A REPORTER AT LARGE

HOWLING WITH THE WOLVES

I HAVE known Karel Janda, as I shall call him here, for twenty-five years—ever since I was a law student at the University of Prague. He was then a clerk in a small business, of which he later became the manager, but despite the difference in our interests we were always close friends. I was at his wedding, when he married the vivid brunette I shall call Marta, and just after the Liberation I visited their home and saw their two children, whom I shall rechristen Antonín and Matilda and who are now seventeen and twelve, respectively. I visited them again in 1948, and again on my most recent, and possibly last, trip to Prague. On this occasion, I rang up Janda at his office. He sounded glad to hear from me, but then he asked me where I was calling from, and when I told him I was at my hotel, the heartiness went out of his voice. He asked quickly, "Can you come to dinner tonight at seven-thirty?" I said I could, and he hastily said goodbye and hung up.

When I set out that evening for the Jandas' apartment, the contours of the old baroque houses and church towers were soft and diffuse against a twilight sky. Across the Vltava River, below Hradčany Castle, the lights were beginning to come on in the old palaces. I've never forgotten the relaxed evenings of my youth, when the dim lights and black shadows, the hushed sounds from darkened doorways, and the gentle air seemed to have a curious effect on the people in the streets. They would slacken their pace or stop entirely to look at the reflection of the lights in the river, and they would inhale the air deeply, as if they had just arrived at a mountain resort. Now, as I walked along, the air was as it had always been, and the lights and shadows and the silhouettes of the buildings looked the same, but something was different. After a while, I realized that it was the people. They didn't seem relaxed. They walked fast, as if they were under some compulsion. They stared down at the sidewalk, avoiding one another's eyes. The music and gay voices one formerly heard in the streets of Prague were gone and the only sounds now came from trolley gongs and automobile engines.

The Jandas live in a comfortable five-room apartment in an attractive middle-class district centering on a street that once bore the name of Marshal Foch and later that of Reichsprotektor Baron Neurath, and now is named for Stalin. The door of the elevator in the Jandas' apartment house was locked. One could open it by putting a koruna in a slot, but I didn't have a koruna, so I rang the bell of the janitress's quarters. After a while, a fat woman with unkempt hair and wearing bedroom slippers waddled up from the basement and looked at me suspiciously. I remembered her from my previous visits, but she didn't remember me, and I suspected that it was better that way. She asked me whom I wanted to see, and after I'd told her she opened the elevator door for me with a key. I left her mumbling to herself, and rode to the fourth floor and rang the bell of the Jandas' apartment.

I HAD expected that the apartment door would be opened by Emma, the Jandas' cook, who had been with the family since the children were born, but instead it was opened by Marta, wearing a polka-dot apron over her dress. "Hello," she said, holding out her hand. "Come in. Karel just phoned about you from the office. He'll be here any minute. I wish I'd known earlier that you were going to be here this evening. I could have fixed something special for you. It isn't easy nowadays to get all the things we used to have." She was breathless and seemed nervous, and perhaps a little too eager to appear pleased. I noticed that she had gained weight, and that her hands were rough and unmanicured. She nodded her head toward the kitchen, at the end of the hall. "Emma isn't here any more," she said, rather self-consciously, I thought. "We had to let her go last fall. Karel said we couldn't afford her. Besides . . ." She hesitated, and then went on, "This is no time to have servants. The neighbors were talking."

Marta led the way into the living room. "Let's see," she said. "When were you here last?"

"In January, 1948," I told her. "Just before the *Putsch*."

"Before the revolution," she said. I was surprised. Party enthusiasts have always avoided the word "*Putsch*," but I had never known Marta to show any interest in politics.

The oak parquet floor in the big, bright living room was as clean as ever. Conscientious Prague housewives don't wash their floors with soap and water, because this would darken them; instead, they scrape them clean with steel wool and then wax them—quite a job. Marta saw me look admiringly at the floor and smiled. "I had a woman to help me, but even so it took three days to get the whole apartment clean," she said. "That was at Easter time. Karel insisted it was foolish, but when you've been used to having things nice all your life . . ." She shook her head. Along the walls were the paraphernalia of middle-class comfort—a glass chest filled with blue and red Bohemian crystal ware, two glass vases etched with deer-hunting scenes, two landscapes, a painting of the old Karlstein Castle. Janda's desk stood in a corner, with a big globe at one side of it and bookshelves at the other. At first, the room looked to me as it always had, but then I realized something was missing. It suddenly came to me that it was the piano, which had stood in the corner by the window. Now a rug covered part of the space where it had stood, but it didn't conceal the marks two of its legs had made in the floor, marks that Marta or her cleaning woman had undoubtedly spent hours trying to smooth and polish.

