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Sergio de Benedetti

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Memoirs of an Anti-Fascist

by Sergio DeBenedetti

translated by

Lydia, Vera and Gilbert DeBenedetti

Contents

Foreword

Part I – ITALY, MY ITALY

1 Strange Education	1
2 Domestic Rebellion and University Life	15
3 Physics at Arcetri	28
4 Eritrea and Post-Doc in Padua	41
5 A Year in Paris	51
6 Italy Acquires an Empire	69
7 Subservience to the Germans	76

Part II -- EXILE

8 Betrayal at Munich	87
9 Popular Front	100
10 Organizing Émigrés	114
11 Treason by the Left	123
12 Defeat	141
13 Portugal	157

Foreword by the Author

Why did I ever write these memoirs? Partly to fill the empty evenings upon arriving in an unfamiliar American continent; to keep myself occupied; to think back on distant friendships, on beloved places, on problems which I couldn't discuss with my newfound American acquaintances. But also, and most importantly, to explain to America the problems of Europe and to make my contribution to the struggle against fascism which I was too far away to fight. Thus one cannot expect these memoirs to be objective. The motivation for them was strictly partisan.

Why did I not try to publish these memoirs when they were written? For a variety of reasons, one of which is that America entered the European conflict and I became immersed in the war effort and scientific activities here in the US. I bear the guilt of having derived some satisfaction from working on the Manhattan Project -- building a bomb which we thought could defend democracy and which we now know can destroy the world. And finally the void of the new country became filled with new scientific and political interests, with new friends and a new family.

Why have I decided to publish now? For reasons which are rather difficult to explain. For one, the war in Vietnam has rekindled my fears of a nuclear holocaust, and the atomic and hydrogen bombs have made me doubt the social value of scientific research. Also, physics has lost its charm as a pioneering science. The immensity of the new machines attracts me a good deal less than the simplicity of primitive methods with which, thirty years ago, one could explore vast and intellectually virgin territories. And finally perhaps, because with the passage of years, the problems of man have become more interesting to me than those of matter.

Needing a new outlet for my energy, I have recently reorganized these memoirs. I've made a minimum of changes, of which perhaps the most significant is the addition of a few pages explaining the progress of physics and my connections with this science. This subject was glossed over in the original because it didn't contribute to the partisan approach which motivated my writing. I am submitting the memoirs to an Italian editor because they are still in the original Italian in which they were written, although someday I would like to see them published in English.

Sergio DeBenedetti,

Pittsburgh, 1965

Translator's Note

“I have described what happened to me in Europe, not because I thought it was extraordinary. It was a typical story, that of an average person, certainly not a hero, in a world in crisis. It's the story of the world situation, not my story, that I wanted to tell.”

PART ONE

*My Italy, though talk is vain
before the fatal wounds
which have so often marred your
lovely body...*

Petrarca

Chapter One

A Strange Education

Although in the records at the registrar's office in the city of Florence, Italy, my birth is recorded as falling in the month of August of the year 1912, my life effectively began in 1929. In the winter of that year, after a laborious and very painful reevaluation, I liberated myself of all the ideas -- ideas which were for the most part nothing more than prejudices -- which had resulted from a strange education. Then, after a period of much skepticism and pessimism, I began to gradually construct my own conception of the world on the basis of my experiences. This rebuilding of my personality is far from complete even to this day, and may well be modified in the future. This state of continual search and eternal doubt is not always very agreeable; it is, however, more satisfying to me than the acceptance of any of the ideologies that allow most people to relax lazily with a certain sense of ease.

Even though I tried to construct my personality according to my experiences in the world, it would be vain to deny that my earlier life history, from the perspective of heredity and education, did not have a considerable influence on me. The influence of what I saw, heard, absorbed and learned before the year 1929 is largely confined to my subconscious; none of the doctrines and ideas that I considered to be mine before that date remained without having been subject to a severe critical evaluation. I think, though, that it would be fitting to acknowledge, at the start of these memoirs, the experiences of my childhood, in order to provide some insight into my present and future attitudes.

* * *

My family belongs to the Jewish petit bourgeoisie of Florence. I was born and lived the first years of my childhood in the home of my maternal grandparents Carlo and Bice Passigli. My grandfather was a businessman who had retired before the First World War with a small savings which he watched, with truly Jewish trepidation, as it shrank with the inflation. I believe that my great-grandparents, Cesare and Rosa Passigli, must have lived in the ghetto for part of their lives, and must have been admitted into Italian society by the liberal reforms of the Risorgimento. My grandfather therefore, perhaps with reflexive memories of the past, was naturally a liberal: he was always against Fascism, yet as part of the group who, through free trade, was able to pass from a condition misery to one of relative comfort, he was equally opposed to any radical movement for social reform.

My mother, Amelia, had the minimal education that every Jewish family feels obligated to give its children. I consider her to have been endowed with an uncommon intelligence and sensitivity, and above of all, an insatiable thirst for truth and justice. Until a relatively advanced age, she cultivated an intellectual freshness and enthusiasm for confronting problems which, in some cases, were superior to my own. I remember, for example, her passion for learning when she took some courses in Paris at the Sorbonne and the College de France.

Her overriding characteristic is a need for justice and coherence that prevents her from compromising, even on trivial matters; and this has resulted in more than a few problems for her. Her need to delve into problems and to discover new things is not, however, accompanied by what one would call a rational outlook; on the contrary, she leans towards mysticism and spirituality, which has furnished us with topics for endless discussions. When my mother is convinced of something, she is fully convinced, blocking out every doubt, and she is quite capable of sacrificing herself and others for what she thinks is right. Given that her convictions are not always the fruit of objective reasoning, this characteristic subjects her to a kind of fanaticism. However in her interactions with me, except during my adolescence, she left me rather free to develop as I pleased, something for which I will always be grateful.

I have very few memories of my father, Guido DeBenedetti, who died when I was only six. He came from a family that was somewhat more intellectual than my mother's. (My paternal grandfather, Abraham or "Nino" whom I never knew, was a high school teacher.) Of my father I know only that he adored my mother; I was told that he was intelligent, but lacking in those qualities required for success in life. He was an employee at the Post Office. He was a Mason and sympathized with socialist causes. I regret having no more details about facets of his personality for which my memory does not serve me.

Such was the character of my family.

The life of this family took place in a second floor apartment on a side street in Florence. The apartment was relatively large, but nevertheless rather modest and furnished in the questionable taste of an self-made businessman.

The first years of my childhood were spent in this home in a gloomy setting. I only have vague memories predating the death of my father. I remember some disconnected and unimportant events: Many days during the First World War my family ate potatoes, but for me there was always good bread and plenty of good food. I remember that on some evenings my father would stay with my mother and me, entertaining me by designing and building marionettes that he carved out of wood with a penknife.

The situation in my family certainly was not ideal for a growing boy. My grandfather had a heart of gold, but an irascible temper. He was prone to violent outbursts at the dinner table about the amount of salt in his soup. My parents were certainly not completely happy living in my grandparent's house (as my mother later confided to me) but they were forced to live there due to financial problems.

The apartment did not have adequate air or light for the healthy physical or spiritual growth of a young child. All in all, however, the conditions in which I spent my childhood were quite a bit better than those of most of my peers in Florence. Now, familiar with life in an American suburb, airy and full of greenery, with its neat little private homes, my old apartment in Florence seems dark and unhealthy.

Spending my childhood in Florence certainly has had a marked influence on my personality: my maternal language is Italian, the pure Italian which is spoken on the banks of the Arno, and my artistic sensibility cannot but be influenced by the beauty of the artistic and natural treasures of my native city. It is therefore natural that, without undue patriotism or provincialism, I retain a certain attachment to my Italian and Florentine roots.

The education that my mother gave me in my early childhood years was, as far as I can remember, exemplary. She tried to develop a sense of responsibility and to instill a certain seriousness about life. On the rare occasions when she punished me, she tried to point out what I had done wrong, so that the outcome would be a desire to better myself. Besides, she never used corporal punishment; her disapproval was mostly symbolic. The most common form of punishment, and the one that had the most profound effect on me, was refusing my good-night kiss at bedtime; also, occasionally she withheld my fruit at the end of a meal. I don't remember many details of my behavior in this first phase of my life, but I have been told that my family was more concerned by my inactivity than by tantrums or bad behavior.

At five years of age my favorite form of play was building with blocks. I had a box full of wooden blocks and little columns with which I built unstable architectural structures on the floor. These inspired the admiration of my indulgent relatives and when someone wondered aloud whether I might grow up to be an engineer, this comment stuck in my mind to the point that those wooden structures directed all my future studies. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I could not imagine myself going into any other profession than engineer. I prepared to enter the polytechnical high school and only changed my mind when I was on the verge of entering the School of Engineering.

A man's whole life can be determined by a single casual statement overheard during his childhood. Until I was twenty years old, because of this statement, I considered the profession of engineer as that best suited to my intellectual abilities. And so, to prepare me for polytechnical school, even before the death of my father, my mother began to teach me to read and write. Her instruction was caring; she was serious without being rigid, and I seem to have learned without much difficulty, using my pen and books as though they were toys.

I had no religious instruction whatsoever, and I am grateful to my family for having spared me the painful effort of liberating myself from it. My grandfather was aware of being Jewish, but he was not

observant. He fasted on Yom Kippur and, although prosciutto was admissable at our table, he would not permit pork to be cooked in our kitchen. This minimal respect for tradition -- truly minimal, as is clear to those who know how rigid and numerous are the laws of the Jewish religion -- had no religious content: it was simply an affirmation of his own Jewishness that he cared to hold onto. But I remember that my parents did not respect even those last residual traditions, and during Yom Kippur they would take their meals in another room out of respect for my grandfather.

I was taken to the synagogue a few times, but this experience made no great impression on me. I was surprised when I found out that our acquaintances included both Jews and non-Jews, and it took me a while to figure out what that meant. Even now, though I know what it means, I don't know the difference.

* * *

At about six years of age I was faced the first turning point in my life, due to the death of my father and the start of school. My father died of the Spanish influenza which was a consequence of the First World War; his disappearance overturned my mother's life so completely that it inevitably had a profound effect on my own.

During my father's illness I was removed from the house for fear of contagion. When I went back home, I was told that my father was convalescing in a nursing home and that he would be gone for some time. But I knew the trick, which had already been used on a little cousin whose father had been killed a few months earlier in the war. I immediately suspected just what kind of home my father was in. I did not express my doubts to anyone, perhaps not wanting to complicate the already difficult family situation with the need to comfort me, or perhaps also because I preferred to remain in doubt rather than have my fears confirmed.

But upon reflection, I can't rule out the possibility that my silence was somewhat more egotistical. I didn't know what kind of behavior was expected from a boy who had just learned that he was an orphan and, afraid of not being up to the demands of the occasion, I preferred to feign ignorance. This way at least I was left in peace, otherwise I would have become the center of attention, and thus might have created an embarrassing situation for myself. I didn't want to cry, and was afraid that this might be considered shameful. Furthermore the idea that the old ladies who came to pay their respects would also try to comfort me, was a horrifying prospect. The only way I could be left alone, it seemed to me, was by keeping silent, and so I stuck to it.

A little while later, maybe a few weeks later, we went to the country, as we did every year during the hot summer months. That year my grandparents rented a flat in a little villa in Fiesole. I do not remember spending much time with my mother during that sad summer. As she did in all the following years, my mother spent most of her time shut in her room dwelling on her grief and her memories. From that time on, even though she was still young, her life as a woman was over. She kept herself busy exclusively with spiritual problems and humanitarian activities, and of course, with my education.

That summer many of our friends and relatives were in Fiesole scattered in various houses and villas not far from our own. From time to time I went on walks with my grandfather and I was frequently taken to friends' houses where I could be with boys of my own age. Among these were Giuliano Treves and Gualtiero Procaccia, who were distant relatives, and my best friends. Giuliano had lost his mother to the influenza and Gualtiero's father, Giorgio, had died in the war.

That summer, and in the following summers, my mother spent much of her time with Gualtiero's mother. The two widows became close because of the similarity of their situations. Together they began to practice spiritualism, hoping to make contact with their departed loved ones. One of Giuliano's aunts, who was reputed to be a medium, wrote letters which she claimed were inspired by, or dictated by, spirits of the departed. She put her hypothetical powers at the disposal of my mother and Gualtiero's mother, and they brought home bundles of paper covered with scrawled letters. Some of the pages actually bore written messages from their dead husbands presumably channeled through Gualtiero's aunt. The messages were written in a hand that at times strangely resembled the writing of the purported authors. These were of utmost importance to my mother, who would read me a few lines. One day she brought

home a prayer which I was supposed to learn and to repeat every night before going to sleep, and which I did for many years. The prayer was neither religious nor morbid; it appealed to a "great omnipotent God," who, even though he may not have done any good, at least he didn't do any harm.

But otherworldly concerns absorbed my mother more than it was reasonable to expect. In this dejected and debilitating period she undertook, together with Gualtiero's mother, the search for a faith which could comfort her in her grief and give her the will to live. Thus the two friends began to go to lectures and to frequent the strange haunts of mystics, until finally they believed they had found the "truth" in Theosophy.

Those who wish to know about theosophy can read the vast literature on the subject. The Theosophical Society is an international organization whose general beliefs entail universal brotherhood and the search for truth. But behind this organization, whose principles are so broad, is a fantastically complicated doctrine, a doctrine in which many of its members believe blindly and observe faithfully. It is a strange mixture of Indian mysticism and Western bigotry, of high ideals and crude superstition. The doctrine of Theosophy includes all areas of science and ignorance, from reincarnation to the structure of the atom, from the hereafter to the evolution of the species, from the cosmos to the kitchen. The believer has access to a whole pseudo-scientific literature based on the beliefs of people who claim to have extraordinary supernatural powers and who provide the most extravagant explanations on any subject whatsoever. Occasionally science, with its progress, has proved a few details wrong: the theosophical authors had all too rashly approached a subject that was verifiable.

In any case, the rest of my education was steeped in theosophy, and this eventually necessitated an intense re-evaluation to destroy its effects. I do not regret this aspect of my education: it gave me an intellectual flexibility, awakened in me an interest in fundamental principles, and allowed me to clearly see how easily once can get lost in the strangest of fantasies when reason is abandoned.

During my childhood my grandfather took me on long walks in the enchanting environs of Florence. These walks continued for a while after I started elementary school, on Thursdays and Sundays which were vacation days. As he walked, my grandfather talked: although I do not remember the gist of what he said, I am convinced that these walks had a marked influence on my development. I think especially that this was how I acquired my solid middle class common sense.

My grandfather talked about political events and tried to instill a sense of patriotism. Once, returning from Piazzale Michelangelo, he spoke of the events in Fiume, portraying Yugoslavia, which had recently been created, as a nation of ingrates towards Italy, whose sons had spilled their blood to allow Serbia to expand its borders.

A few chance encounters during these walks illustrate my grandfather's unconscious reactionary ideas. Once, for example, he complained that the peasants no longer acknowledged the better dressed city residents with a "good day, sir" as they had done in the past -- as though they should feel honored that we deigned to visit the fields that were bathed in their sweat. This took place near Fiesole.

Another time we met a man who was walking with his wife on the Viale dei Colli. The two were fairly well dressed, but my grandfather observed that the man was from the working class because his hands bore the signs of manual labor. My grandfather took the opportunity to comment upon how life had improved for the proletariat. While he approved of this, he also expressed doubts about pushing these positive changes too far. At this time, the proletariat was called the "fourth class" and my grandfather pointed out that in every history book, only three classes were mentioned -- the clergy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie -- and the fourth class was nothing but a dangerous invention of socialist demagoguery. In other words he completely denied the existence of the proletariat as a social force.

Meanwhile, immediately after the war, Italian politics was being disrupted by workers and peasants who, returning from the front, expressed their dissatisfaction with the existing social structure and were determined to change it. This was a one of the most favorable periods for socialist propaganda because it resonated with the less affluent classes who were disillusioned by the outcome of the war and embittered by the contrast between their poverty and the wealth squandered by the profiteers.

The leftist movement took a typically Italian form, it was loud and disorganized. The people had not found leaders to follow, or a party with the theoretical groundwork to guide them to success. As a

result they took advantage of political demonstrations to plunder stores of food and other necessities; workers occupied the factories, but couldn't organize production. The disarray and disorganization of the movement spelled its defeat, and soon the people realized that a stolen piece of bread or pair of shoes could not solve their problems, and that the movement created disorder without imposing any order of its own. And so the effect of the strikes and the "red days" was simply to scare the bourgeoisie.

During our walks my grandfather explained that the "right" was better than the "left," speaking of checks and balances and rates of international currency exchange to bolster his point of view. My young mind concluded that the rightists were "good" and the leftists were "bad." One day, walking along a road I saw the slogan, "Long Live Fascism" scrawled on a wall. I asked my grandfather the meaning of Fascism and he answered that it was a political party which was against liberals. In response to my insistent questioning as to whether the party was on the right or the left, he replied that Fascism was on the extreme right. I concluded that the Fascists were the best of all the political parties, and none of my grandfather's protestations against the dangers of extremism could change my mind. This was my first contact with Fascism, an episode which demonstrates the effects of "right-wing" propaganda.

I judged political events on these grounds until the day I began to think for myself. In my youth, I believed in the claims of the party propaganda -- Fascism was the defender of the nation and the law. On the other side were the "reds" who represented only violence and evil. As a consequence I was indignant about the blood shed by the socialists, and I thought that Fascist reprisals were heroic acts by pure defenders of justice. The insults to the national flag, the strikes, the late trains -- often the trainmen refused to proceed when a priest or military official was discovered on board -- all seemed unjustified. It never occurred to me that these acts might be the result of disillusionment about the war or a commitment to social justice.

When Giovanni Berta was killed I was profoundly moved and angered. An industrialist's son, Berta was thrown into the Arno from the Ponte Sospeso by thugs provoked by the tricolor flag on his bike. It is hardly surprising then, that at ten years of age I greeted the news of the March on Rome with great joy.

* * *

When I was about six years old I started school. I was placed second grade since I already knew the basics of reading and writing, and from then on I was always a year ahead of my classmates. I started school after the start of the scholastic year and for that reason I was not admitted to public school. I was sent to a very snobbish Catholic school, which I can barely remember, run by English nuns. But at the end of the year my mother had me take the exam to be admitted to public school, where I completed the next two grades of elementary school.

During this time, I had no contact with any of my classmates. I was accompanied to and from school by a family-member as befit a young "gentleman" who was not considered capable of crossing the street by himself. This privilege was reserved for the sons of working class families who were then disparaged as "street-boys." "You're like a street-boy!" my mother would say when my attire did not conform to the requisite esthetics and cleanliness appropriate to my class.

After elementary school I attended middle school for four years; I remember these four years as if I warmed the school benches for just a few hours. In the second year my schoolmates clued me in on the secrets of sex, in a most disgusting way, and for several years my language was quite foul, even though I didn't always know the meaning of the words I was using.

After middle school, since I was going to be an engineer, I attended the Science High School instead of taking the traditional classical curriculum. As a result my education in the humanities is not as good as it could have been, and my scientific education did not benefit either since, in any case, I would have studied science later.

Everything I was taught in middle school was completely lost on me, even though my teachers were satisfied with my performance and gave me decent grades. I didn't appreciate any of the literature we studied -- The Illiad, Eneide, *I Promessi Sposi* -- nor do I remember anything about ancient history. I

learned geography later, I would say "experimentally" and so, too, with French. Those four years of school were wasted on me.

However, things were different in Science High School. I was passionate about chemistry, biology, and mathematics from the beginning. History was taught by a teacher who had a very subtle and quick mind, who tried to infuse into our immature brains the significance of events and the character of various historical periods. Professor Porzio was an old populist who loved to spice up the historical narrative with interesting stories. In this manner, he awakened our interest and taught us, without being obvious, to sympathize with the oppressed against the oppressors, with the exploited against the tyrants.

According to the curriculum in those days, history professors were also assigned to teach history of philosophy. But the good man was a historian, and he had no interest in philosophy. From the first day, he told us sarcastically that this discipline searched for first principles and final purposes, but that no two philosophers agreed with each other -- his own position was between agnosticism and skepticism -- and he restricted his course to the exposition of various systems, from the ancient Greeks to Bergson, without taking any of them too seriously and without missing any opportunity for sarcasm. This caldron of opinions created quite a bit of confusion in my young mind, but I fondly remember my grey-bearded professor of history of philosophy, convinced that his lessons had a considerable influence on my later development.

As to literature I always did rather well, without ever having been too deeply moved by it.

At that time the Italian curriculum was based on the reforms of Gentile. Gentile was an idealistic philosopher who placed himself at the service of the Fascists and oriented Italian schools along the lines of his philosophical principles. From a certain perspective, Gentile's reforms were not terribly bad. The purpose of learning was to shape the student's personality, rather than to grasp practical ideas; humanism was emphasized, as well as the study of literature and Latin. Boys and girls at the age of ten or twelve wrote essays on esthetics, and were invited to express their opinions on a given piece of poetry or prose. I succeeded reasonably well with these tasks, even if I did not resonate under the influence of certain literary works.

From my perspective, the shortcoming of Gentile's reforms was to minimize the importance of scientific culture. Like any idealistic philosopher, Gentile must have considered science to be a dry subject -- a collection of disconnected thoughts incapable of molding a mind. In my opinion, however, science can give not only intellectual satisfaction, but can also inspire a young mind, more so even, than can be gleaned from reading a piece of poetry. No work of Italian or Latin literature has ever inspired me as much as when I learned the laws of evolution, or when, in natural science class, I became aware of the presence of the simple and pure beauty hidden in nature. And the harmony of the laws of nature is for me far superior to any strains of Dante.

From the advent of Fascism and through the first few years of its ascendancy, the administration of Italian schools was sound. The professors' integrity was truly extraordinary, especially considering their meager earnings. As a general rule, they were no longer young and they had considerable experience; often they were also very knowledgeable and had a real interest in their subject matter.

Schools were completely divorced from religion until the time that the Fascists reconciled with the church. At that time, Catholic religious instruction was introduced into the schools for one hour a week, from which students could be excused at the request of their parents. On the bare walls of the schoolrooms, there had always been a photograph of the king; after a while a crucifix came to keep him company, and later still, a photo of Mussolini made its appearance, with eyes bulging out of their sockets.

Upon leaving high school, so much culture was stuffed into the poor head of an 18-year old boy that he could not have assimilated, or at least marginally learned, anything more without resorting to physical violence. Unfortunately, it was a "scholastic" education, which aimed at teaching what had been written in books, and not actual life in the real world. Well-turned phrases, resonant words, and lots of adjectives were the marks of a classical education. The purpose of the system was to teach us to write well about what had already been written by others, instead of to express our own thoughts about the world around us, or our own observations and reactions to the world. The result was that we appeared to

be educated to those who, in turn, had been educated in the same manner. Rhetoric and pompousness, these sorry Italian traits infected us from our first years on the school benches.

The only religion that I was taught in school, perhaps the only religious education that I ever had, was the religion of the Greeks and Romans. This is the religious education which most educated Italians receive -- to the extent that, it could be said that Italy is more pagan than it is Catholic.

* * *

Relations with my classmates were simple and cordial. There was some profanity and lots of cheap humor, but beneath it all, much solidarity and friendship. I wonder what happened to my high school classmates. How many of them were sent away, far from their homes to fight and perhaps to die?

In school the subject of politics surfaced relatively infrequently, but Fascism's hand became steadily heavier, and already in the early years when I was in school, it was possible to foresee a time when the schools would be completely subservient to the Fascist regime. In my last year of high school all the students in my class, with only one or two exceptions, were members of Fascist organizations. Our principal actively engaged in propaganda, but none of the professors ever discussed politics in their classes, and the education which was imparted to us was not yet twisted by a political agenda. In fact, most of the teachers were suspected of having anti-fascist views.

The hours I spent on the high school benches were mostly quite pleasant. Though I did not study much at home, I was always able to make decent grades. I spent several years without many worries in this regard. I was never a timid student; on the contrary I often went to the opposite extreme of becoming impertinent. If I lacked energy in my earlier years, I acquired a goodly dose of it later on. At school I could not keep still, and my conduct was not at all disciplined. This unruliness, though, did not displease either my friends or my teachers, who reproached me good-naturedly, and occasionally made me leave the room without thinking any less of me.

During my last years before college, I was less isolated than I had been, and I spent much time with my schoolmates and other boys of my age. My friends in high school were not very remarkable and none of them, as far as I know, made a name for themselves in the years that followed. In general they came from the *petite bourgeoisie* of Florence and were perhaps of a slightly poorer class, the recently formed Science High School being less "refined" than the Classical High School.

Therefore, my friends at the time represented a cross-section of Florence, with no snooty pretensions or foreign contacts. My high school friends had all the virtues and defects of our common Florentine mentality: they were brilliant, vivacious and skeptical. We prized a witty saying more than a good deed: there was a real manic quality to our wittiness, and everyone constantly teased each other, not out of mean-spiritedness, but for the sheer pleasure of sharpening one's wits in quick verbal repartees of insults and retorts.

None of my friends had any serious or profound ideas or aspirations. Fanaticism of any kind, including any political or religious fervor, was unknown in our class. Only one of my schoolmates, having been educated by Jesuits, truly believed in Catholicism, and all the others saw him as a strange specimen of some nearly extinct species.

When we were not talking about our studies or involved in pointless teasing, our main topic of conversation was sports, or rather, *il tifo*. This word describes the attitude of those who read the "Sports Gazette," and made a noisy fuss over this or that particular team, or this or that particular athlete, without ever going onto the playing field themselves. This fictional enthusiasm was probably the outcome of the dearth of the kind of ideals that might inspire real passion.

Mainly our enthusiasm revolved around the "Fiorentinas," the local soccer team; when Italian teams or athletes competed internationally, the *tifo* took on a nationalistic tinge. All the so-called patriotism shown by Italians during the Fascist wars was never substantially different from rooting for their sports teams. The average Italian never made an in-depth study of what was best for our country. He wanted victory for the Italian army, just as he yearned for a win for his soccer team.

Our conversations were often colored by extreme profanity, which delighted most of the class, almost as though it was proof of one's virility. In our scholarly life, lack of discipline was valued over good behavior, and whoever received a grade of ten for good behavior could not expect any respect from his peers. The most prized intellectual gifts were wit and the ability to get ahead without too much effort. Persistence and concentrated effort were scorned.

The character of an Italian class is profoundly different from that of an English or American class. In Italy the class is bound by ties of solidarity against the school authorities. A student does not perceive himself as an individual who wants to learn; he is not interested in loyal collaboration with his teachers. Rather he sees himself as part of a group whose interests are opposed to his professors. Thus, deceiving them by copying, or by allowing one's work to be copied, or by suggesting answers to a classmate who is being interrogated, is considered not just legitimate, but even commendable.

I frequently passed answers to my neighbors, and I devised a particularly ingenious method for signaling answers to students who were being questioned. I remember once, in my first year of high school, I took a written chemistry exam with an extremely strict professor -- one who was considered impossible to cheat. I wrote a long list of formulas on my thigh, which was normally covered by my short pants, and it so happened that the test covered exactly the formulas which I had written down. Naturally I received an outstanding grade. All my friends considered this scheme to be quite an achievement, rather than the act of disloyalty that it really was.

Such a scholastic ethic shows an inability to impose discipline upon oneself and a disregard for the importance of individual responsibility. These attitudes do not completely disappear as the years pass and the little scholars become adult citizens; and one can't deny that this state of affairs contributed to creating the conditions which allowed the victory of Fascism.

Unfortunately, with or without Fascism, the lack of a civic sense has always been one of the dominant weaknesses of the Italian people, probably originating in centuries of foreign occupation, during which Italians came to regard government as the enemy. This lack of civic pride is cultivated in the schools where the child learns to cheat his teacher so that later he will be able to cheat the tax collector.

The character of my high school class, which I have tried to reconstruct in my mind, corresponded to that of the general population of Florence. Furthermore while there are differences between various parts of Italy, the "scholastic ethic" which I describe above, is the same throughout the country. The Florentines are a people with an old civilization and they have seen much water flow under their Ponte Vecchio. Many governments have come and gone; many illusions vanished. So they are fundamentally skeptics, but they still have a quick wit and an active intelligence. The extraordinary natural and artistic beauty of their city has nurtured their good taste; but there is but one small step between refinement and decadence.

* * *

And now let's go back home to see what happened in my family.

During the entire time that I was in school, my life at home was influenced by my mother's theories on theosophy. In turn, I was introduced to the theosophical groups, instructed in its doctrine, and initiated into its various mysteries.

In the early years, theosophical gatherings were held in the home of an elderly woman who insisted on being addressed as "Countess" even though she was no such thing. She loved to strut through her rooms posing as a patron of the arts. The leader of the Florentine theosophists was a French professor, Emile Marcault, who was employed in the philosophy department of the University of Pisa. I remember him as an intelligent, articulate man, certainly a person of much greater breadth than the theosophists whom I subsequently met. Later, when the Fascists expelled foreign professors from Italian universities, Marcault returned to France where he was director of the Theosophical Society of France until the German invasion.

I was introduced to the theosophists of Milan when my mother took me to the city to visit my aunt. There, I was invited to attend a meeting of a recently formed para-theosophical society called "The

Ideal Knight." At the meeting, members were dressed in strangely embroidered blue and white tunics and they referred to each other as Pages, Squires and Knights. They entered the room following a predetermined ceremony and sat in a circle while executing complicated rituals: they appeared to be reenacting the knights of King Arthur *sans peur et sans reproche*. It was a painful spectacle of cheap mysticism, based on the most absurd medieval traditions. But my childish imagination was swept up in this exercise of nobility and gallantry, and when a knight placed his hand on my head as I kneeled before him, and proclaimed me a Page of The Ideal Knight, I was profoundly moved. This ceremony, this vestige of feudalism, stirred up such enthusiasm in me, that I returned to Florence eager to spread the word of this ridiculous organization.

My enthusiasm would probably have spent itself without any unpleasant consequences if, one awful day, my mother had not received a visit from one of the most narrow-minded men I have ever met. This man insisted on being called Professor Dammeno although he had never completed his coursework in mathematics at the University of Pisa. He was a recent convert to Theosophy and a zealous proponent. In his small way, he was ambitious, and he was tickled at the thought of becoming president of a group of boys.

At twenty-four Dammeno was still young, small, dark, with a large red nose and low forehead. To compensate for his small stature, he wore heels that were two centimeters higher than those worn by other western males; to compensate for his intellectual insignificance, he abused the title of professor. His pants were always hitched up above the ankle and his jackets always too tight. His smile, which reached from ear to ear, was affected and unspontaneous. His quick and lively eyes never had a moment's rest, and his whole being was in a state of constant agitation, always bustling with matters of no importance.

Professor Dammeno knew how to do anything and everything better than any other mortal, but he was too modest to brag about it. In his goodness, though, he was generous enough to demonstrate to the inexpert common public the correct way to approach various problems. Dammeno taught us boys how to sleep in the correct position, how to breathe, how to walk and so on. He taught my mother how to wrap her packages, how to knock on the door, how to use a penknife, and many other equally precious things. This individual was for many years my mother's and Gualtiero's mother's best friend, and our education was in part entrusted to his capable hands.

Naturally Dammeno was enthusiastic about the whole idea of The Ideal Knight, and in no time the other child theosophists and I were garbed in white tunics. We made the rounds of all the antique stores in the city--and there is no scarcity of them in Florence--to find old lamps, old swords, old goblets and other articles needed for the ceremonies. Having obtained all the necessary accessories, we held our first meeting under the presidency of Dammeno who, with his large nose and red face emerging from his blue tunic, looked more like a strange mother hen than a proud knight of King Arthur. Under Dammeno's leadership the Ideal Knight flourished and prospered for several years. Under the irresistible impetus of his profoundly original personality he created new ceremonies, collected dues, produced festivals for charity, organized pitiful performances, and cared for poor children and stray animals, all in same spirit.

Meanwhile Dammeno gave us moral advice and taught us the mysteries of theosophy with an outlook that would be considered narrow-minded by the most bigoted country curate. I remember one time, when I was about thirteen, he proposed the formation of an inner group from among his favorite students, to secretly initiate us into some mysterious rites. I refused to join a group whose purpose I didn't know. This was perhaps my first act of rebellion, and at the same time my first affirmation of democratic principles. My mother considered me a rebel, but Dammeno had to give up one of the victims for his little group and was forced to carry on his important activities without my participation. This affirmation of independence was, however, my only one for several years.

All the while, my mother had been attending meetings and lectures. She translated literature from French and English into Italian (she had begun learning English expressly for this purpose); she typed programs, articles and invitations (she had also learned to touch-type for the same reason); she mailed books, argued, studied sacred texts, proselytized and was herself proselytized. For several years all the enthusiasm of which she was capable, and it was considerable, revolved around theosophy or related activities.

Meanwhile, I was growing. One summer vacation I developed pleurisy which, as I learned later, was thought to be tuberculosis. Against the advice of the doctors and of all our friends and relations, my mother suddenly had me become a vegetarian (as a good theosophist, she was, and is still, a vegetarian) and had me take cold showers in winter. (This was Dammeno's idea.) In spite of all this, I did not develop tuberculosis since I was not predisposed to it, and now I am in excellent health. But during my entire adolescence my height and weight were below average. My physical development was always slow and at school I was always the smallest in my class -- this was partly because I was a year younger than my classmates. I don't think, however, that my slow development and relative weakness at the time were in any way related to the practice of vegetarianism or taking cold showers. In any case, these events have not left a trace on my physical condition, and despite my slow development I am endowed with a body that I have no reason to criticize, although I am neither an athlete nor an Adonis.

My family life was very sad while I was in high school. My grandfather suffered from arterial sclerosis and his condition deteriorated steadily. Little by little he lost his hearing, which made him suspicious of everyone and more irascible than ever; unfortunately the friendly talks we once shared were now a thing of the past. Later he developed cataracts which made him almost blind. He was successfully operated upon, but his tired body did not allow him to benefit from the operation, and he carried on for several years with very limited vision. Even worse, he had a stroke which left him partially paralyzed and mentally impaired. He died when I was in my third year of high school, followed to his grave by my grandmother, who survived him by only a few weeks.

But even when my grandparents were in relatively good health, our home life was far from serene. When my Milanese uncle, Vittorio Levi, was in financial straits, my Aunt Luisa came to live with us. My aunt's personality did not contribute to family harmony, and thus, between my mother's obsession with theosophy, and my grandfather's bad temper, life at home was a living hell.

I closed myself off, almost pretending not to see the tragedy within my family. I went to school and came home only to study. My mother bore the brunt of the situation, caring for her parents in exemplary fashion during their protracted and painful illnesses, dedicating all of her time and energy to them. As if this weren't enough, she carried on continuous discussions, which sometimes degenerated into arguments, with my aunt. The two sisters' personalities were diametrically opposed to each other. My mother was always dedicated to spiritual matters, and my aunt, who loved the luxuries and joys of the world, found it impossible to adapt to her financial difficulties.

In the afternoons I would often visit my best friend Gualtiero, not without giving his family some trouble given that, after the inactivity of my early childhood, I had become quite a noisy child.

On Sundays, I often spent time with Giuliano who was a few years younger than I, but intellectually rather precocious. When the weather was good we would take drives in the Florentine countryside with his family. Those were the grand years of the automobile when we drove down dusty roads in an open convertible wearing sport's caps and driving goggles, removing the muffler to better impress the peasants and chickens, who scurried off in fear.

Nevertheless, these drives around Tuscany were pleasant. We went to Siena, Viareggio, Lucca, Pisa, Pistoia, Chianti, Casentino, Mugello to admire the natural and artistic treasures. The green hills, blanketed by lovingly tended fields imbued with the sweat of generations; the villages in every valley with their little churches overlooking some piazza or noble statue; the castles on every hilltop with Guelph blackbirds or Ghibellines--these have all become a part of me, in whatever part of Italy or of the world that I happen to be. I long for this countryside, a countryside filled with the vestiges of an old and uninterrupted civilization.

Gualtiero and Giuliano's families were large, extended families of Jewish businessmen. Having held on to their businesses during the war, their financial situations were better than my grandfather's: they were the *nouveau riches*, or, in the post-war slang, *pescecani* -- sharks or profiteers. Gualtiero's relatives were good people, unabashedly proud of their money, loud, unsophisticated and good at heart. Giuliano's relatives, who branched out endlessly in every direction, often put on a show of being refined, and despite the newness of their wealth, some did have a quiet dignity about them.

* * *

Such was the ambience of my childhood and adolescence, in which I chose my friends and toys. All these people, or, as my mother would sometimes call them, this tribe, were vaguely related to my family. Of actual relatives other than my mother's sister, mentioned above, I had only an uncle, my father's brother Emilio DeBenedetti, who was a high school teacher in La Spezia, and his wife Fernanda and their two daughters Fiorella and Ninetta who were a little older than I.

Almost every year, during the summer vacation I went to La Spezia for a few weeks to swim in the blue Mediterranean with my uncle and cousins. I was a guest in their house, but every morning we took the ferry across the gulf to the pure water beyond the dam, at San Terenzio, Lerici, or Portovenere. It was a magnificent excursion, in the company of other children, to be repeated on the return trip towards the setting sun. I learned to swim distances from my uncle, to love the rocks and deep water and to disapprove of the sedentary life of the beach.

My frequent contact with my uncle during these vacations influenced me rather more than I realized at the time -- not that I felt either the desire or the need for guidance, and much less for some fatherly authority figure. As to guidance, I had plenty from my mother. But my uncle, though he lived in the more provincial city of La Spezia, had perhaps the most far-reaching perspective of any person that I had yet encountered. He was a classicist, a devoted humanist, a free thinker, a patriotic Italian, and a liberal in the best sense of the word. He had a broad historical perspective and followed world events, upon which he made precise and sensible judgments. A monarchist by tradition, he felt highly honored one time when the king, on a visit to La Spezia, shook his hand.

Although he was actively interested in current affairs, his integrity prevented him from participating in politics or taking a position in favor of any politically endorsed ideology. He was disappointed by their shortcomings, imperfections and corruption. Even before Fascism, so as not to compromise with the political parties, he refused to vote in any election. During Fascism his distrust of political parties transformed itself into an increasingly bitter disdain for the only remaining party. He never joined the party and never hid his sentiments, despite the benefits that would have accrued to his career.

The most humiliating day of his life came when, at one of the obligatory elections in favor of the regime, he could not refuse to participate. But at home, in the safety of his family, he retold with pride his modest feat of heroism: "Although I put the yes card in the ballot box, which could be seen from the outside, in the privacy of the booth, I crossed out the yes and wrote NO!"

* * *

Except for some distant echoes, political events never affected me. At the time of the March on Rome I was a boy of about ten and I remember greeting the event with joy. I had no information about the "reds" except stories of their murderous violence and I had no knowledge of their social program. In the years that followed however, I began taking note that the Fascists did not refrain from violence either. Only steps from my house, the offices of the *Nuovo Giornale*, a newspaper guilty of not being sufficiently enthusiastic about Fascism, were broken into, looted and burned. The police naturally did not intervene.

A few years later, in October of 1925, a Fascist leader, a certain Luporini, went to the house of a socialist worker in my neighborhood to teach him the significance of the new regime with blows from a club. He was greeted by a well-deserved rifle shot. The next day, the Fascists arrived, set fire to the house and decided to vindicate their "hero." The vendetta was ferocious and many Florentine intellectuals were victimized during three days of terror. A lawyer was murdered in his own bed in the presence of his wife. In those days people were killed simply for being Masons.

But these facts, though they instilled some doubts, were not enough to destroy my sympathy for Fascism. During one of my last years in high school, under pressure from the school administration, I joined the party's youth group, the "Vanguard." I was, I think, the next-to-the-last student in my class to succumb to this pressure, and that was not so much to my credit as it was the influence of my grandfather

and professor/uncle, who worked valiantly to keep me from taking this step. The last student to join was a Jesuit, who decided to don the black shirt only when the Fascists and the church signed the Concordat.

So I put on my uniform on Sunday mornings and went down into the street to march in the parades with my friends. Our favorite pastime during the long delays was telling anti-fascist jokes. "Why did they put a Fascist in front of a locomotive?" "To better eat the road." (Eating the road was used to describe a roadhog, but politically, "eating" was used as a synonym for graft.) Or: "A perfect man must have three attributes: he must be honest, intelligent and Fascist. Unfortunately, perfection is not of this world and so he who is honest and Fascist cannot be intelligent, and he who is honest and intelligent cannot be Fascist."

The long delays and the parades were a nuisance. So much so that immediately after roll call, would-be paraders fled the area or found any means to steal away. Often during the parades, the last ones in line would turn unobserved down a side street and return peacefully home. And in the years that followed, it seems that Mussolini was unable to substantially change this Italian attitude toward military or paramilitary activities.

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This is the story of my childhood and adolescence and of the places that I frequented. What can properly be called my life begins after my last year in high school, for it is from that time that my personality began to form and to find its own expression.

Chapter Two

Domestic Rebellion and University Life

During the last years of high school, my youthful mind was filled with a large number of contradictory philosophies: theosophy, Judaism, patriotism, Christianity. It was not easy to live with all these ideas, so I was forced to find a resolution. As soon as I began to think for myself, I threw them all out at the same time.

The first step was a rebellion against Dammeno's narrow-minded rule. I began to understand how pathetic and ridiculous the Ideal Knight's regulations were, and for the first time felt the need to break away. At first I did not doubt the theosophical doctrines; I felt that the organization did not allow me to grow. I wanted to be able to think for myself and not be forced to follow someone else's orders in every minute detail. I wanted at least the freedom to consider and discuss.

With this in mind, I approached my friend Gualtiero, thinking that I would have to use my finest debating skills to explain myself, and to exercise the refined art of persuasion to convince him to join me. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I had only to push at an open door: he agreed with me completely.

After some complicated parliamentary maneuvers we were able to win the battle. Dammeno retired as president of the group, although he kept the high-sounding title of Italian Head Knight. It was a pompous title that allowed him to direct a group whose only active members were Gualtiero and I. I was proclaimed Head Knight of the Florentine group, and I dedicated myself with enthusiasm to my new job. I called meetings -- which consisted of Gualtiero, his younger sister, his young aunt, and a few other young people. I tried to promote discussion and new activities. For a few months I was convinced of the importance of my role as liberal reformer.

Soon, however, I discovered that there was nothing to reform: everything would have to be started from scratch. I realized that the Ideal Knights were ridiculous, and that as president of the group, I was presiding over nothing more than a flock of sheep. Back to more long discussions with Gualtiero. The result: resignation. We resigned from the group together, taking our cue from a more-or-less theosophical text which referred to freedom. We invited the others to resign. It was a tempest in a teapot, and Gualtiero's mother cried. But the Ideal Knight was dead.

The king is dead, long live the king, says an old French phrase. An ideal is dead, another is needed. What could we substitute for our poor King Arthur, treacherously murdered? It was a difficult task, but I faced it courageously. The problem, which started as an intellectual exercise, soon became emotionally distressing. My life lost all interest and meaning. I concentrated all my energy on finding solutions to problems that had no solution, such as the existence of God and the problem of free will. As I became more critical, I was assailed by even graver doubts: Does an external world exist? Do I exist?

My approach to these issues was scientific; I required genuinely rational logic before accepting any solution. I required rigorous proof, as if for a mathematical theorem. Everything fell before my rational inquiry like a house of cards. Nothing survived my criticism. In every theosophical system I discovered an irrational assumption; and in every religion, a faith that did not hold up to reason.

What could guide me in my search for Truth? All men's lives are based on an act of faith, and I, in my youthful pride, did not want to accept it. To me, science described a world whose very existence I doubted. Mathematics seemed like an enjoyable pastime based on postulates that could not be proved. Philosophy could not approach Truth either, and the contradictions between philosophers seemed to demonstrate the futility of their efforts.

What significance does life have if we do not know Truth? What is the purpose of our actions? I moved about in a void. I groped in the dark. I felt that I was living in a nonsensical world. The earth was dropping out from under my feet, and shadows were enveloping me. Why? Why? Why?

One winter afternoon these anguishing questions assailed me with renewed force. I put down my school book, and I began to think with such intensity that my head seemed to burst. Severe pain pierced my brain. Exhausted, I lay on the floor. Suicide seemed the only way out. I don't know how long I remained in this position . . .

Finally my survival instinct took over. The same survival instinct that makes a rabbit flee from danger, made me arrive at a decision: for a while I would quit thinking. I felt that some aspect of the problem was escaping me, and I decided to postpone my inquiry until a time when I was more mature and had more experience. When I got out of that strange position, I felt reborn. I was born naked and in suffering, as we all are. But I was born free, as we should all be born: free from every prejudice, from every tradition, and from all relics of the past. My personality, naked and free, took its first tottering steps in an unknown world.

I had abandoned every faith, every principle, and every ideal, but still I had my body and my ability to think and feel. My liberation from the past was complete, but equally important was the residue of the past that stayed with me. My body and my psyche were shaped by millions of years of evolution. They were bound by hereditary factors passed on to me by my parents and my ancestors. The environment in which I had grown, and the education which I had absorbed, had left their traces. I spoke a language: Italian. My sense of beauty was shaped in certain ways because I had encountered certain objects. My thinking was influenced by my studies.

These characteristics were my own personality, from which it would have been absurd to escape. But I had completely rid myself of any theoretical baggage beyond the pure understanding of historical, geographical or scientific facts.

* * *

After this period of crisis, I lived a few months in a purely vegetative state. My main occupation was studying, which in the beginning of the summer became particularly important since in July, I had to take high school exams and university entrance exams.

In the spring I spent two weeks in Viareggio, as a guest of Giuliano's family. At Easter I went to Rome, where I took part in a Fascist camp. At Camp Dux thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of *avanguardisti* (as these young adolescent Fascists were called) assembled from all parts of Italy. They came to participate in paramilitary activities, which included marching and shooting. With other youths in black shirts -- the *avanguardisti* were between 14 and 18 years old -- I lived like a soldier in tents pitched in a field that was normally used for horse racing.

This was the time when the militarization of Italian youth was getting underway. This process became stronger later. Towards the end of my stay in Italy, even little six year old children, called *balilla*, were taught to march and to use toy rifles which were specially designed as a miniature replica of the rifles used by the army.

Although everything was done in military style at Camp Dux, it would be an exaggeration to say that discipline was strictly enforced. I had gone to Rome intending mainly to see the city -- camp life held no interest for me whatsoever. So I left stealthily and returned late at night jumping over the hedges and wire fences that surrounded the camp. I certainly was not the only one who made these clandestine excursions. Most of my companions, like me, could not adapt to military routine -- and it seems that even afterwards, their attitudes never changed on this score.

At this time, I saw Mussolini. I paraded in front of him while he reviewed the troops from horseback. I heard one of his speeches given from the top of an immense podium shaped like a gigantic ax. What impressed me most during the parade was the crimson tassel that he wore on his black fez. (Later he must have realized the operatic effect of this part of his uniform. He stopped wearing the crimson tassel -- a distinction that went with the title of *caporale d'onore* -- and he began wearing a black tassel like all the other Fascists.) I have no recollection of what he said. I only remember the mass of boys in black shirts and black fezes, standing in formation under the Roman sun, and the considerable number who fainted under its hot rays.

The eternal city did not make a great impression on me, accustomed as I was to the fine style of Florentine monuments. The Roman ruins and baroque churches seemed ponderous by comparison. After a week at Camp Dux, I returned to Florence to study for my high school exams. I passed without much effort or worry, getting fairly good grades -- certainly better than I had expected. That was probably because I was never frightened or intimidated by the examination board, and I retained all my *sanguine froid*. This calm in the face of life's difficulties has stayed with me.

Immediately after my exams I left Florence to spend a few weeks with my aunt and uncle in La Spezia, swimming in the enchanting bays of the Riviera. It was there that I started living like a normal person again. The beauty of nature, the warmth of the sun, and the sea breezes that caressed my body -- all these sensations made me feel that, after all, life was not so bad. From contact with simple things I regained my will to live.

I was perfectly aware of this process. Remembering the classics I had studied in high school, I compared myself to Anteus, that mythological being who regained his strength every time he touched Mother Earth. I found an unexpected solution to the distressing problem of the meaning of life: I realized that life was an end in itself. The Greek Gods had triumphed over King Arthur and over the God of the Jews.

During that summer I began to take an interest in the opposite sex. But it was several years before I understood relations between men and women. The memories I have of this period make me want to kick myself retrospectively. I was still young: I had worn my first pair of long pants for my exams. I chattered too much, and had a childish temper. I was the type of beardless young man who tries to look brilliant by making frivolous and superficial conversation. I must give credit to the female sex when I say that no woman, not even among the girls in our group, took me seriously until I changed my attitude. But since I was very active, and was always ready to organize games, to chatter, to dance, etc., I was the center of a group of boys and girls, and I thought myself successful.

I spent part of August and September in a small village near Florence, where most of my time was spent on the tennis court. Tennis was one of my favorite pastimes during my first years at the University. Even now, when spring arrives I feel the same almost childish enthusiasm when I get on a tennis courts.

I returned to Florence to wait for the academic year to begin. It was at this time that I took part in one of those student demonstrations that was often cited in foreign newspapers as an index of Italian public opinion. The event, insignificant of itself, is worth mentioning: The crown prince of Italy, Umberto of Savoy, had gone to Belgium to be engaged to Maria Jose', a Belgian royal princess. On that occasion, an anti-fascist named De Rosa (who later showed his commitment to his beliefs by finding glory and death in defense of the freedom of the Spanish Republic), attempted to assassinate the august scion of the House of Savoy. A large crowd gathered in Piazza Vittorio to protest the assassination attempt and I was among them.

I met some of my friends and, to show my disapproval of De Rosa, I said, "I would understand an assassination of Mussolini, but an attempt against the prince is completely unjustified." My companions thought this statement was scandalous, and objected strongly. I dropped the subject, and was could not understand how such a sentence had escaped my lips. The implicit justification of an assassination attempt against Mussolini was an expression of the feelings that were forming in my subconscious. I was the first to be surprised at having said it. My ideas were still such that the attempt to kill a member of the

royal family seemed like an affront to the Italian nation.... Unless I meant that Prince Umberto's life was not worth the price of a bullet.

But at the moment, I did not stop to reflect on my thinking. I listened to an agitated speaker who incited the crowd against France. Someone proposed that we go to the French consulate. We ran towards Via Tornabuoni where the consulate stood. The physical spectacle of hundreds of people yelling and running excited me and I was curious to see what would happen.. It is hard to distinguish, in the rush of the moment, between excitement and enthusiasm. I was the victim of the kind of collective psychology that overtakes many people in these situations. The race excited my competitive spirit, and I ran because I wanted to be first, or among the first.

So I found myself at the front of the line against a cordon of soldiers who were under orders to defend the consulate. Via Tornabuoni was closed to the crowd. I wonder what I would have done if the soldiers hadn't been there. Would I really have gone on to sack the consulate? It's hard to say, but I was in an uncomfortable position, squeezed against the soldiers by a pushing, whistling, yelling crowd. I didn't know what to do. I asked myself how I had gotten myself into such an embarrassing situation and as soon as I could, found my way out of the crowd, and quietly returned home.

This, and Camp Dux, were the two Fascist episodes of my life. Fortunately, they were the only two.

I don't know how I changed my mind. I only remember that even before the beginning of the academic year I had gone over to the other side. The corruption of the Fascist hierarchy, its violence, its injustice, and its oppression became clear to me. But I don't remember a particular event that caused me to change my political leanings, or rather, that created my political leanings. It must have happened gradually, as my consciousness developed and allowed me to see things from my own perspective.

I began to realize that there was something that did not completely satisfy me about the regime. So I began to think more seriously about it. I saw that my thoughts were going in a forbidden direction, a direction that I was not free to express. I realized that it was dangerous to voice my criticism and this feeling of confinement incited me to a complete, if silent, rebellion. The step from incomplete satisfaction to implacable aversion took very little time.

I don't know what my political beliefs were before I became an antifascist. I only remember that I considered myself a Fascist, and in all honesty, I told people that I was one. But if I think back to particular episodes during junior high school, I see that after all, my tendency toward democratic beliefs was already in place. For example, for a while I corresponded with an English boy to practice the language that I was learning in school. To compliment his country I remember that I once wrote that I liked England because it was the first country to rebel against the absolutism of Cromwell's time (a statement that is historically incorrect).

Evaluating historical events, or events that took place outside Italy, my sympathy was always with those who upheld freedom and with the poor. In high school, when we studied Roman history, my sympathy was with the plebeians and against the patricians. In the struggle between the Italian city-states against the German Holy Roman Empire, I sided with the citizens of the towns (if it's possible to take sides in events that took place so long ago). I always considered the French revolution to be an important step in the history of civilization.

These fairly liberal views were probably instilled in me by Professor Porzio's intelligent history lessons. He never said he was an antifascist -- he had even taught us, without comment, the required course in the elements of corporate law. Yet he frequently threw seeds in the virgin soil of his students' minds. In some cases these seeds came to fruition, and this shows the positive influence of intelligent and conscientious teaching. The Fascists did not underestimate this influence, and as soon as they came to power they completely took over the schools, and got rid of many of the older teachers.

Probably I had been calling myself a Fascist for some years only because I did not understand the meaning of the word. I was certainly not alone in making this mistake. It was a common mistake even among educated adults who refused to think seriously about political problems, either because they were intellectually lazy, or because they were afraid that too deep an analysis might lead them to nonconformist conclusions and to the loss of their spiritual or material peace. On the other hand, one mustn't believe that this type of mistake happens only in Fascist countries. I later realized that the

opposite mistake is possible. More than a few people publicly claim to favor democratic principles although, maybe without full awareness, they are actually Fascists.

For example, I was under the impression that Fascism was the defender of "order", and I had admired this. Then I realized that a regime that puts the life of a nation into the hands of a hierarchy that governs by whim, without providing the least appearance of legality, can't in any way be considered a defender of order.

What is the origin of the widespread opinion that Fascism is the party of order? It seems to me that this relies on the fact that most people confuse the general concept of order with a particular form of social order. They come to identify the idea of order with the existing order, especially when the existing order benefits them.

It cannot be denied that the feudal system, or absolute monarchy are forms of order, but they are not the only possible ones. It's understandable that Louis XIV and his court could not imagine a democratic and republican order. To them, republicanism implicitly meant disorder.

So, many people in modern capitalist society, react against the possibility of a different order, for example, a socialist order. In their eyes, socialism and disorder are synonymous. Fascism was undeniably opposed to socialism, and for this reason it was welcomed as the defender of order. Some of those who shared this opinion were unpleasantly surprised by Fascism's disorder in all things except in the systematic oppression of its rivals.

Even though at the time these ideas were not yet clear to me, antifascist beliefs were the first step in the reconstruction of my personality. After my crisis of skepticism, the first need that I felt that was not purely physical was the need for freedom. Passion for political and social justice was the first passion that I felt after having destroyed the false ideals of my childhood. This belief, this need, and this passion have stayed with me all my life.

As soon as I realized the change in my beliefs, I went to confide in my best friend: Gualtiero. He had been my comrade in my fight for liberty within the domestic walls. I thought he would be the best person with whom to share my new ideas. Gualtiero was studious and conscientious, the type that parents call a serious boy ... he was much more serious than I was. He did not know the meaning of frivolity and he had no unclean thoughts. Even though his character was not completely developed, one could see the type of person he would be as an adult. It was therefore not surprising that he was as disgusted by Fascism as I was, and once again I discovered with pleasure that, on his own, he had reached the same conclusions as I had.

Having discovered that we agreed on the subject, our youthful enthusiasm required us to "do something" beyond simply talking. We felt that the fight that we were embarking on was extremely simple. We thought that if a few months had been long enough to depose Dammeno, then a few years would be sufficient to overthrow Mussolini.

We were not the only ones to underestimate Fascism's stability. To our young and pure minds, the immorality of the regime, its corruption, and the oppression exercised by a minority over the majority were so evident that it seemed to us that everybody, like us, should be ready to act against tyranny. It was only a matter of organizing the antifascist force into a united front. We thought that Italy was waiting for us to undertake this work.

We looked for people who were likely to become members of a core group. We assembled about ten young men who were all equally enthusiastic and equally beardless. We organized a "chain." Each one of us knew only two or three other members, so that if a spy should infiltrate, he could not compromise the entire organization. I believe that these precautions are the a-b-c's of every illegal movement, but we designed them on our own without outside advice.

Gualtiero was able to contact *Giustizia e Liberta'* (the Justice and Liberty" Movement). I never knew whom he contacted or who gave him the illegal materials. He never told me, nor did I ask, as it was against the discipline of conspiracy.

We felt strong emotions on reading the *Quaderni* (Notebooks) and leaflets ... just the name "Justice and Liberty" made us tremble with excitement. The *Quaderni* were well written and we read

them with religious veneration, passing them from one person to the next with infinite precautions since, we believed, the Fascists would not tolerate any justice and liberty in Italy.

In addition to the *Quaderni*, we had some issues of *Becco Giallo* - a satirical weekly written in Italian and published in France - and a large number of leaflets and posters. We wanted to distribute this literature beyond our little group and we had long discussions about the best method: we could paste leaflets on the seats of movie theaters taking advantage of the dark, but we decided that this would be too risky. So we decided to paste them inside the public urinals. In order to escape the notice of the police, the entire operation took place in one night. After studying a map of Florence, different members were assigned to various parts of the city.

One of our members used a different tactic: he entered a church when there were few people inside and he plunged his hand into the holy water with the leaflet on his palm. With a quick movement he pasted the leaflet on the wall next to the holy water. Then he made the sign of the cross and, so as not to arouse suspicion, performed some other devotions. He said that it was the first time that he had found a good use for holy water. Gualtiero and I, being Jewish, did not use this method.

Some leaflets were sent by mail. But as youngsters, we had little money. We were unable to mail in bulk as the price of stamps was too high for our modest resources. These financial limitations encouraged us to be imprudent. Instead of using random addresses from the telephone book, we decided to send mailings only to those we thought might be open to our message, so that the ideas were sown in fertile soil. Using this method, the mailings went only to people known to us.

One of my tennis partners guessed the source of the anonymous leaflet, and brought it back to me saying that he would keep the incident to himself if I destroyed it. I never told him that I had sent others in the same way, and he believed me when I said that I myself had received one in the mail. Another student, fearing that the leaflet was a provocation (so great is the mistrust and fear of espionage in Fascist countries) brought it to the *Gruppo Universitario Fascista* (G.U.F.), where they told him that the Fascist authorities were aware of it and had already arrested the responsible party.

The responsible party had not been arrested, but the police actively began a search for them. We learned that a print shop that had produced flyers for my mother had been searched. The police had demolished a wall, believing that the illegal papers were hidden inside. When the news reached us we were, not surprisingly, quite afraid. Every time we heard the doorbell ring, we thought the police were coming to get us. We decided to destroy the remaining literature, and to stop our activities for a while. So ended the first, rather childish episode of my political life. It left me with a feeling of bitterness and discomfort.

At that time, I thought only of politics. After reading a biography of Lenin, I was profoundly impressed by the pure figure of the great revolutionary. I wrote a few pages describing an ideal society -- a kind of rational utopia. These pages disappeared along with other antifascist literature during the days of the scare. My memory of my former ideas of perfection would have men truly born equal, inheritance having been abolished; schools would be free. Those who proved to have the greatest aptitude at school would form the ruling class -- intellectuals, technicians, artists -- while those who did not demonstrate intellectual ability would be relegated to lives of manual labor. Private property would be abolished. Production would be determined by the state which itself would be governed by people who had been democratically and freely elected by all citizens.

It seemed to me that this social organization would destroy every existing institution. I was not willing to sacrifice all society as I knew it, and I thought that if this problem wasn't somehow resolved, this construct could not work.

Later, I forgot about this rationalized socialism which seemed so completely utopian. I believed that any form of socialist society was equally utopian. In the following years, freedom was my only political belief. All my ideas were based on the distress caused by lack of freedom. From the perspective of Fascist Italy, my ideal consisted of a form of parliamentary democracy similar to the French system, that allowed for progress towards social justice, without violence.

I always recognized the necessity of revolution in a dictatorship, but I thought that the best kind of change in a free society would be accomplished by infinitely small steps, through a continuous

succession of states of equilibrium (here I used an expression taken from thermodynamics), so as to avoid any disturbance that might result in the elimination of freedom. Certainly, when this is possible, it is ideal.

* * *

I started attending University courses in the fall of 1929. Remembering my childhood structures of wood, and the constructions that followed with the *Meccano*, I enrolled at the Biennio to study engineering in the Faculty of Science. To complete the engineering program I would have to leave Florence after two years of study.

My first impression of the University was obscured by harassment by the older students. According to an old tradition, freshmen had to provide cigarettes and drinks to the upperclassmen in order to be "admitted" as "university students." The "admission" paper consisted of a paper written in *latino maccheronico*, using the most obscene language, and covered with obscene drawings. This paper was a kind of passport for admission to the lectures.

