground. She decided to be stern with Anna and bring matters to a head.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, sarcastically, 'but that is not the way to answer when you are spoken to. If you don't like the place – here's your reference-book.' She flung it on the table. 'You may go.'

'She didn't mean to be rude,' Fichor pleaded. 'You didn't, did you, Anna?'

'What did she mean, then?' asked Mrs Vizy.

There was a silence while she and Fichor awaited Anna's answer. At length, Anna mumbled:

'I want to stay.'

'That's all right, then,' said Mrs Vizy. 'But remember that you must always speak politely and clearly in a lady's house. If you behave yourself properly, you'll be well treated here.'

'You'll like it here, Anna,' Fichor added hastily. He was anxious to help Mrs Vizy in getting the girl to make up her mind.

'There are only the two of us, my husband and myself,' Mrs Vizi went on. 'No children.' Unconsciously, she glanced at her dead daughter's photo on the wall. Her hand went to her head in a mechanical movement and stroked her amber-coloured hair, as though the weight of it were too much for her. 'Besides,' she continued, 'this isn't like some places. You'll get plenty to eat here. I'm told that at your last place you had only soup for breakfast. Here you'll have coffee every morning, – hot coffee. Meat twice a week, and pudding on Sundays. If you turn out well now and again I'll give you a pair of shoes or a dress.'

'A dress, Anna – do you hear that?' Fichor repeated, beaming.

'And later on, perhaps' – Mrs Vizi played her trump card – 'perhaps I'll send you to a dressmaking school.'

'A dressmaking school, Anna – do you hear that?' Fichor repeated again. 'But you must work hard. You'll be with real gentlefolk here. This isn't an ordinary place. There's nothing to touch it' – he hesitated for a phrase to do the place justice – 'in the whole Christina district.'

'When can she come?' asked Mrs Vizi.

'At once,' replied Fichor.

Mrs Vizi had not counted on Anna's coming at once.

'I arranged for her to come at once, Madam,' the caretaker boasted, 'because, when I promise anything . . .'

'Where are her things?'

'Downstairs, in my kitchen.'

'Will you bring them up, please.'

Mrs Vizi waited until Fichor had gone. Then she went up to Anna and stared at her so closely that her face almost touched the girl's.

Anna stared back at her, with terror in her wide-open eyes.

The blue of her eyes was not a bright blue. It was a pale-violet, a milky blue, like the water of Lake Balaton on a misty summer's morning.

For the first time, Anna became conscious of Mrs Vizi's appearance. She saw before her a tall, pale, frigid lady, who reminded her – Anna could not tell why – of some strange bird, with shiny, bristling feathers. She backed towards the door.

To put the girl at her ease, and also to hear her speak – so far Anna had uttered only the four words: 'I want to stay' – Mrs Vizy questioned her in a kindly tone of voice.

'What does your father do?' she asked.

'He's a hired hand,' Anna replied.

'What kind of hired hand?'

'On the land. Farm labourer.'

'I see – an agricultural labourer. And has he any property of his own – a cottage, a plot, pigs?'

'No, nothing.'

'But he gets corn as part of his wages, doesn't he? You country people are so much better off than we townspeople nowadays. And what about your mother?'

'My mother . . .' Anna's voice trailed off.

'Well, what about her?'

'She's dead. I've got a stepmother. . . ' Anna caught her breath.

'Have you any brothers?'

'Yes, one.'

'Is he an agricultural labourer too?'

'He's only just come home.'

'What, from the war?'

'No, from France. He was taken prisoner.' Anna shrugged her shoulders again.

'You must not do that,' said Mrs Vizy, sharply. 'Can't you say yes or no without doing that? You'll have to get out of that bad habit.'

Still, she reflected, there was plenty of time to train Anna. She turned to more important matters. She spoke to Anna confidentially, as one woman to another.

'Have you got a young man?' she asked.

Anna shook her head. She did not exactly blush, but a pink flush suffused her high, smooth forehead.

'Be honest with me,' Mrs Vizy warned her. 'Don't deny it if you have, because I shall find out. I don't want my house to get a bad name. I won't have anybody hanging around, day or night; and I don't allow any latch-keys. Have you any friends or acquaintances?'

'No.'

'But surely you know somebody?'

'The Fichors' – Anna paused – 'and Mrs Wild' – another pause – 'and Mrs Czifka, Mr. Bartos's sister-in-law.'

'His sister-in-law? She lives in the Bartos' flat, doesn't she? Is she a tall, strong woman?'

'Yes.'

'Nobody else?'

'No.'

'Well, it's a good thing,' Mrs Vizy wound up. 'Friends only lead you astray. I don't mind if somebody comes up to town to see you – your father or your brother, for instance; but you must ask permission to see them. Otherwise, you can have every other Sunday afternoon off, from three to seven; but you must be back by seven o'clock.'

Fichor came back with a small bundle tied up in a check shawl.

Exercising her right as a mistress, Mrs Vizy opened it. She always inspected every new servant's bundle to make sure from the start that the girl was not a thief.

In Anna's bundle she found very little. It contained a few torn cotton handkerchiefs, with no monogram and so obviously not stolen; a worn blue print dress; one or two scarves; and an old pair of men's shoes, which presumably someone had given Anna. There were also a little round mirror, with an advertisement on the back of it; a metal comb, still full of tangled hair; and finally a dented tin toy-trumpet with a red tassel.

Mrs Vizy was just examining the trumpet and wondering why a servant should keep such a thing, when Katica came in to clear the table. She had her nose in the air and all the haughtiness of a duchess in high dudgeon. Mrs Vizy forbade her to touch anything, and marched her out of the room.

Fichor took advantage of her absence to sound his niece.

'Well?' he asked.

Anna said nothing.

'You'll find it a good place,' Fichor went on, 'a first-rate place. They're well off, and they own the house – the whole house. The gentleman is a Councillor – a "Right Honourable".'

Then silence fell again between uncle and niece. The tie

between them was not so much that of blood relationship as that of poverty. The poor have few happy memories to share. They simply exist together, side by side, always working, always set apart from the rest of the world by a gulf that can seldom be bridged.

Meanwhile Mrs Vizy was busy bundling Katica out of the house as though she were the corpse of somebody who had died of the plague and might infect everybody else.

She flung the girl's wages down and told her to leave at once.

While Katica packed, her mistress stood by to see that she did not take anything except her own belongings.

Katica's bundle was no bigger than Anna's; but she had plenty of self-assurance. Before she left, she ostentatiously returned a woollen jumper which Mrs Vizy had given her. Katica was afraid of infection, too. She did not want anything that reminded her of the house where she had been so humiliated.

Mrs Vizy took the jumper, and slammed the door behind Katica.

She went back to the dining-room, and spoke to Anna in quite a different tone of voice; the tone in which she would always speak to her.

'Now, Anna,' she said, 'I will show you your duties.'

She led the girl from room to room.

'This is the study. You will dust the books every day, but you must on no account move anything on the table. The master is very particular about his things not being touched. And be very careful when you dust this.'

'This' was a stuffed owl, which stared at Anna with its yellow glass eyes.

Anna, swinging her bundle, followed Mrs Vizy and Fichor at a respectful distance.

'This is the dining-room. You've seen it already. That basket is for soiled clothes. Of course, it's not meant to be in here, and we'll move it.'

They came to the drawing-room.

'It's time this room had a thorough cleaning,' said Mrs Vizy. 'Everything must be taken out, and we'll put the piano in the other corner. There's plenty of work to be done.'

Anna lingered beside the couch with the red rug. The smell

of camphor coming from the piano was so strong that she went deadly pale. Mrs Vizzy and Fichor had gone into the bedroom.

'Why doesn't she come in?' Anna heard Mrs Vizzy say to the caretaker. 'She's a curious creature. She'll certainly be difficult to begin with.'

A door with frosted glass, painted with little roses, opened into the dark, damp bathroom, in which the leaky taps dripped dolefully.

'Put out the light, please,' Mrs Vizzy ordered Anna as they left it. 'Whenever you leave a room, be sure to put out all the lights. You mustn't waste electricity in these hard times. And always close the door behind you. It's just as easy to shut a door as to leave it open. There are enough draughts in this flat anyway.'

They went into the kitchen.

'This is your . . .' Mrs Vizzy began; but she could not find the right word. 'It's not very big, but all the other girls found it all right. Don't put that there!' she went on, as Anna was laying her bundle on the table. 'How do I know your head is clean? I don't want my flat full of bugs. You must have a bath to-morrow.'

She showed Anna the pantry.

'This is always kept locked,' she said. 'Every morning, I'll give you flour, butter, sugar and anything else that is wanted for the day. Mind I don't miss anything out of here.'

Fichor took his leave. Just as he was going out, something struck Mrs Vizzy.

'By the way,' she asked, 'what about wages?'

'Oh, don't worry about that, Madam,' replied the caretaker, almost pettishly. 'Wait and see how she gets on, and then give her what you think she's worth.'

'Yes,' Mrs Vizzy agreed, 'that will be the best plan.'

She took Anna into the dining-room again, and showed her how to clear away, how to wash up, and how to put the knives, spoons and forks into the sideboard drawer.

It was now getting dark. Mrs Vizzy set the table again for the evening meal. She put a loaf of white bread on it. They could get white bread again now.

Next she got Anna to help her to turn down the beds. Finally, she gave the girl some maize-bread and a piece of cheese.

'Here's your supper,' she said. 'And here's your pillow-case.' She handed Anna a red-striped pillow-case. 'Put it on your pillow, then have your supper, and go to bed.'

She dismissed Anna for the night. The girl bent down to kiss her hand again.

'You needn't keep on doing that,' Mrs Vizy said.

Chapter VI

NEW BROOM

ANNA's eyes roamed round the kitchen. Everything seemed very strange to her.

'Have your supper and go to bed,' Mrs Vizy had said. Anna cut herself a slice of the maize-bread; but she could not take even one bite at it. The bread and the cheese had the same smell as the whole flat.

She had a struggle to open the camp-bed, with its mysterious mechanism, but finally she managed it. Then she put the cover on the pillow, undressed, got into bed, pulled over her the thin counterpane which yesterday had been used by Katica, and switched off the light.

'Dear God, I close my eyes, but Thine are open still . . .'

Little Andris had said this little prayer, and so had Stephen, and so had Mrs Wild's boy. Anna had taught it to all of them.

'While I sleep, take care of me, take care of my dear parents, take care of my benefactors. . .'

After he had said his prayers, she used to tell little Andris – he slept in a cot beside her bed – the story of the clasp-knife and the birds. It was a magic clasp-knife, and when it was opened any number of tiny, coloured birds flew out of it. The little boy fell asleep listening to this story, and in the morning he would chuckle and tell Anna that he had dreamt about the knife and the birds.

Anna repeated the prayer she had taught the children. She did not quite understand all of it; but still it usually helped to lull her to sleep. To-night, however, even though she had been

up late at the Bartos' the night before, she did not feel sleepy. She wondered whether it was late or not.

She could not get used to the position of her bed. It was against a wall, opposite the window. Besides, she was in a flat high up in the air. She had never slept anywhere except on a ground-floor before.

Through the window she could see the depressing cliff of a block of flats. Glowing squares came to life and died again as tenants turned their lights on and off.

Somewhere a pianist started playing an accompaniment. A woman's voice, a lovely one, sang song after song. The waves of music beat against the windows, and the whole house seemed to be floating and swaying upon them. At first Anna thought that the sounds came from below her, but then she decided that they must be overhead.

At length the last chord died away. All the lights in the windows opposite went out. Silence and darkness surrounded Anna.

As she got sleepier, for a moment she forgot where she was. She groped for the familiar form of her old bed, but she could feel only the wall on one side and, on the other, a black void. It gave her a sense of giddiness, as though the kitchen might overturn into an abyss.

Then, high up in the top floor of the house opposite, a little light shone out. It kept unwinking watch with Anna. At first she thought it was a star; but it was only a lamp, an ordinary oil-lamp. Yet it was brighter than a star; for all lamps are brighter than stars.

Some time after midnight, a key creaked in the lock of the hall-door. It was Vizy coming home. He had a permit from the Rumanians to be out at night. Anna could hear him talking to his wife in whispers.

Soon afterwards, somebody came into the kitchen. It was Mrs Vizy, bare-foot and in her night-dress, looking like a ghost. She had come to see whether Anna was asleep. Anna did not stir. A quarter of an hour later, Mrs. Vizy reappeared; but this time the girl did not see her. She had fallen asleep, with her head buried in her pillow.

Mrs Vizy felt uneasy.

Somebody unfamiliar was sharing the air she and her husband breathed. There was an alien presence in their home, a stranger living under their roof. She might be a close friend; or she might be a deadly enemy. She was the mysterious guest who inhabits every home that keeps a servant.

Mrs Vizy had hated Katica; but Katica had at least ceased to be a stranger. This new girl was an unknown quantity.

She did something she had never done before. She locked the doors leading from the bedroom into the drawing-room and the bathroom.

'Surely you're not frightened of her?' asked Vizy.

'No,' replied his wife, 'but still, this is her first night.'

It was scarcely daybreak when curiosity drove Mrs Vizy out of bed. She saw something that left her gaping.

Anna had already opened the windows and swept and dusted all the rooms. Mrs Vizy could scarcely believe her eyes. The girl must have got up about four o'clock in the morning, and she had worked so quietly that Mrs Vizy had not heard a sound.

Anna was on her knees in the study behind the writing-table, polishing the floor. She was wearing the blue print dress and the man's shoes which Mrs Vizy had seen in her bundle.

Mrs Vizy merely nodded to her. She knew that you should never be in a hurry to praise servants: it only spoils them.

She got Anna to grind the coffee and put the milk on to heat. Then she sent her to the baker. Next she supervised Anna as she laid the breakfast table. Finally she sent her to the bathroom 'to call the gentleman.'

Vizy was shaving in front of a mirror, with the soap on his face making him look like a snowman. Anna crept in silently, and caught hold of his hand to kiss it.

'Look out!' shouted Vizy, angrily. 'You nearly made me cut you.' He held the glittering razor-blade out of the way. 'So you're the new girl, are you?' he went on. 'What's your name - your surname, I mean? And what's your father? You're Hungarian, aren't you?'

Vizy always liked to make sure of his facts, and he introduced politics into everything. He was delighted to hear that Anna's father was a Hungarian and a farm labourer.

Breakfast that morning had a festive air about it. As she was not familiar with the ways of the household, Anna had put on the yellow tablecloth which was supposed to be used only on Sundays. Besides, once more the Vizys could listen to the idyllic tinkle of silver spoons.

Mrs Vizy's eyes followed Anna as the girl went out of the room.

'She seems all right to me,' she said.

Her husband frowned.

He did not like this over-confidence on his wife's part. Later on it might mean all the more bitter disappointment.

It was always like this at the start. His wife prided herself on her knowledge of human nature, and she was given to leaping to the wildest conclusions from the slightest of evidence. During the first twenty-four hours her latest servant was always 'a good girl.' 'She isn't like all the rest,' Mrs Vizy would say, and she would lavish on the girl adjectives usually employed only by poets.

Then came the inevitable disillusionment. The next day, she was generally silent about her 'good girl.' On the third day, she would complain that the girl was 'rather slow' or 'careless.' On the fourth day, she would grumble about her manners. Then, with dramatic suddenness, would come the climax. By the end of the week, Mrs Vizy would take her husband aside confidentially, and, in a horrified whisper, she would say: 'Would you believe it? - she steals?' Then she would proceed to pronounce the crowning condemnation: 'And, like all the rest of them, she's a whore!'

So Vizy had good ground for advising his wife to be cautious in her judgment.

'Now, mind you're not making a mistake,' he said. 'See how she gets on during the next few days. A new broom always sweeps clean, you know.'

But this new broom kept on sweeping clean.

When Anna went out with her shopping basket, in her men's shoes, there was no endless waiting for her while she stopped to gossip. She came straight back. She soon got to know Viatorisz the grocer and other shops in the neighbourhood; nor did she lose her way when Mrs Vizy sent her further afield.

She was not the country bumpkin her mistress had at first thought her. The three years she had spent in Budapest had smoothed down her rough corners. She kept the flat in order, and she was not noisy. She walked quietly, she blew her nose silently, and she had no provincial accent, except that she sometimes pronounced 'u' as 'o,' like people beyond the Danube.

But the strangest thing of all was her small appetite. The first night she had left her maize-bread and cheese untouched. She got it again for her supper the next night. She did not touch it this time either. She simply stirred her breakfast coffee and then pushed it away. For three days nothing passed her lips. Then she ate an apple at the Fichors. That, at least, had no smell.

She could not get used to the Vizy's flat, no matter how hard she tried. Her sense of smell was as keen as an animal's, and it protested against the place. When she was on her way back from shopping, she shuddered as soon as she caught sight of 238 Attila Street.

Yet Cornel Vizy's was a nice-looking house. It suggested a miniature castle. Its front was decorated with stucco roses, and its balconies hung in the air as daintily as swallows' nests. The two upper balconies, the Moviszters' and the Drumas', were open; but the Vizys' was a regular verandah, with a shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling, where they could sit and have supper in the summer. On the front of the house by the door were two enamelled plates: '*Dr Constant Druma, Lawyer;*' '*Dr Nicholas Moviszter, Med. Univ. Hours: 11 - 12 a.m., 3 - 7 p.m.*'

One day Mrs Vizy sent Anna upstairs to the Moviszters for some eggs. It was then that she found out where the beautiful music came from.

The doctor's pretty wife was sitting at the piano, in a dress cut low at the neck, with her white fingers, laden with rings, running over the keys, and singing in a clear, strong voice.

That day, too, Anna got to know the other servants in the house.

Ethel, the Moviszters' maid, sat enthroned in the kitchen, which was large and light, in a wide wicker chair. A bunch of

keys hung from her waist. She reigned over the household as though she were the head of the family. In the kitchen her word was law. She decided what the Moviszters were going to have for dinner. She was a regular tyrant. Sometimes she reprimanded her master and mistress, who were terrified of her. She went to sleep every afternoon from half past two till five. While she was asleep, the Moviszters tiptoed about the flat for fear of waking her, and the doctor himself opened the door for his patients. Ethel drank a bottle of beer at dinner and supper. She could only move about slowly, for she was getting fatter and fatter from always eating cakes. She offered some to Anna.

Stefi, the girl at the Drumas', was at first condescending with Anna. She had been in service with a Count's family in the fashionable Fortress district; but she had got tired of high society. She wanted a change, a quieter life and more freedom, and she found them at the Drumas'.

She talked about the Drumas with kindly contempt. They were a young couple, and so hard-up that their flat was only half-furnished. Stefi had taught them some society ways. She rolled the butter into pats, and announced the guests ceremoniously when they had friends to dinner. She wore a black dress and a white apron, and called herself 'the staff.' She confined her reading to papers of strongly Conservative tendencies, and associated with office-girls, chiefly Druma's typist, with whom she sometimes went out arm in arm, hoping to be taken for a typist too.

Ethel and Stefi made friends with Anna. They invited her to play cards with them in the afternoon with nuts and peas for stakes, questioned her about what the Vizys had to eat, and occasionally, borrowed the Vizys' telephone directory.

Anna did not hear much good about Mrs. Vizi from them. They called her 'stingy,' a 'miser,' a 'half-mad spiritualist.' But, whenever they asked her how she liked her place, Anna told them that she was quite satisfied.

What else could she say? Even to herself she could not explain why she felt more and more frightened every day. She simply could not stand the place.

It was not things like electric light and the telephone that worried her. She soon got used to them, even though she never understood them. For that matter, neither did the other two maids in the house. Anna, for her part, once she had been taught how to use the electric light, always looked at the bulb when she switched it on, so as to make sure that it really lit up: it was not enough for her that the room was already illuminated. For the first few days she was shy with the telephone and mixed up the mouthpiece and the receiver; but gradually she became accustomed to this curiosity too. After all, she had seen much more wonderful things on the Hungarian steppes, and accepted them in the same matter-of-fact way.

What disturbed her were other things, silly little things.

For example, one morning when she heard Mrs Vizy call her husband 'Cornel,' Anna felt that she could not stay in the place another moment.

Even the furniture and fittings held queer terrors for her.

Her first impression had been that the stove was green, but it turned out to be white. On the other hand the wall-paper in the drawing-room, which she had taken for white, proved to be green. She had supposed that the dining-room table was round, but it was really six-sided, and it was also unusually low. Some of the doors opened inwards, others outwards. All these trivial surprises upset her. Another thing that frightened her was a vase filled with peacocks' feathers. She imagined that their markings were eyes staring at her, and whenever she had to pass them she looked the other way.

In the morning, almost as soon as Anna woke up, Mrs Vizy used to come into the kitchen, in her night-clothes and with her hair dishevelled, looking as though she were angry with her. Anna could always hear her mistress coming, for the parquet floor creaked under the lightest step.

Mrs Vizy was always fussing about something. She had a horror of draughts, which she said gave her toothache and earache, and too much light got on her nerves.

She was after Anna the whole day long. She bewildered her with fidgety instructions. 'That's the way to arrange the table, girl - but for goodness' sake don't put the things too near the edge, or they'll fall off.' So Anna put everything in the middle

of the table, and her mistress moved everything until it was to her satisfaction.

Nothing Anna did was ever right. If she kept silent, Mrs Vizy wanted to know whether she had not got a tongue in her head. But if Anna remarked that something was done differently at the Bartos' Mrs Vizy stormed at her. This was *her* house, and she wanted things done *her* way, even though Anna might think she knew better than anybody else.

What Anna missed most of all, perhaps, was children. So far she had earned her living by playing with them. They had been her own playthings, and her only friends. She wanted somebody to pet, somebody to whom to tell fairy tales and recite nursery-rhymes. She felt out of her element with these serious grown-ups, whose lives revolved around hers, but remained a sealed book to her.

Within a week after her arrival, a great disaster occurred. She was cleaning the bedroom; and at the same time she was listening to Mrs Moviszter playing the piano in the flat upstairs.

On top of a cabinet in the bedroom stood a little doll's house, with fret-sawn, white lacquered furniture. It included a mirror in an ornamental gilt frame; a basin and a jug on a glass-topped stand; and a couch with a red silk coverlet, under which reposed a fluffy haired doll.

Anna, standing on a chair, was dusting the gilt framed mirror when she dropped it. It smashed to atoms. Mrs Vizy burst into the room like lightning.

'What have you broken?' she demanded. Then she saw the shattered mirror. 'Oh,' she screamed, 'you wretched girl!'

Anna jumped down from the chair, picked up the pieces, and tried to put them together. Her mistress knocked them out of her hand.

'Leave it alone!' she cried. 'It can never be mended;' and she burst into tears.

'I'll pay for it,' said Anna, quietly.

'Pay for it!' stormed Mrs Vizy. 'You can't pay for a thing like that. It was a memento of my little daughter. Go and get a broom.'

While Anna swept up the débris, her mistress stood behind her and scolded her:

'How clumsy you are! Katica never broke anything - I'll say that for her. I shall take it out of your wages, just to teach you.'

All that day Mrs Vizy brooded over the significance of a broken mirror. And what about those seven grains of rice she found under her place when Anna first came to the house? She could not reconcile the two things. She recalled what Mrs Wild had written about Anna: 'not yet quite reliable in her work'.

'She's awkward,' Mrs Vizy said to herself; 'she's going to break things.'

That evening Anna ran downstairs to the Fichors. She announced that she was not going to stay with the Vizys. She would give notice at the beginning of the next month.

Fichor was sitting on the bed, puffing at his pipe. He took it from between his teeth to snarl at Anna. He threatened her with her stepmother's wrath. How would she like to be sent home to that woman who was 'so fond of her' and would be 'so pleased to see her?' He told her to go straight back to the Vizys.

After that Anna never thought of leaving again.

But she sobbed herself to sleep, staring at the lonely little lamp in the house opposite. She felt she would never get used to the place, as long as she lived.

Chapter VII

MIRACLE

BUT, in the end, she got used to it.

When washing-day came Anna found herself faced with great greyish mounds of dirty linen: shirts, pants, clothes of every kind, all grimy with the dirt and sweat of the revolution. She boiled any amount of water, and scrubbed away at the tub, with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows. The damp made her pleasantly dizzy as she dabbled about in the creamy foam. She felt dreamy and energetic at one and the same time. Then she carried the linen away from the tub by the basketful and mangled it. When she had finished the table-cloths looked like snowy cambric, and Mr Vizy's collars gleamed like porcelain.

Then she and Mrs Vizy spent three days giving the flat a thorough autumn cleaning.

They cleared out all the drawers. Things suddenly emerged from the most unexpected places, as though they were playing hide and seek. Nine gold coins rolled out of a little box and laughed roguishly at Anna as she chased them across the floor.

Elsewhere they found other things; some Swiss bank-notes stuck in a book, where they had been put for use in case of flight and then forgotten; two door-knobs taken off for fear of looting and hidden away in a box. Wrapped in newspaper, in a pot which had once held cream cheese, were a pair of ear-rings. One of the drawers in Vizy's desk yielded half a pound of Russian tea, two tins of Belgian sardines, and two pounds of lentils.

Mrs Vizy, who lived obsessed by the idea that some day she would be destitute and die of starvation, found that she was richer than she had imagined.

Further surprises awaited her. From the depths of the wardrobe Anna extracted a royal blue petticoat, which Mrs Vizy had long since given up for lost, and a salmon-coloured silk blouse, which she thought she had given to a peasant-woman for eggs in the days when barter took the place of money. They also unearthed reels of cotton, buttons, and bits of leather of all shapes and sizes.

In her anxiety, Mrs Vizy had kept rubbish of all kinds. It was no wonder. During the past two terrible years she had learned that life was worth little and matter was worth much. Had she not read in the newspapers that the Austrian army authorities estimated the value of a living man, complete with heart and brain, at only thirty-six gold crowns; much less than the value of a horse with its harness? She might well be forgiven for losing her sense of what was valuable and what was not.

Mrs Vizy gloated over her treasure-trove like a miser, and vowed that she would be even thriftier in future.

When metal had been subject to requisition during the war, the Vizys had buried in the courtyard, at the foot of an elder-tree, an old copper mortar, worn to a mere shell, which had long been quite the pride of their kitchen. Now that the storm had passed over, Mrs Vizy got Anna to dig it out of its grave and polish its tarnish till it came to life again.

Mrs Vizy wanted everything in the flat rearranged just as it had been in the days before the war. She wanted anything that reminded her of the bad times – such as the wardrobe pushed against a door as a protection against compulsory ‘tenants’ – put back in its place.

Now there was disorder in the flat. The furniture wandered about aimlessly. An armchair which went astray and got stuck on the landing eyed the door as though it were thinking of walking downstairs. The grandfather clock, ticking no longer, lay flat on the floor as though in a faint, with an egg-whisk and a bottle of red ink inside it. Down in the courtyard tables lounged about and chairs took a nap in the sun, side by side with the couch, now robbed of its red coverlet.

Anna worked amid all this litter from morning till night, in a halo of dust. She spat black and sneezed grey. She beat the mattresses as though she had a grudge against them. She ran up to the flat and down to the courtyard a hundred times a day. She cleaned the inside of the windows, wringing her wet cloth out into the pail over and over again. Then she tied herself to the bars and cleaned the outside of the windows. She was already scrubbing the floor, rubbing it lightly with wax, and dancing and sliding about on it with hard brushes fastened to her feet to polish the large squares of parquet. She went down on her knees, as though attending a long lasting mass. She cleaned the rust off the locks with emery paper.

Then she carried the carpets down from the attic to the court-yard, took out the moth-balls, and beat and swept them. She arranged a chair here and a table there. She moved the piano a little. She hung up the chandelier, with extreme care. She replaced one or two defective bulbs. She sewed brass rings on to the cream-coloured curtains, and hung them upon their gilt rods.

The whole flat was settled by dusk on the third day. Within the next hour the hall, which had become a kind of repository for litter, was spotless.

When Vizy came home, his wife took him by the arm and ushered him in gaily.

‘Look at it, Cornel!’

Vizy gasped with surprise.

'What do you think of it?'

'Marvellous!'

'Isn't it?'

'It feels like home now – much more than it ever did before.'

It was quite a different place, there was no doubt about it. The flat, on which the dirt of years had encrusted, suddenly looked like a picture revived by careful restoration.

Vizy found himself walking on a Persian rug in the study. He examined its pattern: cherry-coloured birds perched on bushes.

'Which one is this?' he asked.

'So you don't recognise it? It's the one that used to be beside your bed. Anna cleaned it with sauerkraut.'

Everything looked as new as though it were a present. The drawing-room was overcrowded like a bazaar with little souvenir jugs and other ornaments, Budapest products or provincial handicraft, which had been piously handed down from generation to generation. Everyone of them was glistening. A cigar-cutter shone side by side with a gleaming chess-board. All the clocks were going: one ticked quietly away on top of the head of a china rabbit, another on the side of a bronze horse.

The ancestors had reappeared from their hiding places. Vizy's father, wearing the black national costume and a tie with a silver tassel. Next to him was the bishop, Camillo Patikarius, a relative of Mrs Vizy's, in a purple sash and with an orange smile on his pious clerical lips; and then an aunt of Mrs Vizy's, Theresa Patikarius, holding a fan trimmed with swansdown.

Vizy rubbed his hands, and straightened one of the pictures. That night he stayed at home.

'She likes cleanliness,' his wife told him, wagging her finger at him. 'I like her. She's clean, and she uses her head, too.'

Now, however, Mrs Vizy was more of a prisoner than she had ever been before with any of her servants. For the time being, she could not leave her alone in the flat. But Anna was not to be mentioned in the same breath as any of the others. She was valuable material, and it was worth while taking pains with her. She only required training and polishing.

By now Anna had started eating; but substitutes such as the war-coffee, saccharin and margarine went a long way with her. She did not bolt her food or keep on munching bread all the time like her predecessors. No, she was not greedy.

She got up at half past five in the morning, and never went to bed until she had finished all her work. She did not answer back either, or click her tongue against her teeth. She did nothing wrong. She simply got through her work like an invisible good fairy. What more could Mrs Vizy want?

Every day she kept on making fresh discoveries about Anna. She carried the good tidings to her husband.

'Come with me for a moment,' she said one day. 'I want to show you something.'

She led him into the kitchen. The copper mortar was burnished and back in its place of honour. Cleavers, cake-moulds, saucepans, skimmers glittered on the wall. Without being told, Anna had covered the shelves of the dresser with sheets of blue paper, which she had scissored into a pattern at the edges.

Sometimes Mrs Vizy brought a trophy into her husband's study and laid it on his desk.

'Plum-jam, made by Anna,' she told him another day. 'Just look at that marvellous ruby colour! She's got the knack of it. Uses her head, as I told you.'

Once more they had home-made cakes.

'What do you think of her?' asked Mrs Vizy. 'Aren't these cakes wonderful? She's a born cook, I really must say the girl's made good.'

Vizy was weakening; but he was not yet prepared to surrender. Formerly he had made excuses for the worst of the servants in order to keep his wife good-humoured, now oddly enough he played the part of an Opposition keeping a critical eye on the Government. He let his wife's praise of Anna pass by unheeded. He remarked that the girl did not seem very cheerful. She was a bit morose. Never said a word.

His wife spent a long time arguing how wrong he was. A servant who did her work so well as Anna could not be morose. Sometimes she even smiled. She was just a bit shy. In any case, why should he expect a servant to look cheerful? Perhaps he

would like her to be as insolent as all the rest of them? God forbid!

Everything about Anna was clear except one aspect of her, the most important, the most critical of all, which remained to be seen: her honesty. Was the girl light-fingered? That was the most difficult thing to be sure about.

Theft, Mrs Vizy was well aware, came unexpectedly, treacherously, like a haemorrhage while we are asleep. One day some trifle was missing. You supposed it had gone astray. You could not remember where you had put it. Perhaps you had lost it. But you were wrong. You found that things kept on being missing. You became conscious, with a paralysing sense of terror, that everything you possessed was in danger. Every silver spoon, every handkerchief, every lump of sugar was in deadly peril. Where are they? Yes, they are still there. You had to keep on counting them to make sure that they were all still there. You had to keep them under lock and key.

Mrs Vizy was in the habit of locking up everything. She was not going to trust Anna lightly. She decided to make an experiment.

First of all, she left a Communist banknote of twenty-five crowns lying on a chair. It was still there the next morning. She dropped a note of a hundred crowns, as though by accident. She found it on her bedside table. She stuffed a ring in between the cushions on a couch. Anna found it while she was cleaning the room and handed it back to her.

Then, as a bait, Mrs Vizy left her wardrobe open, having previously counted her handkerchiefs. None of them disappeared. Next she tried with the food: servants loved to filch coffee and sugar. She left the pantry unlocked, and pretended to forget all about it for a whole week. But when she paid her next visit to it, candle and inventory in hand, she found that every lump of sugar, every grain of coffee, was just as she had left it.

So the girl did not steal. Mrs Vizy said so in her mind but at first she scarcely believed it. Then she stopped saying so, and really believed it. Her husband believed it too. Anna did not want money, she did not want jewellery, she did not want food.

'Do you know what she does want?' Mrs Vizy asked her

husband. She answered her own question in Fichor's words: 'All she wants is work.'

Never had the Vizys possessed such a servant. At last they were really free. Vizy could devote himself to his Ministry in the safe knowledge that all was well at home. Mrs Vizy could get about again too.

Every morning she went for a walk to the mineral spring at the other end of the Elizabeth Bridge and drank a glass of lukewarm sulphur water, which she found excellent for her digestion. She paid visits to her dentist. She resumed her activities as a member of the Christina Charitable Society, which distributed clothes to poor children.