"We sold the piano," Marta said. "They said the government was going to put a tax on it. Besides, Matilda stopped taking lessons. She's too busy now with her other activities. We sold it to the new tenant on the second floor. Got a good price for it, too."

"Doesn't Karel play any longer?" I asked. In other years, I had always taken my violin along when I went to call, and Janda and I had played sonatas—Franck, Debussy, Mozart, Brahms. He had been crazy about Brahms.

"Karel is so tired when he comes home at night," Marta said with a sigh. "Oh, well, I keep telling myself it's just one piece of furniture less to dust."

JANDA arrived a few minutes later. He kissed his wife and shook my hand vigorously. "I didn't want to talk long on the phone," he said. "One never knows who's listening in." A big, robust man with disorderly dark hair, Janda always used to have a zest for living, an

immense enthusiasm for whatever he was doing, but now he looked tired and his enthusiasm seemed not quite genuine. But what struck me most sharply was that he was wearing the Communist Party emblem in his lapel. "Where are the kids?" he said.

"Matilda will be here any moment," said his wife. "Antonín won't be home until eight. This is Tuesday."

"Tuesday?" he said.

"You know," Marta said. "Political education."

"Oh, *that!*" said Janda, and gave a shrug, the weary shrug that has become the standard gesture of resignation in so much of the world. He sat down on the couch, slumped back, and closed his eyes. "Political education. Three times a week," he said to no one in particular. "The boy hasn't even got a free evening any more. And Sundays he has to go out with the brigades, working on farms or building roads. Political education!"

"It's orders," Marta said to me. "Everybody does it, and Karel knows it. But he just won't bring himself to realize that times have changed. I keep repeating our old Czech proverb to him, 'You've got to howl with the wolves or they will devour you.' How true it is."

"I'm howling with them, all right," Janda said resignedly, pointing to his Party badge. "But I don't have to like it. Not at home, at least."

"They're not as bad as you make them out," Marta said. Again I noticed the nervous strain in her voice. "We should give them credit for a lot of things."

"Such as?"

"Everybody is working now," she said. "Have you forgotten the thirties and what a time we had trying to support the family?" Janda assumed an expression of exaggerated boredom. "Well," she said lamely, "I'd better go and see about my dumplings. You still like them filled with strawberries, and sprinkled with cheese, sugar, and melted butter?" she asked me.

I assured her that I did.

"Good," she said. "I'll bring in the wine." Janda looked after her as she left the room, and then smiled apologetically. "Don't mind Marta," he said. "Women always get emotional about such things. I suppose she's been listening to that wretched brother of mine too much. You remember Václav?"

I nodded. Václav had been, when I knew him, a sort of untalented dilettante, dabbling from time to time in journalism, the movies, the theatre, and politics, but mostly just hanging around the coffeehouses of Prague, getting nowhere. I'd always suspected that his brother supported him.

"Václav is a big man now," Janda said. "He's discovered his great gift for Party politics. He's got a finger in every kind of pie. He's a member of an action committee, and when you listen to him you'd almost believe he's sincere.

I'm not very proud of Václav. Sure, I'm no hero myself. I never accomplished anything while the Germans were here, but—"

"You hid that underground fellow," I broke in. I knew that in the winter of 1944 a wounded Partisan fighter had spent two weeks in the room where we were now sitting.

Janda shook his head. "That wasn't much," he said. "The war was almost over then. But at least I never hung around the Lucerna bar with all those German officers, the way Václav did. Oh, what's the use of talking?" He got up and walked over to the window and stared out. "Václav has probably told himself so many times that he is a good Communist that he has come to believe it," he said in a voice that sounded faraway. "I joined the Party because I have to feed the family. I can't afford to lose my job, and joining up was the best way of keeping it. At least, that was what I thought two years ago. But now they've begun to check on everybody who has joined since the revolution. One of these days they're going to catch up with me, and when they do . . ." He didn't finish the sentence. Many sentences are left unfinished in Prague these days.