During the first days of class, the older students crowded around the classroom doors, demanding that the freshmen show their papers. But the papers were always rejected for being improperly filled out, and the freshmen were subjected to all sorts of pressure and vague threats to extort fresh payments in the form of candy and cigarettes. Although generally this custom was treated as a joke, some students were able to extort payments in cash, or were able to stock up on enough cigarettes to last the entire year.

In any case, I did not want to submit to the pressure and the threats. (Having very little money in my pocket, perhaps I overvalued it.) Often I fled through the city streets followed by a group of noisy students. Thinking back on it, it seems to me that I wasn't being very smart at that time. For some months I felt oppressed and persecuted. When the harassment was over and I found myself treated as an equal by the older students, I felt that I had taken a big step -- in fact, it seemed to be more important than passing my high school exams.

My enrollment in the University and my admission to the student body was a big change in my life. Going to school became optional, and though I conscientiously attended classes, the fact that I could choose how I spent my time made me very happy. It was then that I started my routine of walking through the city streets at noon, and in the evening. University students met in a corner of Piazza del Duomo, in front of a cafe called Bottegone. [It was called cafe Motta in 1966.] At times there would be a hundred students on the sidewalk, passing the time of day and watching the girls go by. Sometimes we even had relatively serious discussions. On the corner in front of the Bottegone I was able to meet lots students from all departments and from all levels.

During certain hours, the streets of Florence were like a large living room, where one met friends, made appointments, discussed classes and pastimes, and planned vacations. Every street had its own character. Via Martelli was where students met, Via Roma was for businessmen and employees, and Via Tornabuoni was for rich and idle young snobs.

The University courses were easy. Anyone could get a degree with little effort, as long as he paid the fees for a given number of years. However, for those who wanted, it was also possible to get a serious education.

Aside from politics, I did nothing serious that year. In the fall and spring I played quite a bit of tennis. I was pretty good at the sport, the only one I cared about at all. In the spring my club financed a trip to Naples for a tournament. Tennis was considered snobbish and my friendship with tennis players was the object of justified derision from my more serious friends.

During that year and the next I got to know a new set of people. As soon as I could, I left the friends that I had acquired through my family. I continued to see Gualtiero and Giuliano, and occasionally I still visited their parents. I spent some Sundays with Giuliano, at his house, or in the homes of some relatives where I was still welcomed with affection, and with whom I spent some pleasant hours in the country.

But although I was still friendly with my "rich relatives", I could no longer say that they were part of my group. They thought I was crazy because I was interested in culture, and not in money. I did not

feel comfortable with them because of our divergent political opinions. They were fat businessmen and industrialists, and of course they supported Fascism which had imposed a kind of order that they approved of and that benefitted them.

Looking for new friends, I first gravitated toward bourgeois families, who had a tradition of wealth, and who were more intellectual and genteel. The people with whom I had passing friendships at the time were mostly children of professionals. I was attracted by the worldly life of young people from good families, wasting many afternoons, and quite a few evenings with absolutely insignificant people, chattering over a cup of tea, and occasionally, dancing.

My memory of the Florentine bourgeoisie is not at all good. It was the craze to latch onto foreigners, and to date American girls. In some homes, the ambience was depressingly pseudo-intellectual. In some living rooms you found weird poets and failed artists, sporting long hair and wide ties. In these groups everyone thought himself a genius, and thought their friends were witty. The opinion of the rest of the world counted for little, and the contempt of outsiders was attributed to a lack of understanding.

* * *

My contacts with the opposite sex remained purely theoretical. The sex life of most of my comrades was restricted to dealings with professional prostitutes in brothels that were recognized and regulated by the state. In all Catholic and Latin countries, contact between the sexes is based on unhealthy attitudes. On the one hand, morality is excessively rigid; divorce is banned, and women must be virgins until they marry. On the other hand, there is a profound and recognized corruption.

At that time, even in so-called good families, the accepted morality allowed unmarried men (and less so, married men) to satisfy their instincts as they liked, while women were to remain chaste. Frequenting prostitutes was encouraged by many parents who were afraid that their sons would fall in love before getting a good job, and so might compromise their careers. It was understood that men could not live without frequent sexual relations.

Most of my companions regularly frequented brothels, and those who did not were considered inferior, because they were insufficiently virile. Morality was backwards, and people despised those who wanted to have a more normal sex life. Few were able to distance themselves from this pernicious environment: among these was Gualtiero, who was the object of scorn by the entire student body. Word on the street was that during the traditional ritual of freshman harassment, a group of drunken students forced him to a brothel. When one of the girls approached, Gualtiero climbed on a table and pointed his finger at her, exclaiming, "*Vade retro, Satana.*" (Get thee behind me, Satan.) I don't know if this story is true, but it certainly made the rounds of the students. Since Gualtiero's character does not contradict this type of behavior, it may have actually happened. I don't hesitate to repeat this since I believe his actions were beyond reproach.

Women were exclusively seen as instruments of pleasure. Rarely did girls from good families or female classmates join us at the movies or at other innocent pastimes. Talk among the young men was extremely vulgar, but they resorted to excessive modesty when addressing the girls. Thus understanding and friendship among schoolmates of the opposite sex was difficult.

During my first years at the University, I don't remember having seen any of the flirting, full of freshness and sweetness, that often is the start of a lasting relationship. Some of the girls at the University were nice and intelligent, but none of the boys appreciated them, or could speak to them in a simple, spontaneous way that would interest them. The girls were forced to understand that they were nothing but sex objects, and as a result, their attitude was reserved and defensive.

The lack of spontaneous friendships with girls of their own social class has always given Latin boys a terrible inferiority complex. They try to overcome it with what the Spanish call *machismo*, which could be literally translated as "masculism", and which I like to call the "bull complex." My companions displayed their "complex" in well-known ways. They looked at women with warm, languid eyes -- as if they were moistened with sperm. Whenever possible they felt they had to express irrepressible desires and they described erotic adventures complete with an abundance of detail, as if they were irresistible

conquerors. But in the end, poor boys, they had to be satisfied with brothels. Paid love left them doubting whether they could ever attract and be loved by a woman.

The reason for this absurd situation is found in the social structure of Italian society. The historical causes were very important. They explain the differences in attitude among the regions of Italy. It is known that in Sicily, a place where Arab and Spanish domination had been influential, a girl cannot walk alone in the street, even during the day, without compromising her reputation. In Naples, the situation is only a little bit better. In Northern Italy there is more freedom, especially in cities like Trieste, where Austrian influence was strong until the last war, and Turin, which shares a border with France.

The variation with latitude makes one wonder if the temperament of the population is influenced by climate. It would be interesting to study how much of the difference in attitude is due to the original temperament of the population, and how much is due to inherited prejudice, and a religious, bourgeois morality.

Certainly, the hot, southern blood brings a tendency to exuberance in sexual attitudes. If this exuberance were allowed free and spontaneous expression, it might create some difficulty. Society, which has been dominated by the male sex, solved the problem by not giving women the right to satisfy their desires. On the other hand men, were allowed to satisfy their needs by frequenting prostitutes, who were universally despised and relegated to the margins of society. Thus, men's senses were satisfied outside the arena in which they lived, and this environment was not threatened by their violent desires.

This solution was not perfect (as the frequent crimes of jealousy in the South prove), but it allowed men and women to live side by side. It was a kind of order, although far from the best kind. Naturally, reactionary forces were responsible for maintaining this state of affairs. As I suggested earlier, the main reactionary force is the Church, which, with its opposition to divorce, and its theories about purity, created the conditions necessary to encourage prostitution.

I don't mean to say that the Catholic theory of marriage is to blame. This theory is utopian. In a society where men are made of flesh and bones, it is not applicable. To provide a semblance of realism to this theory, thousands of women are forced into a despised occupation, and most bachelors are persuaded to satisfy their instincts in ways that undermine the possibility of mutual understanding and sympathy.

The bourgeoisie tacitly approved this social plague. Most parents, worried about their daughters' virtue, pretended that they did not know that their sons regularly went to the brothels. In some cases parents even encouraged their sons, urging them to take proper precautions against venereal disease. For example, I remember that on his eighteenth birthday (when he could first legally enter a brothel) one of my schoolmates, the son of a rich *commendatore*, received a gift of an elegant box of condoms.

It is not surprising that among young men it was considered normal to frequent brothels, and that they spoke with pride of whether or not they had had contracted a venereal disease (blennorrhoea). A student or a young, white collar worker living in the city frequented a brothel on average, every week or two. As for blue collar workers and farmers (although unfortunately I do not have direct information on these two social classes), the situation was slightly different since they married earlier. In some brothels the price for a quarter of an hour with a woman, was about the same as the price of a dinner at a modest restaurant. For half an hour, the price doubled. These monetary equivalences are brutally crude, but I provide them because they demonstrate the facts with great precision.

The state tolerated and oversaw prostitution so strictly that it could be said that the government directed and organized the system. The state profited from taxes on prostitution, so that it contributed to the exploitation of the prostitutes. A doctor visited the brothel every week in order to protect public health. Fascism more or less left matters as they had always been. It limited itself to eliminating prostitution on the sidewalks and at cafes, and inspecting known brothels. It could be said that even in this respect, the Fascist regime followed its general principle of hiding existing problems rather than solving them, and of restricting "professional" liberties.

It is hard for me to speak of myself on the subject of sex in spite of Freud's writings encourage us to overcome unjustified reticence about it. I have always been attracted to the gentler sex. My interest was never purely physical. During the period that I am attempting to describe, I looked for feminine company simply because I enjoyed it as such. I often walked through the city streets with a girl. Some of the young

men scorned this habit, thinking that I was being frivolous. But I was not yet an adult, in either a spiritual or a physical sense, so that I was not sexually attractive to the girls who accompanied me. At most they considered me a good friend, and had no inclination to flirt.

On my eighteenth birthday a friend of mine took me to a brothel, but I only felt a profound disgust. I tried not to show it, so that I would not be laughed at, but I worried about my masculinity, given that I did not feel the same way about women as other young men my age. Since then I have preferred long periods of abstinence, rather than the mercenary satisfaction of my senses. But since all around me I heard that a normal man could not live in abstinence, I wondered if I were normal. For a time these doubts gave me an inferiority complex.

During my second year at the University I met some American girls, whose company I enjoyed because they were spontaneous with men. In Italy their spontaneity and their freedom from the usual prejudices was thought to indicate that the girls were "easy". Many young men met American girls hoping to persuade them to have an affair. They were usually disappointed, and I would have been disappointed also if I had wished for it.

During that year I often went dancing, I met various people, and I led a very innocent life, certainly not a productive life in the intellectual sense. Some of my friends said that I was *salottista* (playboy).

Beginning my freshmen year I had good friends among my classmates. We often met in each other's homes to study, or to discuss philosophy, art, and even politics around a cup a tea. We often met in groups of three or four to practice mathematical formalisms by solving problems.

That year I met Eugenio Curiel, of whom I will have occasion to speak later. He was from Trieste. He had come to study in Florence because in Trieste there was no university. He was tall and dark. His face was still childish, but intelligent. He was lively, yet thoughtful. His appearance in those days was not attractive. He was very slovenly in his dress and he stammered slightly. He was timid and reluctant in all worldly things. In company, especially if women were present, he seemed embarrassed.

My first conversation with him was somewhat inconclusive. I remember that at the entrance to the University I asked him, in a playful tone, if it was true that Trieste fared better under the Austrians. Irritated, he answered that this was not at all true, and he proclaimed himself to be Italian and a Fascist. I had not asked the question because I approved of Austrian domination: it was a simple playful opening to allow him to comment on the political situation while allowing a graceful retreat.

The fear of spies (maybe exaggerated in the university environment) was such that two people who were not close associates did not dare to express their ideas openly. Therefore, when talking politics, one resorted to little games. First, a person opened by proclaiming himself Fascist. Then some small and uncompromising criticism would be put forward. Finally, if the other person seemed to share one's views, and if he appeared to be honest and trustworthy, one could talk openly.

The following was a typical conversation:

"Have you read the Duce's speech? It's wonderful! I can't see how anyone would dare criticize it."

"I don't understand either. How is it being criticized?"

"There are those who fear that militarization would involve too much of the nation's wealth and might lead to war. Sometimes I have the same doubts, but I trust Mussolini's judgment."

"Mussolini is definitely a great man, but will he be able to control the forces that he is stirring up?"

"There is definitely a great danger. Another war would be terrible."

"Most people are for peace. They don't oppose this kind of politics, although it certainly doesn't express their will. I don't see any reason to encourage warlike feelings and hatred towards other peoples."

"The only reason that I can think of is that some people oppose the regime, and that this is an attempt to shut them up by saying that the national interest is at risk."

"Surely this is only a way to throw dust in the eyes of the people for the benefit of those in power. A government that does not allow the people expression and control can commit any crime."

After half an hour of this kind of talk we would be speaking of that swine, Mussolini. We would discuss liberty, democracy, socialism, internationalism. We whispered revolutionary songs with restrained enthusiasm.

But these careful tactics did not always work, either because the other person was really a Fascist or because one or the other became mistrustful. If the speaker was Fascist, at a certain point he would notice that the conversation, while not actually subversive, was beginning to deviate from the party line, and he would begin to pull back and argue. The conversation would stop at some point, in itself not compromising, but rather an effort to instill doubt. In this way, every day thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people made their little contribution to anti-Fascist propaganda, and made contact with those who were already convinced.

The first time I used this method with Curiel, I was unsuccessful. He was more diffident than most Florentines, both because of his character and because, as he told me later, Trieste had more spies than Florence.

Nonetheless we met again, and I found him to be an extremely intelligent person, versatile and interesting. He had read a great deal, and could speak competently on every field of knowledge. He began to come to my house to study with my friends. He showed excellent mathematical aptitude. He especially showed a profound interest in the fundamental principles, while the rest of us were merely entertained by the intellectual gymnastics of the problems. He was aware of all modern ideas: psycho-analysis, cubism, atomic theory....And when we spoke about politics we found ourselves to be in agreement in our common aversion to Fascism.

The theatre was one of my favorite entertainments, and I went often. At the time there still were some good theatre companies. Later they fell apart so that it became impossible to see a good production.

In the top balconies of the theatres in Florence one could find mostly students and a many intellectuals, including University professors who did not have money for better seats....

The setting therefore was very pleasant. During intermission one could exchange a few words with old friends, meet new people, or meet the town beauties, and this added to the pleasure of the theatre. Often when I left, I walked with a friend, or with a small group of friends through the deserted streets. This was the best time to share confidences or for discussions.

One spring evening I walked with Eugenio Curiel along the banks of the Arno, near the Ponte Vecchio. No one else was there and we were both in a receptive state. We spoke, as usual, of science, of civilization, and of freedom. But after a while we were taken in by the beauty of the night, and by the mystery of the little medieval streets that end up on the Lung'arno. We would hardly have been surprised if we had seen group of people dressed in costume from the time of Dante, rounding the corner, singing madrigals.

Another time, after seeing Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, I left with a student whom I hardly knew, a friend of Gualtiero's. We started talking about the play, which was intellectually very stimulating. Then we went on to talk of psychology, religion and politics and I ended up making a new friend.

The atmosphere in Florence, as well as that in other Italian cities in which I have lived, was inspiring, and encouraged thought. Among the young people that I met in school there were a large number of insignificant people. But there were also some intelligent and interesting groups, among whom one could usefully and pleasantly exchange, not only words, but also ideas. These groups met at the University, along the streets in the city center, and in the highest balcony of the theatres. All those who had a real interest in culture ended up meeting each other, and they gathered to their common advantage.

From a political perspective, one could say that most were against Fascism. But the strength of the regime lay with all those who did not think and who saw education as a way to earn a living more easily and more abundantly. Almost all the students, including the antifascists, were members of the Fascist's University Group (Gruppo Universitario Fascista -- G.U.F.), and many were also members of the Militia. The Fascist University Militia (Milizia Universitaria Fascista) had its offices on the University grounds. Those same University courtyards and halls that for hundreds of years had had the right to provide asylum, a symbol of the authorities' respect for knowledge, now resounded to the heavy tread of the militia and its officers. Fascism introduced its partisan militia onto University grounds, a place whose freedom had been respected even in the Middle Ages.

Students did not approve of this regimentation. Most submitted to it as a necessary condition to any future activity. Only party members could take part in competitions [for university jobs] or be employed in most positions. Those who did not want to lower themselves to having their names listed as official supporters of the regime had to pay for that act of courage by being excluded from work and from normal civilian life. However there were indications of dissatisfaction. Italian students were not an orderly group, and in some cases lack of discipline can produce the same effect as the desire for freedom.

At the beginning of the 1930-1931 academic year, the G.U.F. issued a "decree" by which 50 lire were to be paid to its office by first-year students, replacing the traditional payments to senior students. The receipt consisted of a paper full of Fascist symbols (fasci), and statements of patriotism and admiration for the Duce. This receipt was supposed to placate the older students. Naturally, this innovation was very much disliked, not just because it cut into some people's profits, but especially because it eliminated an ancient scholastic tradition to which the students (at least those who were not freshmen) were very much attached.

The senior students therefore decided that freshmen who were members of G.U.F. should not have to make any additional payments, but that they would be harassed ferociously. That year, there was a real hunt for freshmen on the streets of Florence. On the first day of the academic year a freshman was thrown into the fountain in the Piazza della Signoria. During the first days of classes, some freshmen were stripped in the street, and their bodies were with obscenities. Although they were not hurt, these poor boys lived under terrible threats. The few who dared to be seen in the city center were surrounded by crowds threatening the most atrocious torture. The freshmen who came to one of the first classes at the Institute of Physics, which was out of town, were tied up and forced to march through the center of town, their faces painted black and carrying a banner stating their shame. The resistance to the greedy arrangement made by G.U.F. was such that the next year it was forced to back down, allowing the classical freshmen rituals along with the traditional drinks. But the 50 lire tax was not abolished.

Student week took place at about carnival time. It included a ceremony whereby the freshmen were accepted into the student body. It was a week of revelry, during which parades, or rather hordes, of students crossed the city at all hours, shouting and singing more or less obscene songs at the top of their lungs. During that week the students felt that they owned the city. They followed improvised leaders who did not lead them anywhere, they danced in large circles in the city squares, and they improvised demonstrations with no meaning, whose only purpose was to appear clever. It was collective madness, but fortunately, it was generally innocuous. I participated in these events and parades. I helped stop the streetcars and I helped lift them off their tracks. I was sure that it was funny, and that I was carrying out my obligations as a student.

In those days the students felt the strength of their numbers and of their youth. But intelligent observers could see the weak morale of these people without ideals, who agitated for no reason. The authorities did not oppose these demonstrations, since the only thing the students wanted was free admittance to the movies, and lower prices at the whorehouses during the days of revelry. The students thought they were being brave when they mocked a policeman who was trying to impose some order:

*Quell'uom dal fiero aspetto
non dica non dica fregnacce.
Lo vada a dire al Kaiser;
forse ci credera'.*

(to the tune of "fra Diavolo")

(That man who looks so fierce
should not, should not, speak nonsense.
He should go tell it to the Kaiser
who may believe it.)

They were not aware, and I myself was not aware, that the authorities must have been pleased with these demonstrations by well-fed students from good families. It was, after all, a demonstration by the bourgeoisie, and the Fascists looked indulgently upon their misbehavior.

Only occasionally, quite rarely one must say, were there moments of criticism and opposition to the regime. For example, one of the student plays, written and acted by students in one of the principal theatres in the city, included a scene in which a secretary of G.U.F. found himself in a nation of apes. After some time among the apes, they were marching three by three, carrying rifles, just like the students in the University militia.

In other cities, student demonstrations occasionally took an antifascist turn. For example, I was told by a very trustworthy person that in Padova some politically active groups were able to start a riot when Achille Starace, the secretary of the Fascist party, attended Student Week in that city. He was carried triumphantly above the heads of the students, some of whom took advantage of their position by pricking his bottom with sharp pins. This was followed by some other signs of disrespect. Starace ordered the suspension of the student games. The students agitated for the continuation of the games, clashing with the police who made some arrests. And for Starace, whose incompetence was well-known, the following epigraph was prematurely composed:

*Qui giace
Achille Starace
Vestito d'orbace,
di mano rapace
di labbro mendace,
di mente incapace,
di tutto capace,
Requiescat in Pace.*

(Here lies
Achille Starace,
dressed in homespun
with greedy hands,
with lying lips,
with feeble mind,
capable of anything:
May he rest in peace.)

Chapter Three

Physics ~~and Anti-Fascism~~ Arcetri

Little by little I became more serious about my studies. I always enjoyed mathematics, which was the major part of what was taught in the two year *biennio*. To me, solving problems was as good a pastime as chess or crossword puzzles was for others. However chemistry, which I studied in my first years was very boring. Without benefit of a lab, studying the properties of various elements was a dry exercise in memorization. I found that I was interested only in the most general aspects of this science and in physical chemistry. Curie, who had prepared for the chemistry exam before me, began to talk of atoms, electrons and quanta and he lent me a few books.

I was fascinated by everything relating to the structure of matter and I realized that I wanted to spend my life on this kind of research; but I didn't know how to go about it since I was unaware that university careers in research existed. Giulio Racah, who was soon to graduate with a degree in physics, took me to the laboratories at the Institute to show me the opportunities for pure research there. I was impressed at seeing only young people there. They were not at all professorial, as they bustled around the equipment, whose purpose I could not fathom. The words "cosmic rays" and "electrons," which I had only seen printed in books, now became much less remote; they were things that could be tested through experiments, contributing, although modestly, to man's knowledge of nature.

I began to seriously consider changing the direction of my studies. I postponed my physics examination until October so that I would have more time to study the material. During the summer I read the *Introduction to Atomic Physics* by Fermi and my interest was so aroused that I decided that I had no choice but to be a physicist. The next year, my third at the University (1931-1932), I did not go to the Politecnico; instead I enrolled in pure physics in the Department of Science in Florence. I studied enthusiastically for my courses and deepened my knowledge of related subjects: it was a year mostly spent on my studies.

My best friend in my studies was Eugenio Curie. After showing me the road to pure science, Eugenio decided to continue studying engineering; he left for the Politecnico in Milan and I was afraid that I might never see him again. His aptitude for science was obvious and, although he did not score as high as I on the exams, I consider his abilities to be superior to my own. He had a great interest in science, as well as every other aspect of knowledge and thought. Practical sense, though, was never one of his strong points. One could conclude, then, that he was an ideal person for a scholarly career and less adapted to engineering, for which he was, without a doubt, too intelligent and profound.

But his lack of practicality misled him: it seemed to him that he could never adjust to the modest life of a man of science, and he set out for engineering in hopes of better pay. This shows how little he knew of himself, the proof of which is that after a few months he came back from Milan disgusted with the School of Engineering and he enrolled in a third year of physics. We resumed our conversations, our discussions, and our calculations. He once again began to frequent my home with a timid and embarrassed manner toward my mother, the ever-present cigarette in his mouth.

It was a whole year of formulas that we thought were physics. We reveled in mathematical abstractions which we thought were more important than the natural laws discovered by experience. We considered science to be a human creation, like a hymn to the power of our intelligence. This concept

satisfied our pride and we enjoyed pondering the ideas of the great scientists. If there is such a thing as Truth in science, it seemed to us that Truth was created by the activity of the scientist.

I spent that summer in Switzerland to practice German, which I considered necessary for my studies. My mother did not want me to go to Austria or Germany, as I would have liked, because she was worried about the political situation in those countries. I took a train by myself to Zurich. But since Switzerland is a trilingual country, whenever I attempted a word in my tentative German, the answer came in French, and I had very little practice in the language that I had decided to learn. I decided, therefore, to enroll in a boarding school and spent nearly a month in a school on a hill by Lake Zug. The summer was filled with tennis, swimming and hiking in the company of other boys who had come from all over the world. Among us we talked a little of every language--French, Italian, English, German--and for the first time I was immersed in a cosmopolitan environment. There were French, Germans, Americans, Greeks, Dutch, and more. . .even the son of an Afghan minister. In contact with these boys my horizons broadened, and my impressions of various countries became a little more realistic.

Between games we occasionally talked politics. My Spanish friends shared a recording which expressed the joy that their people felt at having recently overthrown the monarchy, and I was not a little moved by the words:

*Espania, Espania tua valentia
La monarquia
A destruyo*

[Spain, O Spain your valor
Has destroyed
The monarchy]

A German boy had a poster in his room of an immense democratic-socialist rally with the word FREIHEIT printed in large red letters over the photo. There was certainly no lack of reactionaries, as all of these boys were from well-to-do families: most of the Italians were Fascists and I met a French boy who belonged to the Action Francaise. But those who shared leftist ideas drew together instinctively, to talk about problems in their own countries and to listen to descriptions of situations in countries that they did not know. And so this vacation piqued my interest in international politics, and it demonstrated to me the ease with which one can understand and get close to people who share a love of freedom, regardless of nationality.

The next academic year I began doing research for my thesis. It proved to be a rewarding year in terms of both my scientific and humanistic education.

The School of Physics at the University of Florence is at Arcetri. On this hallowed hill stands an astronomical observatory. Its solitary surroundings and its location cannot help but have a profound effect upon those who work and live there. To get there I had to travel a good distance on foot, through some of the most magnificent countryside around Florence. In the morning as I climbed the hill to Arcetri, I left behind the polluted air of the city. Crossing through the gate of the Institute I had the impression that I was entering a sacred retreat where one could live free of all conventions in the pursuit of science. From the balconies of the Institute there was a magnificent view of the city and countryside. Looking around, one could breathe the intense air of an ancient civilization so typical of the Tuscan countryside. On the nearby hills were churches, castles, monuments, the nobility's stately villas and the peasants' modest houses. The fields had been worked for centuries and farming still followed old traditions. Each hill, each valley had its own story.

And Arcetri's story is among the most glorious: here Galileo died, the founder of the experimental method, the man to whom science owes its beginnings, and the man whose ideas brought about the greatest changes in history, perhaps only after the discovery of fire.

The Director and founder of this Institute was an old senator, Professor Antonio Garbasso, who for several years had been busy with his own interests rather than with physics. He had been Mayor of Florence and only appeared in the laboratory to teach. Afterwards he would linger with his assistants and have a cup of tea. He was interested in the progress of their research and offered advice. His main scientific achievement in those years, the last of his life, was knowing how to choose competent young people for his Institute, and knowing how to find, with his senatorial contacts, the funds for their research. I hardly knew him because in my last year he was already seriously ill, and he died before I finished my studies.

The only part of the Institute with which I was familiar prior to this final year was the large lecture hall where I had attended classes. However this year I was admitted to the laboratories. During the first days I was lost in the large building full of mysterious rooms laid out in a manner which I could not comprehend. I walked the halls for long stretches before finding the proper door, and along the way I caught glimpses of closets containing mysterious equipment. After a while I learned to orient myself, but it took me several months to become really familiar with my surroundings.

I presented myself, with Eugenio, to request a thesis topic. Given the Senator's illness, the Institute was in the hands of a young assistant, one Dr. Gilberto Bernardini. We spoke with him and he welcomed us with an expansive cordiality, but he never did give a definite response; instead he placed a diffusion pump in our hands with instructions to dry it.

The pump was a glass apparatus mounted on a block of wood; to remove it from its support, we had to unscrew a few screws. This work seemed to be at once too humiliating and too lofty for us. On the one hand, using a screwdriver made us feel that we were being ushered into the world of experimental physics. But this was so different from what we had learned during all those long years on the school benches, that we also felt demeaned. I, the intellectual, dedicating myself to such a menial task! After a short time, I realized that even this task was beyond my ability, since while I was drying that poor pump over a flame, it broke. I had to take it to up to the attic to have it fixed by the glass blower.

A few days after this unfortunate incident, Bernardini told us that because of an unusual situation in the lab, he could not take on two thesis candidates himself. He suggested that one of us write his thesis at another University. So Eugenio left for the Institute in Padua directed by Bruno Rossi, a former assistant at Arcetri who had had taken a position in Padua for several months. I remained in Florence and our paths diverged once again.

When I started working on my thesis I was surprised by the endless series of purely menial tasks needed to carry out scientific research. Frequently I became discouraged by technical difficulties; sometimes I simply got annoyed. I was convinced that I was meant for greater and more noble things. My first contact with soldering, glass blowing, and with the more familiar carpentry, machine, and electrical tools dismayed me. I was in a new world and I was not happy about exploring it without a friend by my side. This exploration revealed itself to be anything but easy; behind every apparatus there seemed to lurk some evil spirit which was infinitely capricious and spiteful. The instruments' behavior seemed to defy all laws of logic, and when my equipment did work, it seemed to be in an unstable equilibrium, soon to be destroyed by some unforeseen event.

Fortunately my loneliness at Arcetri only lasted for a few months as Gilberto and another young assistant, Daria, came to consider me more a friend than a student. I absorbed a great deal, and not just about science, from these new friends just by living with them day to day. Gilberto was a young man of rare intelligence, full of life and heartfelt enthusiasm. He was a good-looking man with blue eyes and a full head of disorderly, curly hair. He worked constantly. He came from a family of modest means and was able to study only because he was admitted to the Normal School in Pisa. After his schooling, he spent a few years working for industry, but the work disgusted him. After quitting these positions, he became an assistant--at first as an unpaid volunteer--at Arcetri. Married with two small children, he lived for a while on income from private tutoring until his talents became apparent. He then received a stipend which allowed him to support his family, albeit with many sacrifices and debts.

Many thought him crazy. And in fact Gilberto did nothing to dispel this notion. He dressed for the weather, and in summer he went into town without a jacket or socks, wearing sandals like those worn by Franciscan monks. Frequently he was refused entry to some office, even at the University, because although he was always clean and had a respectful demeanor, his dress was considered inappropriate. He expressed himself without any false modesty. Frequently in the lab or some other public place he would embrace or kiss a friend, male or female, whom he had not seen for a long time. When he disliked someone, he did nothing to hide the fact, and never resorted to the political intrigues which are in most cases indispensable to those who wish to succeed in a university career.

Gilberto was different from others I met in that he lived his life without worrying about what other people thought of him and without playing the roles which were expected of him. It occurred to me that most people don't act on their true feelings, but rather in response to the roles which society has established for them over time. Every group of men has its own expectations, and few are the members who dare not to conform. Social pressure in this regard is extremely strong: the overriding motive for a Neapolitan barber to kill his unfaithful wife is that his peers expect it of him; jealousy is only a secondary factor. Society is cruel to those who do not adhere to its rules: the Neapolitan who does not kill his unfaithful wife is banished from his community for having lost his honor. The fear of such expulsion, the horror at the prospect of feeling isolated from ones' peers, is stronger than the threat of prison or whatever other punishment the written and codified laws might require.

To liberate oneself from this code of ethics requires considerable effort; this liberation is never quite complete since even impulses which seem spontaneous have a more or less remote social origin. To totally destroy the influence of society is to cease being human. But it's always possible to attempt to rise above the level of restrictive social groups by objective analysis and comparison to other groups. By removing oneself from the small nucleus into which one is born, it's possible to adopt, in the society of all mankind, a code of conduct which better conforms to one's personality.

Gilberto had, at least partially, completed this process. He had removed himself from the role which Florentine tradition had reserved for an assistant at the University, and lived according to his own personal inclinations. At Arcetri, he surrounded himself with a new social group whose standards were similar to those of certain intellectuals and bohemians who inhabit every western country.

At the Institute he lived a life which was completely unconventional: he worked night or day, whenever he pleased; in winter he walked through the halls in an overcoat, and in summer he went half-naked; in spring he sat on a balcony to catch some sun, or he walked in the nearby fields scaling walls and gates to reach places from which he could get a better view or cooler shade. He discussed all kinds of subjects: he talked of art and politics, sports and philosophy. . . all in all he lived his whole life at Arcetri.

I was not a little influenced by this atmosphere of "innocent madness," as Senator Garbasso baptized it. Accustomed to living a bourgeois life, the bohemian, intellectual life which I discovered at Arcetri completely seduced me, and I soon felt estranged from my salon companions of previous years. I felt as if I had discovered a new world, or rather the real world, in which human relations were simpler, friendships more intense, and feelings more real. My former life seemed impoverished to me, empty and artificial.

When I descended into the valley, I had strange discussions with my old friends. My favorite subject in those days was "shells." I maintained that people often live alone as if in shells, hiding their true nature so as not to expose themselves to the criticism and sarcasm of others. As a result any form of growth or communication, either intellectual or human, is impossible; there is a danger of suffocating in one's own shell. I maintained that the example of the "Arcetrites" helped me escape from my shell; I was very proud of this fact and also of the sound of all these words.

I began to think of men and women in a new way. I tried to find what was inside their "shells," trying occasionally to break them open brutally. When I first met someone, for example, instead of talking about the weather, I began by saying, "Tell me a little about what really interests you in life." I started to talk more seriously, without being afraid to broach personal subjects. I lost my high school wit which was based solely on puns and wordplay. In brief, I talked less and said more. Society's brilliant icons, whom I had always idolized now appeared to me in all their emptiness.

This change of attitude signaled an important way-station in the development of my personality. I became less superficial; I stopped acting like a sly little kid, and instead tried impress others with an air of youthful innocence which, according to some, is still one of my traits. My morals were transformed. I realized that it is more satisfying to be right than to cheat one's neighbor. I realized that people aren't really so bad after all, and that there are really very few people who would harm someone who is trusting and without malice.

Sexual problems also appeared in a new light. It was then that I realized how far from normal, and from my own inclinations, was the behavior of my former friends. So I completely overcame the sense of inferiority that I felt beneath their stares. And in reaction, I even went to the opposite extreme, where the ideal was to have, in all one's life, extremely few sexual experiences. These would be moments of spiritual, almost religious, ecstasy that should not be obstructed for any reason.

I also learned physics at Arcetri; or rather I learned what physics was, in the face discouraging technical problems. My instruments simply did not want to work and, despite the help of Gilberto and Daria, there was always some new obstacle for me to overcome. Sometimes I seriously doubted myself and became convinced that I overreached my capabilities. But even during these times, which lasted some painful weeks on end, I was not really miserably upset. I had acquired a certain modesty and felt that I would be happy doing farmwork in the fields. Never, even in times of my worst self-doubt, did I ever consider becoming a shop-keeper like so many of my relatives. I felt that I could never be satisfied in that type of job, especially after sampling the life of a scientist. Even peasant's work or blue collar work seemed more productive and satisfying to me than selling merchandise.

When I emerged from these crises I realized that I loved my work and no longer regarded the physical work as degrading. The satisfaction of seeing a clean and useful tool take form from a shapeless mass of metal seemed just as lofty as the satisfaction gained from reading books. Just as lofty, and in a way more serious, more human, because it was more directly related to nature. It occurred to me that none of the formulas I had ever learned had ever brought me a bit closer to understanding nature; they were nothing more than amusing intellectual exercises. From then on the satisfaction which science has given me has derived simply from knowing the laws of nature and not from the more or less elegant ways in which man has learned to express them on paper. From worshipping the human mind I passed to the adoration of nature, and upon this feeling, in the following years, I built my concept of the world.

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While I was taking these first steps in the world of science, physics was progressing by gigantic strides. During my studies at the University, physics was developing at a rate which can only be described as explosive, and was changing in ways so fundamental that they can only be described as revolutionary. Everything was being turned upside down, as in the days of Copernicus and Newton. The laws of classical mechanics, although triumphantly confirmed by innumerable successes--of which the major one was the accurate explanation of planetary movement--were not able to describe the behavior of very small and very rapid particles. This was a field which had only recently been opened up for experimentation, and thus to our eyes. We had absolutely no experience in this arena in everyday life, so here our common sense and our intuitions about physical laws could not be relied upon. But--and this is the triumph of Einstein and Heisenberg--our reason could be trusted instead.

Relativity and quantum mechanics had been introduced several years earlier, and they were still being confirmed and applied with increasing success. At that time I was collecting data on cosmic rays under the patient guidance of Gilberto and Daria. The voices of skepticism, which were as common then as they are today, were silenced by the successes of the new theories, and these successes followed each other so rapidly that the skeptics in good faith had to limit themselves to saying, "It sounds like an awfully complicated way to explain a very simple event." In fact this was exactly what Einstein said about quantum mechanics, and why he was never completely convinced by it.

Simplicity, which is every scientist's dream, seemed hopelessly lost in complicated and, some felt, dubious calculations and arguments. But if in a certain sense they were correct, then simplicity would have to be reborn from the ashes in some unforeseen way.

At first, long explanations were needed to interpret the few known facts. But when more facts became known it became evident that they could all be explained with a minimal number of hypotheses, or rather postulates. From a logical perspective this was a triumph of simplicity.

At first these postulates could not be understood as easily as those of Euclid, because they didn't seem intuitive. But little by little, absorbed in study and lacking previous atavistic and everyday experience, the world of the atom became familiar. Continued mental exercise made comprehension ever easier and the distinction between familiarity and intuition gradually disappeared. In other words another form of intuition developed, about the physics applicable to atoms and subatomic particles, as a result of constant contact with infinitesimally small things.

Deep understanding eliminates mystery. Why, contrary to what is so often read in popular magazines, is there no mystery in science? Because mysteries reside only in ignorance!

But as for me, these things were very remote; at the time I was more interested in gathering data to finish my thesis. To this end, and with very simple methods, I was able to connect with the unknown universe. I made myself some Geiger counters by cutting aluminum tubes, fashioning ebonite plugs for them, and sealing the plugs with bee's wax. Finally, I created a vacuum with a pneumatic hand pump which looked like a reincarnation from the time of Magdeburg's spheres. However badly, my counters did manage to work and, on the balcony of the Institute, they responded to signals from outer space. What were these tiny particles which moved so fast and registered minute discharges on my counters? Where did they come from? How did they behave? I knew I would never be able to provide definitive answers to all these questions, but I would at least be able to clarify them a little.

For at Arcetri, I learned that scientists are modest. Galileo rolled balls down sloped tables while philosophers were busy searching for ultimate truths. They may well have said to him, "If you want to know how bodies fall, why don't you study the problem seriously: read some Aristotle and maybe the Bible. Don't waste your time on those childish games!"

At Arcetri there was still an old inclined plane from *l'Accademia del Cimento* which, when compared to those of Galileo, must have been a great technological innovation. It had ivory balls, and pendulums and bells -- a real marvel--a marvel of such complexity and decadence not unlike those new mass-produced Geiger counters that work so well! To be charming, science must be primitive. The true scientist loves to explore areas in which industry has yet to develop an interest, and generals have yet to invest money.

The fascination of exploring virgin territory is common ground to science and art. This similarity of values is not really very surprising since the arts and sciences are both creative, individual pursuits which validate and ennoble the human spirit. In this sense, and in contrast to the usual use of the word, both art and science are "humanistic" aspects of culture. But maybe it's best to leave these general considerations and return to our history.

In Italy at this time physics was progressing mostly under the influence of the German model. But under the guidance of Fermi, Italy was rapidly asserting itself and becoming recognized in its own right throughout the world. In Rome, while he was still very young, Fermi surrounded himself with other young people and formed a nucleus of friends and collaborators which might even be called a School--a school however which had none of the ponderous scholarship and rhetoric so dear to other Italian academicians. And so, reveling in the intellectual gymnastics of their work and intoxicated by the adventure of exploring the virgin territory of the atom, these youths quickly received international acclaim. But to round out their lives, they also appreciated the simpler pleasures of exercising and exploring their macroscopic world, for which they would frequently travel together to hike in the Alps.

The Roman group, which included Fermi, Rasetti, Amaldi, Segre and Majorana, was without a doubt the strongest proponent of the new physics in Italy, both from a theoretical and experimental standpoint, but the Institute in Florence was easily a strong second in research in modern physics. The same Fermi and Rasetti had been in Florence a few years before I began my studies there. Persico,

another friend of Fermi's and one of the most dedicated and effective teachers of quantum mechanics, had been a professor of theoretical physics there since about 1932; Rossi started experimental research on cosmic rays at Arcetri; Bernardini was a young assistant, and Occhialini and Recha had recently finished their studies. So the atmosphere in Florence was charged by a group of young men whose names would soon become known around the world.

The history of physics at this time and the freshness which accompanied it cannot be described better than in this poem, written by Persico in the lofty meter of the children's magazine *Corriere dei Piccoli*:

... We believe with faith so deep,
A faith which bows to reason,
That light is both particle and wave,
Wave and particle is the electron...

| (...Credon poi con *f e'* profonda
| cui s'inchina la ragion
| che la luce * e'* corpo ed onda
| Onda e corpo * e'* l'electron...)

It would be difficult to describe more vividly how difficult it is to understand, and the disorientation one feels, from the apparent contradiction between the properties of particle and wave--the basis of quantum mechanics.

Relations between the 'Arcetrates' and the 'Romans' were excellent, and Bernardini every so often went to Rome to consult with "the Pope," as Fermi came to be called because of his proverbial infallibility.

Visitors from various countries came knocking at the door of our lab and some of my fellow students, just a little older than I, went abroad to continue their studies. That particular year, Recha was in Zurich with Pauli, Occhialini in Cambridge with Blackett, and Bernardini himself left for Berlin to conduct an experiment in nuclear physics; Bernardini's equipment had been constructed at Arcetri, but lacked a radioactive source.

Our visitors and traveling companions kept us abreast of the progress physics was making in the most important research centers. I remember vividly, a letter from Occhialini who announced that he had observed a whole host of cosmic rays. With an instrument which he had designed and built himself, he obtained the first photographs demonstrating the creation of matter from energy! It was perhaps the most direct proof thus far of the principles of Dirac's quantum relativistic mechanics.

Things which only a year before seemed so remote were now before me--the work of my friend and colleague in the tangible and visible form of a photograph!

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Towards the end of April of that year (1933) Bruno Rossi wrote me a letter from Padua proposing that I go with him on an expedition to Eritrea in Ethiopia to study cosmic rays close to the magnetic equator. This offer had already been extended to my friend Eugenio who was studying in Padua with Rossi, but Eugenio had refused since at the moment he was fed up with science.

Rossi was very disappointed with Eugenio's performance, though otherwise he considered him an excellent student. Rossi wrote a letter to Gilberto to the effect that he, Rossi, had missed an opportunity to infuse a passion for science in this young man. Eugenio wrote me a letter that was rather vague. He said that he had come to realize that physics was too far removed from any other human activity, and that as such, it would never be able to satisfy him. He had decided to study philosophy because physics could never fulfill his sense of moral purpose.

I could not have been further from agreeing with him. Although I did not believe that physics studied "ultimate truths" --an unattainable goal anyhow -- physics always seemed to be the best method for augmenting our knowledge. I felt, therefore, that to dedicate oneself to scientific research was one of the best ways to spend one's life. And so, not being endowed with any extraordinary intellectual gifts, I thought that I might, with hard work, obtain some modest results. I might not revolutionize the history of human thought or affect the future of civilization, but I might contribute a little to the progress of culture.

I thought that Eugenio might have become discouraged in the face of the difficulties posed by practical research and that he was unable to overcome crises similar to those I had experienced myself. As a reaction to what he felt was a -dry scientific method, he turned to philosophy which, it seemed to me, had no appropriate methodology for resolving the problems it examined. In fact, merely knowing the subject matter of philosophy, I considered it futile to make it the main activity of my life.

Actually what we now call science was in the past considered a part of philosophy: *Physics* was the title of a book by Aristotle, the "philosopher" *par excellence*. But when Galileo introduced the scientific method and found a way to explain various natural phenomena (that is, to reduce to simple laws which are themselves unexplained), at that point, the study of physics detached itself from the rest of philosophy by virtue of its methods and reasoning. It then took on the character of a scientific discipline. Other sciences followed -- chemistry, biology, psychology -- encroaching little by little upon the subject matter of "philosophy." What is left of philosophy is not just the unknown, but the unknowable. Philosophers themselves, after centuries of trying to resolve metaphysical problems, have realized the futility of their efforts and banished metaphysics from modern philosophy. And if some problem which is genuinely considered to be philosophical were to be resolved at some future time, it would seem very unlikely to me that this solution would be discovered by using philosophical methods.

Without a doubt philosophers began by posing some fundamental questions, but soon they began to wander around without ever looking for a method for approaching a solution. Despite their long disquisitions it seemed to me that they were just as likely to approach the truth as they were to distance themselves from it. The attitude of the philosopher towards a problem seemed not unlike that of a person trying to find oil without having studied geology: he seemed to be exploring randomly or on the basis of arbitrary and personal criteria. So when this person finally claims to have actually discovered oil, who could possibly believe him? What company would agree to search for oil this way?

In contrast, a person who uses a scientific method proceeds much more cautiously; perhaps in a way which seems more annoying and indirect for those who do not have patience or modesty and who do not enjoy the journey as an end in itself. A scientist would begin by studying seismic and geological data, supported by deduction and laborious calculations--results of observations already made--and finally would state his hunch about the probability of finding oil in a certain area. This can be the only method for discovering oil.

But since Eugenio seemed to disagree, I had the unexpected opportunity to be invited to participate in an interesting research expedition. The expedition was scheduled to leave at the end of August, so it was agreed that I would graduate in July. To finish in time I worked nights in the laboratory while Gilberto monitored the instruments during the day.

A few weeks after being asked to go, I thought the trip would be cancelled. The *Physical Review* published an article describing experiments in Mexico or Peru which were similar to those we were planning. The article was signed by T. H. Johnson. (If someone had told me then, that eight years later I would end up in America working with Johnson in the same laboratory, I would never have believed it!) But Rossi wrote that we would leave anyhow because the conditions in Ethiopia were different from those in America and further research on the same topic might prove interesting.

What beautiful spring evenings I spent in the cosmic ray hut on the roof of the laboratory where my instruments were installed! I monitored equipment, studied for exams, and allowed myself only a few hours of sleep. Frequently, between one reading and the next, I relaxed, contemplating the stars and absorbing the fresh spring air of the quiet country nights.

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And so, as God would have it, I collected enough data to have my thesis accepted. I interrupted my research to study for the exams which I still had to take, and to actually write the thesis itself. I passed the exams reasonably well and, before graduating, went to Padua for a week to help Rossi pack equipment for the expedition.

It was the first time that I had ever left home for work, and from that time on I have returned home only at irregular intervals during vacations or on week-ends. For the following ten years, I have spent my life either in hotels or in unfurnished rooms, and this has resulted in a rather nomadic outlook on life.

What a difference between the institute in Florence and the one in Padua! Padua's lab was in an old section of town. It was dimly lit, had little air and almost no modern scientific facilities. Electric wires crisscrossed the walls and ceilings, which, even if they were clean--which I doubt--always seemed to be covered in cobwebs or mold. A musty smell permeated the Institute, the whole atmosphere a complete contrast to that of Arcetri. When I arrived, full of youthful--if not childish--expectations and enthusiasm, Rossi was not there. The people who greeted me seemed a little musty themselves, and I wondered whether the Institute reduced them to this state, or if they were only able to tolerate being there because they were musty themselves before entering the place. Personally, I favor the latter explanation.

As if to dampen my enthusiasm I was told to wait in a perfectly dark room (many labs use black rooms for optical experiments), and in these somber surroundings I waited for a good half-hour until Rossi finally came to rescue me. He was very kind to me, as he always would be, and he took me affectionately out to have a bite to eat. Immediately afterwards we started packing fragile equipment into twenty or so boxes.

Eugenio Curiel came to Padua a few days later to talk about his thesis. His family had prodded him into taking his final exams, but he was determined that this would be the last concession he would ever make to science or the University. He passed with flying colors and high praise.

Eugenio's personal finances at this point can only be described as miserable. His father had suffered a major financial crisis and was left penniless, and Eugenio himself had barely enough to eat. But his disdain for science was so deep that, despite everything, he renounced a career that would have at least been secure and that in all probability would have ended brilliantly.

To save money he lived on the outskirts of town on the river Brenta, a half-hour commute by trolley. The house he lived in is difficult to describe: it was neither a country house nor a city house; neither a private house nor a hotel. On the ground floor there was a bar where peasants would boisterously gather over a few drinks. Posted on the wall, between advertisements for liquor, was a sign saying, "No political discussions allowed." The owner cooked the meals, and in springtime couples from the city would come partake of her food and, so I heard, her generous hospitality. All in all it looked rather dirty. Eugenio had a room on the second floor which he never let me enter, ashamed perhaps of his miserable circumstances and his messy apartment. The bathroom, which seemed to have missed out on centuries of improvements, was outside, and to get there one had to cross a little garden behind the house. But the stench did not carry very far and all around there was the sweet smell of country air. In front of the house and across the road were the high dams of the Brenta and the river flowed peacefully in its bed.

One night I went to eat at Eugenio's and we had a long talk as we strolled along the levees. He was very excited and confident about his decision. He had no plans for the future but was considering earning a living as an elementary school teacher after becoming certified.

In the meantime my thesis had to be typed. I had only a few days to do this, but the manuscript had been left in Florence for Gilberto to reread. He had promised to bring it to Padua since he was coming to visit his old friend Rossi.

Gilberto did not show up on the designated day. I wrote and telegraphed, but still Gilberto did not arrive. In response to a telegram he finally told me that he would arrive the following morning. I went to the station only to find that again, Bernardini was not there. At this point I became very worried and went to the post office to telephone Arcetri. Daria answered and told me that Gilberto missed the evening train because when he got to the station, he realized that he had forgotten his jacket with his money. So he had to walk back to Arcetri, get his jacket and walk back down the hill to catch the next train. He would be there that afternoon. And in fact this time he did arrive. He wore white pants, tennis shoes, a tennis

shirt and a strange looking outdoor jacket. At the lab all the employees stared at him as if he were a strange animal, possibly dangerous, and probably better off in a cage. In his usual outgoing way, he pretended not to notice and asked Rossi's assistant to use the familiar "tu" when addressing him. The assistant, afraid of coming too close to such an exuberant being, replied, "As you wish, professor" (using the formal "you"). And that was that.

And so my thesis was given to a typist.

The night that Eugenio graduated, Rossi, Bernardini and I took him out to eat at his bar. Gilberto was very interested in Eugenio's identity crisis and the two of them monopolized the conversation with their intimate talk. That year Gilberto himself had similar doubts about the value of science to society. He had done marvelous work, but was tormented by personal problems for which physics could not provide satisfactory answers. Once, in Berlin, where he had gone to do some research on radioactive material which was unavailable at Arcetri, he wrote to Daria, "I can't believe I have worked like a dog for a whole year just to see the needle of a gauge move." Gilberto, who was talkative anyhow, opened up to Eugenio. He told him all about his private life and his most personal feelings after knowing Eugenio for only two days. Eugenio, while sympathetic, felt this whole conversation to be lacking in sincerity. That night Gilberto stayed with Eugenio. The next day he returned to town with a load off his mind, a lighter heart . . . and a few fleas.

I knew a young, very intelligent mathematician back then, Professor Cacciopoli, who must have been about thirty years old. He was small, thin and deformed. He looked like he only had a year to live, but year after year he pulled himself through without any noticeable physical change. He had some Bulgarian (?) blood in his veins. Maybe this Slavic, revolutionary blood (if blood has anything to do with revolution) drove him to living a strange life. He ate rarely and very little. I remember one night I saw him eat two anchovies and a small glass of cognac for his only meal of the day. He hardly ever worked, but his work was considered excellent by everyone in his field. He was a fine musician. His conversation was biting and witty, and he could show contempt for his peers with a fine sense of sarcasm.

He was the exact opposite of Bernardini. Once in a restaurant I witnessed an interesting conversation between the two of them about the Unknown Soldier. Cacciopoli was making fun of the ceremonies for the Unknown Soldier and said that this poor soldier had been singled out so that the media could encourage other poor soldiers to get killed on the battlefield. Bernardini was incensed by these remarks. His naive and effusive personality was an easy mark for propaganda, and this lack of respect for a symbol of the suffering of innocent, anonymous citizens, was for him a sacrilege. His heated arguments must have had an influence on Cacciopoli's cool manner and for a moment Cacciopoli admitted that he might have some respect for the Unknown Soldier, but only as a victim, not as a hero. We all agreed on this point and decided that ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier should show the horrors of war to discourage the warmongers, rather than to encourage their aggression. At that point Bernardini and Cacciopoli, despite their profound differences, began to understand each other and became good friends.

I would like to relate a few anecdotes about Professor Cacciopoli, because I don't think I will have occasion to mention him later. Cacciopoli of course was an anti-fascist, but he was anti-fascist in a negative and destructive way. Never did he utter a new idea which might inspire any revolutionary activity. Instead he chalked up whatever petty victories he could. For example during the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, Cacciopoli told his students that, to celebrate, he would give every student a passing grade on his exams--a sort of amnesty. The students left in a frenzy and everyone passed, even if they had no understanding of mathematics. This was Cacciopoli's response to the Fascist obsession with awards rather than culture. But ultimately this decision was nothing short of sabotage.

During the war in Ethiopia the newspapers announced that the Abyssinian natives used *dum dum* bullets. Cacciopoli remarked how strange it was that civilized ethics considered a small bullet a sign of savagery, while large shrapnel was a sign of a highly developed society, that would leave them to those not yet so advanced.

When the antisemitic campaign started, Cacciopoli played another one of his tricks. He asked the students who came to take their exams if they were Jewish, and when they answered "No," he said, "Well,

that's all I need to know . . . You pass." He continued his antics until he was committed to a mental hospital. (I received this news when I was in France and can't vouch for its authenticity. But knowing him, I would not be at all surprised if it were true.) And probably dear old Cacciopoli was kept in the mental hospital simply for having followed Fascist orders with too much zeal.

After my week in Padua I returned to Florence and graduated. So here the story of Mr. Sergio DeBenedetti ends and the story of Dr. Sergio DeBenedetti begins.

* * *

Before closing the book on my University years, I will say something about my official dealings with the Fascist bureaucracy and military authorities. These dealings went through various stages.

As soon as I began to have any political opinions at all, I decided I would have nothing to do with Fascism. I threw out my *avanguardia* youth card and stopped going to their meetings. I was 18 years old at the time and should have been drafted into the army. In fact I had received a few cards at home summoning me for a physical exam, but I never went. Then the police came to the door to deliver the card personally, but I continued to deny my own existence. After about six months of this charade I heard nothing more from them. But I was nonetheless afraid that my name had been written in some black book among a list of suspects. For two years I didn't carry a party card and this gave me great satisfaction.

During my third year at the University I decided to study physics. The only careers available to a physics major were either teaching or research, and hiring for both these careers was in the hands of the government. At the time, to be a state employee in Italy required a certificate proving one's membership in the Fascist Party. I therefore had to choose between my passion for science and my political principles. This problem posed a thorny dilemma, but finally I decided in favor of science. So I crossed the line and obtained my pitchfork and horns from the party secretary. Being a university student, I should have been a member of the GUF, but I was afraid that my name would show up in their records as a, shall we say, unenthusiastic member. With the help of an acquaintance who held a position in a neighborhood Fascist group, I joined his (non-university) group. It was small consolation that my files were similar to many others in my position who held that hated card. That piece of paper burned a hole in my pocket.

I tried to do the very minimum necessary to still allow me to get a job in my chosen field. I never once went to a meeting and never wore the party pin in my lapel, which was theoretically obligatory. A few years later my advisor, Rossi, asked me "Why aren't you wearing your pin?" and I answered, "You know very well why," and the subject was dropped. The regional group began sending me cards to attend meetings and ceremonies. For a long time I ignored them. I didn't want my presence to augment, even infinitesimally, the number of stupid yes-men.

Then I began to receive more threatening letters, requesting me to come in the evening to explain my behavior to superiors whom I had never met. I decided to go because I would not have to wear the Fascist black shirt for this meeting. I had rehearsed some excuses: my uniform was not ready yet; I was a University student and I didn't have to answer to them, but rather to the GUF. The first time I went, the party officers did not show up. I waited a while and then left.

The second time, they weren't there again, and again I wanted to leave. I was told, however, to wait, and so I waited for a long time in rooms that belonged to the party where some boys were playing billiards. Finally I was given instructions to go down some winding hallways until I reached the landing of a back stairwell. I took a seat on a bench next to another man. After a while the man was ushered into a small room where I saw five or six other people. I waited my turn. The stairs were dark and in disrepair. This was a back entrance for the locals of the regional group, opening -at the bottom of the stairs onto a deserted and poorly-lit street.

For a while there was scarcely a sound from the room. I was getting impatient but didn't dare leave. Then I heard voices being raised and the tone of the discussion was getting violent. I started to worry. Soon I heard people moving about, chairs falling, and someone groaning: it sounded like a fight. The door opened for a moment and I saw the person who had been waiting beside me on the floor, the others standing over him kicking him violently. The man on the floor was saying between groans, "Not in

the face," and then the door closed again. I, waiting my own turn, was very afraid, but still didn't dare move for fear that the door below was guarded.

The door to the room reopened and I heard a voice say, "Get a car." Someone left to find the car which had been waiting nearby all this time, as if it was not unusual at this late hour, and from this particular doorway, for people who needed help walking, to leave the building. Finally the man who had been sitting by me was carried out, supported on both sides, and thrown into the cab. I still waited my turn.

To my surprise one of the Fascists said to me, "What are you doing here?" I told them I had received a summons in the mail, but quickly added that I was a university student. Somehow I managed to mention the GUF. The people in the room seemed worried that someone had witnessed their cowardly behavior. They quickly indicated that I should leave and asked nothing more of me. I leapt into the street, relieved at this turn of events. When I returned home I felt like I was waking up from a bad dream.

I quickly joined the GUF where I was admitted without any trouble. I continued to boycott their meetings with the only consequence being some mailed cards reprimanding me or threatening me with suspension or expulsion from the party. A little later when I was in Padua I occasionally took the trouble of answering on University stationery, asking that my absences be excused since I was out of town studying. They didn't bother me after this.

I remember another episode in my relations with the Fascists. In my third year at the University I undertook, with my friend, Mario Jandelli, the task of keeping the books for the Physical Chemistry course given by Professor Rolla. This involved recording materials that had been sold to the students for use in the course. When I started to inquire about how to make copies I quickly learned that the GUF had a monopoly on this type of work. I did not like this situation at all, both because I wanted to avoid dealing with the GUF and because I could see the better part of my earnings go up in smoke.

My reservations became known to the person who was in charge of business matters at the GUF and who pocketed a good part of the profits from these sales. The group denounced me and ordered me to come to a meeting one night. The GUF didn't use clubs. Violence was useless with students, who were mostly good citizens willing to buckle at the threat of expulsion. There was no need for blood: "white terror" was enough.

When I appeared in front of the officers they accused me of saying that "I could care less about the GUF." But the phrase they used, *me ne frego del GUF*, was rather vulgar and very Fascist—a phrase that I personally was careful never to use. So I answered, somewhat haughtily, that I would never use such language. They seemed satisfied with this answer and the matter was dropped.

The sales records, however, were printed by a representative of the GUF. What else could you expect? How could it have been possible, under Fascism, for students to have access to a duplicating machine? They might have been able use it, God forbid, for illegal propaganda!

The Italian Fascist party was based on a completely different principle than that of the Nazis in Germany, or the Communists in Russia. A Nazi or Communist party member was usually someone who was particularly enamored of political authority, who wanted proof of his loyalty, and by virtue of having become a party member, was in a position to attain certain privileges and responsibilities.

In Italy, instead, it was almost obligatory for young people to join the party, and many older people also became members. The party had a long arm that gathered in anyone who was willing to submit to requesting a card. Mussolini's goal was to have the whole country join the party and there was naturally a decrease in the "quality" of members corresponding to the increase in numbers. In the beginning, Fascists sincerely believed in their platform and fought for its realization.

But after taking power, many of the original Fascists became disillusioned. They didn't see any results based on the platform or the accompanying propaganda. The core of the party was made up of people who were only interested in bettering their political position; most of the other members were politically indifferent and had joined only to avoid being hassled. When Matteotti was murdered there was a public outcry and the party subsequently tried to boost its reputation by swelling its ranks. At first those who joined mainly wanted to eat off the backs of the rest of the population: opportunists, corrupt politicians, and status seekers who switched from Masonry to Fascism with perfect ease. Then the pressure increased, to the point where those who were not party members began to lose their rights as

Italian citizens -- for instance by being excluded from applying for government jobs and from jobs in many private businesses.

Most people thought of party membership as a new tax that had to be paid once a year, and attached little importance to it. But in the hands of the Fascist government, the party was a useful tool for controlling the political activity of its citizens. When a person was enrolled in the party he was more or less obligated not to speak ill of the regime, and the government was able to punish those who behaved improperly by expelling them. This punishment had the twofold advantage of being effective without appearing oppressive, either to the Italian public or to foreigners. And it is this complicated web of control and power that allowed Italian Fascism to retain power without resorting to excessive violence.