She had plenty of time now for these and other things. She could call at the Tatars' house in Uri street, where well-dressed young men swarmed around the family's two attractive girls. She could entertain some of her acquaintances. She had no real friends. She cultivated only the wives of her husband's friends in the Civil Service or in business. Her own family, the Patikarius, lived faraway at Eger. As for her husband, he had only one relative living, poor, wretched Etelka, a divorcée who eked out a miserable livelihood by hawking sham Egyptian cigarettes from door to door. Etelka was rather a trial to the Vizys. She was so 'submerged' that they could not have anything to do with her, and Vizy even cut her in the street.

Thanks to Anna, Mrs Vizy had leisure to find out how few friends she had and how heavily time could hang on her hands. Once a week she tended Piroška's grave in the Farkasret cemetery and laid a fresh bunch of chrysanthemum on it. Once a week too, on Wednesdays, she again attended meetings of the spiritualist circle, which held its séances at a villa in Aldas street, beyond the hills of the Rozsadbomb.

It was a chilly, pretentious villa, with sliding doors, silk tapestry, and statuary in classical style. Its owner, a very wealthy man, greeted the visitors with a resigned smile and handshake. Everybody knew about his tragedy: his son who had lost the power of speech sixteen years ago, and who lived in seclusion somewhere in the gloomy villa.

The leader of the circle was an infantry general. The spirits of soldiers who had died on the field of battle were summoned

at the séances, and bereaved parents waited anxiously for them to respond. A retired High Court Judge, an invalid, sat on one side of Mrs Vizy, and a Catholic priest in mufti on the other. The medium was a neurotic girl who went into contortions in her trances and spoke in German. Mrs Vizy firmly believed that from this medium a network of psychic waves, covering the whole universe, stretched out to the spirits of the departed. Piroska's spirit responded from the planet Jupiter. Once, through the agency of the medium, she filled a sheet of paper in a big scrawl with the words 'Mother, mother!' and another time she materialised out of the medium's breast in the form of ectoplasm.

On her way home from these séances on Wednesdays, Mrs Vizy could now carry her comfort away with her. She was no longer haunted by her former nightmares, no longer in dread of reaching home to find the flat plundered, with its doors smashed and its wardrobes ransacked. She knew that she would find it not only safe, but also in perfect order. She could even leave money lying about uncounted. The days were gone when she used to walk up and down the room, wringing her hands behind her and wondering what the new maid might be up to, but afraid to go and see.

When Anna left the dining room after waiting on them quietly and efficiently, the Vizys found their conversation continually turning to her. By now Vizy was no longer sceptical. He and his wife were warmly re-united in their appreciation of Anna, their adoration of Anna, their glorification of Anna. She was a treasure, and they felt proud to be the sole possessors of such a treasure.

When they went to bed, they kept on talking in whispers about things that had happened during the day which bore witness to her sense of duty, her unfailing conscientiousness. They capped one another's praises of her. They mimicked her ways and made friendly fun of her. They were both amazed and amused that anybody could be so good natured and so simple minded, so wholly honest and so wholly modest. They chuckled more and more uproariously over her as they went to sleep.

It was the beginning of an idyll which did not turn into dis-

illusion. They were not imagining all this, although a miracle had happened to them which defied all imagination. They had found the perfect girl of whom they had always dreamed, the wonder maid.

Sometimes the Vizys felt a semi-serious impulse to take Anna into their arms and thank her for all she had done for them. They played with the idea of sneaking out some evening and getting a photograph taken of the three of them, just like a family party. But they dismissed this fantastically unconventional idea almost as soon as it entered their heads. They banished it from their minds even before they could properly appreciate the humour of it. Their middle-class common sense told them that it was an absurd idea. After all, Anna was only a servant.

Chapter VIII

CONCERNING SPONGE CAKE

EVER since the counter-revolution, things had been getting better; but the country was still upset. The value of the currency kept on falling from day to day. Everybody was depressed and on edge. People spied on their neighbours and wrote anonymous letters about one another to the authorities. Some of them, who would never have acknowledged acquaintance with 'good Communists,' felt it their duty to denounce their friends now that Communists were 'bad.'

The city was stripped as bare as though it had been visited by a plague of locusts. The window of the fashionable Baroque cake shop in the fortress district could display nothing more than one shrivelled little bun, languishing all alone on a fine china dish. The tramcars, rushing madly along as though they wanted to commit suicide, were still painted red and adorned with Communist slogans.

But there were encouraging signs. People in the trams now ventured to reprimand a conductress if she was high-handed and rude to passengers. They reminded her that the days of Bolshevism were over. Once more men offered their seats to women. Chivalry, that fine flower of the Middle Ages, had come to life again. Viatorisz, the grocer, stood in the door of

his shop and greeted his customers once more. He was a faithful weather-cock, and there was no mistaking which way the wind was blowing. When the war broke out he used to nod by way of greeting customers. Later on, he would just casually acknowledge his customer's greetings; but, as the revolution approached, he got too busy to take any notice of them. Now he told Mrs Vizy that she need only telephone an order and he would deliver the goods at once.

It was another sign of the times that there were impromptu parties again at the Vizys. One afternoon Gabriel Tatar and his wife, the Drumas and Mrs. Moviszter all dropped in. The spirit of the middle classes was lifting its damaged head again. It was not quite what it had been before; but still, after so much suffering, it was pleasant to get together again and warm themselves in the glow of hospitality blown to life once more.

Nevertheless, the tea-party started gloomily.

Mrs Tater, with her bosom bulging out of her corset, took charge of the proceedings and tried to start the conversation going by jokes at the expense of the Communists; but that ammunition proved damp. Then Druma produced from his pocket an orange which had been smuggled from Italy by one of his clients. Nobody had seen such a thing for a long time, and the orange passed from hand to hand.

Next Councillor Tatar, who had a reputation as a gourmet, recalled a recipe for a fish-dish flavoured with paprika. He described how, as a young man, he had fished for sheat, sturgeon and carp, and cooked the dish with his own hands on the banks of the Tisza over an open fire. He told the story with such detail and such gusto that he set their mouths watering. Then he relapsed into silence. His red lips, surrounded by his grey beard and moustache, still kept on moving; but all he did was shovel food in between them. Conversation languished.

'By the way,' asked Mrs Druma, breaking the silence, 'how about Anna! Where is she? I haven't seen her yet.'

'She's in the kitchen making the tea,' replied Mrs Vizy.

'Is that your new girl?' inquired Mrs Tatar. 'Is she good at her work? The flat certainly looks spotless. But can you rely on her? Are you sure she isn't a thief, my dear?'

Mrs Vizy did not condescend to answer the question. She just looked through Mrs Tatar.

'Do you mean to say that you don't know Anna?' exclaimed Mrs Druma and Mrs Moviszter in chorus.

'No, I have not yet had the honour of being presented to her,' said Mrs Tater, exercising an old lady's privilege of making poor jokes. They laughed at her sadly.

Mrs Vizy glanced at her husband and rang the bell. Anna came in, carrying an almond sponge-cake on a glass-dish. She had not had time to change and was still wearing her blue print dress. She came forward to the table awkwardly, shuffling her feet, and put the dish down. She wondered whether she should kiss their hands, one by one ; but there were so many of them that she thought better of it.

Around her she could see all the guests smiling at her. Even Tatar stopped eating and craned his fat neck to have a look at her.

Mrs Vizy studied their expressions for a moment with glee. Then she called Anna over to her, and, jokingly but proudly, introduced her.

'Yes,' she said, 'this is Anna—my Anna.'

Anna had scarcely closed the door when there was a burst of laughter in the room behind her: such laughter as a good actress hears when she makes a comic exit. They were not themselves quite sure what they were laughing at; but they held their sides and the tears came to their eyes. . . The whole scene had been so amusing—Anna's awkwardness, her clod-hopping shoes, and finally her ceremonial introduction to the company.

The atmosphere got livelier. Cigars and cigarettes were lit. Vizy told some stories about Anna which set them laughing again.

They were still laughing when old Doctor Moviszter came into the room. He had got rid of his last patient and finished his work for the day. Now he had come to call for his wife.

As a young man, Dr. Moviszter had been a heart specialist and lecturer at a hospital in Berlin. On his return to Hungary he had applied for a lectureship, but the University turned him down. So he had to make the best living he could in general practice. He worked ten hours a day, taking panel patients

and visiting two of the heart hospitals. Treating sick humanity had become second nature to him.

He helped his own weary body along with a stick. When he smiled, you could see how inflamed were his gums and how loose his teeth. A few straggling hairs clung to the top of his head like seaweed to a rock. The doctor was a sicker man than any of his patients. He was in the last stages of diabetes. All the hospitals, all his colleagues had given him up for lost.

Vizy hastened to greet him, and told him how much better he looked than last time they met. The doctor thanked him, somewhat sarcastically. Then he blinked his eyes, for the atmosphere of the room was thick with smoke, and looked round uncertainly.

He felt rather as though he had walked on to the stage by mistake while some comedy was being played. He could not make out what all the mirth was about. They had to explain to him that they had been talking about Anna – the famous Anna. Everybody encouraged Vizy to tell him all about what had amused them so much, so that they could themselves have another laugh over it.

Moviszter was on a diet and would not have anything to eat. He accompanied the other men into the study; but he would not have anything to drink either. Still, not to be unsociable, he clinked his empty glass with theirs.

A little later, still smoking and with their faces slightly flushed with wine, the men went back to the dining-room to join the ladies. Tatar leant in the doorway and listened to their conversation.

Still talking servants! His feelings pursed his paunch and made his white silk waistcoat sit all the more snugly. These women! They couldn't talk about anything else.

But the subject interested the other men too, and they were all ears. Vizy brought the wine into the dining-room. Moviszter sat down in the rocking-chair, closed his eyes, and rocked himself gently to and fro.

They went on talking about Anna.

'And really she's quite good-looking, you know,' said Mrs Druma. 'She's got a pleasant expression, and not a bad figure, either – nice and slim.'

'Yes,' remarked Mrs Tatar, meditatively, 'these country girls soon acclimatize themselves to Budapest. Take my girl, Bozsi. She was sent up to me from the country, thin as a rake and looking like a scarecrow. I made her a bit plumper and dressed her a bit better. I bought her a white piqué dress. Last Sunday' – Mrs Tatar chuckled as she told the story – 'we were at home, and Bozsi opened the door for the guests. Ervin arrived – Ervin Gallowsky, you know: he's just back from a Russian prison camp. Well, this young man kissed my hand in the hall, and then' – she chuckled again over the joke – 'he actually went up to Bozsi, formally introduced himself, and held out his hand to her. . .'

'Held out his hand to your servant?' exclaimed Mrs Vizy.

He did indeed. And if I hadn't signalled to him, he would positively have shaken hands with her! He thought' – she rocked with laughter, and her asthmatic bosom heaved – 'he thought she was one of my daughters' friends!'

'And what did she do?'

'She turned crimson. She put her hands behind her back, ran away into the kitchen, and would you believe it? – burst into tears. I couldn't get her to come and wait on the guests. Of course the girls ragged poor Ervin terribly.'

Tatar caught his wife's eye.

'Tell them about the cat,' he said.

'Oh, yes, the cat!' exclaimed Mrs Tatar. 'Well, when Bozsi first came to us, we had a kitten, two months old, which belonged to Helen. We called him Cirmos. He was only about the size of my fist. The first morning after she arrived, I heard Bozsi calling for his milk. "Please come and have your breakfast, *Master Cirmos*," she was saying. She talked to that kitten just as though he were one of our sons. It was a long time before she would dare to call him just "*Cirmos*." That's what they're like at first, you know. It's a great pity they get above themselves so soon – much sooner than they should. Now she's always wanting to go and visit her people. It's a festival, or grape-picking, or a wedding, or something else ; and one member of her family or another always seems to be staying with us.'

'My Steffi,' said Mrs. Druma, 'is a cinema-fan. She takes a

great interest in politics, too. She's an ardent conservative, by the way.'

'And my Ethel,' Mrs Moviszter contributed, 'rules our house. If we're not obedient enough, she gives us notice.'

Mrs Vizy had been listening to their lamentations with malicious delight.

'But my Anna,' she wound up, 'never goes to the pictures or the theatre. She doesn't sing about the place, and she has no young man. She hasn't got any family worth mentioning, either. Her mother is dead, and her father married again. She's always at home. So far she hasn't even been out on Sunday afternoons.'

'Oh Anna - of course, she's quite different!'

Applause for Anna was so hearty that Mrs Vizy found it almost embarrassing. Now that she held the centre of the stage again, she modestly disclaimed their congratulations.

'Well,' she said, 'you really haven't got much to complain about. And don't imagine that Anna's perfect. She gives me quite enough trouble. She's got her faults.'

'What do you mean - faults?' Vizy emerging from the fog of slight intoxication, was up in arms. Tell us what faults she's got,' he persisted.

Mrs Vizy tried to find some faults in Anna: but she failed. How could she find any when Anna had none? She was unable to answer her husband; and a hum of approval greeted her failure.

Then the subject of the conversation came in, and silence fell.

Anna cleared the table. They paid still more attention to her this time, weighing all her movements in the scales. She seemed to move between the table and sideboard with all the lightness of a fairy. She went to and fro like an automaton. They felt as though they were looking at a machine.

Just as Anna was putting the sponge-cake on the sideboard, a brilliant idea struck Mrs Vizy.

'Bring that here, Anna,' she said.

The guests had got up and were standing round Mrs Vizy. The group formed a circle with Anna in the middle of it, the central figure in the tableau. Moviszter stopped

rocking his chair and leant forward to watch what was happening.

Mrs Vizzy cut two slices of the sponge-cake, and offered them Anna.

'That's for you,' she said.

Her guests' faces lit up. They felt a glow of delight. This girl's virtue was to be rewarded.

But Anna gently pushed away the plate with the two slices of cake on it.

'No, thank you, madam,' she said.

'But why? Don't you like sponge-cakes.'

'No, I don't like it, thank you, Madam.'

There was an awkward silence. It was broken by Mrs Vizzy's voice.

'Then put it back please,' she said, firmly. 'I'm not going to force it on you. You may go.'

A cloud descended on the beaming faces of the guests, still standing in a circle. They looked at one another helplessly, with a horrible feeling of having been snubbed.

'She wouldn't have it!' gasped Mrs Tatar, in amazement.

'Well,' said Mrs Vizzy explained, 'she's like that. She never eats anything good. She won't even touch apricot jam! What do you suppose she eats for supper? You'd never guess. She doesn't eat anything! And all she takes for breakfast is a cup of coffee, and for dinner just some vegetables. She doesn't want anything else. Apparently she doesn't like sponge-cake either.'

'Or perhaps,' put in Moviszter, still leaning forward in his rocking-chair, 'she likes it too much.'

'What on earth do you mean, Doctor?'

'I mean that she *does* like sponge-cake.'

'But she's just told us herself that she doesn't.'

'That's just what I mean.'

'I'm afraid I don't see what you're driving at.'

'Servants, Mrs Vizzy, don't dare to like things they really do like. So they make themselves believe that what is good really isn't good. It's their way of defending themselves against disappointment, against unnecessary suffering. Why should they like something they can't have? They're quite right. Otherwise they'd find life unbearable.'

'But what do you want me to do with her?'

'Well, you might try this experiment. Give her sponge-cake every day.'

'Sponge-cake?'

'Yes, sponge-cake – and plenty of it. More than she can eat. You'll see: she'll soon come to love sponge-cake more than anything else.'

'But why? There's nothing wrong with her. Why should I give a servant a special diet?'

'Would it be good for her stomach to keep on stuffing her with sponge-cake?' murmured old Mrs Tatar.

'This is just one of those theories of yours, my dear Miklos,' said Druma: but the doctor had closed his eyes and started rocking himself to and fro again.

His wife lighted a cigarette, went into the drawing-room, and started playing a fox-trot. The ladies followed her, leaving the men behind them.

Vizy filled the glasses again. The men stayed where they were and had some more wine.

Tatar wiped his drooping moustache with his handkerchief. Then he harked back to the sponge-cake problem, which was still worrying him.

'Look here, my dear doctor,' he said; 'these people are totally different from us. Their stomachs are different; and their minds are different, too. They're servants, and servants they want to remain. They even insist that we should treat them as servants. I'll give you an instance. The other day, I rang up a friend's flat. A strange voice answered the telephone. "Is that the staff?" I asked.'

"No," said the strange voice, quite loftily you know; "*it's the servant!*" You ought to have heard the way she said it! I was so taken aback that I couldn't even explain what I wanted. I just stood there with the receiver in my hand, still listening to the challenging arrogance of that bloody voice. They take a positive delight in saying things like that, you know. It's just bravado. They do it on purpose to irritate us.'

Tatar took another gulp of the topaz-coloured wine. Then he went on:

'People have tried all kinds of ways of dealing with this

problem. I used to know a man called Karl Zelendi – God rest his soul. He was a very good man, but a bit mad. Theories had a habit of going to his head. He was a vegetarian, and went about in sandals. He visited Tolstoy in Russia. When he came back, he made up his mind to solve the social problem. He engaged a servant: a widow of fifty. He told her that they were to be absolutely equal. There were to be no such things as master and servant in the house. It was just a matter of chance that one of them had to attend on the other. The very first day, he made her sit down at the dinner-table with his wife and children. He told me himself how very badly that dinner went off. Pitiful! The wretched woman felt quite out of her depth, being treated like that. She was very uneasy sitting there in her dirty clothes, which reeked of the kitchen. She kept hiding her hands under the table, fidgeted fearfully, and never said a word all through dinner. After all, the poor woman was tired: she had been baking and cooking ever since daybreak. Well, after dinner, she just put on her hat and said she wasn't going to stay another moment in a place like that; and she walked out.'

He was arguing with himself as much as with the doctor; but the doctor gave him a target on which to train his gun.

'Now I ask you,' he continued, and he dented his fleshy nose with his forefinger by way of emphasising the point, 'why did she leave that house? However much they asked her, she wouldn't tell them; but I'll tell you. She left it because she felt he was behaving unnaturally, because she felt he wasn't really sincere. If that friend of mine – and, mind you, he was a broad-minded, self-sacrificing man – had been really sincere, he would simply have given her his whole house and all he had, down to the last penny. Simple-minded people like servants, who live on the lowest rung of the social ladder, aren't capable of thinking except in terms of extremes. They have much more vivid imaginations than we give them credit for. They're not satisfied with any half measures. They want to be masters themselves, or else servants – absolutely and utterly servants.'

'Either one thing or the other. Anything short of that is simply a farce. The ancient Romans used to stage a farce like

that; but' – and here he paused to stress his argument – 'they only did it once a year. I've forgotten which of their festivals it was; but anyhow on that day the patricians dressed themselves up as slaves, made their slaves recline at their tables, and served them with honeyed wine, peacocks' tongues and roasted capon. They said it was by way of commemorating the Golden Age, when all men were equal. But when was the Golden Age, I ask you? It was simply a myth. Even the Romans couldn't remember it; so how can we be expected to remember it?'

'Our very hands aren't like servants' hands.' He raised his own pudgy hands, which in fact were like nobody else's in the room. 'There's no such thing as equality in human society – there's only difference. Damn it all, Doctor' – like all lovers of argument, he was deliberately working himself up into a passion – 'damn it all, there have always been masters, and there have always been servants. Things have always been like that, and they always will be. That's the way things are, and there's no altering them. So servants must just remain servants.'

He looked round his audience. His theory was popular. Everybody present belonged to the social class which he was defending; and so everybody felt grateful to him. Tatar had them all with him; but he turned to the doctor when he said the final sentence.

'There's no other solution.'

'Yes, there is,' Moviszter said quietly. Seated in his rocking-chair, he was playing absent-mindedly with the crucifix hanging from his watch-chain. 'Yes, there is.'

'I see,' Tatar said; his fat, intelligent face swung round at the doctor. 'And what is the solution?'

'Charity.'

'Charity?' repeated Tatar, eagerly. He was glad there was still room for argument.

'There is a place,' the doctor said, 'where everybody is master and everybody is servant at one and the same time. Where everybody is equal. And not only on one day in the year, but all the year round.'

'And where is that?'

'It's Christ's country.'

'You mean Heaven?'

'No, I don't mean Heaven. I mean the sphere of the soul.'

'That may be; but just you try and transfer your "sphere of the soul" to solid earth, with all its Communist comrades!'

'I'm not proposing to transfer it to solid earth,' retorted the doctor, almost angrily. His disease made him irritable. 'The great mistake of the Communists is that they try to bring ideals down to earth. Ideals aren't meant to be brought down to earth. You kill them if you try. Ideals are meant to stay up in the clouds. Then they remain immortal.'

'Look here, Doctor: would you make your own servant sit at your table?'

'No.'

'And why not?'

'Well,' said the doctor, reflectively, 'I suppose just because she doesn't expect me to; and so, in this world of ours, it would be nothing but a farce.'

'Then we're both in the same boat.'

'Not quite, Councillor. Because my servant always sits at my table *in my own mind*.'

'I see what you mean,' said Tatar: and he wrinkled his fat forehead. 'And why not, if you like? But let me tell you something. If your servant made her pile, she wouldn't ask you to sit at *her* table. As soon as they scrape together a bit of money, they turn into regular tyrants. I know: I've seen them. They hire servants on their own account; and how heartlessly, how mercilessly they treat them! God save us all from a poacher turned gamekeeper! Nobody in this world is so badly off as the servant of a servant. Servants are the very people who have no sense of charity.'

'That is not relevant,' Moviszter said.

'I beg your pardon,' said Tatar. He felt it was time to change the subject a little. 'You believe in Humanity, don't you?'

'I? I don't even approve of it?'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't approve of Humanity because I have never seen it. I have never come across it. Humanity, in itself, is simply an idea – and an idea with no life in it. And you'll find, Councillor, if you keep your eyes open, that all crooks love

Humanity. The selfish man who wouldn't give a bit of bread to his own brother, the man who would betray anybody – Humanity is their ideal. They'll hang men, they'll kill men; but they love Humanity. They'll destroy the sanctity of their homes, they'll drive their wives away from them, they'll sacrifice their own father, their own mother, their own children; but they love Humanity. It's a comfortable creed, because it doesn't entail any obligations. Nobody has ever been introduced to me as Humanity. Humanity isn't short of food or short of clothes. Humanity remains at a respectful distance, in the background, with a faint halo round his noble brow. Only human beings really exist. There is no such thing as Humanity.'

'Then is there such a thing as Patriotism?'

'Patriotism, too' Moviszter hesitated as he groped for the right way of expressing himself. 'Yes, Patriotism too. It's too fine, too embracing an idea. It's too big. And what crimes are committed in its name!'

'But then what do you believe in?'

'Priests,' put in Druma, jokingly. 'The doctor loves priests.'

'Or the Reds? I'm not so sure about him. Look here' – he rounded on the doctor – 'I'll bet you're a Red under your skin!'

'Don't deny it, old boy!' he went on. He put his arm round Moviszter, and hugged him until his thin shoulder blades nearly cracked. 'God help you! Have some wine, you old Bolshie!'

This turn in the conversation started Druma off. He proceeded to describe, in lurid terms, how the Reds had treated a woman of sixty who had been imprisoned with him. Every night, at midnight precisely, she was led out into the prison yard to be executed. They made her kneel down and pray, loaded their rifles, and kept them levelled at her for minutes on end.

Vizy, not to be outdone, told how the Reds had proposed to requisition his drawing-room and his dining-room.

'Of course, that's what they wanted,' wheezed Tatar. 'A sort of historical exchange of positions. They wanted to humiliate you, and they wanted to exalt the caretaker. It's the endless

chain, working alternate buckets in the well. I daresay your caretaker would make quite a good gentleman – but it would take three generations to turn him into one. First he must be well fed; that's the first stage. Then he must have time to get tired of any easy life. His sons must fence like our sons. They must acquire straighter backbones and smaller hands and feet. Meanwhile, we should be getting used to living in a basement, eating beans, and getting degenerate. It would take a long time; and what would be the good of it? Nothing.'

The dog of the revolution lay at their feet, dead; but they could not resist the temptation to have another kick at it. They started talking about more practical things.

So far Vizy had said very little, because he thought all philosophy futile, and he did not want to give himself away. But now he took the lead. He talked about the necessity for reorganizing the Government departments and setting up committees of inquiry. He suddenly became alive.

'It's our turn now,' he said; and he laid his hand on Gabriel Tatar's shoulder, by way of demonstrating the bond of comradeship and claiming an ally in the great struggle. In his eyes – as usual when he was on this subject – suddenly appeared a curious kind of furtiveness, a subtly sneakish look. It was inspired by sheer selfishness, and it would have betrayed his grasping greed, but for the fact that long practice in self discipline had enabled him to camouflage it into a longing to benefit humanity.

Vizy's political creed had remained just the same throughout his career, in the course of which he had served changing governments with equal zeal. He condensed it into the formula: 'To put an end to *corruption*.' He refrained from translating the Latin word into Hungarian, lest it might become commonplace and lose its Catonian severity. He left it at that, in the vague form of a passionate platitude. He never admitted, even to himself, that politics was really just a scramble of ambitious men, essentially coloured by all the weaknesses of mankind, and that every party fought for power mainly for the purpose of putting its own hangers-on into office at the expense of its opponents.

In his eyes, it was only to his opponents that the term

'*corruption*' applied. They even carried it to the length of using official motor-cars to visit their mistresses. Vizy condemned this all the more because he remembered how much he had enjoyed driving one night with an actress, under the blossoming trees in the City Park, in an official car which one of his friends had lent him. How pleasant, even thrilling, it had been at the end of the drive, when the uniformed chaffeur saluted him respectfully, with just as much enthusiasm as though he had given him a handsome tip!

Moviszter felt tired. He stopped rocking himself to and fro, got up, and wandered into the drawing-room, where the ladies had gathered round the chess table with their heads together. They were still on the subject which had started the men's argument.

'It's true she works well enough,' Mrs Vizy was saying, peevishly, 'but why shouldn't she? She gets her food, and she has her own room. I'm going to give her clothes, too. She can save all her wages. She could be a lot worse off, these hard times. She has nothing to complain about. *She* doesn't have to keep up a large flat, and rack her brains every day to decide what to cook and how to find the money to get it. She is free from any kind of responsibility. I often think that, in these days, it's the servants who have the best time.'

She sighed, and the other women sighed in sympathy, as if they had chosen the wrong social status, in a cruel world which would not let them be servants.

The doctor beckoned to his wife, and told her that he was very tired. He liked to get to bed fairly early because he had to be in the tram on his way to the hospital by seven o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Moviszter threw her cigarette away at once. The Tatars decided to leave too. They wanted to get home before the front-doors were locked for the night, and thus to avoid tipping the concierge. The Drumas also prepared to return to their own flat upstairs.

In the hall on the way out, Mrs Druma put her ear to the kitchen-door, which was closed.

'What's she doing now?' she asked.

'She's bound to be working,' replied Mrs Vizy. 'Better leave her alone.' But Mrs Druma had already opened the door.

In the dark kitchen, beside the dust-bin, stood a shadowy figure with a pair of men's shoes in her hand. Apparently she was polishing them.

'Good-night, Anna. Good-bye, Anna. God bless you!' They all called out. Anna murmured something.

'What's she saying?'

'She's apologising,' Mrs Vizy interpreted, 'because she can't open the front-door for you. Her hands are all over "box" polish.'

'"Box" polish?' said Druma. 'What's that?'

'The servants here always call boot-polish "box" polish.'

'"Box" polish,' repeated Druma. 'I never heard the expression before. "Box" polish.'

On his way upstairs to his own flat, he chuckled as he thought what funny people servants were.

Chapter IX

LEGEND

THE Vizys spent some little time talking over the tea-party.

'Did you ever hear of such a thing?' asked Mrs Vizy. 'Just imagine my feeding my servant on sponge-cake! Sponge-cake!'

'Oh,' replied her husband, 'Moviszter's just crazy, and that's all about it.'

'And he said it might be the only thing she really liked! Really, the man's hopeless.'

'Well, one thing's quite certain, and that is that I'm not going to treat Anna like a prima donna.'

'Moviszter strikes me as having a slate loose. Of course, he's a sick man. I wouldn't give him more than a couple of months. He's got so much sugar in his system that there's no keeping it down. He doesn't even have the urine test. And he is a doctor!' Vizy shrugged his shoulder. 'Did you notice how the flies kept settling on him? He had to brush them away the whole time. Poor fellow, it won't be long before we're burying him. I wonder what will become of his wife?'

'It was silly of you, boasting that Anna is so perfect. Somebody might try to steal her from me.'

Moviszter's nonsensical remarks had made Mrs Vizy furious. By way of reaction against them, she drove Anna all the harder.

She saddled her with the charwoman's work as well as her own. Once a week she made Anna wash the staircase and scrub the attic. She shut her eyes when the Fichors got Anna to run errands for them in her spare time. When the refuse lorry rang its bell, so long silent, she got Anna to hurry out into Atilla street with the dust-bin and empty its messy contents. In case Anna should still find time hang heavy on her hands, Mrs Vizy gave her socks to mend by the basketful.

She was careful to conceal her satisfaction with Anna. All she told the Fichors was that Anna would do. It was not easy for her to hide her satisfaction, But, in the interests of Anna's training, she held herself in and made herself sterner than she really was.

Anna's first month was over on the fifteenth of September. When Mrs Vizy paid her wages, she did not give her as much as Katica - in any case, she had paid Katica too much - but she promised to give her an increase after a time. Nor did she deduct the cost of the mirror which Anna had broken - only half of it.

Anna did not know what to do with the money. She asked Mrs Vizy to put it in the bank for her, or else buy her something with it. So Mrs Vizy bought her a kerchief at the weekly market in Roham street.

On Anna's fifth Sunday in the house, Mrs Vizy sent her out to have a look round the town.

Anna dressed herself up in the print dress she had worn on her first appearance at the Vizys'. The magic of Sunday made even the granite slabs of the pavement sparkle; but it meant nothing to Anna. This Sunday afternoon with nothing to do stretched before her endlessly.

She loitered at the door, and then sauntered down Logody street. Walking aimlessly, she came to a square, with a church and a big hospital and a crowd chattering like rooks in late autumn. Swabian servant-girls walked up and down arm in arm, giggling and talking their unfamiliar tongue, just as though they were still in their own villages. They stuck together

all the time, congregating on the 'islands' in the middle of the street, getting in the way of pedestrians and holding up the traffic. The tramcars had to clang their bells loudly to clear a path through them.

Anna wandered about all alone.

She retraced her steps to the Vermeza. On the way, a Rumanian soldier tried to catch hold of her as she passed him. She retreated into a doorway, until he went on. Near the South Station she bought some sweets from a hawker for the little boy of her former employer.

When a servant visits an old mistress, she usually opens the conversation by saying: 'I hope you don't mind my coming.' The mistress never minds. It means a change in the routine of her life. Probably it takes a moment or two to recognize the old servant, who has perhaps got a bit fatter or a bit thinner, and certainly a bit older; and the mistress reflects what a long time it is since she saw her last.

Now the former servant is a visitor, to be treated as a guest and offered refreshment. But the visitor is uncomfortable. Memory weighs more heavily upon her than it does upon her hostess. She feels awkward in this room in which she knows every object better than the mistress of the house. She does not know what to do with her hands, which used to work so hard tidying these rooms. She is no longer entitled to behave with familiarity, as she used to do in the old days when she was, willy-nilly, an honorary member of the family.

Besides, she feels that the life of the house has gone on just the same without her, and this is depressing. However warmly she may be welcomed, she knows that she is not indispensable. Everybody has this feeling from time to time; but to a servant it is brought home more vividly, more intensely, than to other people.

Anna, while paying her dutiful visit to Mrs Czifka felt distressed, without quite knowing why. She had a pitifully bewildered look about her. Only a ghost returning to the familiar room could feel this so intensely.

She gave the sweets to Bandika, the little boy who had given her the toy trumpet as a souvenir; but Bandika looked at her with doubt and contemplation while he rummaged through

incoherent memories in his tiny head. Still, the sweets had some effect, and he sat on Anna's lap. Once he had loved her more than anybody else in the world. When he was eighteen months old, he did not call her 'Anna'; he called her 'Mummy.' But now, when she began to talk again about the clasp-knife and the birds that flew out of it, he paid no attention to her. He had forgotten all about the clasp knife, and the birds too. He had heard new fairy tales since.

Anna said good-bye, and she was back at No. 238 Attila street before six o'clock. Home, it seemed, was the better place.

Mrs Vizy always spent the morning with Anna in the kitchen. She did not need to look after the girl; but she knew few places more interesting than the kitchen. It was her laboratory of life. There she could hear all the gossip of the market and what the Moviszters and the Drumas were having for dinner. Besides, it always interested her to watch Anna at her work.

The food which was to come to table after a magic transformation still lay in its raw state. Water for the soup boiled in a large black kettle. Carrots and celery were softening with black pepper in the golden salted juice, later to be filtered through an egg-shell. While the saucepans bubbled, Anna took saffron and ginger from the shelves, cut onions into thin slices—with the smell smarting her eyes and making them water—ground nuts and dry bread, chopped parsley, broke eggs and separated the yolk from the white. Finally she cut up a rabbit, floured the pieces, and threw them into a pan spluttering with fat.

But one thing she would not do, and that was to kill a chicken. When this routine but revolting murder had to be committed, Anna ran upstairs and asked Ethel to come down and do it for her. The old servant cheerfully selected the victim from the run in the yard, took it to the sink, and there with a skilful movement wrung its neck. The blood splashed up to her elbow, and sometimes spattered her face.

Anna turned her head away. Mrs Vizy could not watch it either. She knew that it was necessary; but still she always asked Ethel how she could do it. Ethel laughed, and simply said 'it had to be done, hadn't it?'