"Roughly four-fifths of our people are against them, though they won't admit it," Janda went on, still staring out the window. "But what can a man do? They have the police and the guns, and we have neither the brains nor the courage to do anything about it. The Germans did something to our courage. They broke our backbone of decency and national pride. We Czechs are not cowards by nature. We have our history to prove it. We fought off the rule of the Hapsburgs. During the First World War, our legionnaires were always where the going was toughest. But now we're all howling with the wolves, as Marta says. I've been told to learn Russian. Everybody who works for a nationalized industry has to learn Russian and pass an examination in it if he wants to keep his job. So does everybody who works for the city or national government, and even professional people, too. People laugh and say we must all learn Russian so we'll be able to get along when the Russians send us to their camps in Siberia. A nice joke! And twice a week I have to attend a course in political education, like Antonín. I no longer have time to read the travel books and novels I like, because I have to study the writings of Marx and Engels and Lenin and Stalin and so on. But it's the children—mine and everybody else's—that

I'm really worried about. They learn the Communist theories in school, and when they come home, their parents tell them something different. After a while, the poor kids don't know where they're at. They get confused and frightened. Everybody is frightened. Coming home on the streetcar tonight, I was frightened. A man sitting across from me gave me a funny look. I looked back at him, and almost automatically the questions came to my mind."

"What questions?" I asked.

"I suppose everybody has some reason to be afraid," Janda said. "Everybody is hiding something. You become afraid that your doubts and intentions show in your face. I looked at this man and I said to myself, 'Now, where does he belong? He's not wearing a Party badge. You might say, then, that he's not a Communist, but on the other hand he may be such an important Communist that he doesn't *have* to wear a badge. He may be a member of the central committee. Or a member of the secret police. Or perhaps he's a reactionary. Does he know that I am just an opportunist? Why does he keep looking at me? Have I done anything that might get me into trouble—today, yesterday, last week, last year? Could it be because an American friend called me on the phone?' "

"I'm sorry, Karel," I said. "I didn't think—"

"No, no," Janda said. "I'm just trying to explain our nationwide anxiety neurosis. You go to bed with fear in your bones, and when you get up in the morning the fear is still there. The fear is constantly there. During the German Occupation, it wasn't any fun to ride on a streetcar, with all those S.S. men and German soldiers around, but in those days I was never afraid. I would get on a streetcar and sit or stand beside a Czech. I wouldn't talk to him, but just his presence seemed warm and reassuring. I knew I wasn't alone. We Czechs were all together then. Before the war, we'd had fifteen political parties in Parliament and they fought each other tooth and nail. There was always much talk about national unity but nobody did anything about it. Then the Germans occupied the country, and suddenly the nation was truly united. The much-talked-about dream of unity had at last come true. But today?" Janda's tone became bitter. "It's brother against brother. They take you to Pankrác Prison, and when you get there, Czechs—your own people—beat you up. That's what's so hard to take. You walk up to a shopwindow where two women are talking, and as you approach, they become silent and back away. They are afraid of you. They think you're a secret one. You're all alone now, more alone than ever before in your life. And there is no hope that it will be over someday."

"This is Ethel, Mrs. Wilson. Malcolm wants me to sing 'Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,' and I was wondering if you could tell me how it goes."

• •

Janda turned from the window abruptly. "Remember that evening early in May, 1945, when you were here?" he asked with a warm smile. "You were sitting exactly where you're sitting now. And that girl in the white blouse, with a gun in a holster and the armband of the Republican Guard, was sitting next to you—"

I remembered. The evening he spoke of was the second after the Liberation. There was still sporadic gunfire in the nearby Olšany Cemetery, but the sound of the shots was soon drowned out by joyous shouts from the street. Boys and girls came riding by on trucks, singing Czech songs that had been *verboten* for six years, like the red, white, and blue Czech flag they were carrying. I was an American sergeant at the time, and had entered Prague in a jeep. The Russians were already in the city, but I had no difficulty getting through their lines. Everybody was everybody else's friend. The difficulty was to make my way through the throngs to Janda's apartment. When I finally got there, the living room was a melee of excited, exultant people. Most of them were drunk—as much, I imagine, from joy as from beer and wine. A thin-lipped Czech lieutenant colonel kissed me on both cheeks. Marta's younger sister, Jarmila, was dancing a gypsy dance, and singing and laughing and kissing everybody. Mrs. P., the slovenly janitress, sat on the couch, and Mr. K., the

THOUGHTS WHILE SOWING FIVE POUNDS OF DOMESTIC RYE GRASS SEED AT 40 CENTS THE POUND

("Build Up Your Soil This Easy Way")

My forebear with his bull-tongue plow
Opened the earth, he cared not how.