Military authorities gave me even fewer problems. As the only son of a widowed mother, I did not have to serve more than three months. But every year a directive exempted those in my situation from even this obligation, provided that we completed two years of pre-military training. This consisted of training every Sunday in grey-green shirts under the command of a militia officer. To participate, however, one did not have to be a member of the party, and the final exams were given by the training officer; never did we participate in ceremonies or political demonstrations. The militia officer pressured us to join the militia, but I refused with the excuse that I was a member of the GUF. That was always a good excuse.

In the second year, pre-military service became obligatory and the shirt changed from, the grey-green color for drills, to black, the color of the party. I impudently continued wearing the grey-green shirt from the preceding year, with the only inconvenience of being placed in the back of the platoon during parades. Once they sent home all those in the back of the platoon with the excuse that we weren't in step. It was a petty revenge against those wearing grey-green shirts. For punishment I spent a few days in some barracks filing papers. On that occasion I pricked my finger with a needle and shed a tiny drop of blood. It is the only blood I ever shed for Mussolini's regime and I regret it still.

Chapter 4

Africa and the Institute in Padua

Soon after taking my exams, I returned to Padua to pack crates. Then I went to the Lido in Venice to wait for the day I would leave for Eritrea with the expedition to study cosmic rays.

Finally, toward the beginning of September, 1933, the crates were loaded onto a "mixed use" ship (a merchant ship that also had a few passenger cabins). The ship was headed for the Far East through the Suez Canal. One morning at about five o'clock I went to oversee the transfer of the crates from the Lido, where we had conducted some preliminary experiments, to the commercial port where the ship was docked. Traveling with the crates on the canal boat, I watched as the two gondoliers rowed rhythmically through the city to the other side of town.

It was a glorious day and, given the early hour, it was not too hot. The trip in the gondola made a strong impression on me, so much so that I wrote a few pages about it (who knows where they are now). There was plenty to excite my young mind. Still quite young, I was about to leave on a scientific expedition to a distant country. Leaving Venice, land of civilization, for untamed Africa, I felt a bit like a missionary. I was against colonialism and thought that the Fascists were terrible administrators for their black subjects for whom I felt great compassion. I was glad to have the opportunity to study the situation first hand.

On board, we installed some instruments and immediately started gathering data. A few days later we left Venice headed for Trieste. There I met Eugenio Curiel once again. I walked through the city with him and before we left, he came on board to say good-bye and to see the instruments.

Then the ship stopped for two or three days at a factory pier in Spalato to load cement. We visited the city, which is located on an enchanting strip of the Dalmatian coast. We saw some relics of ancient Italian colonization: a Venetian castle by the docks, as well as an immense palace with superb columns built by the Roman emperor Diocletian. Among these were nested numerous small houses of more recent vintage. Italian ultra-nationalists claimed that these ruins gave Italy the right to annex this part of the coast, but the people were predominantly Slavic. And although Italian was spoken in some of the stores, just outside of town, there was no longer any trace of Italy. On the road from the ship to the city we met peasants wearing the traditional Dalmatian red beret and passed through a very poor and dirty village.

From Spalato we crossed the Mediterranean, reaching Port Said a few days later. The weather was magnificent, and the sea was very calm. On the ship we continued taking measurements, taking turns so that we could collect data throughout the night.

We landed for a few hours in Port Said. This was my first contact with Africa. Naturally, we drank Turkish coffee, bought cigarettes and sent postcards. I entered a store to buy cigarettes and stamps, and I paid what was asked. Some of my traveling companions who were familiar with eastern customs, laughed at my naiveté.

One of them, a doctor, who also wanted to buy cigarettes, used a very different method. He sat with us at a cafe' and waited for someone to approach him with cigarettes to sell. Soon a young Arab man appeared, dressed in the local tunic; his handsome face was tanned, his skin-color was not dark and he had noble features. He asked a much higher price for his cigarettes than I had paid. Before I could gloat over my deal, the doctor offered about ten times less. The Arab did not leave: he approached the doctor

and began bartering by cutting his original price in half. The doctor did not flinch, and insisted on his offer, treating the Arab with what seemed to me to be inhuman contempt. The doctor's behavior repelled me, and my sympathies were with the Arab. The doctor pretended to ignore him, treating him like a stray dog, while he continued to talk to us. The Arab stayed near him. Every once in a while he lowered his price until after about half an hour, the doctor had the cigarettes at the price he had initially offered. This, I learned later, was the normal way to make a purchase in the East.

At about midnight we boarded the ship and began sailing through the Suez Canal. I spent the entire time on the bridge, watching the desert, the canal, and the other ships. There, for the first time, I saw the new German flag with a swastika on the stern of a ship that was traveling in the opposite direction. I must admit that it disturbed me in a way I had not expected. I felt a surge of anger or even hatred.

We also passed a Russian oil tanker, the letters CCCP standing for USSR and a red flag bearing the hammer and sickle flying on the stern. I looked at it with benevolent interest, rather than with approval. For me, everything about Russia was wrapped in mystery. I watched the ship carefully, as if it could explain things I didn't know, as if it were a rare message from an unknown world, from an uncharted land. I knew nothing about the country, but I knew that many people had bravely challenged the persecution of Fascist governments under that flag. I raised my hand and waved a friendly greeting to the Soviet sailors.

We traveled a few more days across the Red Sea. It was hot, and we put on colonial helmets, continuing to take measurements until we were forced to stop because of the heat and humidity.

We arrived at Massawa by night. The pilot boat from the port approached our ship, leaving a phosphorescent trail in its wake. I peered through the darkness in a futile attempt to see the Black Continent. Only a few hundred meters away was Africa, Black Africa, with its wild and primitive fascination. I was excited, and I burned with impatience to set foot in Africa.

Finally, the ship was docked. As though to further delay our landing, a fat colonial official boarded the ship to welcome us. Wearing a white uniform decked out in braids, he informed us that a car and a truck were waiting to bring us and our instruments to Asmara. With the formalities over, we landed. Along the shore there was a brick colonial structure, some public buildings, some banks.

The first thing I noticed were the longshoremen. Oh, how different they were from the beribboned government official! They were thin, and dressed in dirty rags. They squatted on the railroad tracks, perched on their toes, and sitting on their heels. This position seemed uncomfortable and unstable to me. But the local longshoremen were comfortable.

I oversaw the unloading of the crates, urging the porters to be careful, but they did not understand me. Then we went to a hotel to get some sleep. All night a large fan turned in the middle of my room over my bed. Massawa is one of the hottest places on earth.

The next morning we left for Asmara. The road first crossed an arid desert. Then we began to climb towards a plateau. There was little vegetation: a few thin, wild olive trees raised their contorted branches towards the sky. Slowly, as we climbed, it became cooler, and the scenery became more hospitable. Everything looked strange: clothing, faces, plants, rocks and mountains. Packs of monkeys scampered through the hills.

We passed Dogali, a place that had been made famous by one of the many unfortunate incidents of the Italian colonial campaign. A monument had been erected to commemorate the soldiers who had died to conquer this country from which Italy had never derived any gain. The indigenous villages consisted of huts, called *tucul*. Everyone was extremely poor.

In Asmara we entered the house that had been placed at our disposal. Our servant was waiting, a boy of about 15 named Solomon. We began to open the crates and to test the instruments. We went to see the construction of the hut where we were to conduct our experiments. The hut was to be built on an *amba* (hill) a few kilometers from the city, inside a fort. The completion of the little wooden structure would take a few more days.

On one of the first days, when we were still working on the house, a group of local children came to sing in our honor. We came to the doorstep to admire the spectacle, which we enjoyed. Then we distributed *backsheesh*.

The population in the colony of Eritrea is quite varied. On the plateau there are Tigreans, a people

similar to those in northern Abyssinia: with dark skin, but not Negroid, their features more similar to Arabs.

The men wore tight little white pants, over which they wore a white shirt. Over this they wore a white scarf, called a *sciamma*, which was wrapped like a Roman toga. All the clothing is cotton, and not ugly when clean. However, it looked quite poor when compared to the more solemn clothing of the other people. The *sciamma*, for example, did not reach down to the feet, but went only to the waist. The feet were generally bare, the head shaved and uncovered. Shoes and hat indicated a social and economic position quite above the average.

The women wore long tunics of white cotton. The girls braided their hair and tied the braids around their heads like a crown. Married women had a complicated hairdo: their hair was braided close to the skin in little parallel braids that went from the forehead to the nape of the neck -- at the nape of the neck the hair was left free and formed a voluminous rippled mane. The hairdo was not ugly, but it was soaked in grease, which did not make it particularly attractive and smelled bad.

The children were carried on their mothers' backs in a kind of sack with holes for their arms, legs and heads, as though they were in a saddle. Often young girls carried their younger brothers and sisters in this way. Everyone was thin -- maybe it was their natural physique, maybe it was the climate, but certainly there was little to eat. Occasionally a local official was fat. The indigenous leaders wore a black cape made out of light silk, with gold and silver embroidery. They seemed to be ceremonial capes, since I never saw them worn on the streets.

It is strange how easily one can be deceived about the importance of various episodes of one's life! Before writing these memoirs, I thought that my travels were the most interesting part of my life. Now I realize that I prefer writing about details that I thought were insignificant at the time.

This surprises me. Am I not able to appreciate what I see? I don't think that is the problem. But the tourist's or traveler's impressions are necessarily superficial and uninteresting. To know a country, to appreciate it, to love it or to hate it, one must live and work there, side by side with the local people, sharing little everyday problems. One must allow oneself to be penetrated by the local environment as by a slow process of osmosis. A quick glance is not enough to fully appreciate the beauty of the landscape or of a monument. Landscape and monuments are closely bound to the life of the people. The landscape influences the local culture, and monuments are its product. And culture is not revealed by reading a book -- culture is in the cadence of speech, the manner of walking, the gestures, I might almost say, the breath of the people.

The Egyptian pyramids, the mosques, the bazaars in Cairo, the desert scenery, the mountains of Eritrea, the customs of the indigenous population, are to me, only partial views of an unfinished painting. My impressions are incomplete. Therefore it is best that I not attempt to compete with *The National Geographic* or with *Il Millione*. I will limit myself to commenting on a few things that stood out for me, without generalizing.

* * *

In the two months I spent in Asmara I began to understand how the Italians solved the problem of colonialist relations between the races. Italians have always thought that Italy was overpopulated. Therefore, unlike the French, Italians did not try to assimilate people of color who were part of their colonial acquisitions. On the other hand, Italians could not allow themselves the luxury of creating a completely separate society, like the English, because it was too expensive to transport and maintain the families of Italian officials and administrators. So the Italians established a regime in which, like the English, the white race was predominant and did not mix socially with the locals, but it permitted sexual relations with the local women.

This state of affairs suited both the Italian and the Tigrean cultures. In fact, even in their homeland, the Italian men were in the habit of satisfying their "bull complexes" without involving their affections and without making serious commitments. The Tigreans practiced a form of marriage that was easily dissolved, allowing their women to make temporary, but respectable, unions. Also, like many other countries where

there are people of color, the locals admired lighter complexions, even among themselves. The women did not need to be asked twice to become concubines of Italian officials, with whom, in addition to some material advantages, they gained increased prestige in their own society.

But a *madama* -- this was the name given the indigenous consorts -- was not admitted into white society. She did not visit the families of the husband's friends, and she could not enter the hotels and restaurants that were reserved for Italians. Separation was complete, except in bed.

I met one of these *madamas* when I visited an official from the topographic services. He was camped out near the Ethiopian border in order to map the region. He lived in a tent with his *madama*. He was the only white man there. His *ascari* soldiers probably had their wives with them, as was the local custom. The *madama* was a good woman, who welcomed us in a spontaneous and courteous way.

We also got to know, among others, an old colonial official who had lived in Eritrea a long time and who preferred to spend his retirement years in Asmara rather than return to Italy. Having lived in Eritrea for so long, he loved the country and its people, and had written several books about them.

One day we met him on the road. He was accompanied by a distinguished and attractive young mulatto, one of the daughters by his *madama*, a tangible result of his love for the people of the country. We invited him to a meal at the hotel where we usually ate, "together with the *signorina*." He came, but the *signorina* did not, because she was not permitted. It is not clear to me what the future held for these mulattoes, educated as Italians, but not admitted to Italian society. Many of the girls became prostitutes, or, at best, they also became *madamas*.

I did not see any serious effort being made to settle Italians in the colony. Italians do not have a pioneering spirit. If Italians emigrate, they prefer to go to a country that offers them a job, than to a land where everything still has to be organized. The government had built a few experimental agricultural stations, and a small number of plantations. But there were no small farms of the kind that put down roots in the soil.

In spite of their complexes, the Italians have been less effective in populating the world than the cold-blooded Anglo-Saxons. I am sorry to offend the pride of my co-nationals, but modern Italians, as opposed to the ancient Romans, have not had much success in exporting their genetic or cultural patrimony.

* * *

After collecting our data, we spent two weeks travelling around the colony in a government car. We returned home with a stop in the Sudan and disembarked at Port Suez. Crossing the desert to Cairo by car, we then boarded a train to Alexandria. The pyramids did not impress me as much as the New York skyscrapers did later. But I was impressed by the treasures of Tutankhamen and some of the Egyptian sculptures which taught me how refined the art and culture of ancient Egyptian had once been.

We returned to Venice at the end of December. Entering the *laguna* on the "Ganges" (8000 metric tons), we saw the city blanketed in snow. From there, I went straight to Florence to spend a few weeks there before going to Padua where I had been hired to work at the University.

I went to see old friends, feeling the pride of a young man who has just returned from a scientific expedition overseas. For a few weeks I resumed my usual Florentine way of life.

One evening I had a surprise. I was having dinner at Giuliano's house when a phone call from home informed me that Eugenio was waiting for me in my room. I knew that Eugenio was teaching Latin in a high school in Montepulciano, in Tuscany. It was strange for Eugenio to be teaching Latin, as he did not know it well. But his aversion to science had impelled him to look for a different kind of work. He taught in a private school, run, I think, by priests. At that time, if I remember correctly, Eugenio did not want to join the Fascist party so he could not be employed in the public sector. He was confused at the time, trying to decide what he wanted to do. He did not want to compromise.

I found him waiting in my room, looking more unkempt than usual: his shoes had been worn longer than the leather could possibly last. His suit was dirty and worn. He told me that he had lost his position as a Latin teacher for reasons that were not clear to me -- probably because he was not a member of the party, because of his strange behavior, and because of his limited knowledge of Latin. He had a ticket for Trieste,

but no money. I offered to let him sleep at my house, but here I was in for another surprise -- Eugenio was not alone. He was with the friend (not a girlfriend) with whom he had lived in Milan. The friend was waiting for him at the train station.

We went to find Eugenio's friend. He was a strange person, thin, with glasses. He was carrying a violin. Their baggage consisted of a few old suitcases and a few odd objects, among which I especially remember a box of shoe wax. I don't know why the shoe wax was not in a suitcase. The presence of this friend seemed strange, but I gave him some money so that he could get a room in a hotel.

I never learned who this person was, what he thought, or what his relationship was to Eugenio. Eugenio told me that he was a violin teacher who wanted to get a degree so he could teach in elementary school. Eugenio had taken him as a student, and supported him financially.

I don't know how this person had been able to charm Eugenio. Obviously there was something the two of them did not want known. I think that the priests of the school at Montepulciano thought that the relationship between these men was not only strange, but also sexually irregular, and that this was one of the reasons that Eugenio had been dismissed. For my part, I cannot believe it. However, I would be very much surprised, even now, if I were to learn that their friendship was political. This strange person must have believed in some anthroposophical doctrine which had managed to capture Eugenio's confused imagination.

Eugenio and I climbed the sacred hill of Arcetri to see if he could find a job there. For a few days it seemed that he might get a grant at the astrophysics observatory. Given his need, he would have accepted it. I, as well as his other friends at Arcetri, told him we would support his candidacy on the condition that he left his "friend." This made him furious, and he told us to stay out of his private life, and that if he earned money, he was free to do what he liked with it. In the end, the grant never materialized, and Eugenio left for Trieste. I advised him to stop in Venice to see Rossi, and to ask for his advice and support. He did so, and was appointed to a position the University of Padua, where I met him later.

* * *

I myself left for Padua in January, 1934 where I spent the rest of the academic year as Rossi's assistant. In the old laboratory I patiently conducted scientific research, and helped the younger students handle the more basic equipment.

I was very hesitant with my students. I remembered too well how recently I had been sitting on the other side of the teacher's desk, trying to disrupt classroom discipline. I remembered how classes, especially those taught by young assistants, could become wild and noisy. I decided this would not happen in my classes. I began by treating the students drily and severely so that they would not become over-confident. As I was younger than many of them, I thought I had to stay aloof to keep discipline. If someone dared to talk while I was speaking, I asked him if he had anything to say. The student, embarrassed, would quit talking.

Eventually, I noticed that this method was not the best, so I began to treat students as colleagues which suited me much better. Nonetheless, I cannot complain about lack of discipline in my classes. This could partly be because Venetian students are in general less sardonic and less exuberant than Florentine students. But I believe that most students are relatively disciplined, and try to learn what is being taught when treated cordially by a teacher who has the courage to look them straight in the eye.

Unfortunately, I was not teaching classes that were very interesting. As the youngest person in the laboratory, and the last one hired, I had to conform to a long-established tradition by which students had to learn to weigh precisely, and measure temperatures meticulously, without knowing anything about the fascinating foundations of science. Later on I tried to change the "physics exercises" so they would promote an appreciation of natural laws, rather than simply develop good measuring techniques.

In Padua, my best friends were Eugenio Curiel and Ugo Fiorentino. Eugenio had received a small grant that was enough to support him for a few months. He still lived out of town with his mysterious friend. Later he found a position as an assistant of *meccanica razionale*. The professor of mechanics, Prof. Laura, was aware of my friend's wanderings, and had taken a liking to him without knowing him well.

Since he had no assistant, he offered the position to Eugenio, who temporarily abandoned his aversion to science. But Eugenio no longer conducted experiments. He rarely thought about science outside of his teaching duties, and then he was interested exclusively in questions of formal mathematics or philosophy. Prof. Laura was an older professor, with a generous spirit, remarkable intelligence, and a good understanding of the human spirit. He felt that at his age it was useless to continue doing research. For a while, both the professor and the assistant worried that the other might require him to work. When they realized that their worries were completely unfounded, they became good friends.

Eugenio lived austerely. Once an editor sent him a letter addressed: Father Curiel, Mathematics Seminary. When this became known, all his friends teased him by nicknaming him "Father".

Ugo was studying law, and thought he would graduate with a degree in Philosophy of Law. For a while Ugo and Eugenio did not meet. Eugenio thought that since Ugo was my friend, he would be "philosophically" uninteresting. Ugo thought that since Eugenio was an assistant, Eugenio had superior standing, and limited his relationship to greeting him respectfully, touching his hat. Knowing that both had wide-ranging interests and both were anti-Fascists, I tried to encourage them to become friends. But for almost a year my efforts were in vain.

Ugo was one of those people whose actions did not always correspond to his logic. His actions were saner than his ideas. He sported an assyro-babylonian beard, which earned him the nickname of Italo Balbo. His dress was slovenly, and he had a well-known horror of water as a solvent for the dirt that accumulated on his body. He looked down on bourgeois conventions to the extent that he sometimes seemed vulgar. But I liked his vulgarity because it was natural and sane.

His most firmly-held theory dealt with sexual relations. There were three people (maybe the only three on this earth) who shared this theory: Ugo Fiorentino, Iona Prato and Renato Mieli. They were all of Egyptian origin, and they had created this masterpiece of thought while resting in the hot afternoons in Alexandria. Maybe as a reaction to the hot climate and the luxuriant nature of their birthplace, they believed that all emotion was immoral, or at least amoral. They thought that sex was one of the lowest types of bodily functions, and compared it to the act of "ridding the body of excess weight", to paraphrase Boccaccio. Anyone interested in understanding this theory can read Ugo's book.

Through Ugo, I got to know other students in the Department of the Philosophy of Law. Among these were Enrico Opocher and Ettore Luccini.

* * *

That year I lived in a *pensione* run by an older lady. She fed us frugally. The place was uninteresting, and lacked some of the basic elements of comfort. With no running water in my room, I washed with water from a jug. Every morning a jug of hot water was brought to my room so that I could shave. There was no bath in the house, so I had to go to the public baths if I wanted to shower. On the other hand, the house was well heated, with central heating. It was the best I could afford.

By economizing on cigarettes and coffee I was able to save enough money to go to Venice or Florence on Sundays. In Padua I had a few good friends, but not a circle of friends, so the trips to Florence and Venice were necessary to relieve the loneliness.

I had visited Venice after high school, but I was probably too young to appreciate it during this first visit. My tastes were not well enough developed. After a few days, I had become bored by the quiet of the canals and the narrow streets. I missed modern life, with its noise and its traffic. At that time, I had not yet come out of my "shell", and I had only a superficial view of life. I remember once, walking by myself, I turned onto a street that ended on a canal: I was indignant at having to turn back since there was no bridge across the canal, and I cursed the irrationality of Venetian topography.

This time I was very happy to wander and get lost among the streets, the squares, the bridges and the canal walks. I realized that even the most modest house was beautiful in some small way; that every canal had its own charm, and that from every bridge one had an almost exalted view. I no longer complained about the absence of exterior signs of contemporary society, delighted to absorb the ambience of an ancient civilization from which modern man had much to learn. I used to say that, after working the entire week, I

allowed myself the luxury of having a dream Sunday in Venice.

One night, walking with Eugenio in an unfamiliar neighborhood, we found the street blocked by a red brick wall. We were probably already engaged in an animated conversation about history or art, and that red wall appeared unreal, or supernatural. The narrow street that ended so abruptly dismayed us, like a bad dream. Why? Because the Venetian surroundings had transported us beyond rational thought, because we had become accustomed to seeing something beautiful at every step -- a window, a door, a balcony, a bridge, a gondola. We responded to every stone and every corner as if it were a living creature. The red barrier across the street was not simply a brick wall. It was a strong malignant spirit blocking our passage. The wall made us shudder, and we quickly turned back.

Then we saw a long street, maybe narrower than usual, at the end of which we could see the star-lit sky. We headed down this alley, filling its entire width, and walked through the shadows towards the vertical stripe of sky. We walked a long time, as if irresistibly attracted by the starlight, until we reached the lagoon facing the island of Murano. This is the kind of adventure that Venice has in store for those who love and understand her.

* * *

In Venice I often met Laura P. I had met her the previous summer at the Lido. I enjoyed her company, and her conversation was interesting. We met often throughout that winter. She was a painter and she sang. I don't know how well she sang, since I never heard her, but she painted very well. She was a distinguished and rich bourgeois, but her paintings did not reveal her origins.

Mostly she painted children. Except for some portraits of rich or noble children that she painted for pay, her models were usually children of the streets, poor and often hungry. Her children were dressed in rags, and had a sad, but determined expression. Her drawing skills were strong. I have a vivid memory of a painting of mother and child, which was the one I liked best.

I often went to Laura's house. It was one of those Venetian houses with a little hidden door in a dark alleyway that opens unexpectedly onto spacious rooms and bright windows -- a house with an irrational floorplan that is fascinating because it's full of surprises.

Her family was normal, or rather, banal. They were so conservative that she was not allowed to go out alone with me in the evenings. She was not happy at home, and she was lonely. The relationships within her family were dignified and boring. Her brother had friends in the Venetian aristocracy, and often came home with a swarm of noisy and insignificant young people.

Laura was a few years older than I, but we enjoyed each other's company. We were best friends. Maybe, at times, we felt that we were more than just friends, but we never admitted it to each other. Now that I think back on it, I wonder if it was because I was shy. But I don't think so. I had too much respect and esteem for her, and I would have felt that by flirting, I would ruin our friendship. To go beyond mere flirting would not have been possible because of her prejudices, and because I wanted to avoid making commitments of any kind.

So we spent long afternoons in conversation -- we were never at a loss for a subject -- or we would explore Venice together, without exhausting its innumerable sources of beauty. My friends from Padua were not aware of the nature of my relations with the Venetian bourgeoisie, and made fun of my visits to Laura P. It was at this time that Ugo Fiorentino began to call me *salottista*. Soon he also became Laura's good friend, and began to visit with her. Still, the nickname *salottista* stuck.

In the summer I worked at night and often spent days at the Lido. I left Padua in the morning and arrived in Venice at about ten. I enjoyed a ferry ride on the Grand Canal, or a walk along the Mercerie. I allowed myself a few minutes of ecstatic contemplation in St. Mark's Square, and then boarded the ferry for the Lido. On the boat I often met friends who were also heading out for a swim, and I joined them on the beach. I was a guest in one of the first row of cabins along the beach, in a section that was frequented by the best of Italian society. The Lido is internationally famous, but it also attracts Italian intellectuals. Its proximity to Venice with its art treasures and cultural attractions was a draw for professors, professionals and artists, who met their Venetian friends on the beach by the *Hotel des Bains*.

There I met the Rossis, the Lombrosos, and the Ternis. Ugo Fiorentino and his friend Enrico Capocher were among the young people who came. Sometimes even the austere "Father" Curiel came. He was an excellent swimmer, and was losing some of the clumsiness and embarrassment of his youth.

I felt very much at ease in this group. The young people in the front-row cabins at the *Bains* were generally antifascist. In some cases, among the children of intellectuals, this was more by family tradition and snobbery than the result of political insight. But this community of ideas helped me feel more comfortable in company. During the long afternoon hours, we lay in the sun, or walked along the beach in pleasant conversation, on subjects that were more or less profound, on all aspects of human knowledge: philosophy, science, politics, love...

One summer morning I arrived on the beach at the Lido. My friends were excitedly reading a newspaper.

"Did you see the news?" they asked me.

I had not seen. The Nazis had killed Dolfuss.

"One less dictator!" was my reaction. "They are beginning to kill each other. Let's hope they keep it up!"

Mussolini sent troops to the Brenner Pass. We feared war. But on the whole, we all, even the antifascists, approved of Mussolini's move. We would have been united in opposing the danger of a strong German state along our Alpine border. Both Fascists and antifascists knew that the Anschluss had to be avoided at all costs. For a few days the spirit of Alberto di Giussano and the Lombard League was in the air.

Towards the end of August, returning from a field trip in the Alps, I met the troops that had been sent to guard the Austrian frontier. The soldiers marched with a heavy step, without enthusiasm, as if they were shouldering the duty of every Italian: to defend the valley of the Po from the Nazi German menace. I saw cannons and light tanks. I was moved by the sight of this army moving along the tortuous Alpine roads. Was this "my army" that had gone to defend "my country" against possible danger?

Maybe there was a psychological element to my emotion that is latent in all people: the admiration of brute force. I was certainly not enthusiastic about the principle of nationalism, yet I had a knot in my throat watching the army marching close to the national border when the country was in danger, even though it was under orders of a government I hated.

If I think about it, I can understand how people kill and are killed in war.

But Mussolini was a traitor even to Alberto di Giussano. The troops were withdrawing. They would not have stopped the Anschluss. The enemy would have eventually descended into the valleys of Italy.

* * *

In September 1934 an "electro-radio-biology" convention was held in Venice. "Electro-radio-biology" is a science that does not exist. It was invented by a quack doctor who had discovered certain mythical-genetic rays. These rays properly disappeared a few years later. Franco Rasetti has written a critical and very humorous article on the subject in the Italian Encyclopedia.

But the quack doctor had impressed the Fascist government, and was given funds to organize an international conference in grand style, complete with receptions, lights on the Grand Canal, and other tourist attractions. Few people can refuse an invitation to Venice in September. So the best names in physics and biology came from all over the world.

If I remember correctly, this was the pitiful occasion when I saw poor Fermi give the inaugural address in the public gardens. He was dressed in embroidered academic regalia, complete with dagger and cocked hat. He stood in front of a statue of His Majesty Victor Emmanuel III seated on a throne.

In spite of these unfortunate incidents I felt like I was walking on cloud nine, or living for a week on Mount Olympus. I found myself among famous scientists whose names I knew only from books or journals, many of them were Nobel laureates.

And these gods from Mount Olympus behaved simply and naturally in private! In the evening Fermi removed his uniform and joined the young people at the Lido. I remember him at a stall at the fair, intent on

throwing rings over the neck of some bottles. Maybe my greatest triumph was to find myself in the same gondola as A. H. Compton. In my poor English, I managed to introduce myself and to convey to him that I had done some experiments with cosmic rays. He said he had read about them in the *Physical Review*.

On this, and similar occasions, I realized that the more a person has done, the less he gloats. The nobodies and the mediocrities have to act aloof to impress others with their own importance. Fermi said, "So-and-so has to show off while he is alive, because nobody will remember him after he is dead." But Fermi was wrong: that person was wrong to gloat while he was alive; even after his death no-one would remember him!

Aside from the lack of pretension, I was impressed by another characteristic of the world of real scientists: the absence of national borders. For the first time, I came into contact with the international sentiments that unite physicists from all over the world, with ties that are well beyond those imposed by a common education and professional correctness.

Everyone has heard that science does not recognize borders. But the leap from banal phrases to real life came as a surprise. These men were interested in the same problems; they reasoned in the same way; they had similar tastes and habits; and they knew enough languages to be able to communicate with each other. Maybe the world's diplomats could learn from them -- but first they must learn to remove their cocked hats.

After the "electro-radio-biology" meeting, a philosophy meeting was held in Padua. My philosopher friends attended that meeting, and probably were as excited as I had been in Venice. During these meetings a schism formed within our group, between the philosophers and the scientists. A feeling of reciprocal misunderstanding developed, and we began to disparage each other's attitudes.

It was difficult to understand why my philosopher friends were all Idealists, and why they attributed meanings to words that contradicted what I had learned in primary school. For example, to them "concrete" meant something like the thinking spirit or pure thought. "Abstract" referred to the external tangible world, which could be studied by "empirical methods" which they considered insignificant.

I, naively, had been left behind in the belief that something "concrete" can be touched, and something "abstract" cannot be touched. So I had trouble keeping up with the philosophers. In addition, what they called empiricism was for me the only way of understanding anything. Maybe it was only understanding, and not the truth, but it was a cumulative form of understanding, where all future progress must be based solidly on prior understanding. Someone once said that he could see far because he was a pygmy sitting on a giant's shoulders. This is something a philosopher can never do.

I have never tried to name my philosophical position. It's useless to associate oneself with a school of philosophy, because there's no guarantee of seeing further when sitting on another philosopher's shoulders. But if I were forced to choose, I would say that I am closer to being a materialist and a positivist.

It's not clear to me how or why all my friends had become Idealists. Even Curiel said he belonged to this school. Sometimes I thought that he made this claim to undermine the suspicion that he was a dialectical materialist.

It would be interesting to study more carefully the reasons for the development of the idealistic school of thought in Italy. Benedetto Croce was very influential. By claiming to be an antifascist, he had become popular in certain intellectual circles. Among these there was a certain sense of antifascist solidarity of dubious value. Though an antifascist, Croce was also a royalist. On a global scale, rather than an Italian scale, he would be considered a reactionary. But in Italy these details were hard to discern (at least I did not see them), and I remember dreaming of an Italian republic with Croce as president.

On the other hand, Gentile was the official Fascist philosopher. Not that one could take Fascist philosophy seriously. Italian Fascism, unlike German Nazism, never had a philosophy or a program. Mussolini came to power on a socialist platform. But once in charge, his only program was the satisfaction of his own ambition. His program was expressed in the phrase, "we are here and here we will stay." What he did was not important, as long as he endured.

Rosenberg's mysticism, as well as his pagan ideas about race, were unknown in Italy. They did not suit the Italian character. Italians are born and live under the warm Mediterranean sun. They are strangers to shadowy, romantic Wagnerian fantasies.

Fascism was neither mystical nor idealistic. It was dressed up in idealism only to oppose Marxist materialism and because it was ashamed of its philosophic inadequacy. I don't understand how idealistic philosophers, followers of Gentile, could play this game. Maybe it's because I do not understand; maybe it's because there's nothing to understand.

Chapter Five A Year in Paris (1935)

Shortly after arriving in Padua at the beginning of 1934, as I walked through the administrative offices at the University, I saw a poster announcing a competition for a fellowship for three years' study abroad. The competition was sponsored by the University of Naples and open to those who had received a degree the previous year. I felt that this competition was designed just for me, since I had been lucky enough to have gone on the expedition to Eritrea and few other graduates could claim to have had a similar experience.

I was also lucky to be in contact with a professor in Naples. I had been asked to deliver an instrument built by A.H. Compton in the US, to be used for measuring cosmic rays in different parts of the world. I wrote to ask this professor if I should enter the competition and he encouraged me to do so.

I sent my application and in spring, when I went to Naples to take the examination, I arrived with the boxes containing the American instrument. Before the exam, I assembled the instrument and got it working perfectly. I was therefore received more as a colleague than as a student. My examiners welcomed me, offering me coffee in the lab, showing me their instruments and their most prized devices. The exam took place in a friendly atmosphere and I won the fellowship. Professor Carrelli, who was on the committee, wrote to Rossi praising me, and from then on I was in Prof. Carrelli's good graces.

To me, going abroad meant going to Paris, and going to Paris meant the Curie Lab. Rossi wrote a complimentary recommendation for me to Joliot, and Joliot replied that he would be pleased to have me. I was to leave the following autumn.

The idea of spending time in Paris was very attractive. I would be able to work in one of the most famous laboratories. I would live in the *Ville Lumiere*, which at the time was the cultural capital of the world. Best of all, I would finally breathe the air of a free country, become acquainted with the ambience of a democratic nation, and be able to judge its virtues and defects through personal experience.

France is by definition the land of liberty, the land of the 1789 revolution. France is the second homeland of every intellectual, the "latin sister" which exerted a fascination on Italian liberals, a place with similar customs and language, but with democratic governance and a greater tradition of freedom. The thunderings of the Fascist newspapers against French democracy served only to increase our sympathetic feelings toward this country.

So, with great anticipation, I boarded the train for Paris in the beginning of December 1934. I arrived at the Gare de Lyon at about nine in the evening and, after finding a room in a small nearby hotel, I immediately began to explore the city with the help of the maps in the Metro. Having already visited many cathedrals, I went to Bastille Square, since of these, there is only one.

I was a bit disappointed because the square was not architecturally interesting, but this did not dampen my excitement. I walked around the square, aware that with every step, I was treading on the soil where that hated prison once stood, symbol of oppression and darkness. With every step echoing on the

deserted sidewalk, I rejoiced that the Bastille was gone. I imagined the revolutionary furor of the Parisians in the act of tearing down the prison walls. And on a tall column in the middle of the square stood the angel of liberty.

The next morning I bought a newspaper and a map of Paris. With the help of the map I walked to the Quartier Latin. I still remember the route I took. I crossed the Seine at Pont Henry IV (I think), then I took the Boulevard St. Germain. At the Cluny monastery I turned left and walked up Boulevard St. Michel . . . The Boul' Mich' which later I came to know so well.

Arriving at the Curie Laboratory, I spoke to Joliot, then left to find a room. I ate lunch in a small restaurant on rue St. Jacques, trying to order a meal that looked French, and trying to hide my uneasiness at eating a meal without pasta. I walked through the Luxembourg Gardens as the December sun peered from between the low gray clouds like a pale white disk. I compared it to the warm Italian sun, which always shines brightly when not completely hidden by clouds, and never looks like an insipid white plate.

The third pension I tried seemed all right: Pension Parisiana, university clientele, telephone, elevator, 4, rue Tournefort. Rue Tournefort was one of the small streets behind the Pantheon that still retains the fascination of ancient Paris. It was a quiet corner where children played ball in the street, rarely interrupted by passing cars. It had an intimate feel, which can only be found in old cities. Rue Tournefort was located between a student neighborhood and a working class neighborhood.

Just a few steps from my door was Place de la Contrescarpe, which I have often seen in paintings in expositions abroad. The square was like a village lost in the heart of Paris, surrounded by some old houses with a few trees and a monumental old public urinal in the center. It was the end of the line for the S bus, which waited there until it was time to leave the square.

Parisians are very proud of their buses, and they consider them very practical, but in any other city they would have been sold for scrap or put in a museum. They looked as if they were designed in the most aerodynamically inefficient way possible. They were painted an awful green color and had a platform in the rear where passengers are exposed to the weather. The only entrance was in the back, not on the side, and it was used both to enter and to exit.

But after living in Paris for a while, one grows fond of its buses, and doesn't want them changed. I became as fond of the back platform as of the balcony from which I first looked upon the world at home. The bus looks like an old but harmless giant that enjoys lounging in the quiet shade of the Place de la Contrescarpe before launching into the traffic of the city center.

There were some modest cafes and bistros around the square. They were places where the neighborhood men -- workers, shopkeepers, fruit and vegetable vendors, newspaper sellers -- gathered in the evening for a glass of red wine. They took every opportunity to bad-mouth the government, and to compliment a beautiful woman. The conversation was always intelligently cheerful and witty. Public opinion is formed in the bistros. Everyone had carefully read a newspaper, and everybody had an opinion on news of the day.

In Paris everyone carries a newspaper, either in his hand or in his pocket. In the metro, in the bus, at the cafe, people checked what newspaper the other fellow was carrying. Those who read the same paper, or one with a similar political slant, exchanged looks of sympathy and felt a sort of friendship toward each other. Towards others they are indifferent or hostile. In both rich and poor neighborhoods, when two people met, they talked politics, as in England and America people talk about the weather. They carefully tested a newcomer's opinions, then tried to present their own point of view and tried to influence the other person with a choice word. After ten minutes they are engaged in animated conversation, and know whether they are friends or foes.

4 rue Tournefort: on one side of the street was this little French world; on the other, the international world of a major university. Between the two lived some fifty pensioners who hailed from around the world, drawn in by the fascination of La Ville Lumiere.

I liked the Pension Parisiana at first sight, and during the entire time I spent in Paris, I always lived there. I didn't have much money, so I took an incredibly small room, preferring it to a larger room in a place I liked less. I had all the modern conveniences: hot and cold water, good heating, and a telephone on the landing near my room. A private bath is a luxury few people could afford in Paris.

I ate my meals in the dining room where there were several small tables and a central table that accommodated about six people. I was destined for this table as were all the other guests who were living alone. Slowly I got to know the other diners. They changed once in a while, but I became friends with those who stayed on.

There was a Romanian student who was preparing for a Doctor of Law degree, a Russian preparing for a doctorate in literature, a French engineering student, two brothers from the Republic of San Salvador, and an Austrian pseudo-student who gambled on races and talked about horses. All nationalities were represented in the dining room at the Pension Parisiana: from Persia to Brazil, from Siam to America, from Yugoslavia, Poland, Sweden, Mexico, Australia, and Martinique. Generally they were all young and educated. They could clearly explain their opinions about the problems of their own countries, and the international situation from their own national perspectives.

At the lab, the situation was the same. Shortly after I arrived, I was shown the various rooms and was introduced to the various "workers:" Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Chinese, Persians and Portuguese.

Many of my ideas about international politics were formed in this environment, where I was able to gather first-hand information about various countries. In Paris I understood how France and England could appear to be the bulwark of liberty and the hope of salvation to a Czech, while seeming dangerously aggressive and exploitative to a Burmese. There I learned that Persian women no longer wore the veil, and that a railroad had been built between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. There I learned that there was a dictatorship in Portugal and that its peasants were starving. There I learned the difference between the Serbs and the Croats, and the antagonisms between the Romanians and the Hungarians.

Above all, I learned there that men from all over the world can understand each other, they can become friends or develop hatreds just like people who are born and live on the same block. The peasants are poor everywhere, the workers are exploited everywhere, the rich eat well everywhere while worrying that they might not always eat so well. People of good faith and good will all speak the same language, have the same hopes for peace, justice and liberty, no matter their country of origin.

At that time France had a rightist government that took over after the riots of Feb. 6, 1934. This government ruled against the will of the majority, due to the self-serving attitude of the radical party. While I lived in France the heads of government were the people responsible for the sad demise of the French republic: Flandin and Laval.

The people protested and grumbled. They tried to return to power using the legal means allowed by the constitution – by organizing the Popular Front which succeeded in the following elections. It was an ephemeral victory which came to naught, due to the weakness of its leaders and the strength of the reactionary forces.

I started sampling the newspapers. I read *l'Oeuvre* (the Worker) and the *Populaire* (the People). In the *Oeuvre* I especially liked the articles by La Fouchardiere whose killer satire showed no respect for authority. Some of his phrases stuck with me, even though they were not terribly profound, because they expressed truths that I had never heard before. "The only serious war is civil war because it is fought for principles: it is so serious that the opponents do not respect their prisoners of war." Genevieve Tabuis' gossip (she was the concierge for international politics) interested me, and I read the *Oeuvre* during the whole of my first stay in Paris.

During the first weeks I bought the *Populaire* several times, but it did not interest me because it went in too much detail about local politics and didn't have enough articles on the international situation. Occasionally, I bought *l'Humanité* on Sunday when it was sold on the Place de la Contrescarpe ("Comrades, read *l'Humanité*, the paper of the Communist Party.") I didn't like *l'Humanité* at all, partly because of my opinion of Communism, but mainly because, since it was directed toward workers instead of intellectuals, its rigid and dogmatic style did not conform to my tastes. I never bought extreme right-wing newspapers. Sometimes, in the living room of the boarding house, I found *l'Action Francaise* which, in conformance with my perspective, I found disgusting. In the evening I read *Le Temps*.

Once a week I bought *Giustizia e Liberta*. I bought it stealthily, always afraid that someone was spying on me, quickly turning back the front page to hide the showy red title. I took the newspaper back

to my little room where I could savor this forbidden fruit of Italian antifascism in the quiet of my own room. Then, after reading it from front to back, I jealously conserved its taste.

While I read newspapers to try to orient myself in the world of politics, I remained fearful of the oppression of the Italian Fascists. I could not believe that I was free to express my ideas without courting danger. I was always afraid that the mysterious tentacles of the Ovla could reach me in my Parisian sojourn and at first, I made sure to watch my words. Once, one of my fellow pensioners asked me why I was reading leftist newspapers, and I answered that to defend one's country, one had to know one's enemies.

But little by little I told everyone what I thought. I first began to speak freely at the Institute whose members I trusted because of their scientific interests. Later, I spoke my mind anywhere.

Despite the many new people I was meeting, and the new world to explore, I was somewhat homesick during my first days in Paris. Although I had already traveled some, this was my first time abroad for an extended period, away from my childhood home. I did not have friends yet and the language was not easy, although I was able to explain myself and to understand almost everything. I remember being alone in the evening in my little room, and asking myself, "What in the world am I doing here?" This is a natural reaction for a person who has left his homeland, even for the best of reasons.

* * *

During my first few weeks in Paris, I got to know Franco Venturi. An Italian friend had given me his address and I contacted him in order to meet with an antifascist émigré. During my first trip to France I knew no one else but him, whom I saw every month or two. Maybe it was due to excessive caution on my part, but I didn't want to have too many contacts among the émigrés, as I had an Italian fellowship, and I thought that I would be returning to Italy.

Venturi belonged to the Justice and Liberty movement. He was about twenty years old at the time I met him. His father had been an art history professor in Turin who had left Italy because he wouldn't take the loyalty oath to the regime, as was required of all university professors. He had moved to France, bringing his family. Franco had thus left Italy while still very young, before having any opportunity to be active in Italian politics.

Franco was sorry that his well-known antifascist activities did not allow him to return to Italy where he could work in the underground. His sincerity became evident from his subsequent conduct. Like all political émigrés, he listened eagerly to my news of Italy, and to my impressions of life there. I saw that the political émigrés who lived as exiles were like fish out of water. All their thoughts and all their activities were directed towards Italy and news from home was like a breath of fresh air to a dying man. During the winter I received a letter from some friends in Padua saying that they had become editors of the G.U.F. newspaper. They asked if I would write an article about my impressions of France. This letter surprised me a great deal since it was signed by a person whom I had considered a serious antifascist. I replied indignantly that I was not in the habit of collaborating with that kind of newspaper, leaving to them to decide whether by "that kind of newspaper" I meant a Fascist newspaper or a non-scientific one.

My surprise showed how little I understood about antifascist propaganda at that time. I later learned that my friends from Padua had remained antifascist and that they wanted to use the G.U.F. paper for their own propaganda. They hoped that I would write an article describing French university life, and the current thinking among French youth. An article of this kind, even if it began with "long live Fascism" and ended with "long live Il Duce," would have been useful to students in Padua. It would have made them think about new problems, and about solutions that were not imposed by the Fascists.

I did not rise to the occasion, because I did not understand what was needed. But even if I had understood, I don't know what I would have done. I believe that the methods being used in this situation should only be used when there is absolutely no hope left for direct action: that is, when it seems that the fight is over and that there is no hope for change over a period of generations. In such a case, of course, one must start from scratch in an attempt to spread new ideas in whatever way possible, even if it means infiltrating party organs and enemy organizations.

But was this what was happening in Italy? Even though there was almost no hope of an antifascist revolution in the near future, there was a significant current of opposition to the regime. In my opinion, the best tactic would have been to expand this current, by amplifying it in a more or less obvious way. Unfortunately, even this method doesn't bring immediate results, and is a passive form of opposition which cannot lead directly to revolution. But it has the advantage of keeping the trustworthy elements united and ready to exert their influence when the propitious moment arises. It would have the advantage of showing that there were some people, respected for their profession and for their moral conduct, who did not approve of Fascism. The example would have a significant impact as a propaganda technique. It would certainly be more effective than a few phrases infiltrated in the G.U.F. newspaper.

Collaboration with Fascist organizations could be confusing, and could produce an effect opposite to the one desired. The consequence of a good article in a Fascist paper might be that some people who had opposed the regime might think better of Fascism in the belief that that the regime's approach was improving.

* * *

About a month after I arrived in Paris, there were two weeks of vacation for Christmas and New Year. I took advantage of the break to explore the city, going to the Louvre almost every day, and familiarizing myself with schools of art I had not known in Italy. In the Louvre I found many Italian objects by schools that I did not know or knew little about. In Florence I had seen examples of the Tuscan school of art and art from Umbria. In Venice I had gotten to know the Venetian schools of art. But in the Louvre I found masterpieces from all over the world exhibited in chronological and geographical order. I didn't much like French painting. At the time I didn't appreciate Impressionism or modern art. All the rest, from Poussin to Delacroix, seemed mediocre compared to Italian painting. Velasquez, the primitive Flemish, and Rembrandt were a revelation. My dislike of Reubens was fully confirmed in the Salle des Médicis.

But my exploration of Paris was not limited to suggestions from the Baedeker guide. I did not restrict myself to seeing relics of the past. I also connected with, or one might say I had physical contact with the various city neighborhoods, taking long walks on foot. Each neighborhood had its own center, its own unique personality. I walked along the Quais of the Seine; I walked down the Champs Elysées, and I climbed the hill of Montmartre.

I also explored the less-known and less opulent parts of the city. I walked along Boulevard Voltaire, from the Place de la République to the Place de la Nation. I visited the large housing complexes in the poor neighborhoods at the edges of the city. Everywhere people were smiling and friendly, ready to joke around and launch a witty word. Everywhere, I saw the democratic spirit deeply engrained in the people, each person feeling equal to others, avoiding overblown shows of deference. The joking familiarity of newspaper vendors and sweepers in the métro made me smile, although some others thought this behavior to be impertinent. And my heart warmed each time I saw the words *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* written on the walls of a church or school or public building.

When I stood next to the obelisk on the Place de la Concorde I felt like I was standing at the center of the world. The monuments that surrounded the square took on a symbolic meaning. On one side was the Louvre, vestige of absolute monarchy, and on the other side was Napoleon's Arch of Triumph. Across the river was Palais Bourbon, the Chamber of Deputies, and on the opposite side was l'Eglise de la Madeleine, a Catholic church. In the distance I could see the Eiffel Tower, a technological wonder. All the forces that had acted on the history of Europe and the world converged at the Place de la Concorde -- at the exact point where the guillotine had stood in the days of the terror.

* * *

Meanwhile, clouds were gathering on the international horizon. During that winter we talked a lot about the plebiscite in the Sarre, because we were worried that it might have international repercussions. But France's policy of appeasement delayed it to a time when it would be impossible to win it. The Nazi-Germans were allowed a free hand with their propaganda, while the French made no effort to influence the people at all, either regarding French nationalism (which would not have been appropriate given the German majority in the Sarre), nor on the subject of democracy. The population was led to believe that the Nazis would win the plebiscite, and the fear of retaliation certainly contributed to the high percentage of votes in favor of reuniting with Germany.

In any case, the French government of the time was the least qualified to oppose the Nazi propaganda machine. Mr. Laval was pleased to see any strengthening of Hitler's regime. Even at that time, he played whatever card necessary in hopes of seeing a Fascist victory, from which he hoped to satisfy his own political ambitions. Anybody who made such a claim at this at the time would have been called a dangerous Communist. At the time, I also thought that this interpretation was exaggerated. Unfortunately, the facts bore out those who dared to speak these thoughts.

Another aspect of Laval's foreign policy was his *rapprochement avec l'Italie*, which is to say, his defense of Fascism against the Italian people. This policy was endorsed by even some of the more honest nationalists who considered Germany the historical enemy of Italy, and were grateful to Mussolini for his actions on the Brenner Pass. They hoped to create a united Latin front against the German danger, without considering the differences between the French and Italian political regimes. But the two predator regimes would inevitably unite for their aggressive ends. Freedom was their common enemy as it threatened their very existence, and sooner or later they would end up joining forces to fight it together.

To pave the way for the *rapprochement*, various Italian dignitaries visited France in that period, and various Frenchmen visited Italy. Fermi was among the Italians who came to Paris. Naturally I took it upon myself to show him around Paris and to guide him through the maze of the métro. He came to visit the Curie Laboratory where he won everyone over with his deep insights and his modest and simple manner.

Fermi gave a conference at the Sorbonne on slow neutrons: one of those incredibly clear lectures that left both the scientific and non-scientific public thinking that they understood everything. At the same time it was so profound that afterwards even the specialists realized that they had not understood it all.

I was invited with Fermi to have tea at the home of deBroglie. Prince Louis deBroglie, Nobel Laureate of 1929, and his brother, Duke Maurice, lived near the Etoile in a palace which was partly used as a scientific laboratory. The tea was a purely social affair, and various dignitaries were there. There I met Paul Langevin for the first time, and I was fascinated by him. He had an imposing look: white hair and a big white mustache. He spoke slowly with a deep voice, every word making an impression. From what I knew of him, my imagination had endowed him with an aura of glory: his great fame as a scientist, his profound political thinking, and his antifascist activities were all qualities to which I was deeply susceptible. Maybe even the gossip of his love for Mme. Curie, true or not, increased my respect for this man of the highest order.

I was not disappointed when I met him. I remember a *bon mot* that he said that day. The Duchess de Broglie was showing off a Brazilian parrot to her guests, lamenting that parrots do not reproduce in captivity. "No intelligent animal reproduces if it is not free, Madame la Duchesse," he said. This seemingly off-handed sentence, with its intended lesson casually tossed out in the royal salon of the deBroglie palace, reminded me of the problems of education in a Fascist country.

* * *

Slowly I began to master the French language. I made many acquaintances with whom I became friends, and I began, after a first tentative period, to undertake some personal research. I found that I was completely happy in Paris, so much so, that I now I remember it as the city where I would choose to live the rest of my life.

The first person I met in the lab was M. Joliot. (After he and Irene Curie married, they officially took the name Joliot-Curie. In the lab they remained M. and Mme. Curie.) He welcomed me kindly, he gave me some of his publications to read, and he showed me his instruments. Joliot was a young man of about thirty when I first met him, tall, dark, thin, with a distinguished silhouette and generally attractive. He spoke easily about science as well as other subjects. He was straightforward and friendly with everybody, with a lit cigarette always on his lips when his wife was not watching. Without a doubt, he was a person whose company is always pleasant at first sight.

Mme. Joliot was very different. A few years older than he, she was cold and her appearance austere. A person of few words, her seemingly severe attitude was due partly to shyness. Only by becoming better acquainted could you see her true character. She had long conversations with people she had known a long time. She was always ready to give friendly advice to her colleagues to help resolve both personal and scientific problems. She was incredibly modest.

I remember often meeting her in the street at about lunch time. She wore a green raincoat and carried a net bag for the frugal meal that she bought in one of the small stores on rue St. Jacques that she prepared in the lab over a Bunsen burner. And this was a few years after she had received the Nobel Prize, when she was at the peak of her scientific career and her international fame. People said, "*Irene est une tres brave fille.*" She was a person of few words, but if she promised something, you could count on her to do her best to make good on it.

M. and Mme. Joliot were members of the socialist SFIO party (*Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere*). They had joined after the riots of February 6th to show their disapproval of the reactionary forces that were threatening to take over the government at the time. Their names were among the signatures on all the liberal manifestos.

While I was at the lab they were honored with the highest scientific recognition: they received the Nobel Prize for the discovery of artificial radioactivity. The announcement thrilled the entire lab and, to celebrate, a champagne toast was organized. Everyone in the lab participated in a spirit of complete camaraderie. From directors to assistants, we all drank together. Old Perrin was the only person in attendance who was not a member of the Curie Laboratory.

During the next few days the Joliot's were great celebrities. Flowers arrived. There were calls from newspapers, interviews, and even movie cameras to record the faces and voices of the two famous scientists. M. and Mme. Joliot, always conscious of their social responsibility, took advantage of this publicity to voice their political opinions. In front of the recorders, she spoke of women's right to work and to complete participation in political life; he spoke for peace, saying that for the price of an army, something like twenty scientific laboratories could be funded.

During my first month at the lab my job was to help Mme. Joliot. With the simple instruments available at the time, she was working on "radioactivity induced from the neutrons in uranium." It was a field of research that had been opened up by Fermi, which was still manifestly problematic. Fermi had quit working on it because maybe he thought the effects were too complicated to be interesting. But Mme. Joliot, who was a good chemist, was sure that she could solve the problem. And in fact, she pursued the work with great competence and perseverance.

Her collaborator on this project was a Yugoslav named Paul Savic. When I arrived he was sick, and I took his place for a few weeks.

The neutrons were kept on the balcony. They were emitted from a radioactive source and were extracted every week from a radioactive solution by the Russian physicist (or maybe he was an eastern European) who was exposed to enough radioactivity to kill a bull. [Nevertheless, he survived in good health, at least until 1966, in the United States.] Next to the neutron source, which was wrapped in paraffin, he would place the uranium. Mme. Joliot did the chemical separation of the radioactive elements, *sa petite cuisine* (her cooking), and I "counted" the rays emitted by the substances that she prepared as they decayed.

The work was simple, but the problem was truly complicated. There were many half lives, and they changed according to how they were irradiated and depending on Mme Joliot's "cooking." It was

incomprehensible to me and when Savic returned, I asked to work on my own. But Mme. Joliot and Savic kept at it, and some time later they published the famous sentence (Journal de Physique, 9, 355 (1938)):

"Il se forme dans l'uranium irradié par les neutrons lents ou rapides, un radioélément de période 3,5 h qui possède des propriétés chimiques semblables à celles du lanthane.... Dans l'ensemble, les propriétés de R3,5 h sont celles du lanthane. . ."

[Trans. When uranium is irradiated by slow or fast neutrons, a radioactive element with a life of 3 1/2 hours is formed. This element has chemical properties similar to those of 'lanthane'... On the whole, the properties of R3.5 are the same as those of "lanthane."]

But they didn't have the courage to believe that the radioactive element with a life of 3 1/2 hours was actually "lanthane." Had they had believed it, they would have discovered nuclear fission a few years before Hahn and Strassman.

If I had been less independent and had continued working with Mme. Joliot and with Savic, maybe I would have believed that the radioactivity was really lanthane. Would we have discovered fission? [Probably not, but in any case, I am not sorry that I lost the opportunity. I would not want to be the person responsible for the consequences.]

After this introductory period, I began to study the creation and annihilation of positive electrons, as suggested by Joliot. More simply, one could say I was studying the creation of matter from energy, and the annihilation of matter with the emission of energy. The phenomenon was generically predicted by Einstein, specifically calculated by Dirac (who could not believe the results of his theories, because no one had ever seen a positive electron), and finally observed, after the discovery of the positron by Anderson, Blackett and Occhialini (see Chapter III), Thibaud, and Joliot. It was not a completely new field, but it was recent enough that much remained to be done. And it was the most fascinating subject of physics at the time -- at the intersection of the most fundamental ideas of relativity and quantum mechanics.

I spent all of my first year in Paris working on positrons. Alone, in the basement of the lab, with simple instruments, I observed the creation and annihilation of matter . . . and I felt like I was in contact with the ultimate reality of Nature.

* * *

During Easter break in 1935 I traveled to Belgium and Holland for two weeks. I went with a Brazilian physicist, Cintra do Prado, who was also staying at the Pension Parisiana. He too, had been attracted by the words "university clientele" in an advertisement in the *Semaine de Paris*. Prado was a great guy; he is now a professor at the Polytechnical Institute in Sao Paulo. He had come to Europe on a fellowship, but in France he was adrift because he knew no-one in the scientific community. In Brazil he was considered the greatest scientist in the nation (or so I was told by other Brazilians), but he was disoriented in France, and he had an inferiority complex. He took some courses, and went to class and tried to learn like a student of 18. (He was about 30 at the time.)

Before leaving Paris, I introduced him to the Curie Laboratory, and after I left he was accepted into the lab. But I learned afterwards that he never had the courage to do his own research and he restricted himself to helping the assistants in an attempt to learn proper technique. He was extremely modest, but not shy. Once he got to know people, he could be brilliant, but with people he did not know, or those he barely knew, he kept to himself. He was afraid of bothering, or appearing too forward, to the point that he could appear aloof if you did not know better. He was intelligent and cultured and besides being a scientist, he spoke several languages and played the piano well. He was very Catholic, although he was not ostentatious about his faith. He was also scrupulously honest -- the type of person that a mother would find ideal as a partner for a daughter. And also the kind of man that young women liked because he was good-looking, straightforward, and as I said earlier, brilliant in company. At the pension he had lots of success with the gentler sex, but he never took advantage of it, and remained unconquerable *turris eburnea*.

DoPrado wanted to go to the Riviera during Easter break, but he decided to come to Belgium with me instead. We went together to find a cheap Baedeker Guide for Belgium and Holland-- used of course. We went to the Quais and to the Boulevard Saint Michel and we found the desired book at a low price. On the train we studied the map of Brussels, and the basics of Flemish art. We stayed in Brussels a few days to see the museums and the monuments.

We left for Amsterdam by bus. It was one of those buses that makes the trip from Brussels to Amsterdam and back in a day, conscientiously jostling the poor tourists with the excuse of showing them the famed tulip fields and a giving them the opportunity to send illustrated postcards of Holland to the folks at home.

We stopped at the Hague for lunch, after which in the half-hour before the bus left, we walked around a bit. All we saw was the royal palace with a modest and totally democratic bicycle parked in a bicycle rack in front of a service entrance. (At times I wonder if the house with the bicycle, contrary to the indication of the Baedeker, was actually the royal palace. This posthumous uncertainty shows the value of these bus tours.) In Amsterdam, Prado and I had intended to get off the bus and find our way back to Brussels at a more leisurely pace. We had arranged everything with the bus company in Brussels, but the driver had not been informed, and we were already several kilometers outside of town before we were able to explain the plan to the driver.

Picture an Italian and a Brazilian physicist walking together through the Dutch countryside, speaking French, each carrying a small suitcase and no Dutch florins. We walked until we saw a kiosk which looked like a stop for a local bus. While we waited, we counted the few coins we had in our pockets which had been intended for tips at the restaurant, in the hopes that it would cover our trip into Amsterdam. Finally, a bus arrived and actually took us to the city center, thus ending our little adventure.

The wonderful city of Amsterdam made up for this adventure of microscopic proportions. For me it was a new world. We were in the North, with its sloping roofs, its pale light, and its infinite delicate shadings of gray. It was a city that preserved the fascination of antiquity. Its canals and bridges reminded me a little of Venice, yet in a completely different style. It was a wonderfully provincial city, whose citizens took to the streets at seven every evening, to greet each other and gossip. The girls smiled at the sailors; the rich smoked their cigars and placidly read their newspapers. They all seemed happy, well-fed, and problem-free.

I was most impressed by my visit to Rembrandt's house. Crossing a canal over an old stone bridge, you find a square where, among many modest houses, stands the house where Rembrandt lived and painted. Thinking back, there's nothing extraordinary about it, but in the moment, the feeling of being in the place where some of the greatest artistic masterpieces were created, produced an intense emotion, almost a sense of exaltation. Some of the great master's drawings and etchings hung on the walls. They were a revelation to me, since I had never seen any of Rembrandt's black and white etchings. I have always appreciated drawing more than color. Maybe this is the reason I do not appreciate Reubens.

On leaving, we wandered through the little streets in the vicinity. The inevitable prostitutes from all over the world smiled sweetly -- oh! no! not suggestively! -- from the windows. Canals, bridges, and church towers were reflected in the water.

Returning to the Hague from Amsterdam, we were more conscientious tourists, but the memory of the Hague is dull compared to that of Amsterdam. We saw the International Tribunal -- almost an obligatory stop to demonstrate our respect for the idea of justice between peoples, and our hope for international law.