Mrs Vizy gave Anna to understand that she did not like her spending too much time with the other servants in the house. Ethel, she said, was not a suitable companion for her. She was a rude old hag. As for Stefi, she gave herself airs, and would not be seen in the street with Anna. So why should Anna have anything to do with them? They only laughed at her behind her back.

More than once, when Ethel or Stefi asked to see Anna, Mrs Vizy said that she was out. Anna felt her mistress was quite right. Why should she run after people who thought themselves too good for her?

She would sooner sit in the kitchen and mend stockings, with a chick chirping round her feet. She had brought this chick in from the run and reared it herself. As a country girl she was at home with fowl, and she knew every hen by its feathers and its cluck. The chick had its own saucer of water, and Anna petted and pampered it. At night it perched on her bed and slept at her feet.

During their morning together in the kitchen, Mrs Vizy talked to Anna about her dead daughter, Piroška. In return, Anna told Mrs Vizy all about her step-mother, that gaunt young peasant woman who had turned her out of the house on a winter night.

Fichor had written to Anna's father, Stephen Edes, and told him that his daughter had gone to a new place; but he received no reply. Anna's father was not particularly interested in his daughter's fortunes.

Little by little, Anna settled into her new surroundings. She stopped talking about her old place, and Mrs Vizy stopped talking about her predecessor, Katica. Now all that became past history.

Anna was beginning to feel proud that her master and mistress were so much better off than the Moviszters or the Drumas. She was delighted when Mrs Vizy bought a new rolling pin. She called the sieve 'our sieve' and the corkscrew 'our corkscrew.' They were, of course, much better articles than anybody else's.

She admired Mrs Vizy's dresses, too: especially the black silk one in which she went to the séances in Aldas street on

Wednesday afternoons. Sometimes Mrs Vizy joked with her about it.

'You see,' she would say, 'I'm wearing this for your benefit.'

Mrs Vizy found Anna a convenient companion. If she got tired of the girl's company, she could always retire into her shell. The company of a servant is as handy to a lady as the service of a prostitute is to a man. When they no longer want them they can easily dismiss them.

Now that the big political excitement was over, Vizy used to come home early and linger about killing time while he waited for supper. Mrs Vizy and Anna tiptoed about the house, because he was supposed to be working. Silence reigned in his study, which Anna kept spotlessly clean and neat, with pen-holders, scissors, sealing-wax and the stuffed owl all in their proper place.

Occasionally, in fact, Vizy wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Francis Patikarius, who managed the Vizys' five-acre vineyard at Eger. But he found letter-writing a trial. His ideas flowed readily enough when he was dictating to a typist at the Ministry; but writing a private letter was a slow process. He came to a halt at the end of every sentence, and kept on re-reading what he had written. Finally he blotted it, read it all over again, licked the envelope, lit a candle, and sealed it with his crested ring.

Then he would yawn. His heart, his lungs, and his liver all worked excellently, and he had a digestion like an ostrich. Yet he suffered from boredom: the boredom of some Civil Servants, who are always at a loss when they are by themselves.

Vizy would wander out to the kitchen to see when supper would be ready. There his wife had the company of Anna, this new, young personality in their home, to help her to pass the time. Vizy would have liked to stay too; but his wife said that Anna must not be disturbed at her work, and turned him out of the kitchen. Anna, she told him, was a servant not a spectacle.

Still, however much Mrs Vizy tried to hide Anna, she could not keep her completely shut up in a glass case.

Anna went every day to Viatorisz's shop, where the grocer

greeted the wonder servant with a jocular wink. His shop was the gossip-centre of the women of the Christina district, and through it everybody got to know Anna. She was talked about at the baker's, at the butcher's, at the laundry. Even the undertaker knew all about Anna. So did the fat policeman on point-duty in Attila street, who saluted Vizy smartly when he passed.

The news about Anna spread like wildfire. First it ran through the inner Christina district; Attila Street, Christina Square, the adjacent parts of Christina Boulevard and Attila Boulevard, Pauler Street, Miko Street, Logodi Street and Tabor Street. In less than a week it had spread up to the Fortress on the Hill, to Uri Street, where the Tatars lived, near the State Archives, to the Bastion Promenade, Ferdinand Square and St. Gyorgy Square, where the Prime Minister lived, opposite the Royal Castle. Everywhere the news was repeated, and so it spread and spread.

Everybody talked about the wonder maid, though very few people had even set eyes on her. They knew her only by her Christian name. Anna became a legend, indefinite, almost unreal. When people heard it, they felt about her as some do about a spring which works miracles, or a holy picture which heals the sick. One's mind is unable to credit its supernatural effects, but still one has to believe it exists.

After running its course, the news came back to its starting point.

One day, a colleague of Vizy's at the Ministry asked him over the telephone whether Anna had a sister, as he was on the look out for a good maid. Another day, when Mrs Vizy was buying her pills at the local chemist's, the assistant, as he dropped the weights on the scales, went out of his way to mention Anna with a knowing smile.

As Anna walked through the market with her shopping-bag, the stall-holders whispered to one another:

'That's her. She works at the Vizys - you know, the ministerial councillor.'

On the other hand, if they saw Vizy they remarked:

'There's Vizy - you know, the man I was telling you about the other day... Anna's master.'

In the evening, the men of the neighbourhood and their wives used to go for a stroll, arm in arm.

All at once, a woman's feet would take root. She would no longer listen to what her husband was saying, and stared as though she had seen a vision.

'Look,' she would whisper, 'there she is.'

'Who?'

'Anna. The girl at the Vizys. The Vizys' Anna!'

The husband peered hither and thither in the gas-lit twilight; but he could not see anybody. Anna was gone in a second.

That flitting shadow in the blue cotton dress, hugging the wall, with a newly-baked loaf under its arms, had already hurried into the Vizys' coffee-coloured house and scampered upstairs out of sight.

After a minute of hesitation the couple strolled on, immersed in their thoughts, without saying a word.

Chapter X

MASTER JANCSE

ONE September morning, a messenger from the Ministry brought Mrs Vizy a telegram, which her husband had already opened. It was brief.

'Arrive to-night. Jancsi.'

Jancsi, Francis Patikarius's twenty-one year old son, had figured frequently of late in the letters which Cornel Vizy exchanged with his brother-in-law. His father was worried about his wasting his time at Eger.

Jancsi had been at the Military Academy at St. Polten until he was fourteen. When his elder brother, Alexander, was killed in the Carpathians in 1915, his father took him away from it and sent him to the high school at Eger. He wanted to educate his only surviving son for a civilian career.

During the four years Jancsi spent at school at Eger, discipline was lax because of disorganisation among the staff, and holidays were longer than usual because of the coal shortage. These years fled by with the swiftness of a dream. Jancsi saw his masters and his schoolmates leave for the war

one by one. Some of them turned almost overnight into the 'glorious dead'.

Then the time came when Jancsi himself was in the top class and old enough to go to the war. He was enlisted and given a course of training. Then he stayed on at school, in uniform. Every day he expected to be drafted to a regiment; but the day never came. The revolution broke out. Meanwhile Jancsi easily passed his matriculation, for which the standard was now much lower than before the war.

The stern discipline of the Military Academy in Lower Austria lay far behind him. The freedom of a disorganised world lay in front of him. Jancsi proceeded to squander his days in idleness.

He developed into a society man. He led a gay life at house parties, flirted with all the girls in Eger, and blossomed into an amateur actor. He had visions of becoming a film star. Apart from this he had no ambitions. For two years he would not even try to do anything. Further education did not appeal to him.

At length his father got tired of his doing nothing. He begged Vizy to help him to make a man of the boy, whose life was in danger of being ruined by the war. Vizy advised him not to send Jancsi to the Bar or make him a Civil Servant, a 'gentleman-beggar'. The Gentile middle-class had to adapt itself to the spirit of the new age. The best plan was to look for some practical, money-making career for Jancsi. His brother-in-law approved Vizy's idea.

Vizy got into touch with a friend of his, the chairman of a bank, and he agreed to take Jancsi on as a clerk.

There remained the question where Jancsi should live. At this time it was almost impossible to find rooms in Budapest. But Mrs Vizy was particular about her furniture, and it was only after long hesitation that she agreed to her nephew's living with them until they could get rooms for him somewhere. She felt she could not refuse, for her brother's sake.

After receiving Jancsi's telegram she laid the table for three that evening; but no Jancsi arrived. Mrs Vizy was not really surprised. She knew he was the most unreliable person on earth.

It was not until three days later, when she had forgotten

all about it, that the door suddenly burst open, at eleven o'clock in the morning, and Jancsi shot in like a thunderbolt.

'Hullo, Aunt Angela!' 'Oh, Jancsi!' they exclaimed in chorus.

'My dear,' Mrs Vizy went on, 'why are you so terribly late? When did you arrive?'

'This very moment,' replied Jancsi, 'by the express. It was three hours late.'

The two of them talked almost at once, smothering their words in a shower of kisses. It was much more dramatised and vivid than a reunion on the stage.

'Let me alone, idiot,' said Mrs Vizy, tearing herself out of her nephew's arms. She settled her hair, which he had rumbled, and pushed him away from her.

'Let me have a look at you.'

Jancsi was dressed from top to toe in white, like a naval officer in summer uniform. He was wearing a white jacket, white trousers, and white shoes, all immaculate. He looked as though the 'dark days' had never existed.

'How tall you've grown!' Mrs Vizy went on. Her voice assumed a critical tone.

She had expected to see the little soldier in embryo who, whenever he had a day or two of leave from the Military Academy, had sat stolidly at the Vizys' table, with his bayonet by his side too large for him.

A meeting, after some years have gone by, always means a shock. We think of absent friends as we think of the dead: at a fixed point, at a definite stage. In our minds, time does not affect them. Our imagination misleads us into the belief that, just as they have frozen into photographs, so we ourselves have gone no further in our progress towards the dust.

When we meet them again, we realize that we have been deceiving ourselves. We are shocked; but we smile, as though the realization they arouse is pleasant, instead of most unpleasant.

Mrs Vizy looked back into the past, and smiled at her memories, without paying any attention to what she said.

'Come along, and I'll show you your room. . . You'll have to sleep on this couch.'

'Fine!' said Jancsi; and he lay down on it. Then he suddenly rolled off it, and turned a cartwheel. He proceeded to walk round the room on his hands, waving his legs in the air. His pale face flushed as the blood rushed to his head. His jacket hung upside down. Mrs. Viza noticed his fine zephyr shirt, and the silk handkerchief pouting out of his breast-pocket.

'Stop it, you idiot!' she cried. 'I'm not going to have you turning my house upside down. Do you mean to say you're still just as much of a madcap as you used to be?'

'Yes, Aunt Angela!' Jancsi said.

He sprang to his feet, swept his aunt a mock bow, and started strutting round the room, whistling.

Mrs Viza watched his capers with affectionate eyes. Memories of his childish pranks came back to her, and with them the echo of laughter long long ago in the dining-room.

But Jancsi was a pleasant legend only to those with whom he had grown up.

Anybody else, any outsider, who came across this slim young man for the first time would not have found him so amusing.

Despite his sprightliness, there was a stiffness about Jancsi which kept people at their distance. His elegant attire, carefully correct, emphasised this reserve. His muscles were well developed; but he was strong, his chest narrow. His hands were delicate, but they were also dry. Jancsi never sweated, even in the hottest weather. His close-cropped auburn hair displayed not only the shapeliness of his skull, but also its unusually small size. His rimless ears stuck to it lightly, as though they were cut out of paper and stitched on to it. His thin lips were hard and cruel. There was no real life in the irregular features of his face. It looked like a wood carving: a collection of crazy planes slung together anyhow, like a piece of Cubist statuary.

Jancsi stopped whistling as Anna brought in his suitcases. They were two marvellous affairs of English pigskin. Jancsi turned serious, and opened their patent locks with devotion and reverence.

He had a wonderful assortment of clothes to match the suitcases: eleven lounge suits; full evening dress; a dinner-jacket suit; a winter overcoat with fur collar; sumptuous shirts; and

trunks of fine materials, socks with silken arrows up the sides, patent-leather shoes, and sporting brogues with flaps over the lacing.

He proceeded to unearth a manicure-set, scent-sprays, and cakes of glycerine soap in white celluloid cases. Jancsi could never wash with anything but glycerine soap.

At the bottom of one of his suitcases were two books. One was a book of literary parodies, dog-eared like a lettuce, entitled *That's How They Write*. The other was a 'grammar in a nutshell' entitled *English in Three Days*.

Aunt Angela wanted to help him unpack; but Jancsi would never let anybody but himself touch his clothes, and he told her he could manage all right by himself. He had brought a clothes-brush with him, and he proceeded to brush his suits one after the other, sometimes flicking away a speck of dust with his fingers. He put all his trousers on hangers, and hung them up in the wardrobe which his aunt had placed at his disposal.

Then he took his dressing-case into the bathroom, and set about his toilet. He washed himself carefully all over with his glycerine soap, and rinsed himself under the shower. He had shaved that morning; but he ran his brand-new American safety-razor over his face again. He sprayed some eau-de-Cologne under his arms, changed his shirt, and put on a blue suit with a rust-coloured tie.

Thus refreshed, he went into the dining-room, where his uncle was waiting for him.

'Hullo, Uncle Cornel,' he greeted him, in English. 'How d'you do?'

'Hullo, you young ass,' Vizy responded. 'Well, how are you, my boy?'

Uncle Cornel patted Jancsi on the back and, in accordance with the family custom, kissed him on both cheeks.

'Zank you, very well,' said Jancsi, still in English.

'Don't you think he speaks English quite well?' asked Mrs Vizy. 'He wants to go to Hollywood, you know, and become a film actor.'

'I dare say,' remarked Vizy. 'But, before that, he must make some money here.'

'Uncle Cornel,' Mrs Vizy explained, 'has got a job in a bank for you.'

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed Jancsi, again in English.

'Now listen to me, scatter-brains,' said Vizy. 'To-morrow morning I'm going to take you to the bank and introduce you to the chairman.'

He proceeded to tell Jancsi something about the banking business: but Jancsi found it impossible to pay much attention to what his uncle was saying.

On the left side of Uncle Cornel's face, just beside his nose, there was a copper-coloured wart. This wart was Jancsi's most vivid memory of Uncle Cornel. It kept moving up and down as he talked. When Jancsi was a child, he had always been tempted to take the wart between his finger, pull it hard, and make Uncle Cornel cry out with pain.

Meanwhile Aunt Angela was giving Anna instructions about laying the table. In her white frock, with her fair hair, Mrs Vizy seemed to light up the room like a tall candle which shed a soft glow.

Jancsi looked at his uncle and aunt. They meant nothing more to him than an actor and an actress who happened to be playing these parts because they found some peculiar pleasure in playing them. He lacked the sympathy which would make him feel that other people's lives were just as important as his own. He had all the merciless nihilism of youth.

Still, his impressions of his uncle and aunt made him feel self-conscious, and he tried to brush them away. He interrupted their trend and Vizy's remarks about banking, by saying that his father was looking forward to having the Vizys to stay with him at Eger. Then he started fiddling with the cutlery on the table.

They sat down to supper. Jancsi sat opposite Uncle Cornel. He kept his eyes fixed on his plate, but occasionally stole a furtive glance at his uncle as he drank his soup. He had not long to wait.

'Hullo, what the devil's this?' Vizy exclaimed, suddenly.

He held up his spoon. Mrs Vizy stared at it as though she must be dreaming.

The spoon, as Vizy dipped it into his soup, had melted away, leaving nothing but the handle between his fingers.

'This is one of your tricks, you rascal,' he said, pointing a finger at the grinning Jancsi.

'Isn't it a good joke?' asked Jancsi.

'No, I think it's a silly one. Where did you get it?'

'I bought it in a bazaar in Vienna when I was there last month. Here's another one.'

Jancsi fished a second trick-spoon out of his pocket.

Uncle Cornel took his joke in good part; but Aunt Angela chided him gently.

'When are you going to get some sense?' She said 'Aren't you ever going to grow up?'

After supper, Jancsi showed them a whole box of tricks, produced by a Viennese firm to promote general gaiety and cheer up the heavy-hearted human animal.

There was a cigarette-case from which all the cigarettes leapt out as soon as anybody helped himself to one. There were evil-smelling explosive cigarettes. There was a box of matches which would not strike. There was a liqueur-glass full of yellow Chartreuse, from which you could not drink because of an invisible film of glass. There was a revolver which whined when you pulled the trigger. Lastly, there was a complimentary ticket, which entitled its holder to lie in front of any tramcar free of charge.

Aunt Angela said Jancsi had not changed a bit. He had been just the same when he was a small boy. At Eger he had once pulled a chair away from under a fat old canon. Another time, when workmen were painting a fence, he had painted his father's dog bright green. The poor beast had stayed green till it died.

Uncle Cornel tried to drink out of the liqueur-glass, and fired the whining revolver. Then he said that this was enough foolery for one night. They had serious work in front of them to-morrow.

The next day, Vizy and Jancsi drove to the bank. They asked to see the chairman, but they were first sent to another director, and only after some little time could they get into the chairman's waiting-room, which was crowded with visitors. Vizy

sent in his card, and the chairman sent back a message that he would see him shortly, but at the moment he was engaged with a Bulgarian Cabinet Minister.

A bespectacled secretary led Vizy and Jancsi into an unpretentious little room which was used for favoured visitors. Here, in a few moments, they were joined by the chairman, a short but forceful-looking Jew, wearing rather shabby clothes and smoking a cigar in a holder.

After greeting Vizy and Jancsi he took them into an empty committee-room, explaining that he had to play hide-and-seek like this whenever he wanted to snatch a spare moment.

Vizy explained his business and reminded him of his kind promise. The Chairman had forgotten all about it, but he proceeded to produce a writing-pad from his pocket. Then, strangely enough, he found he had no pencil on him, and asked Jancsi to lend him one. He scribbled something on a sheet from the writing-pad, talking all the time, smoking away furiously, and not troubling to brush away the cigar-ash which fell on his waistcoat. Then he shook hands with Vizy and Jancsi, and went out through a side-door, behind which, he said, a committee-meeting was waiting for him.

His place was soon taken by an immaculately-dressed gentleman, to whom the chairman's note had been communicated. He gripped Vizy and Jancsi by the hand eagerly, as though he wanted to feel the warmth of the chairman's sacred hand-clasp.

Then he took them to the ground-floor in the lift, and on down steel stairs until they reached the strong-room in the basement. Here Jancsi was given a desk, introduced to his colleagues, and put to work.

It was a miraculous world. The more Jancsi got to know about it, the more he marvelled at it.

The great bank building in the centre of the square soared up into heaven as proudly as a cathedral. Smart, speedy motor-cars waited patiently beside the pavement outside it. Passers-by looked in at its doors with curiosity mingled with reverence. They lowered their voices and all but raised their hats. People who believed in nothing elsewhere became devout believers here. They felt that here was something really sacred.

The hall-porter, a statue of self-respect, stood guard on the threshold, half in the street and half in the cathedral. He kept a suspicious eye on indigent infidels who had no right of entrance. It was he who first filtered visitors. It was he who, with quiet tact, removed brawling blasphemers, such as that Jesus Who drove the money-changers out of the Temple. This cathedral tolerated no unbelievers, nobody who was not devout in his worship of Money.

Jancsi loved lingering in the main hall: a long room all gilt, green marble and stained glass windows which softened the sunlight. Imposing stairs branched at the end of it. Panelled reception rooms with comfortable chairs and couches opened out of it. Everywhere there was plenty and well being. Lifts hummed up and down. Behind the counter, thirty typewriters clicked and a hundred clerks stooped in their glass cages.

In the strong-room where Jancsi worked lights burnt day and night, as though in honour of some deity. This department, where securities and other valuables were kept, was specially protected. The rooms were separated by doors two feet thick. Alarm-bells rang on the slightest provocation. At nightfall watchmen made their appearance in the corridors, lamp in hand.

To this department customers brought their valuables – currency, gold, jewellery – and made their way to small cubicles like confessionals, where they sorted their treasures as though examining their consciences with contrition. Then they put their property into steel cases, and locked it up in a safe with their own hands. Smart little page-boys, summoned by bells, hurried to attend on them.

Over this and all other departments of the bank ruled the chairman. Jancsi never set eyes on him again. The chairman's office was off a corridor on the first floor, but he never seemed to be there. He was omnipresent, everywhere and nowhere. The ordinary staff of the bank rarely saw him, but he was always busy. He carried on financial negotiations even in his car. When he came to the bank, a speedy lift whisked him unseen up to his office. Here his assistants bustled about him obsequiously. The secretaries were like chaplains, the depart-

mental managers like canons, the directors like fat elderly bishops; but only the chairman, like a high priest, could approach the altar and gaze upon the idol of the one god in whom the Twentieth Century still believed: Gold.

All this enthralled Jancsi. It gave him a sense of safety. He felt that he had got to the solid core of the crumbling world. and become himself a member of this priesthood, an acolyte of the new religion. He was more grown-up and self-assured than ever.

When he had been in the bank for some little time, he found that an old school-fellow, Jozsi Elekes, was working there too, in the foreign exchange department on the second floor. They happened to meet in a corridor, and greeted one another like long-lost friends. They arranged to meet at a café after work was over, and spent the evening together. Then Jancsi went part of the way home with Elekes, who lived with his family in Vienna Gate Square. Elekes returned the compliment by going part of the way home with Jancsi. They repeated this performance until they had exhausted their sole topic of conversation: women.

Elekes was two years Jancsi's senior at the Eger high school, and he had already been a year in the bank. He knew plenty of people in Budapest, and considered himself quite a man about town. He and Jancsi became inseparable. Every morning, over the bank's house-telephone, they made arrangements for the rest of the day.

Jancsi's first ambition, now he was living in Budapest, was to find a girl for himself. He could not live without one. He could not settle down properly until he had a girl whom he could idealise, honour with his attentions by day, and dream about at night.

He hesitated between two girls. One was Elekes's sister, and the other Helen Tatar. His choice finally fell upon Helen.

A dozen young men gathered at the Tatars every afternoon. Elekes devoted himself mostly to Margaret, and so Jancsi concentrated on Helen. She was an attractive, lively girl, pretty but inclined to plumpness. It looked as though one day she would be as fat as her mother and father.

Jancsi's courtship of her consisted in the following cere-

monial. When he came into the room, he looked round for Helen first of all, shook hands with her rather lingeringly, asked her to play 'something' and leant on the piano while she was playing it. He also sent her flowers. Every morning he was to be seen in the flower-shop in the Boulevard Christina, smelling the flowers critically. In the end, he always decided on white violets, and ordered them to be sent to Helen Tatar with his card.

Mrs. Vizy found Jancsi less of a nuisance as a guest than she had feared. He left home at nine o'clock in the morning, and came back for dinner at half past two. After dinner, he manicured his nails, rolled cigarettes, and chatted with his aunt.

"Poor Helen!" she teased him one day.

"Why poor Helen, Aunt Angela?" asked Jancsi.

"Because you're a man who can't really fall in love, my boy," Mrs Vizy told him. "You're attracted by a pretty face, and then you forget all about it. I know you. Don't turn poor Helen's head."

Jancsi blushed and protested, but not too much. It flattered him to be thought a philanderer. He proceeded to make scornful remarks about women in general. His aunt rebuked him, but actually she was thrilled by her nephew. She thought she could read secret sins in his face.

About four o'clock, Jancsi changed his clothes and gargled his throat with a scented wash. Then Elekes called for him, a dapper little man of the world, wearing a monocle, and the two of them went out to see life.

Jancsi took no interest in anything in the Vizys' flat except his clothes. He had no eyes or ears for anything. He was so absent-minded that he would look for things he had in his hands all the time.

When he had been with the Vizys three weeks, he was still calling Anna 'Kati,' which was the name of the servant at home in Eger. He did not know Anna when he met her in the street.

Anna, for her part, took pains to please him.

She called him every morning at eight o'clock, and put a cup of chocolate, a roll and a glass of water on a chair at his

bedside. But Jancsi found it hard to get out of bed, with the result that Anna had to waste half an hour every day clearing up after him.

He jumped out of bed, knocked over the glass of water, splashed and whistled in his bath, left the taps running and flooded the place, walked on the polished floor with wet feet, and dressed like a whirlwind for fear of being late at the bank.

When his whistling of jazz tunes stopped, Anna went to tidy up the bathroom, still reeking with his scent. The smell and the moisture made her giddy. She rearranged Jancsi's nail-scissors and file. Once she pressed one of his scent-sprays. A jet of chilly scent sprang out of it with an alarming speed, and she put it back in its place in a panic.

Jancsi reduced his relations with the family to a purely official basis, so to speak. His sole connection with Anna was that, when he left the house with Elekes, he called to her through the kitchen door to tell his aunt what time he would be back for supper.

Late one afternoon, however, Anna was alone in the flat. She had some ironing to do, and as the kitchen was so cramped she had put the ironing-board on two chairs in the hall.

She was just damping a pair of trousers when Jancsi suddenly opened the front-door. His way in was blocked by the board. Anna was going to move it, but Jancsi signed to her to leave it alone. He backed to the door, took a run, and jumped over the board.

At the dining-room door, Jancsi turned round to see how Anna was impressed by his feat.

Anna was quietly going on with her ironing. She was bare-foot, and standing with her legs slightly apart. Her dress clung to her body.

A few days later, at the beginning of October, Jancsi's father invited the Vizys to come and stay with him at Eger for the Vintage festival. Vizy got leave from the Ministry, and it was arranged that they should go for four days.

Jancsi was invited to Eger too, but he did not want to ask for leave from the bank so soon. Besides, he found life more amusing in Budapest, with its cinemas and other entertainments, not to speak of visits to the Tatars.

Mrs Vizy gave Anna instructions what meals she was to cook for Jancsi while she and her husband were away.

The Vizys left on a Wednesday, by the midday train. Jancsi accompanied them to the station; for, though they had lived twenty-five years in Budapest, the Vizys were still provincial at heart, and they attached great importance to family ceremonial.

They had reserved half a first-class compartment. Vizy settled his wife in a seat by the window, asked whether she was comfortable, and fussed over her. Then he went off to buy magazines and mineral water.

As the train moved slowly out of the station, Vizy leant out of the window and once more told his nephew to look after everything at home. Then Uncle Cornel waved his handkerchief. Jancsi flourished his straw hat, and shouted good-bye after them.

Chapter XI

BED OF SHAME

THE train had not yet gathered speed, and Jancsi could still see Aunt Angela's face and Uncle Cornel's handkerchief, when – so suddenly that he himself was taken by surprise – he decided not to return to the bank at all, but to go home and seduce Anna.

This lustful idea was so exciting that it made his throat feel dry. He held on to one of the steel pillars that supported the roof to steady himself, and looked at the station clock. It pointed to noon. He drew the acrid smell of smoke from the bad coal deep into his lungs.

Once outside, in front of the station, he felt as though he had arrived in a strange city where any number of novel experiences awaited him. He did not see the square shining in the sunshine, with its always exciting people and the sombre bronze statue of Gabriel Baross. He saw only Anna, standing in the narrow hall of the flat, with the ironing-board laid on two chairs in front of her: Anna, in her check frock, barefoot and loose-limbed.

Desire drove him to rush home, grab her from behind, and

throw her down on the floor without any ceremony, just like a sack of flour. After all, she was only a servant-girl.

He started running. The warm October sun seemed to make his clothes burn him. He jumped on to a trancar going his way; but it was not fast enough for him, and he jumped off again at the next stop. He hailed a taxi, and promised the driver a good tip if he took him home at top speed.

But how slowly the man drove: Every turn of the wheel seemed to be an eternity. Meanwhile that picture which had risen up before him so suddenly ten minutes ago, that picture which haunted and challenged and excited him now, was turning into a film and coming to life. Anna was putting down her iron. She was smiling shyly. She came and sat on his knee. .

But, when he opened the front-door, there was nobody, there was nothing in the hall: no Anna, no ironing-board. Where was she? Jancsi was thrown out of his stride. He looked into the kitchen. Anna was over at the stove.

'Is dinner ready,' he asked.

'So early?' Anna said in surprise. 'I thought . . .'

'What did you think?'

'I thought you wouldn't want it till half past two, as usual.'

'I see. But I'm hungry.'

'I can get it ready in a few minutes.'

'Tell me . . tell me. . .'

'Yes, Sir?'

'What is there for dinner?'

'There's soup.'

'And what else?'

'And mutton-cutlet.'

'And what else?'

'And poppy-seed roll.'

'Poppy-seed roll!' repeated Jancsi, with a frown.

'Don't you like it, Sir?'

'Poppy-seed roll? Oh, yes, I do - I like it very much.'

Jancsi scarcely knew what he was saying, but all the time his mind was working furiously. He was comparing this girl, who now stood before him in a different mood, a different position, a different dress, with that other girl whom he had noticed one day ironing clothes in the hall. He was trying to

reconcile the two pictures, to merge them into one, to turn this new girl into the one he wanted, to make her mirror his desire. What upset him most of all was the fact that Anna was no longer barefoot.

She came into the dining-room and laid the table for him, at the place where Uncle Cornel usually sat. Then she went out again.

Jancsi looked around him, and a hot wave swept over him, just as it had done at the station. For a moment or two he could not move. He was alone in the flat with her; quite alone.

He tip-toed quickly into his uncle's and aunt's bedroom. The key was outside the door. He put it inside, and locked and unlocked the door over and over again. There was a glass panel in the door, but it was frosted. Not even in broad daylight could anybody see into the room from the corridor.

His imagination caught fire. He touched a cushion, and it set him trembling. He fingered a table-cloth, and it seemed to show him two naked figures clasped together. Every piece of furniture, every ornament, every single thing in the room conspired in his scheme and contributed to it a subtle emanation. The empty flat was no longer a domestic setting. It was a haunt of crime. It was a silent accomplice, ready to connive at anything.

Jancsi picked up the writing-tablet on his uncle's desk and looked through it. He had no reverence for anything. He ransacked wardrobes, tugged at closed drawers, tried all the chairs in turn, sprawled on the couch. Then he lay down on Aunt Angela's bed. He propped himself up on the pillows and put his feet on the white silk coverlet, heedless whether his shoes dirtied it or not. He revelled in the thought that everything here belonged to somebody else, and that he could do just as he liked with it. He felt intoxicated. The vandal instinct of an unlicked cub urged him to run amok, to break open the drawers, to smash up all the furniture, to cut things to pieces and trample on them, to destroy and spoil and befoul everything in the room.

He decided to start on Anna at dinner-time.

When she brought in the soup, she did not look at him. This led him to think that already she had her suspicions.

When she came in with the meat course he fancied that an ironical little smile was hovering round her lips. He felt that if he said a word to her she might laugh; and that would make everything impossible. So he said nothing till she brought in the poppy-seed roll. Even then all he could say was 'Thanks.'

After Anna had cleared away, Jancsi flung himself down on the couch in the dining-room. He felt exasperated. He was furious at his own impotence. He covered his face with his hands and cursed his stupidity. He never knew how to talk to women, especially when they attracted him. He was either so enigmatic that they did not know what he was driving at, or so boorish that he offended them; and then he blushed up to his ears at his own awkwardness. Usually he fell back on telling them funny stories. He could get on fairly well with girls like Helen Tatar. But he did not know where to begin with Anna.

He had noticed many things about her which put him off. Her hair, like most peasant-girls', was short: it made up only a poor little plait. Flowing locks he thought must be the privilege of the upper class; they were seldom found on servants' heads. Anna had down on her upper lip. The warmth of the kitchen had made it glisten and drawn Jancsi's attention to it. She had a tiny pimple under her nose, too. Finally, she was much too thin. But she had beautiful eyes and teeth.

Jancsi tried to console himself by exaggerating her blemishes. She looked like a boy, she had a moustache, and she sweated. A boil blossomed on her face, and she had nothing but a wretched tuft of hair on her head.

But all this was no good. The more he thought about her, the less good it was. All these little shortcomings, which at first had seemed to make her alien and almost repulsive, now served only to attract him to her. They emphasised what sort of girl she was, and what purpose he meant her to serve. Jancsi groaned, writhed, and rolled over on his other side.

It was the first time in Anna's life that she found herself without a mistress. She could do what she pleased. She enjoyed herself playing the mistress in her own home. When she had finished all her house-work, she decided to give Mr Vizy's suits a cleaning with petrol.

She was on her way from the bedroom to the kitchen with

an armful of clothes when she caught sight of Jancsi lying on the couch in the dining-room. He was lying on his back, and in his mouth he had a glass tube, such as she had never seen before.

'Are you ill, Master Jancsi?' she asked.

'Oh, no!' said Jancsi. He sat up and took the thermometer out of his mouth. He shook it down without looking at it. 'Just felt a bit feverish, so I was taking my temperature. May have caught a bit of a chill.' For some reason he could not himself make out, he emphasised the word 'chill.'

What he was really saying to himself was this:

'Here's my chance. I must make some kind of a joke. A vulgar joke that will make her laugh. A very dirty joke that will make her laugh so much that she turns giddy. That's the way to catch the girls - with a joke. Then I can get her down and lift her skirt. She might try to hit me, but that won't matter. I'll bet she's no virgin, anyhow. Her breasts are small, and they look rather wobbly. That's the best kind of girl, so Elkes says. She'd make a fine little tart. A peasant-girl turned prostitute - a peach of a whore!'

He goaded himself on, letting his imagination run riot. He found his thoughts so sweet that he felt as though he were stuffing himself with honey. They turned his throat dry and made him cough.

'Shall I run up for Dr Moviszter?' Anna suggested. 'He'll be at home now, and his patients haven't started coming yet.'

'Oh no!' Jancsi laughed her suggestion off; but his laugh was very forced. He propped himself up on his elbow and stared at Anna.