He did not plant a cover crop,
And neither did *your* grandpa's pop.

He ran his furrows up and down
And blithely drove his grain to town.

He did not sow domestic rye;
His was not to reason why.

He planted wheat and made it pay;
He never heard of T.V.A.

He sowed the land to corn and cotton,
And he will not be soon forgotten.

The fields ran out, the plains blew dust,
The bull-tongue plow was left to rust.

Bare to the searching wind and rain,
The bleeding furrow left its stain.

With dock and wire grass, sedge and thistle,
My forebear's children had to wrestle;

Abandoned, worn-out farms lay dozing;
And sounds of mortgages foreclosing.

A century, a new frontier,
And now, by God, what have we here?

With lime and super, grass and clover,
This awkward grandchild makes earth over.

I plow the contour, disk the rye,
Restore the soil with blood in eye.

With birdsfoot trefoil and with brome,
I bring the spirit back to loam.

Astride my scarlet Farmall tractor
I am the good earth's benefactor.

And as, on golden harvest days,
Across the blooming mead I gaze,

My forebear, called the Pioneer,
From where I sit seems cracked and queer.

But as I rectify his error
I guess I do things even queerer.

—E. B. W.

• •

landlord, sat beside her with an arm around her shoulder. Mr. K. owned three other houses and two factories, and subscribed to the reactionary newspaper, *Národni Listy*, but he got drunk that night with a Russian officer who boasted that in three years he had marched with his regiment all the way from Stalingrad to Janda's apartment without even getting flat feet. The officer emphasized the accomplishment by taking off one of his boots and displaying his foot, and Mr. K. sprinkled slivovitz on it and said, "God bless the Russian feet that have walked the long way from Stalingrad to liberate this country!"

Janda, who had remained standing, came and sat down near me. "Remember the lieutenant colonel who kissed you when you arrived at the party?" he said. "Poor fellow, he got into trouble. His promotion to full colonel was just about to come through when the Communists took over. During the war, he had kept in touch with the Beneš group in London, not with the Gottwald group in Moscow. So, naturally, the Communists didn't promote him. Then he began going around telling everybody how he'd fought for Masaryk with the Czech Legion in the First World War and for Beneš in the Second, and look at what a man got for being a patriot. So they came for the patriot and put him in jail, and he's still there."

I asked Janda what had become of Mr. K.

"You can probably guess," he said. "He always was a fool. That big party up here was the only time I ever saw him forget about class distinctions. He was fraternizing with the janitress that night, but two weeks later he wouldn't have been seen talking to her. Well, today the janitress wouldn't want to be seen talking to K. I never liked K., because he was so arrogant and always making trouble for us, but I'm almost sorry for him now. For a while, they let him keep his houses and factories. Then they nationalized the factories, and afterward they put confiscatory taxes on his houses. Instead of keeping his mouth shut and trying to get along in the apartment they were going to let him keep in one of his houses, he went to a lawyer and started raising hell. So now they've taken him away to a labor-and-correction camp, and his wife has been moved into one room in a tenement house. You can imagine who got his apartment."

"The janitress?"