From the Hague we went to Ghent to see Van Eyck's mystical sheep. Then on to Bruges -- the city of dreams, rightly called the Venice of the North. But it was a sad Venice, with quiet colors, not radiantly lit like the Venice on the Adriatic. We saw Memling's paintings and walked along the Grand Place. We climbed the tower on the Béffroi and admired the famous carillon.

In the evenings we strolled through the streets, or indulged ourselves on a few beers. This is what I told my Brazilian traveling companion: "You come from Brazil, a young nation, and have come to see Europe. Here is Europe -- here in Bruges. The great capitals, the traffic along the Boulevards, and the great universities are undoubtedly important. But you can create those in America. You might even create better ones -- ones that are larger, faster and more modern. But you can't create this little city in the

Flanders. If you want to see it, you must come here. You can't copy the feel of an old civilization. You must come here to observe it, to study it, and if you can, to assimilate it. If you understand it you will return home ten times richer than if you had received ten doctorates from a major university, or if you had spoken to kings and prime ministers, or if you had bedded the most famous actress. You see, I am profoundly affected by this environment, and I would suffer if I could not live in it.

This environment exists in all European cities, but it is particularly intense in Bruges. Such places are rare: Tuscany, the Flanders, and also Venice. In these places you live as if in a dream, outside of time. Here one can appreciate the value of what our ancestors left for us: the cult of beauty and harmony, the aspiration to something higher. It is true that our ancestors also left us a tradition of feudalism and clericalism, an inheritance of hatred and war. We will have to free ourselves from this, but we will manage. It will be hard, but we will be able to think objectively, rationally. It will take courage, but we will free ourselves, maybe using force, from the traditions that do not correspond to modern ideas, and from social constructs that are no longer meaningful. But this artistic and cultural inheritance must be conserved. And one must come here, to a little city like this, to understand our civilization." This was the gist of our conversations, at night in Bruges. I returned to Paris to my little pension and to the lab until it closed on July 14 for the summer holidays. In the days preceding the national holiday of July 14th, all of Paris prepared for the celebration. Already on the evening of the 12th there was great excitement: in every little square there were bands and loudspeakers, and people danced in the streets.

The July 14th holiday was subject to different interpretations by people of various political persuasions. For those on the right it was a nationalist and imperialist holiday. The wealthier set celebrated the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille in the morning, watching a military parade on the Champs Elysées. For those on the left it was a liberal and revolutionary holiday. In the afternoon, the "people" gathered by the thousands in an endless crowd stretching from the Place de la Nation to the Place de la Bastille. They celebrated the past glories of the republic, and prepared themselves to defend democracy with propaganda from the Popular Front.

The Popular Front movement was born in France after the riots of February 6th, when the Socialists, lead by Blum, refused to support the rightist government imposed by the pro-fascist crowds shouting on the Place de la Concorde.

The Communists were happy to form an alliance with another worker's party, so the first nucleus of the Front Populaire was created. Its symbol was three red arrows: against Fascism, against war, and against hunger. Its platform was the defense of democracy and the union of all liberal forces.

Combining social goals and a patriotic spirit, his platform resonated with the French populace. Red flags and tricolor flags flew side by side in this new alliance. The words from the Marseillaise *contre nous de la tyrannie l'étendard sanglant est levé* (the bloody flag of tyranny is raised against us") were followed by the words from the International: *c'est la lutte finale, groupons nous et demain l'internationale sera le genre humain* (it is the final fight, let us gather together, and tomorrow the Internationale will be the human condition.) The call *débout les forcats de la faim* (stand up, all you hungry people) seemed to be the modern adaptation of the old words *aux armes citoyens, formons les bataillons* (to arms, citizens, let us form our battalions.)

The people of Paris paraded behind the two flags, singing these anthems, feeling their power and making a show of their strength to their enemies, both internal and external.

Disgusted by the domestic and foreign policies of the reactionary government, a large part of the *petite bourgeoisie* supported the Popular Front. The endorsement by the amorphous Partito Radicale was proof of it. The Partito Radicale may have joined the Popular Front merely to get more votes. But however artificial and unstable this alliance between leftist parties may have been, the idea of a Front Populaire was sincerely welcomed by the people, and they placed all their hopes for the future in the movement.

* * *

During the next winter I did not live the "Parisian" lifestyle that most tourists associate with the city. More often than not, I spent evenings in the Quartier Latin rather than on the Grands Boulevards. And if I needed a change of scenery, I was more likely to go to Montparnasse than to Montmartre. Of course, I did visit some *boites de nuit*, and I saw some of the fabulous reviews at the Casino de Paris or at the Folies Bergeres, but these excursions were almost like trips abroad, away from the Paris that I knew and loved.

The wonderful thing about Paris is that you can live the life you choose, and you can always find a community that is suitable for whatever kind of activity. Students set up shop in the Quartier Latin, artists hang out in Montparnasse, businessmen near the Opera, and wealthy and distinguished visitors in the area around the Champs Elysées, while those seeking inexpensive thrills go to Montmartre. And each of them go home thinking that Paris is the most cultured, the most artistic and libertine, the greediest, the most distinguished or the most corrupt city in the world.

But by choosing to live in one of the lesser-known neighborhoods where the petite bourgeoisie live, the visitor would be convinced that Paris is just plain boring. Those who somehow manage to break into French high society would be convinced that France was reactionary and chauvinistic, whereas by getting to know the workers who live in the suburbs, you would think that the country was overrun by revolutionaries.

I became acquainted with all these aspects of Paris, enough to know that they existed, but not enough to know them well. And I know nothing about the French provinces, or about its rural life.

All my explorations of Paris began and ended in the Latin quarter. It's strange how certain places bring out certain feelings and fantasies. I have already mentioned that at the Place de la Concorde I had the strange feeling of being at the center of the world. In the Latin Quarter, and more precisely on the corner of Boulevard Saint Michel and Rue Sufflot, on the sidewalk between the Café Capoulade and the newsstand, I had the sensation of being completely at home.

It is said that France is the second home of all intellectuals, but this does not correspond precisely to my feelings on that corner: France was not so much my second home, as the international community was my first home. In no other place did I feel so comfortable as when I walked around that corner, overhearing bits of conversation in different languages and on different subjects. In the spring, at about two o'clock walking passed the cafe tables, I could greet a group of physicists from the lab, a German biologist, a Romanian journalist, a Chinese student, an English poet, a Mexican editor and a Greek artist. The newsstand carried daily papers from the four corners of the world, as well as various papers issued by political refugees in every conceivable language.

My little pension was similar.

The most interesting person there was a strange Frenchman: M. Barbier. He did not eat in the dining room, but he often went to the Salon, where he entertained himself by chatting with people in the evening. I saw him several times before speaking to him. He had the face of a prophet, with a long beard and gray hair that fell to his shoulders. He was thin, as if devoured by an interior fire whose sparks glinted in his eyes. He dressed in dark colors, and he always wore a long black coat although he never went out. He smoked Gauloises continuously and desperately, waving them in the air with a thin, nervous hand.

A mathematician by profession, he had graduated from the École Normale as an Agrégé. He was interested in everything and spoke intelligently. Smoke and rivers of words flowed from between his moustache and beard and he was extremely animated, but his voice was quiet. He smiled graciously, but more often his smile was ironic, and his irony did not lack for wit.

M. Barbier had only one problem: he was crazy. When people told me, I did not want to believe it. I thought he was simply misunderstood because of his original thinking and superior intelligence. Then I noticed that sometimes he talked obsessively about certain subjects, to the point that he was boring and unbearable. At times these subjects had no connection with reality. Eventually, I came to believe that he *was* crazy. In the end, after a violent episode, he was taken to an asylum. -- But M. Barbier was, and in my memory, still is a friend.

His mental problem had taken a political form. The Stavitsky scandal and the corruption of the French ruling class had upset him: he believed that the money printed by the French government was

"fake", and that therefore it was immoral to use it. To avoid touching money, he refused to work. He was supported by his sister, who taught high school math and who also lived in the pension. But at some point he forbade his sister to accept her salary. There were angry discussions with the owner of the pension who wanted to be paid. These discussions ended with M. Barbier going on a brief hunger strike, refusing to eat rather than act in a way which, in his sick mind, meant compromising with a corrupt society.

Poor M. Barbier, whose peaceful retreat at the asylum at Seaux would be interrupted by the German invasion! Now I ask myself if it was he who was crazy, or if it was us . . . if we weren't the ones to blame for the world's misfortunes due to our passivity in the face of events! We were the ones who were unable to foresee or to prevent the disasters brought on by our own moral weakness!

M. Barbier read the *Populaire* in the morning and the *Temps* in the evening. He was informed on all current events, and he made wise observations. A convinced antifascist, he hoped for peace through international justice and collaboration between nations. He became indignant when politicians made mistakes, or when there were financial scandals. Often he played chess in the evenings. He usually played against M. Grunberg and M. Nunez. Sometimes I played against him, but he always won.

Grunberg was a Soviet citizen who had left the USSR at a time when it was still permitted. His family was well-off, and he received a regular monthly check from his parents in Poland. If asked, he said that he was studying for a Doctorate in Letters. He spoke perfect French, without a trace of an accent, and a good vocabulary. He read a Russian newspaper of the socialist Menshevik party, and the *Populaire*. He never spoke of life in Russia. For that matter, he never gave an opinion on any subject. He was always politely evasive, which earned him a reputation for "diplomacy." He was about thirty-five years old, distinguished and cultured, with an Eastern Europe look and vaguely Asian features.

I admired how well he tolerated inactivity. He did nothing. He said he had a bad heart, but I thought he was inventing it. He took a bus to go from idleness at the pension to more idleness at the Café Capoulade which was only a few steps away.

His idleness was so great that it aroused suspicion. Everybody tried to figure out what he did and naturally there were some who thought he was a spy, but it is hard to imagine what a spy would discover at the Pension Parisiana. His laziness led to a horror of war and of revolution. In his eyes I was a "warlike pacifist" because I believed in decisive action against the Fascist peril. It is true that at the time others also thought of me the same way.

Senor Nunez was a citizen of San Salvador. He spoke in a loud voice, gesticulating, like all Latin Americans, but without having anything interesting to say. He was at the pension with a brother who had not learned a word of French in the two years that he had been France, and with the brother's son, Benito, a lively boy of about eight. He did nothing in Paris, although he claimed to be a student. Every week during the year I was there, he said that he would leave for El Salvador the next week. He was lively, and at times he told vulgar jokes and laughed loudly at them.

These were the people who were sure to be in the salon in the evening if one wanted to chat with someone before going to bed.

There also were normal people at the pension. One was a Romanian student who was studying law. He was a rightist (he read, I believe, *le Journal*), but he was not anti-semitic (which for a Romanian, is significant) and he was ferociously anti-German. He also claimed to be antifascist, and he said it in good faith, and in some ways he was. He was not scandalized if he heard progressive ideas, and would listen to them with a slightly ironic smile, as if they were childish arguments. (Maybe, in some way, they were.) He believed in collective security, in the defense of the Treaty of Versailles, for the League of Nations; in other words he believed in all the conservative forces that would defend the status quo. His heroes were Caesar, Napoleon and Goethe. He loved Paris and France. The day before he left, after completing his studies, he literally had tears in his eyes. He was the product, and would have been an agent of reasonable French propaganda in Eastern Europe, based on culture. Money spent on a scholarship for a foreign student serves the national interest better than the salary of an agent or a spy.

There was Stephan, a twenty-year old, of indeterminate nationality. Growing up in Vienna in a family from high society, he was a victim of the education given to the privileged classes. He always had money in his pocket and he read the *Sportman*. His favorite subject was horses. He bet on the horses and

he rode. He had started various courses of study, but had not finished any of them. He was a good kid, and he could not be faulted for his bad education. He had some artistic sensibility, and a certain sense of style.

However, when one evening he told me that he drank too much and didn't know how to stop, I could not keep from saying that if "I were president of a revolutionary tribunal, I would send you to the guillotine." I expected him to react violently, but instead he agreed with me. I began to take an interest in him, thinking of him as a man who needed help. And being naive, I thought that I could help him.

To keep him from going out to some *boite*, I suggested that we have a little drink in the pension, among friends, in familiar surroundings. We ordered a bottle of champagne in the salon with Stephan, Nunez, a French girl, a German refugee and me. The first bottle was followed by many more, and towards midnight we were all drunk. We wanted another drink, but the owner refused to serve us. Stephan went into the basement and returned triumphantly with a bottle, but his legs were unsteady and the stolen bottle fell from his hands, exploding on the carpet. The owner came out, furious, and an altercation followed. She told Stephan that he would have to leave the pension the next day. At this point, Stephan's girlfriend (a French girl with colored red hair, a would-be actress, who had nothing in common with actresses except an ability to change costumes) went back to her room, and to simplify matters, she pretended to faint.

I tried to come back to my senses and iron things out. We persuaded Stephan to go to his room. He became depressed and threatened to jump out the window, which was on the sixth floor. Nunez and I caught him and tried to calm him. The girlfriend arrived, acting a new part. She took advantage of the situation to recite a romantic love scene, but Stephan kicked her out. Finally, everyone went to bed while I stayed with Stephan, conscious of my obligation to save him. We started talking -- a pessimistic drunk and an idealistic drunk. We talked a long time, maybe four hours. Stephan started by saying that he did not have a right to live and I started talking of the good things that can be done in life: science, the struggle for freedom and social justice. He listened to me and slowly calmed down. I thought it was the effect of my words, but probably it was the alcohol that had worn off.

When I left, we were friends. For a few weeks I tried to keep him from drinking, spending the evening with him until midnight. He drank after I had gone to bed. I was not very successful in my brief career as a savior of souls. Soon afterwards Stephan left for England, leaving behind some trunks and some debts. I never saw him again.

Maybe my original idea -- the one about the guillotine -- was the better one.

I took a fancy to a young girl of about twenty who came to stay at the pension. She was French. She studied literature. She was not particularly beautiful, but her eyes were an intense blue. She ate at the central table in the dining room, as did I. We had similar ideas and we immediately became friends. She taught me the words to the International. The Romanian shook his head, smiling, hearing our talk about progressive and anti-fascist subjects. Seeing our friendship blossom, he spoke of a Franco-Italian *rapprochement*.

One evening we danced at the pension. Then we went out. Spring was just beginning. As we walked along the quais, we could see the trees buds, lit by the street lights, against the dark backdrop of the river. We walked and talked about social and moral problems with the earnestness of a girl and a boy out on a night in early spring. When we returned I gave her a long kiss on the steps of the pension. Suddenly she exclaimed, "What have we done!" and ran to her room, closing the door behind her.

I stayed back trying to understand what she meant since I didn't think we had done anything wrong. The next day she explained: she was "engaged," to use the bourgeois word for it. Among young, more modern people on the left, it would be described as 'having a boyfriend.' Her boyfriend was a student who shared her ideas, and they were going steady. It was a straightforward relationship, sincere, honest, without any commitment to marry, or exchange rings, or to get the blessing of the family, and with no talk of a dowry. It was a serious relationship, and to her an innocent kiss on the sidewalk seemed like a crime.

She confessed her crime. I got to know her boyfriend and they asked me to spend an afternoon in the countryside with them. I became good friends with both of them. I wished them happiness, and hoped

they would be happy. But maybe now he is a prisoner in Germany, and she has children and is starving in France.

I was very happy at the lab. I had begun my own work and was pleased with it. I worked quite hard at that time, and in my free time I talked to those around me, including long conversations with the lab assistants. I had discovered that to get any work done, it was helpful to carry on long conversations with them on various subjects.

During the first few months, it took a long time to have my equipment made. I was told that the assistants thought I was acting superior because I did not shake hands with them when I entered the lab and didn't speak to them. I was not acquainted with the French habit of shaking hands with everybody at every meeting. When I learned to do this, and started talking to them about current events, they produced my equipment quickly. If I was in a hurry I started the work myself. They would come to give me advice and to help me, and they ended up doing the work themselves. Sometimes they used slangy expressions to confuse me and to tease me.

Among my colleagues, Hassinski was my best friend. He was small and ugly, with a ready smile on his large mouth, and a pair glasses with enormous plastic frames which were completely out of proportion to his face. He had started by studying the Talmud and the sacred Hebrew texts in some city in the Ukraine. He was in Russia during the revolution but left during the early 1920's to fulfill the dream of all Ukrainian Jews from rabbinical families: to go to Palestine. There he tilled the soil like a good Zionist, and it was there that he came into contact with Western civilization for the first time. Western ideas excited him so much that he left the Promised Land and went to Italy, arriving in Rome without a penny. He had decided to go to Rome because he had the address of a vague acquaintance there.

I don't know how he survived, but he managed to get a degree in chemistry. I suppose he lived like other Eastern European Jews who wanted to study: he gave private lessons, did some translations, and ate very little. I don't know if his antifascist and anticapitalist ideas were formed in those years, but I wouldn't doubt it.

After getting his degree, he wrote a book on physical chemistry in Italian. It was a rather well known book which I had read at the university. (The first thing I asked him when I was introduced to him was, "Are you the son of Prof. H. who wrote that book?")

His aversion to Fascism led to problems with the police and a few weeks in jail. This persuaded him to face the unknown of a second emigration, this time to France. He left full of hatred for Mussolini, and with great sympathy for the Italian people, which is how anyone who has lived in Italy for a few years always seems to feel.

Having lost every trace of Jewish religion and tradition, he was completely secular. In France he had married a teacher, and had two children. His family lived a humdrum middle-class life, modest and comfortable. I often went to dinner at their house, where we talked of science and politics.

* * *

My mother came to see me in Paris at the beginning of the summer and we spent the summer vacation together in England -- four weeks by the sea at Hastings, and two or three weeks in London. I can't say that I know either England or the English people after such a short visit. I only have some random impressions.

In Hastings we stayed in a hotel where low-level employees vacationed. It was much nicer than similar hotels on the continent, and the guests were much better mannered than Italians or Frenchmen of the same class. I learned that the idea that the British are a quiet people was a myth: everyone spoke to us, without being formal, but well-mannered nonetheless. We could not ride the elevator with a stranger without being regaled about the weather. But what was difficult was to talk about anything *but* the weather. Conversation was much less interesting and lively when compared to the continental standard. I had the feeling that on the Continent, the average person spends a lot of energy demonstrating his intelligence, culture, sensitivity, and wit. An Englishman expends energy to prove that he is a gentleman. The Englishman's ideal, the goal of all English education, seems to be proper behavior. Although I

appreciate proper behavior, and by temperament and education I consider it necessary, I don't consider it an important quality. So I was not enthusiastic about the English: in fact, I found them boring and insignificant.

In London, due to my mother's vegetarianism, we ended up in a pension that was frequented by Indian students. I made friends with some of them, and I learned some interesting things about India and its problems. Among other things I learned that on average, Indians lived about 26 years, give or take.

While I was happily relaxing, new clouds gathered on the international horizon. The Fascists were completing their preparations for war against Abyssinia. Somewhat belatedly, the democratic powers were starting to worry.

When I left Eritrea in December 1933, I went with other members of the expedition to say goodbye to the commander of the armed forces in the colony. He told us that the Italians were thinking of expanding their power in East Africa and, somewhat mysteriously, he told us that this might actually happen. Our reaction was that career officers had to do something with their time, and for lack of anything better, this commander amused himself by imagining fantastic military ventures.

But I also remembered a visit to an officer in the geography service, who crossed the border to make maps of Ethiopian territory. Then, in September 1934, during the meetings in Venice, a university professor told me that a decision had been made to attack Abyssinia. Naturally I did not believe him.

But while I, a private individual, had heard these things, the democratic governments, with their 2eme Bureau and their Intelligence Services, knew nothing about it until the summer of 1935. If, as they later claimed, they opposed this invasion, they would not have allowed the troops and military supplies to pass through the Suez Canal. At least they would have prepared adequately to oppose such an expedition once it was initiated.

To understand the reasoning behind the war in Abyssinia, it's necessary to understand Italian internal politics, and the economic and financial position of the Fascist government. Nevertheless, the Fascist victory was largely due to the complicity of the democratic nations.

Fascist international politics was beginning to work. Laval's Franco-Italian *rapprochement* should have been called international Fascist solidarity. Laval denied giving Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia during their talks in Rome. But it is not surprising that the man who willingly sacrificed his own country to the Nazis, would be quite willing to sacrifice a faraway land to prevent the collapse of Italian Fascism.

The situation in England was different. Some conservatives felt that the Abyssinian expedition was a threat to the English empire. So they talked about international law, the League of Nations, and in the name of justice, freedom and brotherhood, they stated their exclusive right to exploit the people and the lands of Africa. The English people had no idea of the extent to which its empire was vacillating, and they were wholly convinced that nobody on earth could oppose the might of England, since it was written in the heavens that the interests of the crown of Her Britannic Majesty were sacred.

Some Englishmen worried about the fate of the Abyssinians, and would have gladly offered protection with the same concern that old maids worry about the fate of starving cats. To these people, the League of Nations shared the same halo of sanctity as the National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals. Poor Continentals, poor African natives, poor stray cats! England is thinking of you and belongs to organizations that care about your well-being! England is even willing to make some small sacrifices to help you!

And while conservatives and philanthropists fretted in England, more troops passed through the Suez Canal. New recruits were drafted in Italy, and the day came when I read in the newspaper that I too was being drafted.

The idea of going to Africa did not interest me, even from the perspective of a tourist since I had already been there. The idea of killing black people filled me with horror, surpassed only by the idea of being killed by a black person, (or by a white person, for that matter). I had no doubts about the war on the horizon, and felt that it should be avoided by destroying Fascism through decisive political action. If this were not possible, then the alternative was to help the Abyssinian army. The destruction of the Fascist forces would have averted much worse problems, not only for the world but first and foremost, for Italy.

Given this perspective, the news that my cohort was being drafted did not put me in the best of spirits. I said nothing to my mother, so as not to worry her. We had decided to return to Paris the following day and I thought I would go to the consulate to ask whether, since I was in a foreign country, I still had to report to the military authorities in Italy. Afterwards, I would decide on a course of action.

We arrived in Paris on a Sunday. My mother went to her room and when I went to join her, I found her in tears. She had received a letter from my uncle saying that I had been drafted. The next day I went to the consulate, where I was told that I had to leave immediately. I tried some excuses, saying that since I was a student I should be exempt, and that since I was living abroad I did not have to serve in the army. But my legal arguments did not convince them.

At one o'clock I returned to the pension. I told my mother that my only option was to get a student deferral by enrolling in an Italian university. At two o'clock my mother boarded a direct train to Padua, where the University office had all my records. My mother was introduced to the chief administrative officer, and a few days later I was enrolled -- I think as a student of chemistry.

Meanwhile, I went back to work at the Curie Lab.

One day, as I left the lab, I saw headlines announcing that the war in Abyssinia had begun with the bombing of Adua. The headlines in all the newspapers hounded me as I walked through the streets. The cries of the newspaper vendors bellowing the latest news reverberated in my ears like a reproach. I felt like people were staring at me, pointing at me, saying, "He's Italian. He's responsible for the massacre in Abyssinia." I felt guilty and ashamed; the faults of my government reeled around my head.

To be able to follow the military campaign, I cut out a map of Abyssinia from a newspaper, and posted it on the wall of my room at the lab. I indicated the position of the Fascist troops with little "fasces" cut from aluminum foil, because I did not want to use Italian flags. Later, we bought a better map of Ethiopia. This map was posted on the wall of a young Romanian, Sanialevici, the only member of the lab who had served as an officer in an army.

He may have been in the Engineers Corps, but he talked about strategy as if he had graduated from a military academy -- or at least so it seemed to me. He was able to picture the possibilities inherent in the strategic situation. He talked of attacks, of defensive lines, of advances along river valleys, of possible encircling tactics. I referred to him ironically as *mon Général* and often went to his lab to discuss the strategic and political situation.

We were hopeful. De Bono's incautious advance on Makalé appeared to set the stage for a Fascist defeat. The diplomatic situation seemed promising. The unanimous vote of the League of Nations made us hope that for the first time, the weight of international solidarity would be felt. There was talk of sanctions. But the complicity of the democratic governments with Fascism became evident with the publication of the Hoare-Laval pact.

In the meantime, my personal situation had its ups and downs. I was often called to the Italian consulate where I was actively encouraged to return to Italy. The visits to the consulate were humiliating. I arrived in the morning at about nine and was seen at about noon. While I waited, I couldn't even read my favorite newspapers, because it didn't seem appropriate to open an antifascist paper. The portraits of Mussolini and the Italian king hanging on the wall felt oppressive. There were many others waiting with me -- mostly poor people who had emigrated from Italy for economic reasons. The attendants and treated us like cattle, with no consideration for our lost time.

Finally, I received news that I had been granted a deferral. I went back to the lab happy as could be, and I offered tea and cake to a dozen people to celebrate the event. But not long afterwards I was told that in order to be granted the deferral, I would have to actually attend the university where I was enrolled. I protested, and this was followed by a long correspondence between the consulate and the Ministry of War. Finally, I was formally instructed to return to Italy.

I asked Joliot if there was any possibility of getting a French fellowship, so that I could stay in France. He told me that at the moment there was nothing available. I was left with no alternative since I wouldn't be able to work in France if I was not in good standing with the Italian government.

On the evening of January 31, 1936 I boarded a train for Italy.

Chapter Six

Italy Acquires an Empire

Passing through the Sempione Tunnel I said good-bye to freedom. At the Domodossola station, Fascism awaited me. It welcomed me with a horrible quarter hour, during which the passport officer returned the passports of all the passengers in my compartment, but withheld mine. He had me get off the train and escorted me to the station's Public Safety Office.

I didn't like this business a bit. I was afraid that some of the opinions I had expressed so openly in France had come to the attention of the OVRA, and that instead of ending my trip in Florence, I would end up exiled on some isolated island. While I waited in a room by myself, I spent the time concentrating on preparing myself to behave correctly in the event of an interrogation. But this was all for naught since after about a half hour, the officer returned my passport and I never found out why my trip was interrupted.

The train filled up with soldiers who were traveling south. They were neither excited nor unhappy: mostly they were poor peasants for whom military life may have provided an interesting diversion; it certainly did not make their situation worse.

As I looked out the train window to visually embrace my native land, I was surprised by an unexpected novelty. In the stations, in the towns, on houses in the cities, block-print inscriptions in black paint defaced the walls : DUCE DUCE DUCE DUCE.....BETTER TO LIVE ONE DAY AS A LION THAN ONE YEAR AS A SHEEP....DUCE DUCE....BELIEVE OBEY FIGHT....DUCE DUCE DUCE...

I arrived in Florence in the evening, meeting my mother, by chance, at the station. As soon as I arrived home I rushed to the phone to call my friends. After an absence of over a year, I wanted to see familiar faces again; I was anxious to hear how my friends' opinions had changed and to know their interpretation of the international situation.

My friends came, and that same evening, ten of them gathered in our living room. I was excited to be back, full of things to share. I almost felt an obligation to explain the importance of international solidarity, the indignation of the rest of the world about the invasion of Abyssinia.

And so I talked: It was a strange feeling after all this time to speak my native language again. At first even the sound of the words was strange, and it was difficult to put sentences together, but soon the language flowed fluently, easily, sweetly, though with an occasional French twist.

But the recent crises had not changed my friends' ideas. Giuliano, ever the philo-Fascist, expressed himself in patriotic phrases: the glory of Italy, the right to a day in the sun. He had come with his fiancé, whom I met for the first time -- an intelligent, young girl of German descent who fully understood my point of view. Gualtiero, after a parenthetical episode of anti-fascism and a romance with a Catholic girl, had become one hundred percent Zionist. The fate of the world interested him only from the perspective of Palestine, and international solidarity was for him an empty phrase. He judged everything in its relation to the establishment of an independent Jewish state as a first principle. I will have occasion to speak about him later.

My internationalist fervor, my deep and naive passion for brotherhood between peoples collided, on the very evening of my return, with an obstacle I had underestimated: nationalism--a misguided nationalism which measures the greatness of a people by the extent of territory that it occupies and not by

its artistic and scientific achievements; a nationalism which holds that the conquest of distant lands will relieve misery and suffering and not inevitably result in the exploitation of one man by another.

At Arcetri I had the same disappointing experience. My friend Gilberto, -- now Professor Bernardini and no longer merely Dr. Bernardini -- said that his children had a right to a better life than his own and, while disapproving of certain Fascist methods, supported the government's involvement in Ethiopia which was supposed to make Italy as rich as England. He hoped the Fascist army would prevail, and he could not understand (and in this he was correct) what right the British Empire had to oppose Fascist expansionism. The physicists from Arcetri once came to my house for lunch, and it was only my sense of hospitality that prevented this meeting among friends from erupting into a violent argument.

Without a doubt the war had increased nationalist sentiment and reduced the enthusiasm of its opponents. Mussolini had carried out his plan. He was able, once again, to fulfill the only plank of his program that he never betrayed: to endure.

What does the spilling of innocent blood matter, what do rifts between people matter, compared to the one fundamental issue: remaining in power? The government coffers were empty, and the only way to save the regime, demanding even greater sacrifices from the people, was to go to war. And so it was -- a war for an empire without resources; by which the Fascist government incurred such shame in the eyes of the international community that its allies could no longer openly support it; a war which resulted in the creation of an empire and in due course, the submission of the mother country to the growing threat of Nazi power; a war however, which would enable Mussolini and his clique to stay in power.

The poor peasants and the unemployed left for war voluntarily. Misery is responsible for many crimes, and hungry people should not be blamed. The Abyssinian war was presented as an easy enterprise, and prospective volunteers were lured with photographs of black women with breasts bared to the wind. Italy sang:

Little black face
Lovely Abyssinian girl
Await and hope as the hour draws near
When we will be near you
We'll sing the praises of our Duce and our King.

But under their breath, in hidden corners, others gathered to sing the same song with different words:

Black shirt
Assassins' face
Wait, wait, as the hour draws near.
When we will be near you
We'll blow away the Duce and the King too.

Maps of Abyssinia were posted everywhere, and everyone listened passionately to the radio. But in the crowds which gathered in front of the maps and around the loudspeakers, there were always those who hoped for defeat instead of victory: "This time they'll break their necks! . ." And these people would strike up a conversation with another Somebody, instilling doubts: "But even if we win, who says that Abyssinia is rich?" "If the English left, it must be worthless." "It would have made more sense to build bathtubs rather than cannons." "We have had Eritrea and Somalia for 50 years, and they have cost us nothing but blood and money, without any return." "The whole world is against us. . ."

To those who said that defeat meant the death of our boys in East Africa, the answer was, if the speaker was to be trusted, that a defeat for Fascism now would save innumerable lives and incalculable suffering later.

I remember discussing the situation one day in Venice with Eugenio Curiel and another friend. At the time, sanctions seemed like a real possibility: we expected an oil embargo and the closing of the Suez Canal. Excited by the prospect, we counted the days until the end of Fascism in a matter of months,

or rather, weeks. On the Makalé front things were not going too well. "Black shirt, Assassins' face!" . . . A few months, a few weeks, and then the revolution, the barricades. The Italian people would liberate themselves with the support and sympathy of the peoples of the world. And after the revolution . . .

After the revolution . . . a golden age. Brotherhood, justice, bread and education for everyone. "After the revolution" life was open to every hope. At the mere thought of this heroic and blessed age, the eyes of revolutionaries shone, like the eyes of exiles at the thought of their distant homeland, like the eyes of children in front of a pastry shop window.

But the sanctions on gasoline never came, the Suez Canal never closed and, on the maps of Abyssinia posted in the shop windows, a long red line showed the advance of Graziani from Somalia to Neghelli. That line cut into our flesh, leaving a trail of blood and wounded dreams.

* * *

After a short stay in Florence I went back to Padua to return to my work as an assistant professor. My most important assignment that year was to oversee the construction of a new Physics Institute. The government had established a large fund for expanding the University of Padua, and the buildings plans included a new Physics Institute. The purpose of the construction, in the mind of the authorities, was to create a "Showpiece of the Regime," in other words a monument to the Fascist government. Rossi tried, and succeeded, in making a physics laboratory, and actually, it was one of the most beautiful labs I had ever seen. He rejected all the architects' plans, and designed the building himself, including the details for installing all the technical systems.

The Institute had about 100 rooms, sensibly laid out and well equipped for research and teaching. There was a large lecture hall, plenty of office space, a large room for high voltage experiments and a tower for research on cosmic rays. I frequently went to the construction site to oversee the work, explaining where the plumbing and wiring went, making sure that the windows closed, and that the machinery was installed with all due care. All research in the old lab was suspended so as to devote full attention to the construction of the new Institute which held such great promise.

I lived at the Centennario Hotel until summer vacation that year. Almost all the guests at the hotel were students. It was modern, clean and reasonably comfortable. I ate my meals at the hotel in the mixed company of both engineering and philosophy students. Curiel was the go-between for the two groups. He was still an assistant in rational mechanics but he devoted all his time and energy to philosophy. There were always philosophical idealists at our table.

We spoke of many things but we always avoided politics out of respect for a student who ate with us but who suffered greatly at hearing our harsh criticism of Fascism. He was a count from Friuli, a wonderful kid, reasonably intelligent, sensitive and friendly. He, like everybody else, was aware of our opinions, of which he disapproved deeply. But it never crossed my mind that he might denounce or betray us -- denunciation and betrayal might happen in Germany, but in Italy these things were left to professionals. The trade of spying was so despised that amateurs were in short supply. If a few times I was afraid that I had spoken too openly, each time my fears proved unfounded.

One evening, for instance, Giancarlo Facca, a student of natural sciences, came to my room. He was a young man from Friuli, very intelligent, with blatantly socialist tendencies, but one of those who supported the politics of collaboration with Fascism. He had a position in the GUF and he frequently showed up at their meetings. He had volunteered for service in East Africa while I was in France, but returned before the end of the war to take exams. He spoke in a loudly, even brutally, smoked a pipe and dressed carelessly.

He looked a little like a colonial veteran, but there was something about him that inspired trust. His eyes were cold as ice. As I was saying, one evening he came to my room and we began to talk. We talked of politics, socialism . . . at first I was a bit reticent, knowing his past, but after he himself made some radical statements, with which I totally agreed, I couldn't resist telling him all my ideas -- revolution, social justice, the armed overthrow of the government. At the word revolution those cold eyes flashed, with one of those flashes that betrays nothing. I asked him why he went to Africa. He said that he

considered it an act of solidarity with the enlisted men, not an act of loyalty to the government. Thinking back on this conversation the next day, I worried whether I had spoken too freely. But nothing happened; my trust was not misplaced.

Another time, perhaps a year later, I had a long conversation with the Secretary of the Cultural Committee of the GUF. He was a slimy young man -- the kind who has a limp handshake, who never actually takes your hand. He had flat feet and styled himself an idealistic philosopher . . . I thought he was somewhat disgusting. He had an unctuous air, with a bit of a clerical bent. But occasionally he had a crisis of conscience, and a need for self-criticism like a character in a Russian novel.

I happened to run into him one evening when he was in one of these moods and I was momentarily taken in by him. I sat with him and listened as a fellow human being, and in return I spoke to him openly, man to man. I told him in no uncertain terms that he usually made me sick, that his political activities were immoral, and that I did not know how to reconcile his political theories (in reference to Croce's position towards Fascism). He listened, making the most of this opportunity to beat his chest and confess his sins, and that was the end of it. We never got any closer as a result of this experience, but I'm sure that he didn't abuse my confidence to better his political position.

I remember an interesting conversation with a young man who had recently graduated in physics, the son of one of the owners or editors of Venice's daily newspaper, *Il Gazzettino*. He gave me interesting insights on how the government controlled the Italian press. In Fascist Italy there was no censorship; control was exercised indirectly and by proactively. In the early years of the regime reporters who were not sufficiently respectful towards the regime were forced to drink castor oil; newspapers that were not openly Fascist were ransacked or burned. But as time went on, violence was no longer necessary.

Theoretically there was freedom of the press, but prudence dictated that the editors of surviving newspapers stick close to the party line. And the party, in its goodness, helped them in their need by supplying daily instructions on the layout of the paper: Page One: The Duce Visits Littoria: five column headline with photograph; Page Two: The King Visits a Hospital, three columns; News about the new tax increase on the last page, on the bottom.

Thus, each editor became his own censor. The reporter did nothing more than fill the assigned columns with common propaganda and adulation for the regime, following directives from above -- and in the absence of specific instructions, he invented them. So as not to endanger himself, the reporter did his best to exaggerate his praises rather than run the risk of appearing too cold; this process had no limit beyond the opinions of the reporter and the political authorities, as to where it crossed the line into the realm of the ridiculous; and in general, the limits of the ridiculous for a paid shill or a bureaucrat in a black shirt were far beyond those of the common mortal.

But from these papers, as from papers all over the world, it was possible to find news. People could reach their own conclusions. I would even say that, knowing the journalist's writing style, and the techniques used to control the media, one could deduce many things that were not explicitly stated. Some of the dailies had foreign correspondents who wrote fairly clearly. Columnists sometimes reported extensively on the opinions of opponents of Fascism, taking care to introduce the remarks with an insult directed at the person being cited, and concluding with a personal statement of disapproval. I sometimes wondered if this practice was a conscious attempt to keep Italians informed, despite control of the press.

Weekly newspapers were not an Italian tradition, except in the form of *Domenica del Corriere*, or its look-alikes, which catered to the less educated in terrible taste -- stupid papers like most of the funnies or like New York's *Daily News*.

Satirical political papers were for all practical purposes destroyed by Fascism which did not allow political satire. In its place, a new kind of humor arose which I never appreciated, but which was popular among many, even people of considerable intelligence and good taste. It was a humor completely devoid of logic and often based on empty plays on words. It can't be denied that newspapers containing this kind of humor, like *Marc' Aurelio* and *Bertoldo*, had a large circulation and popularity. But in my opinion this success was a result of a kind of decadence attributable to Fascism. No longer able to laugh at what is happening and since, especially in hard times, laugh one must, we are reduced to laughing empty wordplay, given that substance is forbidden.

College papers, which I will write about later, enjoyed much more freedom. In the last years of my stay in Italy, a rather good weekly came out which reminded me of those in France. In this paper whose name I don't recall, I frequently sensed some antifascist undertones, deftly camouflaged.

* * *

Meanwhile, the war raged on in Abyssinia until finally Fascist troops entered Addis Ababa. Mussolini gathered the Italian people on every piazza in Italy to proclaim the advent of the Empire over loudspeakers.

Everyone was summoned to hear the words of the Duce. Party members had recently been issued new uniforms of a funereal, Sardinian fabric. The instructors and assistants at the University of Padua were instructed to assemble at the University gate. Fearing a roll call, I went to find out what the situation was. Of course, I was out of uniform. In the midst of this crowd of people of my own nation, I felt like a foreigner, if not an enemy. I saw my professor, some of the other instructors and the technicians from the lab, all in their new somber black uniforms; I could only pity them.

But I also saw the crowds of hard-working people, good people dressed in inexpensive clothes, young and old, women and children, all elated that the war was over, proud of their victory, proud of their Empire, which, sad burden, was being turned over to them through the loudspeakers. All this saddened me deeply; I felt alone in the midst of this crowd, my heart out of step with theirs, indeed out of step with the heart of my own country. I felt disillusioned by my ideals, as though all my dreams had failed. I could not shake these feelings, and, before the speeches began, I withdrew hurriedly to my room. Even there the sounds from the loudspeakers reached my ears.

I had never been so discouraged by a political event. My ideas had suffered worse defeats, but a defeat inflicted by a known adversary is less disheartening than being cut off from those in whose name you have struggled: the people of one's own country. I felt rejected by the single energizing principle in which I had placed every hope: the masses, the good, common, everyday, courageous people!

After a few sad days, I thought that perhaps I had been mistaken. Maybe Fascism had really fought for the good of the country, maybe the Empire was the cure for Italy's ills, after all. When I first met Giancarlo Facca, the naturalist with the cold eyes, I told him my misgivings. I told him that I realized that Fascism now had tremendous popular support and that it could do almost anything.

Mussolini could now move toward a reasonable political program, renounce all further military campaigns, work peacefully to develop the conquered territories without oppressing the native people, cut his ties with the capitalists and reactionaries; he could return to the socialist platform which he had originally espoused in his youth. If he wanted to, he surely could do it; and in that case, I told my friend, I would be willing to collaborate, to do everything in my power to help him.

He looked at me rather quizzically. He was better acquainted with the inner workings of the party than I was. He told me: "Don't get your hopes up. There's nothing to be done. You have no idea how corrupt things have become."

And the future proved him correct. A few months later, the Spanish Civil War began. And the Italians, recovering from the passing the excitement of becoming an Empire, disappointed at seeing the longed-for peace vanish along with the riches they had dreamed of, returned to their wise old satirical form of humor: "Before the Empire an Italian citizen residing in the monarchy was called *regnicolo*; now he is called *impericolo*." [play on words; impossible to translate]

The only good news at the time came from France with the victory of the Popular Front in the elections. One spring Sunday I went to Florence for one of my regular visits with my mother. Eugenio Curiel came with me. That evening we turned on the radio to get the news of the elections in France. Paris P.T.T. was broadcasting the results. It was a true victory. The parties of the left reported having many elected candidates and almost everywhere they lead the balloting. "Mr. So-and so, S.F.I.O., elected; Mr. So-and-so, Communist, elected; Mr. So-and-so, Radical Socialist, elected." The following Sunday, the results were confirmed. We bought *Le Temps*, which had a complete listing of the election results, and spread it out on a table at the cafe without attempting to hide our delight.

* * *

My private life continued untouched by these incidents. I spent most of my time in the lab, and relaxed by chatting with friends during meals and in the evenings. My friends and I were a close-knit group; we discussed a variety of topics, or chatted about nothing in particular. We frequented the student cafes of Padua and sometimes went out to see a show. Usually we went to the movies as it was difficult at that time in Italy, and in Padua specifically, to see good theater. On Sundays I went to Florence or Venice.

In the lab there were still the same employees, aloof and musty. There were, however a few younger people with whom I got along. Among these was Arturo Loria, a young native of Padua, who had recently graduated, and who disappeared every once in a while for a few months to do his military service as an officer in an artillery unit. He was a wonderful young man and we became the best of friends. His extraordinary intelligence was not obvious at first. He was quiet, without being timid, and very sensitive. He loved to work, but not too much, and often needed someone to provide encouragement to see his projects through.

Loria, Persano (another young instructor who had recently come from Florence) and I made a threesome in the lab where I was the unofficial scientific director, as well as, I might even say, ethical director, in the sense that I had a certain influence over them.

In the University library, during the entire year, was a girl who was writing her dissertation. She had arrived the year before, preceded by a reputation of great intelligence, and extraordinary performance on her exams. She was writing a dissertation on chemistry and, poor thing, she spent her days calculating molecular orbits on a calculator. She was the daughter of an engineer. Attractive, blond, tall, and slim, her bearing revealed her upper class background. She dressed elegantly and in good taste, used a good perfume and make-up -- a little too much for my taste, but she used it well.

Spending a whole year calculating molecules on a calculator would be enough to depress any person with a minimum of energy and imagination. In fact it became obvious that this activity was not good for this particular girl (whom I will call Marina). I felt sincerely sorry for her. This girl of about 21, who was used to studying little and doing brilliantly on her exams, was wasted on that kind of work. It was a shame that a pretty girl like her, in particular, was wasting away in a dark room working on something that could not possibly give her any intellectual satisfaction or interest.

My relations with her were insignificant that year. She called me "Doctor DeBenedetti." As for me, I did nothing more than glance in her direction every time I walked through the library, and all I could think to ask was, in a half-scientific and half-sarcastic tone of voice, how her calculations were going.

Until one fine day, those famous molecules gave Marina more trouble than usual and she began to cry. I thought her tears were for fear of not graduating in July, and of spending her whole summer at the calculator. Seeing a pretty girl cry for the sake of molecular orbits can break a man's heart. In my capacity as an assistant at the University, I approached her to assist her in her time of need by saying a few comforting words. I told her that she was tired and should get some rest: I told her not to think about these things for a few weeks. "Why don't you go to the Lido and spend a few days there? The weather is beautiful, the sun's hot, and I'm sure a few days in more natural surroundings will help you forget your problems."

Marina left for the Lido and we made a date for Sunday morning in Venice to visit the Biennial which had opened a few weeks earlier. We met on the banks of the Schiavone Canal by the Paglia Bridge near the ferry stop. Venice glistened in the sun of a beautiful new summer day.

We saw the art show in the morning and then went to the Lido where we rented a row boat. We rowed out for a swim, and as I rowed she stretched out on the boat.

The problem of correct behavior with a girl in a boat is one of the great unsolved mysteries for young men. As for me, I always came up with the wrong answer. The correct solution must be a complicated function of latitude, longitude, temperature and many other variables which are more difficult to define, like the education, moods and personalities of the two people involved. The last time I had had this experience was in England with a well-built, very attractive 16 year old girl. As the weather

on the Channel is a good deal more turbulent than on the Adriatic, I was full of violent thoughts, but that time I controlled myself, with not a little trouble, scolding myself for my evil thoughts. Of course that was the wrong solution, and my boating companion was disappointed, as she herself told me the next night when we visited the ruins of Hastings Castle under the stars.

So I was very self-conscious with Marina. My desires and my previous experience were pushing me toward an aggressive stance, but my position as a University assistant advised caution. I tried to dampen my embarrassment by rowing and talking. I talked on and on under the summer sun about how strange physics is as a career, about my research, about my interests in general problems, about my travels in Africa and Europe, about my friends in the lab, and the differences between various countries in the world. Marina listened attentively.

Suddenly I stopped rowing and talking, and pondered my companion in the boat. She had spoken very little and I wondered what kind of person she really was. I saw her close to me; I saw her body which she modeled so gracefully under her wet bathing suit. The long, slim, strong legs, the ample hips, the thin waist, the small firm breasts, the delicious curve of her shoulders from which her arms extended as gracefully as the neck of a swan. With all my senses I felt intently the proximity of a healthy intelligent animal of the opposite sex and of my own species. I saw her blond locks protruding from her bathing cap, I saw her blue eyes.

I suffered from not knowing what was going on inside her head, and under her left breast, inside her heart. What is this person experiencing so close to me now? Is she having the same sensations as I? Is she waiting for me to approach her, or is she thinking something altogether different? Would an advance be an unwelcome surprise? Is she one of those girls who is used to flirting casually, or does she number among those who believe in true love and who live only for this, who wait only for this?

From these questions, and from many more, a banal question sprang from my mouth, almost without my being aware of it,

"What would you say if I courted you?"

"Oh!" she answered, "I wouldn't be at all surprised. I'm so used to it!"

I interpreted this reply as an invitation; I took the oars again and distanced the boat from the beach and from any watchful the eyes. When we were a little further away I approached to kiss her. . .

Naturally this was the wrong solution, and the three dots at the end of the sentence stand for absolutely nothing. She said no in an astonished tone, almost as if she was surprised that something like this could possibly happen on the face of the earth -- or for that matter, on the surface of the sea. I understood that she did not say it teasingly, as an experienced person might, expecting the other person to pursue. She said a simple no, earnest and quiet, offered almost as an apology for asking me to take back what I had asked for.

To calm down I dove into the water. Then I returned to the boat and rowed to the beach. On the way back I asked her to forgive me. I told her that I respected her more after her refusal, I spoke sincerely and intently -- basically, my advance was only a result of the accidental convergence of many factors: the sun, the sea, the beautiful day -- and a purely physical attraction. So if she was not in the habit of flirting, she did well to refuse me, and if she was not in the habit of flirting, I respected her all the more for it. Of course I liked her, she was intelligent, refined and, above all, beautiful. The feelings which attracted me to her were these -- they were certainly healthy motives -- but they were not based on qualities that were exclusively hers, and there was nothing lasting about them. I asked her to excuse my behavior and hoped that she and I would remain good friends.

Marina listened attentively and seriously; she seemed disturbed. When we got off the boat we walked together a while and she told me she regretted having refused me.

I asked her to come visit me at the lab when she returned to Padua to prove that she wasn't angry with me. Two days later Marina came to the lab. We went out together that night. We walked through dark deserted streets and talked the whole time about insignificant things, like friends we had in common, and did not broach any subject which could have appeared personal.

Rather than being concerned about an indiscretion to which I attached little importance, I was much more concerned that the indiscretion might be taken seriously, more seriously in fact than it had

been intended. Being rejected for an insignificant advance wounded my pride, but did not trouble me. If Marina had accepted the relationship which I had so impulsively offered, and which I felt was not reciprocated, I would have been very uncomfortable indeed. For that reason I kept the topic of conversation to general personality characteristics and, after taking her home, I considered the incident closed.

A few days later, towards the end of July, I went on vacation.

* * *

I had decided to spend a month in Austria to learn a little German. My mother was going to the Dolomites, to Masare', a little town on the banks of Lake Allaghe, where some other relatives were staying. We left together and I accompanied her to her summer home. I stayed on with her for a few days. in a small village at the foot of the enormous vertical cliffs of the Civetta.

I heard the news there that a Spanish general had rebelled.

I left the Dolomites for Zell am See, a quaint Tyrolean town on the banks of a lake under the Grossglockner. The first few days there I was bored. I knew no one and didn't know the language. I took walks alone and in the evenings I went to cafes and dance halls for some excitement and to find someone with whom I could exchange a few words in German. I read the newspapers to study the language and for news of the insurrection in Spain, which was getting steadily more interesting.

I met a group of people from France and turned to them for news from their country. I started speaking with a couple in my hotel. He told me that things were going badly in France; that the Popular Front government could not last and that a rebellion like the one in Spain was imminent. Another day, in a cafe, I had a conversation with another couple, from Paris on their honeymoon. He taught literature in a high school. He came from a place near where I had stayed, and we discovered that we had some mutual friends in Paris. Of course their version of the events in France was quite different. They were full of enthusiasm and had great hopes.

Then I got to know an Austrian girl whose name was Gretchen. We were staying at the same hotel and sometimes took walks together. She was studying medicine in Vienna. Her mother had remarried, this time to a well known psychoanalyst. So we talked of many things: psychoanalysis, science, travels, life in various countries. We happened to agree on many issues, including politics. We went swimming and rowing together on the lake always speaking in German. I speak German very badly, but somehow I was able to express myself.

We started to flirt and one night, on the shore of the lake I kissed her. The next day we went to a field full of flowers -- she was wearing a Tyrolean dirndl. The next night we slept together. We became lovers and spent a romantic two weeks together.

She, the couple from France, and I drew up a plan for an international student organization, with a journal printed in German, French and Italian. The journal would not be openly antifascist, but it would, within the restrictions imposed in Italy and Austria, strengthen the solidarity of young people across national boundaries. It might have been a meaningful organization, but never got it off the ground for many (rather uninteresting) reasons.

Staying at our hotel was the manager of the *Matin* newspaper with his daughter. They were going to Greece by car and needed directions through Italy. I took the opportunity to talk about the high price of gas, the war in Ethiopia, which was the cause of the high prices, and of the sad plight of the Italians. Monsieur Brunneau-Varilla was a remarkably cultured and intelligent man. He was a member of a very wealthy and well-known French family. He was well-versed in physics, which along with music, which was a hobby for him. He knew the physicists at Broglie. He was pro-Fascist, which he confessed more or less openly, but his daughter was a member of a Communist youth group.

Meeting people from France in this little Tyrolean village demonstrated to me how deeply divided the French were. The venerable old democracy was in danger of being cast aside by nascent pro-Communist and pro-fascist forces.

Towards the end of August Gretchen and I left for Vienna. We stopped for half a day in Salzburg. Gretchen's mother met us at the station in Vienna with a small car. I registered at a hotel in the center of town.

I saw Gretchen frequently during my stay of ten or so days. We usually went out together in the evenings. Once we went to an exquisitely typical Viennese *keller* in an old cellar where a piano and violin played the sweetest and most moving waltzes. We went to visit the communal houses, the *Gemeinhausen*, of the socialist workers. Dolfuss had taken them over at gunpoint when, with Mussolini's help, he instituted Austria's Fascist government. I went to see the Marxhaus, that famous bastion of the Viennese proletariat, and for rather nationalistic reasons, I went to see the Matteottihaus.

Austrian Fascism was more restrained than Italian Fascism. There were, for example, some newspapers which sympathized clearly enough with democracy. After the assassination of Dolfuss, Shussnig walked an unsteady tightrope between the socialist workers, who were defeated but not placated, and the Nazis who advocated annexation to Germany. This precarious balancing act was aided by the victorious hand of Mussolini. The only support the government had in all of Austria was among the Catholics. Clearly such a situation could not last.

Vienna had the sad appearance of a grand old capital in decline after losing its empire.

From Vienna I went to Budapest, traveling through Hungary by boat on the Danube. I arrived in Budapest at night and saw all the buildings of the city lit up. It was a beautiful sight. Seeing the sights close up, however, revealed that there was not much of great artistic value. I was there for Saint Steven's Day, the day of the patron saint of the country. It was celebrated by a picturesque assembly of noblemen in old ceremonial dress, and of course the obligatory clergymen. The peasants came in from the country in their national costumes. The women wore heavy boots which did nothing for their looks.

I went back to Vienna by bus, traversing the Hungarian countryside. I could see how poor the peasants were. They lived in absolutely primitive conditions, both materially and intellectually.

My impression of Hungary was that of a stupid and greedy nobility, a rich, snobbish and pseudo-intellectual merchant class, another small, predominantly Jewish merchant class, and a general population which was outrageously exploited, and so accustomed to being exploited that they were hardly aware of it. Before returning to Italy I passed through Vienna and visited Gretchen. She cried when I left. I realized that our relationship, which had started so innocently, had become serious for me, and for her perhaps something more.

This episode, which I now hold so dear, disproved the contention which young middle class Italians men are taught: Be careful with women -- they are self-centered and dangerous. Afterwards, following other similar experiences, I became convinced of the very opposite: Be careful with women -- they are generous and easily hurt.

PART II

I seek liberty, which is so dear to me . . .
--Dante Alighieri

Chapter Eight Betrayal at Munich

In the second class compartment of the express train from Milan to Paris, I sat silently next to the window, watching closely ~~as-at~~ the ~~passing~~ countryside ~~ee-went-by~~. Lake Maggiore . . . I might never see it again. The train climbed the slopes of the Alps.

I had some luggage with me and enough money to last a few months. After those few months -- the unknown, maybe hunger. Actually, the unknown had begun much earlier: it was a question of weeks, maybe days. The unknown did not just affect me: it affected the entire world. The crisis in the Sudeten seemed to have reached its maximum intensity during that week. In Nurnberg, a meeting of the Nazi party was unfolding. Hitler was to speak the following evening. Would there be war or peace?

Compared to the world-wide anxiety, my small personal problems paled in importance. After all, I was young, I had good friends in Paris and many connections. I had my education and my profession: *omnia mea mecum porto*. I was sure that I would not die of hunger. Why worry? Compared to most refugees, I was in an enviable position. Not only that, I was in an enviable position compared to most Europeans who didn't belong to the upper class. My education, my behavior, and my knowledge of languages put me in a privileged position. How dare I complain when I compared my future to that of a peasant from Calabria or a Polish miner? I would look for work, any kind of work. If I could not find work, I would find something useful to do, rather than die of hunger. In Spain people were fighting for freedom. I could go there and volunteer to fight in the war against Fascism.

I was in the state of excitement that people often feel in difficult times. These are, in the end, the most interesting times in a person's life, when you feel every muscle and every nerve ready to act to take advantage of an opportunity, whatever it may be. For me it is most difficult to tolerate the boredom that results from an easy life, a boredom that drugs you and keeps you from reacting. On the other hand, bad luck has a stimulating, almost intoxicating, effect. My situation also satisfied my need for adventure, which lies dormant in everyone. I was going to Paris -- and then? All the roads in the world were open to me. Maybe I would end up in Spain, maybe in America, maybe in a colonial country.

Never have I felt as rich as in the moments when I had nothing. All the infinite possibilities that life can present to a young man lay before me. Maybe I would continue being a physicist; but -- why not? -- I could become a free lance journalist, a political agitator, an officer in a people's army. Or, who knows? I could be a waiter in a café, a doorman in a hotel, a worker, a farmer. Every possession limits one's freedom. Every profession has its limitations. I felt naked, but as free as I had ever been.

I had left Italy quickly because in case of war, I wanted to be on the other side. As I made my way to exile, what were my thoughts about the country I was born in? I was certainly sad to leave people and places that were dear to me. But, the thought of going towards freedom was reassuring. France was

not foreign to me. The Popular Front, which was nominally in power, made me feel as though I were going home, rather than going away from it.

I felt more guilt than sadness about leaving Marina. Maybe, if things went well, she could join me some day. As for my relatives, especially my mother, I felt bad because I knew that they would miss me, more than feeling that I would miss them.

But what really saddened me was that for a long time I would be leaving behind the experience of Italy, without any hope of return. I would miss the million imponderables that make up a country: the tone of a conversation with friends, the special character of its social relations, the color of the sky, the light, the feel of the countryside, the shape of the houses and cities, the culture, the art ... For many years, I would no longer meet a Florentine who called me *bischeraccio*, an exuberant expression of friendship, nor a Roman who said *va a mori' ammazzato* (go die from being killed) . . .

From a political perspective the situation seemed very clear to me. Italy was Fascist. France was democratic, or rather, Popular Front. My obligation in case of a conflict was to fight against Mussolini's armies for freedom in Italy.

At that time it didn't even cross my mind that one could fight Fascism, even Italian Fascism, without first leaving Italy. I couldn't even imagine that my responsibility might be to fight Fascism as an Italian, in Italy. I had been influenced by Fascist propaganda that had tried to give the impression that Fascism and Italy were one thing. In reaction to Fascist propaganda which exploited patriotism to the very limits of the possible, I arrived at the conclusion that nationalism had no positive value at all. I knew that the Italians suffered under Fascism, but I did not give them credit for being able to fight for freedom. I believed that freedom would have to be imposed on them for their own good as a gift from abroad.

My views on the nature of Fascism were not clear. I did not understand that the current situation was caused by historic and economic conditions. I thought Italy was Fascist because the Italian people were innately inferior. I believed, as did French and Italian nationalists, that "this could not happen" in France or in America, because those peoples were innately superior. But maybe the idea of fighting Fascism from the inside had not occurred to me simply because I did not have the initiative or the courage to live the heroic life required of a fighter in the underground.

But, beneath my excitement there was sadness: the sadness that comes when one takes an irreversible step. In a country without divorce, a girl cries when she marries the man she loves. She cries because she knows there's no turning back, and she thinks of all the possibilities that she leaves behind.

* * *

When the train left the border at Domodossola, I gave a sigh of relief. I had been afraid that the border might be closed to young men of military age because of the international situation. On the other side of the Sempione tunnel, at Briga, I got off the train to buy a newspaper and some cigarettes. This is the first, inevitable act of every Italian who leaves his country.

On the Italian side of the border everybody in my compartment had been silent, but as soon as we crossed the border they all became loquacious. There was a Jew from Vienna, who had been travelling from country to country since the occupation of Austria. He couldn't become a resident of any country, but he was trying to run his business which had connections in various countries. There was an official from the Albanian army -- the only distinguished looking Albanian that I had ever met -- who was on vacation. There was a young English archaeologist who had left Rome because of the international complications. And, finally, there was a French couple.

They all briefly told their stories and expressed their worries about current events. These people who had been silent and reserved in a Fascist country, were open and friendly in democratic Switzerland.

I got off the train at Lausanne.

"Good luck," said the Englishman.

"*Bonne chance*," said the French couple.

The Albanian wished me, "*Buona fortuna*."

"???", exclaimed the Austrian.

This international greeting did me good. It gave me faith and it demonstrated to me that, in spite of the innumerable divisions of old Europe, it was still possible to find unity among people on an individual basis, to show sympathy towards a young man who was forced to leave his country to rebuild his life.

I stopped in Geneva to find out if there were organizations or committees at the League of Nations that would help refugees from oppressed minorities. I telephoned Nina Raditza, daughter of Guglielmo Ferrero and the wife of a Yugoslav diplomat. She invited me to lunch with her and I met her parents there. I learned that the League of Nations had held a conference at Evian about Jewish refugees. The conference had ended after approving a noble agenda for action, but they had not even opened a small office to help those in need. The Ferrero and the Raditza gave me advice, the gist of which was that one had to eat in order not to die of hunger.

So, after one day in Geneva, I left for Paris.

France was in a state of ferment. Everyone on the train talked about war. The conductor had to enlist the next day. Meanwhile Hitler was speaking in Nurnberg, and there was no way of knowing what he had said because in all the railway stations, the newspapers were sold out.

I arrived in Paris in the evening. "4 rue Tournefort," I told the taxi driver, and with the pride of a veteran Parisian, I showed him the way.

I took a tiny room at the Pension Parisiana. At the Pension I found a *Paris Soir* where I read Hitler's speech: threats, but still no war.