'She's looking me straight in the eyes now,' he reflected. 'I made a mistake at dinner-time. She doesn't suspect anything. But why should she suspect anything? Girls like that don't understand hints. They're too uncivilised. On the other hand, you can't rush things with them. You must treat them a bit gently. But I haven't got any time to lose. If I go on wasting my time like this, there'll be nothing doing. Thursday, Friday, Saturday. By Sunday it will be too late. I must be quick.'

He opened his mouth; but he could not think of anything to say. All he could manage was:

'Anna. . .'

'Yes, Sir?'

'Listen. I'm going to stay at home the whole afternoon. I'm not going out. If I ring the bell, please come in. . . Wait, Anna,' he added, though she had not started to go out. 'No, that's all. . .'

Anna went out. Jancsi jumped off the couch and ran to the door after her; but when his hand was on the knob he drew back. After all, it would look ridiculous to run into the kitchen just after he had told her: 'That's all.' And it would be no less ridiculous to ring for her. He changed his mind and went back to the couch. His cursed 'temperature' had made it hot.

What was the matter with him? He could not make himself out.

Only once before in his life had he felt anything at all like this. He remembered that now. It was just after his 'matric'. He had run up to Vienna for a few days' holiday and was coming back by an evening train, by himself. His compartment was badly lit.

He pressed his finger-tips to his eyelids, and tried to recall the whole thing. Just before the train reached the Hungarian frontier, he noticed a woman who was travelling in the same compartment. She was sitting with a large hat-box on her lap, for there was no room for it in the luggage-rack. Her face was lined, and she looked lonely, depressed and ill. She was wearing a thick grey woollen dress. The heels of her shoes were very much worn. Jancsi had no idea who she might be, what age she was, whether she was married or single, whether she spoke German or Hungarian; but, once he had caught sight of her in the gloom, he could not take his eyes off her.

The train ran on, under a leaden, lowering sky. Then it started drizzling. The air was close, like the atmosphere of a Turkish bath. The names of the stations, as they were called out, were smothered by the mist as though it were cotton-wool. Before Jancsi had a chance to speak to her, the woman got out: at Bruck the frontier station. She plodded away along a miry track, carrying her hat-box. She had no umbrella, and the rain streamed down on her. She walked away until she vanished in the misty distance. Jancsi watched her through the

window for as long as he could see her. He felt as though he would give anything in the world to be able to follow her, take her hand, and kiss her weariness away. Then they would have had dinner together in an inn on the frontier, and gone to bed together in a room with nothing in it but a chest of drawers, a table and a bed.

By the next day Jancsi had forgotten all about the incident.

Surely Elkes must have been wrong when he said that servants were the easiest? On the contrary, they were the hardest of all.

Angrily he changed his clothes and went out. He thought of calling on the Tatars; but when he got to the Zerge steps he changed his mind, turned round, and went through the tunnel under the river to Pest. There he went to a cinema and saw part of an amorous Italian film in seven reels. After that he went to the "Pathéphone" and listened to the *Flying Dutchman*.

Night was falling when he came out. The twilight made him feel bolder. He imagined Anna crying out as he possessed her.

He ran upstairs to the flat. The kitchen was empty.

Feeling rather like a murderer who has burst in, knife in hand, only to find his intended victim gone, Jancsi sank dejectedly on to a chair beside the table. Somehow he found it comforting to be sitting in this squalid kitchen, where the reek of petrol still hung in the air.

When Anna came in a few minutes later she was startled to find him there.

'Where have you been?' Jancsi asked.

'I've been to the butcher's to get a chop for your supper.' She took the chop out of her bag.

'I don't want it,' snapped Jancsi. 'I'm not going to have any supper to-night. I don't want anything but some coffee.'

He drank it black. Then he stood at the window and stared out at the night.

At ten o'clock he heard Fichor shut the street-door. Mrs Moviszter stopped playing the piano, and the house fell silent. The kitchen was in darkness.

Jancsi undressed, and put out the light; but he did not go to bed. For some time he stood still in the dark, hesitating.

Then he took a step forward. The parquet flooring creaked so loudly that he imagined everybody in the house would hear him and suspect what he was about. He stepped back again.

He hesitated once more; and then, step by step, he experimented, groping his way forward in the dark, as cautiously as though he were a chessman being moved from square to square in the final round of a tournament.

The floor started crackling like a machine-gun. At that Jancsi set his teeth and ran for it, no longer caring what the people in the house might think of his prowling. Every knob seemed to scream, every door seemed to wail.

Jancsi was in the kitchen, in the dark. He put his arms out and felt for the wall. He had no idea where Anna's camp-bed was. He fumbled for it, but he could not find it.

'Are you asleep?' he asked, in a quavering whisper.

'No,' answered Anna promptly. She sounded very wide-awake.

'I thought,' stammered Jancsi, 'I mean to say—I imagined you were asleep.'

Now he had found Anna's bed. With a boldness which staggered him, he sat down on the side of it.

Then at last Jancsi was sure that he was not dreaming, and that, when he whispered to the darkness: 'Are you asleep?' the voice that had so unbelievably answered him was real.

'Do you mind my coming?' asked Jancsi. He could hardly get the words out of his mouth.

Anna simply went on sitting up in bed, just as though she were a patient waiting to be examined by a doctor.

She could not quite make out what was happening. She had heard that sometimes a master came to his servant at night; that sometimes the servant became his mistress; and that sometimes she had a child. She knew all this, and a lot more, because a girl at Kajar, whom a lawyer in Budapest had got into trouble, had told her so. But that any such thing should happen to her simply filled her with a sense of bewilderment.

'Are you afraid?' asked Jancsi. He was still sitting on the side of her bed. 'Are you afraid? Because, if you are, I'll go away again.'

Anna was a bit frightened. But she felt honoured that the young master should come to her like this. Her fear lest he should go away again was greater than her other fear. So she said: 'No.'

Thereupon Jancsi got into Anna's bed. He lay at the very edge of it: so near the edge that he nearly fell out. Anna retired to the other edge. There was almost room enough for somebody to lie between them.

But they were both under one and the same blanket: under that coarse red woollen blanket which, even though it was Aunt Angela's property, struck Jancsi as feeling alien and un-clean, as though it belonged to somebody plague-stricken.

He pulled the blanket up to his chin. The heat of this forbidden bed was overpowering. He felt as though a fiery fever were burning him up. Slowly, voluptuously, he pushed his feet down into the dark, mysterious depths of this servant's bed. There might be anything there, something terribly dirty: bugs perhaps, or even snakes. His fingers trembled on the edge of the worn blanket.

The he rolled over and wallowed in this bed of shame. He grovelled in it as though it were a dustheap in which he was trying to make himself dirtier. He let himself dissolve in it. He became part and parcel of it.

Suddenly something moved at his feet.

'What's that?' cried Jancsi, in a panic.

'It's only my chick,' said Anna. 'Here, shoo!' she went on, clapping her hands to chase the chick away. It fluttered from the bed into a corner of the kitchen, where it proceeded to go to sleep, standing on one leg.

Slowly, inch by inch, Jancsi edged closer to Anna. His enjoyment was so intense that he felt he could scarcely bear anything more. He put out his left hand, and touched Anna's breast. She did not move away.

Anna, for her part, was full of a warm sense of stimulation, a first awakening of passion. She knew already what it was like to be kissed. At home in her village, boys had sometimes kissed her and fondled her breasts just in fun.

Then, all at once, she burst out laughing.

'If only they could see us!' Anna said.

'Whom do you mean?' asked Jancsi. He snatched his hand away from Anna's breast as he heard a sound outside on the staircase. Then a door slammed, and all was quiet again.

'Do you mean my uncle and aunt?' Jancsi went on.

'Oh no!' replied Anna.

'Then whom do you mean?'

'I mean the young ladies.' The idea tickled Anna, and she laughed again, mischievously. 'I mean your young lady friends.'

'Oh!' said Jancsi. He felt very much flattered. 'But I really don't care a pin about them,' he went on. He said it with as much condescension as though he were dashing the hopes of dozens of young ladies yearning for his love. 'I don't want them; and I don't want the married ones, either. I've had married ladies, too, you know' - he put it into more popular terms to suit Anna's intelligence - 'even ladies with titles. But I don't want anybody but you. You're so beautiful.'

'Why didn't you say so this morning, Sir?'

'Oh, so you knew how I felt about you this morning, did you? Was it when I came back from the station, or at dinner-time? *Didn't* you know this morning?'

'If you had told me so this morning, I would have made myself beautiful for you all day, *Sir*.'

'Oh, don't, Anna!' Jancsi begged. Her stress on the 'Sir' cut him to the heart. 'Please don't! You're so beautiful. I swear. '

'That's a sin, Sir,' Anna reproached him.

'What's a sin?'

'To swear over small things.'

Jancsi made up his mind it was time to put an end to all this. This peasant-girl, with her laughing and her chaffing, seemed to make a mockery of a gentleman's desire. That refined desire of his, that hot-house fruit, needed silence to make it mature.

He put out his hand to touch Anna's breast again; but this time she turned away from him with another laugh.

'Listen, darling,' pleaded Jancsi. He felt he must speak after all, if only to drown that vulgar laugh of hers which grated

on him so dreadfully. 'Don't laugh, don't speak! Just listen to me, darling. I won't hurt you, I swear. You're so beautiful. I love you. Only you. Only you.' he whispered softly into her ear. 'You.' That short personal pronoun thrilled him as he said it. It seemed to burn the roof of his mouth. 'Call me "Jancsi." Say "Jancsi" to me.'

Anna said nothing. She was meditating on the enormous gulf which the word 'Jancsi' can bridge.

By now Jancsi's eyes were getting accustomed to the dark. He could see the shapes of things. He could see Anna. Her two white breasts glimmered in the night.

He tried to make her tell him whether she had a lover; if so, who he was; what she knew and what she didn't know. Anna answered him briefly and ambiguously, and then relapsed into silence. Perhaps it was that only now she became offended because he had told her to keep her mouth shut five minutes ago.

When she did not answer him, Jancsi took it to mean that she had had many a lover before him. So much the better, he thought; and he started trying to caress her.

But he was awkward, and Anna had no difficulty in keeping him at bay. When he tried to put his arm round her waist, she pushed him away so roughly that the bed creaked loudly.

'No,' she said, firmly.

'But why not?'

'No.'

'Listen to me, Anna . . .'

'Oh, leave me alone! Go to your ladies!' This time she did not even say 'Sir.' She seemed to have resumed sole possession of the bed.

Jancsi buried his face in the pillow. In his frustration, he chewed its coarse cover. His face was all over tears, sweat and saliva.

Anna could hear him panting and moaning miserably as he lay on his face beside her.

Suddenly, her arm clasped him round the neck. It held him so fast that it almost hurt him. He could hardly breathe.

Then, slowly, very slowly, he was sinking into overwhelming depths of delight, drowning in them.

She was terribly strong, this little peasant-girl, and even thinner than he had imagined. As they embraced, he could scarcely feel her flesh at all: only bone and muscle and sinew.

Over and over they drowned in those depths and rose again.

In the middle of the night, a taxi drove up to the house. Somebody rang the bell, and the caretaker opened the door. In whispers, Jancsi and Anna wondered who it could be at this late hour. He passed their door, went on up to the third floor, and knocked. They could hear Moviszter's voice. Somebody had come to fetch him to a patient. In a few minutes the two of them came down, and the taxi drove off.

Towards dawn, Jancsi noticed a little light high up in the house opposite. He asked Anna who lived there.

A little later, he went back to his own room, as furtively as he had come. It was not yet daybreak.

In an ecstasy of self-satisfaction, Jancsi flung himself down on his bed. He had done it at last. It had been sordid; but it had been wonderful. And also – this was important – it was unique. Nobody since the creation of the world had ever committed such a sin. But he was happy, and not in the least sorry.

Helen Tatar, he reflected, was probably still asleep. Helen Tatar . . . Her father had a beard. When the Tatars gave a party for young people, he always came in and joined them just before the end of it, cracked a few poor jokes, and ate some of the cakes that were left over. Helen's mother ran an expert, quizzical eye over her young guests, and tried to find out what they had been talking about.

Jancsi laughed aloud. Now he understood why he was always so shy with the 'young ladies'; why he was so glad when his social duties were over; why he whistled on his way home.

He knew nobody belonging to Anna. She was as alien to him as a bird of the air.

Half-awake, half asleep, with that odd lucidity which belongs to the borderland between waking and dreaming, he marvelled at what had happened between them. Was that all it was, the most important thing in human life, the thing that parents

were so careful to make a mystery of to their children? Was that all it was – something so simple, so childish: in short, so ridiculous.

Jancsi fell asleep over his thoughts, with a nasty, smug smile on his lips.

Chapter XII

IDYLL'S END

JANCSI was sitting in the strong-room underground.

The manager had given him a sheet of paper with a column of figures on it, and told him to add them up. To Jancsi the column of figures looked as tall as an American skyscraper. He climbed up from floor to floor with his pencil; but he kept on making mistakes, and had to climb down again. At last he gave up the job in disgust, pushed the sheet of paper away, and stared straight in front of him.

All at once, Anna's mouth came into his mind. He had never kissed Anna on the lips.

During the night, when their burning faces approached each other, Jancsi had turned his head away. He had shrunk from the very idea of kissing Anna on the mouth. A servant's mouth...!

But now the thought of kissing her chapped, colourless lips struck him as a pleasure more thrilling than possessing the whole of her body. Keeping his own lips pressed to them would be like tasting some luscious, exotic fruit that melted in his mouth.

Jancsi walked out of the bank and hurried home.

He found Anna working in the dimly lit bathroom.

'Stay still!' panted Jancsi, and he kissed her.

His first kiss was cool, curious. He liked it so much that he could not have enough. He kissed Anna over and over again, eagerly. The taste of her tongue was like that of some strange spice. Its flavour intoxicated him. He kept on kissing her, as though he were a greedy child stuffing himself with strawberries and cream.

Anna had not spoken to him since he left her bed. She had taken him his chocolate as usual at eight o'clock in the morn-

ing, and left the room before he awakened. Jancsi had gone straight out of the house.

Anna would have thought it quite natural if he had taken no further notice of her, if he had said nothing about what had happened between them during the night.

His kisses surprised her much more than his creeping into her bed. Blushing with shame, faint with delight, she sank down beside the bath and let Jancsi do what he liked with her.

'Why don't you kiss me back?' murmured Jancsi. 'Why don't you say something? Don't you love me? . . '

He went on stammering the eternal endearments of lovers.

Then, satiated for the moment, he stopped for breath. Anna slipped out of the bathroom.

'Wait!' Jancsi called. He ran after Anna and kissed her again in the hall.

Then he followed her into the kitchen. Here kissing her had still another taste.

'Come and stand in front of the window,' he ordered. 'Here in the corner, beside the cupboard, Facing the light. I want to look at you. You look at me, too.'

He studied her face closely, at length.

Our eyes, posted on a projecting bastion of our skulls, are the outer sentries of the minds. They are in themselves, so to speak, detached brains. Somewhere in the cosmic course of evolution, in a fever for sight, they made holes for themselves in the bony walls of our skulls, and started peering through these loopholes to find out the purpose of genesis.

Anna's eyes and Jancsi's eyes gazed into one another. They groped for something, as though they could give each other enlightenment and point out the path to salvation.

'Now don't touch me,' said Jancsi. 'I shan't touch you either. Like this!'

Letting his arms hang lax at his sides, he kissed Anna again. Between their two bodies the one point of contact was their lips.

Anna obeyed him just as though he were asking her for a clothes-brush or a glass of water.

The next day Jancsi made up his mind not to go to the bank at all. He rang up and said he had a sore throat.

He dressed himself carefully in his white trousers, with a smart leather belt, and a zephyr shirt. In this costume, coatless, he lounged about the flat.

The whole day was theirs. Now and again the bell rang, but it was only the postman or a tradesman's messenger-boy. Otherwise they were not disturbed all day long.

Anna came into the room with a dust-pan. She had a bright kerchief tied round her head. She looked quite charming, Jancsi thought: just like an actress in a musical comedy, a soubrette playing the part of a family retainer.

He asked Anna to give him her hand – just her hand.

'Why?' asked Anna.

'Please give me your hand,' Jancsi persisted.

'But they're all dirty!' Anna protested; and she started wiping her hands on her apron.

Jancsi seized hold of one of her hands. He held it very gently, like a captive butterfly. He stroked it; this hand of hers, which, in the course of her work, came in contact with so much dirt. He clasped it in his own refined, manicured hand and pressed it. There was something unspeakably sweet, unspeakably delightful, in the feel of Anna's coarse, calloused hand. Jancsi took her fingers and kissed them one after the other. He marvelled at them with all the awkwardness of the lover, who never knows quite what to do with the beloved one.

All at once he put Anna's fingers into his mouth.

She snatched them away from him, dismayed.

'What are you doing?' she cried. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Leave me alone!'

Her face flushed scarlet, and she ran away into the kitchen. There she stayed and sulked. She could not understand Jancsi.

But that night, when she heard the floor creak under his bare feet, she was glad he was coming to her again. She let him see she was, and made room for him in her bed.

It was only in the daytime that Jancsi's ways upset her.

What she did not realise was that Jancsi was now descending the ladder of love. Every day he went a rung lower on the way down from passion to sentiment. Having had the whole of

her, he was now treating her prettily. There were plenty of things about Jancsi that Anna could not understand.

After kissing her, after fondling her hands, he next took to addressing her in the formal third person. On the other hand, he asked her not to call him 'sir' or 'Master Jancsi.'

Sometimes he would repeat her name – the most beautiful of all girls' names – over and over again. He would spend hours with her, without saying anything else but 'Anna!' Before he kissed her, he humbly asked her leave.

He had all kinds of whims. Anna had to keep on changing her frock for him all the time. He sent her out to put on her check dress and come back barefoot. Then he wanted her to put on her blue cotton dress and her shoes. She could not make head or tail of him. He also tried to get her to put on Mrs Vizy's opera-cloak over her naked body; but this she firmly refused to do.

Sometimes he talked so much that he made her head whirl.

Kneeling on the floor in front of her, he said that, when the whole house was asleep, they would steal out into the gardens and wander among the ash-trees and the lilac-bushes until dawn. Then, another evening, they must go for a drive outside the city and have supper in a country inn. Everybody would think she was his fiancée. Some day, too, he would take her to America. He would buy her high-heeled shoes, long silk stockings coming above her knees, and a flounced petticoat such as chorus-girls wore. They would drive about the streets of New York, sitting side by side, close together.

But Anna simply laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

On the Friday, their last day but one alone together, Jancsi made her lay the table for two. When she brought in the first course he begged her to sit down opposite him and have dinner with him. But Anna would not have sat down in that room for the whole world.

It was only after endless entreaties that she finally agreed to come to him on the couch. This was in the afternoon on Saturday, their last day. It was broad daylight; but Jancsi closed the shutters and switched on the lights.

First of all, he sprayed Anna all over in the bathroom with his scent-spray. Anna stood soberly amid the mist; but she

cried out when the spray tickled her breasts and the scent flowed down over her stomach.

Then they went into the dining-room.

About seven o'clock, Jancsi yawned and lit a cigarette. He felt in need of a new sensation.

'Anna,' he said, 'give me the telephone.'

Anna handed him the instrument, with its sixteen yards of flex hanging from it like a dead snake.

'Thank you,' said Jancsi. 'Now you may go.'

He rang up Jozsi Elekes.

'Hullo, Jozsi! Not very nice of you, never looking me up all this time, I must say. Here I've been away from the bank three whole days, and you . . . Well, as a matter of fact I haven't been ill. . . Something quite different, and much more important. I'll tell you all about it later. . . No, I can't tell you over the phone. You'll come round at once? All right, I'll wait here for you. . .'

He put the instrument down, smiled to himself, and went and dressed. Then he sat down at the piano and played the only dance-tune he knew; the latest one-step. He sang the words:

*'You made me love you,
I didn't want to do it.
You made me want you,
And all the time you knew it.'*

He heard Elekes ringing at the door; but he went on hammering on the piano and singing at the top of his voice.

*'You made me happy,
Sometimes you made me glad;
But there were times, dear,
You made me feel so bad.'*

'Well,' Elekes said, 'so you haven't been ill?'

'No, I haven't,'

'You certainly look awfully ill,' remarked Elekes.

'Do I really?'

He got up and studied himself in the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was dead white. He felt pleased with himself.

'Well,' he said, 'perhaps I have had a bit of a headache, after all.'

'How could you?' Elekes asked. He must always have his little joke. 'What have you got inside that head of yours that could ache?'

'Don't try and be funny, Elekes. Can't you see I've got something on my mind?'

'In love, eh?'

By way of answer Jancsi crashed his hand down on the treble keys of the piano in a jangling discord.

'Is she a girl, or a married woman?' asked Elekes. 'And where did you pick her up?'

'At the Ritz.'

'Is she a lady?'

'No, she's on the stage.'

'Oh, is she? And where does she act?'

'Various places. She's a dancer.'

'I see. And when did she fall for you?'

'Last Wednesday evening. I met her in the grill room at the Ritz. Believe me, old man, she's a bit of hot stuff, a regular little devil. She came away with me on the spot, in her car - she's got her own car, you know. And now she's my mistress.'

'And where do you meet?'

'Here.'

'H'm,' said Elekes, reflectively. 'And so,' he went on, smiling a bit wryly - for Jancsi was making him jealous - 'so she comes here, you young rip?'

'She's been here every day since my uncle and aunt went away. Every day and every night. In fact, she's only just left. When I spoke to you on the 'phone she was still here.'

Jancsi pointed to the couch.

Elekes sniffed the air. He smelt the scent of orchids. He saw the brightly lit rooms. It did not sound so improbable, after all.

'Is she plump?' he asked.

'No, very thin.'

'Dark or fair?'

'Chestnut.'

'What's her name?'

'Give me your word of honour you won't tell,' said Jancsi.

Elekes shook hands on it. Jancsi felt very much like laughing; but he managed to keep a straight face.

'Her name's Marianne,' he said. He heaved a sigh. '*Chère Marianne!*'

'Well,' said Elekes, 'she may be a nice little thing. But mind what you're about, and see she doesn't deceive you. You know how hysterical these girls often are.'

'I know—and she's hysterical enough! Her eyes goggle when I kiss her. She doesn't know what she's doing. And listen to this, Elekes. . .'

Elekes prepared to listen. It was his duty as a friend. In similar circumstances, Jancsi would be at his service in the same way.

But Jancsi stopped, with his mouth open.

While he was speaking, Anna had come into the room to say that tea was ready.

Jancsi glanced at her, and then at Elekes. Elekes turned round and looked at Anna.

Jancsi waited for him to burst out laughing. He expected Elekes to recognise Anna, from his description, as his 'dancer.'

But Elekes did nothing of the kind. He simply crushed out his cigarette, and stood up to accompany Jancsi into the dining room.

Jancsi felt suddenly depressed. He experienced that vague, formless sadness which often overtook him when he was alone.

Since he could not bear misery for a second and always angrily protested against either understanding its causes or giving himself over to it and enjoying it, he resorted to artificial solutions like the drug addict, who puts an end to his torments by one little stab of the needle. No sooner had he and Elekes finished tea than he hastened to pour out some cherry-brandy. He clinked glasses with his friend, and started whistling to keep up his spirits.

Then he brought out his favourite book and read extracts from it aloud. It was a volume of literary parodies, in which

poets he had never read, hobble with sprained limbs after their golden dreams spattered with mud.

When he and Elekes were tired of literature, they tried to play a practical joke; but it was only half-successful. They rang up a friend of theirs. He was out; so they had to content themselves with telling his widowed mother that her son, in his own interests, would be well advised to report at the political department at police headquarters at eight o'clock the next morning.

Elekes kept looking at his watch, and finally, though Jancsi pressed him to stay, he announced that he had an appointment; perhaps with another 'dancer.'

Left alone, Jancsi applied himself to the cherry-brandy. At length, as he reached for his glass, he clumsily knocked it over and spilled its contents on a white Persian rug.

He rang for Anna. She cleaned the rug, swept up the cigarette-ash, and generally tidied up the mess which the two men of the world had made in the flat.

After all, Jancsi said to himself, he had to say something to this girl.

The cherry-brandy he had consumed had not gone to his head. It had simply made him stiff and stately. He stood up straight and made his way towards Anna.

'Look here!' he said.

He stuck a pair of spectacles, with eye-holes made out of red paper, on his nose, and squinted at her through them. He waited for Anna to laugh.

But Anna did not laugh. She was horrified.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'how awful you look! How can you make yourself such a sight?'

Jancsi proceeded to pull his trick-revolver out of his pocket. He pointed it at Anna, and fired. The revolver whined.

Anna shrunk away from him, automatically raising her hands over her head. Jancsi followed her.

'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'It's only a joke. Come here, and I'll show you something else.'

He fumbled in his pocket, produced his wallet, and took some bank-notes out of it.

'Have you ever seen any money like this before?' he asked

Anna. 'This is American money: a dollar. Do you know what it's worth? Well, it's worth a lot. This one's French; and this one's Dutch.'

He stuffed all the notes back into his wallet. He stretched himself. His head felt like a football, and his spine like a lath.

'Make up my bed for me,' he went on. 'I want to go to bed early, Mr and Mrs Vizy will be back in the morning. By the way, don't say anything to them about my not going to the bank, or about Mr Elekes's coming here either. I'll tell them myself.'

Despite Jancsi's demands on her time, during the past four days Anna had done all the work Mrs Vizy had given her. She had mended any number of socks, and ironed any number of shirts. They were all ready, in two great piles. Besides doing all the housework, she had washed down the staircase as well. She was not afraid that Mrs Vizy would have any complaints.

That night, she waited for Jancsi in vain. He never came.

All alone in bed, she felt frightened. She was haunted by a white-faced figure with red glasses on his nose, pointing a revolver at her.

About two o'clock in the morning the kitchen window started rattling. Anna got out of bed and shut it. Outside she could hear rain falling. The trees rustled in a chilly wind.

Chapter XIII

SOMETHING VERY BITTER

IN the morning it was still raining. It was steady, persistent rain, which gradually churned the yard into mud. All the gutters were streaming.

When she looked out of the kitchen window Anna found the whole sky clouded. There was not even a patch of blue as big as a hand.

She thought how nice it would be if you could reach the clouds with a long broom, and sweep them away like cobwebs from a ceiling.

She ran downstairs and, under a battered umbrella, waited for her master and mistress.

Her hands trembled as she held the umbrella. They must

never know her secret, never even suspect it. She would die of shame if they did. She pulled the kerchief on her head low down over her eyes.

Then the Vizys, who had travelled overnight, drove up to the house. Anna first caught sight of Mrs Vizy, who leant out of the window while the taxi was still some distance away, and asked whether everything was all right. Anna nodded.

When the taxi had pulled up, Mrs Vizy wanted to know whether Jancsi had given any trouble. Anna hesitated for a moment, as though she were wondering what to say. Then she said No: Master Jancsi had given no trouble.

Her master jumped out of the taxi first. He was wearing a travelling cap, and had a leather-covered bottle slung from a strap over his shoulder. Anna picked up the suitcases and hurried up the stairs.

She was glad the Vizys were back. She was still more glad that they seemed to find everything just the same as usual.

Mrs Vizy was glad to be back, too, and glad that Anna was still there, and still the same Anna. She had kept the flat very clean and tidy, and she had baked a cake as a surprise. But this was not more than Mrs Vizy expected of her.

During the past few days at Eger Mrs Vizy had been in a fresh environment, meeting plenty of new people and collecting new experiences. She looked at her home and the running of it from a new angle. She lost no time in telling Anna that at Eger the servants got up at four o'clock in the morning, worked on the farm as well as in the house, and got next to no wages.

The Vizys unpacked their things, and then had some tea, for they were feeling cold after the journey.

Jancsi was still asleep. He lay sprawled on the couch with his mouth open and his eyes not quite shut, white as a corpse.

It kept on raining all Sunday, and for the next three days as well. Autumn was early this year.

The little house in Attila Street seemed even smaller, closer and darker than usual. The temperature went down, and the mornings were distinctly chilly.

Druma was making more money, and Anna passed him on the staircase wearing a transparent English mackintosh, while

Mrs Druma bought herself a new autumn overcoat and a pair of goloshes. Mrs Moviszter started driving to rehearsals at the Dramatic Club in a carriage and pair, and giving highbrow parties at home, at which she welcomed her guests with dignity in a particularly low-cut frock, by way of prelude to reciting poetry.

Stefi and Ethel gave up gossiping at the door. They felt the cold too much. They stayed at home in the evening, kept warm at the fire, and wrote letters. They ventured out only to cool their charcoal irons, describing fiery circles as they swung them in the chilly night air.

The Fichors, too, stuck to their cellar like moles. Mrs Fichor made warm soup for breakfast again. Her husband, in a drenched postman's cloak, flitted up and down the foggy stairs like a ghost, with a pipe smouldering in the corner of his mouth. He coughed continuously, and cursed if anybody left the attic door open and made a draught. The famous brown shoes which he had appropriated were wearing out.

The short summer had come to an end. The rich piled more clothes on, while the poor went more and more threadbare.

Jancsi went back to the bank.

He breathed more freely once he had escaped from his four days' voluntary confinement and was out in the street again. He did not feel comfortable in the flat any more.

His memories filled him with shame. He was so overwrought that he found relief in talking to himself.

Anna had become unbearable to him. Ever since that evening when Elekes had come to call on him he was at a loss to understand how he had ever felt about her as he had.

Now that his uncle and aunt were home again, now that everything was going on as before, he could not even bear to look at Anna. He suffered physically whenever she came into the room.

For the time being, he placed himself under the protection of his relatives. They saved him from any risk of finding himself alone with Anna.

He took to loitering in the streets and eyeing the women he met. They had no secrets for him now. He could undress them all in his mind.

The Tatars' tea-parties bored him. He left them as early as he could.

Finally he picked up a girl in a tea-shop. She did not attract him very much; but he took her to one of those discreet hotels where they let rooms by the day. After this girl came a mannequin, and after her a self-styled 'actress.' Jancsi took her for drives.

He rarely went home for supper. He made his headquarters at the *Club des Parisiens*, where they kept a table reserved for him.

This new establishment was, as the times went, luxuriously furnished. It was all mirrors, chandeliers, and plaster columns covered with gold leaf. A jazz band wailed endlessly.

Jazz has the advantage of making it impossible not only to think, but even to feel. This very well suited the emotional needs of the fashionable public which frequented the place. They were mostly foreign business men, the new rich, former army contractors, Allied officers, and high-class prostitutes.

Gay little war-widows went there too. These wives of the 'glorious dead' hoped to relieve their financial straits thanks to the generosity of a grateful posterity.

They were fascinated by the negro dance-band, which mimicked not only the cries of wild animals, but also the vomitings of the post-war sickness. Its din drowned everything: even their despair. They listened to it until they were drugged by its rhythm, and then took the floor.

The dance-floor itself was, in those days, a wonderful spectacle. It consisted of a sheet of glass, lit up from below by pink lamps and surrounded by masses of flowers, so that it looked like an ice-rink miraculously warmed.

Jancsi spent every night here until the place closed. The women who frequented it got to know him and cadged cigarettes from him. They liked his style of dancing, with its stately elegance. He became a familiar sight amid the mist of cigarette smoke, with a girl clasped in his arms, and his pale face bent down as he admired his patent-leather shoes drifting over the glass floor.

Day was usually dawning when he got home.

He turned his key carefully in the lock, took his shoes off in the hall, and stole to bed in his stocking-feet for fear of awakening the Vizys.

But Anna always heard him come in. She could not get to sleep until she caught the sound of Master Jancsi's footsteps.

She waited for him every night, in vain. She waited for him all day long, too. She was waiting for something else as well; but meanwhile she waited for Master Jancsi to smile at her, say a kind word to her, or at least ask her to do something for him.

But Jancsi never said a word to her. He was always in a hurry, always apparently thinking about something else.

Anna could only suppose he was angry with her.

Still, on Jancsi's account she was always very careful about how she looked. She studied her appearance in her mirror in the kitchen. She kept her hair well combed. Even when she was working, she always wore her best dress: the check one.

November came, and the nights grew longer and longer. From the South Station the whistles of steam-engines kept on crying, like lost children whimpering in the dark.

One Sunday Mrs Vizy had gone to church. Vizy was out too.

Jancsi got up late. He was brushing his various pairs of trousers and hanging them up in the wardrobe when Anna came into the room.

She opened the window, as though she were gasping for air. Then, with a great effort, she breathed:

'Master Jancsi!'

'Yes?' said Jancsi.

'Oh,' exclaimed Anna, 'can you ever forgive me?'

She burst into tears. She wept silently, but so violently that her whole body was shaken by her sobs.

Jancsi stared at her, too astonished to say anything.

Was this the girl? Was it possible that he could ever have loved this girl?

She wiped her tears away with the back of her hand, and her snivelling nose was as red as a drunken peasant-woman's. She was wearing a shawl over her shoulders, and it brought in the damp smell of autumn, just as a dog does when it comes in from the open air.

The window she had opened let in an infernal draught. Anna kept on crying, as though she would never stop.

Then she murmured something.

All Jancsi could catch was:

'The shame of it! . . . The shame of it! . . .'

'But that's impossible,' said Jancsi, firmly. 'Absolutely impossible. It's quite unthinkable.'

'But it's true!' sobbed Anna.

'Oh, do stop crying!' said Jancsi. 'Can't you stop crying?'

He put his hands to his ears to silence the sound of her sobs, just as he had once done to silence the sound of her laughter. If only she would stop crying!

'Oh, Sir! . . .' sobbed Anna.