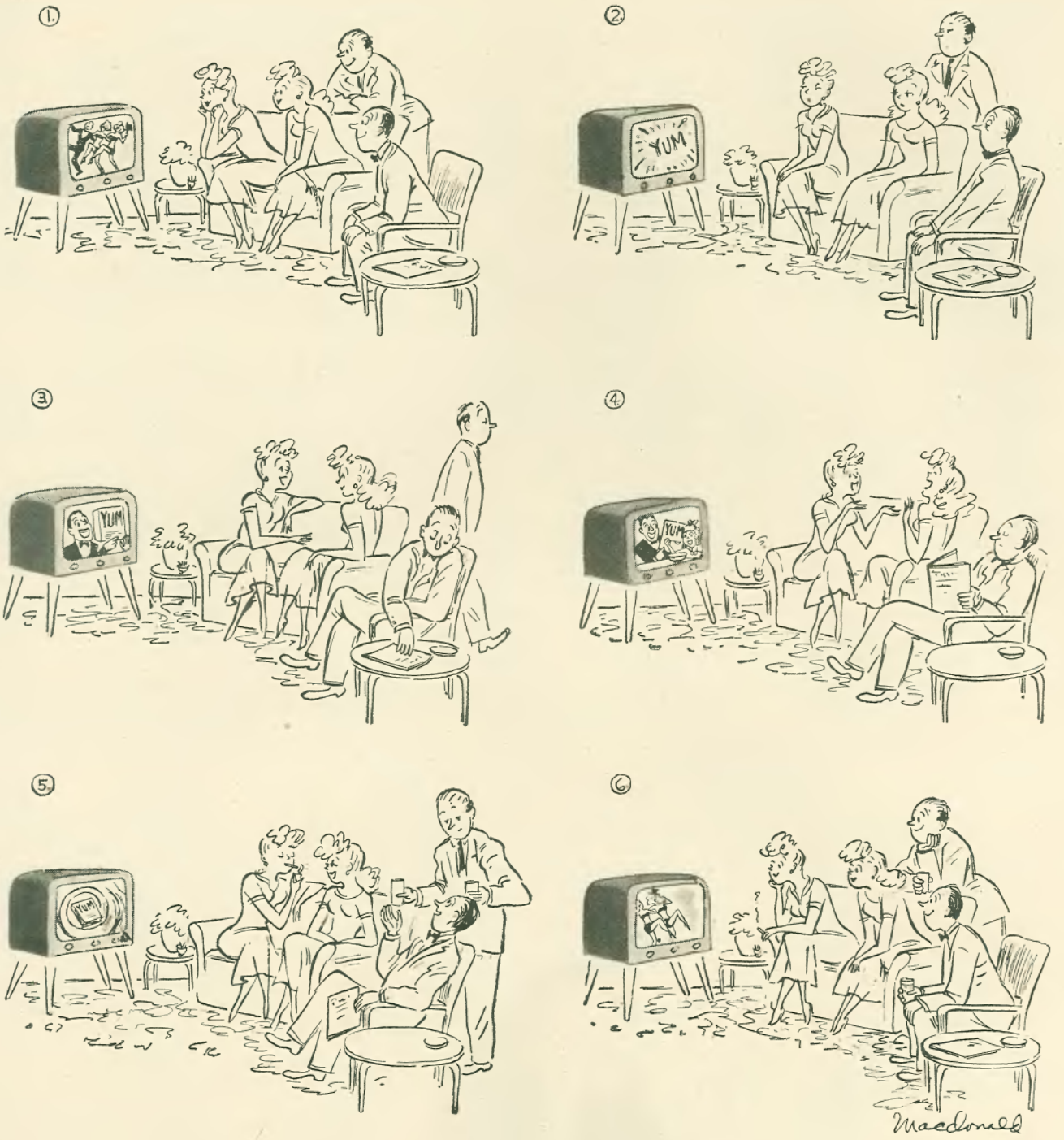
"No, it's not *quite* as pat as that. The son-in-law of the janitress. He's a secretary at the Trade Unions Center. He's the one who bought our piano."

Marta came in with a tray on which were glasses, a bottle of white wine, and some slices of dark bread thickly spread with pâté. Janda filled the glasses. "One of our last bottles of good Moravian wine," he said.

"Well, if you'd only stop finding fault and try to make the best of things, you could have all the wine you want," his wife said tartly. "Party members have priority, haven't they?"

"Now, Marta," Janda said, "I've told you time and again that I joined the Party on account of my job, and not so I could beg favors from some pompous stooge."

The telephone rang and Marta went into the hall to answer it. "I never thought the day would come when we'd



have political arguments in our family," Janda said, staring gloomily into his glass. "Politics used to be fun—something to argue about in a beer parlor, over a glass of Pilsner, when you had nothing else on your mind. Now, every time one of us opens his mouth we're in a fight, and that includes the children. Antonín hates the Communists, and Matilda is violently on their side. Politics has become our bitter daily bread. There seems to be no other topic of conversation. It makes me sick." He shook his head. "And there's just no getting away from it. People can't travel any more. Last year, everybody had to turn in his passport. Now you've got to be a high-ranking official, or at least a member of a trade mission, to leave the country. You even need a permit to go from one Czech town to another. We're virtually locked up here. It gives you a feeling of claustrophobia."

WE heard the front door open and close. "That should be Matilda now," said Janda, and a moment later his daughter walked into the room. She had grown up a good deal in the two years since I'd last seen her. She was still slim and pretty, but there was now a thoughtful, serious air about her that made her seem much older than twelve, and neither the red net she wore over her hair nor her ankle socks helped to convey an impression of youth. She barely smiled as she greeted me, and when I held out my hand she touched it, and then quickly withdrew her fingers, all the time looking at me uneasily.