The next morning I went to the lab.

"Here you are, old friend. We were expecting you. What have you been doing all this time? Why haven't you written? When we read about the anti-semitic campaign in Italy we thought: De Benedetti will arrive in a few days. And here you are. Don't worry, old friend. Irene will find something for you. She is a good person, you know."

Vacation was not over, and most of the employees had not returned. Those who were there did not feel like going back to work because of the uncertain future. They spent a lot of time in the garden, talking politics.

"We must not give him the Sudeten. He must be stopped this time, otherwise things will get more difficult. War won't be easy. He should have been stopped three years ago, when he occupied the Rhineland. But the British didn't want to fight. Anyhow, we are going to win. The Soviet Union is with us. Czechoslovakia is well-armed. The Spanish Republicans have kept the Fascists at bay without any outside help. With French and British help we can get Franco and throw all the Fascists into the sea."

This was the general opinion in the lab. In the lab, those who disagreed kept quiet. But in other places people weren't always sure. "After all, the Sudetens are Germans. Why fight for Czechoslovakia? It is so far away . . . All Germans have the right to live under the same flag. Germany needs to expand, and it's better if it expands to the East than to the West. After all, Communism is the real danger."

Nazi propaganda had had undeniable success with its favorite arguments: nationalism and anti-communism. "We aren't ready for war. What do you want: the Popular Front, a forty hour week?" None of those who sympathized with the Nazis or, as they said, with Germany, would say that France was unready for war because the reactionaries were undermining people's confidence. The people wanted to fight Nazism. Or that production was low because the owners had been unable to employ the idle hands of the many unemployed who were relegated to being unproductive due to an absurd social organization.

The situation became more critical each the day. "Have you seen the posters at City Hall in the Fifth District?" they asked me at the lab. I went to the Place du Pantheon, near the entrance to City Hall, to read the call to arms of various divisions. Each division had a number, but we didn't know how many men were in each division. Every once in a while a new poster appeared with a new number. "Has your number come out?" people asked each other gaily, as if it were a lottery.

The men corresponding to the numbers, men of flesh and blood, with parents, wives, and children, with small or large personal problems, said goodbye to their families, closed their shops, and left. They left from the *Gare de l'Est*, heading for the Maginot line, singing the Marseillaise and the International.

And the tension grew.

Workers came to prepare the street lamps for a black-out. In the evening we walked in the dark, guided by a feeble blue light.

The other lab employees came back from their vacations, and the group in the garden became larger and larger. We bought every edition of the newspaper, and we listened anxiously to the radio. Chamberlain went to Berchtesgaden to talk to Hitler.

War seemed inevitable. One morning I went to the *Maison Americaine* at the *Cité Universitaire* to see if I could get a room. The director, who obviously was in contact with the embassy, was surprised. "A room? Don't you realize that it will only be days, maybe hours, before there is war? Here, on the embassy's advice, we are evacuating rooms, not renting them."

Talking to friends I realized how much the Soviet Union's prestige had grown among Parisian leftists during the years that I had been gone. The French Communists had been in favor of national defense against Fascism during the period of the *Front Populaire*. They had earned the sympathy of many of those who had been undecided. The Communist Party had become one of the majority parties, and had received many votes (~~how many?~~) at elections. My friends began informing me about Soviet assistance in Spain, about the quality of Russian airplanes and equipment, and they gave details on skirmishes in Japan which, in their eyes, proved the military power of the Soviet Union.

Propaganda, I thought. Miracles are not possible in this world. It's impossible to organize the industry necessary to supply a modern army in only twenty years. They might produce a lot of steel, they might build tanks and airplanes on a large scale, but the quality can't be good. Twenty years are not enough to transform a population of *muzhiks* into a population of precision mechanics. Good schools are needed to prepare workers, and they did not exist in Russia.

My friends answered that what I said might be true in a capitalist society. But in the Soviet Union there was a new spirit. People there knew that they were producing for the good of society and this provided an incentive for improving the quantity and quality of their work, more than any monetary reward could provide in a capitalist society.

Words, I said. Money is the only incentive for work for the uneducated masses. Only some intellectuals, like us physicists, work for their own satisfaction or for goals that are not directly remunerative, such as to promote culture. But a worker . . .

My friends patiently explained that in the Soviet Union there was no difference between workers and intellectuals; that everybody felt part of the socialist society and worked with the same passion as a scientist in his laboratory, knowing that he was doing good for society.

At this point, I would decide that I was speaking to a fanatic. It is impossible to educate an entire population in twenty years.

And the trials? . . .

Basically, I supported the Russian revolution, because it had overthrown the Czars: but I was influenced by an article that I had read some ten years earlier, which held that the most important post-war event was the failure of socialism in Russia. I thought that Russia would have to evolve toward a bourgeois democracy; and that sooner or later, it would go back to allowing private property and freedom of speech. I was galled by the lack of freedom of expression. I saw no other reason for it except as a form of brutal oppression. Thus the Russian people were victims of a regime analogous to Fascism, which, by denying them their freedom prevented them from making progress. And I didn't want to hear stories about the Soviet paradise, the happiness of its people, their sympathy for their bloody tyrants, and their new education of the masses.

Certainly, in terms of its foreign policy, the Soviet Union had behaved well, especially in regards to Spain. The Communist Parties, with their revolutionary programs, were useful in Fascist countries, but dangerous in democratic countries, where evolution was possible without resorting to revolution. I understood that workers and peasants could be victims of Communist propaganda, that its violence and radical solutions could earn it the sympathy of the less educated. But me? an intellectual? falling for this simple demagogic ploy? Never. I was almost offended that people tried to feed me such absurdities. Just the fact that they thought I might fall for this, showed that people had little faith in my intellectual ability.

And what about the trials? . . .

And while we argued, workers were leaving, singing the Internationale. And if I, a Jewish petty bourgeois intellectual, did not whole-heartedly approve of this hymn — although I did have a soft spot for it since it was an antifascist hymn -- it was not surprising that the aristocratic, umbrella-toting Englishman, who held the destiny of England in his hands, was absolutely terrified by it. Chamberlain sprang into action in order to stop this army whose revolutionary songs interfered with his sleep even more than Hitler's savage eloquence. From the radio we heard that the prime ministers of France and England were going to Munich to consult with the German dictator in hopes of keeping the peace.

* * *

A few days later the telephone woke me. It was a woman I knew. "Did you hear the news?" "No, I just woke up." "Ah! you don't know. There will be peace. Finally. Peace. Come eat with us. We will celebrate peace together." I rashly accepted the invitation to celebrate a peace whose terms I did not know. She didn't even give me time to thank her. And so, with a family of good conservative liberals and antifascists, I toasted to the saddest date in recent history: Munich.

I became indignant when I finally read a newspaper. So indignant that I felt the need to grab a piece of paper and write down my feelings.

But on that day, many French families opened the bottle of wine that they had been jealously saving to celebrate peace. On his return, Daladier was met by a crowd that greeted him triumphantly though he had signed an agreement that dishonored his country, and handed it a defeat that could not have been more complete. Apparently, he looked sad on that day, and that should come as no surprise, since anyone, even a person who was intellectually brilliant, would have realized the shame of this act, and the desperate condition in which France found itself after betraying the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

The betrayal at Munich was approved by the Chamber of Deputies. The only votes against it were seventy-three Communists and M. De Kirillis, a sensible nationalist.

Public opinion was divided on the Munich agreement. Its defenders were called "*Munichois*" and opponents were labeled "*anti-Munichois*." The majority, or at least the majority of the newspapers and political parties, defended, or at least justified, the unconditional surrender that was signed at Munich. Those who opposed the pact were the extreme left, especially the Communists, and the few rightists who placed national interests above their class interests.

The average Frenchman was influenced by the mainstream newspapers and thus they were lead to justify the government's action. Even after war was declared against Hitler's Germany, while claiming to be aware of the German and Nazi peril, the general public continued to think of the Munich agreement as a wise, if not noble, act. The pro-Munich faction ~~which-that~~ did not favor of Hitler, argued that France was not ready for war in September 1938, and that by postponing the outbreak of war, the government would be able to complete its military preparations.

I don't want to base my arguments against the Munich agreement on what happened afterwards. The future proved that France was not ready for war even two years after Munich. But I want to explain why it seemed clear to me, in September 1937, that any rational person had enough evidence to be able to oppose the agreement.

Militarily, Munich meant that France gave up the fortified line in Czechoslovakia, a line which had been paid for by the French, and which everyone considered to be excellent. As a result, the Czech army, which was said to be well-equipped, could not resist a numerically superior enemy. So Czechoslovakia's independence depended on Hitler's guarantee. Was it possible, in September 1938, that anyone could still believe in Nazi promises? Since no-one, at least in France, was this blind, it was clear that the Munich agreement meant the complete surrender of Czechoslovakia, with its natural resources, its agriculture and industry, to the Nazis. I cannot understand how, in the eyes of the pro-Munich faction, this could be balanced against the prospect of a period, however long or short, of military preparation for the French.

The Czech army certainly had more equipment than France could produce in a year; and in the balance of the forces, this equipment should be counted double: 1,500 airplanes in allied hands are 1,500 more than no airplanes; but the difference would amount to 3,000 if these airplanes ended up in enemy hands. Furthermore, all Czech industry, and in particular the Skoda enterprises, were given over to Hitler.

But even supposing that Hitler would not be able to take advantage of its occupation of Czechoslovakia, was it reasonable to think that military production in France and in other democracies equal German production? In Germany, all industry was subordinate to the military, while in France and England military production accounted for only a small percentage of available resources. Given that France and England, with their allies, were militarily weaker than Germany in September 1938, it would have taken a radical change in their economic structure and in the lifestyle of these democratic nations to overcome the differences in a few years.

First of all, industry would have to be reorganized, starting with retooling for war on a grand scale. And this meant that, during the time that arms production geared up, Hitler would wait patiently for his enemies to prepare to defeat him. Clearly, the Frenchman's blind trust in the Maginot line was one of the reasons that the state, the government and public opinion believed they had the time to rearm. But if this was the reason for the excessive faith in French security, then why was the Maginot line not extended along the Belgian and the Swiss borders? After the example of Austria and Czechoslovakia, could anyone possibly believe that Hitler would have scruples about going through neutral territory?

From a strictly military perspective it therefore seems clear to me that the politics of Munich were not sustainable. From the diplomatic perspective, its effects were even more disastrous, if that were possible. The allied betrayal of Czechoslovakia could only destroy any faith among other allies that the great democracies would help them in time of need. The Little Entente, which was the only factor in the stability of central Europe, was annihilated by the pact signed in Munich. The alliances between the Balkan countries and Eastern Europe fell apart. Hitler's propaganda was reinforced, and submission to Germany appeared to be the only logical hope of the smaller nations, not just to maintain their independence, but to avoid useless bloodshed. Germany's hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe was implicitly recognized by the signatories at Munich.

Another important factor was the consequence of this pact on the politics of the Soviet Union, which had not been invited to participate in the discussions in Munich. For some years, the Soviet Union had been conducting a foreign policy based on collective security, and collaboration with democracies against the danger of Fascist aggression. It had acted according to these principles, and had demonstrated its good faith by its aid to republican Spain. The Soviets hoped this would help the parties of the left to create gradual improvements in social conditions that would foster a tough antifascist outlook in various countries. This was the only hope for combating the reactionary forces in Germany and Italy. In other words, this was the politics of the Popular Front. The agreement in Munich was the equivalent of sending the following message to the Kremlin: the Popular Front has failed; we have decided to come to an agreement with Hitler without considering your opinion; we will allow the Nazis a free hand in the East; but if tomorrow we should find ourselves in trouble we are still counting on you.

Mussolini took advantage of those tense weeks to put on a pitiful spectacle as class clown, styling himself as having saved the peace. He gave a series of talks in the Veneto region, which no-one listened to, affirming the right of Germany to the Sudeten, and denigrating Benes and the Czechoslovakian Republic. He was followed around by a trainload of young Fascists, who were taking advantage of a cheap trip, and were instructed to applaud and boo at the right moments. One of my friends, in whom I have complete confidence, told me that he spoke to one of these young men, and that he saw the little whistle that he had been given with instructions to use it whenever he heard the name Benes. Hitler rewarded Mussolini for this histrionic performance by spreading the word that Munich had been Mussolini's idea. Hitler was so generous that he claimed to have consented to meet the French and English prime ministers in order to please his friend Mussolini.

So why was the Munich agreement signed, given the obvious consequences? To me it seems absurd to look for nationalistic causes (which according to a tradition inherited from the last century tend

to be used to explain wars and other political events). It seems obvious to me that the causes can be found in the social arena.

It is true that Munich was a victory for Hitler and a disastrous defeat for the French and English democracies. But it is also true that, at the same time, this victory for Hitler was a temporary success for those factions which more or less openly controlled French and English politics and this appeared to be the reason why the prime ministers of the two countries signed the infamous document.

There were two possible consequences if the Munich agreement hadn't been signed. The first was the bloodless defeat of Hitlerism -- a defeat from which the Nazi regime would be unlikely to recover. The second was immediate war. Without trying to evaluate the probabilities of either of these events occurring, I will try to analyze them.

The first possibility would have resulted in the defeat of German Nazism and Italian Fascism at some point in the future, as well as victory for the Republicans in Spain, triumph of the Popular Front in France, increased prestige for the Soviet Union -- and its control in central and eastern Europe and in the Spanish peninsula. The French and English leaders -- especially the French leaders -- would thus have been caught between two fires, and it would have been difficult to resist popular pressure for reforms that were even more radical than those introduced in 1936.

In the second case, things would have been even worse for the *Comité des Forges* and for "the 200 families." The gentlemen of the Bourse and of the Stock Exchange were more frightened of the soldiers who left singing the Internationale, who would have sided with the Red Army and the Spanish Republicans, than they were of Hitler's legions. These soldiers were an enemy close at hand, an enemy in their own home. The soldiers, excited by the war against the Fascists, might have tried to destroy, maybe violently, any group that was hostile to the Popular Front in their own country.

These gentlemen did not particularly like Fascism. I am convinced that they would have preferred to continue to profit by economic liberalism in a democratic regime. But the choice between Fascism and Socialism was simple: Fascism would have simply controlled, but not eliminated, their profits, while Socialism would have removed their privileges, whether legitimately inherited or earned by someone else's honest labor. And maybe, who knows? socialism might have threatened their delicate complexion.

Far be it for me to libelously insinuate that these gentlemen liked Fascism! It was just that they wanted to fight the Fascist danger themselves. They did not want to give the Popular Front the honor of the battle, in case, after victory the people might -- God save us -- take advantage of the situation for their own ends. And when these gentlemen said that they were ready to fight Fascism, it was no different from when, in their secret administrative meetings, they decided to build, say, a railway: according to them, the people would vanquish Fascism, while they exercised their indispensable directorial functions and reaped economic and political profits from the operation.

As simple as two plus two equals four! Hadn't things always been this way?

* * *

Meanwhile my personal situation was resolved in the best possible way. When Madame Joliot returned from vacation I went to her to explain my situation. She said that she would be happy to have "a worker who knew how to work" in the lab. I was naturally flattered, and I am aware that by repeating it here, I'm simply promoting myself for my own satisfaction. As to the possibility of getting a stipend, things had changed since I left. During my absence, France had been governed by the Popular Front and Madame Joliot served as under-secretary of Scientific Research. A National Research Center had been created, and a stipend might be available to me.

The committee that decided these matters was to meet several months after my arrival and I was advised to present my case. I spent a few days in the lower realms of university politics that appear to be indispensable throughout the world. I went to see professors whom I knew, asking them to speak favorably about me to members of the committee; I obtained letters of introduction and recommendations. Before the meeting I was sure that a majority would be voting for me and in fact, Joliot, Madame Joliot, Perrin, Langevin, DeBroglie, Auger, and others did vote in my favor. So I began working again in the

Curie Laboratory. My stipend was not large, but given that I had been considering the possibility of starving, I felt like a wealthy man.

I realized that my idea of finding work other than research was completely impractical. As a foreigner I did not have a right to work without a work permit (*carte de travail*) that was issued by the Prefecture de Police. This was almost impossible to get due to French unemployment and the influx of refugees. On the other hand, I could take advantage of a stipend with a simple residence document that I obtained without much fuss from the Prefecture de Police upon presenting letters from the University and the Minister of National Education.

The problem of "documents" was much more complicated than it had been on my first visit to France. Events had led to a growing number of refugees entering the country. First it had been Jews and German antifascists. These had been followed by Austrians, then Czechs. The first refugees had been welcomed warmly, but as their numbers grew, more and greater obstacles had been put in place to prevent their arrival and their stay in France.

Some had arrived illegally, not having the means to get a passport or visa; others had permission to stay a few months or a few weeks. All these refugees met at the Prefecture de Police when they had to obtain or renew their permits. Their situation could be expedited if they had money with which to bribe the officials. Otherwise they were forced to make lengthy repeat visits to the Prefecture and to wait in endless lines.

I can report that some of my Italian friends who came with adequate resources, had gotten identity cards for a nice little sum from an official who told them that he helped Italian emigrants. As it turned out, he was an OVRA agent, and he was tasked with keeping the Italian government informed about the activities of political émigrés as well as other information about the Parisian police.

During my first few weeks in Paris, I saw Franco Venturi again. I spoke to him frequently, as well as with Battino, who wrote for *Giustizia e Libertà* newspaper under the pen-name of Vittorelli. They asked me for news from Italy and I told them that I had reliable information that German officials were posted to the Italian government.

An official of the *Fasci Femminili* in Padua had gone to Rome to find out how to handle the case of some Jewish women who had donated time and money to the Fascist cause and who held executive positions. To her surprise, at the Ministry of Interior, which dealt with racial matters, she found herself speaking to a German through an interpreter. After the goose step and the anti-semitic campaign, the premonitions had given way to the first real indicators of the end of Italian independence.

This news was published in *Giustizia and Libertá*. The Ministry of Interior, which naturally read the antifascist papers, promptly sent a letter denying the charge. *Giustizia e Libertá* published the Ministry's letter from a sense of excessively scrupulous honesty, along with a disclaimer implying that information from the Fascist government was not to be trusted. And soon no-one could doubt the fact that Germans had a presence in the Italian government.

However, my contacts with *Giustizia e Libertá*, were always very superficial. I had a personal friendship with Venturi and Battino, and I liked to talk to them about politics, but I did not work with the movement in any way. They asked me to write an article about my impressions of Italy. I did not write the article, partly out of laziness, and partly because I thought I had nothing to say. Although I had a positive opinion of these two friends, and I believed the *Giustizia e Libertá* was serious movement, I felt only a negative tie to it: a common aversion to Fascism. But they did not communicate any positive ideas to me, probably because their political program was not well-defined; and I didn't feel there were any new ideas that could provide a new direction for Italy and Europe. They didn't convey the confidence I needed in order to undertake the work. In other words, they seemed too academic -- serious academics and refined intellectuals -- rather than political activists.

Not that I understood at the time that these were the reasons for my lack of action. I attributed it simply to laziness, since I considered *Giustizia e Libertá* to be the group closest to my opinions ideologically. And there was also a sentimental element, given my memories of the *Quaderni*, and how they had excited me in Italy, almost 10 years earlier. But later I realized there is no such thing as laziness when you have a deep belief that the work is actually useful.

* * *

Shortly after Munich, I received mail from Switzerland. Opening it, I was surprised to find a letter from Eugenio Curiel who had left Italy and now wanted to come to France. He had financial problems and had been blocked by the Swiss because Italians were now required to have a French consular visa.

Although I had little money, my position at the lab was secure, so I sent him some money. One night, speaking to Battino about this friend who was having problems, I asked him if the *Giustizia e Libertá* organization would be able to help him to come to France illegally in case of necessity,.

"What is your friend's name?" Battino asked me.

I replied, "Eugenio Curiel."

"Eugenio Curiel? But Curiel's a Communist. Why is he asking you?"

I was baffled. Eugenio, a Communist?? And I was his best friend and never knew about it? Why would he keep this a secret from me, whose anti-fascism he could not have doubted. And what about his activities with Fascist organizations?

Battino explained to me that Communists liked to work underground; that they follow their Party's instructions blindly; that they are diffident, disparaging or even hateful towards everyone who is not a Communist; and that, in the last few years, they promoted a devious politics of collaboration with Fascism, or at least of infiltrating their ranks. But he had heard that Eugenio was a person of extraordinary intelligence and highly cultured.

"If Curiel turned to you," he said, "it means that he either can't, or he won't, depend on the help of the Communist Party. It means that he has broken with the Party . . . Certainly, a person of his intelligence can't last long in that kind of militaristic organization, which demands an iron discipline which no-one but the most fanatic or unintelligent will tolerate. Maybe he wants to join *Giustizia e Liberta*. Naturally, we would be glad to have him in our organization . . . It's not that hard to cross the Franco-Swiss border."

I wrote to Eugenio, but got no answer. For about a month I heard nothing more from him until one day, on the corner of Capoulade, I met a student from Padua--a Jew from Trieste who was emigrating. (Meeting a friend on the corner of Capoulade was no surprise. You can meet the most unexpected people on the corner of Capoulade.)

"Do you know anything about Eugenio?" I asked him.

"What? Eugenio is here! He's in Paris, and he lives in the hotel where I'm staying," and he gave me the address.

"That's just down the road from my place," I observed. "Why hasn't he contacted me?"

But Eugenio's strange habits no longer surprised me, and I was willing to forgive him. So I went to his hotel, and not finding him, I left him a note. He responded by leaving a note at my pension. He certainly wasn't showing much interest in seeing me. But I was curious and went looking for him again several times until I finally found him.

Eugenio was of Jewish origin so it was not strange that he had left Italy during that time. However, his behavior was totally different from the conduct of all other émigré Jews. He was very happy, sure of himself and of the future. In other words, he seemed like a man who has an open road ahead of him, and who believes he understands the meaning of everything that is happening and who has a goal in life. He didn't have the afflicted or preoccupied look of a recent émigré in search of work to put food in his mouth, shaken by events that his mind cannot comprehend. He didn't have the frightened appearance of a person who has left behind everything he holds dear; he seemed to be a man with a precise goal; one who is certain that he is doing something important and noble.

He told me that he had come to Paris because a rich uncle had paid his way to help him get set up in a foreign country after having lost his position in Italy. He stated that he would be returning to Italy soon, and that he took advantage of the opportunity to travel for pleasure.

"I can't live outside of Italy. I am too attached to my country. Abroad, I feel like my life has no purpose."

"But how do you expect to live in Italy with the anti-semitic laws?"

"I'll figure something out; maybe I'll give private lessons. And plus, I have some contacts in the Fascist Party that can be useful. Maybe I'll go live in Milan."

I didn't object. But one evening -- only in the evenings can one speak of important matters -- I alluded to the rumors that were making the rounds about his relationship to the Communist Party. I told him that he was crazy to go back to Italy, and that maybe he could find some work in France, maybe in the anti-fascist movement. I suggested that I could introduce him to my friends in *Giustizia e Libertá*.

"Are you crazy? I want to go back to Italy and I have no desire to compromise myself so that I can talk to some activists. And anyhow, I'm still a Fascist."

"Despite everything?"

"Despite everything. There's a lot to do in Fascism, for the good of Italy, and I hope that my friends allow me to collaborate with them again. Obviously, I won't be in a high-level position; I'll write articles and publish anonymously, and I'll work for the improvement of the regime which I still support."

I told my friends at G & L about this conversation.

"Curiel is still a Communist," they deduced, "and he doesn't want to blow his cover."

I didn't understand what was going on. Curiel sounded sincere and I couldn't imagine that even an immoral Communist could lie in this manner to a person who had been his best friend. On the other hand, *Giustizia e Libertá* seemed to be certain of it.

On another evening, I tried again.

"I understand that you are still a Fascist. But here in Paris it appears that even if you are not close to the Communists, the Communists are close to you. You have journalistic experience and, if you read the *Voce degli Italiani* (an Italian language daily published by the Popular Front under the auspices of the Communist Party) which is very poorly written, it's clear that the Communists could use someone who knows how to write. Why don't you try to contact them? You could work as a journalist, which you are very interested in, and try to spread your ideas. It would be satisfying work which, in my opinion, would be useful because it would improve the tone of an anti-Fascist newspaper.

"Please quit making all these inferences. I don't want to have anything to do with the Communists or with any other anti-Fascist party." His voice shook with disdain as though I had bitterly offended him. "And please quit talking to your friends about rumors that are circulating about me which, in addition to being invented out of thin air, can be extremely damaging toward me in the future, in Italy."

And before leaving, he added some patriotic statement of faith in Fascism.

I left him not knowing what to think and finally convinced that it was useless to speak to him. We didn't see each other for several weeks.

Finally, for the first time, he came to see me, which completely surprised me.

"I'm not going back to Italy," he said.

"Did you change your mind?" I asked.

"Did you read about Colorni's arrest?" Colorni was a professor who was arrested in Italy, a few days earlier, for anti-Fascist activities.

"I read it, but what does that have to do with you?"

"I knew Colorni. We worked together. Now I can tell you everything. I am a member of the Communist Party and the Party has decided that it's useless for me to go back to Italy because I would be arrested immediately."

I was floored. What kind of Party was this and what kind of people would be members of the Party? I had heard people speak of discipline, but I had never expected anything like this. "The party has decided." This meant that Eugenio was not free to make his own decision to stay in France or to go back to Italy. Why did he submit to Party orders? Why didn't he care more about his own interests? This Party controlled his existence to the extent that it decided his relationships with his friends. It was inhuman!

And yet, Eugenio was not stupid. Why did he let them lead him by the nose? Was he going through a fanatical phase? His behavior seemed so strange that it seemed absurd. All of a sudden a window had

opened on a world that I knew nothing about, whose existence I didn't even suspect. I knew anti-Fascists in Italy and abroad. They were sincere, enthusiastic, serious, intelligent. But this Communist Party was completely different. It was inhuman -- this was certainly the best word to describe it. It isn't logical; it isn't admissible that a man should behave in this manner.

Towards this unknown world, I felt immediately and instinctively, a sense of fear and repulsion, like a child confronting an unknown food.

Eugenio asked me to introduce him to my friends from *Giustizia e Libertá*. I did so with pleasure, hoping that they would show him the road to reason. I took part in their conversation. It was an orgy of culture and erudition. I knew that Eugenio was well-educated but I was amazed when I heard him speak. He knew the tiniest details about the lives and ideas of the most obscure philosophers; he knew history, not by years, but by hours and minutes. He had ideas about everything; he had thought about everything; he had answers for everything.

On the conditions in Italy from the Risorgimento to the present, his knowledge was even deeper. And it wasn't a dry culture -- lists of kings, ministers and thinkers -- it was a live knowledge of the conditions of the people in various social classes and in various regions. He knew how much workers and peasants earned; the cost of bread in each region, at least in more recent years; he knew how people dressed, how they ate, and what kinds of houses they lived in. And none of this was dry statistics. In his mind, these were not numbers, they were facts -- real facts, tested by personal observation or by patient library research. This Communist, by definition a man of internationalist interests, had Italy in his blood; its problems in his head. Southern questions; colonial questions. . . . I had to admit that among Communists, even if they were exceptional, some serious people were involved.

The "Party" (such respect, such devotion, such affectionate attachment in Eugenio's voice when he spoke this word) had "decided" that Eugenio was to go to Egypt to establish and direct a Popular Front Italian-language newspaper. For Eugenio this was the best possible opportunity. I almost envied him for this magnificent opportunity. We had dear friends in Egypt who would welcome and help him. He could look forward to a fairly comfortable and secure life -- away from this boiling cauldron of Europe -- and the possibility of working for his ideas, and of exercising some influence on the populous Italian colonial community in Egypt.

He just had to wait for his visa from the Egyptian Consul, which would take some time.

But after a few months, Eugenio came to see me again.

"I've come to say good-bye," he said.

"Are you going back to Italy?" I exclaimed. "What happened?"

"They tried Colorni. Apparently, the Fascists didn't have much evidence against him, given that they condemned him to internal exile rather than to prison. It seems that Colorni didn't talk. The Party believes that I wouldn't be completely compromised so they decided to send me back to Italy."

"And Egypt?"

"Egypt? I'm Italian and my first obligation is to Italy. That is the best place to combat Fascism."

I had no choice but to take him to the station. I saw him leave. I waved goodbye after wishing him good luck. And I was left alone on the platform, since none of his other friends had come to see him for fear of compromising him.

I was left alone with my thoughts. I felt the depth of my own personal misery and of the world where I lived. I felt the insignificance of my life and of my little problems. The new world, the world of Communists, which I believed to be a world of the disenfranchised, of failures and intellectual pygmies, violent, blood-thirsty egoists and low-lives, all of a sudden seemed like a world of martyrs and heroes. The example of Eugenio, leaving to take part in a difficult struggle, possibly including prison and torture, with a serene smile on his lips, gave me the desire to explore it -- to find out which of these elements corresponded to reality.

Chapter Nine

The Popular Front and *The Italian Voice* (Winter 1939)

During my second visit to Paris I created a completely different lifestyle for myself. I no longer ate meals at the hotel, originally just to save money, but later because I preferred to eat at the small restaurants in the *Quartier Latin* with my new friends. I rarely spent time in the living room of the Pension and came home only to sleep.

Three years earlier, knowing that I would eventually return to Italy, I had hardly spoken a word of Italian. At the time, the only Italian person I knew was Venturi, and I saw him only occasionally. In contrast, during my second stay in Paris, I lived almost exclusively among Italians. This was partly because, knowing that I would not be able to return to Italy, I was not afraid to spend time with political refugees, and also because the Jewish emigration brought many Italians with whom I shared similar problems, and who frequently came from the same intellectual background as mine.

My best friend during my entire stay in Paris was Bruno Pontecorvo, a young physicist whom I had met occasionally at conventions in Italy. When I arrived in Paris he was vacationing in Sweden. I thought that he had left France for fear that the crisis in Munich might erupt into war. How wrong I was became clear later. In fact he and his Swedish girlfriend, with whom he had lived during the previous year, had hitch-hiked to Scandinavia where she was returning to live with her parents.

I knew very little about Bruno. At the Lab everybody greatly respected him as a scientist. He had come to Paris with an Italian fellowship from 1935 to 1936, and then remained in France after receiving a French fellowship. A professor from Padua had told me that when the Roman physicists spoke of Pontecorvo, they described him as an antifascist -- "even worse than DeBenedetti." Once I ran across Bruno in Venice, possibly at a meeting of the Italian Society for the Advancement of Science; we talked politics, but we weren't particularly cordial as I sensed he leaned toward Communist ideas. But in any case, it was clear that he was using this brief visit to Italy to promote antifascism with everyone he knew. I remember going to a hotel room on the Riva del Vin to discuss politics with various professors and students.

At the lab everyone talked about Bruno with such admiration and warmth that I was almost jealous that this young Italian physicist was more popular than I.

When Bruno returned from his vacation, naturally we met. He was working with Joliot Curie at the *College de France*. We talked about our work, scientific problems, about Italy and the international situation. I could not agree with his politics; he was too radical for me. He believed, for example, that Fascism was an outgrowth of capitalism. This seemed absurd to me because I had heard many rich industrialists complain about government control and high taxes imposed by the state. He maintained that despite state control and the high taxes, these grumbling industrialists were still rich, as I myself conceded.

Sure, I answered, but without Fascism they would be richer still. "Without Fascism, without Fascism. . ." he would say, stopping himself as if either he couldn't think of a good response, or he didn't consider me politically mature enough to understand what he was thinking. Evidently he thought that without Fascism, the rich would be neither rich . . . nor alive.

Anyhow, we became the best of friends. Since our finances were equally meager, we often ate together in the cheapest restaurants of the *Quartier*. Frequently we ate at crowded tables with no tablecloths, in the *Foyer des Étudiants*.

I couldn't resist sharing the opinions which I had heard in the lab. Bruno's intelligence was well above that of most of our colleagues: he had a deep understanding of scientific issues and he had earned everyone's admiration for his energy and spontaneity. He worked only when he pleased, that is when he was thinking about an interesting problem that he wanted to resolve. Otherwise, he did whatever he pleased. He got up late if he wanted to stay in bed; he read newspapers or books, he listened to music -- which he loved with a passion, or he went to the movies if a good film was being shown.

He was from Pisa, and as a fellow Tuscan, I felt close to him. He was good-looking, tall and dark with strong features. A disheveled dresser partly because he didn't have much money, he nevertheless had an innate elegance.

Eventually a third Italian friend joined us. He also came to work at the Curie Laboratory. He was a biologist -- or rather, he had studied medicine at the University. He had given up practicing medicine to do pure research and to find answers to problems which he found interesting and began studying physics. After a year at the Institute for Physics in Rome where, he assisted some of the researchers in order to learn laboratory procedures, he earned the honorary title of Mr. Gofer. But during that year in Rome this "Mr. Gofer" had learned a great deal, and he found himself in the rare and extremely valuable position of being a biologist who knew and understood physics.

Salvator Luria (as I will call "Mr. Gofer") was supposed to come to Paris with an Italian fellowship which he had won in an routine competition. But because he was Jewish, he was denied the fellowship, even though he had already made arrangements to work with Holweck at the Curie Laboratory. I pleaded Luria's case with Holweck, but he said there was nothing he could do to help.

I didn't give up despite this setback because I was sure that Luria could easily get a position on the strength of his extraordinary background in biophysics. When I heard about a convention being held during International Cancer Prevention Week, I advised him to come to Paris. He came and introduced himself to various people, including Holweck, who became excited about him and finally found him a fellowship so that they could work together.

The three of us formed the core of a group that remained together until the fall of France. Many others joined us -- Italian intellectuals who were passing through for a few days or sometimes longer. It was always an interesting group, which I will describe later. I have wonderful feelings about those years. I have never made more friends, in less time, than during those two years in Paris.

* * *

After Eugenio Curiel left, I contacted the Communists. Eugenio had given me the address of a girl, Anna Caprera, who worked at the "newspaper." He had suggested that she introduce me to Ambrogio Donini.

I went to see Anna: an Egyptian-born Italian of very limited aesthetic attributes. She was outwardly very enthusiastic, but it was easy to see that this enthusiasm was not complemented by any depth of understanding or conviction. I realized later that she was merely tolerated at the newspaper by her "comrades" who gave her what little she could be trusted to do. Despite her absolute dedication to the cause (partly as a result of an intimate relationship with one of the "comrades"), she was never considered mature enough to join the Party. Among other things, she was handicapped by having been born bourgeois. Meanwhile, Donini had left and I didn't meet him until much later in the United States.

But one day Anna phoned me to set up an appointment with the "colleagues at the newspaper." That evening she arrived at the Richelieu-Drouot metro station accompanied by two men who, at first

glance, appeared strange to me, insasmuch as they were different from all of my other friends. Clearly these two comrades were not the intellectual types I was used to. They did not engage in that exuberant speech that was common among armchair revolutionaries. Their eyes didn't sparkle with enthusiasm. They were the "doers," the professional revolutionaries. My first impression was thus not very positive.

We went to a cafe to talk. Of course, their first questions were about my impressions of Italy. I spoke mostly of the situation in the universities and I was surprised at their knowledge of the subject. They were well-informed and spoke seriously -- especially Plato, the newspaper's editor-in-chief. I realized that, although they appeared to be aloof, they worked night and day for the Party and the movement, and they did this on a salary which barely sustained them. I realized that their faith was too disciplined to be apparent to an outsider; it had been tempered by years of prison and a life of danger; by long periods of study and thought, alternating with periods of activity and turmoil. Their dedication was profound enough to convince them to settle for modest goals and submit to an iron discipline.

Of the antifascists I had met who were willing to devote their lives to the cause, and who made politics their life's work, there were none who did not expect, more or less consciously, that after the revolution they would someday be tapped for a ministerial position; and I am convinced that most of these antifascists would be far less enthusiastic if this had not been their expectation. Not so for these two Communists. They did not work for personal gain; they worked for the good of the Party.

As the conversation progressed, I realized that I was in the presence of a very serious and substantive phenomenon. When it was my turn to ask questions, I asked what they thought of the Soviet Union. Plato had lived there for several years after escaping from Italian custody, following a trial in which he had been sentenced *in absentia*, to ten years in prison. For him Russia was the Promised Land: a land of hope if not of total happiness.

The soul of that country inspired him more than the best of his own accomplishments. "The people truly participate in the life of the country. My daughter, who is eight years old, went to school in Moscow, and one day she said: 'Sure our heavy industry works well, but our light industry is not yet good enough.' Where else in the world would a boy, let alone a little girl, talk of 'our' industry, be it light or heavy?" We talked about public education in the Soviet Union, living standards, about the role of women, etc. . . I was astonished by his description of this great Soviet experiment, by the courage with which problems were confronted, by the decisiveness with which certain directives were radically changed when they proved inadequate to the overall plan.

Impressed by Curiel's example and by their talk, I asked if I could be of any help in the struggle against Fascism. They answered by inviting me to write for their newspaper.

So we began to talk about this famous "newspaper." *The Italian Voice* was a daily, written in Italian, nominally published by the Popular Front, but in reality controlled and written by Communists. This newspaper was not to my taste; it was not serious enough for me. They told me that the paper was directed toward blue collar workers, and not to intellectuals; and obviously, if only for this reason, I wouldn't like it. But since the revolution could only be made by workers, they had to be addressed in language which was accessible to them.

The paper was short of money and contributors. Only a few people were available to write the entire daily paper, and there was no money to pay for news from the large press agencies. We basically agreed that *The Italian Voice* was not a great newspaper.

Nevertheless, or maybe precisely *because* of my opinion, I accepted their offer to help. They told me that, at the office, nobody except Anna Caprera, would know my name or address. Every appointment would be made through her and I had to use a pen name and never come to the office.

"Why such secrecy?" I asked.

"These are simple precautions. Your mother is still in Italy, and you are more useful if you don't expose who you are. Tomorrow you may want to return, or you might be more useful working in Italy rather than here [revolutionary work, of course]. Even here in France it's better if your friends don't know that you're writing for our paper; you never know what might happen tomorrow. Basic conspiratorial technique."

I went home, enthusiastic and fully resolved to accomplish something. I had been offered opportunities to write for antifascist publications before, for example for *Giustizia e Libertá*, but I had never done it. Why was I so enthusiastic about *The Italian Voice* which, after all, I liked much less, both in terms of ideas and presentation? Because I had the impression that there was a solid organization behind the *Voice*; because it seemed that by doing this I could throw a seed in the uncultivated yet fertile soil of the masses of workers and I wouldn't waste rivers of useless words on sterile intellectuals; because I hoped to raise the standards of the paper, and thereby increase its circulation even reaching people like my own friends. Because, in the end, for the first time, I had the impression that I could do something that was truly useful.

The following days were very busy. At noon I took fifteen minutes for lunch and then wrote. In the evening I locked myself in my room and wrote. My activity was shrouded in secrecy, and for the first few days my friends thought that I had found a female companion. Eventually, they began to suspect that I was involved in some sort of political work, and when I ran into Luria in the hallway at the lab, he asked me in an ironic tone, "So when's the revolution coming to Italy? If you keep this up it should be any day now."

Finally I finished an article on the university scene in Italy --observations that I have already described in these pages. But then I had second thoughts. The *Voice* claimed to be a newspaper of the Popular Front, but it was, for all practical purposes, run by Communists and I was by no means a Communist. By contributing to the paper, wouldn't that tie me to a party that I did not know well? I had heard that Communists did not place a lot of value on freedom, which for me was fundamental. Wouldn't collaboration imply renunciation of my deepest beliefs?

So I started writing another article to clarify my position. The title was "Proletarians, Intellectuals and Freedom." In this piece, I defined intellectuals in terms that Communists did not espouse, but in such a way that, I felt, expressed an important concept. For me, not all educated people were intellectuals. True intellectuals were only those whose goals were to study, conduct research or create something of cultural value, rather than those who used their education as a means of personal gain.

Intellectuals, so defined, need freedom like they need air to breathe. Of course, by freedom I meant freedom of thought, of the press, of expression and of the diffusion of knowledge, and not economic freedom, which is a completely different thing. I did not intend to support freedom for the movement of capital; nor the freedom of private production or freedom to extract profits without paying taxes.

Furthermore, I maintained that freedom of expression is also indispensable for the working class in its struggle for higher standards of living, for their unions, for the dissemination of their ideas, for the defense of their interests. This kind of freedom is a weapon in the hand of every oppressed majority against the privileged few.

Therefore -- and this was my main idea -- the proletariat and "true intellectuals" had a common interest in the defense of "true freedom." The proletariat and intellectuals should therefore lend each other a fraternal hand: intellectuals from all nations unite with the proletariat from all nations.

Finally, the articles were ready. All that remained to be done was to choose my pen-name. I chose the name Lucio Minori: Lucio because its root is the same as the word "light" [in Italian: *luce*], and Minori because it conveys a certain modesty. Besides, the pseudonym could be shortened to LUMI [Italian for "lights"].

And so Mr. -- or shall I say Comrade? -- Lucio Minori set out, articles in hand, for his appointment with the editors of *The Italian Voice*. I insisted that my article on intellectuals and the proletariat be published first. I proposed that its publication be conditional to the publication of the second article about the university. The liberal article was accepted, as was the other.

When Plato read my first article I asked him if he agreed with my ideas. He evaded the question and told me that I should read Marx: "The Party doesn't have 'ideas.' It's based on Marxism and Marxism is a science. It's a political and historical science. You are a scientist. You should study it."

"Science," I objected, "is merely a word. I am used to the exact sciences, and certainly politics is much too complicated to be studied scientifically."

"Maybe Marxism is not a science like physics, in that the rigors of mathematics cannot be applied, but it certainly is as much a science as geology or biology. Marx and Engels have discovered a new method for understanding social problems, and so have been able to transform a more or less philosophical discipline into a science. Dialectical materialism is to politics what Galileo's experimental method is to physics."

These Communists are ignorant fanatics, I thought. They probably don't even know what science is. Yet they dress up their absurd ideas with serious-sounding talk, and are able to convince people who are more naive than I am. I couldn't understand what objection they could have, if they were true antifascists, to my thoughts about the proletariat, intellectuals and freedom.

But Communist ideas about freedom were different from mine. My article was accepted only because it fit the Party line at the moment: i.e., the Popular Front and collaboration with all antifascists in the battle against Fascism. But for them, the "defense of freedom" was only a passing fad. They were convinced that it was not possible to defend freedom in a capitalist system. According to them, freedom as I understood it, would spell the end of the capitalist system, and since according to dialectical theory, the capitalist system could never end by gradual evolution, at a certain point the defense of freedom would become impossible.

Eventually, the reactionary forces would confront the progressive forces and, in the resulting savage battle, every semblance of lawful democratic government would be destroyed. Therefore the "true intellectuals" were useful fellow travelers as long as they were dedicated to defending democracy, thus reinforcing the ranks of the proletariat with their propaganda. But, it was expected that many intellectuals, with their ties to the bourgeoisie, would eventually pass to the other side of the barricades.

I was not convinced by the Communist theory on the necessity for revolution, or at least for a violent rebellion. The idea of peaceful evolution, achieved by a peaceful succession of stable states, like those envisioned by the Social Democrats, was much more attractive to me, from a purely theoretical perspective, and it also corresponded to the utopian ideals of my youth.

But I had to concede that often, in fact too often, peaceful evolution has been interrupted by a bloody reaction. This happened in Italy, in Austria, in Spain, and eventually happened on the entire European continent subjugated by Hitler. But was this progression of events a historical necessity? Was it a general law based on the "science" of Marxism, as the Communists maintained? Couldn't the examples of England, and perhaps the United States, be used to defend the opposite point of view, that of gradual evolution? And even if gradual evolution never actually occurred, could it not still be an ideal in which to place our hopes and deploy our energies?

In any case, even though the editors did not approve of the content of my first article, "The Proletariat, Intellectuals and Freedom," was published in the *Voice* with a brief paragraph introducing the new writer...and dissociating the paper from his opinions.

In the meantime I wrote more articles. I published one entitled "The Recent Jewish Emigration" in which Lucio Minori, posing as a veteran political refugee, addressed a few words of welcome to the new refugees from the racial laws. He invited them to collaborate in the common struggle: "It is useless for you to flee from this struggle by saying that you only care about your own personal problems, or by trying to find shelter on the other side of the Atlantic. Even if you don't want to become politically involved, politics will find you! We must confront the enemy, here and now, while there is still time! The world is too small for you to flee. We must confront the enemy, here and now, while we still have the time."

These words were in effect directed toward me. After Munich there was no shortage of bad news and I had periods of depression and fear in which I foresaw Hitler in France, and was obsessed with getting out, the farther the better -- to America, Brazil, Australia, anywhere as long as it was far away! How many humiliating mornings I spent in various consulates waiting for information or a visa! Why stay? Europe was a mess and there nothing could be done about it.

But the example set by Curiel gave me renewed courage.

From the time I started working for the *Voice* and frequenting active antifascist circles, my attitude changed completely. Without underestimating the danger, I felt there might still be a thread of hope. I became aware that there were still forces able to resist Fascism within France and throughout

Europe. Unfortunately these forces were not well organized, and despite their importance, they could not have much impact on events. Therefore, it was important not to dissociate myself from them, to actively collaborate with their organizations, to fight until they came to power, and to prepare for the struggle against Fascism. And I expounded upon these ideas in *The Italian Voice* in the hopes that someone would hear me.

* * *

They seemed to be pleased with my work at the newspaper, and invited me to collaborate on a regular basis -- that is, they proposed a weekly column about science which was intended to raise the cultural standards of the newspaper. I talked it over with my friends at the laboratory and they were enthusiastic.

The first to contribute was Bruno Pontecorvo, whose pen name was Mario Sbrana. It wasn't hard to convince him to contribute to a Communist paper; he believed, indeed, he had a profound belief, in Marxist theory and wholeheartedly approved of the Communist political platform. Furthermore, he was among those who, admitting that the Party could make mistakes, believed that it should be defended at all costs; among those who, while admitting that the Soviet Union might be a bad proletarian state, believed nevertheless that it should be defended against any possible attack by capitalist countries, and against any and every criticism from capitalists generally because it was, for the moment, the only proletarian state in existence.

The Communist Party was for him more than a political party: it was the representative of the proletariat, which someday would bring the working class to power. Within the Party there could conceivably be a number of different factions just as in capitalist countries there are a number of parties. His faith in the Communist Party was analogous to patriotism within a bourgeois state which, in time of war, can supersede differences of opinion.

Communists like Pontecorvo considered themselves to be in a perpetual war with bourgeois society, so that they were duty-bound to adhere to the Party line, even if it was inconsistent with their personal interests or the interests of their affinity group. Is this fanaticism? In my opinion it is the kind of fanaticism that the Romans displayed when they said *dulce est pro patria mori*, or the Americans who say, "my country right or wrong." Such displays of absolute devotion have always bothered me.

Even Luria, the biologist, began to contribute enthusiastically. And so atoms, electrons, chromosomes and viruses made their appearance each Saturday on page three of the *Voice*.

Our articles were placed next to a column which poked fun at the Fascist authorities and members of the royal family. It was supposed to be witty, but in fact it was vulgar and in the worst possible taste. For the sake of our dignity, and the dignity of the paper, my friends and I decided to have this disgusting column removed from the third page. We told Plato that it was outrageous, and we offered to lengthen our pieces in order to take the place of those horrible articles.

And so, besides the usual articles that we had been preparing every week, we were given two more columns of science news, briefly reviewing the results of research done in various fields. This work required spending several hours in the library, leafing through various journals and limiting ourselves to writing abstracts of articles whose subject matter was accessible and which could be of interest to the general public.

I remember tracking down every newly discovered skull fossil that might convince my small, uneducated readership of the fact that man descended from the apes. With these brief news items we tried not only to present interesting findings to broaden the horizons of the Franco-Italian worker, we also tried to provide information that might call into question their more or less religiously based superstitions regarding the origins of mankind.

Our science news articles were well-received, but they were only published once a week, and the gossip column never moved from its spot on Saturday on page three.

We spoke to Plato again. He listened politely, nodding his head and smiling a little to himself. But all he would say was that in some working class areas this column was very popular and that some people bought the paper for this article alone.

Afterwards, after the paper had folded, we learned that Plato himself was the author of this awful column . . . and Plato could write well and forcefully if he wanted to. But once a week he forced himself to write a half a page of inanity, just to attract readers who could not be reached in any other way.

What a strange person Plato was! One night when we had finished our work -- this was after having known him for more than a year -- he spoke to me about some of his experiences. He humorously described the rout of the Italian Army at Caporetto which he happened to witness. He said that he had participated in the worker's movement as a journalist and an agitator even before the advent of Fascism.

He told me of his escape and his conviction *in absentia* and the part he played in a secret mission in Fascist Italy. Entering the country with a false passport, he rented a house on the Riviera, and from there, with a number of assistants, directed the illegal activities of the Party for a few months. He already had the weight of one conviction on his shoulders and if he had been caught, at the very least, he was sure spend the rest of his life in jail.

He talked about these adventures as if it was the most normal thing in the world; in fact for him there was nothing at all adventurous about it. It was simply his job and his obligation. He had never mentioned it before because, for him, it wasn't at all interesting. Any other comrade would have done the same if he had received similar orders.

The ugly gossip column was not the only source of disagreement between the editors and me. The scientific articles continued to be published regularly, but the ideas of Lucio Minori did not always survive the editors' censorship. The exception made for my first article, "Proletarians, Intellectuals, and Freedom" was not to be repeated.

I once submitted an article on the value of science to society. It was rejected outright because it wasn't Marxist enough. "You see, Minori, it's a fine article. We'd be happy to publish it if it weren't your own. But you are slowly coming around to our point of view, and we wouldn't want to compromise your good name with an article like this. In all probability in a few months you will have changed your mind about some things. Think about it; talk to your friends about it. Study a little dialectical materialism, and maybe someday you'll come back to us with a few corrections to your article."

The point of the article was the importance of science -- and culture -- to society. My thesis was that science could satisfy, within the framework of materialism, the needs which were once satisfied by religion: the need for harmony in the world, the need to feel part of a unified and purposeful universe. In other words, I was arguing that scientific knowledge could be used as a political device; I was trying to highlight the usefulness of the development of rational thinking among the masses, to help them to free themselves from prejudices which function as bastions of privilege.

I took the Communists' advice to heart: I thought it over; I talked at length to my friends, but in the end, my views hadn't changed and I saw no reason why my article should be corrected. I would never change the way I thought or wrote to adhere to the party line! And so my article was not published.

But aside from these ideological disagreements, my collaboration with *The Italian Voice* filled a vacuum and gave purpose to my life in exile in France. Discussions with friends and contacts with political refugees kept me so busy and involved that I remember that year in Paris as being the best year of my life. I felt like I was doing something serious and useful and was totally at peace with my conscience. I felt like I was carrying out my responsibility and felt totally free of worries of a more personal nature.

* * *

Pontecorvo, Luria and I met every day in the most modest restaurants of the *Quartier Latin*. At first we went to the *Foyer des Etudiants* which was the cheapest restaurant in the area, subsidized by an agency whose name I don't remember. It was a crowded, noisy cafeteria. But as soon as we cashed the first meager installments of our student grants, we allowed ourselves the luxury of leaving the cafeteria --

which is fine for less discriminating people like those in the United States -- and met in a small restaurant near Rue Soufflot where the food was a little better.

We soon realized that the most radical elements of the student body of the Sorbonne gathered there. The waitress was an amiable woman in her thirties; one of those gregarious types one finds in France. Her name was Marthe. She addressed everyone with the familiar "you" and everybody addressed her in the same way. As soon as we found a table, we would start reading the newspaper. We commented on the news and talked about problems of politics and philosophy: freedom, Communism, historical materialism, the purpose and place of culture, the importance of the individual in society. We agreed on articles to write for the newspaper, and exchanged addresses of people that we needed to meet; we made appointments with each other, and so on.

A short time later, one of Bruno Pontecorvo's younger brothers showed up -- *il Gillo*. He was barely twenty years old and, upon first meeting him, his most obvious feature was his good looks -- which is not to say that he was lacking in other qualities. He had a dark complexion and light green eyes. He had not yet chosen a career, although he had been enrolled at the University of Pisa.

What he did best was play tennis, although the sport was never his life's goal. He certainly did not have the temperament of the typical tennis pro. But tennis had been useful to him. With an eye to escaping Italy after the passage of the anti-semitic laws, he obtained a fifteen-day visa to France. This happened in the fall of '38. Having been invited to participate in a tournament on the Riviera, he stayed for a few extra months playing in tournaments and giving a few lessons. As he was not a professional, he was not paid for playing (and he should not have given lessons), but he was invited to stay in the finest hotels.

He had lived like a gentleman without a penny in his pocket. Between tournaments he survived on dates, the food which according to him, contained the most calories for their unit price. People took a liking to him immediately; the girls went crazy over him. The rich invited him to their tables and their villas for the pleasure of seeing this lively and sunny boy in their midst. Girls invited him to share their beds.

His success is easily explained: he combined the body of a Greek athlete, a simple demeanor and a refined way of expressing himself. He had an exuberant brilliance about him, an almost animalistic spontaneity, and at the same time a sincere interest in culture. His ideas were not yet either well-developed or profound, but he spoke about everything intelligently, with an honest interest in understanding what others were saying.

He had an extraordinary talent and passion for music. Despite his inability to read music, he impressed everyone with his piano playing. He could recognize a piece of music after hearing just two or three measures, and whistled entire concertos. In Paris he spent what little money he had to rent a piano by the hour, or to listen to classical music at the Chanteclair on Boulevard Saint Michel. He bought himself a harmonica from which he was able to produce magnificent music.

The life he had been living on the Riviera over the past several months would have ruined a less stable young man. But Gillo arrived in Paris, modest and almost ridiculously respectful. He had a great love and respect for his older brother, the scientist, and this respect extended to his friends. When I saw him for the first time he was so tanned I thought he was biracial. For a few days I amused myself by treating him like a child, addressing him with the familiar form of "you;" he continued to address me formally, as though this was the most natural thing in the world, until I finally asked him to cut it out.

When he walked along the Boulevard Saint Michel, he would turn the girls' heads, and with little encouragement they would follow him to his little room at the Hotel des Grands Hommes.

He came to Paris thinking he would study some serious subject, but the only thing he really learned was Communist ideology. He became interested and began to sympathize with Communism partly under the influence of his older brother. He read the literature and bought *l'Humanité* every day. He was soon able to make judgments on the facts, and express his opinions without deviating from the party line. It was not that he thought a certain way simply because it was the party line, rather he had already formulated a framework from which he could personally evaluate events, taking into account both Marxist ideology and his own interpretation of the official party line.

At our table, with Marthe serving us, other Italian students and young professionals joined us. Some were staying in Paris for a while, and others were just passing through. Some had scholarships, and without a doubt, they represented the best of Italian University students.

The Fascist authorities were aware of the quality of these students, at least from a cultural perspective, having granted them scholarships in the first place. Yet among these, I never once met one who was himself a Fascist. One was a Catholic antifascist, another a contact person for *Giustizia e Libertá*, and two others were members of the Communist Party.

There were two young medical doctors who could always be counted on to sit at our table and join our conversations. One, who was from Pisa, had gone to find Pontecorvo in the lab. He had been given Bruno's name by a Communist group in Pisa and, naively, wanted to get information about traveling to the Soviet Union. He was a simple, honest fellow of modest origins -- a good Tuscan proletarian.

It was amusing to hear him talk about the time, during the "red days" in Pisa, when the workers chanted, ". . . and even the Pontecorvos will have to work!" The Pontecorvos were industrialists and, given their economic status, it was assumed that they'd be found on the wrong side of the barricades. But in Paris, the son of a factory worker lunched with the boss' son, and together they talked about the proletariat coming to power.

The other Italian doctor, Antonio (?) Natoli, was Sicilian. He had studied in Rome where he and Pontecorvo had met. His temperament was as hot as the climate of his native island. His eyes seemed to shoot sparks and his speech was longwinded and exuberant: "Terribbille Verramente. . ." In the spring, walking along the Boul. Mich, torrents of words issued from his mouth about girls' legs, about the new leaves on the trees, or about the mild sun of the new season.

His soliloquies were like poems without rhyme or meter. "That girl's legs are a flutter in the air." He had a rich vocabulary and improvised original and expressive analogies on whatever struck his fancy. He was naturally refined and generous. One day Marthe complimented him on his tie; Natoli took it off and gave it to her. He was perceptive and intelligent in his conversation, passionate about music and art, and sensitive to all that is right and beautiful.

Politically, Natoli worked at the GUF in Rome. He said that there was a good [Communist] organization in Rome which had infiltrated the hierarchy of the *Gruppo Fascista* [Fascist Club]. This underground organization was part of Gaida's group. For a long time Gaida had no idea that most of his students were mostly antifascists, or even Communists.

Natoli told us a story about how they behaved at the *Littoriali* [organized Fascist events]. As long as Communist orders were to gain the confidence of Fascist authorities, these boys dutifully went to Fascist meetings acting the part of true believers, but they never missed an opportunity to carry out Fascist directives with such exaggerated enthusiasm as to make them look ridiculous to anyone with any semblance of intelligence -- that is, to anyone except the Fascist bureaucrats.

But when, at a later time, they were under new orders to be more assertive, Mr. Gaida was surprised to hear himself contradicted during a political discussion about the Mediterranean situation. These students, whom he considered his disciples, began talking about the basic political principles of Mussolini's foreign policy, grumbling and expressing their unanimous distaste for the "Word" as revealed by Mr. Gaida, whereupon Mr. Gaida announced that he refused to talk about these matters any further. The students then walked out, leaving Mr. Gaida completely alone in the meeting room.

After a brief caucus, they decided to return to the room. They all took seats, symbolically, on the left. Not a single person sat on the right. This episode may not sound terribly exciting for those who are unfamiliar with Italian ways, but it demonstrates if nothing else, how little the Fascists can rely on the younger generation that is enrolled in the ranks of the Party.

This Roman underground organization was discovered in the fall of 1939. About 70 young intellectuals were arrested.

Natoli and the doctor from Pisa were in contact with the Communist Party and they expected to be returning to Italy. We knew nothing of their contacts or their assignments. It was so obvious that we were supposed to be kept in the dark that we never bothered to ask. Occasionally, one of these friends

announced: I have an appointment tonight. And he asked us for directions to an obscure part of Paris that we were unfamiliar with.

Nobody pursued these matters, and I never found out who they met or what the meetings were about. The illegal activities of the Communist Party were kept strictly secret, even from Party members, and only those who were in charge of coordinating the activities knew the whole picture. When someone returned to Italy, those of us who stayed behind no longer spoke of him. His name was never again mentioned, not even among his closest friends.

It might be interesting at this point to tell another story of a friend of ours who ate *chez Marthe* -- a story which I myself have found difficult to understand, but which might be useful in describing the relationships among this group of political "para-communist" exiles. The protagonist is a law student from Abruzzo, Mario (?) Corbi who left Italy, so he said, because he was in danger of being arrested for participating in subversive Communist activities.

We called him *il Flic* because his southern Italian accent reminded us of the Italian police. We gave him this nickname when, one of the first times we saw him, he told us a joke about a certain Benito Merda (Benito Shit--trans.). This man went to the police station to request permission to legally change his name. To their surprise he told them that it wasn't "Merda" that he wanted to change, but "Benito." Corbi told this joke with much animation, and his rendering of the cop who was so surprised by this request, was so realistic that one of us -- I think it was Gillo -- said, "With that southern accent of yours, you really sound like a Flic!" And the nickname stuck.

Corbi, or Flic, was introduced to our table by Natoli. The first evening we met we were eating at the *Petite Auberge* on *rue de l'École de Médecine*. We hardly said a word to him because we didn't know his politics and he kept his thoughts to himself for the same reason. I remember that he told some witty anti-clerical anecdotes, with allusions to sexual life in the convents. These types of anecdotes were a bit too far-fetched for my taste and, feeling that he wasn't providing a truthful description of the situation, I ended up defending the monks and nuns.

Looking back on it, I think Corbi may have been trying to connect with us, as he knew that several of us were Jewish. That first evening I had one of my regular appointments at the newspaper and I disappeared mysteriously, not wanting the newcomer to know my business. The next day I found out that everyone else had gone to a meeting at the *Salle de la Mutualité* and that Corbi was a "fellow traveler."

Corbi claimed to be a member of the Communist Party, and by the way he spoke, he seemed to be one. He was familiar with Marxist ideology, he had read many books, and he told us a lot about subversive activity in Italy: peasant uprisings, underground radio stations, and the clandestine distribution of literature. His conversation was pleasant; he was articulate, funny, and had a knack for adding interesting and relevant details. He was competent and serious in his political discussions and never deviated from the Communist Party line. He defended every action taken by the Communist Party and took a particular pleasure in cerebral dialectical reasoning. He seemed absolutely sincere to us all.