'Listen to me,' said Jancsi. 'Will you listen to me? You can't go and say a thing like that. You can't possibly be sure yet. There's no way of being sure. You'll have to wait and see.'

He shivered with disgust. It was outrageous that he should have to talk so intimately to such a creature.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'You'll just have to wait and see,' he repeated.

He refused to believe it. Perhaps Anna was trying to blackmail him.

Yet it might be true. Every day he asked Anna whether she had anything to tell him.

But Anna could only shake her head.

At length, one night when he was at the *Club des Parisiens* with Elekes, Jancsi steered the conversation to the subject of his 'dancer.'

'Look here, Elekes,' he said, leaning back in his chair, 'I'm in trouble - the worst kind of trouble.'

'Oh, are you?' Elekes said.

He bent forward and whispered something in Jancsi's ear.

'But are you sure?' Jancsi asked.

'Of course I am,' Elekes said. 'It never fails.'

That night Jancsi went to Anna when she was in bed.

'Put your feet in hot water,' he told her. 'Very hot water - as hot as you can bear it.'

Anna heated some water - so hot that she could have plucked

a chicken in it. Then she sat with her feet in it until they were scalded.

'Well?' asked Jancsi, a day or two later.

Anna shook her head again.

'It can't be true,' muttered Jancsi, 'it simply can't be true!'

He snapped his fingers in exasperation. He was in hot water himself now – right up to his neck. What a wretched business! And what a scandal it would mean next spring!

Elekes recommended him to a gynaecologist, a great friend of his, who knew all kinds of dodges and was especially accommodating to ladies of the stage. But Jancsi felt that it was rather too complicated a matter to take this 'dancer' of his and introduce her to the doctor.

Then Elekes put him in touch with a shady person who made a living by smuggling Hungarian cigars into Czechoslovakia, and silk from Austria into Hungary – silk, and sometimes other things.

He took advantage of a moment when his aunt had gone out of the room.

'Here,' he said to Anna, 'take this?'

'What is it?' Anna asked.

'It's medicine.' He slipped four little packets of powder into her hand.

Anna turned them over and over.

'Oh, put them away, can't you?' exclaimed Jancsi. 'And then take them. You will, won't you?'

'What am I to do?' asked Anna. 'Swallow them?'

'Can't you understand?' said Jancsi. 'There's powder in each of these packets. You're to dissolve it in water, and then drink it.'

'Do you mean now?' asked Anna.

'No, no, not now!' said Jancsi. 'When you go to bed. It will work in the morning. But you mustn't let anybody see it, because it's against the law. If anybody knew about it, you might be sent to prison.'

'Then ought I to take it?' asked Anna.

'Of course, you ought,' replied Jancsi. 'But be very careful. And don't tell anybody.'

Anna did what she was told.

Once the house was quiet, she opened the paper packets. There was white powder in them. It looked like flour. She smelt it. It had no smell at all.

Anna poured the contents of all four packets into a glass of water. She did not dare to drink it in the kitchen. She went into the lavatory. There she shut her eyes and gulped it down quickly.

Oh Lord Jesus Christ, how bitter it was! Oh Blessed Virgin Mary, how bitter it was! Anna had never drunk anything so bitter in her life.

It turned even more bitter when she went back into the kitchen and lay down in her bed. Its acrid bitterness ate into the roof of her mouth, burnt her throat. Surely only poison could be so bitter as this?

Anna pressed her hand to her mouth. She fingered her tongue to make sure of this frightful bitterness. She marvelled that anything on earth could be so bitter. Even her hair seemed to have turned bitter.

She fell asleep – for how long she did not know. Then she opened her eyes wide and stared at the window. The orange-coloured light in the house opposite fascinated her. It was quivering, jerking about.

Wasn't that a bell ringing, somewhere in the distance? It kept on ringing, on and on, with a dull, deep hum that grew louder and louder.

Anna sat up in bed to see where a bell could be ringing so late.

Then a man came into the room: an enormous man. Anna had never seen anybody so huge. How had he got in, when the door was locked? He stood at her bedside, as big as a horse.

Her thoughts went whirling wildly.

'Steady on, Father, what are you doing? . . . My dear Father, do you know your head is made of ham? . . . No, don't hit her. She'll stop doing it, just like the broom that sat on the chair for fun. . . I must get on with my sweeping, or the dirt will choke me. Just look at this drawer – all full of millet seed. . . Oh, how you frightened me, Madam! I thought you were going to fall off the wall. . . And what does he want here?

Oh, go away, can't you? My thickening for the soup will get burned, and the water will boil over. Why can't you leave me alone? . . .'

Mrs Vizy bent over Anna.

'What's the matter?' she asked. 'Are you ill?'

Anna did not answer. She was in such a deep sleep that Mrs Vizy could not hear her breathing.

Mrs Vizy shook her.

'Anna,' she cried, 'Anna! Don't you hear me?'

Anna rolled over on her other side.

'Must be ill,' Mrs Vizy said to herself.

She touched Anna's forehead. It was very cold. Mrs Vizy felt her hands and feet. They were like ice, too.

'It would be awful if she died here,' thought Mrs Vizy.

She ran upstairs for the doctor; but Moviszter was at the hospital, and not expected back before his regular consultation time.

When she got back Anna was awake. Mrs Vizy made her some tea, laced it with rum, and urged Anna to drink it. It would warm her up.

But Anna kept on twisting and turning restlessly, and pointing to something.

Then she asked Mrs. Vizy to switch on the light.

'Why, what do you mean?' Mrs Vizy replied. 'It's half past eight. It's broad daylight.'

Anna was stricken with a terrible fear. She groped in the air around her. She pressed her hands to her eyes. She could see nothing. Everything was black. She had gone blind.

She sank into a deep sleep again.

At two o'clock, Vizy and Jancsi came home for dinner. Mrs Vizy told them how worried she was about Anna. Imagine the girl getting ill in her house, of all places!

Then Anna suddenly appeared in the dining-room to lay the table.

'Are you better?' Mrs Vizy asked her anxiously.

Anna could see now: but she could not hear. She could only see Mrs Vizy's lips moving.

'I expect she's got a chill,' said Vizy.

'Yes,' agreed Jancsi, 'it looks like a bit of a chill.'

'Still,' said Mrs Vizy, undecidedly, 'perhaps I ought to send for the doctor.'

'Please yourself,' said her husband, 'but you know what these peasant-girls are like.'

'After all,' added Jancsi, 'she doesn't seem too bad now.'

A little later, Anna herself asked Mrs Vizy not to trouble about the doctor. She was quite all right now, she said.

But her eyes still seemed dazzled, and there was a singing in her ears. Once she could not find the ice-box. Another time, she dropped a silver spoon and did not hear it fall. There was a tightness round her heart, just the same as during the night. She felt very small, and everything around her seemed terribly big.

'Perhaps you ate something that disagreed with you,' suggested Mrs Vizy. 'Did you eat too much of something you like? Can't you remember?'

Jancsi took advantage of a moment when nobody was looking about to run into the kitchen for a word with Anna.

'Well,' he asked, 'is it all right?'

'Yes.'

'So you see,' Jancsi said. 'I told you it would be all right.'

Anna smiled a faint, convalescent smile.

'But it was dreadful bitter,' she said. 'Oh, it was so bitter!'

'Bitter?' repeated Jancsi. 'What does that matter? All medicines are bitter. The main thing is that we're through with it. Good-bye.'

But Jancsi had had enough of the flat, and enough of the Vizys, too. They were always lecturing him for keeping late hours.

He decided to settle the question of getting a place of his own. Vizy got him a card from the Minister, he went to the housing committee and was allotted a room in Marvany street. The whole thing was done within forty-eight hours.

It was a third-floor room, and not very big; but it was at the front of the house, and, more important still, it had an entrance of its own.

That very same day, Jancsi kissed his Aunt Angela and his Uncle Vizy good-bye, and moved into his new room. He never spent another night at the Vizys.

He was sitting in his new room talking to Elekes when the bell rang. He wore his overcoat with the fur collar.

Anna had brought his things. She came in and had put them down.

'Thank you, Anna,' said Jancsi.

He pressed a hundred-Crown note into her hand, and showed her out. At the door he paused.

'Wait a moment,' he said.

He fumbled in his pocket, and handed her a paper bag.

'You can have these, too,' he said.

Anna looked inside the bag as soon as she was out in the street. It contained a few small roast chestnuts still warm.

Then Anna knew Master Jancsi was not angry with her any more.

Chapter XIV

MR. BATHORY THE SWEEP

EARLY in November the Rumanians evacuated Budapest. At eight o'clock on the fourteenth the advance-guard of the Hungarian national army reached the Danube bridges.

The people in all the houses in Buda which faced the river rushed to the windows and waved their handkerchiefs to the short, strong men from the Hungarian plain as they marched into the city in smart style. Across the river, on the Pest side, people thronged the balconies and watched the march of the advance-guard through field-glasses. It was like a family reunion. As so often in Hungarian history, the exiles were home again.

Army lorries thundered up and down the boulevards for days. The old familiar trumpet-calls were heard once more. At nine o'clock every night 'Retreat' was sounded from the Ferdinand Barracks to call the soldiers back to their quarters.

On the eighteenth - a bleak, foggy morning, with the sun hanging low in the northern sky like a red plate - the bells of all the churches in the city rang out to welcome the Commander-in-Chief. He made his formal entry by the Fehervari road, where he was greeted by the bishops.

Cornel Vizy, in top hat and frock coat, was among those

present at the ceremony, as a member of a deputation representing the Ministry. Mrs Vizy, too, was there with the ladies' parliamentary committee, and presented a bouquet tied up with ribbon in the national colours.

Meanwhile Anna had the flat to herself as she worked. It was very quiet, with nobody whistling in the passage.

All the windows were open to air the flat. Anna went out on to the balcony to shake her duster. When she came in again, the draught wafted a pleasant scent to her from the bathroom. She went into Jancsi's old room, as though she were looking for somebody.

But later in the day, as Mrs. Vizy was sitting in the drawing-room with her husband, she suddenly stopped talking and listened.

'Do you hear that?' she said. 'It's Anna singing.'

Anna was singing a gay little air:

'Tomorrow's Saturday, and in the park

I'm going to meet my sweetheart in the dark.'

'That's funny,' Mrs Vizy went on. 'I've never heard her singing before.'

'Well,' said Vizy, 'I suppose she's feeling happy. Would you rather she cried?'

A day or two later, while Mrs Vizy was sitting in the kitchen, Anna, who was cutting up the meat for dinner, suddenly gave a little cry.

'What's the matter?'

'I've cut myself,' Anna said.

Her hand was covered with blood. The big kitchen knife had cut her thumb right down to the bone, nearly taking it off at the joint. It was a nasty, gaping wound.

'Why can't you be more careful?' said Mrs Vizy.

'It's not much,' Anna said.

She washed her thumb under the tap, sprinkled it with salt, and tied it up with a bit of rag. But the rag was soon soaked with blood.

Mrs Vizy sent her upstairs to Dr Moviszter. He put something that smarted on the cut, bandaged it properly, and patted Anna on the cheek. He told her it wouldn't leave any scar for her wedding-day. Such a nice gentleman, Anna thought.

Winter set in sharply. It froze hard, and such a thick fog settled on the city that it was impossible to see two steps ahead.

Then snow fell, burying the streets. The trams and the buses stopped running. It kept on snowing. The big fat policeman rang the bell, and told Fichor to keep the snow swept away from the pavement in front of the Vizy's house, or he would report him.

Anna did it for him. At five o'clock in the morning, when everybody was still asleep, she went out in her check dress – she always wore it now – and looked round at the snow, blue and purple in the dark. Deep silence surrounded her. Sparrows hopped on the dry twigs. Anna broke the frozen crust of snow with a hatchet and shovelled the snow away.

There was nobody about in the streets yet. Not until towards eight o'clock did civil servants start sauntering to work, smoking cigars.

As he made his way slowly downstairs, wearing a wide cap with flaps to protect his sensitive ears, old Dr Movizster sometimes stopped at the Vizys' door and asked Anna how she was. One day he took her hand in his, looked at the bandage on her thumb, which had got dirty, and told her to put on a fresh one.

Owing to the cold and her hard work, Anna's cut took a long time to heal. Even apart from this, her hands got chapped all over and always grimy with coal-dust. They were so ugly that Anna could not bear to look at them.

Every woman becomes less attractive in cold weather, but servant-girls lose their looks to such an extent that anybody who has seen them only in the warmth of summer can scarcely recognise them.

Anna lost her looks like all the rest. Her hair kept on falling out. More and more tangled pieces of it came away in her steel comb. She felt ashamed to be seen by anybody.

For the first time in her life, too, she started feeling tired. It was a curious kind of nervous exhaustion, which would not let her keep still.

At night, when she had finished her work, she could not go to bed. She walked about the flat, swinging her arms and

slapping them with her hands. She went up and down the passage, and from room to room.

One night Mrs Vizy, who had gone to bed, called out to her and asked what she was doing out there in the dark.

Anna shivered and went to bed. She did not know what she wanted, or what was the matter with her.

Jancsi had given up having any of his meals at the Vizys', though he had a standing invitation to come whenever he liked. They expected him every Sunday and every public holiday; but he came only once.

Once, too, Anna caught sight of him through a café window. He was leaning over a big green table, and he had a long pole in his hand.

She did not see him again for a long time.

As the days went by, something inside her turned cold and dead. She had almost forgotten what had happened; but she still suffered.

Animals seldom have a sense of the past or the future. Most of them live only in the present. But they are able to feel that something that used to exist has ceased to exist.

Anna was like a hungry dog who does not know what is wrong with him. He keeps on sniffing round his empty dish, and when he finds nothing in it he slinks back to his bed, with a mournful backward glance now and again.

One evening, Anna was standing on the upper landing, outside the door of the stairs which led up to the attic, with her arms hanging lax at her sides, in a kind of daze.

'Come in here for a moment,' she heard Stefi's voice say. 'I want to show you something.'

Stefi showed her a pink frock: a wonderful pink frock which she herself had made. Flushed with excitement, she let Anna into a secret. Before long there was to be a ball, a grand ball; and, in front of all the society people, a hundred couples were to dance Hungarian national dances.

All the girls who were going to dance were of good family: daughters of doctors, lawyers, and so on. But Stefi had been chosen too. She had to go to a dancing school, and have lessons from a dancing master; and he was very strict. She owed this great honour to the fact that she was friends with a

corporal belonging to the corps of Guards of the Holy Crown. He had recommended her, and she was to be his partner.

Anna listened patiently, and Stefi was delighted to have her for an audience.

After that night, Stefi often asked Anna to come and see her. She invited Anna to go to the cinema with her, and said she would pay for her. Anna hesitated at first, saying that she had no clothes for such a grand place; but in the end she went.

It was the first time she had ever been in a cinema.

Motor-cars dashed across the screen, and somebody fell into a pond. Then the hero kissed the heroine in a garden.

Stefi talked about her corporal. He was fond of her; but she did not care for him much.

'I don't care if he gets hurt,' said Stefi. 'It does men no harm to get hurt - they're so selfish, all of them.'

At the same time, she explained the picture to Anna.

Her favourite actor was a tall, thin, pale one. Whenever he appeared, she clutched Anna by the arm.

'Look,' she said, 'that's the one I like. He's my type. What's yours?'

Anna could not answer this question. She did not know what type meant. Besides, the number of characters in the film and the crowd around her confused her.

When it was all over, she thanked Stefi; but she never went to the cinema again.

For that matter, she had not much time to spare.

She had to spend most of the day looking after the stoves. The heating of the flat gave her more trouble than anything else. All the stoves in the flat were thoroughly unsatisfactory.

Early every morning, after she had swept away the snow, Anna went down into the coal-cellar with a candle. The cellar was deep under ground, and its walls oozed damp. The damp heat almost choked her. She filled her two scuttles with coal without daring to look behind her; for there were rats in the cellar which made their way in from the sewers, burrowing far under the earth, and Anna was terrified of them.

The dining-room had to be warmed before breakfast. Anna lit the stove, blew at it, fanned it with her apron; but the fire

only smouldered and gave off clouds of suffocating smoke, which filled the whole flat.

It was the same thing every day, in the other rooms as well as the dining-room.

Mrs Vizy was always scolding Anna about it.

'Why don't you send for the chimney-sweep?' she asked Anna one day.

'Mr Bathory was here only yesterday,' replied Anna.

'Then it must be your fault,' said Mrs Vizy. 'I expect you don't put enough chips in the stove.'

Mr Arpad Bathory, the sweep—he claimed connection with the noble Bathory family—lived opposite the Vizys. He often came to see to the stoves, played about with all kinds of tools, and burnt the soot out of the chimneys. The next day the stoves smoked as badly as ever.

One day, when Mrs Vizy was out, Anna ran over to him in despair.

'What is it, little Anna?' he asked.

'I can't get the stove to burn,' Anna exclaimed.

Mr Bathory came over at once, put his ladder up against the wall, kicked off his shoes and attended to the sick stove in his stockinged feet.

'I've tried everything,' Anna lamented.

'Well, well!' said Mr Bathory sympathetically, as one workman to another. But he was not thinking about Anna personally; he was thinking only about the stove.

He shook its grate, he tested its pipe, he almost put his head inside it in his perplexity.

'The wind keeps blowing the smoke down,' said Anna.

'Wait a minute,' said the chimney-sweep, all at once. 'Give me the key of the attic.'

In a few moments, Mr Bathory was outside on the snowy roof. He climbed up to the chimney-stack as lithely and nimbly as a cat. As he stood out black against the white of the roof, Anna, watching him from the yard, thought he looked just like a tom-cat on the tiles. He tinkered with the chimney-cowls.

'Now we'll see whether there's a draught,' he shouted down, with his voice deadened by the snow.

'Weren't you afraid up there?' Anna asked him when he came down again.

'Why, what should I be afraid of?' Mr Bathory replied.

Anna started making up the fire again.

'Leave it to me,' Mr Bathory said.

He shoved his big hands inside the grate, raked out the ashes, still hot, and started the fire blazing with a newspaper.

Squatting side by side, Anna and Mr Bathory watched the chips catch alight.

'It will burn all right now,' said Mr Bathory; and he stood up.

They waited until the embers glowed, and then the sweep put on a good supply of coal; but he knew all about fires, and was careful not to choke the stove.

They could hear the coal starting to crackle. They held their hands in front of the stove. More and more warmth came from it, and the little iron grate started getting red.

'Well,' said Mr Bathory, 'what did I say?'

His white teeth gleamed in his sooty face as he grinned.

'Thank you very much,' Anna said.

'Not at all, Miss Anna,' said Mr Bathory. 'Come over for me any time you want me.'

Henceforth all three chimneys of the Vizys' flat poured their smoke gaily into the sulphur-yellow sky.

'Burning all right?' Mr Bathory asked Anna a day or two later.

'Yes, thank you,' said Anna.

'They should burn all right now,' said Mr Bathory.

Next Wednesday, a fierce storm swept the city. The snow-covered surface of the grass in the Vermezo tossed like Lake Balaton on a rough day. The wind howled around the house and shook it.

Mrs Vizy had gone to her spiritualist séance.

Anna, listening to the storm, sat beside the stove warming herself. The glowing coal purred softly, and fell with a sparkle like diamonds. The iron door of the stove stared at her with its five red eyes.

Suddenly Anna heard somebody softly trying the door-knob.

She went to the door, and found Mr Bathory standing outside.

'Oh,' she said, 'you frightened me!'

'Who, me?' Bathory asked.

'Yes,' Anna said, 'you're so black.'

The sweep was standing in the hall in his black clothes, with a black brush over his shoulder, and a black rope slung round him.

'How can you be so black,' Anna said, joking away her fright, 'you look as black as the devil.'

'Well,' retorted Mr Bathory, 'maybe neither of us is as black as we're painted.'

He came forward to the kitchen door, inside the circle of light cast by the lamp.

'Nobody in, is there?' he said.

His eyes twinkled. They were blue eyes, as improbably big as those of an actor wearing make-up.

'What are you doing?' he asked Anna.

'I'm just going to make a cake,' replied Anna. 'And what are you doing here?'

'Oh,' said Mr Bathory, 'I just thought I'd drop in.'

He stayed standing at the kitchen-door.

Anna put her dough into a bowl, and added butter, sugar and salt. Then she poured in some warm milk, and beat up the mixture.

The sweep watched her working for a few moments.

'Well,' he said, 'I must be getting home soon. I want to see whether that daughter of mine is home yet. She gads about so much.'

'How long is it since your wife died?' Anna asked.

'About two years,' Mr Bathory said. 'She died in the autumn.'

'What was wrong with her?'

'Consumption.'

Anna put down her wooden spoon. She looked up like some people do when they read something profound.

'I can't bear living alone,' the sweep went on. 'I must have somebody to look after her.'

'You ought to find someone easily enough,' said Anna. 'How old are you?'

'Thirty-five.'

'Well, you aren't old, and you earn quite a lot.'

'I've been recommended several women lately. The latest is a widow with a small house in Pest-Erzsebet.'

'Well, what more do you want?'

'Ah,' said Mr Bathory, 'but I'd like to have you. I don't know why nobody recommended you to me. . .'

'Don't be silly!' Anna interrupted him sharply. She had no intention of being flirtatious. She knew now that she was not attractive.

But Mr Bathory found her attractive. Perhaps it was her suffering, her still fresh grief, which men can always detect. Perhaps it was her modesty, her humility, which often attract more than beauty itself.

Mr Bathory went on leaning against the lintel. He waited until Anna put her cake into the tin. Then he said:

'Well, I'll have to be going.'

'Yes, you'd better hurry, Mr Bathory,' Anna said. 'They'll be home soon.'

Mr Bathory did not press his suit with Anna too much.

Meeting her by accident in the street again he remarked casually that he was looking out for a second wife. Then, a little later, he sent a message by Mrs Fichor that he would be very glad to marry Anna, if she would care to marry him.

Mrs Fichor did her best to second his proposal.

She told Anna that it was a great stroke of luck for her, and that she ought not to miss it for anything in the world. She sang the sweep's praises. He was a sober, industrious man, and he had treated his first wife very well.

Anna did not say 'No,' but she pleaded for time to think it over.

Mr Bathory, for his part, asked her to come and see his home.

On Anna's next evening out, he met her in the Vermezo and took her there. It was a big room on the fourth floor, running from back to front of the house.

Wintry moonlight played on the frosty windows, and lit Anna and Mr Bathory with a leaden light as they entered the dark room.

Anna ran to the front window and looked down below. She could see the Vizys' house, and picked out her own window from a tree which grew outside. She was surprised how small the house looked from so high up.

Mr Bathory lit a paraffin-lamp, and placed it on a wall-bracket near the window.

There were any number of things in the room: two bedsteads, two big wardrobes, a sofa, a sideboard, a table – everything you could want for the making of a home.

Mr Bathory pulled out some drawers. He showed Anna all his wife's belongings, neatly folded and scarcely worn. There were six chemises, three petticoats, and a red Kashmir kerchief.

Mr Bathory treated Anna with the utmost respect and politeness.

Anna felt a little thrill of delight run through her. She tried to make up her mind.

Later on, Mr Bathory's daughter came home. She was a surly little lass of fourteen, wearing muddy court shoes. Mr Bathory introduced her to Anna, but she went and sat in a corner and said nothing.

Then Anna prepared supper for them, boiling potatoes with paprika. The three of them ate it in silence.

As Mr Bathory escorted Anna home, he asked her:

'Well, what do you think now?'

'I haven't made up my mind yet,' said Anna.

Mr. Bathory remarked that he wanted to get married as soon as possible.

'Don't ask me now,' said Anna. 'I'll tell you after Christmas.'

They left it at that.

Before Christmas, Anna had plenty to do. She made all kinds of cakes.

One day, her brother came to see her unexpectedly. They had not met for five years, for he had been a prisoner of war in France. He was quite a man now, and had grown a moustache. He had a job as a coachman at the Pusztá, and carried his whip in his hand. He had driven over in a trap on an errand. They talked for a time, then he drove away again.

There was great festivity in the house at Christmas. At the

Drumas most of the presents were for the newborn baby. Stefi got a gold wrist-watch. The Moviszters gave Ethel a length of linen.

The Vizys were the last to light their Christmas tree, with the Drumas and the Moviszters as their guests. Mrs Vizy surprised her husband with a cigar-case, and he gave her two dozen handkerchiefs, as he did every year.

Then Mrs Vizy handed Anna her gift, wrapped in tissue-paper.

It was a jumper: a thick brown knitted jumper to keep her warm while she swept away the snow.

As Anna unwrapped it by the light of the wax candles, Mrs Druma nudged Mrs Moviszter.

Both of them knew that jumper very well. It had been a present from Mrs Vizy to Katica, and Katica had given it back when she left.

Chapter XV

MIND AND MATTER

ON the day of Epiphany, the Vizys went to the Tatars, who were giving a big political tea-party, attended by two Cabinet Ministers.

When they got home, Mrs Vizy went to the kitchen to see Anna.

She stopped on the threshold in surprise.

There was a strange man in the kitchen. He was sitting at the table, and with him – sitting at the other side of the table – was Anna.

At the sight of Mrs Vizy, the strange man stood up respectfully.

‘Good evening, Madam,’ he said.

Mrs Vizy could see him better now. The lamp lit up his pale face and his curly fair hair. He was wearing a light grey suit and a bow tie.

Mrs Vizy searched her memory in vain. She scrutinised him with growing distrust.

‘You don’t recognise me, Madam,’ said the man, in a pleasant, deep baritone. He smiled. ‘The chimney-sweep.’

'Oh, of course,' said Mrs Vizy. 'I really didn't recognize you. I've never seen you like this. Good evening, Mr Bathory, good evening.'

The uninvited guest did not intrude much longer. He waited until the mistress of the house had left the kitchen, lingered a little lest it should look as though he wanted to hurry away, and then took his leave of Anna quietly.

The scales fell from Mrs Vizy's eyes.

She shook her head, and that absent-minded look of hers came into her face. She had never thought of anything like this. She had never thought that Anna might take up with a man.

Her Anna!

The very idea of somebody sitting in the same room with Anna! It was worse than a nuisance: it was a scandal. It was an open usurpation of Mrs Vizy's rights. It was as bad as finding the chimney-sweep sprawling on her bed, calmly puffing his pipe.

His impudence, Anna's impudence, put Mrs Vizy out of temper; but she said nothing for the moment.

The next day, she approached the subject carefully.

'Tell me, Anna,' she asked, 'does Mr Bathory often come to see you?'

'He looks in now and again,' replied Anna.

'What do you mean—"now and again?" So this wasn't the first time, eh? He often comes, does he?'

'Pretty often.'

'How many times has he been?'

'I'm not sure.'

'You know very well that I don't like having that kind of thing. I don't like a strange man in my house.'

'I don't ask him, Madam, and I can't turn him out.'

'I can't allow this sort of thing, you know.'

'It's all the same to me whether he comes or not.'

'Well, why don't you tell him so?'

'I can't do that, Madam.'

'Very well, then, I shall tell him myself. You've got other things to do.'

'Just as you like, Madam. It's really all the same to me.'

So Mrs Vizy spoke to the chimney-sweep, and Mr Bathory never showed himself in the house again. But this was by no means the end of the affair.

One day in the kitchen, Mrs Vizy brought up the subject again.

'Was Mr Bathory courting you, Anna?' she asked.

'Oh, we just talked,' replied Anna.

'I suppose he's been filling your head with a lot of nonsense. Mind he doesn't turn your head.'

'Where is the butter, Madam?'

'It's on the window-sill. . . I warn you, you'd better be careful, Anna - very careful. I repeat, he'll only turn your head. What has he been saying to you?'

'Well, one day he said . . .'

But Anna turned on the tap and filled a saucepan with water, so that Mrs Vizy could not hear what she was saying.

Mrs Vizy waited until Anna had put the saucepan on the stove. Then she went on with her examination of Anna.

'Well, what did he say?'

'He said he couldn't bear living alone.'

'Was that all?'

'Then he said he wanted to get married again.'

'Interesting ! And what did you say to him?'

'Nothing.'

'And quite right, too. Such a ridiculous idea! He's not the man for you at all.'

Anna agreed with Mrs Vizy. In her own mind, too, she thought that perhaps her mistress was right.

The news that Anna had a suitor, that somebody had proposed to her, did not remain a secret for long.

The whole house got to know of it, and the people in it became divided into two parties.

Mr Bathory had been careful to create partisans to look after his cause in his absence. He had fostered a public opinion in his favour. Chiefly he relied on the servants.

He had promised to reward Mrs Fichor if she got Anna for him, and she was his loyal ally. It was she who won Stefi over to his cause.

Stefi urged Anna to be reasonable. If she was too fastidious,

she might have the same experience as Stefi herself. At the age of thirty-two, Stefi was still a servant.

Ethel, the Moviszter's old servant, did not fall into line entirely. She agreed that Mr Bathory was a good match; but marriage was a serious step. Why should a servant get married if she were happy unmarried?

The Drumas were emphatically in favour of the idea of Anna getting married. Mrs Moviszter regarded the matter with benevolent neutrality.

They all gave her advice every day. One urged her to make up her mind quickly. Another told her to take her time, and not be in a hurry on any account.

Anna received so much advice that it only confused her. When she thought it over, she felt that she would like either to be left alone or to let them decide her fate as they wished. She was sick of the whole thing. She always sided with the last person who spoke to her on the subject.

Mrs Vizy wondered what would happen. If Anna was always influenced by the last person who spoke to her, to whose opinion amid the medley of conflicting counsel would she finally listen?

At last, one day while she was peeling potatoes, Anna solved the problem.

Quite calmly, she broke the news to her mistress that she would have to look for another girl. She had decided to marry Mr Bathory.

If the new servant could come by then, she would like to leave on the fifteenth of the month. If not, she would stay till the end of the month, but no longer.

Her notice was not unfriendly, but it was businesslike.

At the moment, Mrs Vizy did not try to influence Anna by a single word. She accepted her notice in the same businesslike way. Then she looked Anna up and down as though she were a stranger, and stalked out of the kitchen.

The blow had not come unexpectedly. She had felt it hanging over her head for weeks. Perhaps for that very reason, it was all the more shattering now that it had fallen.

Anna had been with her for six months: the longest time any servant had ever spent in her house. She had grown so

used to Anna that she could not imagine anybody – either anybody better or anybody worse – in Anna's place.

Mrs Vizio did not start looking for a new girl at once.

After the first shock, a strange lethargy descended upon her. She had a feeling of confidence. It might be unfounded, but she was supported in it by her faith in spiritualism.

Indirectly, she asked her guardian spirit what she ought to do. It gave her this answer:

'What you are afraid of will not happen; but you must show yourself very strong.'

With this assurance Mrs Vizio was content.

Meanwhile, however, she fell ill.

Her husband found her in bed one day when he came home to dinner, lying in the darkened bedroom with an ice-pack to her head and a bottle of smelling-salts beside her.

Mrs Vizio's illness, which recurred at irregular intervals, started as a rule with a sudden fit of crying, which came on without any apparent reason. Then her head starting aching terribly. This overpowering headache tortured her for hours. It affected the nerves of her stomach, which eventually relieved itself by vomiting. Then the headache slowly passed off. The doctors called it 'hysteria', but they could do nothing to cure her.

Vizio did not even speak to his wife. He cast a reproachful glance at her and turned away. His wife's attacks gave him no anxiety, but they gave him a good deal of annoyance. He took her daring to be ill as a personal affront to him.

In the afternoon, Mrs Vizio got worse. She moaned and groaned and wrung her hands. After a time, she started vomiting. Anna was kept busy going to and fro with a basin.

Dr. Moviszter came in after his consulting hours. He looked bored as he hung up his overcoat; but he put on his best bedside manner before he went into the sick-room.

The doctor switched on the small lamp on the bedside-table; but Mrs Vizio complained that she could not bear the light, and held one of her numerous handkerchiefs to her eyes.

Moviszter, however, insisted on one of the windows being opened. He said the room was too stuffy.

Vizio stood at the head of the bed, dancing attendance on

the doctor. He called his wife 'Angel', as he always did in the presence of outsiders, and asked her whether she felt any better.

Moviszter gently reprimanded his patient for not looking after herself. He took her hand and held it in silent sympathy; then he felt her pulse and took her temperature. He nodded, satisfied to find that she had no temperature and that her pulse was normal.

Then, feeling that he ought to do something more, he made a general examination of the patient. He stripped Mrs Vizy's body and started inspecting it.

He knew this body just as a piano-tuner knows a piano which he overhauls regularly. He knew every hammer, every key of it; but he also knew that the mechanism was not everything. He knew that what was essential was the co-ordination of the hammers and the keys, if real harmony was to come from it.

He knew, too, that something even more than this was needed. This body beneath his hands, though it might seem so, was not something self-contained, aloof and independent from the world around it. It was not something solitary, something isolated: it was linked with everything that lived in heaven and earth.

But that was beyond the range of his science.

Disillusioned but conscientious, he went through the formality which he had performed so many times in vain. He pressed his patient's stomach and abdomen, made her sit up and take a deep breath, listened to her lungs, tapped her heart. Finally he thanked her politely.

During Moviszter's examination of his wife, Vizy held his breath, as though to help the doctor in his search.

Vizy was one of those educated, otherwise up-to-date men who believe in medicine as it is currently taught, and in all those other branches of science which supply their students with official diplomas, as a devout man believes in his religion. He regarded doctors as men who knew things that ordinary men did not know. So he saw them in a more or less mystical light.

It was with this feeling that he watched Moviszter's proceed-

ings. As the doctor shook down his thermometer, making the links in his stiff shirt-cuffs rattle as he did so, Vizzy felt that the rattle on the shirt-cuffs had a 'medical' sound. The stethoscope aroused a similar sentiment of awe in him.