"Hello," Matilda said to her father, without going near him.

"What's new in school?" Janda asked.

The girl hesitated, and again looked

warily at me. Then she said, "We had more trouble with that reactionary culture specialist of ours—Karolina. She wanted us to hang up a picture of Masaryk in the classroom, underneath the Gottwald and Stalin pictures. I had to bring the matter before the pupils' committee."

"Matilda is secretary of the pupils' committee," Janda said to me. I wasn't sure whether he was proud of the fact or apologizing for it.

"What is the pupils' committee?" I asked.

Matilda seemed amazed. "Why, every class has a committee," she said. "We elect members of the class to make special studies of political education, sports, newspapers, lectures, economics, excursions—*and* culture. That's Karolina. Naturally, she was voted down—six to one. What do we need a picture of Masaryk for?"

Janda sighed. "Matilda," he said patiently, "we wouldn't have this republic without Thomas Masaryk."

The girl made a face. "That's not true, and I can prove it. You know what *Rudé Pravo* said?" *Rudé Pravo* is the official newspaper of Czechoslovakia's Communist Party. "*Rudé Pravo* said," she went on, quoting, "'The chapter in our history that was connected with Masaryk is now closed. He depended on the West. Today the Czechoslovak nation is marching toward Russia and Socialism.'" She spoke the memorized lines in a low, monotonous voice, and I was not at all sure she knew what she was saying. There was little that was childlike about her, but she wasn't mature, either. I glanced at Janda, and from the way he looked back at me I knew that he was distressed. He was losing Matilda, and there was nothing he could do about it.

"Matilda," I said, "you're too young to understand what President Masaryk did for this country."

The girl made another face, and her father reddened. "If you're fresh, Matilda, you're going to your room!" he said.

Matilda shrugged and walked out.

For a while, neither of us spoke. It was painful to see the despair in Janda's eyes. At last, I felt I had to say something. "She's only a child," I told him.

Janda drew a deep breath and cleared his throat. "She's just twelve," he said. "What are girls of that age supposed to be interested in—books, games, dolls? I don't know. Matilda doesn't care for any of them. The walls of her room are covered with pictures of Russian marshals. She's crazy about Marshal Rokossovsky. When they put him in charge of the Polish Army, she cried and said they should have sent him to Prague. Her Aunt Jarmila brought her pictures of Clark Gable and Robert Taylor, but Matilda doesn't care about movie stars. She doesn't seem to care about anything but politics. Before the last election, she and her classmates went all over the twelfth district at night and glued Communist slogans across the campaign posters of the three other parties. She's given up her piano lessons and she's earnestly trying to read the same books by Marx and Gottwald that I have to study. She loves candy, but when I brought home some chocolate a while ago, she wouldn't eat it, because it came from some old Unrra supplies."

Janda got up and began pacing back and forth. "This is a fairly well-to-do district, as you know," he said, "but of the twenty-nine girls in Matilda's class twenty-seven are members of the Communist Youth Organization. The other two are called reactionaries, but don't be fooled by the word. It simply means anybody who is not a follower of the regime. The two reactionaries come from poor families—I believe the father of one works on the railroad. Don't ask me to explain all this. Nothing makes sense any longer. Let's have some more wine."

MARTA came in. "You haven't eaten anything," she said, looking at the tray. "Don't you like the pâté?"

"I guess we lost our appetite listening to Matilda," her husband said.

Marta glanced at him questioningly and sighed. "You've been arguing again!" she said. "I wish you wouldn't keep antagonizing the child, Karel."

"I'm going to thrash that damn nonsense out of her head."

"Someday she's going to tell her teacher that you—"

"Don't be an idiot!" Janda said brusquely. His wife stopped short and flushed. It was a trying moment. Then Janda cleared his throat. "I'm sorry," he said. "I never used to lose my self-control."

"You're losing it very often these days," Marta said.

"Who was on the phone?"

"Jarmila. She's coming over for dinner."

"Oh, Lord! Did you *have* to invite her *tonight*?"

"You know no one ever invites Jarmila," Marta replied. "You know my darling sister as well as I do. She's always inviting herself. She probably was downtown all day long looking at dresses, and then she got home and discovered there was nothing to eat. Oh, well, Pepík knows her," she said, glancing at me. Pepík is the Czech diminutive for my first name.