I remember his reaction to my article about the purpose of science in society which I have already described. The rejection of this article by the editors of the "Voice" was the subject of endless discussions among Corbi, Natoli and me. Others were less concerned with abstract theoretical questions. For days at a time we talked of nothing but "superstructures" and dialectics, accusing each other of rigidity and "idealism." These discussions rarely resulted in changing anyone's mind.

At that time Corbi was anxious about defending the perspectives of his superiors in the Party, and he used such a multitude of arguments that he seemed to be trying to prove the depth of his own convictions. But for him, this multitude of arguments may have been nothing more than a facility with words. I remember one time, on the back platform of a bus, we were talking in Italian about revolutionary ideas. Suspecting that someone was listening to our conversation, we agreed with a sign to change our tone. For the next ten minutes, from the Louvre to the Grands Boulevards, *il Flic* talked like a Fascist.

I was overwhelmed by his pro-Fascist arguments and by the fluency and apparent sincerity with which they flowed from his lips. Goebbels could not have done better. Trying my best to keep up with the game, I could do nothing more than nod my head, and occasionally offer a few words which might be construed as Fascist: I had to search for them and think about them, and I felt disgusted as I spoke them. I

was even uncomfortable hearing these things said, and I could not understand how my friend could be so talented at this game. But honestly, this kind of ability did not appeal to me.

While Corbi was one of our closest friends, members of the Party were neither warm nor encouraging toward him. It seemed that his stories about underground radio stations and peasant uprisings were fabricated. The Party became suspicious of him (something which we could never do, as we had no knowledge of what was actually happening in Italy). Also, the way he had left the country was suspicious: a Party member could not simply leave Italy without orders, or at least permission from his superiors. Leaving, even to escape arrest, was considered desertion from the front lines. And Corbi had left without orders and held a valid passport.

To add to our suspicions, our friend found a well-paid job in a Paris print shop run by a former Communist who had been expelled from the Party. It was a strange job: translating comic strips from American newspapers [into French]. And Corbi wasn't very qualified for the job since he didn't know any English and his French wasn't very good. It was a strange job, but being his friends, we were glad that he had found work.

One day at lunch Corbi arrived in a very depressed state. I noticed it immediately and I knew that it was an important matter. I had never seen anyone in such a state. He seemed broken by some terrible disaster. He was pale and uncommunicative, as if he had lost a loved one, or even worse, as if his own life was shattered. He said he wanted to talk to me, and me alone. We went to my room, a large mansarde at the Pension Parisiana. We sat down next to the window. It must have been spring.

Corbi started talking. The Party suspected him; he had been suspended and put on trial. The night before, he gone to an "appointment." He met some "friends" who drove him to a deserted cafe in the suburbs -- he didn't even know where. That's where the trial began. There were five or six "friends" who, after telling him of their suspicions, informed him of his suspension and began an intense interrogation. No definite decision was made, but all activity and contact with Party members was forbidden. He was also told to keep his distance from our group and in the following days, we saw him only rarely.

Was he really a spy? I couldn't believe it, and if any of us had been called upon to offer our opinion, we all would have supported him. But the Party had information that we weren't privy to, and experience with revolutionary activity which we didn't have.

Poor Corbi seemed broken. "Outside the Party my life has no meaning and no purpose. If they decide to kill me, it would better than being expelled. You don't know what it's like to be a Party member; to have dedicated everything you do to it; to have taken risks for it. All my friends are in the Party; it's like a family ... more than a family. All my hopes revolve around the Party. Now everything is finished between me and the Party, there is a chasm of suspicion, or worse. They accused me of infiltrating, of being a spy. How can I prove to them that they are wrong? I asked them to trust me with a dangerous assignment in Italy, or wherever, to prove my good faith. I'd risk anything to clear myself! But my friends from just yesterday are now deaf to anything I say. I'm barely human to them. I'm a worm to them, and I myself feel like a worm now, and from this day on. My life as a man is over."

He could not have sounded more sincere. He wanted to convince me, at least, of his innocence. He wanted to know that, even if we weren't supposed to see each other again, our friendship was not over. Sure he had made some mistakes. Maybe he had inflated his accounts of his activities in Italy a bit, but now his friends didn't believe that any of it was true at all. He denied knowing anything about the politics of his boss (who had hired him to translate comics). He was a victim of an unfortunate set of circumstances which taken together seemed to condemn him, but he hoped that I, at least I, might believe him.

Corbi's troubles in turn complicated Natoli's situation. Natoli was supposed to return to Italy at the beginning of the summer, but the Party was worried about him because of his contact with Corbi. For several weeks before leaving, he had appointments every night. The Party was waiting for answers from Italy before deciding his case. Natoli, with his usual southern exuberance, swore that his close friend Corbi was innocent. He said that all their suspicions were unfounded and he thought it ridiculous that he was being detained in France because of Corbi. Finally he left. He gave Marthe a big fraternal hug, and we never saw him again. A few months later he was arrested.

So what was the truth of this matter? Was Corbi a spy or the victim of a Russian purge? Were the suspicions of the Party justified or were they the reckless reaction of an underground movement which could never be too cautious? Or could they be the direct result of too much rigidity in imposing discipline, and an almost pathological intolerance for individual expression?

* * *

When our evenings were not filled with writing for the newspaper or with political appointments, we talked among ourselves. Frequently we attended meetings. I was deeply impressed by the crowds attending the political rallies at the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* arena and the Buffalo Stadium. Sometimes there were tens of thousands of people, and I felt like I was one of them: one of these proletarians full of hope and of passionate courage.

As we approached the site of the rally, the metro spewed out people. But they weren't irritating people; they more than just people, they were comrades. What a pleasure it is to be squeezed into a subway car when you know that the person who is pushing against your stomach is a comrade; when the person who has stepped on your toe is another comrade; that another comrade is stepping on the toe of the comrade who is pushing against your stomach, and yet another is pushing against the stomach of the comrade who is stepping on your toes! "Excuse me, comrade." "That's OK, comrade." "It's going to be a great meeting." "Oh, here we are, good-bye, comrade."

People sang on the subway: The Marseillaise, The Internationale, songs of the Spanish Civil War. When we got to our meeting place, the ushers showed us to the empty seats: "Over here, comrade." "There's one over there." Girls offered buttons or ribbons as souvenirs of the event. We gave them coins, but how much might we have paid for the simple pleasure of hearing them answer, "Thanks, comrade"? At the Arena, tens of thousands of comrades squeezed into the stands. All brothers and eager to fraternize. A person buying Brazil nuts offered them to his left, his right, above and below, with an open smile, "You want some, comrade?" All blue collar workers, all proletarians. Hardly any intellectuals or professionals. They were the people, the true people of France and abroad. The international proletariat.

"Oh, so you're Italian, Comrade? We'll show that idiot Mussolini one of these days!" The people at these big events were conscious of their strength. Tens of thousands of faces, and all of them comrades. Tens of thousands of voices singing in chorus, with deep conviction, with emotional voices filled with hope and enthusiasm; they were the voices of our comrades.

Speaker followed speaker on the podium. Sometimes we'd hear the well-turned phrases and whining voice of Leon Blum; sometimes the powerful, stirring voice of Maurice Thores. The enthusiasm for Thores was boundless. When he came to the podium everybody stood and applauded deliriously: "Tho-res au pou-voir, Tho-res au pou-voir" ("We want Tho-res," or literally, "Thores to power"--trans.) or "Les So-viets par-tout, Les So-viets par-tout" (Soviets everywhere--trans.) And then everyone sang The Internationale. At the end, the Communist leader spoke, interrupted by deafening applause. The crowd melted away. Sometimes we went out for a glass of wine with a factory worker and we'd be astonished at his knowledge, even beyond politics, and of his interest in science.

I was in my element in these crowds: certainly more so than in an elegant club and even more than at a scientific convention.

Once, there was a great parade to commemorate those who died for the Commune. After the Commune, in 1871, reactionaries killed a great number of people in the Pere Lachaise cemetery at the wall of the *Fédérés*. Tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of people filed past the wall on the anniversary of that day. Thores and other leaders of the Communist and socialist parties lead the parade. Thores had his son, a boy of perhaps four, on his shoulders. He followed the procession of people who had gathered from all over France. Representatives of political parties, of organized labor.

A few students in the procession recognized us as they filed past as we watched from the sidewalk. Most of the students who were there frequented Marthe's place: certainly French intellectuals did not contribute much to the strength of the Popular Front! A physicist yelled, "Let's hear it for our Italian comrades, Hip, hip.." which was followed by a deafening "Hurrah." Then they started singing

Bandiera Rossa" [Red Flag] -- in Italian. We were moved and, with clenched fists raised, we joined in the chorus:

*Avanti o popolo, alla riscossa
Bandiera rossa, bandiera rossa.
Avanti popolo, alla riscossa,
Bandiera rossa trionfera.*

[Onward, people, join the struggle,
Red flag, red flag,
Onward people, join the struggle
The red flag will bring us victory.]

Some of our group who planned to return to Italy subsequently reproached themselves for this indiscretion. But how was it possible, at the time, not be dragged into the refrain of that old revolutionary song, and that show of solidarity by our French friends?

Frequently there were meetings to help the struggle in Spain. At the entrance girls held folded red, yellow and purple flags into which passersby threw money. "For a Republican Spain, Comrade. Thanks, Comrade."

In the sad days after the fall of Barcelona, a Spanish Deputy, Margarita Nelker, came to participate in some meetings. She was scheduled to speak, on the same evening, to a group of intellectuals at the *Salle des Sociétés Savantes*, and at a meeting of proletarian women at the *Salle de la Mutualité*. First we went to the *Sociétés Savantes*.

Madame Joliot [Curie] was seated at the speaker's table. The hall was small and overcrowded. We had to stand by the doors. As Madame Joliot spoke, some Fascists, of the *Croix de Feu* or *Action Francaise* or some such group, who were interspersed throughout the hall, began heckling her. One of them, near the speaker's table, pointed a gun at Madame Joliot, who quickly stooped behind the table. Confusion followed as the listeners tried to throw out the hecklers. The police intervened, and as foreigners who did not want to be caught at an antifascist event, we hurried out of the room.

From there we went to the *Mutualité*. That's where the real people were: the real passion, the real solidarity, not intellectual curiosity and vague compassion for those poor Spaniards, those inferior brothers to those at the *Salle des Sociétés de Savantes*. The Fascists didn't dare show their faces there, in the midst of women who would not have hesitated to dig their nails into their flesh.

There Nelker spoke French well and movingly. She had a son at the front about whom she had heard nothing. She spoke firmly. "Even if all of Catalogna falls, we will continue to resist, we will fight to the last man." And these were not the idle phrases of some minister or professor who follows the war from an impeccably decorated study. These were the words of a working class woman who had a son at the front, who regretted being in Paris rather than on the barricades or in the trenches. A woman who knew the pain of war [and who by chance found herself in the middle of it]. These were not the words of a government supported by a class of people corrupted by its own comfort; these were the words of the people of Spain, of a people that knew the miseries of war, and yet continued to fight, these were words to be believed.

* * *

The Spanish Civil War aroused strong feelings among the French, both for and against. One day at Marthe's, a student sat at our table. When he realized the language we were speaking he began asking questions about Italy and Fascism. He himself was a Fascist, I think a member of *Action Francaise*. As he started talking, he sounded just like the stereotypical Fascist described in Communist propaganda. He was up to date on current events and carried his ideas through to their logical extremes.

The "reds" in Spain had to be beaten because a victory for them would mean a threat to the social structure of France. Yes, it's a matter of point of view. But then one of us asked him what France's strategic position would be should Franco's Fascists win. It had not occurred to him that France would be caught between Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Fascist Spain. He understood that perfectly, but to him, this situation was still preferable to Communism. He expressed himself very clearly: "Better France in defeat than France under the Popular Front." Perfectly logical.

What happened to this boy who, for the sake of a full belly, found himself in a group of extremists? He must have realized that in a defeated France, he could no longer have the luxury of *creme de marron a la creme*, which was one of the specialties at Marthe's.

But he wasn't the only one.

One Sunday to kill time I went to see a newsreel at the theater at the Gare Montparnasse. On the screen one could see Franco's soldiers who, having reached the Spanish-French border, encountered the French border guards. Most of the people in the theater applauded Franco's troops.

How could you hope to save a country from being invaded by Hitler when the ruling class (at the Montparnasse Theater, on Sunday, the audience was mostly small businessmen) applauded Fascist troops arriving at their own borders? That applause signaled the beginning of the end of the Popular Front, of resistance to Fascism, and even the end of France's Third Republic. The end was inevitable; there was no turning back. And one might even say it was an end that they deserved.

Chapter Ten

Organizing Emigres: A Failed Idea

Barcelona fell. That was a very sad day. Afterwards, Warsaw, Oslo, Paris, and Athens also fell. But none of those defeats was as sad as the day that Barcelona fell. The war in Spain, being a civil war, was more grievous than the world war that followed. In Spain, the people knew what they were fighting for. In Spain, it was a people fighting for its own freedom; it was not an empire masquerading as a democracy, defending its own interests. With the defeat in Spain, the hope for a future civic order had been quashed.

Paris began to see refugees arriving from the Spanish Civil War and I met some of them, often people of Italian origin. One night, leaving a lecture given by Langevin at the Sorbonne, I met Cesare Colombo who had worked on Italian-language broadcasts for Radio Barcelona. At the border, the French had interned him in the concentration camp at Gurs from which he escaped, taking advantage of the confusion of the early days. I will say more about him later.

I became better friends with a man who had escaped from a concentration camp for Spanish refugees. He was known as Scotti. When we were introduced, I wanted to shake hands, but "No," he said, "Be careful. I have ringworm." I had never met a person with ringworm, which I thought was a disease of undernourished, stray cats. But in the internment camp that the French Republic had set up to welcome the Spanish Republicans, it was completely normal to get ringworm.

Catalonia's fall and the arrival of these refugees marked the end of the hopes for the politics of the Popular Front, which had already been hard hit by the Munich agreement. A period of uncertainty, mistrust, and discouragement followed.

It was during this period that Plato asked me to form a group of Italian antifascist intellectuals. The community of Italian émigrés had been made up primarily of workers and political refugees, while intellectuals had only become an important group after the recent anti-semitic campaign. These new émigrés did not have a definite political orientation. It would be useful to try to pull them together into some form of organization, both for the prestige that they could lend the antifascist cause, for their potential involvement in antifascist activity, or to keep them from becoming completely detached from Italian affairs and become a loss to their country, aside from their loss to the fascist cause.

It seemed like a good idea and I was in a good position to take this on. I was not beholden to any political group and I was in a position to attempt to get the collaboration of all the existing groups. After all, I, too, was part of the new intellectual emigration.

Of course, the Communist Party was counting on me to allow it to exercise its influence on this future organization. On my end, I felt that I had no obligation to them. I did not care whose idea it was. In principle, it seemed like a good idea, and I expected to proceed in my own way.

According to me, the organization should have been apolitical. I wanted to form a purely cultural group, where every party could exercise its influence, a neutral meeting ground, where various ideas could be discussed.

My idea was to start by finding or renting a room in Paris. The group would subscribe to many Italian newspapers, both Fascist and antifascist, and cultural magazines, so that people would have a central meeting place from which to keep track of events in Italy. It would be a kind of club, maybe with an espresso machine, where people could meet in the evening, read the papers, smoke a cigarette and chat a bit. Once a week, people would take turns greeting visitors, using their spare time to prepare a notebook documenting the latest news on Italy and Fascism. We hoped that contributions from friends would allow us to buy books for a small library, and that various political groups would donate their publications. Every once in a while meetings, discussions, and small conferences could be organized.

I set to work in spring. It was hard work, and required a great deal of tact because the political groups were suspicious of each other, jealous of their ideological purity, and constantly preoccupied with maintaining and extending their influence. I therefore started a diplomatic initiative which, among other things, allowed me to get a close-up look at the relationships between the various groups, movements and parties, and to understand the tactical and ideological similarities and differences between them.

The first person I turned to was Franco Venturi. Despite my collaboration with the Communists, my sympathy for *Giustizia e Libertá* was undiminished and for some time I deluded myself into believing that it was possible for the two groups to reach a lasting agreement.

There was in fact a kind of reciprocal respect between the Communist Party and *Giustizia e Libertá*. The Communists recognized the good faith of some of the members of GL, such as the Rosselli brothers, who had died for their opposition to Fascism, or Emilio Lusso, or Franco Venturi himself. The GL's recognized that the Communist Party was a serious movement, and one of the major forces in the fight against Fascism.

But I quickly learned that there were also insurmountable differences that made it impossible for them to come to the agreement I was seeking.

GL was a "movement," not a party. Its members were not subject to any kind of discipline. They worked on the principle that people performed best when they followed their own inclinations and their own inspiration. This was unacceptable to the Communists, who were monolithically disciplined and did not allow any ideological deviations or deviations in practice. They were suspicious of the lack of discipline and control within the *Giustizia e Libertá* movement, and they inferred that it was infiltrated by dubious elements, if not by spies.

Giustizia e Libertá did not subscribe to a well-defined political theory and its official position was essentially one of criticism. It not only criticized Fascism, it also criticized bourgeois and capitalist society, and it had a profound aversion to rich capitalists and landowners. Its members were generally quite far to the left and leaned toward support of a socialist republic as a political solution for Italy. But they wanted a republic that respected individual liberty, and that was not based on a dictatorship of class or party.

From a philosophical perspective, the Communists were materialists, while GL supporters were idealists: They may not have been totally devoted to Croce, but they showed considerable respect for him. From an ideological perspective, the Communists had a very well-defined "theory," while *Giustizia e Libertá* allowed its members to think as they pleased.

Finally, the Communist Party consisted mostly of workers, while *Giustizia e Libertá* was made up primarily of intellectuals. (The GLs claimed that their group in Lyons was composed of workers, but the Communists held that at most, there were no more than two or three workers in that group.)

The intellectuals in *Giustizia e Libertá* did not tolerate the discipline that the Communist Party imposed on its members in the belief that this discipline extinguished their members' potential. They were particularly indignant about the Party's tactical maneuvering. Unwilling to compromise, they accused the Communists of hypocrisy for being willing to collaborate with the devil or the pope, in order to gain a tactical advantage of a given situation, and then refusing to tolerate any criticism of these allies.

GL believed in the importance of the talented man, the leader who makes history. Therefore, it did not shrink from organizing terrorist attacks against Mussolini and it was probably this type of activity that led to the fatal knifings of the Rossellini brothers. Despite its veneration of Stalin, the CP claimed to believe solely in action by the masses and it condemned terrorist attacks against single individuals. According to the Communists, targeting Mussolini was not significant because this would not change the economic structure of Italian society. According to their theories, the capitalists would easily replace Mussolini.

Here I will allow myself a digression on the Communist idea of the "leader." Once I was talking to a Communist about one of the better-known leaders of the Spanish Republic. I think it was Negrin. The Communists had touted this person -- let's call him Negrin -- in the press, praising him to the skies with their usual exaggerated accolades. "Negrin," my Communist friend said, "is your average guy, but the masses need a man to be held up as a symbol, like a flag. In Spain we have chosen Negrin to be the symbol. Why not praise him to the skies, on paper, if this strengthens the fighting spirit of the Spanish populace?"

"The same is true here in France, with Thores. Thores is, without a doubt, a smart guy, but there would be no reason to idolize him if it didn't fit the needs of the masses. It is purely a question of propaganda, a way of simplifying things. Few can understand dialectical materialism, but many of those who don't understand will still follow a man or a flag." Maybe this reasoning explained the portraits of Stalin, the "great comrade," in Russian homes, replacing the icons that were removed by the revolution. The Russian people held a place in their hearts for the czar, the "little father," and this had to be filled somehow.

All this, if true, proves that Communists, while having the greatest faith in the power of the masses, don't have a very high opinion of their judgment, at least in their current state of preparation. Communists believe that the masses must be "educated." The masses can intuitively understand where their interests lie, but can easily fall victim to their prejudices or be tricked by false leaders. Therefore the CP gives itself the exclusive mission to protect the masses from such men, to educate them, to guide them in their own interests, toward the true light. If, however, another group wants to take on this task, the Communists scream "scandal" and claim that no one has a right to teach the masses. In their defense, one could say that the leaders of the CP are themselves of the people, and therefore the education of the masses might be considered a form of self-education.

In spite of these many differences and the distrust between them, the Communist Party and the *Giustizia e Libertá* movement had occasionally worked together. GL was not, and had never been anti-Communist in principle, and the Communists at that time, still adhered to the politics of the Popular Front. For example, an Italian chapter of a group named LICA (*Lega Internazionale Contro l'Antisemitismo* - International League Against Anti-semitism), an extremely radical organization, had been formed under the auspices of the CP and the GL. But even in this case, it had been difficult to settle on an arrangement because the two groups were unable to agree on a president. The issue had been resolved by naming two presidents, one a member of the CP and the other of the GL.

Given these precedents, I thought it would be a good idea to talk to Venturi about the prospective intellectual group. At first Venturi had some doubts, maybe fearing that my ties to the CP were stronger than they actually were. In the end he decided to support the idea and to talk to the Socialists. I insisted that I wanted active cooperation from GL and the Socialists because I did not want the group to be exclusively Communist.

One evening I met with the representatives of the three groups in a small cafe. There was Gallo (Luigi Longo) representing the CP. He had recently returned from Spain where he had been assigned the important position of political commissar for the International Brigade. Mario Levi represented the Socialist Party -- the same Mario Levi who had eluded the Fascist police by swimming across a river into Switzerland (mentioned above). Venturi represented GL. I was there, and I think there was another Communist, Roncoli (Montagnana.)

We talked for a long time that night. Finally, we came to an agreement in principle, to kick off the new activity by holding a meeting that was less political than intellectual.

I was charged with arranging the meeting. I rented a small room in a cafe in the *Quartier Latin*, and sent out announcements. I prepared a motion to be voted on at the meeting, so that I would have something to show the people who would be asked to support the group financially. It was an innocuous motion that stated a desire to create a group for the general purpose of upholding the Italian tradition of liberal culture, with the expectation that this might be useful to Italy in the future, and to all of Europe in its struggle against the forces of oppression.

About twenty people came. Writers, painters (I think Carlo Levi came), artists, men of culture and of science. No one came as an official representing the GL. I made a little introductory speech, and presented the motion which was discussed and slightly modified to satisfy every taste. Finally the motion passed, and an executive committee was formed whose job it was to collect money, and to find a place for the new group's headquarters. The next meeting, to be organized by the executive committee, was set to take place after the summer vacation at which time the committee would report on its activities. The committee consisted of Luria, Signori [was that his real name? I don't remember], and me.

Signori was a painter, a typical, traditional bohemian from the Montparnasse. He lived in a shack in a courtyard behind the Cafe Dome. Naturally, he did not have a telephone. He didn't even have a doorbell. It was therefore very hard to contact him. Some evenings Luria and I would head for Montparnasse to talk to Signori about some idea we had been discussing. We crossed the Luxembourg Gardens and Boulevard Montparnasse and when we arrived at Signori's place, we banged and kicked the green door of his courtyard, without getting the slightest response from inside. In the end, we slipped a note under the door, and went off to Cafe Dome. In spite of this, in a few months we were able to collect a few thousand francs which would allow us to show concrete results at the fall meeting and the possibility of achieving our plan. The money came mostly from recently emigrated Jews, who had fat wallets and relatively liberal ideas.

But in the fall, war broke out, and it was no longer feasible to organize a group of intellectuals.

* * *

In March Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia, which had been defenseless since Munich. New refugees arrived in Paris, and some of those who had arrived earlier started leaving for countries overseas. France no longer felt either welcoming or secure, and those who could, moved on.

The first to leave were the rich Jews who had left Italy with a nest egg, and who had no difficulty either getting visas or paying for the voyage. Visas for South America were easy to get with bribery. A United States visa could be had legally as long as the applicant could prove that, in case of need, he could support himself without recourse to government assistance. What a strange place the United States is, where bribes don't work, and officials worry about people dying of hunger! Compared to people of other nations, Italians had an easy time entering the United States, because Mussolini had prohibited emigration, so the quota was open for those few Italians who were already outside the Italian borders and were in a position to request a visa.

Among the first hotels to empty out was the very respectable residential Hotel Saint James et d'Albany, on the Rue de Rivoli, near Place de Jeanne d'Arc along the Tuilleries, where a number of wealthy Jews from Turin and Milan had pitched their tents. These people were notable for their status in Italian society, and their well-furnished wallets. Among others, there was the family of Prof. Fubini, the mathematician from Turin, as was the family of Giuseppe Calabi, the owner of San Pellegrino of mineral water fame, as well as some of the Olivetti family from Ivrea, known for their typewriters.

I knew the Fubinis best, because they had two sons who were about my age. The family combined abundant material resources with academic success and scientific renown and -- and this was not as well-known -- liberal thinking and charitable sentiment. When one of our group of students or recent graduates found himself in financial straits, he knew that by going to the Fubinis he would find understanding and financial assistance. When life in France became difficult, the Fubinis helped several

of their friends immigrate to America by sending the required sum of about \$2,000 to an American bank in the name of their protégé, so that he could demonstrate financial independence.

And this was not the only type of support the Fubinis provided for the people around them. Their voluminous purse could be counted on for support when money was needed for liberal and cultural causes, and a substantial portion of the funds that I collected for my intellectual antifascist group was donated by them.

The tastes of the Italian upper middle class had been transferred to the Hotel Albany, with all their routines and temperament and customs. The Fubinis brought a considerable provision of truffles to America to sweeten the trials of exile with the joys of Piedmontese cuisine. Once, at a small reception in their rooms in the Hotel d'Albany, while pouring champagne into glasses which for some reason did not fully meet with her approval, Mrs. Fubini said, "I'm sorry, but you know, we are poor refugees."

During this time, the principal pastime of the younger Fubinis was to study how to procure visas and residence permits from various countries around the world. They were professional refugees, becoming true experts on the subject. They knew whom they could bribe for the least amount at various offices and consulates. For those who had the money to take advantage of it, this information was quite useful at the time.

As for me, as I have already mentioned, there were times when I wanted to stay, and others when I wanted to escape. Before becoming actively involved in political activities, I became alarmed whenever the news seemed to predict the outbreak of war, and with every victory of Fascism, I went to visit the North and South American consulates. After I started working in the anti-fascist movement, I abandoned the idea of leaving. Leaving would have been the equivalent of running away and deserting my place on the battlefield.

With every move Hitler made, uncertainty grew in the minds of the people, whether they were Frenchmen or refugees. From uncertainty, it's easy to pass to fear, and fear being a bad counselor, reawakened the traditional hatred for the Germans. Hitler had succeeded in one thing: he had convinced everyone that there really was a German race, and that its characteristics were violence, greed, and sadistic criminality.

I confess that, in spite of my belief in the equality of the races and my efforts to remain rational, I could not, and I still cannot, think of the Germans without aversion. It's hard to eliminate the effects of education and history from one's emotions. In Italian schools the Germans were always considered the hereditary enemy, the invaders, the oppressors, from Frederick Barbarossa to Cecco Beppe to Guglielmo. The French had vivid memories of the invasion of 1870 and of the hard-fought war of 1914. Contemporary events just added to this traditional anti-German prejudice. As for me, personally, my Italian education and my Jewish background made it very hard to dispassionately appraise Germany and the Germans.

In university circles and among anti-fascists we were a bit ashamed of these anti-German feelings which were expressed in occasional observations. Some said, "All of Europe's troubles stem from the fact that Julius Caesar neglected to occupy German lands," and "the real tragedy of the One Hundred Year's War was that two-thirds of the German population survived it."

A friend of mine told me a typical little anecdote. It was about a Brazilian physicist who had gone to visit a lab in Germany. His host was a Nazi sympathizer. The German began by saying how bad the Jews were, and how it was necessary to expel them from the universities. "Good. Good." said the Brazilian. And it was necessary to confiscate their possessions. "Good. Good." said the Brazilian. And a goodly number had had to be killed. "Good. Good." said the Brazilian. A bit surprised at such understanding and agreement, the German asked, "But I thought that you did not share my ideas. I had been told that Brazilians don't understand racism, and that they don't approve of our treatment of the Jews." "No, no, you're doing fine, because the Jews that you are persecuting are German. The trouble is that you are not killing enough non-Jewish Germans."

* * *

During Easter vacation in 1939 I went to Switzerland to see my mother. Since I thought it was unsafe for me to go to Italy, and at that time she didn't have a French visa, we decided to meet in Geneva. We were together for about two weeks, enjoying the beautiful views of the city and taking boat trips on the lake.

That year, on Good Friday, Mussolini proceeded to heroically invade Albania, a country which already belonged to him. So our vacation was troubled by rumors of war. But then, was there any week that year when there weren't rumors of war?

In Switzerland people were not very worried, and I have to admit that on my part, it didn't even occur to me that that Chamberlain and Daladier might declare war on their friend Mussolini just because he wanted to burnish his image among Italians by invading a Balkan country that he already controlled. After all, the Balkans were to the east, and in those days, officials in London and Paris looked favorably on any activity directed towards the east.

In France, on the other hand, everyone was very upset. When I crossed the French border to visit a friend, I found that everyone expected that war was imminent. Mussolini had violated a "gentleman's agreement" that he had made with England concerning the status quo in the Mediterranean. It seemed that the French still felt that a "gentleman's agreement" with Mussolini was a serious matter, and in their gullible minds, they believed that the English government had signed it for reasons other than to appease and cooperate with the Fascists.

During this turmoil my mother and I visited the palace of the League of Nations. Tourists have always had a special feeling for ruins. Ruins are always sad. But contemporary ruins are tragic. The palace of the League of Nations had just been built. It is a rare example of good modern architecture. A guide showed us around the various rooms, showering us, as all guides do, with descriptions of their details and their original inspiration. But while the average tourist is rather indifferent about whether the marble on the walls of a certain church comes from Carrara rather than from Verona, I was moved by the guide's explanations. One room was decorated with wood donated by the Persian government, another with stone from Argentina. It seemed that every country in the world had tried to outdo the other in decorating what was to be a Palace of Peace, which now, with its deserted rooms, was reduced to little more than a historical curiosity.

I was so moved that as soon as I got back to my hotel I wrote an article for the *Voice*. The next day I mailed it along with some photographs. I thought it would make a magnificent article for the center of the third page. After a brief description of the building, I made some observations on its significance, and I ended by hoping that the Palace of the League of Nations might truly become a palace of an organization of nations, and not of an organization of governments.

Back in Paris, I looked through the recent issues of the *Voice*, and was surprised to find that my article had not been printed. When I saw the editor again -- my friend Plato -- he gave the article back to me for a "few corrections." "Think it over again, Minori," he said, as he had done on similar occasions. I thought it over again, but found there was nothing I wanted to change. Rather, I was very proud of this literary delivery. The article was never printed.

As usual, I attributed this little episode to another aspect of Communist intransigence. I really could not understand how my article could trouble the sensibilities of Stalin's priesthood, especially since until that time, Litvinov had directed the Soviet Union's foreign policy in a strictly "societal" way. I thought that Plato's refusal to print was due to potential political ramifications.

But Molotov succeeded Litvinov, and Soviet foreign policy changed direction after Munich and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The editors of the *Voice*, who were better informed on Moscow's position than I was, did not want to print compromising statements in support of the League of Nations.

While I was in Geneva, I again visited the Ferreros. I wanted to ask for their support, both moral and financial, for the prospective organization of antifascist intellectuals. When I telephoned, Mrs. Ferrero answered, and she invited me to come visit the next evening, saying that there would be other friends visiting. I accepted with pleasure, thinking that I might make some contacts in the antifascist community in Geneva.

When I arrived I found myself in the company of a type of "antifascist" whose existence I had forgotten, and that I no longer recognized as such: distinguished professors, members of the diplomatic corps, all more or less famous intellectuals. At one point everyone sat in comfortable chairs and then, *contingere omnes intentique ora tenebant*, Father Ferrero, may peace be with him, awarded us the unexpected privilege of hearing him read from a chapter of a book that he was writing. The book was about Talleyrand and it was eventually published, but I never read it. I had had my fill from the chapter that, like it or not, I had been forced to listen to that night.

It was nothing more than the theory of legitimacy based on the theory of fear. According to Ferrero, a legitimate government is not afraid of being overthrown. Therefore, it does not do crazy things. On the other hand, an illegitimate government is afraid and does crazy things. Example: Napoleon. But an intelligent and honest man such as Talleyrand, understands the reasons that induced Napoleon to shed so much blood, and wisely plots to reestablish the legitimate monarchy. . . and everyone lives happily ever after.

I think that the supporters of Darlan and of Otto von Hapsburg could not have found a better justification than this theory: the theory of conservatism. After this, Raditza declared his intention to write a book entitled: "Discussions with Guglielmo Ferrero." I left soon afterwards to allow the Ferrero-Raditza families to complete their reciprocal rituals of mutual admiration in the intimacy of their domestic compound.

But I went back a few days later for work. Ferrero had a name and some money and I was interested in his name and his money for my organization. I was received by Mrs. Ferrero who gave me neither her name nor her money. Maybe she suspected that I had some contact with the Communists, and that I was not a big supporter of legitimacy. Instead, she gave me some books written by her son Leo, asking that I read and distribute them.

We spoke of this and that. The conversation moved to the subject of Switzerland. I said that it was a beautiful place, but that the Swiss were boring. She said that Switzerland was an ideal place which France could have become if not for the revolution. At these words I took my leave.

* * *

At the beginning of the summer I learned that Paris would be hosting some international meetings of antifascist students in mid-August. The information came from a Communist who called himself Vigna who joined me and some co-workers from the lab at a cafe in the *Quartier Latin* where we met every night.

Vigna was a former worker who had destroyed his health and gained a vast education during fourteen years in prison. After his release, he had escaped to the USSR where he was welcomed with all the honors: a sanatorium in Crimea and courses in Marxist culture and revolutionary praxis. It seemed that he was a big shot in the Communist hierarchy. He was not employed by the Italian party as were most of the Communists that I had met. He was attached directly to the Comintern.

He was tasked with organizing young people and students, and though he had never attended university, he knew much more about Italian universities than did I or my friends. His knowledge of history and philosophy was such that he could outshine any intellectual. He was a pleasant man, with a broad and deep outlook. His decisive manner was veiled by regret at having lost the best years of his youth in prison.

What a difference between Vigna and the stereotype of a Comintern agent envisioned by the middle-class! He was a young man. (He laughed when people called him a young man. "It's true", he said, "No-one counts my fourteen years in prison, and they think I'm still young because I was young when I was arrested.") He had a delicate character, poised and discriminating, although far from being refined. A sweet man, but who probably would not have hesitated to use violence to accomplish his ideals.

I remember one evening, as we were strolling along the Boulevard St. Michel with Vigna, we saw an English girl who was staying in the house where he was living. He was attracted to this girl. Vigna left the group for a moment and entered a pharmacy to purchase the necessary items for any possible eventuality. But soon the Comintern agent emerged from the pharmacy looking sad, holding a toothbrush in

his hand. He hadn't had the courage to ask for a condom because the clerk in the pharmacy was a woman. He entered another pharmacy and came back with a bar of soap. Such is the sad story of the shy Comintern agent!

Leaving aside the gossip about the intimate affairs of the Comintern and going back to my story In August I took part in two meetings of antifascist students. The first was a meeting of Marxists which was intended for socialists and Communists. I went only once, as a spectator, as I could not claim to be a Marxist. The only outcome of this meeting was a split between the socialists and the Communists. The socialists refused to collaborate with the Communists whom they accused of intransigence, hypocrisy, etc. And they were not wrong, you have to admit they were right, given that the Communists had had the gall to refuse to vote in favor of the Munich pact, and had had the hypocrisy to want to maintain a semblance of unity with the socialists who had officially voted for the pact.

I was more active in the second meeting. It was a meeting of the *Rassemblement Mondial des Etudiants* (International Student Union). Pontecorvo, Manuelli and I participated officially as the Italian delegation. We prepared a report which I presented at one of the meetings. Also participating and speaking, independent of us, was Battino from *Giustizia e Libertá* with whom we maintained excellent and friendly relations.

Students from all over the world took part in the RME meeting. Every delegation prepared a report which was translated into French and English and was mimeographed for distribution to all the delegates. Pontecorvo, Manuelli and I locked ourselves in a room with three typewriters. We were interrupted only by Manuelli's wife who brought us meals. The result was a huge twenty-page paper entitled *La culture dans l'italie fasciste*.

Then, with the manuscript under my arm I went to the offices of the RME to submit it to be typed. The offices were located on the ground floor of a building on Boulevard Arago, near Danfert Rochereau. I found some twenty very busy young people -- some were typing, some were translating from French into English or vice-versa, some were mimeographing, some were collating. They worked devotedly for endless hours and never seemed to tire. The air was filled with the aroma of ardent youth and enthusiasm.

A very young Spanish girl stood on top of a table battling a mimeograph machine. Her black eyes blazed, and she looked like she was standing on a barricade. Her hands and face were black, and she held a tube of ink as if she were brandishing a bomb.

Indians, Chinese and Americans worked side by side in their common struggle against Fascism and aggression. I was immediately drafted. "*Restes ici, camarade, il y a un tas de choses a faire; travaille avec nous.*" I sat at a large table to help collate mimeographed sheets. There were reports on the conditions of students from the four corners of the earth: Austria, Germany, England, Spain, America, Brazil, India, the Dutch Indies, China . . . Some Indian girls in saris were sitting at the table with me. We spoke French and English, but conversation was reduced to the minimum necessary to expedite the work. We went out together for meals, and talked about the political situation in various countries. They called me Minori, or the Italian comrade.

The meeting began two or three days later. Everything was ready: the reports were set out on a table for the delegates. Every country and every political tendency was represented, from conservative English to Communists. Only the French socialists were missing.

Those were intense and happy days. They were the last days of freedom in France and, as if I could foresee the future, I enjoyed them completely. I was pleased to be among people from around the world who, in large part, shared my views. The fact that I was contributing, in my own small way, to the meeting and in a larger sense, to the international movement to save the world from the dangers of Fascist aggression and imperialist oppression, gave me great satisfaction.

Those were perhaps the happiest days of my life. I was happy to do something useful for a greater cause. I had the pleasure of being immersed in a friendly environment, without losing my independence as an individual. These pleasures are greater than any purely personal satisfaction. What is money, what is the satisfaction of a personal career compared to the profound satisfaction of fulfilling one's social responsibilities, and assuming one's appropriate role in society?

This is how I felt in those days, and these are the kinds of feelings that appear to have the power to impel people into action and sacrifice. It may seem like fanaticism to some. But those who have personally felt it, even briefly, know that it is a solemn and profound source of inspiration.

One of the most interesting aspects of the meeting was the participation of the colonial peoples. There were representatives from Indochina, from India, from the Dutch Indies, from Burma, from Syria. Their reports spoke of years of struggle and of student organizing for national independence. Their nationalist feelings were always tinged with a more or less fiery brand of radical extremism.

The reports that got the most enthusiastic reception were from the Spanish and Chinese delegations. The Spanish representative was a young man who was studying mathematics at the University of Madrid at the beginning of the insurrection and who, at the end of the civil war, was commander of a division. He spoke to us about the war and about the conditions of the Spanish fighters in the French internment camps. It seemed that the French Republic had voted to provide enough money to allow a decent, if not comfortable life to the heroes of Spanish war who had been interned in the camps. But it was not clear where this money had gone.

During the meeting, the defenders of official France could still claim that the inhumane conditions were due to an initial lack of organization, since hundreds of thousands of people had crossed the border in just a few days, obviously without having asked if accommodations had been prepared for them. But these excuses did not hold, and it soon became clear that, intentionally or not, the French government treated the Spanish refugees as enemy prisoners and not as friendly guests. Since the Spanish had by now lost their struggle and had no powerful protectors, they had no advocates to oversee how they were being treated or mistreated. There was little we could do for them at the RME meeting except pass some motions of protest.

The Chinese were represented by a young woman who spoke about the universities that had moved into central China to escape the Japanese invaders, and about students who roamed the countryside inciting peasants to defend themselves against the aggressors. I felt that China was awakening and that its enormous potential energy was about to become organized.

It was during that year, under the influence of a Chinese co-worker in the lab, that I began to think of China as the hope for the future. As I learned more about Eastern civilization, my respect for the Orient gradually increased. There are those who speak of the yellow peril. Maybe there will be a yellow peril in the future, but until now it is the "yellow folk" who have been threatened and oppressed by the "whites". It would be more logical if Asians spoke of the white peril.

Afterwards, at the Lotus, a Chinese restaurant in the Latin Quarter, *rue de l'École de Médecine*, the Chinese embassy participated officially at a banquet for the delegates.

A few hours before the banquet I got sad news from an acquaintance whom I met by chance: Eugenio Curiel had been arrested in Italy and had been interned for five years.

In the banquet room, a microphone which was connected to the radio station was set up to transmit student songs from the countries of the world. When our turn came, we sang *Bandiera Rossa*. It almost created a scandal because some considered the song to be too revolutionary, and they motioned desperately in an attempt to stop us. But we sang it to the end, and many of the delegates joined in on the chorus. Maybe someone in Italy heard the old song on the radio.

The RME meeting was a ray of hope in the midst of general pessimism, a moment of enthusiasm during a period of discouragement. Unfortunately, the events that followed confirmed the most pessimistic predictions.

Chapter 11

Treason by the Left

(Summer 1939-Summer 1940)

My mother arrived in Paris during the meeting of the *Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants*. She had managed to get a French visa which was valid for a few months and she planned to spend the summer holiday with me. When she first arrived, I told her that I was busy at a meeting, and I left her on her own for a few days. Afterwards we went to a small town near Fontainebleau to spend a few weeks in the country. I expected a quiet vacation which I could dedicate exclusively to my mother.

If nothing is more exciting than Paris, then nothing is more boring than the French provinces. The farmers have no imagination, and they seem to be happy with a meager and empty life. Passing through a French village, it seems that for generations the smartest people moved to Paris, and only the poor in spirit are left to live and reproduce in the countryside. This is a disadvantage of centralized national entities that Italy, a divided country with regional capitals, does not suffer from.

But the rural calm and provincial boredom were brief. Within a few days, a bomb exploded. Just as real bombs are preceded by a hissing sound, this bomb was preceded -- by a commercial treaty. A commercial treaty between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Who would have believed it? The treaty was followed by a non-aggression pact between Stalin and Hitler. What was the meaning of this?

What were we to make of the French and English military missions that were traveling together, sailing slowly across the Baltic to Russia, with the intention of eventually joining forces with the Red Army? The news was incomprehensible. What the hell was happening? I was completely disoriented, or rather, dumbfounded. I felt an urgent need to discuss the situation with my friends. At a time like this I couldn't stay here in the middle of nowhere. So my mother and I boarded a train and returned to Paris.

At the Gare de Lyon, the station was teeming with people -- vacationers were all returning to the city. This time, we really seemed to be on the brink of war. Everyone thought of one last thing that needed to be done in Paris before war was declared. Everyone assumed that Paris would be bombed in the first days of the war -- maybe there would be poison gas. The lady who had gone to the Alps on vacation had to come back to get her pet canary, or her feather pillow -- "In that hotel in the mountains the pillows are so hard that if I had to stay through a war, I couldn't stand it." Others, like me, were returning because they felt they had to be in Paris at an important time like this.

In any case, at the Gare de Lyon, and in all of Paris there was intense confusion. The confusion that was apparent in the disorderly traffic and the agitated crowds reflected the inner confusion and uncertainty felt by individuals who did not understand what was happening and expected major changes without knowing or being able to predict their direction or import. In the meantime, they were busy running here and there, without a plan or goal.

We had a hard time finding a taxi, but finally we arrived at the Pension Parisiana where we found everyone listening to the radio. The news were truly bad. It seemed clear that Hitler would not defend Europe from Communism, and this time there was no reason to expect another Munich.

But if Hitler had betrayed his reactionary allies, Stalin had betrayed his allies in the Popular Front. The French Communists had not yet received directives from Moscow and did not how to explain the situation. *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir* followed their old directives and in spite of the obvious absurdity,

continued to defend the Popular Front. They said that the Russians had acted to damage Hitler, and despite everything, they supported a treaty with the Soviet Union against Fascism. The Communist deputies voted for war credits.

The employees of the *Union Populaire Italienne* (the Italian Popular Union)-- a Communist-leaning organization of Italian émigrés -- offered their services to the *Amis de la République Française* to help enlist foreigners who wanted to volunteer to fight under the French flag. (I signed up, but learned later that it was not official.)

Through all the confusion, the only person to maintain his *sangue froid* was Bruno Pontecorvo. In Communist lingo, he "understood" the pact -- which meant that he was able to interpret Stalin's actions and to justify them according to the eventual official party line. He was quicker than the editors of *L'Humanité*, the Communist deputies, and the other leaders of the French and Italian Parties who were steeped in Marxism and dialectical materialism!

Bruno's "correct" analysis consisted of evaluating the situation solely from the perspective of the interests of the Soviet Union. He said that, after Munich and Czechoslovakia, it was obvious that the Western democracies would never take action against Hitler. In fact the democracies would have encouraged Hitler, if not helped him, to take action against the East. This was a great danger to the Soviet Union. By making a pact with Hitler, Stalin had freed the country of this danger, at least for the moment. He had acted to safeguard the home of the proletariat, and therefore he had done "well."

If you were a Communist, Pontecorvo's interpretation made sense.

I tried to come up with an interpretation that made sense to an antifascist. We had to fight Fascism with, without, or maybe even *against* the Soviet Union. But I was left with terrible doubts: Who could be trusted? Who would help us in this struggle? Were there any allies left?

While we were trying to find answers to these distressing questions, Hitler was sending an ultimatum to Poland. Chamberlain advised the Poles not to mobilize so as not to provoke the Nazis. Bonnet telephoned Rome hoping that Mussolini could save the world, and other similar comedies which will be recorded, if it hasn't already been done, in the history books.

As at the time of the Munich Pact, posters called up soldiers, and electricians slowly changed the streetlights into weak blue bulbs.

* * *

What should I do? I began by writing a letter to the *Caisse Nationale de la Recherche* offering my services as a scientist, to help the government with the national defense.

But I could not stay calmly in Paris after all I had said about the need to fight fascism! My coworkers at the laboratory were enlisting as soldiers. How could I stay behind when my French friends would be fighting heroically for the ideas that I had always held? Wasn't this the war against Fascism, the war for freedom, democracy, and justice? Wasn't this the people's war, the continuation of the Spanish war?

I wanted to enlist. But what if there were another Munich? What would happen to those who had shown that they wanted to fight Hitler? I decided that I would enlist on the day of the general mobilization, when a new Munich would no longer be possible.

The day of the general mobilization came, and I enlisted.

Pontecorvo had enlisted the day before. This may seem strange given his opinion on the war that was about to begin. This was his reasoning: "They have no choice: either it's a war for democracy, or they will lose. Therefore there will be a war for democracy." His reasoning seemed logical enough, but he was wrong, because rather than having a people's war, the French preferred to lose.

I went to the Ministry of War with Luria. Even there, there was great confusion. Luria said that it was interesting to see how the greatest army in the world could be mobilized in such apparent confusion. "This must be the system that worked so well in the War of 1914. The French are the best soldiers in the world. They do everything so casually. It's a great army." And he looked around so he could learn their system.

They took my name and address in a courtyard of the ministry. Much to my surprise, they didn't have me sign anything. When we left, it was impossible to board the metro or to get a taxi. My mother had left me free to do whatever I wanted, saying only that I should do what was right. She was stoic when she heard the news that I had enlisted, and she prepared to stay in France for the duration of the war.

All that was left was to wait for the declaration of war. War was declared on September first.

* * *

Paris quickly changed its appearance. Life lost its vivaciousness, its happiness, its charm. The *Ville Lumière* suffocated under the black-outs. In the evening the streets were dark and gloomy, especially on moonless nights. Many of the small shops closed because their owners had enlisted. Windows were covered with strips of paper to protect them against bombs, and during the first few days everyone walked around with gas masks which had been distributed to all French citizens.

Anti-aircraft guns appeared in the Luxembourg Gardens, and the water was taken out of the fountains because it could be easily seen from the air. Children could no longer play with their sailboats. Intellectual life also seemed to be obscured by the blackout. There was a feeling of mourning, resignation, and lack of enthusiasm. Leftist newspapers were shut down, and those that still circulated were cut by censorship. People on the streets no longer ventured to express their opinions.

On the first nights of the war, we heard air raid sirens, but there were no German airplanes. They were testing the civil defense system. During these events, the guests of the Pension Parisiana met in the basement which had been equipped with a few chairs and mattresses. Of course, it was also equipped with the international symbols of bomb shelters: a hoe, a shovel, a bucket of water, and a bucket of sand.

A crowd of sleepy people in bathrobes and slippers gathered in the basement. On the first night, some were wearing gas masks. Every Frenchman had received a gas mask from the government. Foreigners were expected to die quietly of asphyxiation. The women knitted for the soldiers; the men chatted. The first few times it was somewhat exciting; we tried out the hoe and the shovel; we tried to figure out the thickness of the walls to guess how strong they were, and to plan an escape route if we were buried in the rubble. Then the air raids became boring and obviously useless.

My mother and I decided not to go to the basement until we heard the anti-aircraft guns in the Luxembourg. Then we decided to stay in bed even when the guns were firing. The probability of dying from a cold from sitting in the basement seemed greater than the probability of being killed by a German bomb during the *Sitzkrieg*. And so began the *drole de guerre*.

But the Germans were advancing in Poland, and the war was not at all *drole*. I did not have a radio in my room, so I listened to the news in the salon. It soon became obvious that Poland could not resist and Mila, a beautiful Polish girl, always listened to the radio with tears in her eyes. When she heard of the bombing of Warsaw where her mother lived, she could not hold back the tears. I would like to have comforted her, but I was afraid to interfere with her worries and her pain.

The French advanced a few kilometers into the "no man's land" beyond the Maginot Line. M. Duchon, a French chauvinist, could not contain his nationalist pride. One day in the dining room, he said: "You see, we are advancing. That's the French way, slowly but surely. A little artillery, a little advance. Then we move the cannons to the new front line, and we begin again and advance some more. We will arrive like that to Berlin, and then to Moscow." Evidently, Moscow was his final objective. But a few days later the French army prudently retreated to the bunkers of the Maginot Line.

Since it was impossible to send an army to Moscow, given Germany's inconvenient geographical location, the French government had to resign itself to sending policemen to raid the homes of Communists.

Soon after the Russian-German pact, the Communist newspapers "understood", probably following the revelation of the true Russian party line. Or maybe, like Hitler, they had a sudden intuition. The fact is, that the editors suddenly, and simultaneously, saw the truth. The war was an imperialist struggle which was of no interest to the proletarians of the world. Therefore it was the duty of the proletarians, as usual, according to Lenin's teaching, to fight against their own governments in order to

win power. The Communists were not able to spread the word to the masses who were thirsting for these truths. The government silenced them with the weapon of censorship. *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir* no longer appeared as legal newspapers.

For the reactionaries who were in power, the Russian-German pact and the attitude of the French Communists were like manna from heaven. And they rushed to take advantage of the occasion to attack the only worker's party that seriously worried them. The Communist Party was declared illegal.

As for me, I no longer understood anything, and I didn't know what position to take. It was clear that the Communists were turncoats, and the ideals that I had been developing over the past year began to crumble. Only my antifascist beliefs remained intact. I tried to put my trust in France and her government, but official France quickly persuaded me that this was impossible.

During this time, France began an all-out courtship of Mussolini. All the Italian-language antifascist newspapers were shut down, even the most innocently liberal ones. All criticism of Fascism disappeared from the French newspapers. The radio declared that France was fighting to defend its territory and its empire: It was absurd to think that the war might be an ideological crusade for democracy.

The famous posters advertising war bonds began appearing on the walls. There was a world map where the English and French empires were shown in red, while the German empire was in black. Thanks to the Mercator projection, Canada looked huge. And the caption stated: "We will win because we are the strongest."

If they are the strongest, I thought, they don't need my help. If they are fighting for their empires, it is none of my business. I certainly am not burning with desire to defend the French and English empires. If it's a question of empires, then I am Italian, and if I were to believe their propaganda, then I should be fighting for the Italian empire.

I was sorry that I had enlisted.

The French government seemed to prove the Communist propaganda right. Instead of being an ideological and democratic war, it was becoming nationalist and reactionary. All Germans, simply because they had German passports, were sent to concentration camps, regardless of their beliefs. The Nazis were treated better than the antifascists because they were protected by Hitler's government, which could retaliate against French prisoners in Germany.

During that whole year, I lived in an state of permanent doubt. At times these doubts became quite distressing. The Soviets had betrayed the struggle against Fascism. France was fighting German Fascism in the name of French imperialism. In fact, the French were organizing their own local version of Fascism.

One day the Red Army marched beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union to occupy a large part of Poland. That was a day of great excitement. The Red Army was advancing. Where would it stop? Would it confront the German army? Was the agreement just a trick to force France to enter the war? Maybe the Russians would fight the Germans, and the Popular Front would rise again. Without realizing it, I began whistling the *Internationale* in the laboratory. Madame Joliot heard me and smiled.

But the Red Army stopped, and I stopped whistling.

However it seemed that the Red Army, without declaring war, had blocked the Nazi advance more effectively than the so-called democracies had done when they declared war.

The reactionary policies of the French government played out, in a certain sense, to my personal advantage. Since there was reason to believe that the Italians who had volunteered might be anti-Fascists, the French army was careful not to call them up. The French felt that these men could not be trusted, and it was better not to provoke Mussolini by potentially forming a corps of Italian antifascist volunteers.

So my enlistment amounted to nothing and I certainly was not sorry about it.

* * *

While I am on the subject of Italian volunteers, I want to mention the "Garibaldi" episode. When it became clear that the war was not against Fascism, some agents with more or less official connections to Italian Fascism, decided to organize a corps of Italian volunteers. There were political

reasons for this. Some people were suspicious of the Italian workers who had emigrated to France, and the workers wanted to overcome those suspicions. It was inevitable that groups would be formed to affirm their loyalty to France, independent of any political ideology, simply and solely to protect their members from the suspicion of being anti-French, and to protect them from trouble with the police. It was a natural thing to do, and when these movements are formed, there are always politicians who are ready to become their spokesmen.

So two "Garibaldi" organizations were formed. Both had ostentatious offices in the *Place de l'Opéra*. One was organized by Ezio Garibaldi, a pro-Fascist. The other was organized by a person who was even more Fascist, named, I believe, Marabini. The two groups were in competition with each other. Whoever passed through the Place de l'Opéra could see Ezio's office on the left, with a sign in big block letters. On the right was Marabini's office, with an even more pretentious sign. The French government let them be, in fact it did not disparage this organizational buffoonery, given that it had authorized their existence. The point of the two groups was to be seen. People joined them to avoid trouble with the police and to save their jobs.

Some of my friends said that Marabini used his Garibaldi organization to compile a list of Italians in France who wanted to fight for France -- and then sent the list to the Italian consulate and to the Ovra. This could be, but I don't believe so, since the members of his group were usually good Fascists.

I don't remember how many people joined these groups. In any case, as was clear even from the start, they never went to war. The French government did not know what to do with these men, since there was no reason to send more idlers to join those who were already at the border. Also, even if these men were needed, the French would not have dared use them without Mussolini's explicit approval. So Ezio Garibaldi and Marabini held some meetings, and made belligerent speeches, and everyone stayed put. When the war with Finland started, the speeches became more inflammatory. There was talk of sending the Italians to fight the Soviet Union. After much discussion, they stayed home except for, if I remember well, a few drifters.

* * *

Our favorite restaurant, Marthe, had closed when the war started. My friends and I met at a small restaurant which had been named Prosper by its owner, a good Austrian woman (who was not Jewish), as if to compensate for its sad and very modest appearance. My mother and I regularly ate dinner there. My closest friends joined us every evening and sometimes we were joined by others who lived further away.

Bruno Pontecorvo rarely came because, in the meantime, he had married his Swedish girlfriend Marianne. One day she came. She was thin, blond, silent, and very attractive. Soon afterwards a year old baby appeared who, unbeknownst to us, had been brought up in a French village while Bruno worked in Paris and Marianne lived in Sweden with her parents. Bruno and Marianne were married at City Hall in the Fifth Arrondissement, and I was one of the witnesses.

We saw little of Bruno after his wedding. He and his wife ate their meals in their hotel room, and I suppose they took care of the baby. But we all felt that Marianne did not like our group of friends and that she avoided us.

Luria and Gillo often ate with us. Their presence gave our meals a feeling of youthful spontaneity. After dinner they often played the harmonica, alternating popular and classical music. They were much admired by the other few diners, and especially the owner's daughter.

After having been to England for the spring tennis season -- he was invited to all the tournaments, including Wimbledon -- Gillo had gone back to Italy. Since there was nothing he could do there, he came to Paris to study. He came carrying his gas mask, which his parents had thoughtfully provided. His arrival in the middle of the Sitzkrieg with the gas mask caused general hilarity.

He did not eat with us for several months because he had met Henriette. From then on, he quit walking down the Boul' Mich in search of women and spent all his time with her. They frequently came to dinner at the Prosper, but they sat at their own table.

My mother had no difficulty joining in with my friends. During the first weeks I tried to keep her away from my political friends, fearing that there would be repercussions when she returned to Italy. But it became impractical to keep her isolated so, little by little, she met them all. Her youthful temperament and curiosity about new ideas made it easy for her to feel comfortable with them, and they soon got used to thinking of her as one of us.

Naturally she was biased against Communism, not so much as social theory, but for its doctrine of revolutionary violence and its materialistic philosophy which was diametrically opposed to her mystical ideas.

One day she was talking to Corbi on the terrace of a cafe on the Boulevard Saint Michel. Corbi drowned her in a river of words and well-turned phrases. She showed an interest in his argument until he carelessly mentioned the "Bolshevik Party." She reacted violently at hearing this phrase: she was willing to talk about Communism, but not about Bolshevism. In her mind the Bolsheviks were connected to the worst horrors.

When Corbi said that Communism and Bolshevism were the same thing, she stared at him in concern and dismay and said, "But wait, are you a Bolshevik?" Her eyes widened in amazement at not seeing a bloody knife between his teeth. It took her a few days to recover from the shock and to get used to talking of Bolshevism without shaking in horror.

Sometimes my mother and I entertained guests in our rooms. People dropped by without being invited and without prior planning. Sometimes we came back from dinner with friends, and others joined us later, and we often ended up with a dozen guests. By that time we had a short wave radio in the room, and we listened to news from England and Italy. Sometimes we were able to hear Russia, to the great joy of some of my friends.

The Volterras also lived in the Pension Parisiana. Edoardo Volterra [who became a professor in Rome after the war, as well as a Rector of the University], was the son of Volterra, the great mathematician and senator in the Kingdom of Italy. Edoardo must have been about 35 at the time. He had been a professor of Roman Law in Bologna and he knew the most unexpected things, like about the Hittites and paleography. Sometimes he talked too much, but on the whole he was a wonderful person.

During his student days in Italy, he had courageously taken part in politics and he had been badly beaten by Fascist students on the steps of the University in Rome. But in 1939 he was a pure intellectual, of the kind who preferred erudition and critical study to action. Furthermore, he had the responsibility of a wife and child which also kept him from political activity. Despite this, he prudently stayed in touch with political people from various groups.

He was a good friend of Emilio Sereni, an influential member of the Communist Party. He knew Lussu of *Giustizia e Libertá*. Once he took me to see the old Nitti. He knew everyone. He met everyone more or less secretly, but he was politically inactive. His greatest concern was to be able to return to Italy. His father, to whom he was very much attached, lived in Italy, and he would not take a step that would make it impossible to go home.

When I enlisted in the French army he disapproved strongly. Maybe he was right. His favorite topic was the need to abstain from action in moments of enthusiasm. Rather, he recommended sleeping if off, and then acting with deliberation. He certainly followed this principle, but he found it difficult to find the moment when his mind was calm enough to act with the proper deliberation. So he limited himself to giving erudite lectures at the Sorbonne, or writing an occasional pedantic article for journals in his field.

His wife Nella, was a good and unaffected woman. She became great friends with my mother. I became friends with their daughter, Laura, an intelligent nine year old.

Among his more interesting friends were the Sereni brothers. Emilio Sereni was a true blue Communist, experienced and decisive. Enzo Sereni was a Zionist, equally convinced, equally experienced and equally decisive. Enzo appeared in Paris for a few months, probably to collect funds for his kibbutz. He was one of the very few Italian Zionists who had actually gone to live in Palestine, where he had founded one of the more progressive and successful kibbutzes.

It consisted of one thousand people (if I'm not mistaken) who organized their lives around Socialist rather than religious principles. In fact, I would say that religion had no part in the organization

of his kibbutz. It was a Socialist experiment, and, from what people said, it worked. These one thousand people lived together without private property, and without using money among themselves. Most were intellectuals who gladly performed manual labor. A daughter of some of my "rich relatives" had ended up in this kibbutz after Italy passed the anti-semitic laws. She was very enthusiastic about it, to the great despair of her parents.