All the time the doctor was bending over Mrs Vizzy, he expected him suddenly to exclaim that now, at last, he had discovered the real cause of her illness.

But Moviszter simply said:

'I can't find anything wrong.'

'Not with her stomach?' Vizzy asked.

'Nothing wrong there.'

'Her lungs?'

'Absolutely clear.'

'Her heart?'

'Very strong.'

'What ought she to eat?'

'Anything she likes.'

'A little clear soup, perhaps?' suggested Vizzy, trying to be helpful.

'Quite so,' agreed Moviszter.

'Are you going to prescribe something for her, Miplos?'

'Yes,' said Moviszter, indifferently.

He scribbled something on a sheet of paper.

'I'll get it made up at once,' Vizzy said.

'Oh, it isn't so urgent as all that,' the doctor said.

He handed the prescription to Mrs Vizzy.

'Take ten drops of this on a lump of sugar,' he told her.

'You can take fifteen drops if you feel feverish, but not otherwise. All you really want is a rest and something to take your mind off yourself. Have you still got a headache? No? Didn't I tell you there was nothing wrong with you?'

He got up to go, and held out his hand.

Vizzy glanced at his wife.

'Shall I show you up, Angel?' he said. 'What's really the matter with her is that she won't stop worrying. Our servant, Anna, has given notice. She's going to get married.'

'I see,' Moviszter said.

'My wife's been worrying about this for a week,' Vizzy went on. 'She can't sleep.'

'Are you really worrying about it so badly as all that?' asked the doctor.

'Well, it's not very pleasant, is it?' replied Mrs Vizy, in a husky tone of voice. 'I've just got her trained, and now she's leaving me.'

'Well,' Moviszter said, 'isn't that what they all do?'

'Yes,' retorted Mrs Vizy, 'because they're an ungrateful lot. They've no consideration for anybody except themselves. Look at all the trouble I've taken teaching her for the last six months. And now what's the good of it?'

'I'll tell you, Mrs Vizy,' said Moviszter. 'I have a patient who is seventy-six, and she's just started learning English. She may die before she learns it. But let's suppose she doesn't. Let's suppose she dies at the age of a hundred with a knowledge of English. You might ask what's the good of that. For that matter, is it worth while to start anything even at twenty? It is. One must pass the time somehow.'

'And she was such a good girl,' Mrs Vizy whispered. 'But now she's gone crazy - quite crazy.'

'Oh no, she hasn't,' said Moviszter. 'She just wants to get married. Well, let her. You'll soon find another one.'

'Another one like Anna? No, never!'

'Perhaps not one as good as Anna. Perhaps one a bit worse.'

'Yes, a thief, perhaps.'

'She may be a thief. But, believe me, there's no such thing as the perfect servant. You have to take them as you find them, good and bad together.'

'Like your Ethel, eh? I beg your pardon, Doctor; but I wouldn't have her inside my house. I've always wondered how you ...'

'I'm not by any means enchanted with her myself,' Moviszter interrupted. 'She's rude even to my patients. The other day she scolded one of them for not wiping his feet on the mat. But what can I do? They all have their faults. It's quite natural, and one must make the best of it. Their lives aren't such a bed of roses, you know. They have so much to do, and it's the kind of work in which they can't take much pleasure, because as soon as it's finished it has to be started all over again. Other people eat it up or make a mess of it. Yes, that's what we do;

make a mess of it. So they ought to be allowed the compensation of a few faults. You must understand their point of view.'

'Oh, I do,' Mrs Vizi nodded; but her eyes gleamed behind her wet lashes. 'There's only one thing I can't understand about them. Tell me, my dear Doctor, why are they such awful creatures?'

Dr Moviszter decided that the conversation was pursuing parallel lines which would never meet.

He murmured something about 'ten or fifteen drops, as I said', and took his leave.

Mrs Vizi stared after him. She made up her mind she would never call the old fool in again.

Her husband came back from showing the doctor out.

'Moviszter's quite right,' he said. 'There's nothing whatever the matter with you. . . Do you have to keep on patting your hair like that?'

'Does it annoy you?'

'It does, very much. I often get a splitting headache at the Ministry, and then when I come home I've got to put up with things like this. It's not fair. You'll just have to find another girl, and that's all about it.'

'But can't you see that I can't get on without Anna? I'd be lost without her.'

'That's an exaggeration. You always exaggerate. She's a good girl, I agree; but, after all, you can't make her stay if she doesn't want to stay. You'll just have to let her go.'

'I've no intention of letting her go.'

'But what can you do to stop her? Even if you stand on your head, she'll go. You're getting on my nerves - and just when I'm so busy at the Ministry, too. I've had enough of this servant-problem. I've had enough of it, I say. Let her go. Let her go to hell.'

'Don't shout!'

'Well, who started it? Look here, this is ridiculous. Do you mean to say nobody else can do what Anna does?'

'That's just what I do mean,' cried Mrs Vizi, 'Nobody else can do what Anna does.'

She got to her knees on the bed, in her white nightdress, and beat the air.

Vizy stared at her in astonishment.

'Have you gone mad?' he exclaimed.

'If anybody's mad,' retorted his wife, 'it's you. And, as well as that, you're a nasty, cruel beast. You're rude, and you're selfish - and you have been all your life. . .'

She started sobbing slowly, wiping her tears away with one handkerchief after another.

Vizy sat down, and picked his nose. He listened to her scolding patiently, with all the submissiveness of a husband who deceives his wife, and is sometimes prepared to do penance for it.

The telephone rang. Vizy hurried to his writing-desk. He crooked his hand round the mouthpiece and spoke into it in a low voice, furtively. Then he put on his overcoat and went out.

Left alone, Mrs Vizy went on crying for a little; but she soon tired herself out, and lay staring straight in front of her.

All at once, she saw Anna standing beside her bed.

'I just came to see whether you wanted anything,' murmured Anna.

Mrs Vizy did not answer. Since Anna had given her notice, she had hardly spoken a word to her. She hated Anna so much that she could scarcely bear to look at her.

Anna waited, uncertainly.

She was conscious of this hostile atmosphere which surrounded her. She felt sorry for her mistress because she was so ill; and perhaps it was partly her own fault that Mrs Vizy was suffering so much.

Mrs Vizy sighed.

Anna was still there, reluctant to go away. Mrs Vizy felt that the chill in the atmosphere had weakened the girl's resistance.

She settled her pillow, and spoke to Anna in a reproachful, but conciliatory tone of voice.

'Well, have you come to your senses?' she asked.

Anna hung her head and said nothing.

Mrs Vizy went on, with weighty pauses in between her sentences:

'I must know what you are going to do. . .I've had enough

of this uncertainty... I can't stand scenes... Of course, I can't keep you against your will... You've every right to go if you like... You've every right to go and leave me alone in the middle of the winter... I told you already, I can't force you to stay... If you don't like being here, we must just part in peace... But if you're going to stay, I must know once and for all... I really can't understand you... What's the matter with this place?... Has anybody here ever done you any harm?... You get plenty to eat, don't you?... Do you want any money?... Your wages have been accumulating at the bank. You can take the money out, any time you like, and buy anything you want with it... Or do you want more wages?... I might consider that... If I only knew what you really want...'

Anna came a little closer to the bed.

Mrs Vizy felt that the time was now ripe to sweep Anna off her feet. She remembered the voice of her guardian spirit, telling her to be strong.

'You don't know what you want yourself,' she continued. 'You believe in this wretched man who's turned your head... But I know the kind of man he is, only too well... He'll promise you heaven and earth, and then he'll leave you... He doesn't make enough money to keep himself decently... Are you going to live in that miserable hovel of his?... All he wants, if anybody is fool enough to marry him, is an unpaid servant... If he were a young man, I might understand it. But he's not a young man, and he's a widower. He's got a daughter nearly as old as you are... I know that little wretch. She'll scratch your eyes out... Do you want to be a step-mother?... Oh, I've seen things like this before... Several of my girls got married... Then they came and told me that their husbands beat them, that they drank, that they wouldn't work... They asked me to take them back. "Oh, Madam," they said, "if only I could come back here!"... But I won't have anybody back who's once left me... And what will you do if that happens to you?... Where will you go?... Home?... Or into a bad house?...'

Anna whispered something, with a smile; but Mrs Vizy was bent on making sure of her victory.

'Don't ruin your life!' she went on. 'Don't ruin your youth! And it is lovely to be young like you. You'll never have it again... If you do, you'll be terribly sorry... Take advice from somebody more experienced and far-seeing than yourself... I'm not against your marrying when the right man comes along... But a man like this!... The right man will come along later on, and then you can get married... As I say, I can't force you... Think it over, and make up your mind once and for all... Tell me to-morrow... Think it over thoroughly...'

Anna patted her hair.

'I've made up my mind already,' she said.

'Then you'll stay?' asked Mrs Vizy.

'Yes, Madam,' replied Anna.

The great battle was over. Mrs Vizy sank back on her pillow.

'Will you have something to eat, Madam?' asked Anna.

'I don't think so,' said Mrs Vizy. 'Yes, perhaps I will. I haven't had anything for two days. Give me a little stewed fruit.'

Anna served her more briskly, more cheerfully, than she had ever done before.

She brought her mistress a jar of preserved cherries. On the label Mrs Vizy recognised Katica's spidery handwriting.

'That's last year's,' she said to herself. 'Katica preserved it.'

She thought about Katica for the first time for months. As she ate her cherries and spat out the stones, her last servant came into her mind, as though the memory of her had been preserved in the jar too and had now burst out.

The jar lasted a few days, and every time Mrs Vizy ate the cherries Katica came back to her. Then the little label was torn off and the jar was washed out, and she never gave Katica another thought.

Peace reigned once more in the Vizys' home.

Anna herself went to see Mr Bathory. So emphatic was she in her refusal of him, that he was much offended. A fortnight later, he married the widow who had the little house in Erzsebet street.

Anna did not seem to mind. If she was asked whether it wasn't all for the best, she said that perhaps it was.

Stefi made no attempt to prevail upon Anna to accept Mr Bathory. She had troubles enough of her own to worry about. When she had already learned the Hungarian folk-dances, and even bought her patent-leather shoes for the ball at which she was to dance with gentlemen's daughters, she had received a letter from the organising committee saying that 'to their great regret they were unable to include her in the dancing.'

Now that all the excitement was over, the people in the house lost interest in Anna more and more. She fell into line with everybody else, and became so familiar a figure that they scarcely noticed her and stopped talking about her altogether.

Like most servants, Anna took to imitating her mistress. She had caught Mrs Vizy's nervous trick of patting her hair. When the Vizys' friends rang up, they could scarcely tell the difference between the voices of mistress and maid.

Chapter XVI

CARNIVAL

ONE day, when an office-boy at the bank brought the mail up to the Foreign Exchange Department, he put a mourning card on Joseph Elekes' desk.

When he took it out of its envelope, he was so much taken aback that he nearly dropped it.

In the middle of the sheet of paper, surrounded by a thick black edging, he saw the name of his best friend, Jancsi Patikarius.

For months Elekes had heard nothing of him. Jancsi had disappeared from the bank one day without any warning, and his name had been struck off the list of clerks. At his room in Buda nothing was known about him. The Vizys told Elekes they believed he was in Vienna; but he had not written to them or anybody else.

Elekes proceeded to read the mourning-card. It ran as follows:

Francis Patikarius and his wife Theresa (nee Jumbor),
in their own name and in the name of their family,
announce with broken hearts that their only son

JANOS PATIKARIUS

on February 16th, 1920, departed serious life and
from now on will live only a life of gaiety.

The happy deceased adopts this unusual form of inviting his friends on the above day, at midnight sharp, to a champagne-supper at the *Club des Parisiens*, in order that they may bury all troubles with due solemnity.

Fun is obligatory.

Down with sadness!

R. I. P.

Elekes leant against a steel safe, dumbfounded, staring at the mourning-card. Really, he thought, old Jancsi was going a bit too far.

Then, as he got over the shock, a broadening smile dawned on his face. He read the card over again, and this time the witty boldness of its style tickled him. Jancsi had certainly taken him in at the start.

Jancsi arrived in Budapest by the Vienna express the same day.

From the West Station he drove straight to a hotel on the Embankment. He had a bath, and went down to the restaurant for dinner.

The estate-agent with whom he had made an appointment by telegram was already awaiting him at a table. They settled their business in a few minutes. Jancsi signed an agreement handing over the lease of his room with all the furniture in it. In return, the agent handed him a wad of dollar notes. Jancsi slipped them lightly into his waistcoat-pocket. They shook hands on a transaction carried through with the best 'American' hustle.

After great, glamorous Vienna, poor little Budapest seemed so intimate that it made Jancsi almost sentimental.

It was a rapturous afternoon, delightfully fresh, the kind of winter afternoon when everything sparkles with the joy of life.

Crisp snow lay everywhere. The snow on the foreheads of the stone lions at Adam Clark's Chain Bridge made them look as though their heads were tied up in white kerchiefs. Sleigh-bells tinkled, and so did skates in the hands of girls hurrying to the ice-rinks. The sharp frost made everybody's face look healthy and fresh. Inside Gerbeaud's pâtisserie the glass chandeliers were already lit, and in the narrow seventeenth-century streets of the City the lights came on one by one behind the glass in the shop-windows, making everything in them seem more magical, more desirable than ever.

The sky, too, took part in this enchantment. It glimmered apple-green beyond Gellert hill, and glowed pink behind the Royal Palace. Then the winter stars came out, tiny and clear.

That evening, the Vizys had a lady visitor.

Anna ushered her into the drawing-room, and asked her to take a seat. Mrs Vizy was changing her into an afternoon frock. The lady waited, pulling her fur-coat about her. She was feeling cold.

When Mrs Vizy came into the drawing-room, the lady introduced herself in a thin, birdlike voice. She spoke about Vizy, whom she had met at the Ministry, and about the Patikarius family, whom she had met at Eger. She went on chattering, staring at Mrs. Vizy through her lorgnettes.

Mrs. Vizy treated her visitor with reserve. She could not quite make out why the lady had called on her. Mrs Vizy imagined she must be one of those 'committee-women', who were always organising for various charities, enlisting members and collecting contributions.

The lady kept on mentioning a certain countess. She talked very fast, spinning a regular web of words, and slipping from one subject to another with glib superficiality. She was apparently dressed for a party. Under her fur coat silk stockings and green shoes peeped out. Then she opened her coat, and took off her tulle scarf. Her frock, a smart ball-dress richly embroidered with gold beads, became visible. So did her thin, powdered neck.

Mrs Vizy, more than a little suspicious, was on the point of asking her to produce her identification papers, or . . .

Then an idea struck her.

Without a word, she went over to the lady and pulled off her hat. Her head was covered with a fluffy wig, the same colour as her own hair.

'You wretched creature!' Mrs Vizy cried. 'What are you doing masquerading here like this?'

'I'm going to a fancy-dress party, Aunt Angela. How are you darling?' Jancsi replied.

'Where have you sprung from?'

'From Vienna.'

Jancsi got up and promenaded about the room, holding his fur coat up a little.

'Tell me, Aunt Angela,' he went on, 'don't I make a pretty woman?'

'You make a pretty nuisance of yourself, let me tell you,'

'Do you realise your poor father doesn't know where you are? What are you up to in Vienna?'

'I'm in business there.'

'Profiteering, eh?'

'I'm in the coal-trade. Do you want any coal? How many tons shall I send you?'

'Idiot! And how long are you staying here?'

'I've only come for the day. I'm going back to-morrow morning. And how are you these days? And how is Uncle Cornel?'

'Haven't you heard? He's going to be promoted to Under-Secretary.'

'Give him my congratulations. Perhaps he could get me some Government orders? If he comes to Vienna, tell him to be sure to come and see me. I've got a nice flat - No. 1, Rothenturmstrasse. Well, I must be going, Aunt Angela. My friends will be waiting for me - Elekes and the whole gang of them.'

'Surely you're not going out in the street like that?'

'I've got a taxi waiting for me outside.'

'Take care of yourself, Jancsi dear,' his aunt begged him, 'and do write to that poor father of yours!'

Jancsi went into the *Club des Parisiens* by a side-door. He was surprised to see how empty the rooms were. There were very few coats and hats hanging up, and most of the waiters were still lounging about in their shirt-sleeves.

The proprietor welcomed Jancsi in person, bowing deeply to the coal-agent from Vienna, and escorted him to the curtained alcove where, in accordance with Jancsi's orders, a table for ten had been laid.

Jancsi ordered flowers to be put on the table, and asked for a special waiter. He glanced over the menu, and found everything in order.

Finally he gave orders that his guests were to be directed there when they arrived, but they were not to be told that he was there. Then he put on a black mask, and went down to the dance-floor.

The whole place was brilliantly lit, and the jazz band was working hard; but there were only a few couples dancing. To

add to the gaiety of the proceedings, the waiters released thirty coloured balloons. They hovered uncertainly in the opalescent light, as though wondering how they had got there out of the clear sky, and then bobbed up and down against the ceiling round the lamps, from which streamers hung in a fantastic array.

Gradually people in fancy-dress began to arrive: Pierrot and his Pierrette; a Gipsy girl by herself; a peasant-boy with his shining *fokos*, like a tomahawk; a jester with green hair; another with red hair; and the usual red noses, drooping moustaches, grey beards, fools'-caps and paper hats. The fancy dress which attracted most notice was that of a well-known stockbroker, who came as a headsman, with a blood-red robe, a blood-red hood, a mask, and an enormous sword.

From a corner, behind his fan, Jancsi watched the slowly growing crowd. He was looking for his friends, the nine guests whom he had invited. So far he could make out only Elekes, in plain evening dress, with no mask, dancing with a yellow-haired girl.

The dance-floor got so crowded that the couples could hardly move. There were so many of them that they could simply shuffle where they stood, clasped close to one another.

Jancsi strolled on to the floor. A man unknown to him, who had lost his partner somewhere in the crowd, asked him to dance.

Later on, he met Elekes on the dance-floor. Elekes flung his arms round him and started dancing with him, holding him tight and gazing into his eyes, gleaming through the holes in his mask. As they danced, Elekes pressed Jancsi's hand with his own warm, moist hand.

It was such a curious, such a pleasant sensation that, when he had finished dancing with Elekes, Jancsi asked several people to dance with him: men and women indiscriminately.

But he waited impatiently for supper-time. He wanted to relax in the company of his own friends, whom he had not seen for such a long time.

At midnight, when everybody unmasked, he looked around him eagerly; but the faces which appeared from behind the masks were all strange to him. Jancsi took off his own mask,

and his wig as well, started unfastening his frock, and made his way to his private alcove.

His guests, whom the waiters had conducted there, gave him a hilarious welcome, waving their mourning-cards at him. Jancsi, in his disappointment over the failure of his party, stared at them with a serious face.

Only four of his guests had turned up.

In addition to Elekes, there were Dani Tottosi and Stephan Indali, whom he had met at various parties, and Gallovich – with a huge imitation ox-head in his hand – quite a distant acquaintance of his, whom he had invited with some reluctance.

The guests on whom he had counted most, the fellows from the bank, had not come at all. Their absence depressed Jancsi.

He changed hurriedly into ordinary evening dress, and rang up his missing friends, only to be told that they were not at home.

Jancsi and his guests waited some little time for the absentees. At length they had to sit down to supper without them.

In any case, there was plenty to eat and drink: clear soup in cups, Lake Balaton pike, turkey with Californian plums; wines from Budacsony and the Rhine. In addition, the waiter brought in ice-pails, with French champagne cooling in them.

Jancsi sat at the head of the table. At his left side – the side of his heart – sat Elekes, with his beautifully parted hair, his creole complexion, and his monocle.

Jancsi all but laid his head on Elekes's breast as he talked to him. Like all people who have not spoken their mother-tongue for some time – for in Vienna, of course, he had talked German – he became unusually talkative. He poured out to his friends everything he had been bottling up for months. He told them how much money he had in his pockets: not only the dollars he had got for his lease, but also some two hundred dollars more, as well as Austrian and Hungarian notes. He told them that he was living with a Polish dancer named Daisy. They had a five-roomed flat, and his mistress helped him with his business. To prove it, he produced her signed photograph and letters from her in German.

They passed from hand to hand, and seemed to confirm his story.

But Gallovich – that unspeakable fellow Gallovich – teased him.

‘So you say you support her, Jancsi?’ he said. ‘I suppose it’s only when she’s so tight that she has to be supported?’

Jancsi put up with his banter for a time. Then he turned on Gallovich.

‘I don’t find fleas funny,’ he retorted rudely.

His supper-party was not going as well as he had hoped.

They had scarcely finished the Carnival-pancake when some strangers made their appearance. Gallovich introduced one of them as a friend of his, and he sat down and helped himself to a drink. While they were eating their fruit, a couple of girls burst in and threw confetti at Jancsi. It left a taste of sawdust in his mouth.

After supper, while the headwaiter was going round with cigars and cigarettes and a lighted taper, Elekes drew Jancsi aside. Jancsi, of course, was at his service for fifty dollars. Tottosi and Indali also extracted a few notes from him.

Then the little yellow-haired girl came and asked Elekes to dance. She was like a flower, though she had bloomed in the gutter, and freckles showed through her orange coloured powder. She brought some other girls with her. Gallovich poured out champagne for them, and put on the ox-head to amuse them.

Gallovich and the others went off to dance, and then transferred themselves to other tables with the girls.

Jancsi was left alone.

He had no desire to dance. The faces around him were all unknown to him, which was not surprising, for the place changed its clientèle about once a week.

Elekes came back from dancing, with his collar limp. Jancsi clutched hold of him.

He wondered what to say. He had boasted about everything already: his money, his five-roomed flat, Daisy. He had nothing left with which to impress his friends. He felt dissatisfied.

He rubbed his forehead with his dry hand.

‘Listen, Elekes,’ he said, suddenly. ‘There was somebody

else, too. But you didn't know anything about her. It was when I first came to Budapest.'

'Oh,' said Elekes, 'you mean that dancing girl of yours?'

'No. I don't. It was at the same time; but it wasn't the dancer. Do you know who she was? She was a servant.'

'Oh, really?'

'Yes, Elekes, a servant.'

Jancsi stood up, and tried to shout down the saxophone.

'A common little servant-girl,' he repeated. 'Oh, what a girl! She was a virgin, too.'

'You don't say so?' Elekes said.

'She was,' Jancsi said. 'She was plain, she was dirty; but it was wonderful fun.'

Elekes leant back in his chair, and played with his silver cigarette-case. He found Jancsi very boring. He was glad when the little yellow-haired girl peeped through the curtains and asked him to dance again with her.

'Elekes!' Jancsi shouted after him, desperately, 'Elekes!'

But Elekes was not listening to him. The drums of the band were rolling as drums roll at dawn before a military execution.

Jancsi stood motionless for a moment; then he sank into his chair. Left by himself, he felt empty. Nothing seemed to matter. The thought of the 'gang' made him sick.

He got up, went to the lavatory, and washed his face in cold water. Then he asked the headwaiter for the bill.

The man reckoned like lightning, and the huge sum that resulted sobered Jancsi at once. He pointed out to the head waiter that he was not drunk, and proceeded to argue about how much champagne had been consumed. The head waiter sent for all the empty bottles, and explained that the gentlemen had entertained ladies at separate tables as well as at Jancsi's.

Jancsi and the head waiter went on to differ about the rate of the dollar exchange. Finally the latest rate was found in the evening edition of the *Pester Lloyd*. Jancsi paid the bill and left the place in disgust.

He reached his hotel at a quarter past five in the morning. After settling his bill there, he found he had hardly any money left. He did not feel like going to bed, so he told the hall porter to send his suitcase to the eight o'clock train for Vienna, and

went for a walk along the Embankment to get some fresh air.

He strolled along the deserted Rakoczi-ut. There was not a soul about. It struck him how much gloomier Budapest was than Vienna.

He felt depressed again, and looked around for a café. But the cafés were not yet open.

He turned into the curved parallel streets of the Joseph Town, of which he had always been fond. Traffic had hardly started. A corner café was still open, but there was no band, and the place was being swept out. Street girls, chilled after their night's vigil, were standing at the counter drinking coffee. Only the hardest still prowled.

Jancsi wandered further and further down the street. He whistled, and stared at the sky. The lovely colours with which it had glowed the evening before were replaced by sombre snow-clouds. Frost formed slowly on the fur collar of his overcoat.

About half-way along the empty street, on the opposite side, was a piece of waste ground which had been there for years. On it stood a small hut, and outside this hut was a woman.

She was no longer young: probably over forty. She leant against the door-post of her hut with an expression of bovine patience on her broad, fat face. Her hands, rough from scrubbing floors, hung at her sides. She was wearing peasant costume, with an apron and a bright kerchief.

It looked out of place in these surroundings; but the woman adopted it in order to appeal to the imagination of workmen from the country, to suggest to them the cosiness of a quiet home and a good wife.

Her clients did not consist of people like Jancsi. She made no attempt to stop the well-dressed young gentleman as he walked past her.

'Oh,' Jancsi said to himself, when he was a few steps beyond her, 'it might be a curious experience. But perhaps a bit too awful.'

He did not walk any more slowly or any more quickly; but the woman standing sentry at her door seemed to have read his thoughts. She stole boldly up behind him.

'Please come in with me,' he heard a voice say. 'You won't be sorry.'

She said it with such horrible brazenness, such a repulsive ring of confidence in her tone of voice, that Jancsi stood stock still.

He did not turn round to look at her; but he could hear her walking slowly away towards the door of her hut, which stood open. Jancsi followed her.

The door creaked from the frost as she shut it. There was a lamp standing on a red plush cloth in the middle of a table. The woman turned up the wick. Jancsi caught sight of a couch, a cushion, a towel, and, hanging on the wall, a portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm, wearing all his decorations.

A little later, as the wan light of a February morning glimmered through the window, he stood up and lit a cigarette. He offered one to the woman. As she took it, she dropped it on the floor. She picked it up, wiped it on her nightdress, and put it away, saying that she never smoked.

Jancsi looked idly round the room. On the table was a book bound in worn green velvet, with brass corners. Its pages came loose as he opened it. It was the woman's autograph album. It was full of good wishes, worldly wisdom, classical quotations, worn thin by constant repetition, and references to 'the dawn of life,' and to 'the anchor of hope.'

Jancsi glanced all through it. He had to kill what little time remained before his train left.

'Who wrote this?' he asked the woman, pointing to a page.

'Oh, just a friend of mine, long ago,' she replied. 'But sometimes visitors write in it too. Won't you write something for me?'

'But what shall I write?' Jancsi asked.

'Oh, anything that comes into your head,' the woman said. She brought him an ink-pot and a rusty old pen. Jancsi pushed them aside, and unscrewed his new fountain-pen.

Then he racked his brains for something to write.

'What's your name?' he asked the woman.

'Piskeli,' she replied, giving her surname as though she were being examined by the police.

'Are you a widow?' Jancsi asked.

'No, my husband's still alive. His name's Joseph Piskeli. He's an upholsterer, and he lives in Transylvania. He won't divorce me.'

'I see,' Jancsi said. 'But that isn't what I meant. What's your Christian name.'

'Helen.'

Jancsi frowned in an effort to concentrate, with his gold-nibbed pen poised in his hand. Then, in round-hand, as carefully as though he were writing in a copy-book at school, he wrote:

*'I walked in a green forest.
I found a blue violet.
The violet told me
Helen would be happy.'*

He signed his name underneath, his full name, and after it – he did not know quite why – he added an exclamation mark.

'Janos Patikarius!'

He dried the ink over the funnel of the oil-lamp, and handed the page to the woman.

'You write so beautifully,' she said, as she thanked him. 'You must be a civil servant or a law student.'

Jancsi just caught his train.

Chapter XVII

CRIME

THE rumour that Cornel Vizy was to be promoted to Under-Secretary became more definite every day.

Apparently he had the Government's entire confidence, and sometimes it was thought that his appointment would be announced the very next day. But somehow there was always a hitch somewhere. Then a word in the right place set things in motion again. Gabriel Tatar, among others, pulled strings. At length from the parliamentary lobbies and from the party headquarters came confirmation that everything was all right.

Meanwhile spring arrived. The chestnut-trees on the Christina Boulevard sprouted their white buds, like candles, and in the golden dust of April the oval Regency frame of the tunnel under the Royal Palace put forth green leaves. Shoemakers in their leather aprons worked outside their shops again, like the guildsmen of the Middle Ages.

In the afternoon of the Saturday before Easter, Mrs Vizy took part in the Resurrection procession. She was standing in Attila Street, watching the banners starting to move slowly, as though they were sailing above the heads of the crowd, when Gabriel Tatar came up to her and congratulated her on her husband's appointment.

The next day, the newspapers announced Vizy's appointment officially. His dearest dream had come true. At last he was an Under-Secretary: not, of course, a real Under-Secretary of State, only a deputy, but still he had the title and he became the head of the department.

Over Easter there came a steady stream of visitors to the flat to congratulate him. The Vizys could receive them suitably now. During the long months of waiting, they had had the flat redecorated in anticipation. A crystal chandelier hung from the drawing-room ceiling, and the candles in the wall-brackets under their pink silk shades, shed a pleasant, warm light on the new wall-paper. Brandy, cigars and cigarettes were ever ready for the visitors.

Vizy now always used an official car to bring him home.

He and his wife decided that they must lose no time about giving a party to celebrate his appointment. They had not given one since the war, and they were bound to entertain all the friends to whom they were indebted.

When they made out a list of those who had to be invited at all costs, they found that they would have to ask twenty-five or thirty people.

Vizy was anxious that the party should do justice to the occasion, Mrs Vizy thought of engaging another servant to help Anna, but there was no room for an extra girl to sleep in the kitchen. The Drumas and the Moviszters offered to lend Stefi and Ethel.

Finally, after days of preparation, during which the flat was

turned into the back-stage of a restaurant and confectioners, the party took place one sultry evening at the end of May.

The problem of finding room for the guests had been solved by clearing most of the furniture out of the drawing-room, the dining-room, and the study. Tables were laid in these three rooms. The Drumas and the Moviszters lent chairs and silver as well as their servants. The Vizys' flat was changed out of all recognition.

That evening, Fichor, in full-dress uniform, opened the door to admit the guests into what looked like a little palace. The staircase was brilliantly lit, and a red carpet ran up to the first floor. Viza, in evening-dress, stood on the landing, waving a most charming welcome to his guests as they came upstairs. Attainment of his ambition seemed to make him look years younger. He became almost good-looking.

The guests were his colleagues at the Ministry, business friends, a few army officers, and one or two priests. They included the Tatars and their daughters, and Jancsi, who brought a big basket of flowers for his Aunt Angela.

Punctually at nine o'clock the Minister and his wife came up the stairs. Viza went down a few steps to meet them, kissed the hand of the Minister's wife, cracked a joke with the Minister, and escorted them into the flat.

Druma acted as deputy host to receive the remainder of the guests.

Ethel and Stefi served at table, smartly dressed as parlour-maids in white aprons and white caps. Anna, however, stayed in the kitchen, frying chickens and dripping fat over young geese to make them nice and tasty.

As the other servants went to and fro with their trays, they brought her news of what was going on inside. Mrs Viza was sitting beside the Minister, in her purple velvet dress, with big gold and pearl rings in her ears. Mr Viza was talking to the Minister's wife, and Master Jancsi to Mrs. Moviszter.

Now the Minister was making a speech. Then it was Mr Tatar's turn, next Mr Druma's, and finally Viza's. From time to time Anna in her kitchen could hear cheering and applause.

At length Ethel, after serving wine, brought out the last of

the dishes. She had fresh news for Stefi, who had joined Anna in the kitchen.

'They've all gone into the drawing-room,' Ethel said.

'What are they doing?' Stefi asked.

'Oh, just talking.'

'What about?'

'What do you think? About servants, of course.'

'Oh, they can't talk about anything else,' Stefi said; she turned up her nose.

'Let's have something to eat,' suggested Ethel.

She sat down with a dish in her lap, twisted the 'Pope's nose' off a goose, and started gnawing it.

Stefi ate with a knife and fork, like a lady.

'Why don't you have something to eat?' Ethel asked Anna.

'I'll have something later on.'

'What's the sense of saving food for them?' Ethel urged her.

'Why worry about them?'

'Eat as much as you like, I say,' Stefi added.

'That's right,' Ethel said. 'They did make a show tonight, didn't they?' she went on. 'Next thing, I suppose, they'll be engaging a valet and a chef.'

'No, a butler,' corrected Stefi, smiling sarcastically, 'just like we used to have in the Count's house.'

Ethel went on eating, smacking her lips.

Stefi gazed at the fire, reflectively.

'In our house,' she went on, 'the butler even had to warm the newspapers at the fire in the winter. Once they were cold when they were brought in from outside. The Old Count gave them back to the butler to warm them, and after that he always had to warm them. And do you know, Ethel, how the chef used to light up the fire during the war, when he wanted a good blaze? With lard! He threw ladles of lard into the fire.'

'Well,' said Ethel, with her mouth full, 'it didn't do you any harm, did it?'

She went on chewing a chicken's neck and dipping bread into the gravy.

'That was all right,' she went on, 'so long as they could afford to do it. At any rate, you could get lard yourself, couldn't you? The only thing that matters is to have enough

to eat. You can't be sure of anything except what you've eaten.'

Ethel had not yet finished her supper. She proceeded to take bones off the plates and suck them. She did not mind sucking them after they had been on other people's plates. Then she emptied heel-taps of wine into a glass and drank them.

Inside, somebody started playing the piano.

Ethel opened the kitchen door to hear the music better. She nodded her head in time with the rhythm, looking like a fat old angel in her white cap.