I knew Jarmila, all right—a vivacious, headstrong, handsome woman. As far back as I could remember, she had always been in some sort of trouble—always she'd just been thrown out of a school or lost a job or broken off

with a man. No matter how tough things were, though, they didn't get Jarmila down. She had had a fling at the theatre and the movies and knew everybody in town. She was hopelessly generous and habitually in debt, thoroughly honest and recklessly impulsive. I suppose no one was very surprised when Jarmila joined the Resistance during the German Occupation and went to live with a group of Partisans in the Slovak woods. There she married a minor hero, but by the time of the Liberation they had split up, and Jarmila was left without money and had a baby girl on her hands. For a while she worked as a salesgirl, and then she began to sell her personal possessions.

"I hope you two won't fight all evening long," Janda said to his wife. He had always admired Jarmila for her kindness and loyalty.

"*I* don't fight," Marta replied. "It's Jarmila who starts those arguments. She's a reactionary, just like you, and doesn't want to understand that times have changed. Life is no longer merely a nice evening at a night club."

"Jarmila doesn't go to night clubs any more," Janda said.

"Well, she used to—a lot."

JARMILA arrived presently, bringing with her her daughter, Anna, a pretty six-year-old child who much resembled her mother. Most women in Prague now have a tired, beaten look; they don't bother much about hairdos and makeup, and they wear coats with collars that have been turned and shoes with worn heels. But not Jarmila. She had managed to clothe herself smartly, her nails were manicured, her eyelashes were mascaraed, and her hair was glossy and well cared for. She threw her arms around me and gave me a long, loud kiss. "God bless America, Pepík!" she said. "Have you seen my Billy?"

"That red-headed lieutenant I met here at the party?" I asked. It wasn't always easy to keep track of Jarmila's boy friends.

"No, that was Teddy. Billy was the dark captain with the Czech nose."

"It was an Irish nose," I said, remembering.

"Well, they're the same to me. The Czech nose was why I loved him so much. I still have his flag. Look!" She opened her jacket. On her blouse was a silver brooch with a small American flag in its center. "*Ježiš*, I'm tired!" she exclaimed after I had admired

it. "I've been all over town trying to find a pair of shoes."

"Didn't I tell you?" Marta said to her husband.

"Shoes for Anna, if you don't mind," said Jarmila. "Have you heard the latest joke about Martička?" Martička is a nickname for the wife of President Gottwald, a homely, plump, somewhat graceless woman, who is the butt of many popular gibes. "Somebody asked her, 'Madame President, are you going to "The Marriage of Figaro" tomorrow?' and she said 'No, I'm too busy, but I'm going to send them a telegram.' "

Jarmila and I laughed. No one else did. Janda looked annoyed. "Jokes," he said bitterly. "We've lost our freedom and our self-respect, and what are we doing? Cracking jokes."

"Now, don't get despondent, Karel," Jarmila said, and kissed him on the forehead. "It won't last forever. Nothing does. They will be here on the twenty-eighth of October."

"Who?" I asked. October 28th is Czechoslovakia's Independence Day.

"Who?" Jarmila repeated, with surprise. "Why, the Americans, of course. Didn't you know? I have it from somebody who has connections at the American Embassy. It's not mere gossip. My friend knows what he's talking about."

Janda sighed. "I don't know where you pick up all these stories, Jarmila," he said.

"It's no story, Karel," Jarmila said. "It's a fact. You tell us, Pepík," she went on, turning to me. "When are the Americans going to come and liberate us?" She was looking at me intently with eyes in which hope and hopelessness were mixed. I didn't answer. After a long silence, she drew a deep breath. "Just the same, someday they will be here," she said defiantly. "Let me have some wine, Karel." She drank her wine, and ate a canapé. "I ought to watch my figure, or I'll soon look like Martička," she said. "Have you noticed how people here eat all the time now?" she asked me. "It's as if they wanted to make up for all the food they couldn't get during the war. The girl at the post office eats bread with pork fat while she sells you stamps, and the stamps get all greasy, and the streetcar conductor has his mouth full of cake when he gives you your ticket."

"They've been hungry for years," said Marta.

"That's no reason for them to behave like pigs," said Jarmila. "What a beautiful city Prague was! Now it's beginning

to look like a big Russian village. Of course, that's exactly what those gentlemen up in Hradčany Castle want. Then their protectors from the real Russian villages will feel perfectly at home here. Don't you think Prague has changed, Pepík? Have you seen the people's faces? Mean faces. What has become of all the people with good, decent faces? Have they all died?"