This Zionist experiment interested me, not so much as a Jewish experiment (I hadn't been interested in this for a while), but as an experiment in forming a socialist society without resorting to revolution or violence. I wondered if it would be possible to organize similar "kibbutzim" in other countries. I talked to Enzo about it. As a Zionist, he was not at all interested in what might be done in the rest of the world. In spite of his objections, I realized that the kibbutz existed in Palestine only because of the help it received from Jewish capitalists in other countries. Enzo insisted that his kibbutz was economically sound, and I don't doubt it. But, then, wasn't he in Paris to collect money? Had he not gone to America for the same reason? Probably, once they were established, the kibbutzim could become self-supporting, and maybe even pay interest on the capital invested by Jews in the diaspora. But was there a bank that would loan money, even at a high interest rate, to form a Socialist community in any other country?

It therefore seemed to me that kibbutzim could not be created outside of Palestine. And in Palestine, where an unusual conjunction of events had made them possible, they were necessarily tainted by chauvinistic Jewish nationalism or religious narrow-mindedness. Maybe with the formation of a strong cooperative movement which would be able to finance large enterprises, kibbutzim might be organized in other countries, such as America. They might prosper until the day they inconvenienced the ruling class which would make it their business to dismantle them, either legally, as an offense to the freedom of business, or illegally, using methods used by gangsters or the Ku Klux Klan.

Enzo belonged to the II International, I think. He certainly agreed with it.

Instead his brother Emilio, called Mimmo, was a Communist. At that time he lived very modestly in a workingman's suburb. He had no money because the publications for which he had worked had been shut down. One day he decided to learn how to use a lathe. He took a course organized by the government which needed skilled specialists and he was very proud of doing manual labor.

The two brothers loved each other very much, but Enzo tried in vain to see his brother during the months he spent in Paris. Mimmo did not want to meet him because of their political differences and he told him so. This did not stop him from accepting the 3000 francs offered to him by his brother when Enzo learned of his brother's financial troubles. I never understood why Mimmo did not want to see Enzo. Is a difference of political opinions a good reason? I certainly did not think so and I saw this refusal as another instance of Communist narrow-mindedness.

There was another episode which confirmed this impression. At that time, I was reading Silone's *Fontamara*, an excellent book, and a very interesting discussion of Fascist Italy. Silone had been a Communist, but he disagreed with the dominant ideas of the official Communist organization, and he resigned or he was kicked out of the party.

Emilio noticed a copy of the book on my night-table. In an authoritarian and scornful tone, he said, "don't read this crap," and he wanted me to quit reading it or even destroy it. He tried to convince me that reading that book was bad thing, a crime, or a sin. Evidently, in his mind, Silone was damned, and the book was on the Index.

I never liked the Inquisition, and I was not going to substitute a red inquisition for the black one. I finished the book. This incident certainly didn't help to increase my respect for Comrade Emilio, also known as Mimmo, or for Communists in general.

* * *

My position at the Laboratoire Curie was, shall I say, unusual. My French friends who were my age were in the army. Older people were doing war research. After making the grand gesture of enlisting, I was still doing pure research. During the first few months I expected to join the army, but soon I stopped

waiting. I was embarrassed even though no-one said a word about it. I felt isolated from my community and I had a bad feeling about my situation, that was not overcome by everyone's friendliness toward me.

The defense research did not seem to be well-organized. It was supposed to be secret, but I knew of various projects. Not only did they seem to have nothing to do with the war, they were also not interesting. It seemed like the government had decided to use the scientific labs, but had no idea what to do with them. The army rarely proposed projects. They were mostly industrial problems whose study would have been just as useful, or just as useless, in a time of peace.

When we learned about magnetic mines, a French friend and I began working on a way to disarm them. We did a few experiments, and then sent a brief report outlining our proposed methods, and asked for information on the types of mines so that we could proceed. The report was filed according to the rules of the *Caisse Nationale des Recherches* and we heard nothing more about it. The information didn't come, and in fact, we heard nothing at all. Later we learned that the English were doing a project similar to the one we had proposed. But nothing was done in France.

The most sensational news in physics was the discovery of fission. I learned about it from Bruno Pontecorvo who said to me one day, "Joliot has made another great discovery." What had actually happened was that Joliot had read the article by Hahn and Strassman in which they demonstrated complete chemical evidence that when uranium was bombarded by neutrons, a radioactive isotope of barium was created -- a result that Irene Joliot had suspected a few years earlier, but which she had not wanted to believe because she could not reconcile it with the workings of common nuclear reactions.

With the chemical evidence presented by the Germans, Joliot -- as well as Lisa Meitner, Fermi, etc. -- understood the physical mechanics of fission, and demonstrated, with a simple experiment, that the nucleus of uranium gives off a large amount of energy when it splits in two.

The most surprising thing about fission was that it was not discovered sooner. --[as if a guardian angel had closed the eyes of scientists to what was otherwise obvious, in order to delay the construction of atomic bombs. And if such a guardian angel actually exists, it's too bad that its work was not more protracted, until the human race found a stable form of international organization (1966)]

After the work of Hahn and Strassmann and the first experiments, many theoretical physicists around the world said to themselves, "How stupid of me! It was clear that fission existed!" In fact, the nucleus had been described as a liquid drop with an electrical charge whose oscillations had been mathematically analyzed. But no-one had remembered how Lord Raleigh, in his book *The Theory of Sound*, had discussed the conditions for splitting a drop of electrically charged mercury.

The theoretical physicist who said "How stupid of me!" was Ugo Fano, who explained these things to me as he passed through Paris on his way to America.

Naturally Joliot and his collaborators understood the possibility of using the energy liberated by fission, with the potential of creating an explosion. But they never thought that there would be practical results within their generation, and even less so because of the war that had just begun. To the point that, when Fermi wrote to Joliot (or some other physicist in America wrote to some other physicist in France) suggesting an agreement among scientists to refrain from publishing these results so that the Nazis would not learn of them, the French physicists laughed, "The Americans are crazy and deluded! It will be ages before there will be any practical results!"

This episode reflects the French lack of imagination with respect to science and the war. They had the Maginot Line and felt no need to think any further.

I finally found some "war work." My job consisted of the highly warlike mission of spending two afternoons a week in an office reading articles on radioactivity and cosmic rays. It seems that the *Caisse Nationale des Recherches* could find nothing more useful for winning the war than publishing a monthly scientific bibliography. This activity was intended to increase the dissemination of French culture and to strengthen French prestige among neutral nations. The directors of this "scientific documentation" tried to persuade themselves of the great value of their mission and from what they said, our journal could have won the war.

It was a good little journal. It was very complete because we had access to the strangest assortment of reviews and the journal had a few lines of summary for each article.

I read every Italian article on physics and in my area of specialization -- radioactivity and cosmic rays. I also read articles in French, English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese. The German articles arrived on microfilm from a Swiss library. We did not get the originals because we would have had to subscribe to the journal and this would have added precious value to Hitler's coffers. With those few francs, we may have prolonged German resistance by a few days, for it was evident to all that Germany would surrender on the day it ran out of gold.

The documentation offices were full of Jewish refugees from all over Europe who could read the most unusual languages. There was a nice young German woman whose greatest worry was getting her husband released from an internment camp. Every so often she succeeded, and her husband would appear for a few weeks. Then he'd be re-arrested, and she had to start over. Finally, the poor man joined an auxiliary force of the French army which took foreigners who were "entitled to the right of asylum."

It was a nice place to work. Afterwards, we all had coffee together at the Capoulade. The work was interesting because it allowed me to keep up with physics from around the world.

At the office I was able to read Soviet magazines that did not usually reach the library at the laboratory. Some of these magazines had articles written in French, English and German. I was surprised to see that the Soviets were doing pure science that was as good as that done in other countries. Thus, I learned things that interested me, and which I could never have learned otherwise.

I mentioned this to Laslo Tisza, a Jewish Hungarian physicist who was working with us. He told me that he had lived for several years in Russia and we started talking about the Soviet Union. Both of us were so interested in the subject that we continued to meet to continue the conversation. One day I went to his place and he told me his story.

When he was a young man in Hungary, he had spent time with Communists. He did not say whether he had been a member, and I did not ask him because, in France in 1939, it was best not to talk about these things. Anyhow, he had been offered a job in a big research laboratory in Kharkov and he was enthusiastic when he left for the Soviet Union. I never saw anybody so bitterly disgusted. To him the Soviet Union was the epitome of inefficiency, disorganization, and disorder -- in other words, hell.

Supervision by the Communist Party rendered all productive activity impossible. For example, the original director of the Kharkov laboratory was a physicist, but he was replaced by a party member who did not know physics. The workers at the lab lived in perpetual fear of being arrested. Every once in a while someone was sent to prison for no reason.

In the lab, as in every factory, there were required meetings of all personnel for so-called political discussions. But in his opinion these discussions were much worse than Fascist meetings, because not only was attendance required, but people were also required to speak in favor of the existing regime. Any person who did not speak regularly was suspect, so everyone tried to outdo the others in exalting Comrade Stalin and the benefits of Communism, even if they did not believe what they said.

The party's interference in every activity, often had negative consequences. Tisza told me of an acquaintance who ran a factory that made porcelain ashtrays and who was forced to quit because one of the designs was vaguely reminiscent of a swastika -- and other similar stories.

Naturally, Tisza concluded that the people of the Soviet Union were waiting for any opportunity to throw off the Communist yoke. Soviet military power was non-existent since factories were not producing and the people hated the government. He thought that the *drole de guerre* was a bluff, and that the "democracies" made an agreement with Hitler in order to partner in the exploitation of Russia's immense natural resources which the Russians were incapable of exploiting. He was not enthusiastic about this because he did not like capitalism, but he accepted it because he felt that the Soviets should be expelled from the face of the earth.

This is an opinion: or rather, it *was* an opinion, since my friend would have had to change it, at least in part, in light of subsequent events. I thought it would be interesting to report it as it was told to me. Who was right? Tisza or Plato?

* * *

During my second stay in Paris, my relations with the gentle sex were almost non-existent. Before the war, my life was so full of political events and my time was divided between the lab, the newspaper and meetings, so that I never even had time to think of women. Also, at first I was corresponding with Marina and, if nothing else, knowing that there was a woman who cared about me helped me endure my abstinence without developing an inferiority complex. But our correspondence gradually became less frequent and less interesting.

Once the war began, my political involvement diminished, and my evenings were empty. At first, I avoided going out because the darkness was depressing. Then I went out, but rarely. Usually I spent the evenings in my rooms, keeping my mother company, reading, writing or studying.

In the hall and in the elevator of the pension I often met Mila, the Polish girl who had cried when Warsaw was bombed. She no longer lived in the pension, but she often came to see her brother. One evening she told me that she had received news from her mother. Her eyes shone with joy; and I was struck by the luminous happiness in her smiling blue eyes, just as I had been struck by her sadness when her eyes were filled with tears. I suggested that we go out, and some evenings we went to a cafe and once to the movies.

Mila was what the French call *une jolie femme*. She was a few years older than I. I would not know how to describe her. She had a turned-up nose. But what made her beautiful were her light grey-blue eyes, warm and bright. Her long lashes highlighted her eyes like diamonds on black velvet. She had an honest and calm beauty. She was not a *coquette*, and she did not flirt like the French girls. She had a serious beauty, without any frivolity. This made her all the more feminine to my taste. She had a sweet smile that could be joyful, but that usually had a touch of sadness or mystery. Her smile had an expression that was uncommon in our countries, but may have been more common in Slavic countries. I remember a similar expression in a Russian film.

We talked of everything and nothing at the cafe. She was well-educated. She called me *Serioja*, a Russian diminutive that sounded good to me. (She spoke Russian perfectly, as well as Polish and French.) I knew that she had been in Paris for a few years, and that she lived off money that her family sent from Poland. She did nothing in Paris; nothing, not even love.

Once, before the war in the hall of the pension, I told her that, in a way I admired a person who could be happy doing nothing and still maintain a positive attitude. I added, with some irony, that I couldn't do it. I don't have the strength to live without feeling that I am doing something important. She smiled calmly.

But one evening, while walking along the *quais*, she told me that since the beginning of the war she hadn't received money from Poland, and she had gone to work. She was a milliner, and she supported both herself and her brother, who was an incurable hypochondriac. She seemed to apologize for doing this kind of trivial work. She didn't know that the fact that she was working actually increased my admiration for her, and the fact that she was doing rather menial work, for which she was undoubtedly being exploited, increased my sympathy. Mila, the idle, refined Polish girl, was a milliner! I didn't think she was capable of it!

The cafés were depressing. They were lighted but the curtains were drawn, and even indoors one had the feeling that outside, on the boulevards, it was dark. Officers and soldiers on leave frequented the cafés. They were considered heroes, but they didn't need rest from courageous activity as much as they needed distraction after long periods of boredom in the bunkers on the Maginot Line, .

The *Sitzkrieg* soldiers were strange. They had even lost the brutal vitality and the noisy masculinity which usually accompanied military life. They weren't noisy, they didn't drink or sing. They didn't chase women. Some had learned to knit to kill time. A friend of ours once met some soldiers on leave who were sitting on a park bench, knitting, and they had a conversation about difficult stitches. It was said that the soldiers knitted for the citizens at home, while the citizens knitted for the soldiers.

The soldiers in the cafés looked as though they were trying their best to do what was expected of them. The middle class girls thought they were expected to provide consolation to them in their sadness, so in the evenings they patriotically dated soldiers they had barely known before the war. Meanwhile,

there was no danger. The French soldiers in 1940 seemed to have been instructed not to be aggressive in any sense of the word. On the Maginot line they were given bromides to keep them calm.

Mila and I talked at the cafes enjoying a beer or a cafe creme. We enjoyed each other's company. One evening we stopped on a bench at the Pont des Arts watching the Seine flow slowly by, and the spires of the Sainte Chappelle, and the towers of Notre Dame silhouetted against the dark sky. It was nice to be with an attractive young woman between the moving waters and the starry sky, in the deserted streets of one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

Like anybody with any self-respect, Mila lived in an attic. It was on the sixth floor of a building on the Seine, on the Rive Gauche, near the Pont Neuf. There was a marvelous view from her little window. To get to her room, we used the service stairs or the freight elevator, when it worked.

The first time I went to her place she said, "You know, it's the first time since I came to Paris--three years." I answered that it was the first time for me since I'd been in Paris. It was more than a year, which for a man is a real record! Especially in Paris.

Mila and I became great friends. We saw each other more often. This was hard on my mother who could not help worrying when I came home late. Eventually, my mother became good friends with Mila too. When we first became intimate, Mila was afraid to see my mother. She was afraid to be thought of as her son's "chick." But my mother had rapidly crossed the abyss between the morals of her generation in Italy and those of my group in France. This was certainly proof of her flexibility. I don't know how enthusiastic she was about my relationship with Mila: she never said anything about it. But it is certain that she gave Mila the respect and sympathy that she deserved.

Once Mila told me her story. She was born in Warsaw to a well-to-do family and she had been evacuated to Russia with her mother during World War I. She was in the Ukraine during the revolution and the civil war. She was a little girl then, but she remembered the horrors of war. When the Whites were in power, her mother acted like a lady. When the Reds were in power, her mother hid her jewels and lived by sewing for the Red Army. This alternated several times. Finally they were able to return to Poland after some diplomatic arrangement. Only one of her mother's jewels was left. It was placed in the handle of a knife. The trip was in a cattle car, and lasted weeks. Mila got typhus and almost died. The knife with the jewel was passed from person to person, without anyone suspecting its true value.

They finally arrived in Warsaw. Mila recovered, and grew up well-off, and maybe even in luxury. But she always remembered her younger years and the horrors of war. She would say that nowhere in Western Europe, not even in France, was the war as violent and disastrous as in Russia and Poland. History repeated itself in World War II.

Mila had come to France to end a romance. She was my sweet and intelligent friend until the fall of France. Dear Mila! She was very emotional and she was affectionate and generous. She was very feminine, and needed a man to protect her. She often said, "I'm afraid!" although she was in reality a strong person. But she liked to express her fragile femininity, by saying, almost flirtatiously, "I'm afraid." Sometimes she was afraid of a passer-by in the dark, deserted streets of Paris. She would hold onto my arm and say, "I'm afraid!"

Poor dear Mila! I'm afraid that after I left, you may have often had real reason to be afraid, and my arm was not there to hold onto!

* * *

After war broke out, it became so unpleasant in France that more and more often I thought of crossing the Atlantic. Naturally my mother did not like the idea and she panicked at the very idea that I could go so far away. She told me that after a death, it was customary for people to say, "Pretend that he moved to another world. Pretend he's in America." To her America was that "other world" not very different from the one where souls went to their rest.

But my situation in the lab was becoming more and more difficult. I began writing letters to acquaintances in America to learn about possible jobs and living conditions in the New World. I applied for some fellowships and jobs, but with no success. I applied for a fellowship at the Westinghouse

Research Laboratory in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, I was told in Paris, was the ugliest city in the world. [Now that I have actually seen Pittsburgh, I have to admit that this person did not know much about other American cities.] I also applied for a position with an oil company in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I had never heard of either Tulsa or Oklahoma. To me, Oklahoma sounded like a Japanese name. From my atlas I learned that Tulsa was a city of twenty thousand people. Someone told me of its rapid growth after the discovery of oil. In my mind, I imagined Oklahoma to be a desert, where instead of oases with palms growing next to water wells, derricks sprouted next to oil wells. A person who was raised in Florence, and lived in Paris could not have much respect for a city that did not exist twenty years earlier. I imagined Pittsburgh to be a coal desert.

[I reread this in 1966, in Pittsburgh, where I have lived for the past 20 years. I have to add that Pittsburgh is surrounded by lovely hills. The smoke for which it was famous was eliminated by an admirable civic effort. On the whole, one does not live badly in Pittsburgh, especially if one returns at least once a year to old Europe to visit cathedrals and monuments, and to honor the ancient Gods, especially the Greek ones.]

All of America seemed like a desert except for the cities whose names I had learned in school. This was because my idea of a real place was quite different from the American idea. A place that did not have a long history, ancient monuments, and an old cultural tradition, was to me a desert. I don't think I've changed my mind about that.

For a few weeks it seemed that I might go to Tulsa. My mother was unhappy. Mila cried. But it was a false alarm. The position at the oil company was later taken by Bruno Pontecorvo, who arrived in the United States before me.

Despite this setback, to be prepared for any eventuality, I began to collect the many documents that I needed for a visa to immigrate to the United States: certificates of all kinds to prove where I was born, that I was not sick, that I had not been in jail, and other things that the Americans rightfully wanted to know.

Meanwhile some of my relatives had ended up in America. I wrote to them asking them to supply me with an "affidavit of support," i.e., a document that declared that a United States resident was willing to support me financially if I ran into trouble. As we shall see, these documents proved useful to me later on.

* * *

Then came the war in Finland.

I wasn't enthusiastic about the Russian occupation of the Baltic states, but I felt it was justifiable. It seemed like a move to prevent further German expansion.

But the French newspapers were indignant toward the Soviet Union and its expansionist actions. I remember an article in *Le Temps* which, to show its disgust, claimed that the Red Army had put "criminals" in charge of Lvov, that is, people who had been in jail before the occupation--as if only criminals were sent to prison!

I hoped that the Russian-Finnish negotiations over military bases would succeed. After the war started I came to believe that the Soviet Union was in the wrong. Had the Finns revolted against their own government and welcomed the Red Army as liberators, I would have been happy to overlook traditional moral principles and approve the Russian actions. But the Finns fought, and for a few months the Red Army could not advance. It was both a military and ideological defeat for the Soviet Union.

For the French press that still had permission to publish, it was a windfall. It proved what the newspapers had been saying: Russian tanks were made of *papier maché*, morale was awful, etc., etc.

The war continued. The Finns had no intention of accepting the Russians as liberators and the Russian army could not advance. I was the only one among my friends who did not approve of the Soviet Union's position. They thought that a capitalist Finland under German or English influence would be a danger to the Soviet Union and that as long as Leningrad was under Finnish fire, it was a holy war. The home of the proletariat could do no wrong.

While I recognized these dangers, I felt that the war in Finland was, if nothing else, a mistake, since it alienated the Soviet Union from people around the world. I felt that people's sympathy was a better defense than a secure border.

In the meantime, a subtle warlike fury had permeated the Anglo-French allies. The leaders of those two nations, which not only refused to declare war, but had done nothing, and didn't intend to do anything to oppose Hitler's Germany, were overcome by a heroic fever to defend the "little Finnish democracy." These same men who, without batting an eyelash, had seen democracy drowned in blood in Austria, in Spain, and in Czechoslovakia, were now talking of a "question of principle."

And the most absurd ideas come up when generals and government leaders start talking about principles. They talked of expeditionary forces and armed intervention. General Weigard went to Turkey to try to organize an attack on the Russian Caucasus.

Seeing that a Finnish revolution wasn't going to happen, the Soviet Union got serious and attacked the Mannerheim Line. Impossible, said the military critics. One cannot take a fortified line. Admitting the contrary would have been equivalent to admitting that the Maginot Line was not impregnable. And then there was the cold, the dissatisfaction of the Soviet troops, the communication problems and many other matters.

But the Red Army did attack. It attacked with such violence that the illustrious minds of the military critics hastened to say that such an attack could not last more than a few days. The attack continued for several weeks until the Mannerheim Line was obliterated. *Le Temps* then decided that the Red Army had accomplished a prodigious feat, that the soldiers had shown great courage and spirit of sacrifice, that their military equipment was first rate, that the attack was extremely well-organized, and that the problem of supplies had been brilliantly resolved.

Finland sued for peace which the Soviet Union conceded on terms that were quite lenient toward the defeated country. This was partly done out of fear of international complications with one or the other of the major belligerents, and partly because the Soviets had no interest in occupying a country whose population was unrelentingly hostile.

So ended the war in Finland, as did the related discussions with my friends. Russia's initial mistake was in part rectified by its victory and the generous terms of the peace. But in my eyes, and in the eyes of many others, the Soviet Union ended up with a black mark, added to the one that it had earned from signing the pact with Hitler.

* * *

My mother and I had more or less normal relations with the French authorities. That is to say, we were able to get the necessary residence permits with lots of aggravation, but without great difficulty.

My situation was simple. Since I was a fellowship recipient at the *Caisse des Recherches*, the police had to give me, albeit reluctantly, a student's green identity card. The card was valid for a year and it could be renewed without difficulty with a letter from the Sorbonne or the *Caisse*. It took two or three days of waiting in various lines to get the card, but since this happened just once a year, it was not too bad. My friends and I who were in a similar position, considered ourselves to be a privileged category of refugees, because although we did not have the right to work (the green card was for non-salaried workers), we at least had the right to reside within Republican France without begging every few weeks.

To get permission for my mother to come to France, I had gotten a letter of recommendation from Madame Joliot to some high official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was in charge of granting visas. One morning I went to the Quai d'Orsay with the letter in my pocket. After a reasonable wait of just a few hours, I was admitted to the secretary of the exalted person to whom the letter was addressed. The secretary welcomed me with the face of one who has slept in late, and who, having nothing else to do for the rest of the day, could allow himself the luxury of chatting with a young Italian man who was trying to get a visa. It was clear that he talked to me only out of consideration for the letter I carried, and that his conversation with me had no other purpose than to use up a quarter hour of his boring day at the office. He told me, or he let me know, that nothing could be done for my mother.

Seeing that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not going to give my mother a visa, and that their authorization was a necessary condition for her to get the visa, I was not at all surprised to learn that my mother had gotten her original three-month visa after giving a small tip to a consular official. This was normal procedure. One could almost say it was legal, since corruption had become an integral part of the French *corpus iuris*. And, also, this institution was perfectly geared to the aims for which the Republic was organized: to keep out those who could not pay.

My mother arrived with her three-month visa, and as could be expected, stayed almost a year.

When the war started, fingerprints were added to my mother's visa and to my green card. A few days later there was a census of foreigners who were "beneficiaries of the right to asylum." Posters went up on every corner ordering these foreigners to register at the police station. These "beneficiaries" then could be asked to serve in military-style formations, but as non-combatants, and they would continue to have the right to asylum.

The poster was mysterious given that there was no legal definition of "beneficiaries of the right to asylum" that I know of. Optimists thought this was a generous act by the government to protect political refugees, and to use their enthusiasm in a war for democracy. Pessimists thought that this just a way of getting a list of anti-fascists who then might be recruited to do forced labor.

Registration was voluntary and it was to be done in alphabetical order. I was in the group which was first to register, and I did not know what to do. I went to the Italian Popular Union to ask advice. They told me that they knew nothing, but that I had a few days to figure out the situation. They knew me as Minori, and the M's were scheduled for the following week.

I decided that since I had already enlisted as a volunteer I would go ahead and register as a "beneficiary of the right to asylum." The police told me that I had made the right choice by coming forward. But a few days later the orders changed and the police stopped accepting Italians with valid passports as "beneficiaries." Some of my friends who were having difficulties renewing their visas were not allowed to sign up. It was clear that Italy was not about to enter the war in the immediate future, and that Italian antifascists were not acceptable allies to the French.

When my mother's visa needed to be renewed, we went to the *préfecture*. For the next few months we had to visit the *préfecture* every few weeks, and the applications became a real torture.

The *Préfecture de la Police* is in a somber building that looks like a barracks. It is located on the *Cite*, between the Hotel de Dieu and the courts. The offices for foreigners occupied most of the building. We started by going to Information. The first rule was to go when the multilingual little old lady was there. Other employees were impolite, but the little old polyglot was a gem. She took people's problems seriously, and she told people to come back to see her if they had problems.

The little old polyglot told us to try the ground floor, which was for normal cases, such as those who had been in France for a long time and wanted to renew their identity cards. After waiting in line for several hours we reached an overworked employee who told us there was nothing she could do, and that I should see the supervisor. The supervisor worked in a little wood-paneled room in a corner of the ground floor. There's a long line and a policeman at the door. You get in line, and after half an hour you reach the door. The policeman refuses to let you enter. You show the inevitable letter of recommendation and the policeman continues to refuse. You enter while he is momentarily distracted, maybe on purpose. The supervisor gets angry because this is a case of renewal, not a normal extension: you have to go to the third floor.

The little old multilingual woman says that it really *is* a case for the third floor, but that it's always best to go to the ground floor first because, you never know, they might renew it by mistake.

On the third floor you go to a waiting room, already full of refugees from all over the world. You wait there for the rest of the day, and then you get a number for one of the following days.

Returning on the assigned day, you wait in the same room. That day you buy *Le Matin*, because you're afraid that the police would not approve of *l'Oeuvre* or *l'Époque*. [After the antifascist papers were shut down, I read *l'Oeuvre* (radical-socialist) or *l'Époque*, a paper with a reasonable French nationalist bent. It was in favor of creating a political climate in which France could exist, even if it meant collaborating with the antifascists.] Then you have to go out to have your photograph taken, and to buy

official document paper. You come back with the necessary items, and see an employee for a few minutes. He takes the application, extends the visa temporarily for two weeks; as proof all this, he provides a receipt for the payment for the identity card.

Two weeks later, it's the same deal, except that you go directly to the third floor, and you don't have to buy the official paper. Each time it represents a loss of four or five hours for those who live near the *préfecture*.

In the waiting room you could study languages and personalities. There were all kinds of people: old people, young people, intellectuals, workers, women who tried crying, and women who tried to seduce with their provocative elegance. But there were many women were really crying because they were desperate and upset! Most of them seemed to be people who lived in a furnished attic, rented weekly, after being accustomed to living in a comfortable house with a sense of permanence. There were parts of families that shouldn't have been on their own: wives who had left their husband in concentration camps or in the Polish army; fathers with sons in Czechoslovakia or America; or maybe under the ruins of a house in Warsaw. They were all there to beg for an extension of their visa, for permission to continue living on French soil, maybe on charity if they didn't have work permits. To live in their attic, far from their homes and dear ones, counting their pennies, economizing on meals, doing their own laundry.

To live in France. Why, you ask yourself, did they want to go on living? Maybe they were waiting to for a visa to join relatives in America. Maybe they wanted to stay alive to hear from the Red Cross that their relatives in Poland are not dead. But many were waiting there, without hope of a better future and with no faith in the world, without hope of ever having anything more in life.

And this was not the last floor. I have never been on the top floor. There they deal with refusals. When the police refuse to renew a residence permit, they give a document that gives the reason for the refusal. The residence refusal invites the party to please leave French soil, and if this were impossible, to come back in a period of between one and thirty days -- usually about five days. Since in 99% of the cases, the person has nowhere to go, he would return on the assigned day. If it was not worthwhile to arrest him, or to send to an internment camp, he would be given a new refusal with which he could continue to live in Paris for a few more days.

We never went to the top floor, because after going to the Prefecture for a few months, my mother received an extension that lasted longer than the receipt, and the French Republic ended before the termination date of the receipt, a situation that the Prefect the Police had probably not anticipated.

But the top floor of the Prefecture de Police was not the lowest level in Hell. Below were those "illegals" and those interned in various camps. Most of these people were active political revolutionaries and despite everything, their cases were not as sad as the hopeless people at the Prefecture.

* * *

My political activities stopped when the war started. The *Voce degli Italiani* was outlawed and the newspaper employees began organizing clandestine propaganda. As for me, I quit working actively in the anti-fascist struggle, not so much because I was afraid of doing illegal work, as because I was assailed by doubts about all the political positions that had seemed so clear in the preceding year. Who could be trusted? Certainly not the Communists, but neither could I trust the governments of the democratic nations.

These doubts changed my relationship with the Communists, but this was not the reason I quit meeting them. In spite of my many disagreements with them, I could not help but respect their devotion and their spirit of sacrifice which could be described either as heroic or fanatical, depending on one's opinion. But no-one could accuse them of egotism or moral depravity. What did they have to gain by risking being sent to internment camps? They were certainly not taking these risks for their "Moscow salary."

Among the Communists that I knew, the most visible had been arrested during the first few days. Every once in a while I met one of the others who would tell me, with apparent conviction, the official Communist interpretation of current events. If they really believed it then they were fanatics. If they hid their doubts, they were hypocrites. On rare occasions I thought they might be right.

One evening Plato said, "I don't know if I'll be seeing you next week. They might arrest me at any time. I have already warned my wife so she will be prepared." He talked as if his arrest were unimportant, as if it were a normal problem at work. He was calmer than if he had said "I have to go to the dentist tomorrow." He apparently had no intention of avoiding arrest, certainly not by quitting the Party, but not even by cutting short his organizational and propaganda activities. It didn't even cross his mind. After *La Voce degli Italiani* closed down, he practically starved. He spent entire days talking to people, to maintain old contacts and maybe to try to develop new ones.

He was arrested much later. I saw him almost every week. He came to the Quartier Latin to give a course on Marxism. I went a few times, but I have to admit that I was never interested in the study of religious texts, so I rapidly lost interest.

The project of convening Italian intellectuals had gone up in smoke with the start of the war. I had several thousand francs that I did not know what to do with, given that any antifascist activity had become impossible. I did not want to give this money for illegal work, because that was not what it had been donated for. The members of the temporary committee decided to send this money to the Spanish soldiers who were interned for their antifascist activity before the war and before the Russian-German agreement. Some Communists wanted to give all the money to the Communists. I insisted that the money should be divided equally between Communist volunteers and volunteers from *Giustizia e Libertá*.

I got in touch with the two groups to distribute the funds. The Communists were enthusiastic, but the G.L. were not. I had to woo Battino and Venturi for several months to persuade them to come to a meeting to talk about this money. Several times, with several excuses, they missed the appointment. The Communists were angry because they knew the condition of their comrades in the camps, and they wanted to send the money as soon as possible.

One evening I arranged a meeting at the Source with Scotti, representing the Communists, and Battino representing *Giustizia e Libertá*. Scotti came; Battino did not show up. A stranger came about an hour late, saying that Battino had sent him. He started talking about his adventures in prison and in Spain, bragging of having killed Communists in Spain. He seemed like an unprincipled adventurer. His name was Spinelli. I got the feeling that *Giustizia e Libertá* wanted to provoke the Communists. I refused to discuss anything with Spinelli who acted like an agent sent to foment trouble. So the Communists ended up with all the money.

My relations with *Giustizia e Libertá* were bad for some months after this incident. Battino sent me a letter in which he said that he was insulted by how I had treated this "friend." The letter seemed to be intended to provoke me, written as it was on *Giustizia e Libertá* letterhead, with various official-looking stamps. I answered *per le rime* and for a few months we no longer saw each other.

One day Battino appeared at the Curie Lab looking for me. I was glad that he was the first to break the silence after our less than cordial missives. We did not mention the Spinelli incident. I implicitly accepted the apologies that he did not give, but that were implicit in his actions. I did not want to have bad relations with *Giustizia e Libertá*. Even if the various antifascists groups could not work together, I wanted to have good relations with them all. I hoped to serve as a kind of meeting point, and to help them reach out to each other when the moment was right.

Maybe in the meantime, Battino had realized who Spinelli really was. I don't think he was a Fascist spy, as the Communists insinuated. But he certainly was an unprincipled adventurer without serious goals. The fact is that Battino, Venturi, and I met again without the Spinelli incident affecting our relations at all.

Battino also introduced me to Emilio Lussu. Lussu lived in a small apartment very near my pension and, after meeting him, I visited him often in the evenings.

Lussu was the head of the *Giustizia e Libertá* movement. I don't know what his title was. He was serious and distinguished with the face of a refined intellectual. His bearded chin gave him the air of a prophet. He was tall, thin, a bit tubercular, with warm lively eyes. Enthusiastic and honest, he was a man of thought as well as a man of action--a classic liberal revolutionary with a wholesome zeal and the disingenuousness of a revolutionary from the last century. A good person to talk to, even if I thought his

opinions outdated. I won't tell his story because anyone interested in the history of the Italian emigration can read it elsewhere.

Lussu lived modestly in Paris with an Italian girlfriend. She was intelligent and loyal. They were waiting for the Italians to form a government that they considered legal before getting married. In the meantime, their friends' recognition of their union was more important to them than legal recognition. She served tea very well: an ideal mate for an old-fashioned revolutionary.

Lussu wanted to fight alongside the French army. He complained that he was not allowed to form an Italian legion, evidently not understanding that this was a reactionary war, and that if the war was reactionary, there was no reason to fight. He wanted to fight against Mussolini at all costs -- on God's side or the devil's. Naturally he disliked the Communists and he was very critical of their position. I thought that Lussu could have a positive influence on the Italian political scene after the war, especially in Sardinia. He was a man of the past who could also be a man of the future.

Nitti, on the other hand, was a man of the past without a future. I went to visit the old President of the Italian Council with Edoardo Volterra. I was amazed at his intelligence and erudition, and by his broad vision. He had a very open mind although he was quite old. It was very interesting to talk to him about the past, but not about the present or the future. When I left his home I was so impressed with him that I wondered why a man of such significance had not been able to save Italy from Fascism.

* * *

Some of my friends ended up in French internment camps. One of these was Ernesto Melamerson. Although he had lived in Italy for a long time, and was officially apolitical, he was arrested as a German by the French police.

In August, Melarmerson and Battino left to spend a few weeks vacation on the Atlantic coast. The war began while they were away and Battino came back to Paris without Melamerson. Melamerson had been arrested.

When the weather turned cold, poor Melamerson wrote me a desperate letter asking me to send him his winter clothes. They were in three huge trunks in the warehouse of a shipping agent at the other end of Paris. I went several times to the warehouse, which was quite a feat. When the employees learned that I wanted to send part of the contents of the trunks to a man in an internment camp, they raised all kinds of legal questions. If the owner of the trunks was German, then they would have to give the trunks to the authorities, and everything would be confiscated as enemy property. They couldn't tell me what to do, so they finally told me to come back to talk to the boss.

Fortunately the boss was a good man. He listened to the story and said, "German, or not, the poor guy is cold. I was in the last war, and I know what it means to be cold. We'll have send the poor guy his things." He gave me what Melamerson had asked for, and advised me to have the package sent by another shipping agent.

I had several opportunities to see this man, because Melamerson kept needing things from his trunks. We almost made friends. We certainly understood each other. It was good to meet a person who, in the midst of official chauvinism, put human solidarity ahead of nationalism. He was not an intellectual, like most of my friends but the good man was cordial and exuberant.

The last time I saw him was to ask him to send the trunks to Bordeaux, where Melamerson had been sent while awaiting a visa to go to America. When the authorities realized that he was not one hundred percent German, and certainly not a Nazi, they had given him permission to leave France, transferring him from a concentration camp to a debarkation camp.

The agent was sincerely happy to know that the owner of the trunks had gotten permission to leave and he invited me to his private office and offered me a glass of whiskey and soda from a cabinet that looked like an archive. Together we drank to my friend's good luck.

Many Frenchmen thought like this man, slightly left-leaning, middle class people, not in the least bit defeatist, but disgusted by the government's empty nationalist propaganda and its refusal to treat foreigners as humans. They would have been happier fighting a war against Hitler than a war against the

Germans. They represented the real France, combining a deep generosity and humanity with some excusable middle-class narrow-mindedness.

In dealing with Melamerson's problems, I met another interesting person. I went to see Pietro Nenni, ex-secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, to ask him to intercede with the French authorities to free Melamerson. I visited Nenni in his modest apartment where he lived with his family. He was disgusted by the German-Soviet pact, but he was equally disgusted by the allied governments' pro-fascist attitude. As a Socialist, he thought that maintaining the unity of the working class was the most important goal. Despite his disapproval of the Soviet government, he was not an anti-Communist and he was forced to resign as secretary of the Socialist Party for this reason.

Nenni lived on money earned from his small publishing firm, and from a few articles that he had published in Swiss newspapers. Naturally, the newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party had been shut down in France. Nenni did not complain. He said, "The political situation is so complicated that, even if I had a newspaper, I wouldn't know what to write. I much prefer having my newspaper shut down by the reactionaries than having to publicly stating my opinion at a time like this." Poor Nenni was completely at a loss, as was I. I sympathized with him. He seemed to be a serious and honest person.

But, as was to be expected, Nenni could do nothing for Melamerson, who was left to rot in his camp month after month. Compared to others who were interned in the camps, Melamerson was actually in an enviable position. He had clothes and some money--that is, he had friends who could occasionally send him money. Furthermore, in the eyes of the French government, he was not guilty of having fought against Fascism, so they did not treat him too badly.

The Communist internees were treated much worse, and the refugees from the war in Spain even more so. They had nothing: no clothes, no blankets, shoes, food or medicine. My friends and I would collect old rags and shoes, and send large packages to the camps. Luria, who was a doctor, was able to get some medicine, which he sent to them. Every once in a while we sent a little money. But there was little we could do compared to the needs of the internees. The description of their conditions was unbelievable and after the German occupation, the conditions became so bad as to be unimaginable.

Another young Italian whom I knew pretty well, and who ended up in an internment camp, was Cesare Colombo. He had been involved in a trial against *Giustizia e Libertá* in Italy and he had spent several years *al confino*. After serving his sentence, he had illegally gone to France where he joined the Communist Party. When the Spanish war broke out, the Communists sent him to Barcelona, where he was in charge of Italian language radio broadcasts. When Catalonia was occupied by Franco's army, he crossed the Pyrenees on foot with other refugees, and was interned in a French camp. As I have already said, he escaped during the first few days and came to Paris which is where I met him, and I saw him occasionally, at the cafes, at conferences and at meetings.

Naturally Colombo had no documents and he hid in the homes of friends. After the war broke out, the police searched the cafes and the boulevards more frequently. At first, Cesare was careful, staying away from more crowded places. After evading the police for a few months, he began to feel safer, and quit being as careful. He even dared to spend evenings at the Dome, or walking on the Boul' Mich.

He managed to evade the police until he was finally arrested with a girl at the Bois de Vincennes. A suspicious officer approached the couple and the girl was offended. She talked back to the officer and the result was a trial for indecent behavior. They were both acquitted and Colombo got documents that refused him residence. He was very proud of these documents, and he bragged about the strange way that he had been able to "regularize" his situation.

The thing that worried him most was that the girl was not a Communist, and the Party did not approve of "mixed" liaisons, even during the period of the Popular Front. When he went to renew his documents and his situation became known, he was sent to rot, and to literally starve, at Gurs. Later his case was transferred to the Italians who sent him to the *confino*, where he lived much better than he had at Gurs. There he had access to food, and he survived to become a loyal member of the Italian Communist Party after the war.

CHAPTER XII

Defeat (Summer 1940)

One morning, unlike most mornings when the radio served up the usual colorless reports, I woke up to an announcement that the Germans were invading Denmark and Norway. During the first few days it was not clear what was happening and we were promised a naval battle. Eventually we heard that a naval battle was in progress. Then we heard that the battle was over. Result: the Germans occupied Denmark and Norway and were in no hurry to leave.

The "military critics" explained that the German strategists had made a grave mistake by abandoning their defensive position: "Now that the wolf has left its den, it will be easy to kill." The public was so rhapsodic at the idea of the death of the wolf that it seemed like the wolf was already in the bag. But the wolf seemed very comfortable outside its den and it was apparently in very good health, and it certainly was not worried about strategic errors.

The French and English were so convinced of their superiority that even intelligent people fell into the trap of believing in this German strategic error. It was a period of general optimism, during which time the Norwegian army was liquidated.

I did not share the general optimism, and with the training I'd received reading Italian Fascist newspapers, I based my opinion on the few facts rather than on the many written words. I was in a terrible mood all week. Then one evening, while I was listening to an Italian language BBC program, the program was interrupted to announce the victory at Narvik. I so much wanted to hear good news that I gave too much importance to the news of that unimportant local episode, thinking it was the start of a larger operation. The general enthusiasm was so great that we ordered champagne and toasted to the success of the Allied operation.

After Narvik, I was optimistic for a few days. Then, seeing that it was only a local victory, I despaired again. I was so disturbed that I could no longer work. In the first place, I did not feel at all safe if the Germans were to occupy the country, or if France were to make peace with Hitler. Many of my friends were in concentration camps. I was not very exposed, and I was protected by my scientific work, but I was afraid that if the Fascists did occupy the country, I might share the fate of my friends. The authorities might find my name associated with theirs in the records of the Italian consulate and I too, might end up in a camp.

Besides worrying about my safety, I tortured myself because I didn't have a clear idea as to my responsibilities. The thought of the Nazis winning the war made me cringe. But I thought it useless to enlist in the French army in whose commanders and management I had no faith, and which gave me doubts about my role in preventing an enemy victory. The doubts that had assailed me during the war in Finland returned to torture me again even more intensely.

I went to talk to Joliot. I told him that every once in a while I thought of leaving France, given that by staying I was exposed to all the discomforts and risks of a nation at war without the slightest opportunity to act in the defense of France or my own principles. Joliot agreed with me. He asked me to keep his comments confidential since he "didn't want to be accused of defeatism." But, in his opinion the

war effort was incompetent and he himself was frustrated, since the research problems that he was given were not very interesting, and his own proposals were lost in a vacuum of either bureaucracy or sabotage.

This conversation did not give me any consolation and I began to think more seriously about leaving. During this period I hardly went to the Laboratory. I'm not sure what I did or how I wasted my time, but I was always busy. I went to the Italian consulate to have my passport extended to include the United States. This was rather easy since I stated that I wanted a student visa which was outside the quota. I gave my uncle power of attorney so that he could manage my legal affairs in Italy. I wrote to everyone I knew in America to ask for an affidavit and for a job. I completed a large number of applications.

Meanwhile the Germans began their offensive against Holland and the Netherlands, to which the Allies responded with a flurry of insolent remarks, while abandoning their defensive positions on the French and Belgian border. Again, we listened constantly to the radio. We heard news from France, England, Italy, and Germany. The news from Germany and Italy was bad and after a few days the bad news was confirmed on the Allied radio.

I realized that there was no more time to calmly plan a departure or to wait for the right opportunity. Someone told me that the Portuguese consulate was the only one still granting visas, so one morning my mother and I went, and both of us got visas for a month's residence in Portugal. The next day when one of my friends went to apply for the same visa, he was turned down because of new instructions from Lisbon. I got a transit visa through Spain automatically, after only a few hours in line at the Spanish consulate. Then I went to the *Banque de France* to get permission to export my mother's money by converting it into *escudos*.

My mother was afraid to go to Portugal and when I think about the conditions in which I arrived, I can't blame her. She thought it was a crazy idea. Meanwhile the Germans occupied the Lowlands; Rotterdam was half destroyed by air raids; the king of Belgium surrendered and was accused of betrayal by the French newspapers; and the English claimed they were the victors of the defeat at Dunkirk.

It was a terrible situation. The choices were either to fight or to leave. I often went to see Lussu, who was full of romantic ideas, and wanted to fight. But the French would not allow him, and he was very upset. He was humiliated by the enforced inactivity while the French army was engaged in "fighting" our enemies.

I became convinced that there was no alternative to leaving. But how? As a foreigner I needed a police permit to go anywhere, but I was afraid to ask for one for fear of being turned down. Since I had declared myself a beneficiary to the right of asylum, in theory I had some obligations toward the French army. As it happened, just during those days I was called in for a physical and declared fit to render service as a *préstataire*.

The military situation became more and more critical. When the Italian radio said that the Germans were at Abbeville, having separated the army in the Lowlands from the rest of the troops on French territory, I knew that all hope was lost.

I decided to first make sure that my mother and Mila were safe. My mother asked for a police permit to return to Italy and Mila asked for a permit to stay with an uncle in Bretagne, which at the time seemed safe. Within a week, my mother received her permit and left for Florence. I did not hear from her again until after the war.

Meanwhile I was trying to find a way to get to Portugal. I was supposed to leave with a friend, Andrea Levialedi who, like me, had a Portuguese visa, but no permit to leave France. We did not want to ask through normal channels, for fear we would be turned down because we were of draft age.

We were told that it would be quicker to ask the military authorities directly. This office was in the building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and to be admitted we needed a letter of recommendation. Who would give us one? We could not ask at the Laboratory: it was not right to ask them to help us leave. So. . . .

So we went to the office without a letter. We were not admitted, but we found out what kind of letter was needed: a letter from the Italian consulate! And this was just a few days before Italy declared war on France!

Andrea and I had no contacts at the consulate for various reasons. But Andrea remembered that a girl he had known in high school had married a Count who was at the embassy. We telephoned the Countess and she received us in a very tasteful apartment in a large attic on the Place Vendome. She offered us cocktails, and told us that the situation in France was desperate. She said that Italy was about to declare war, and that the Italian diplomats were embarrassed about it. She said that for the moment, the Soviet Union had won, having demonstrated political astuteness, and incomparable diplomacy.

The next day we were admitted into an office of the Italian Embassy. Count So-and-So received us kindly and told us that he would do what he could to help us. But he was afraid that if we went to the French military with a recommendation from him, we would be shipped directly to a concentration camp. We told him that he did not understand the French military. So he gave us the letter, with the seal of the embassy but no signature, because he probably didn't want it known that just a few days before Hitler's victorious entry into Paris, he had helped two antifascist Jews escape to Portugal.

The letter had the desired effect, that is to say, we were politely admitted to the office, our request was accepted, and it was transmitted to the appropriate office . . . but Hitler arrived before we received an answer!

On one of the last few days I went to request a visa at the American consulate. By that time, I had gathered all the necessary documents. The consul looked at them, verified that they were correct, and asked me what I was doing in Paris. As soon as he heard the magic words, *Laboratoire Curie*, he issued the visa. The Italian quota was open.

There were only two things I needed before leaving: a vaccination and my quota number, which had to be sent from the General Consulate in Naples--a mere formality. I mailed a return postage paid telegram to Naples and got a vaccination, thinking that I would be leaving for America in the next few days.

I went to various travel agencies to look at schedules and possibly to buy a ticket for America. But the schedules were being kept secret as a precaution to protect against submarine attacks. So I got nothing accomplished. At this point, I decided to take a more modest and cautious approach: I went to the Bon Marche and bought a bicycle.

After my mother left, I stayed with Mila, seeing her between appointments at the various consulates. One day we went together on an errand. While she was running her errand, I talked to the taxi driver. I told him I was Italian.

"Italien? The Italians are a great people! They showed it at Caporetto! They don't want to fight for dirty capitalist and imperialist governments. But this time, we French have also understood. Why should we fight for Daladier and de Reynaud? They are as Fascist as Hitler! I'm a Communist, you know. My duty is to fight against Daladier, Reynaud, Laval and company. But if Hitler arrives tomorrow we are going to fight against Hitler while those bourgeois will make peace with him and against us. There are millions of us, and we will fight Hitler when he is here, but not under this rotten government."

The end of France was in sight, and we expected the Germans any day. Mila decided to go to Bretagne, and I never saw her again. I gave her some of my mother's money, which I hoped helped her in her last days. Unfortunately I have no doubt that she did not survive. Could a Polish Jew in German-occupied France have any other fate?

* * *

I made two important decisions. I packed my suitcase for possible internment in a concentration camp, and I kept my bicycle ready for an escape. This way, I felt prepared for any eventuality.

For many days, refugees passed through the city, leaving the war zones to go south. Cars filled with people went through the streets, some with mattresses and all kinds of domestic items on the roof. Poor people, thought the Parisians.

But every day the front was approaching, and soon the Parisians started to leave as well. Why? To keep up the fight? Out of fear of the Germans? Where were they going? Who knows? They were going south. Soon there were no more trains, and those who left had to find their own transportation.

My Italian colleagues and I wanted to go too. The thought of waiting for Hitler to arrive was not at all appealing. But as foreigners, we could not legally leave without a permit from the police and there was no way to get one. The police were paralyzed by a lack of orders, or by contradictory orders, or by uncertainty as to what government they might have to answer to the next day.

Pontecorvo, Luria and I had our bicycles ready, but we put off the decision from day to day. Then, when it was obvious that the French resistance had crumbled, Mussolini declared war. I didn't think he would do it, because I thought it was not in his own personal interest or in the interest of Italy. It was the stab in the back by which Italy lost its dignity and what was left of its independence.

The next day, Paris was blanketed by dense smoke. It was black as a nightmare in the semi-deserted city: an apocalyptic vision. There were those who said that all the gasoline in the Luriaty had been burned, and those who said that the Germans had dropped a smokescreen in order to cross the Seine undetected.

That day I left the pension convinced that as an enemy Italian, I would be interned by the French. I stopped at the *Mairie* to see if instructions had been posted to that effect, but there was nothing. Evidently, there were too many Italians and the French government had other things to think about--if the French government still existed. I went to the Capoulade for breakfast. In the distance I could hear the sound of cannons.

Reynaud's new government wanted to continue to defend the city. He set up a defensive line south of Paris and encouraged the evacuation of the city. The ministers went to Tours. The employees of the Laboratory left. Stores were closed. The city was empty. But it was not an evacuation--it was a river of people with no destination, a mass migration, a total rout. The defeat could not have been more complete.

The front came closer and closer. People were leaving on foot and by bicycle in the vain hope that they could escape the German occupation. The hordes of refugees were joined by the first divisions of soldiers in flight--a few trucks and some old tanks heading down the Boulevard Saint Michel toward Porte d'Orléans.

The Germans had crossed the Seine north and south of Paris.

* * *

We left that night. It was July 12th.

We were three, on bicycles--Pontecorvo, Luria, and me--three Italians, three Jews, three scientific researchers. All three of us thought that we would be in great danger under a Nazi-fascist occupation. We preferred to be arrested as Italians by the French, than as anti-fascist Jews by the Germans.

We didn't know that France was completely broken. We headed south, thinking we might give ourselves up to the French police or enlist in the army. We didn't know what fate awaited us, but the ultimate destination for all three of us was America. It was somewhat unusual to head for America on a bicycle, but the facts show that it was perfectly satisfactory, because we all got there in the end.

But our most immediate concern was our documents. On the morning of our departure, I had gone to the United States consulate to see if my number had arrived. But communications had been broken off when Italy declared war. I asked a secretary to send my papers to Bordeaux. Accustomed as I was to French bureaucracy, I felt that I might as well have shouted my request to the winds.

The consulate in Paris was partially evacuated, and I didn't think anyone would be able to act on my request. I was not yet initiated to the efficiency of American secretaries! She probably left that afternoon or the next day carrying my documents in a suitcase in a big American car!

That afternoon before leaving, my friends and I went to the French police to request a permit. A churlish policeman told us we could not leave. Another, more sympathetic one told us, "Get out as fast as you can! Everybody's leaving, and your situation is more dangerous than theirs . . . Of course, I haven't said a thing, and I'm not responsible for what might happen to you."

So we went illegally. We decided to leave in the evening, thinking that we wouldn't be seen in the dark. It was a useless precaution, since the French police had disintegrated, and the streets were just as

crowded at night as they were during the day. We agreed not to speak so that our Italian accents wouldn't attract attention, and to keep a distance between each other so that if the military police stopped one of us, the other two could go on ahead as if we didn't know him.

A few hours before dusk, we ate at the Capoulade: I still remember, we had sauerkraut at the counter. Then we left in a drizzling rain. A woman, seeing us pass, shouted to us from a door, "You are brave, leaving at this hour in the rain."

"It's not bravery, Madame, it's fear," we would have liked to answer.

I had about fifty kilos of luggage on my bicycle: all my summer clothes, cans of meat, a wool sweater and a coat. I even had my portable typewriter tied to the back of the bike. But most precious of all was the envelope with my documents--papers to show that I had been born, that I had studied, that I worked at the Curie Laboratory, that I had a fellowship at the *Caisse de Recherches*, passport, identity card, Portuguese visa, and all the necessary documents to continue negotiations with the American consulate.

Our immediate destination was Orleans. Why? Because Orléans was in the south, and everyone was going there. We reached the Porte d'Orléans, which we knew well because it was close to the university. On the other side of the Porte d'Orléans we were caught in a traffic jam. The traffic was impressive. It looked like every wheeled vehicle in the city was on the road, and they were all going in the same direction: cars, trucks, taxis, hearses, fire trucks, carts, horse buggies, old carriages, hand carts, baby carriages that had been pulled out of the attic to carry the luggage . . . old people in wheelchairs pushed by their children . . . bicycles, tandems . . . armored cars, military trucks, ambulances . . .

At first, there were people walking slowly on the sidewalk, carrying either a disproportionately small package, or a suitcase that was too heavy. The bicycle was the best form of transportation. While cars sometimes got stuck in traffic jams, we could slip between them. And we didn't need gas, which was hard to get after a few days.

We pedaled til late at night in the drizzling rain. We went slowly in the darkness, pushing our bicycles uphill to save energy. At about two in the morning we decided to stop, and we lay on the grass by the side of the road. It was still drizzling. We slept a few hours, and when we woke at dawn, we could see miles and miles of sleeping people, spaced so close together that we had to be careful not to step on anyone.

As soon as it was light, we were back on our bicycles. There was less traffic, and fewer traffic jams. At one point, we saw a young man bleeding by the side of the road, surrounded by a crowd of helpless people. He was a bicyclist who had been hit by a car and had injured his head. We stopped and Luria, who was a doctor, administered a bit of first aid, trying to speak as little as possible. It was not a bad injury. A military truck stopped and picked up the young man.

On the evening of the second day we were close to Orleans and we began to feel safer. We had travelled about 100 kilometers, and we didn't think the Germans would get so far. So we decided to go to the French authorities to straighten out our documents. Would they arrest us for leaving Paris without a permit?

Passing through a village we saw a young man directing traffic at a crossroads, re-routing cars, trucks and bicycles around the town. The townspeople stood on the sidewalk watching this river of people and vehicles. More astonished than frightened, they had the dazed expression of spectators at an execution.

We told the young traffic director that we wanted to speak to the mayor. "The mayor? There he is," he said, pointing to a group on the sidewalk. We went to the mayor, and began telling him our story. "Good evening, Monsieur le Maire, we are Italian..."

"Ok, ok," interrupted the mayor, who was completely uninterested in our nationality, "if you want to sleep here tonight, go to the school. We put some straw on the floors in the classrooms. ..."

Obviously he didn't wanted to arrest us or to shoot us. We went to the elementary school. On the door was an old flag with the inscription, "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.*" The French Republic was still hospitable, offering beds of straw, because there was nothing better.

We were grateful for that straw. We slept dressed, among snoring men, women, and crying children. The next morning we asked our mayor for a letter saying that we had spent the night in the school, and that we had not performed acts of sabotage or other crimes. He did as we asked, making three copies, one for each of us.

We went on. In a store we bought bread and some cans of lobster which was the only canned food left. We headed for Tours.

Towards noon Luria had a flat tire. A passing horse cart stopped and carried him and his bicycle to the next village by the banks of the Loire. While he was fixing his tire, I went to buy cigarettes. At the store there was a fat lady, in despair, "I was here in '14, but this time it's much worse. I never saw so many people on the road. You see soldiers travelling alone or in small groups. What a mess! What's going to happen?"

Outside the little store, cars, army trucks and tanks were passing. The soldiers made room on their trucks for women, especially if they were young and pretty. I saw a girl sitting on a tank, talking to a soldier whose head was stuck out of the turret. Everyone was heading south.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I don't know, and you?" was the invariable answer.

"Me? I'm going to America, I think."

"By bicycle?"

"Yes, by bicycle."

In that village, we were told that in about twenty kilometers there was a train station where we might find a train. We decided to go, but it meant crossing a river. We arrived at the bridge just as the villagers, in what seemed to be an isolated and spontaneous act of resistance, were mining it to stop the Germans. A man in civilian clothes and an armband asked for our documents. I stopped and motioned to my friends to cross the bridge. I showed him the papers from the Caisse Nationale de Recherche, the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, etc. which seemed to satisfy him. He showed me the road to the next station, but told me that there were no more trains.

I crossed the road to catch up with my friends, but I never found them. A few months later I learned that I had taken the wrong road, and that they had waited for me for hours. I pedaled as fast as I could hoping to catch up with them, and I arrived breathless and dead tired at the station, where I found neither friends nor train.

After drinking a glass of wine, I turned back ... I wanted to see Blois, Tours and the castles of the Loire. An inveterate tourist like me does not miss a famous site just because it's a few extra kilometers on a bicycle! I was worried that they might have blown up the bridge while I was gone. But the bridge was still intact.

I pedaled on my own, down the banks of the Loire.

In the countryside on the other side of the river, some army divisions were still scattered around. I came to a tank company. The soldiers were camped near a village, waiting. Waiting for what? There were so few organized divisions, and the disorder was so complete, that they were probably just waiting to surrender. But I still hoped that a new line of resistance would be established on the Loire, and that the bridges would be blown up.

I followed the river to Blois. Along the road a column of trucks carrying British soldiers passed me at regular intervals. The soldiers were seated in an orderly fashion. They seemed to know where they were going, following precise orders. This army was still functioning. I greeted them with a thumb up and they responded by raising theirs. They were driving along the river, probably heading for the coast to embark.

Blois is a nice quiet town. The old bridge on the river had been blown up, but another bridge was still in use. I pedaled around the town a bit to satisfy my touristic curiosity and then I went to the station to get information out about the trains. I was told that no trains were running.

Dirty, tired, and unshaven, I went to what seemed to be the best hotel in town to have a good meal, which I felt I deserved. They looked me up and down, but they served me. After dinner I asked for a room with bath and they laughed at my naiveté. I learned later—too late!—that in the cities where the

refugees passed, it was so hard to find a bed that whole families had been taken into warehouses, kindly received by the madams and the usual guests.

I got back on my bicycle in search of shelter, hoping that outside the city a peasant would allow me to sleep in his haystack. Instead, I ended up sleeping on a bag of flour in a baker's attic. My deep sleep was interrupted by the sound of explosions. German airplanes were bombing Blois.

The next morning, I continued riding all alone down the Loire. I saw the famous castles, but I did not appreciate their beauty as much as I would have under other circumstances. I'd pedal for an hour or two, and then stop for half an hour to rest at a bistro or along the side of the road. I still had the canned lobster that we had bought, and during the next few days I lived primarily on that. The food situation was not too bad yet, and in the morning before six, it was still possible to find bread along the main roads. By going a few kilometers off the main refugee routes, it was easy to find all kinds of food at any time of day.

I reached Tours and headed for Poitiers. There was still a lot of traffic, but now there were only cars and bicycles. Pedestrians and horse carts had not come this far. From the license plates I could see where the refugees came from. A great many were from Paris, some were from the northern provinces, others were from Belgium and Holland.

Some gypsies who were camped along the side of the road stared at the long line of vehicles. They looked surprised and somewhat pleased at seeing that so many others had taken to the nomadic life.

Just to give myself a goal, I decided to head for Bordeaux where I could contact the American consulate. To entertain myself, I fantasized about America, but I didn't really think I would ever get there.

The next night I slept again on some hay on the floor of an elementary school. The classrooms were not as crowded as in Orleans. Next to me there was a family of three generations that had arrived in a small car: father, mother, children, and an old grandmother. The poor old lady must have been 80 years old. She was in tears at the tragedy that had befallen her country. She had an old lady's need to talk to someone, so she spoke to me. "It's terrible, Monsieur. This is the third time for me. I have been through the war of 1870, the 1914 war, and now this one. At my age I did not expect to see such a catastrophe again ... It's terrible. It's terrible ..."