The guests started dancing. Ethel and Stefi had moved the tables aside before they left; but still there was not enough room for all the couples. Some of them had to dance in the hall.

Jancsi came out into the hall, dancing with Mrs Moviszter. He was in fine form. He danced Mrs Moviszter through the bedroom, round the whole flat, and back again.

When they reached the bathroom, Jancsi drew his partner close and kissed her neck. The doctor's pretty wife laughed at him coyly.

Anna was in the hall, cooling her face, which was burning with the heat of the fire. She saw the kiss.

Blindly, she turned to run back into the kitchen. She bumped her head against the wall. There was a flash of light before her eyes.

The party went on for a long time. Moviszter had left directly after supper, but everybody else stayed. Even the Minister did not make a move. He was enjoying himself. Everybody thought it an excellent party - perhaps because the Minister found it so.

There was a hubbub of light, gay chatter. Nobody started an argument. Everybody was bathed in a feeling of good fellowship.

Gossips whispered news about who had died, who had got a divorce, who had got fat, who had got thin. People mixed up one distant acquaintance of theirs with another. They were told that the one they were thinking about was somebody else; that the one who had been divorced was married again; that the one they thought still alive was dead long ago; that the thin one was really very fat, and that the fat one was indeed

very lean. Having got everybody mentioned properly sorted out in their minds, they felt quite satisfied.

Her guests' gaiety exhausted Mrs Vizy more and more. She swallowed yawns nervously. She was tired of being a hostess and of all the duties it involved. Above all, she was tired of the empty congratulations which she had to answer with words equally empty.

She watched her husband through the smoke. He was away in the third room, fussing round the Minister and paying compliments to the ladies. The more charming lies he told, the more he had ready to his tongue.

On a window-seat Mrs Vizy came upon a pretty blonde Viennese woman, the wife of a big business man, to whom she had not yet talked. Since she spoke no Hungarian the lady could not take part in the general conversation. She was all alone, just as her hostess was at the moment. Mrs Vizy sat down beside her, and very minutely, down to the smallest detail, told her in German all about the death of her little daughter. She had told the story so often that she simply listened to her own words flowing mechanically. She had ceased even to feel any pain as she told it, or to find any comfort in speech.

She kept on looking at the big clock, more and more impatiently.

At last, at three o'clock in the morning, the Minister got up to go.

The flat was full of dense smoke. The drawing-room chandelier was completely hidden by the blue cloud, and gave no more light than a gas-lamp in the street in a November fog.

Vizy heard the Minister's car start, and the noise of the departing guests gradually dying away. He sat down on the edge of the table, dropping with sleep. It was all over at last, everything had gone off all right; but he felt as though he were choking.

He took some bicarbonate of soda, and went to bed.

Mrs Vizy lingered after him, staring at the devastated table. A yellow patch of spilt apricot jam struck a futuristic touch of colour amid the debris of cigar-ends, tooth-picks, wine bottles and flowers.

The sight irritated her. She would have liked to put everything tidy again with her own hands; but she was so tired that she wondered why people ever ate at all.

The three servants came into the room.

She told them to open all the windows to air the flat. Then she sent Stefi and Ethel upstairs to bed.

Anna was standing beside the table, fumbling about with the things on it. She picked up a jug, and then put it down again.

'Oh, leave them alone!' cried Mrs. Vizy. She covered her face with her hands. 'I'm sick of the sight of it. I can't stand looking at it any more. But for Heaven's sake don't make any noise tonight. Shut the windows, and go to bed. You can clear away in the morning. But don't disturb me. I want to have a long sleep.'

When she went into the bedroom, her husband was already snoring, with the light on. Mrs Vizy took her clothes off anyhow, and tumbled into bed too.

Barely five minutes later the dining-room door opened and Anna came in. Without switching the light on she started fumbling with the things on the table again. She had a vague idea that she had better clear the table, or she would have too much to do in the morning.

After all the talk, all the laughter, the silence was profound. The muffled sound of Vizy's snoring, like the sawing of wood, made it seem deeper still.

Suddenly there was a crash. It echoed through the disordered rooms like the sound of a shot.

Anna, unfamiliar with the new position of the furniture, had knocked over an oak chair belonging to the Moviszters.

She stood still. The Vizys were in the first deep sleep. They did not wake up.

Somewhere outside a dog started baying the moon. Anna knew the dog. It was a big white dog called Swan.

Anna prowled to and fro. Then she ran back into the kitchen and started eating in the dark, ravenously, the first thing that came into her hand. She ate the leg of a chicken, and then a lot of sweets.

When she had finished, she went and threw herself against

the hall-door, as though she were trying to get out. Then she seemed to change her mind.

She ran into the bathroom, noisily. From there she ran through the yellow door into the bedroom.

Mrs Vizy woke up to find somebody sitting on her bed.

She raised herself from her pillow, opened her heavy eyes wide, and stared at the figure. In the misty moonlight it looked like a ghost surrounded by silver haze; but Mrs Vizy did not feel frightened.

The figure took hold of her hand with its left hand.

They stared at one another, with their faces close together.

'Oh, it's you, Anna,' whispered Mrs Vizy. 'What do you want? Go back to bed.'

The figure stayed sitting on her bed, still holding her hand. It did not answer.

Then it started moving, slowly, strangely slowly, terribly slowly.

Now it frightened Mrs Vizy. She could not wait any longer to see what it was going to do. With her free hand, she clutched Anna by the neck to push her away; but she did it so clumsily that instead she pulled her closer, almost hugging her.

'Cornel!' she shouted, suddenly. 'Cornel! What is this . . ? Cornel ! Help! Help! . . .'

But now she felt a blow on her breast: the hardest blow she had ever felt.

'She's gone mad!' she said in a weak voice; and she fell back on her pillow.

Vizy muttered something. His head was heavy with sleep and wine. Then he leapt out of bed. He stood in the middle of the room, in his long nightshirt, down to his knees.

'What is it?' he shouted. 'Who are you? Help, help! Murder!'

All he could see was the gleam of the knife, the big kitchen knife, as Anna slashed the air with it. But what had happened, or who this was, man or woman, he had no idea.

He only knew that somebody was stealing towards the door, trying to escape. He flung himself at the figure, and dragged it back, struggling. It was a hard fight. By now, Anna was afraid she was going to be hurt. She was as frightened as her master.

With her left arm, made strong by years of hard work, she

seized him round the waist and bent him backwards. They wrestled with each other for a few moments. Then Vizy stumbled against the bed, and lost his balance. He fell on the bed, and rolled off it on to the floor.

In a frenzy, Anna knelt over him and slashed at him again and again; his stomach, his chest, his throat.

Then she flung the knife into a corner, and staggered out of the other door into the drawing-room. She made her way into the kitchen, and washed her hands under the tap. Then she went back to the drawing-room.

There was something dripping in the bedroom, like a tap not properly turned off: drip, drip, drip. . . Vizy stirred and groaned. Then he groaned again, more faintly. . . Anna lay down on the couch, and fell asleep.

At six o'clock in the morning, the dustman rang his bell. Anna got up to take out the refuse, and then start her day's work. It was not long after dawn: a lovely, bright morning. Anna rubbed her eyes. She stared at the rich remains of supper, lying strewn on the disordered tables. She wondered what she was doing here, how she had got into this room.

Suddenly, on her way across the room, she stopped. She stood dead-still.

The two leaves of the bedroom door stood open, about an inch or two. She seemed to remember staggering out of that room. She thought she had closed the door behind her. She dare not look into the room; but she listened at the door. She could hear nothing. There was silence everywhere: deep silence.

Now she suddenly felt frightened. She pressed her hands to her face. Her heart felt as though it were frozen. Rapidly, she collected her belongings and tied them into a bundle. She must make her escape as quickly as she could. After the party, everybody in the house would still be asleep. She might run up to the attic; or perhaps down to the cellar, and hide behind the mangle. But somebody might see her on the staircase. She threw her bundle down again.

Then she opened all the windows. She looked out into Attila Street. She felt less lonely like that. Outside, the thrushes were singing, greeting the wonderful spring morning. The bells

of the trams were ringing. Anna could see peasant-women going their rounds with milk.

Nobody came to the door until eleven o'clock. Anna stayed crouched on the couch, on her knees. About eleven, somebody rang the bell. He kept on ringing. He seemed to be anxious for an answer.

Then she heard Fichor shouting up the stairs:

'Don't go on ringing. I expect they're still asleep. Bring it down here. I'll give it to them.'

That must be the messenger-boy from Viatorisz's, the grocer's. He came about this time every day.

'There was a big party here last night,' she heard Fichor telling him.

Then she heard Mrs Moviszter in the flat above going to the piano, and playing and singing as usual.

Next, the telephone bell rang. Anna lifted the receiver; but she put it back again. The bell went on ringing for a long time.

Towards two o'clock in the afternoon, Anna heard a knocking at the door, then voices.

'Open the door! Can't you hear me? Open the door!'

'I suppose they're still asleep.'

'But they can't be, as late as this. Let's try from the street.'

Somebody shouted up from Attila street:

'Hullo, is there anybody there?'

'But there must be somebody there,' said another voice. 'The windows are all open.'

Then Anna heard more voices, outside the door, in the street.

'But I tell you, Sir,' came Fichor's voice, 'they can't have gone out. We wouldn't miss seeing them if they had. Anna, Anna! Are you asleep? Surely she can't be asleep. Go on knocking. Knock louder. . . Hadn't we better break down the door? Let's break down the door.'

'You can't do that,' came Druma's voice. 'Go and fetch a policeman.'

The constable on point duty arrived. Anna could hear them telling him all about the party last night. The constable rang the bell and knocked on the door.

Then, 'his suspicions aroused', he sent for a locksmith, who picked the lock.

The policeman called upon Mr. Druma and the locksmith to act as witnesses. Accompanied by them, and by Fichor, he came into the hall.

'I told you there was somebody here,' said Fichor, triumphantly, as he caught sight of Anna, who was now standing beside the couch.

'So you are here,' he went on. 'Why didn't you open the door? Have you gone deaf?'

The policeman paid no attention to him. He strode across to the bedroom, and flung open the two leaves of the door.

Then he started back from that chamber of horrors. It was his first experience of a case of a double murder.

He rushed at Anna, seized her by the shoulders, and shook her with all his strength. He was beside himself.

'Did you do this?' he cried.

Anna cast her eyes down, as though she were in confession.

'Why did you do it?' roared the policeman, with his drooping moustache quivering, and his eyes popping out of his head.

Losing all control of himself, he assumed the office of the judge.

'They'll hang you for this,' he shouted.

Anna knew they would. But her heart, numbed by the deadly terror of the night, was suddenly thawed as though by a warm spring breeze. This policeman was a peasant. He was just like one of the boys of her village. She did not think of him as an official doing his duty. She thought of him as one of her own kith and kin.

A crowd was gathering in the hall: people belonging to the house, people out of the street. They started peering into the dining-room; but the policeman hustled them out.

'Move on there, please!' he said. 'There's been murder here. Everybody out of this flat - in the name of the Law! Caretaker, see that nobody belonging to this house leaves it. Lock the front door. I'll hold you responsible.'

Uncle Antal, Uncle Antal Szucs, the policeman from the corner - Anna knew him so well. Now Uncle Antal had taken

charge of the situation. Everybody felt relieved. In this setting of madness and mystery, amid all this orgy of bloodshed it was so comforting to see how simple, how sober he was. He stood for power, for authority. His vast, broad-shouldered bulk of healthiness inspired confidence. He towered above them all, amid all this tragedy, all this horror. He was the policeman, the big, strong policeman, the pillar of social order.

'Where's the telephone?' he asked Anna.

She nodded her head towards it.

'Hullo,' said the policeman, 'is that the Christina District Station? Hullo, hullo! . . . Antal Szucs, Police-Constable No. 1327, reporting, Captain. There has been a murder – a double murder – at 238 Attila Street, first floor. The name is Vizy. Christian name? Cornel, I think. . . Cornel – yes, that's it . . . Yes, they're both dead. I've got the culprit, and I'm standing by. . . Very good. . . Very good, Captain. . . Very good. . . Very good. . . Very good, Sir.'

He took Anna into the drawing-room, and made her stand up against the wall where she would be safe. Then, keeping one eye on her and the other on the door, he took off his helmet, wiped his forehead, and, now that all the excitement was over, heaved a big sigh of relief.

Fichor had faded into the background, and stood looking at the floor, apparently in deep thought.

Druma and the locksmith talked to one another in whispers.

They heard the klaxon of the police-cars as they came along Attila Street. Two cars drew up outside the house. In the first were an officer from the station, a Commissioner from Police Headquarters, the Court Attorney, and a police-surgeon. The second car was full of detectives.

Constable Antal Szucs saluted the Commissioner smartly, clicking his heels together.

'I am the constable on point duty,' he reported. 'At two o'clock this afternoon. . .'

'Is this the murderess?' interrupted the Commissioner, pointing at Anna.

'Yes, Sir,' replied the policeman. 'She's their servant.'

All the men looked at Anna in surprise.

In their long experience it was the first time that a culprit had made no attempt to escape from the scene of the crime. This was strange.

They closed in around her, as though they were afraid she might change her mind and run away, or as though they themselves were going to turn on her.

'I see,' the Commissioner said.

Druma introduced himself to the Commissioner, who gave him and the locksmith leave to go.

Then the police-surgeon went into the Vizys' bedroom, accompanied by the Commissioner, the Attorney, and another officer.

Mrs Vizy lay still in her bed. There was no blood on her. She looked as though she were asleep. Her mouth was closed, and around it hovered a faint smile. That one blow of Anna's had driven the knife straight into her heart, and she had died of internal haemorrhage, doubtless at once, without suffering. Her face reflected an expression of ethereal calmness.

Cornel Vizy was lying on the floor beside his bed, in a black pool of congealed blood. He had nine wounds, as well as a slight scratch on his neck and a longer scratch under one eye. It was clear that he had struggled till the end. The doctor said that he had died quite a time after his wife, after a long agony.

His jaws were tightly closed, and his hawk-like nose jutted out sternly from his waxen face. Both his hands were clenched. Even after death, he conveyed an impression of strength and dignity. He looked like a fine fallen statue.

In both bodies *rigor mortis* had already set in.

Even these men hardened to crime, who had witnessed so many horrors in their careers, were appalled at the animal-like brutality with which the murderess had treated her victims.

When they returned to the drawing-room, sheer terror was reflected on their faces. They were terrified because they could not understand why she had done it, it was something they could not fathom.

Only Anna's face showed no fear.

She herself did not understand just why she had done it. But she had done it of her own volition. Somewhere, deep

down inside her, was hidden the motive which had driven her to it. She saw it from the inside. She saw it in a different way from these men, who could see it only from the outside.

'Search the flat!' the Commissioner said.

His men had been waiting for these words. Like hounds summoned by the huntsman's horn, they scattered through the rooms, sniffing for clues.

While the master and mistress of the house still lay side by side in the bedroom, their flat, yesterday the scene of such ceremony, was unceremoniously ransacked by the detectives.

One of them tore the cover off the couch in the dining-room and peered underneath it, as though he expected to find somebody there. Another opened the top of the piano. They poked about among the food on the supper-table. Photographers got busy. The finger-print expert discovered two conspicuous prints on a sheet and a bolster-cover, and took them away with him for record. They made an inventory of the furniture in the bedroom, and took its measurements to the nearest inch. They made a plan of it, and marked the position of the two bodies. In the corner they found the knife, and carefully put it away as an important exhibit. The police-surgeon scribbled notes.

Then they turned their attention to the kitchen. They pulled Anna's camp-bed to pieces. On a chair, they found Anna's bundle. A detective brought it into the drawing-room and opened it. In it were most of the things with which she had first crossed the threshold of the Vizys' flat: her few kerchiefs, her few torn handkerchiefs, her hand-mirror, her steel-comb, her toy-trumpet. Only her blue cotton dress and her heavy men's shoes were missing. She had worn them out long since.

There was something else in Anna's bundle as well: a little paper bag, and in it a few small roast chestnuts.

'Her bed hasn't been slept in,' one of the detectives reported to the Commissioner.

'That's important,' the Commissioner said. 'Make a note of that. If she didn't go to bed, her crime must have been premeditated.'

He made Anna come over beside the stove, and stand facing the light: the bright May sunlight.

'You did it, didn't you?' he asked her.

'I... I...' stammered Anna.

'Why did you do it?' the Commissioner went on.

'I... I...' stammered Anna again.

'What do you mean with your "I... I..."?' exclaimed the Commissioner, angrily. 'You've said that already. I asked you why you did it. Why did you?'

'I... I...' repeated Anna.

'Did you hate them?' the Commissioner suggested. 'Did you want to have your revenge on them? Did they treat you badly? ... You must have had some reason for doing it.'

Anna wrinkled her forehead, young but prematurely lined like a peasant's. She wrung her hands. Then she sighed, and sighed again. She patted her hair with the mechanical movement she had picked up from her mistress.

The police-surgeon murmured something to the Commissioner. They made her stand still nearer the window.

The doctor pressed his fingers lightly against Anna's eyes, and then took them away again quickly. He did this several times, as though he were playing a game. He put his hand behind her ear and pressed hard. He made her sit down on a chair, and kept on hitting her with the side of his hand just below her knee.

It was then that the Commissioner noticed that on her stockings there were two large patches of blood, the size of a carnation.

'It's her period,' the doctor explained in undertones.

He was overheard in the hushed silence and all the men in the room suddenly looked at the girl, then quite as suddenly and collectively they looked away from her, as if united in a masculine sense of shame.

'Otherwise there doesn't seem to be any blood on her,' he said, looking at her closely. 'Oh yes, here's a little. I suppose you washed yourself, eh? Where did you wash? Anyhow they'll examine her at the station.'

They talked and exchanged notes among themselves, and then the Commissioner turned to Anna once more.

'Where were you during the Revolution?' he asked. 'Whom did you work for? Have you ever had a lover who was a Com-

munist or has anybody ever given you any Communist books or leaflets?"

Anna simply shook her head.

In the end, they had to assume that it was a case of murder for robbery, though this did not seem probable, as it seemed everything was left intact in the flat.

"What have you stolen?" the Commissioner nevertheless asked Anna. And where have you put it? It will be all the better for you if you own up. We shall find out, in any case."

"Better search her," he ordered.

"Put up your hands!" a detective told Anna.

Anna held her arms up awkwardly, a bit bent at the elbows.

"Straight up!" said the detective.

Anna stretched her arms out to their full extent. The attitude of this girl, this murderess, guilty of a particularly horrible crime, reminded them for a moment of the statue of a saint, standing with her arms outstretched to Heaven.

The detective ran his hands over her, looking for weapons. "Nothing," he said, "Nothing."

They had already finished their investigation of the flat, and they telephoned for the men to take the bodies of the Vizys away. The Commissioner and the police-surgeon signed some documents on the table.

"Bring her along," said the Commissioner, signing to two of the detectives.

Anna was still standing with her arms above her head, simply because they had forgotten to tell her she could lower them. The detectives told her she need not hold them up any more.

"Come along," they said.

Anna did not move.

The two detectives took up positions on either side of her, and one of them touched her on the arm; but she pushed his hand gently away.

The Commissioner, who was pacing up and down the drawing-room, came to a halt.

"Better handcuff her," he said.

They put Anna's hands together, and encircled them with a chain. The ends of it locked together with a click.

Anna did not attempt to resist. She looked at her manacled hands with curiosity.

It was a brand-new glittering chain: a thin little chain, but so strong there was no breaking it. Anna had expected it to be thick and rusty, with a big, heavy ball hanging on the end of it. It seemed to her that she had had this picture in her mind for a long time. Perhaps it came from fairy-tales, in which the prison was always next door to the royal palace. Then she ceased to be interested in the chain. She looked at it with unconcern, as though she had often been handcuffed, and got used to it long ago.

One of the detectives put on his black bowler, and led Anna out of the flat.

Outside on the landing, people whispered as she passed: 'The murderess! . . . Here's the murderess!' Stefi and Ethel hung over the bannister of the second-floor landing, white-faced. Everybody in the house shuddered with horror as she was taken away.

A little later, two black wooden coffins were brought upstairs. Anna's two victims were put into them, and taken to the ice-chamber of the police-mortuary to await *post-mortem*.

The house had hardly got over its first shock when it had another. Half an hour later, detectives hurried back and arrested Fichor and his wife, on suspicion of being involved in the Vizys' murder. The preliminary investigation had suggested that, as relatives of Anna's, they might be her accomplices.

This left the house thoroughly disorganised. Druma took charge of the situation. He appointed Ethel to act in Fichor's place for the time being. He sent Stefi to the post office with two telegrams announcing the Vizys' deaths: one to Mrs Vizy's brother at Eger, the other to Jancsi in Vienna. He kept in touch with the police on the one hand, and on the other dealt with the stream of reporters who arrived one after the other when the news of the Vizys' murder leaked out, asking him and the servants for 'human stories.'

Apart from Druma, everybody lost his head.

Even Moviszter hurried through his consulting hours. Then he joined his wife at the Drumas'. Everybody felt cold and

wretched from the shock, following a late night. Mrs Druma served coffee, and they started talking about the murder.

'I can't understand it,' complained Mrs Moviszter. 'I simply can't understand it, no matter how hard I try. A girl like Anna — such a good girl! . . .'

'I never liked her,' Mrs Druma said. 'There was something shifty about her eyes. She had a treacherous face.'

'But she'd been with the Vizys nearly a year,' Mrs Moviszter pointed out. 'We all knew her. She seemed so trustworthy.'

'I say,' Mrs Druma said suddenly, tapping her forehead, 'something has just struck me. I had a pair of small scissors — you know, those curved nail-scissors. I was very much attached to them. . . Well, they vanished just after Christmas. My husband and I searched for them for weeks, and so did Stefi, and, do you know, we couldn't find them anywhere. We could never make out what had become of them. Stefi's never stolen anything, and your Ethel isn't a thief, either. Now I see it, of course. Anna stole them.'

'Do you really think so?' Mrs Moviszter murmured.

'I'm convinced of it, dear.' 'I'll stake my life she stole them. A person who can commit a murder will do anything.'

'Still I can't understand it,' Mrs Moviszter said. 'It's really frightening. It shows you don't know the people who live under the same roof. Horrible, you know.'

A chilly sense of nervousness descended on the room.

Mrs. Druma took her little son on her lap and kissed him. She looked round at the room, furnished with cheerful comfort; but still she shivered.

Her husband got up to stretch his legs. He could not get rid of the dreadful picture he had seen in the Vizys' bedroom with his own eyes.

'Those Communist scum poisoned the healthy mind of the Hungarian peasant,' he said. 'That's what it was. A terrible thing like this could never have happened in the old days. It's the result of Red propaganda, those agitator schools, you know. Yes, this is the final outcome of Bolshevism.'

'And the war,' Moviszter said quietly.

'I think,' Mrs Moviszter said, 'she must have been mad.'

Nobody with a sane mind could do a thing like that. After all, she had no reason for doing it. She can't be normal.'

'Oh, that's a very easy line of defence for her, Mrs Moviszter,' protested Druma. 'Temporary insanity, eh? And the lives of those two people? No.' he shook his head. 'She ought to hang. . . What do you think, Nicholas? Would you say she really wasn't responsible for her actions?'

'When she committed the crime,' Moviszter said, 'she certainly was not. But otherwise. . .'

'There you are, Mrs Moviszter,' interrupted Druma, triumphantly. 'You see, even your husband doesn't think she's mad; and he's a doctor. No, that won't do. Do you want us all to be murdered in our beds? Put a rope round her neck, I say! Even if she is insane, she still ought to be put out of the way, just like a poisonous snake. But, they all worked hand in glove if you ask me: Fichor, that Communist crook, his wife, the whole gang. There ought to be no getting out of it with a medical certificate saying that she's a half-wit, or that her nervous system is unstable. You must take the legal line. Otherwise what's to become of society? The whole viper's brood ought to be stamped out. Those who try to upset the social structure should be destroyed without mercy. Hang them all, I say!'

The Druma's little boy, sitting on his mother's lap, started whimpering. His mother took him up in her arms, rocked him to and fro, trying to comfort him.

Druma got uneasy too. He wondered why Stefi was gone such a long time, when the post office was only a short distance away.

While they were talking, a girl stole up the dark staircase.

Softly, like a shadow, she flitted up to the first floor without anybody noticing her. She stopped at the door of the Vizys' flat, and stood staring at the police seal on it. Then she rang the bell, again and again. When nobody answered it, she sat down at the top of the stairs and started crying noisily.

Ethel heard her, and went to see who it was. Then she ran up to the Drumas.

'Please come down,' she said, out of breath. 'Katica's here.'

'Katica?' Druma echoed, rather startled. On this sinister

day, everything seemed frightening, a possible omen of fresh misfortune. Katica? Who's Katica?"

'She used to be Mr and Mrs Vizys' servant, before Anna,' Ethel explained.

'What does she want here?' asked Druma, nervously. 'How did she get in? Why didn't you lock the front door?'

They all hurried down to the first-floor landing.

There, still crying noisily, in her white skirt, her pink blouse and her patent-leather shoes, the Vizys' old servant sat at the door of her dead master and mistress, like a living statue of loyalty, like a haunting ghost.

They stared at her, so moved that they were tongue-tied.

'She's crying for them!' whispered Ethel; and she wiped her own eyes.

All this was real melodrama, as 'sensational', as full of human interest, as the last chapter of a novelette. A number of people, attracted by Katica's crying, had invaded the house and come upstairs. They stood on the staircase, gaping. Druma told Ethel to turn them out, lock the front door, and bring Katica up to his flat.

Katica seemed helpless with grief. She could not stop crying. Ethel patted her on the back, helped her upstairs to the Drumas' kitchen, and gave her a chair. But Katica had hardly opened her mouth when she started crying again.

At last she managed to explain why she had come.

She had just read about the Vizys' murder in an evening paper. She had dressed herself at once and hurried to their flat, hoping for a last glimpse of her 'dear lady and gentleman,' the best people on earth.

'But I knew it would happen,' Katica said, gasping for breath. 'I felt it. I had a dream about it.'

'What did you dream, Katica darling?' Ethel asked.

'I dreamt she was a bride,' Katica sobbed.

'Who? Mrs Vizy?'

'Yes. Such a beautiful, pale bride. With a white veil. And a wreath on her head.'

'Of course, a wedding in a dream always means bad luck.'

'And then we killed ever so many chickens, and fried them. We were having company. The fat was sizzling so! . . .'

'Yes, dreaming about guests means the worst of bad luck.'

'I meant to come and tell Mrs Vizy about it,' said Katica, sobbing again. 'Oh, if only I'd come! Or if only I'd stayed with her! There wasn't a place to touch it in all Budapest.'

Katica wiped her nose with her handkerchief, which was as damp and dirty as a dishcloth.

Mrs Druma had come to the kitchen to see her. To take Katica's mind off her grief, she asked her:

'And where are you now, Katica?'

'I've got a place with the family of an engineer at the gas-works,' replied Katica. She started crying again.

'Now, stop crying, Katica,' said Mrs. Druma. 'Here's Stefi back again.'

She poured out some coffee, put cream into it, and handed the cup to Katica.

'Now, drink this, my dear,' she said. 'And here are some rolls for you, too. Stefi dear, won't you have some coffee? You haven't had anything to eat all day, have you? Get some fruit off the sideboard. And Ethel, hadn't you better have some coffee, too? Do try to eat something. We must make the best of things. There's nothing we can do now.'

Mrs Druma left the servants to themselves in the kitchen.

The three of them sat there, with their eyes red with weeping, as though they were all mourning members of the Vizy family. Katica, with her powder caked on her face with her tears, seemed overwhelmed by her grief.

But when the other two servants, with some relish, started telling her all about the murder of the Vizys, Katica came to life again. She knew the scene of the crime so well that even her slow imagination could follow the story. Unsated with what she heard, she pressed them for more and more details. When Ethel and Stefi had exhausted their repertory, she repeated the whole story herself, experiencing it so vividly that she shuddered as though she had been there when it happened.

She was so sorry they had taken them away, the poor things. She would so much have liked to see them again for the last time: especially dear Mrs Vizy, covered all over with blood in the bed which she had made for her so many times.

Meanwhile the Drumas and the Moviszters were talking about Katica's visit.

'You see,' Druma said, 'it just goes to show what kind of people the Vizys were. There can't have been anything wrong about them, when an old servant of theirs is so fond of them. What kind of girl is this Katica?'

'A very good servant,' Mrs Druma said. 'Hard-working, and, so far as I know, of very high moral character. She was the best servant they ever had. I can't imagine why they let her go. If she'd stayed, this would never have happened. Don't you agree, Doctor?'

'Possibly,' Moviszter said in deep meditation. 'Possibly.'

Chapter XVIII

WHY?

NO excitement ever lasts very long. It burns for a few days, people talk about it everywhere, then it is consumed in its own fire.

It was the same with the murder of the Vizys.

At first it was feverishly discussed in the neighbourhood. The grocer's shop, Viatorisz's, became a kind of debating club. Mistresses and servants from the Christina district met there and talked the murder over among the flour sacks and the preserve tins.

Everybody asked himself and everybody else why Anna had murdered her master and mistress. But to this question nobody could find a satisfactory answer.

The victims were buried amid the deep sympathy of all Budapest, in a grave next to the one in which their only daughter Piroska lay.

There was such a crowd at the funeral that a couple of policemen had to be called out. Street urchins ran after the coffins, and jostled one another in their efforts to grab flowers from the wreaths as souvenirs. The graveside suggested a political meeting. There were several speeches and many public figures were present, together with all but one of the guests at the Vizys' last party.

This was Jancsi. The telegram which Druma had sent him, it seemed, had failed to reach him.

But Jancsi's father and mother, the Patikarius couple, were there from Eger; and so was Vizy's unmentionable sister, Etelka, the one who made a living by selling fake Egyptian cigarettes, sobbing behind her black veil for the loss of her great, important and influential brother.

After her arrest Anna Edes was charged at the police station with the murder of the Vizys. She had nothing to say for herself. They took her finger-prints, photographed her in three positions, and conducted her to the Marko Uteza prison.

As she entered it, Anna felt as though the walls were going to fall upon her. It was a great building with any number of lighted windows, so high that it seemed almost to reach the sky. All the doors were steel, and so were the stairs, which clacked like a huge mill ceaselessly grinding.

The jailers took her up to the third floor, and shut her in a cell.

There was nothing in it but a bed, a table and a chair. But the cell was spotlessly clean, rather larger than her kitchen at the Vizys', and much brighter.

Anna could scarcely believe that she was really in prison. She had always imagined that prisoners slept on straw, and that their cells were dark, lit only by the gleaming eyes of snakes and frogs.

She sat down on a chair and meditated. She did not cry. Then she got up, knelt at her bedside, and prayed.

After studying the police evidence, the examining magistrate could see no more light in Anna's case than the people who gossiped about it at street-corners. But the public prosecutor thought it was essential that this complicated case, which might have far-reaching political significance, should be probed to the bottom, especially when the downfall of Communism was still so recent and social order was not yet completely re-established.

So the examining magistrate set to work with great zeal. But, the further he went into the case, the more points emerged of which he could make nothing. He kept on finding himself at a dead end.

First of all, he wanted to clear up what part, if any, Fichor and his wife had played in the murder of the Vizys. When they were arrested, they swore by everything in Heaven and earth that they were innocent. Having left themselves nothing else to say, they proceeded to exhaust themselves in blackening Anna's character. She was a secretive, treacherous girl, capable of anything.

There was no direct evidence of any kind against the Fichors. It was true that the grocer's messenger-boy testified that Fichor had angrily told him not to keep on ringing the Vizys' bell and go away, because everybody in the flat was probably still asleep. But, on the morning after a very late party, it was quite likely that Fichor had acted in complete good faith.

After a few days the examining magistrate ordered Fichor and his wife to be released.

Meanwhile, he examined Anna every day.

When they came for her the first time, Anna crossed herself and commended her soul to God. She was sure they were going to take her to the gallows and hang her straight away.

She was taken before a thin, slightly bald gentleman, who wore a scarf-pin in his readymade tie, and a gold ring on one of his hairy fingers.

Anna thought that this modestly paid employee of Justice was somebody very important and very rich indeed.

As time went on she found that he was not a bad man. He spoke to her kindly and tactfully, and she became accustomed to him. But he tired her out by the number of questions he asked her. He wanted her to tell him what she had done at such-and-such a time, and told her to think carefully before she answered.

Anna found it very hard to remember. But the gentleman seemed to remember everything better than she did, and he helped her out with her answers. In this way, they reconstructed the history of the last few days before the murder hour by hour, almost minute by minute.

Anna always looked the examining magistrate straight in the face. She did not seem upset or disturbed. She did not deny anything he suggested to her. Sometimes, indeed, she seemed to be condemning herself.

When the magistrate had completed his report on his examination of her, with special reference to the question whether she had any accomplices in the Vizys' murder, it seemed unlikely that anybody besides Anna herself was implicated.

Her statements were consistent, and she did not seem to be trying to hide anything from him.

There was only one question which Anna would not answer: why did she murder her master and mistress?

All the people in the Vizys' house were summoned before the examining magistrate in turn.

The most important statement was Druma's.

On the night of the murder, about two o'clock in the morning, he had caught sight of Anna fumbling about in the drawer of the kitchen-dresser. It was from this drawer, according to Anna's own statement, that she had taken the knife. Druma also said that he saw her lurking in the bathroom when the guests were leaving.

An interesting point came out in Ethel's voluble, but vague statement.

She said that one Sunday afternoon, during the spring, she and Anna had made an excursion to the citadel on Gellert's Hill. Anna lay down on the grass and went to sleep. A few minutes later, she suddenly woke up and started running down the hill, waving her arms about and shouting frantically. Ethel wondered what was the matter with her, and shouted after her. Then Anna stopped and came and sat down again; but she went on trembling for some time.

Stefi, too, had something suggestive to contribute.

About a fortnight before the Vizys' murder, Stefi had met Anna in Marvany street, loitering about in front of the house where Jancsi used to live.

When Anna caught sight of her, she ran into the hall of the house. Later on, when Stefi asked her what she was doing there, Anna only stammered and gave some vague answer. She could not give any definite reason for being there.

The examining magistrate promptly requested the police in Vienna to get in touch with Janos Patikarius at his address in that city. The Viennese police replied that he had left the city, and his present address was unknown. He had been living

with a Polish dancer, and she had given up her flat in Vienna and gone to Warsaw. Possibly Janos Patikarius had gone with her.

It did not strike the examining magistrate as essential to try and trace this Janos Patikarius. After all, he had not been living in Budapest for more than six months at the time when Anna Edes murdered the Vizys.

Anna's parents were also summoned to Budapest.

Her father got out of the train with a bundle and two pairs of chickens. He was followed by a pretty peasant-woman in red slippers, tall and stately, much younger than himself. She did not carry anything. This was Anna's step-mother.

It was early in the morning. As they did not know their way about this big city, they went to the Vizys' house, and there they settled themselves on the stairs and waited until the Drumas got up. Then they presented Druma with the two pairs of chickens and some cream cheese. It was a good thing, they thought, to stand in well with the gentry when there was trouble with the Law. Druma explained to them where they were to report themselves.

The examining magistrate questioned them.

Anna's father was a lean, bent farm-labourer, over fifty. He was not yet going grey, but his yellowish hair was getting thin, and time had made it dusty-looking, like chaff. He twisted his hat in his hands as he stood before the examining magistrate, and kept on glancing at his better half out of the corner of his crafty, cunning eye.

He was not a bit surprised, it seemed, at what had happened.

For that matter, it is difficult to surprise a peasant. He regards any event in human life, even murder, as simply as he regards the birth or death of animals.

But Anna's father tried to make himself out sophisticated. He spoke in a whining voice, as though he were chanting a dirge at a village funeral. He told the examining magistrate that, ever since he had married his second wife, four years ago, his daughter Anna had always shown herself stubborn and disobedient. She had caused a good deal of trouble at home, and that was why he had sent her to Budapest as a servant.

Anna's step-mother, a tidy, industrious-looking young

woman, nodded agreement ; but she had more than this to tell the examining magistrate.

In a horrified tone of voice, she related how Anna had once threatened her with a sickle. Her wicked step-daughter might have killed her if her father had not intervened. She went on and on tirelessly, pouring out a tirade against Anna ; but she proceeded to contradict herself. Summing up their worth as witnesses, the examining magistrate sent her and Anna's father home again.

Finally, he ordered Anna's mental state to be examined. The official pathologist examined her, and reported that she was anaemic, but otherwise in good health and accountable for her actions. This report concluded the examining magistrate's preliminary investigation, and Anna was formally committed for trial on the charge of deliberate double murder.

A barrister was assigned to defend her: a little fellow, a young man who so far had handled only an inheritance case and similar trifles. He took up Anna's case with enthusiasm, for he was anxious to build up a criminal practice.

He visited Anna in her cell, assured her that he would do his best for her, and urged her to keep up her spirits.

Anna told him just the same story as she had told the examining magistrate.

She was also visited by women missionaries, with blue veils hanging from their hats. They left her religious tracts, told her she would find comfort in faith, and bade her be penitent and contrite.

Anna's trial for the murder of the Vizys took place in the middle of November. It was held in the largest courtroom at the Criminal Court, on account of the great public interest which the case had aroused.

It was a cold, gloomy winter's day. Gaslamps flickered in the big, overheated courtroom. The tiers of seats running round it were packed with people, many of them friends and acquaintances of the victims.

The clerk called over the names of the witnesses who had been summoned. There were eleven of them ; six for the prosecution, and five for the defence. They included everybody living in No. 238 Attila Street. Gabriel Tatar, sitting with his

wife behind the Press bench, waved to them as they took their seats.

At nine o'clock sharp, the members of the Court entered: the presiding judge and two other judges.

The presiding judge rang his bell.

'I declare the Court open,' he said. 'The case before us is that of Anna Edes, charged with murder. Bring in the accused.'

Anna had been brought from prison to the Court at eight o'clock, and had since been waiting patiently in an adjoining room.

The door into the dock opened and Anna appeared in her tattered check dress, followed by two jailers with rifles and fixed bayonets. She tottered rather than walked to the front of the dock. The jailers, close behind her, pushed her into her proper position as though she were a doll, and then stood to attention.

Below her Anna saw hundreds of faces, and above her hundreds more faces, with lights and pictures over them again. She felt an overpowering warmth. Her six months in prison did not seem to have affected her health. Indeed, her face had filled out a little. But her complexion, like that of all prisoners, had assumed a kind of earthy pallor. She exhaled an aura of calm.

'Your name is Anna Edes?' asked the presiding judge. Without waiting for Anna to answer, he turned to one of his colleagues.

'Have you got her birth certificate there?' he said.

Then he proceeded to answer for Anna, without looking at her.

'Anna Edes, aged twenty, spinster, childless, no previous convictions. Sit down.'

Anna sat down, and her two jailers sat down one on either side of her, with their rifles between their knees.

Then the clerk read out the charge against her.

'Anna Edes, Hungarian subject, Catholic, of no means. . .'

It was a long charge, and it took a long time to read. Meanwhile the public looked at the judges who sat on the bench, trying Anna Edes for her life.

They were without wigs or robes, in ordinary civilian

clothes, with stiff white collars and dark ties, but all the weight of tradition invested them with a timeless and impersonal dignity. Their vocation was to find out the truth about other people. They had been trained for this; they lived for this; and some day, on their mourning-cards and their tombstones, would appear that dread word: 'Judge.'

The presiding judge was turning over the pages of a law-book. His senior colleague, a man with a moustache and a long nose, wearing pince-nez, was tying documents together. His junior colleague, a burly, fat man, sat with his arms on the table and rested his big, heavy head on his left hand.

On the left, immediately under the bench a little man fidgeted: counsel for the defence. He greeted his father, mother and many relatives, whom he had invited to witness his début. Counsel for the prosecution was deep in his own thoughts.

After the charge had been read, the presiding judge ordered Anna to stand up.

'Anna Edes,' he said, 'do you understand the charge against you?'

He raised his voice, as though he were talking to somebody deaf or not on his own intellectual level.

'You are accused of murdering your master and mistress,' he went on. 'Do you feel that you are guilty? Do you plead guilty?'

'I do,' murmured Anna.

The audience whispered, the senior of the other judges stared at Anna, and the junior shifted his head to his **other** hand.

'In that case,' continued the presiding judge, now in an encouraging tone of voice, 'tell us in detail just how it happened. I call your attention to the fact that, if you admit everything, you will benefit yourself; but - ' and here he raised his voice again - 'if you deny anything which the prosecution is in a position to prove, you will only harm yourself. Go on . . .'

Anna's counsel signed to her to start; but not a word came to her lips.

'So you were Mr and Mrs Vizy's servant,' the presiding judge prompted her. 'You worked for them for ten months. We had better start with the fact that there was a big party

in their flat on May the 28th. That evening' – he tried to speak in a popular, colloquial tone – 'you were working, weren't you?'

'I was cooking,' said Anna.

'Quite so.' The presiding judge nodded in approval. 'You were attending to your household duties. You did not wait on the guests at table. They had finished supper long before. It was about three o'clock in the morning. Where were you then?'

'In the kitchen.'

'Yes, you were in the kitchen. And you searched the drawers in the dresser, looking for a knife?'

'I can't remember,' stammered Anna, glancing at her counsel. He nodded his approval.

'There is a witness to prove that you did,' remarked the presiding judge. 'And what did you do then?'

'Then I went into the bedroom.'

'Don't mix things up. You didn't go into the bedroom then. That comes later. First the guests started to leave. You were lurking in the bathroom, lying in wait, preparing yourself for your deed. Don't you remember Mr Druma looking in there?'

'No.'

'Well, Mr Druma will testify that he did, and saw you. Let us go on to where you opened the windows, and your mistress sent you to bed. Instead of going to bed, you waited until she and Mr Vizy were asleep.'

'Then I went into the bedroom.'

'No, you still did not go into the bedroom,' said the presiding judge, in exasperation; and he thumped the table with his fist.

Anna shuffled from one foot to another. She was similarly stumbling backwards and forwards in the past. It all seemed so long ago that she was hopelessly confused.

Counsel for the defence stood up.

'Mr President,' he said, 'I humbly suggest that a competent alienist should be ordered to examine the mental state of the accused, and to remain in court during her trial. Her confession is so disconnected, incoherent and pathological that I

regard it as my duty as counsel for the defence to plead that she is not sane.'

The presiding judge held a whispered consultation with his colleagues.

'The court rejects the motion,' he announced. 'As the learned counsel is aware, the accused has already been medically examined, and pronounced accountable for her actions. I would ask him to defer any other remarks until the end of her statement.'

'I shall then humbly enter a plea for mitigation of sentence,' said Anna's counsel. He bowed deep.

The presiding judge went on with his pilgrimage into the past. He groped his way forward with Anna, searching for the truth. He led her along, even though he himself could not see in the darkness. Now and again, he waited, in the hope that she would lead him to a point where some light would suddenly shine out and make the whole thing clear. But they were like two blind men walking hand in hand in the darkness, one leading the other; the blind leading the blind.

'Now,' the presiding judge resumed, 'try to remember. Why did you take the knife? What were your feelings at the time?'

Anna said nothing. She let the presiding judge try to interpret her feelings, her inexpressible feelings, and translate them into intelligible human speech.

'Perhaps you felt angry with your master and mistress? Your brain was suddenly flooded with blood. You couldn't control yourself any more. Perhaps it came into your mind that your mistress had once scolded you and you wanted to have your revenge. But why such a dreadful revenge?'

Still it was he who had to try and lay bare Anna's feelings.

'Did your conscience not awaken?' he went on. 'Did your soul not speak inside you? Did you not stop to think about what you were going to do? Did you not realise what the consequences would be? Did you not know that you would have to answer for it before God and man? After all, you weren't the kind of girl who would do a thing like this . . .'

The presiding judge had an inkling that behind Anna's act there must be some secret motive, unknown to anybody else: perhaps unknown even to Anna herself. He, however, went

on. He knew that an act is not always explained by one reason, or by a number of reasons. He knew that behind every act is the whole of a personality, the whole of a life.

But he also knew that the whole of a personality, the whole of a life, cannot be dissected by the law. He had come to resign himself to the fact that one could never get to know all about anybody.

Meanwhile he had to do his duty.

'And now,' he prompted Anna, 'when you reached the bedroom, your master and mistress were asleep. What did you do then?'

'I . . .'

'Well, say it,' said the presiding judge, sternly. 'Then you went up to your mistress's bed, and while she was asleep you drove a knife into her heart. This knife here. . .'

He picked out the big carving-knife from among the exhibits and held it up in the air. The audience gasped with horror.

The presiding judge held the knife out towards Anna.

'Is this the knife?' he asked.

'Yes,' whispered Anna; and she shrank back. She felt as though he were turning the knife in her own heart.

But at length she managed to stammer out the story of how she killed Mrs Vizy. She did not tell it in her own words, but in those which she had learned from the police and the examining magistrate. She told it more or less coherently.

'You killed your mistress,' the presiding judge repeated. 'You murdered your mistress, who had given you board and lodging, and never done you any harm. Well, go on. What did you do after that?'

'I ran into the drawing-room.'

'No, not yet. You're going too fast. Let's stay in the bedroom for the time being. You murdered your master, too. You murdered him in cold blood. You stabbed him with the knife, nine times. Isn't that true?'

'Yes,' Anna admitted. 'But I didn't mean to hurt Mr Vizy. I got frightened of him.'

'You mean you were frightened of your own conscience, of the consequence of your crime. So you killed him too. And what happened after that?'

'They came for me.'

'No, they didn't – not yet. Before that, you lay down on the couch in the drawing-room, and there . . .'

'I fell asleep.'

'And you could sleep after such a dreadful deed? Then, when you awakened, did you not know what a terrible crime you had committed? You did not surrender to the police. You waited until they broke into the flat. Have you at least repented of your sin now? Or would you do the same thing again?'

'Oh, no!' said Anna, aghast. 'Oh, no!'

'Sit down,' the presiding judge said.

The accused's statement was over. Next came the witnesses for the prosecution.

The leading witness for the prosecution was Constantin Druma. As the tall, red-faced lawyer took his stand in the witness-box, he seemed to tower towards the central chandelier.

The presiding judge mumbled the usual formalities.

'Are you related to the accused? Are you on bad terms with the accused? . . .'

Druma did not take the trouble to answer. He simply smiled at the suggestion that he could be related to anybody like Anna.

Concisely he related the circumstances which seemed to make Anna's premeditation of her crime unquestionable. He answered prosecuting counsel's questions in precise legal language.

Anna's excited behaviour, he declared, had made him suspicious earlier in the evening, and he had kept an eye on her. At two o'clock in the morning, the accused could not have been looking in the dresser-drawers for anything else but the knife. Then she must have hidden it somewhere. Before he left, he saw her again, lurking in the bathroom. He had intended to give her a tip, but she ran away as though she were frightened of him.

Druma had not yet finished.

'May I be allowed,' he went on, 'to say a few words about the political aspect of this case, and enlarge upon the part played by the caretaker and his wife?' He pointed to the

Fichors sitting among the witnesses. 'These people, Mr President, expressed such sympathy with the Reds during the Communist régime that everybody in the house went in terror, day and night, of being denounced. For my part, I see every reason to suppose that they were the real moving spirits in this. . .'

'Order, please!' the presiding judge interrupted him. 'An investigation has already been made in that direction, but it came to a negative result. The Public Prosecutor makes no charge . . .' He glanced at counsel for the prosecution, who shook his head. 'All that has nothing to do with the present trial.'

Druma was left crestfallen, with his political speech unuttered.

Then there was a brief clash between counsel for the prosecution and the defence. Counsel for the prosecution asked that Druma should take the oath, while counsel for the defence opposed this. The Court ruled that Druma should swear to the truth of his testimony.

Next Constable Antal Szucs gave evidence of his discovery of the crime. He emphasized how cool Anna was when he arrested her.

Mrs Druma described Anna as reserved. As a sideline, she brought in the mysterious disappearance of her nail-scissors. She ended by singing the praises of the Vizys, especially Mr Vizedy.

Mrs Moviszter was wearing a dress with the skirt split up the side. She had come to Court to show it off, and she was made-up as though for a first night at the theatre. She answered prosecuting counsel's questions with flirtatious free-and-easiness.

According to her, Anna was not in the least reserved, but of a rather pleasant disposition. She was surprised that she should have been capable of such a crime, especially as her mistress was an angel, goodness itself, and she had been fond of Anna.

Mrs Moviszter was quite prepared to go on talking forever, but, unfortunately for her, her evidence had to come to an end.

When Fichor was called, the presiding judge informed him that, as a relative of the accused, he need not give evidence unless he liked ; but Fichor was anxious to testify.

'I warn you,' said the presiding judge, 'to tell the truth. Your evidence may have to be supported on oath, and the law punishes perjury severely : in certain cases, with five years' imprisonment.'

Fichor had already been frightened by Druma's interrupted charge against him. When the presiding judge mentioned five years' imprisonment, he was all the more anxious to save his skin at Anna's expense.

He repeated all he had said to the examining magistrate. When Anna's little counsel cross-examined him, and tried to show that his evidence was untrustworthy, Fichor lost all control of himself.

'That wasn't all she said,' he insisted. 'She said other things as well. Once, when Mrs Vizy scolded her because she had broken a mirror, she came down to us and said she would leave the house at once; but, before she left it, she would do something to make Mrs Vizy sorry. She would set the house on fire.'

'When did she say this?' asked counsel for the prosecution.

'Shortly after she came to the house.'

'Are you absolutely sure about this?'

'Absolutely sure.'

'Think again. Would you swear to it?'

'I would,' answered Fichor, with fixed determination.

He took the oath, and, before he left the witness-box, bowed to the Court as low as was humanly possible.

His wife took his place. Her fat form was trembling like a leaf.

By now she felt sorry for Anna. She would have liked to defend her niece; but she did not dare to retract what she had already said.

'Well, Mrs. Fichor,' asked the presiding judge, 'what have you to tell us about the accused?'

'Oh, please, Sir,' replied Mrs Fichor, 'she was always so suspectful!'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I mean she was always so suspicious.'

'You mean you suspected her?'

'Yes, and so did everybody else.'

'And what made you suspect her?'

'She was always speculating.'

'You mean, she seemed to be turning something over in her mind?'

'No.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'She always seemed to have something on her mind.'

The presiding judge made an effort to get something definite out of the witness.

'You said something else about her to the examining magistrate,' he pointed out. 'You said that she tried to murder somebody before.'

'Yes, when she went for her mother with a sickle.'

'Did you see that yourself?'

'No, I only heard about it.'

'From whom?'

'From her mother.'

'In any case, it isn't her mother; it's her step-mother.' The presiding judge brushed it aside with a despondent gesture. 'Anything else?'

'Otherwise I can't say anything against her. She was always a good girl, but . . .'

'But what?'

'But then she turned out bad.'

'Well, we know that already,' remarked the presiding judge. Everybody tittered.

'Mr President,' said Mrs Fichor, very much on her dignity, 'I can't say anything but what I know.'

Everybody tittered again.

'All right,' snapped the presiding judge. 'You may go.'

The evidence had not disclosed very much so far; but now it was degenerating into sheer nonsense.

'Call the first witness for the defence,' said the presiding judge. 'Dr. Nicholas Moviszter.'

Dr Nicholas Moviszter was called.

'Isn't he here?' went on the presiding judge, impatiently.

'Hasn't he been subpoenaed? He hasn't sent any excuse, has he? Where is he ?'

Where are you, indeed, Dr Moviszter? Where are you, with your eight per cent. of sugar in your blood? Are you dead? Or are you lying helpless, in that sleeping sickness that comes before death to people like you? Is there nobody left to speak for Anna Edes?

If you are still alive, if there is a spark of life still in you, here is your place. Now is the time for you to come forward.

He came forward.

He had been sitting right in the back row of the witnesses' seats, lost among them, lost in his fur coat on this dreary November day, with the chill of oblivion already upon him. It took him some time to hobble forward to the witness-box, bending upon his stick, so shrunk, so bowed that people had to stand up to see him.

'Present,' he said, bowing to the Court.

In view of the state of his health, the presiding judge said that the witness could give his evidence sitting down. A policeman brought forward a chair; but Dr Moviszter refused to sit down. On the contrary, he drew himself as erect as he could.

'Dr Moviszter,' asked the presiding judge, 'do you confirm the statement you made to the examining magistrate?'

'I do,' replied Dr Moviszter.

His voice was scarcely audible. The presiding judge had to cup his hand round his ear to hear him.

'Can you give the Court any evidence in support of your statement?' he asked.

Dr Moviszter hesitated, as though he were assembling his arguments.

'Why do you hesitate?' an inner voice urged him. 'Do your duty. You are only one man; but what is more than a man? Not ten men, not a thousand men, are more than a man. Step forward. So. And now another step forward. It's your turn now. Lift up your voice, Moviszter. And lift up your heart, too. *Sursum corda!*

'I can't hear you,' said the presiding judge. 'Could you speak a bit louder?'

A bit louder?

Not a bit louder – a lot louder.

‘Shout at the top of your voice!’ Moviszter’s soul sang within him. ‘Shout your hardest! Shout as your true kinsmen shouted! Shout like the heroic priests of the early Christian ages! Shout like those priests who, in the face of death, shouted to Heaven, calling upon their God, a God terrible but righteous, for mercy on mankind! . . . After all, you say the prayer for the dead every day, don’t you? Remember what it says: *Ne tradas bestiis animas confidentes tibi* – ‘Throw not to the wild beasts the souls of those who trust in Thee . . .’ *Et animas pauperorum tuorum ne obliviscaris in finem* – ‘And forget not the souls of Thy poor at the last . . .’ Try and shout like those who shouted in the arena, drowning the roars of the lions! Try and be a worthy proselyte!’

Moviszter’s voice waxed stronger.

‘I maintain my statement to the examining magistrate in its entirety,’ he said. ‘I can only repeat what I said in it.’

‘I have your statement before me,’ said the presiding judge. He turned the pages of a sheaf of papers. ‘But can you give the Court any facts in support of it? Did they ill-treat her? Did they starve her? Did they overwork her? Did they stop her wages? . . .’

‘I see here,’ he went on, ‘that at Christmas they gave her a present: a small present, to be sure, just a jumper – but still a present. What have you to say about that?’

‘What I maintain,’ said Moviszter, and his voice was firmer than ever, ‘is that they treated her as though she were a different kind of human being. That was always my feeling. They treated her heartlessly. They treated her without affection.’

‘But in what way did this show itself?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t explain that exactly. I can only repeat that it was always my definite feeling.’

‘Then, Doctor, you can adduce no more than your feeling – I might almost say your fancy. The Court is dealing with a terrible, a horrible crime. We cannot take account of mere impressions. On the one side, we have facts: dreadful facts. We must have facts on the other side, too. Every other witness has testified in a different sense. They all say exactly the

opposite of what you say. They say that the accused was highly valued by her master and mistress – even that they were fond of her. The accused herself did not complain of their treatment of her, either to the police or to the examining magistrate.’

He turned to Anna.

‘Stand up!’ he said.

‘Did your master and mistress ill-treat you?’ he asked.

‘No,’ said Anna.

‘Sit down,’ said the presiding judge.

‘You see,’ he went on to Moviszter, ‘there is nothing to support what you say.’

‘Look at the girl, Moviszter, How indifferently she’s sitting between her jailers. She’s not a pleasant sight; but look at her more closely. And look at the presiding judge more closely, too. See him settling his glasses in front of his old blue eyes. See him putting his hand to his head lest you should look inside it. He stands only for earthly justice; but he tries to see the truth impartially – to see it, so far as is possible on this earth, from the inside as well as the outside. . . Don’t you feel that he knows he is nearing divine justice and that he is already on your side? Let him argue a bit. After all, that’s his duty. Then speak up again. Don’t be afraid of him. Don’t be afraid of anybody. God is with you.’

‘Even if we admit that she was badly treated,’ argued the presiding judge, ‘the law gives her the right to make a complaint against her master and mistress. She could have given notice. She could have left in a fortnight.’

‘They forced her to stay.’

‘How do you mean – “forced her?” They couldn’t keep her in chains.’

‘She was such a wretched, impressionable girl.’

The presiding judge thought that over.

‘That,’ he said firmly, ‘is no excuse for her committing such a horrible crime.’

‘Then,’ asked Moviszter, ‘why did she do it? My feeling,’ he insisted, stubbornly, ‘is that they didn’t treat her as a human being. . . They didn’t treat her as a human being at all. They treated her as a domestic machine.’

Moviszter's voice rose to a shout.

'They made a machine of her, I say!' he repeated. 'They didn't treat her like human beings. They treated her like devils.'

'Order, order!' protested the presiding judge.

There was a stir in the audience. They approved of the presiding judge's intervention. They were scandalised by what Moviszter had said. There were murmurs in Court.

'Silence!' ordered the presiding judge; and he rang his bell.

'Moviszter,' said the doctor's inner voice, 'he is sounding a knell.'

'Have you anything else to say, Doctor?' asked the junior judge.

'No,' Moviszter said.

And a very good thing, too, thought the audience. They felt that this aged doctor, with one foot in the grave, was a limited man. Moviszter, indeed, had his limitations. Otherwise his human charity would have spent itself in a void.

Anna's little lawyer sprang to his feet. He humbly asked the Court to make the witness take oath to his testimony.

Prosecuting counsel objected. The witness's evidence was too vague, too unimportant.

The presiding judge took his decision promptly.

'The Court,' he ruled, 'orders the witness to take the oath.'

The audience stood up excitedly. The noise they made was quite theatrical.

Moviszter stood with his right hand on his heart, and three fingers of his left hand held up to Heaven.

He recited the oath after the presiding judge:

'I swear to the all-knowing, all-seeing, ever-living God . . . I have confessed the truth, and nothing but the truth . . . So help me, God . . .'

'So help me, God,' Moviszter repeated.

He dragged himself back to the witnesses' seats. The audience stared at him curiously, and drew away from him as he passed.

But Moviszter did not mind. He did not belong to them. He did not belong to any party, any class. He was a member

of the human community, the community of all souls, the quick and the dead.

He went away to tend his sick. He did not want to hear any more.

He did not wait for the trial to drag on. He did not wait until the Court adjourned to consider its verdict. He did not wait to see Anna brought back into the dock, deathly pale now, terribly afraid: afraid of the rope, afraid of death. He did not wait to hear the sentence on Anna:

'In the name of the Kingdom of Hungary . . . declare her guilty . . . aggravating circumstances of the brutality with which she committed the murders . . . but taking into consideration as extenuating circumstances her past life, her penitence, her lack of education . . . sentence her to fifteen years' imprisonment . . .'

They took Anna away to the Maria Nostra women's prison. There they gave her a frieze dress and a number.

Sometimes – but less and less as time went on – they talked about Anna in the Christina district.

Once a woman stopped outside the house in Attila Street.

'That's where Anna Edes murdered the Vizys,' she said to her husband. 'You remember her, don't you? A tall, strong girl, with black eyes and great big hands?'

'Rather plain, wasn't she?' said the husband.

'Oh, no,' said the wife, 'Quite good looking.'

'Oh, yes,' said the husband, 'she had a Rumanian soldier as a lover when the Rumanian army was here, hadn't she? . . .'

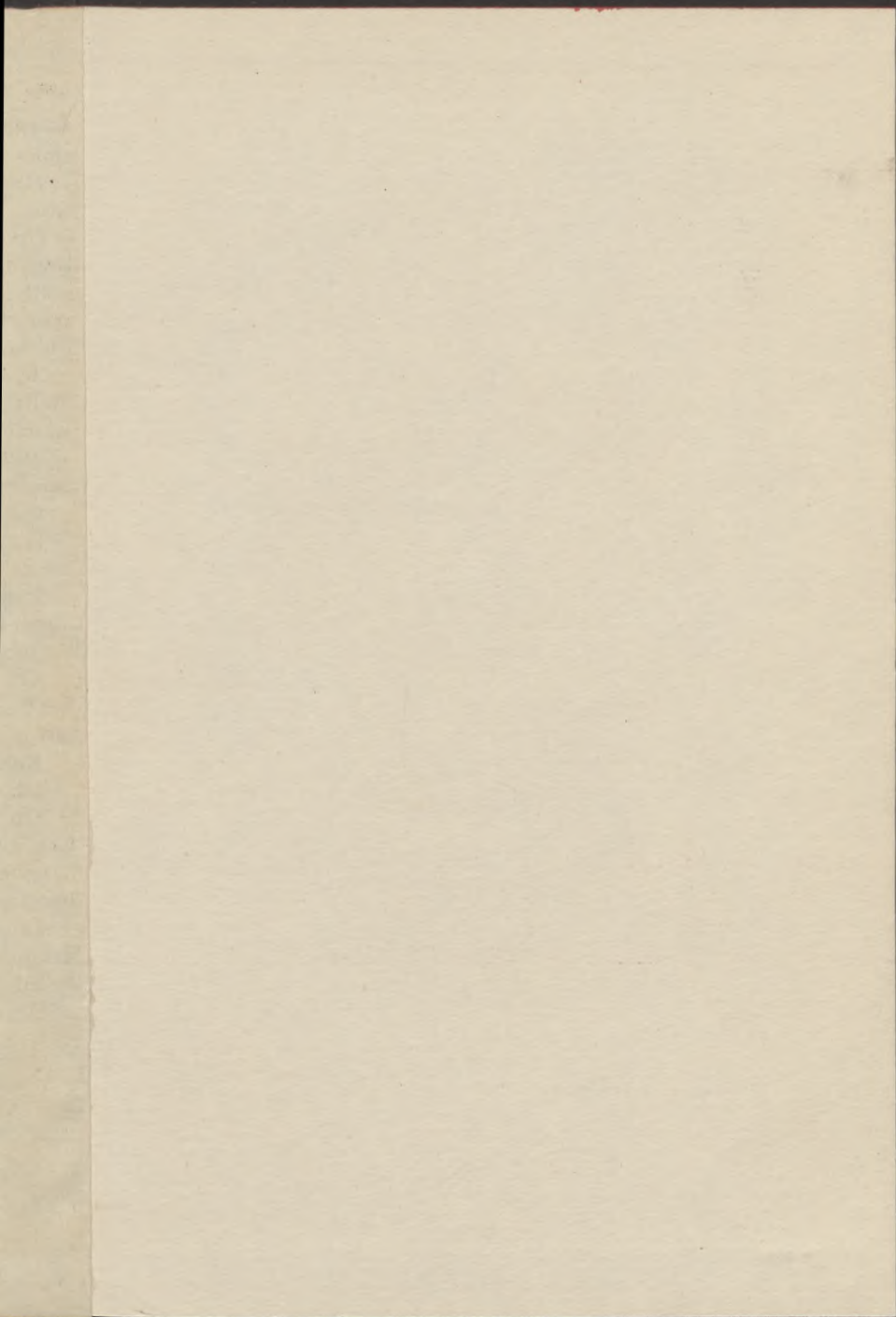
So the memory of Anna Edes grew obscure. Soon everybody had forgotten all about her.

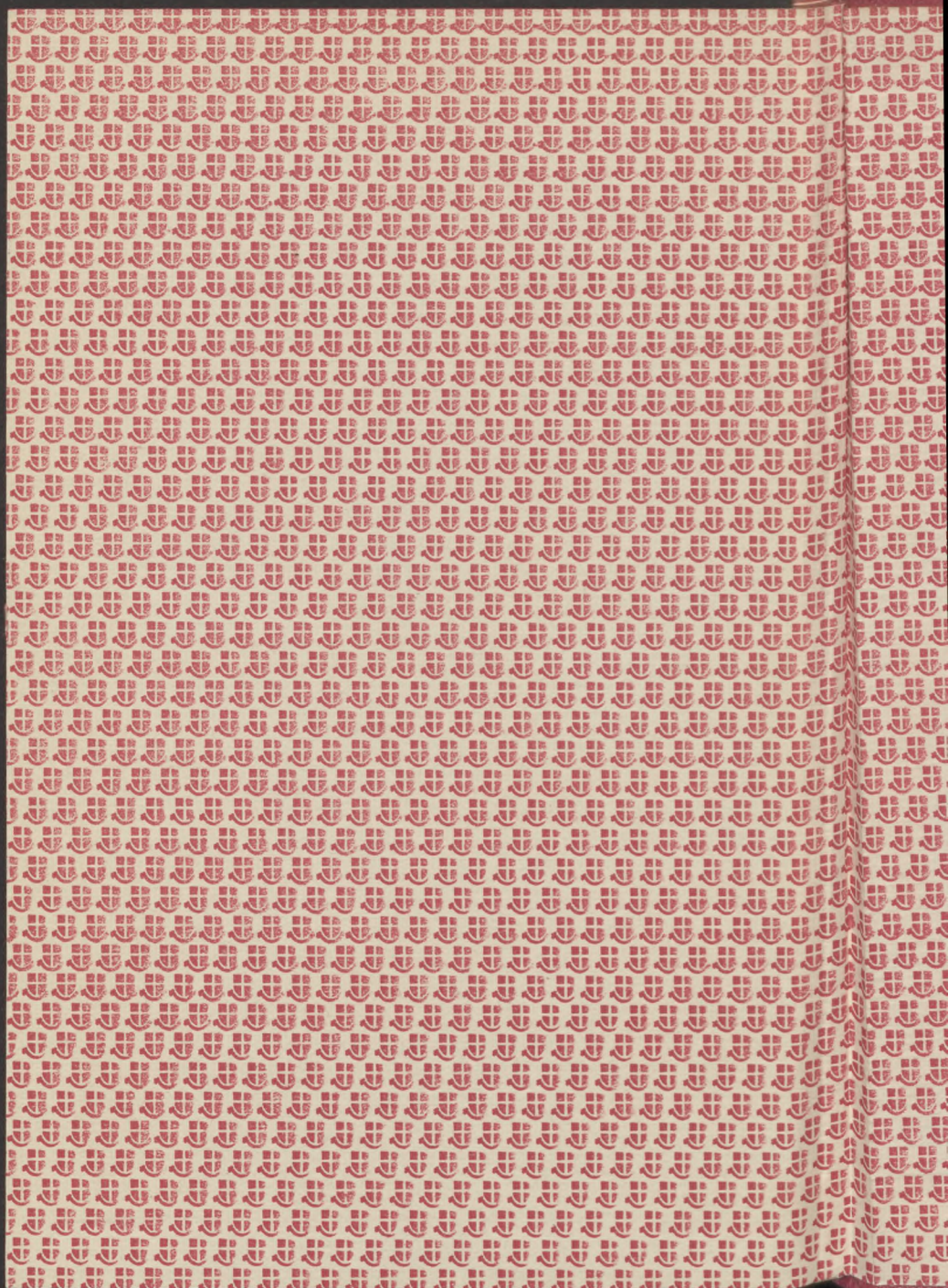
Anna Edes could not have been more completely dead if, instead of being still alive in the Maria Nostra prison, she had rested under the acacias in her village cemetery on the shores of Lake Balaton.

THE END



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WONDER
MAID

Dagso Koxholamys



TAPLES