The next day I arrived in Poitiers at about four in the afternoon. I stopped at a cafe, and sent some postcards to my friends in Switzerland, asking them to send my news along to my mother. I don't know how, but my mother received the news not long afterwards.

Then, I got back on my bicycle to find a spot in the countryside where I could sleep.

* * *

In the evening I arrived in a small town called Vivienne. I had a bite to eat, and while I was looking for shelter, I saw a train stopped in the station. I couldn't believe my eyes! I went to the ticket window. I was so surprised that I almost asked if I was actually seeing a train. Instead I just asked where it was going. "Bordeaux, Angoulême" was the answer. "Can I get on?" I asked incredulously. "Why not?" I bought a ticket for Bordeaux, and put my bicycle in the luggage compartment. I took all my luggage with me. It turned out to be a good idea because my bicycle never reached Bordeaux.

Finally! A train! It was not a Pullman, and it was not an express, but it was still a train!

It was a freight train, and I climbed into a cattle car. I found about thirty people there, lying down or sitting on the floor. The railroad car seemed to be their home. Various groups were organized in each corner. They ate and talked and slept as if they were at home. The train was not moving, but no-one seemed the least bit impatient. They had been in the car for two or three days. Some had come from Tours, some from further north, maybe from Paris.

I looked around, and sat down with some peasants. I was dirty, tired and hadn't shaved for four or five days, and I thought I'd feel more comfortable among them. Also I thought I should behave according to my principles of solidarity towards the poorer classes.

I had not spoken to a living soul in three days, and I felt like talking. I started a conversation, but soon realized that my empathy for the lower classes was purely theoretical. Soon I could think of nothing more to say.

From another corner the sound of correct and gracious French reached my ears. I turned and saw a strange group: a young girl, a young black man, a woman of about forty, and a respectable Monsieur with a white beard.

To kill time during the long wait, the girl was analyzing her friends' handwriting. The black man sitting beside her took part in the conversation, making witty observations that obviously came from a person of culture. The girl called the lady Maman, and addressed the Monsieur with the white beard as Monsieur le Directeur. The black man was called Jacques. The girl's name was Nanie.

I wrote a few lines on a piece of paper and handed it to the handwriting expert, as a way of entering into conversation. She looked at the paper; then, surprised, she looked at me. Still more surprised, she examined my handwriting carefully. Then she inspected my torn jacket and my muddy shoes with her intelligent black eyes. Finally, looking at my dusty, unshaven face, she exclaimed, almost as if she could not believe her eyes, "but this is the hand of an intellectual!" I smiled and answered, "Maybe." I had broken the ice, we had become friends. Before the train left the station, I moved my luggage next to my new friends.

I learned that the older man was the director of the Colonial Ministry. The older lady was a telephone operator at the Ministry and Nanie was her daughter. The black man was a native of Madagascar; he was employed by the French while preparing a thesis at the Sorbonne. They had been evacuated with the ministry from Paris to Tours. Now, in the cattle car, they were being evacuated for a second time to Bordeaux. They had lost an Indo-Chinese mandarin along the way, and they were very upset about it. The mandarin had missed the train because he had returned to get the manuscript of a book that he was writing.

The train started and moved for fifteen minutes. Then it stopped for half an hour at the next station. We got off, and I did a quick wash at the fountain. I washed my face and hands, and shaved.

After this first stop the train started up again. The engineer shouted for us to get back on board, and when he was sure that no-one was left behind, he slowly started the locomotive. We travelled another quarter hour. Then another stop at the next station for half an hour. Monsieur le Directeur and the rest of the group, including me, went to have a bite at the Café de la Gare. We felt as if we had been friends since childhood. In times like this it's easy to make friends, since, in the general disorder, everyone feels the need to attach himself to someone or something.

Nobody asked my nationality. I was an intellectual, as could be seen from my handwriting, and that was enough. I asked Madame if she knew where I was from.

"I couldn't say."

"I am Italian." I was curious to see her reaction.

"Italian? From what part?"

"Florence."

"That's a famous city. It must be beautiful."

At one of the following stops there was no Café de la Gare. Nanie and I got off while the others remained on the train. We sat in the tall grass by the tracks. It was dusk.

We began to talk. I needed to talk, and what better way than to talk to a pretty girl who was interested in what I had to say. I talked about myself, about my work, my ideas. She talked about herself, her studies and her aspirations. I had a strange feeling talking to her. She seemed to vibrate at the sound of my speech, as if she were a finely tuned instrument. My ideas seemed to resonate in her, as if they touched a part of her personality that no-one had ever touched, and that she herself was not aware of. Nanie knew how to vibrate with enthusiasm. She had a sacred fire in her. Later I would compare her to a purebred horse, impatient and full of energy, but that could be guided by someone who could control its fiery spirit.

What did we talk about? About nothing and everything. About the war, about the Sorbonne where she was studying literature, about science, materialism and idealism, about the number of times we unconsciously passed each other on the Rue Soufflot.

When the train left, it was night. I sat next to her, and in the darkness of the train, our lips met. Then we slept.

The next day, at dawn, we got off again and walked back and forth in the station.

"Why did you kiss me last night?"

"Because . . . I don't know. Because after our conversation I felt that I liked you. I think that we understand each other. And maybe also because you are pretty."

"Is that all?"

"I don't know. No, I don't think there was anything else. You seem intelligent and free. Besides a kiss is not such a big deal."

"Maybe not for you. You don't know what it means to a girl."

"How old are you?"

"Almost nineteen."

I was surprised. I had only seen her at dusk. I had seen her delicate features, her black hair worn in two symmetrical waves like a crown, and her lithe and shapely body, but I didn't think she was so young. She was so serious and mature when she spoke that I had not guessed how young she was. In the light of the new day, it was easy to see that she was telling the truth. She looked like a little girl.

"If I had known I wouldn't have kissed you. I'm sorry," I babbled. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"Maybe you have hurt me. You must learn to respect girls."

"Girls? Really, I didn't think there were any more. As for you . . . well, I didn't think you were so young."

"You haven't been respectful, to me or to all girls. There are many girls like me."

I excused myself, embarrassed. I didn't know what to say.

"I will go into another corner of the train, and you can forget that any of this happened."

"No, you can stay with us," she answered so calmly that it seemed like it hardly mattered to her.

I stayed with them, but I avoided talking.

At about nine or ten in the morning, we were thrown off our train at another little station. "Everybody off. It's the end of the line." We got off and found ourselves in the middle of the countryside along with hundreds of other people.

Our train left. Who had ordered us off? Why? No-one knew. We pitched camp as best we could. Nanie's mothers stitched my jacket whose sleeve had been torn by a passing truck.

What should we do? Jacques and I were the only young men in the group and I thought we should do something. Soon afterwards, Monsieur le Directeur disappeared without a trace. Maybe, using his influence, he had found a way to continue his trip without bothering about us lesser mortals.

Bread was brought from the next village: large loaves of dark country bread. It smelled good, and there was plenty for everyone. Together, we polished off the lobster.

I felt the need to do something, cursing the moment that I had left my bicycle. I went to ask if we could rent a car. There was no car available. Maybe a horse and cart? No. Maybe a donkey on which we could load our baggage and we could go on foot? No. My final suggestion was to cut a tree branch, hang our luggage from it, and carry it over our shoulders like jungle porters. Bordeaux was about 150 kilometers away. It would take us four or five days to walk there. My suggestion was met with the most discouraging skepticism.

Finally a train arrived and stopped for a moment. We tried to get on, but it was full of people who pushed us off. We felt better having at least seen a train. After a few hours another train arrived. It stopped, but again we couldn't get on because there was "no room." We decided that we would get on the next train, somehow.

The next train was a freight train, also full to bursting. Refusing to admit defeat, we saw that one of the cars was unlocked. We pushed the door open and confronted a mountain of trunks and boxes. We

climbed onto them and found about fifty centimeters of space under the roof, making ourselves as comfortable as possible. And then the train left for the south.

The train stopped for a long time at Angouleme. We learned that the train was going to our common destination: Bordeaux. At Angouleme, the station was crowded with civilians and soldiers, as were all the other large stations. A hospital train carrying wounded soldiers was stopped near ours. No one was caring for the wounded. One of them told us that they had no food and we gave them some of our black bread.

* * *

It took our train all night to go from Angouleme to Bordeaux. In the morning, at the station in Bordeaux, we found the Indo-Chinese mandarin, who had arrived before us. He was happy because he had found his manuscript.

First we wanted to wash up. It was impossible to get a room at a hotel. At the time, Bordeaux had tripled its normal population. Many people were sleeping on hay or on sidewalks. We headed for the public swimming pool, where we showered, swam, and then dressed like civilized people.

Then we refueled ourselves at a nearby restaurant which became our headquarters. We separated during the day, because we each had different things to do, but we always met for meals at our restaurant. Our little family consisted of Nanie, her mother, Jacques, Tan -- the mandarin -- and a fifteen year old boy who had joined us after losing his family.

Madame T, Nanie's mother went to look for her ministry.

Not knowing what else to do, I went to the university. Nanie came with me. In the streets of Bordeaux we met many acquaintances. All of Paris was there. I found Joliot in the hall of the university.

"I'm glad to see you here," he said. "Pontecorvo has gotten to Toulouse. I have just put Kovarski and Von Halban on a boat for England. [I later found out that they had brought heavy water and other materials to England in order to continue their research on nuclear energy.] I was worried about them: you know one was Polish and the other Austrian."

"And what are you going to do M. Joliot?"

"I'm going back north."

"Back north?" I asked, surprised. "But the Germans will get you."

"Maybe, but I have orders." He did not say who had given him the orders to go back north. In any case, he went to Paris.

The Ministry of National Education had set up offices at the University of Bordeaux. I went to the *Caisse Nationale de Recherche* where I found Madame Mineur, the secretary. She asked me if I needed money, as if she was in a hurry to get rid of her funds before they fell into German hands. I said no, because I still had a good bit of the money my mother had brought to France thinking she might live there several years. But I know that during the time, others had received advances on their salaries for the trimester. "Do you have a place to sleep?" "No." "Well, you can go to the *lycée*." And she gave me a letter that signed by the Doyen of the Science Faculty, requisitioning a bed for me.

Nanie and I walked around town, and visited the cathedral. Then our group met for dinner. Nanie and her mother went to sleep on hay with employees from the P.T.T. I would have liked to give them my bed at the *lycée*, but how could I do that?

I found a comfortable cot for me in a large room at the *lycée*. The other beds were for the pages from the Chamber of Deputies. I slept there for three or four nights. One night there was an air raid and we all went into the basement. I fell asleep on a bench, despite the violent explosions of bombs falling in the city.

At the American consulate I was told that my documents had somehow arrived from Paris. I saw them with my very own eyes. But the quota number had not yet arrived. I paid 400 francs to have the consulate telegraph Barcelona and from there to Naples. Every few days I returned to inquire if my number had arrived, and the response was always negative. I went to Cooks Travel Agency and paid 10,000 francs for a first class ticket from Lisbon to New York.

I ran into Mario Levi, the Socialist who had jumped into the river at the Swiss border. In Paris he had worked at the radio, transmitting Italian language broadcasts. He had been evacuated with the other employees. I met his friends and co-workers. There were two socialist ex-deputies, among whom was old Modigliani who sported the beard of a prophet.

A large group of Italian antifascists had come to Bordeaux for safety. But no-one was feeling at all safe here.

I remembered that my friend Melamerson was interned in a debarkation camp in the city and I decided to pay him a visit. It turned out to be a barracks, not a camp. I asked a soldier if I could visit a friend and he refused. I turned to leave, given that, as an enemy alien, I thought it unwise to insist too much to enter such a camp. The soldier called me back and asked if I was a relative. I answered that I was just a friend. He seemed disappointed to have no excuse to let me enter. He asked me if I really wanted to see my friend. This time I said yes, so he told me to go ahead in, but only five minutes.

I spent practically the entire day in that barracks, going in and out as I pleased. There were about fifty internees. They slept on cots and for washing they had a basin and a pitcher of water. The latrine was intolerable, but considering that it was more or less a concentration camp, the conditions could have been much worse.

The internees were extremely worried about falling into German hands and they were plotting an escape. Leaving the barracks was very easy, but then what? It seemed that they even had some money, but how were they going to get the necessary passports and visas to leave France?

Melamerson gave me back the few hundred francs that he owed me. I didn't want to accept them, because I didn't need the money. But he insisted, and I took them. Money had no value those days. Banknotes had lost their magic prestige, and were no more than stupid pieces of paper.

The internees sent me on errands. First I went to buy food to add to what was given them by the military authorities. Then they sent me to find one of their mothers to arrange an escape. This woman was to rent a truck and to wait for them at a predetermined place. I went in and out of the camp without being questioned. Everything was falling apart. Nothing was being monitored or organized.

I don't doubt the truth of some of the descriptions of the actions of the French officials with respect to the internees. From what I have heard, Kessel's description of the Vernet camp is absolutely true. But in Bordeaux the French officials were very decent.

A sergeant came for rollcall. In answer to anguished questioning, he asserted that if the Germans were to arrive in Bordeaux, the prisoners would be given their freedom. The French military managed to get Spanish and Portuguese visas for all the internees.

I saw Melamerson a few months later in America [He is a professor at NYU. His actual name is Ernest Vanderverden]. He told me that they were liberated at the last moment. The sergeant, with bribery, agreed to sign the release papers that should have been signed by a colonel. Obviously, the colonel did not want to take responsibility for signing the papers, but it's also obvious that he did nothing to prevent their leaving.

During that day at the internment camp, I lost touch with my friends since I had not had lunch with them at the usual restaurant. Towards evening, I started wandering through the streets of the city hoping to find them. But first I had an unpleasant encounter. From a sidewalk in front of what had once been a movie house, I saw a car stop and discharge Monsieur Laval. It was actually Laval, with his white tie, and his cane, and his disgusting fat face. He looked very self-satisfied. His porcine eyes seemed to say, my moment has arrived; my work is complete.

He entered the movie house, probably for an important meeting, passing just a few feet away from me. I wanted to spit in his face. But I didn't, because I felt I had neither the right nor the obligation, since I was not French.

Then I met my friends. They had found rooms in a pension. Jacques had a little room. Madame T and her daughter had an enormous room with two large beds, and a separate little room for a sink with running water and a toilet. Madame T offered me one of the big beds, saying that she and Nanie would sleep in the other. I accepted.

Maybe I was wrong to do so. But after having lived with the entire group for so long, I appreciated Nanie more, and I was becoming really fond of her. So I did not think I was being disloyal by accepting their invitation. I thought I could be close Nanie without being disrespectful.

After our initial conversations, I had tried to stay away from her, without separating myself from the group. I rarely spoke to her, and I addressed her with the formal *vous*, while everyone else used the informal *tu* with each other. But it was inevitable that we would become closer. In our conversations at mealtimes when we all ate together, Nanie and I always took the same positions. Whenever she said something, she found support from me, and whenever I said something, I found support from her. She advanced her ideas, which were the same as mine, with controlled fervor. She did not raise her voice, but her voice trembled and her eyes shone. I could not help exclaiming aloud, "Elle a le feu sacré, cette petite!"

She was passionate about French literature, about which I knew nothing. When she spoke about the sixteenth century, or maybe it was the seventeenth or fifteenth, she became enthusiastic. On the other hand, I got excited when I talked about science or politics. But on general subjects on which everyone has opinions--about people, about moral problems, about educational methods or human relations--we always agreed. And the agreement was deeper than mere words. We felt, and maybe it's a delusion of two people who are attracted to each other, that we were in agreement to the very core, in the deepest recesses of our souls.

We lived in that big room for five or six days, maybe less. During the day, Madame T. went to work at her ministry, where there was nothing to administer. Nanie and I were left alone. We spent the days talking and discussing and walking, all completely platonic.

In the evening Madame T. and Jacques returned. One evening there was an air raid and the electricity was cut off. Jacques read us his poems by candlelight.

Jacques was a strange person. He was about 25 years old, short, and black as the night and a sweet, sad expression in his eyes. He was sensitive and refined and he spoke magnificent French. He loved beautiful things, and he loved his comforts. In Bordeaux he complained constantly that the bathrooms were not up to his standards. Like many naturalized colonials, he was more French than the French. He was a nationalist and a bit of a chauvinist.

When we learned that a new government had been formed with Petain and Weygand, he said, "You can trust people like that." Communists would have said that he had sold out to French imperialism, and that he was an instrument of capitalist and colonialist exploitation of his country. But he wasn't interested in these things. To him, France was its literature, its monuments, its language and its history. And thus, in his eyes, Pétain and Weygand, who were doubtlessly historic individuals, were representatives of the France he loved.

I later learned that after the armistice he went to Vichy. I would not be surprised if he became an official of the collaborationist government. When the English were about to occupy Madagascar, I heard that Jacques was "worried about his country's fate." No-one said why he was worried, but I wouldn't be surprised if he wanted Madagascar to remain under the control of the Vichy government.

After all, Jacques had been a "collaborator" since he was very young. A native of Madagascar who collaborated with the occupying imperialist government of France could easily collaborate with the occupying imperialist government of Germany.

But aside from politics, Jacques was a wonderful person and a good friend. In those difficult days, I didn't care so much about people's politics as I did their human side and from this perspective, Jacques was a gem.

He was very comfortable in France. He could go anywhere, and could choose to live in any hotel, in just about any part of the city. He could dance with girls of any color ... How different from America!

* * *

We got our news from local newspapers, or from Parisian papers which published one-page editions. That's how we learned that an armistice had been signed and that Bordeaux was in the sector that the Germans were supposed to occupy.

A large majority of people were in favor of the surrender. The simple people, those who didn't have definite political opinions, thought only of stopping the carnage since resistance was impossible. If the French army, the best army in the world, had been defeated, then no one else would be able to defeat Hitler. Any further resistance would be in vain.

The rightist politicians, like Laval, whom I had seen a few days before, must have been ecstatic. Their ideas had been proved right, and they expected to divide the cabinet ministries among themselves to govern France as a dependent of Hitler. Finally there would be order! At Vichy, Pétain would be able to substitute *Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité* with Order, Family and Work.

The left also felt that resistance based in mainland France was useless. The Lavals, the Weygands and the Petains could sign all the armistices they wanted without being dishonored in the eyes of the antifascists, since they never were men of honor.

If there were to be resistance it would have to be organized abroad, or guerrilla warfare on the mainland. There were those who wanted the government to move to the colonies, for example to Algiers, to continue the war as a government in exile. But certainly not the current government, or the governments that had been in charge during the war! They would never find support from the antifascists, and they would not be able to inspire the people to face the dangers of an underground struggle.

After all, why would the people want to defend the English empire against the German empire. Let them fight it out amongst themselves!

Everyone was skeptical and discouraged. Nothing more could be done. In those days, very few thought that preparations should be made to fight Hitler, fight Mussolini, and also fight Petain and Laval.

In some ways, I was also in favor of the armistice. In those last few days I thought: "Let them end this war that they did not want to fight and let me go in peace. Western Europe will be Fascist. England will be defeated. But the game is not over because there is still the Soviet Union." But I was surprised that the Soviet Union could allow Hitler to gain so much power and, as usual, I was assailed by doubts.

For me, surrender meant I could not stay in France. French Fascism would be influenced by the Germans, and it would become tinged with anti-semitism and xenophobia. I didn't want to stay under the Germans, and I did not trust occupied France. Therefore: I had to leave.

I told Nanie and some friends that I was thinking of going. Madame T. offered me and Nanie her house in the Pyrenees, in the unoccupied zone. But I didn't even trust the unoccupied zone. They said I was right, because I was Jewish, and in addition, I was not French.

I would try to go to Portugal, and leave for America from there. Nanie would follow as soon as she had her documents. If she had had a passport with a Portuguese visa she would have left with me.

But how should I go? There were no means of transportation, and I didn't have the exit visa needed to leave France legally. When I went to the police office, it was closed and a line of a hundred people waited outside.

As I often did when I was in trouble, I went to the University. I told Mme. Mineur my problem. "I understand, you mustn't stay. Wait, I'll give you a mission from the Ministry of Education." And she gave me a mimeographed sheet stating that the French government was sending me to Lisbon on an official mission. I returned to the police station with this document, but it didn't impress anyone.

However the document gave me access to a military train (they were the only ones still running) which was headed to the Spanish border.

It was a sad afternoon when I left. I put on my backpack and loaded up my few suitcases. Nanie and her mother came to the station, and we said our sad good-byes.

On the crowded train, a man of about forty talked about resisting. "So, you're going to Portugal? As for me, I want to go to England to keep fighting. General de Gaulle is there, and many are going to join him." It was the first time I had heard of de Gaulle.

The next morning I got off at Boulogne. The line outside the police station was even longer than in Bordeaux. I showed my documents, and was told, "But everyone is on an official mission!" In Biarritz,

the reaction was the same. "No exit visas today." Both in Boulogne and in Biarritz they gave me a number and told me to come back the next day. But the next day the response was the same.

I have never understood why the French authorities would not allow foreigners to leave France. I don't think it was intentional malice, just stupid bureaucracy. The most likely explanation is that some general who was worried about spies had decided to keep people from crossing the borders, and no-one wanted to take responsibility for doing otherwise.

In Biarritz I saw the Atlantic Ocean. I sat on the beach. On the other side was America. Would I ever get there? The sky was cloudy and it was drizzling. The gray ocean was steely reflections. Instead of inciting my spirit of adventure, it made me feel uneasy. The ocean looked cold and repellant. The unknown on the other side scared me.

Behind me were France and Italy, cities I knew, people I loved--people in a state of confusion, nameless suffering, but these feelings were familiar. A humanity that was dear to me and whose Latin fire was attractive and interesting for me. This civilization with its ancient streets, its ideals and passions, its loves and hates, its moral values and aesthetics, was collapsing. And ahead of me there was nothing but a cold ocean and a strange land.

At the police stations there were lines of dispirited and patient people, mostly political or racial refugees. They waited beside the closed doors without a glimmer of hope. The youngest and the most energetic had already left, or were trying to leave illegally.

On the streetcar between Biarritz and Boulogne a young Abyssinian held forth on his hatred of Fascist Italy, finally finding a sympathetic ear with the French who had been stabbed in the back.

At the Spanish and Portuguese consulates there were fights. People who had fought for a better place in line had split lips.

There was still enough to eat, but there were no more cigarettes. I met Franco Venturi and his girlfriend at a restaurant. He wanted to go to England, but the English had banned him because he was Italian. He was indignant, "To think that I want to fight for them!" [He went to Spain where he was interned by Franco, and sent back to Mussolini. In New York I spoke to his father, who was very worried about him. But the Fascists just sent him to the *confino*, and I think he became a professor in Turin.]

I don't remember where I slept. It was impossible to find a room in a hotel. I spent one night in a fisherman's house, another with a peasant. They took me in because I had been introduced by certain acquaintances who had sworn that I was not dangerous. Who were these acquaintances? I remember neither their names nor their faces. Maybe they were Polish or Czechoslovakian or Romanian Jews. One day they left for the unoccupied zone.

I walked on the wharf to find a ship that would take me ... anywhere. I got in line for North Africa, England, and maybe other places. I didn't care. I saw a small Portuguese boat flying a red and green flag and I asked one of the sailors if they could take me to Lisbon. "I have a valid visa." No way. The boat was still docked there when I left. I went to see it every day and to talk to the sailors. That red and green flag which I saw then for the first time remained impressed in my mind.

The Germans were getting closer. I decided to try to cross the border without an exit visa. The border was about 50 kilometers away. It couldn't be too hard, and once I crossed the border, I'd be legal with my Spanish and Portuguese visas.

I was sorry I had lost my bicycle. I tried to buy another one, but there were none to be found. I tried to rent a car, but there was no gas. I tried to get on a train, but I wasn't allowed into the station.

I spent my time in the cafes, writing letters to Nanie, not knowing if they would ever reach her. I ran around trying to find transportation, on the ground, over water, or by air. Finally. I went to a garage and asked my usual question.

"Do you have a bicycle to sell?"

"No, monsieur, no bicycle."

"Can I rent a car to go to Hendaye?"

"No, monsieur, there is no gas." I left, discouraged, but not surprised.

Then a young, well-dressed man asked me, "How much will you pay to be driven to Hendaye?"

"How much do you want?"

"Oh, no, no. I'm not going to ask a price. The garage has no more gasoline. I am the assistant director, and I have a small car of my own. It isn't in the garage. I still have a little bit of gas. Could I take you as a friend? As a personal favor? This is not business."

"OK, I understand. So . . .?"

"We can't talk about it here" and we made an appointment to meet at a cafe.

I went to the cafe. He arrived late. While I waited I watched a young man sitting next to me. He was drawing Marianne nailed to a cross, Hitler dressed as an executioner, a small dog with Mussolini's face licking blood from the ground.

The assistant director arrived. We agreed to leave the next morning, for a payment of 500 francs. So I found myself playing the tourist, driving down the Basque coast in an elegant car. I tried to enjoy the drive as much as possible.

At Hendaye I went straight to the border at the Irun bridge, which rekindled memories of the Spanish war. I waited in line with my luggage for about an hour, the assistant director having left me to my fate. The French guard said, "But you have no exit visa." "No, I have an assignment." "Ok, ok," and he let me pass. The French customs checked through my luggage. I had a little more money than was allowed, but after giving the guard 50 francs, he gave me no problems.

There was another long line at the bridge. A continuous line of people weighed down with luggage moved slowly from French customs to Spanish customs. It was drizzling. Behind me was a girl with a heavy suitcase which I helped move every time we took a step forward. Her face looked familiar: "Haven't I seen you somewhere? Were you at the police station at Bayonne?" "No."

Before getting to the customs station, there was a police office. "Italian?" the employee asked in astonishment. "Why are you leaving France just as the Italian troops are entering? You should be in the army at your age." The Spanish Fascists had taken on the responsibility of sending Italian deserters back to Italy for the punishment they deserved. "No, sir, I am Jewish, and I have no military obligations." I showed him a document which proved my claim, and he let me pass.

There was another line at customs. While I waited I saw Falangist signs everywhere and quotes from Franco written in large block letters.

When the girl behind me left the police station, she asked me. "Did you ever eat at Prosper in the Latin Quarter?" "Yes. Well, what do you know!" We immediately became old friends. We had never spoken to each other, but I had noticed her. She wasn't pretty, but she had a lively and attractive expression. She had even flirted with me a bit ... Yes, of course ... I had even once followed her into a cafe once, before meeting Mila, but without success.

"Where are you going?" she asked. "Probably to Lisbon." "Me, too" "Good, then we'll travel together." "Ok. My name is Anni." "Pleased to meet you."

We were out! We took a taxi to the station and bought a second class ticket to Villar Formoso, on the Portuguese border. There were no third class tickets on sale. The authorities wanted to get back all the pesetas they had sold us.

I put my luggage on the train, and went to the post office to send a telegram to my mother. When I got back on the train, Anni was crying. She was crying for France. She was Lithuanian, but she was crying for France's defeat. She was not crying for herself--she was an employee of an organization whose name I didn't understand and she was going to work in its Lisbon office. She cried for France, as if--and even more than if--she were French.

* * *

The train started moving. We crossed the green hills of the Basque country, then the desolate Spanish highlands. We traveled all night. Waking up each time the train stopped, I read the names of the stations ... Valladolid ... Salamanca ... it was like a geography book.

There were soldiers in all the stations. Barefoot peasant women sold sandwiches made with black bread or water. Poverty was everywhere. This was the only outcome of the Spanish war that I could see from the train.

Some minor officers of Franco's army entered our compartment, happy at Hitler's victory. They had brought their own dinner with them: very black bread with a tiny bit of very spicy meat, as if spiciness would compensate for its short supply. If Franco's officials were eating like this, then the rest of the population must be dying of hunger. There were few cigarettes, and the tobacco was horrible. "We have to rebuild ..." they said, as if to excuse themselves.

It was clear that we were fleeing Hitler, and that we despised Fascism. Despite this, they were very kind. Poor people always admire and respect foreigners. With Latin generosity they offered us some of their dinner and their cigarettes. They insisted that we have some. They spoke only Spanish, but we managed to understand them. They were very noisy, and they gestured animatedly with their hands. They flirted a little with Anni, and made her laugh through her tears.

I kept to myself: they were the enemy. But it was impossible to avoid their friendliness. They asked my nationality. "Italian?" said one of them, and he proudly showed me a certificate with an Italian design awarded during the Spanish war. I reacted coldly. "Don't you like Mussolini?" he asked. I did not answer.

We were the losers, and these young men were the victors. It was impossible to hate them as individuals: young, exuberant, ignorant, eager to establish human contact. It was impossible to hate them, but I couldn't forget that they were the enemy.

Chapter Thirteen

Portugal (Summer 1940)

The next afternoon the train stopped at Fuente de Onoro on the Spanish border, and then at Vilar Formoso on the Portuguese border. Everyone had to get off the train at Vilar Formosa.

Portugal: I knew only its name, which I had learned in high school. No, I did know something more: that Lisbon was its capital; that Lisbon was located on an estuary where the Clipper had landed; that Salazar, the head of its government was a Fascist Catholic dictator; and that its second largest city was Oporto, where Carlo Alberto, the ex-king of Italy, had gone into exile. I did not even know that there was a connection between Oporto and Port wine.

With this limited cultural preparation, I got off the train to have my passport checked. At the police station I was told that I could not continue on to Lisbon, where there were already too many refugees. Everyone on my train was being routed to an inland village famous for its hot springs, called Coria -- or was it Curia? The Portuguese wanted to fill their hotels.

I had no wish to go to Curia, which I imagined to be a little Portuguese village with no connection to the outside world. I tried to impress the employee of the importance of my "mission orders" which specified Lisbon as my destination. The employee was not at all impressed by the orders of a French government which had ceased to exist.

So I showed him a letter from a friend of mine, a physics professor at the University of Lisbon, who had invited me there to give some lectures. (I had written to Aurelio Da Silva, a colleague of Curie, to ask him for this letter.) It was impossible to go to Lisbon. "At least send me to a place where there's a university!" I begged. My passion for culture rerouted me to Coimbra. Or, rather, rerouted my passport to Coimbra, and I was told that I would find it at the local police station.

I hurried to follow my passport to its unknown destination. I tried to exchange money to buy a ticket, but was unhappily surprised to find that French francs could no longer be exchanged since no-one trusted them. So there I was, in Vilar Formoso, a little town in one of the more barren parts of the Spanish peninsula, without a penny in my pocket -- and without my passport! Among other things, it was dinner time, and I was hungry.

My new friend Anni was crying on the sidewalk in the station while I walked along the tracks, worrying. A distinguished gentleman approached me and asked my nationality. "Italian," I said.

"Italian. That's a difficult problem. There are organizations for the French, the Belgians, the Poles, etc. Their consulates take care of refugees. But there's nothing for the Italians."

"Ok, ok, I'll figure out something. I have a gold chain that I can sell . . . I'll be able to eat for a few days . . . then I'll go to Coimbra, or I'll work here among the peasants."

"Are you a Fascist?"

I thought the question was indiscreet. How should I answer it in Portugal, to someone who looked like a government employee?

"Me? Oh, I pay no attention to politics."

"Ok. If you want, you can go to the English. They will give you something to eat."

The distinguished gentleman had been sent to the border to welcome some officials visiting an exposition that had just opened in Lisbon (Esposicao do Mundo Portuguez). Instead, seeing the flocks of refugees arrive, he was doing his best to help them.

He took me to the English. It must have been a Quaker organization. It was late, and they had no more soup. They gave me two hard boiled eggs. The distinguished gentleman brought me to his house, had someone set the table, and added salad, bread, butter and wine to the hard boiled eggs. I was very much surprised to find Anni there. There was no organization for Lithuanians, and the distinguished gentleman had invited her to eat and sleep in the house where he was staying.

At the table the distinguished gentleman, his wife, Anni, and I had a pleasant conversation. Anni had stopped crying. But she had cried in the police station, and the police had given her permission to go to Lisbon where she was to work as a secretary for HICEM [HIAS, in English, for Hebrew Immigration Aid Society]. I thought the hospitality extraordinary. After two months I learned that it was typical of Portugal.

After my meal, the distinguished gentleman took me to a shopkeeper whom he persuaded to exchange 80 escudos for my 1,000 francs (Two days earlier the exchange rate was 500 escudos.) It was evening, and I expected to spend the night in the open. But the distinguished gentleman found me a room with a peasant for five escudos. I slept on several tables pushed together, covered by a mattress of prickly hay. There were clean sheets and blankets. The next day I awoke flea-bitten, and was sorry I had not slept outside. I bought a third class ticket for Coimbra and left. Anni, the capitalist, traveled in second class, and I despised her middle class values.

The trip started in barren countryside, and ended in countryside that looked like Tuscany. The sun was setting behind the hills, reflecting on the Mondego. Coimbra was an old city, an enchanting picture on a hill looking over a green valley.

After a brief stop I headed towards a seedy hotel that seemed to fit my resources. I took a room (without running water) which I shared with numerous fleas. I quickly fell asleep, but at about ten o'clock someone knocked. It was a police employee who wore glasses and spoke passable French. The hotel owners had told him of my arrival. When he asked for my documents, I replied that the passport should have been sent to his office. But he had not received it, and asked for the receipt. Taking it, he told me to stop at the station the following day.

The next morning I went out to reconnoiter my new surroundings. Searching for the university, the police, and the American consulate, I went to a bookstore, where I was told that the closest American consulate was in Lisbon (a bad start), and that the university and the police station were at the top of the hill. I was given instructions for taking the streetcar, but I decided to walk to save money.

And so, on an empty stomach, I walked up Coimbra's medieval streets. I noticed young people dressed in black, wearing large capes, looking like musicians in an orchestra or members of a religious order. I asked one of them for directions to the university, inventing a word that was a cross between Italian, French, German, and English. He started a long speech in Portuguese, from which I understood that he was a student, that he was on his way to the university, and that he would be happy to take me there. He was dressed in the traditional clothes of the student organization. We talked all the way, gesticulating more than usual.

I understood little of what he said, although I could understand anything that was written. I said "Physics," and he signed that he did not understand. I said "Chemistry" and he took me to the chemistry department.

There I found an English-speaking assistant who had studied in Cambridge. He showed me the lab, the most prized instruments, and we talked about research. I asked if they could help me get to Lisbon, and they said that they couldn't help me. In the end, they brought me to the Physics Department, saying that the director spoke French and that he had worked at the Curie Laboratory.

Prof. Mario Augusto Silva is one of the most marvelous men I have ever met. I found myself before a man of about forty, with glasses, heavy rather than fat. We talked about the Curie Laboratory, where he had written his thesis a few years before I was there, and of common friends. I told him my situation, and he left his work to help me, accompanying me to the police station, to the Gobernador, and

to influential professors. The result: nothing. Only the police in Lisbon could decide my case. The Governador promised that he would handle my case when he went to Lisbon a few days later.

Mario Silva invited me to lunch at the best cafe in the city. Thus, on the very day that I thought I would die of hunger, I had one of the best meals of my life. *Hors d'oeuvres* of crab, then soup, fish, meat, fresh fruit, cake, good wine. I wolfed it down because I was hungry and I didn't know when I would be able to eat a good meal again.

After lunch Silva presented me to those of his friends who spoke or understood French. Among others I met a retired captain and an ex-senator. They asked my opinion of the French defeat, and I told them, cautiously, of my opinion of betrayal by top officials in the army and by the Fascist middle-class. The little group listened to me with great interest, and when I finished someone said, "Yes, you're right. That's exactly what we think." I gathered courage and spoke more openly. We were in complete agreement. As luck would have it, I found myself in a group of antifascists who shared many of my ideas.

Then we returned to the university, and I was taken to see the chapel and the ancient library. We stopped to take in the view of the green valley which lay below. It looked welcoming, as if opening its arms to receive a foreigner who had just arrived.

* * *

I remained in Coimbra longer than I had expected -- two months, with a few interruptions. In spite of the reasons for my stay, Portugal and the Portuguese were pleasant and interesting. In those two months I became quite familiar with Portuguese life. Naturally I saw it from a middle-class perspective, since I was welcomed by, and lived in middle class society. But I tried, as much as possible, to get an objective idea of the country and its people of all classes.

I learned the language quickly. Unable to find a Portuguese grammar book written in French or Italian, I used a French textbook written for Portuguese speakers, and learned a few hundred words. The roots of the words are Latin, except for a few Arabic words. I quickly learned how to change Italian and French words to make them understandable to the Portuguese.

As much I like Portugal, I have to admit I do not like the language. It is very much like Spanish, but the Latin roots are cut off as if they had atrophied. It does not have the beautiful sound of Italian, or the refined sweetness of French. The many nasal sounds make it still less musical. But if the language is not musical, the Portuguese themselves are. They speak very loudly and fast, their faces are very expressive, and they use their hands frenetically.

A group of Portuguese is noisy and effusive. Two friends who have not seen each other for a few days will not only shake hands, they hug and pat each other on the back with the left palm. If they have not seen each other for a month, they might kiss each other's cheeks -- in public.

This cordiality is not just a facade. The Portuguese are warm and exuberant, as well as generous and affectionate. After a few weeks there, my friends addressed me as *o meu amigo*. The phrase was used frequently in conversation, replacing the formal third person. There were so many ways to address people, that I never learned to use the appropriate phrases. A respectful third person form ranged from *vossa Excellencia*, *o senhor doutor*, "*o senhor*" to the more friendly *o meu amigo* or *voce*. After *voce* one used the second person singular. Women were addressed as *Excellencia* or *senhora donna*.

In spite of these gradations of respect, the Portuguese are very straightforward. Their hospitality is incredible, as my story shows. As soon as I arrived I was accompanied by my new friend to the local bookstore. There I found the little book of French conversation mentioned above. Thinking that it would be useful, I asked its price. The bookseller gave it to me as a gift.

My professor friend continued to invite me to lunch and to dinner for the entire time that I was in Portugal. When he left for his vacation at the beach, he invited me to go with him. I did not want to accept and at times I hid, so that he would not invite me to lunch, eating bread from a bakery on a public bench. But when I saw Silva again, he was sincerely insulted. So I ended up eating at his house all the time. He had five children, among whom there was a sweet four year old named Maria Luiza. She had long blond

curls, and she was my only Portuguese girlfriend. At first I couldn't talk to her, but afterwards we had long, pleasant conversations. Dear Maria Luizinha!

When the whole family went to the beach at Praia de Mira, they insisted that I come and visit. I took a bus that left Coimbra in the evening, and returned the next morning. I did not want to impose as an overnight guest, so I went on Sundays, when the bus left in the morning and returned in the evening. I went two or three times, and each time they insisted that I stay on, and I remained for the week. So I had two or three weeks of vacation on the beach, with wonderful sunbathing and swimming in good company, and the treat of reading the books in my host's library.

The Silva's weren't the only ones who were kind to me. The city engineer, who was the brother-in-law of my friend in Lisbon, regularly invited me to dinner when I was in town and the professor was at the beach. By that time, I no longer needed invitations, since I had been able to exchange my francs at a good exchange rate. At almost half the pre-war rate, I felt rich. I had to fight to refuse the engineer's invitations, and often lost the battle. After dinner I often went to the movies with him since he had a free pass to several movie theaters.

My friends insisted that I change hotels, and they sent me to Pensione Rosa, which was the most expensive and also the cleanest. I stayed there for about a week. Then I went to stay at ACE, the Associacion Cristiano dos Estudentes, a kind of YMCA. In the winter, the rooms were rented to students, but in the summer they were empty. I rented a room at a paltry price and stayed for more than two months. When I went to pay, the director would accept only a tiny sum. At the very low price we had originally agreed upon, I owed about 200 escudos. But he asked me for 80 because they were closing the books and they were 80 escudos short. If I had given him more he would not have known what to do with the money.

He allowed me to pay 50 or 100 escudos for some activity, but I had to argue to get him to accept. "One hundred escudos are equal to five dollars. Five dollars, more or less, are not going to make any difference to me in America." "Five dollars can be very useful to you in America. It might give you one more day to find work." He sent me off with best wishes, as well as a letter to his friend who was director of the YMCA in New York.

There were some modern comforts at the ACE, but in some ways it was quite primitive. There was a gym, a tennis court, and a shower that had hot water twice a week. But since it was summer, there was no hot water. The toilets were not up to American standards. My bed consisted of a wooden table with a mattress made of hay, not more than five centimeters thick. But the sheets were clean, and the whole house was clean. I only found fleas occasionally. I would take a shower, then find a flea. I'd take another shower, and find another. It was like this every day. Nothing could be done about it -- it must have been the climate.

I was not the only person to be treated well by the Portuguese. I heard a story of two women refugees who had gone to the river to wash their clothes. Some peasants offered to do it for them, saying that ladies were not accustomed to that kind of work. They washed the clothes without asking for payment. This shows the generosity of the Portuguese as well as their backwardness. The peasants thought of class differences as being normal. This servile deference to the middle-class is not found in more advanced countries.

When I was not invited -- it happened occasionally -- I ate at a student Pensiao. For five escudos I had enormous meals: soup, fish, meat, fruit, wine and as much delicious bread as I wanted. Many travelers to Portugal have been mistaken in thinking that Portugal is a rich country where one eats well. But these visitors don't know that although food is cheap, most Portuguese cannot afford it. A farmer eats dark bread, with an occasional sardine. Nutrition is so bad that there is much tuberculosis in the countryside in spite of an excellent climate and a hot sun.

The fishermen I saw at Praia de Mira lived in miserable conditions. They worked only a few months a year when the sea was relatively calm. They were too poor to own a boat from which to set out their nets, or oxen to pull the nets in. They offered their services to a fishing company that paid them a small sum and some sardines. It was hard work, requiring muscles of steel.

The fishing at Praia de Mira is one of the scenes that is indelibly impressed in my memory. A vast beach of fine sand extends as far as one can see. Blue sky and hot sun; the sea a darker blue, broken by the white lines of waves breaking noisily on the shore. An unlikely boat, with the traditional slender curves that must have been unchanged for centuries, goes out to sea, bouncing on the breaking waves like an illustration out of a mythology book. About twenty strong, sunburned fisherman row out to into the deep water. A few hundred meters from shore, they drop their nets that are then pulled ashore by oxen.

Meanwhile, the women wait on the beach, talking. They too, are dark, with pure and severe faces, thin from poverty, work and childbearing. They wait in the sun to earn a few pennies by carrying baskets of sardines. The fishermen and the oxen go back and forth, faster and faster, until the resistance of the nets diminishes as they're pulled out of the water. Finally, at a kind of gallop, with everyone shouting, encouraging the oxen so the fish don't escape, the full net is dragged up on shore. You can see the live fish shining in the sun -- one, two, three, sometimes five baskets of sardines . . . sometimes larger fish, more than a meter long. The fish are auctioned off on the beach. The sardines are sold to the storekeepers, and the better fish to the few vacationing families.

But, to return to the conditions of the Portuguese people, I remember a saint's day in Coimbra with a procession with the image of the saint, the clergy, daughters of Christ, etc. Dinner was served to five hundred poor people, who probably left full and thankful, without thinking that they might be entitled to eat on the other 364 days of the year. The local clerical-fascist government organized a few anti-TB clinics, encouraged donations of food for the poor once a year, and invited people to wear traditional costumes and dance.

They were nice dances though, including a competition for the feast of the Reina Santa where teams of folk dancers came from nearby villages and towns. They had colorful costumes, large skirts and pretty corsets. The women carried an amphora on a scarf rolled up on their heads. They not only walked, but they danced with the amphora on their heads.

The poverty of the people was revealed by the incredible number of servants employed by middle class families. My friend the professor had five. Young peasant women went into service work for a few pennies, so that they could eat leftovers from the middle class meals. The illiteracy rate was very high. I don't remember the exact number, but I wouldn't be surprised if it were 80%.

Students came from the well-to-do, middle class. I met several in the ACE where I slept and in the Pensiao where I ate. They were affable, talkative, and expansive and very attached to their country and its past glories. Nationalists, without being chauvinistic, they knew that Portugal was a small nation, but their eyes shone when they spoke of the glorious history of their country in the days of sailing ships and the great geographic discoveries. They were aware of the weakness of their army, but were nevertheless convinced, as in every other country, that the Portuguese were the best soldiers in the world. They had some fondness for England, with which Portugal was allied, and they disliked Spain. Culturally they were more influenced by the French.

Generally, the students were not very interested in the internal state of their country. Since they belonged to the managerial class, they seemed uninterested in whether their country was run as a democracy or a dictatorship. Some supported Salazar, others were against him, but few of them were excited about the internal situation. Most of them hoped that England would win the war.

There were a few people who were not disinterested. I met some Marxist students, who were studying the sacred texts of Marx and Lenin with appropriate seriousness. In spite of the Catholic-Fascist dictatorship, these young intellectuals had their own newspapers. A weekly called *O Sol Nascente* was obviously Marxist. One week it published an entire page on "Idealism and Materialism" defending the materialistic perspective. Radical students in Coimbra published a monthly paper called *O Pensamento*. These publications lasted about a year, after which they were banned and they reappeared under a new name. The organizers were left in peace as long as they restricted themselves to . . . thinking. Naturally they were relatively cautious, but I did not hear talk of spies or arrests. I knew only one person who had been imprisoned for political reasons, but I never learned the whole story. The liberal students admired him, but the Marxists did not trust him. The Fascists respected him [My friend Mario Silva later lost his

position as professor and was also arrested for criticizing the government, which he never tried to hide from anyone.]

I think that the best way to describe Portuguese Fascism is that Portuguese Fascism was to Italian Fascism as Italian Fascism was to German Fascism. In Portugal Fascism did not exert excessive violence due to the ignorance and backwardness of its people.

The private lives of Portuguese students were similar to Italian students, but worse. One evening, as I was going home, I met a group of ACE students who invited me to a cafe. We ate crab and drank beer and port wine. When the drinks had had their effect, the group headed for the local brothel. I could not refuse to go with them, and for half an hour I sat in a smoky front room where the ambience made Italian student brothels seem tasteful. Drunken young men sat all around the room. They were even more disgusting than the tipplers who squawked noisily. The prostitutes would have appeared unattractive to anyone with a minimal sense of esthetics and self-respect. They sat on the client's knees, and the men who couldn't afford their services tried to wheedle kisses from them.

The following day, these same students could seriously say that it was not respectable for women to attend the university. There were very few women at the university and they were distrusted, as if they had no morals. Women were supposed to be ignorant and to stay home, and middle class women upheld this moral code imposed by tradition and the church.

Maybe this was the reason that Portuguese women seemed so boring. They could not even make family life interesting, thus missing out on the purpose of their lives. To escape boredom at home, men went home only to eat and sleep and in the evening they met at the cafe for the conversation and companionship that was missing at home

* * *

I went to Lisbon several times to arrange to get my American visa.

Mario Silva offered me a position as an assistant at the university, but the Portuguese police would not let me stay in Portugal. Besides, even though I had learned that Portugal was *uma terra bonita*, I did not intend to spend the rest of my life in Coimbra's hills. But I was caught in a bureaucratic trap: in order to leave Portugal I had to go to Lisbon to talk to the American consul. But I needed police permission to go to Lisbon, and the police, who wanted me to leave Portugal, would not allow me to go to Lisbon.

I finally decided to leave without permission. Since I did not have an identity card that would allow me to stay in a hotel, I got myself invited to Marques da Silva's house. I went to Lisbon five or six times, always travelling illegally on a night train. Before leaving I asked the police for a permit. The employees knew me, and they always congratulated me on how well I was learning the language, but they could not give me a permit. I needed an official document from the police in Lisbon, which would have taken two weeks to get. But I was in a hurry, and left anyhow. Otherwise I might still be in Portugal!

The employee with the glasses, who had awakened me the first night in Coimbra, told me that I needed a letter from the Italian consulate to get the permit. Maybe the Italian consulate would have given me the letter, but I did not want to ask for it. I had had it with Fascists! The employee asked me why I didn't want to go to the consulate.

"I am Jewish."

"Ah! Then it's better that you don't go."

"But I have to go to Lisbon."

"Then, go. But I don't know anything about it. Don't go to a hotel. You might have trouble. ... I haven't said anything. Do you understand? Don't say that I gave you advice. ... I shouldn't ... But, if you have to go, you have to go."

"Thanks. You know, I've already been three times."

"Good, but I don't know anything about it. Good luck."

Before leaving I would leave my address at ACE, telling them to telegraph me if the police should come looking for me. Once I received a telegram as soon as I arrived in Lisbon. I had to return to Coimbra on the express train. The police wanted ten escudos to renew my residence permit.

I traveled at night in third class. The train was very slow, and crowded with peasants. I avoided talking because I did not want people to know that I was a foreigner. The cars were filthy. The express train had only first and second class cars, made in America. They were comfortable and air conditioned. On the express, the trip lasted three or four hours. In third class, it took ten hours.

Once, for a change, I took a bus. I saw how *bonita* Portugal was. I was so impressed by this trip that as soon as I arrived in Lisbon I went to the Cafe Portugal -- air conditioned -- and wrote a letter to Nanie telling her about the Portuguese countryside. There were still windmills from the time of Don Quixote.

The first time that I went to Lisbon, Marques de Silva met me at the station. He took me to his house in a taxi -- we crossed Avenida da Liberdade -- and gave me breakfast. They all spoke French at his house. The children went to the French Lycée. Marquez da Silva loved France, but he said, "France doesn't exist for me anymore. Now it's 'Petainland.'"

After breakfast he went to the physics lab and I went to the American consulate.

I had asked the consulate in Bordeaux to send my documents to Lisbon, but they had not arrived. They advised me to write to Bordeaux to have them sent. Not knowing American ways yet, I thought they were making fun of me. Maybe they were just trying to get rid of me. Why would the consulate of a great nation pay attention to a letter written by a private person like me? On paper that was not even official? I was also afraid that my letter would not arrive. I asked them to write an official letter. They told me they had too much to do, and insisted that I write. They were obviously busy. I lost all hope of ever getting to America. But I did write . . . one never knows . . .

The consulate was always crowded with refugees from all over the world, all seeking an American visa. Most of them seemed to be quite well off. The poorer and weaker refugees had been weeded out before reaching Lisbon. Those who had come to Portugal without resources lived outside the city. The HICEM took care of poor Jews.

I went to see Anni at the HICEM offices, and we arranged to meet in the evening. Poor Anni was alone and unhappy. Her only friends were her boss and his wife. She wished she were in France. I could not afford to offer her more than a cup of coffee at the Cafe Portugal. Everyone turned to look when they saw a woman entering the cafe. Then we went to see the moon over the Tago, and slowly I walked her home. We talked of love, naturally, and I told her about Nanie. I promised that I would ask Marquez da Silva to get in touch with her.

I went back to Lisbon two weeks later. All my papers had come from Bordeaux, including the quota number. But the consul said that there were new instructions from the State Department, and that I would have to start over. The affidavit of support was inadequate because I did not personally know the person who had written it. When I told him the names of people I knew at universities, he told me to get letters of recommendation from them. I wrote to Rossi, Compton and Fermi.

Meanwhile Marquez da Silva had been to see Anni, and they had become great friends. They had met a group of Portuguese and refugees who all spoke French. Nita was at the center of the group. A beautiful woman of about thirty, she was Portuguese, but she had lived and worked in France a long time. She had been well-paid, and had become Parisian. In Paris she had married a young Polish Communist of Jewish descent. He was handsome too, with sweet blue eyes. His name was Miette, a name that sounded like a cat's name.

Nita made the decisions, along with her brother Joao Brandao, a singer by profession. In France he had occasionally sung on the radio. During the war he had worked for the Ministry of Information for the Portuguese language radio. Nita danced. She had learned some classical dance for pleasure, and now that she was penniless she thought she could give some dance recitals.

Nita, Joao, and Miette had arrived in Portugal with Langouste. Langouste was a salmon-colored Chrysler "spider" that Nita and Joao had bought to escape France, but they could not afford to buy gas for

it. Everyone spoke affectionately of Langouste as if it were a family member who had been abandoned on the street.

Miette had served in the French army. While he was wandering around Bordeaux and Hendaye after the defeat, he ran into Langouste and his wife and brother-in-law by chance. They gave him civilian clothes and took him to Portugal, saying that he was their brother, a Portuguese citizen. They had had to falsify his passport, but what harm was there in that? They lived in an apartment loaned to them by a painter who was travelling.

I did not want to impose on Marquez da Silva, so I went to stay in this house where I had a room in the attic. I paid a little, and everybody was happy with the arrangement. We ate *baccala* and sardines, and we had a lot of fun. Everybody sang and danced and talked, but we ate little. Montparnasse had come to Lisbon. There was even a homosexual poet who often came to see us in the evening. He recited poetry and sang Brazilian songs, using his long delicate hands in effeminate gestures.

Anni lived close by, and she also often joined us in the evening. Marquez da Silva had sort of fallen in love with her, and Joao Brandao was courting her. I did not pay a lot of attention to her as I was still thinking of Nanie. Anni became rude to me. She liked to be the center of attention, and maybe she had taken a liking to me.

Miette told us about the war. His regiment had been sent to defend a position. Everyone dug a trench and prepared to fight. After a few days they got orders to retreat to defend a position a few hundred kilometers behind them. So they retreated from the Belgian frontier to Bordeaux without having seen a single German. He said that when the Germans met resistance, they too retreated, because they knew they could get through another way without a fight.

A Brazilian architect who was passing through came to live with us for a few days. They called him *loco*, but he was a very interesting and intelligent young man. He spoke a great many languages perfectly. He could speak French with accents from the various Parisian suburbs. He had lived in the Soviet Union for a few years, and he was enthusiastic about it. He said that he was not a Communist, but that the Soviet Union was a paradise. He had been paid very well in Russia and said that one could have the same beautiful things in Russia as in Paris. According to him, there was freedom for everyone in Russia, except for traitors. He was convinced that anyone who was arrested or killed was actually a traitor -- after a few days the *loco* left for Brazil.

My doubts about the USSR's attitude had been dissipated with France's defeat. It seemed clear that if Russia had entered the war against the Germans, the French and English would have watched, as they had in fact watched the German-Polish war. If the USSR had been defeated, Chamberlain and Daladier would have made peace with Hitler. The war disgusted me: the English empire against the German empire. Let them fight it out between themselves.

London was bombed. We expected an invasion of England. I thought that the Italian troops in Lybia and in Abyssinia would unite somewhere in Sudan and occupy Suez. It would be a catastrophe -- the end of our civilization. The best thing to do was to go to America to have a few more years of civilian life. When Fascism got there I planned to hide among the Mexican peasants or in the Amazon forests, searching for freedom in primitive life.

I was young, and the world was large. I would find a corner to live in. At times I felt like I owned the world, although I did not have a country in which to stay (the Portuguese police did not want me, and the various New World consulates did not seem to want me in their respective countries). I had no work. I was reaching the end of my money. Since I had nothing, I had no ties, and felt perfectly free. America, Asia, Africa were far away, and their bureaucracies would not let me in. But I felt that I could get to the other side of the ocean somehow. If legal methods failed, I would hide in the hull of a ship, or I would steal a boat. In my optimistic moments, my imagination was full of adventure.

Refugees crowded the cafés at the Avenida da Liberdade and del Rossio. Everyone lived in a state of uncertainty and agitation. Alarmist rumors spread and reproduced like microbes in a culture. Every week rumors spread that Hitler was about to invade Spain and Portugal. General panic was followed by a few days of exaggerated optimism.

The Portuguese were always nice to the refugees. Those who had been abroad and who believed that their country was at the edge of civilization were happy to be in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. They did their best to help the peaceful and frightened invaders.

Miette was the most frightened of all. He felt Hitler's army at his heels, and he couldn't wait to find security on the other side of the Atlantic. Finally he and Nita got visas for Brazil but Nita decided to stay in Portugal with her brother, saying that she had an obligation towards her parents who were, I think, in France. Miette left alone, heart-broken. Nita stayed on, distressed. But she was probably ready to be consoled. I did not try to console her . . . and I'm sorry I didn't.

On the whole, the days in Lisbon were quite pleasant. I was invited here and there. One Sunday, in the rumble seat of Langouste, we went to Coira (?) to swim at the beach at Escuril. Anni's boss invited us to lunch at the best hotel, but Anni was not being nice to me. There was a different kind of refugees in Escuril. They gathered around the roulette wheel, joined by spies from the belligerent nations.

In Coira I went to see a *corrida*. In Portugal the *corrida* is no more cruel than a game of American football. At the end of the run, the bull is attracted into an arena by a herd of cows, and I suppose he lives the rest of his life in green pastures, dedicating himself to the reproduction of the species. The horses' bellies are protected by thick cushions, and the bull's horns are covered by rubber tips which are removed in the end when the matador, after the ritual pirouette, makes the tired beast kneel in front of him. It all ends with the triumph of agility and intelligence over brute force. The Portuguese go home to sleep peacefully, not reproaching themselves at spilling the blood of horses and bulls.

Another Portuguese variation of the *corrida* had five or six unarmed men immobilize the bull with their hands. One throws himself between the horns and over the head, so that the bull can't see. The others hang onto his legs and tail. In the *corrida* that I saw, the man who should have taken the bull by the horns missed, and fell. The bull stepped on him, and the young Hercules survived with a few broken ribs.

I met a few young mathematicians and physicists in Lisbon. The University of Lisbon is about equal to a mediocre Italian university. A few students had been abroad, supported by their Ministry of Education, which sent its best students to the more famous schools abroad rather than invite foreign scientists to Portugal. I thought that there was a nucleus of good people around which a good school could be built later on.

The episode of the young mathematician who had refused to sign a paper declaring his aversion to Communism was typical of the Portuguese political situation. The student could no longer receive his salary directly, but the university found a way to give him a scholarship, as payment for services.

* * *

When I was in Coimbra I heard that the American consulate had received the letter of recommendation that I needed. I hurried illegally to Lisbon where I was received by the consul, who was impressed that two Nobel prize winners were willing to recommend me. He gave me the visa I had agonized so long for.

But I had to wait my turn to complete the necessary formalities. They gave me an appointment for the following week so that I could fill out some forms and to have my visa stamped into my passport. Returning to Coimbra, I went to the police station to ask for official permission to go to Lisbon with my passport, which they were keeping. They had me write a request on official paper and this document was sent off to Lisbon. On the day of my appointment with the American consulate, I had not yet received a reply.

It was so absurd that for the first time since I had left Paris I felt discouraged. Difficulties make me excited, stupidities depress me. I spent several days in bed waiting, unable to do anything.

Finally, I received official permission to go to Lisbon legally for five days with my passport. I arrived at the American consulate with my few suitcases, and I was told that since I had missed my appointment, I would have to wait again. They gave me another appointment for the following week, when I was supposed to be back in Coimbra and return my passport to the police. This time I was desperate. I told Anni my problems, and she found a solution. As a kind of diplomatic representative for

the Jews, one of directors of the HICEM wrote a letter to the police who allowed me to stay in Lisbon for another week.

With my visa and orders to return to Coimbra two days later, I made the rounds of all the shipping companies to find a way to get a ticket before leaving Lisbon. But there was nothing available. I went to Anni's office to say good-bye, and to ask them to reserve a berth for me on the next ship.

I imagined "my" ship leaving while I was in Coimbra waiting for my passport. I said good-by to Anni, convinced that the bureaucracy would keep me in Coimbra forever . . . Suddenly there was great commotion in the office. Seven emaciated Jews had just walked across Pyrenees, among them an old lady who could hardly stand. They had American visas that would expire in a week. If they did not leave immediately on a ship that was already in port, they would have to give up all hope of going to America.

There painful scenes, telephone calls, old ladies crying, more telephone calls. Finally the police said that a ship was in port with eight unassigned berths. There were seven refugees -- I was the eighth, with a brand new visa. I left on the *Nea Hellas*.

I was surprised that my cabin had two berths for just me. I never understood why the Portuguese police, who complained about the presence of refugees, would allow a ship to leave with an empty berth. The only explanation that makes sense is that Portugal was making good money off the refugees, and was not really in a hurry to let them go.

In any case, I left. An employee from the HICEM hired a taxi, and took us to a travel agent, to the police, and to many other places. The money that I had paid in Bordeaux for a first class ticket, was now only enough to pay for half a third class ticket. HICEM paid the other half. I left for America with about \$80 dollars in my pocket, and a few hundred dollars debt. Anni and Marquez da Silva came to see me off.

Ten days later I landed in New York. This is the end of my story. America is here, at my feet, and I cannot describe it objectively. Besides, being in the United States, I am so little connected to world events that it would be of no interest to the reader, or even to me. I have described what happened to me in Europe, not because I thought it was extraordinary. It was a typical story, that of an average person -- certainly not a hero -- in a world in crisis. It's the story of the world situation, not my story, that I wanted to tell.