"A lot of them have," Janda said. "First the Germans killed the Czechs and the Jews, and then the Czechs killed the Sudeten Germans, and now the Czechs are killing the Czechs."

Jarmila poured herself another glass of wine. "Anna, go play with Matilda," she said, then turned to me. "She always sticks with the grownups. Never wants to play with other children."

Anna shook her head. "I don't want to play with Matilda," she said. "She's a Communist."

I was astonished, but apparently no one else was. "Anna!" Jarmila said sharply. "I told you not to talk like that when you come here!"

"You should be ashamed to teach her those things," Marta said to her sister. "Anna is six and talks like a grown-up."

"Well, what she says is true, isn't it?" Jarmila demanded. "Matilda and her fat Russian marshals! Last week she spent an hour showing Anna pictures from Russia. Anna asks me why all the people in those pictures look so well dressed. Sure, why shouldn't they, taking away the things we make and sending us second-rate wheat in return, as if we didn't have enough bread to eat anyway. Yesterday, I was riding in the bus with Anna, and the conductor and I got to talking, and I told him that I was trying to find a pair of shoes for Anna but they were all far too expensive. I said there seemed to be certain people who could afford them, and he agreed. Then a man with a Party badge got on and we stopped talking, but when I left the bus the conductor whispered, 'Don't worry, they won't last forever. The Germans always talked of a thousand years, and we threw them out after six.'"

Marta said, "Someday you're going to talk to the wrong man, and then you'll be in trouble. You're crazy to wear that American flag in times like these."

"I don't change my loyalty every year," Jarmila said. "The other day, a man on the streetcar told me to take off the flag. I asked him what right he had to give me orders. He said he was an *údernik* [Stakhanovite] in the steel in-

dustry. 'Very nice,' I said. 'I suppose you were a steelworker all through the war, helping make guns for Hitler? Maybe even an *üdernik*, getting double food rations from the Germans?' You should have seen his face! At the next stop, he got out. I'm still wearing my American flag."

"Just the same, it's not *prudent*, Jarmila," said Marta. "Someday you'll get yourself in trouble."

"You mean someday I may get you all into trouble? Well, don't worry, I won't. If anything should happen to me, I'll make it perfectly clear that all the members of my family are loyal worshippers at the altar of Comrade Gottwald."

"Oh, for God's sake, stop fighting, you two!" said Janda. "We have a guest tonight."

"A guest from America is no guest," said Jarmila. "He's a friend. Here's to America!" She emptied her glass.

Janda turned to me. "I should have known," he said. "I should have taken you to a restaurant. We could have talked about old times without having to listen to all these stupid arguments."

"Why shouldn't Pepik listen to them?" Jarmila said. "Let him find out what goes on in a family in Prague these days. The same thing is going on in practically every damned house in the country. People sit at home and stare at each other and are afraid of each other. Children fight their parents and their parents are afraid of them. I wanted to take Anna to 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,' but they told her in school she ought to go only to Russian pictures. Who wants to see those tractors and wheat fields and the wonderful life on a collective farm? If they're so happy there, why do they bother with us? Why don't they leave us alone?"

"Some Russian pictures are very good," said Marta.

"Well, you should know. You've seen them all. Does the janitress give you orders to go, the dirty informer?"

"If everybody you call an informer was one, half the nation would be sitting in prison today," Marta said.

"Well, they are, aren't they?"

"Oh, be quiet! You talk like a Fascist."

"And what are *you*, if I may ask?" Jarmila shouted.

"I'm a—a democrat!" Marta shouted back.

"Oh, quiet, both of you!" Janda said. "I'm sick and tired of your squabbling. Let's have dinner, shall we?"

Marta bit her lip. "I'll go and see if

it's done," she said, and went into the kitchen.

The rest of us sat silent for some time. Anna kept looking at me with big, startled eyes. Finally, Jarmila stood up. "I'd better go and help Marta," she said. "Come on, Anna." They went out.

JANDA leaned back on the couch and rubbed his eyes. "Now they'll have a good cry out there," he said. "And they'll make up, because they are really very close to each other. But in five minutes the same thing will start all over again. It has become a disease. Sometimes when Jarmila is here I stay at the office until ten o'clock at night so I won't have to come home and listen to these eternal arguments. Marta is very cross with me because I don't take her side against Jarmila, as she puts it. But I can't help respecting Jarmila, though she often talks a lot of nonsense. She could marry a very high-ranking Communist official. He's an able man, and he's honest; he's been an organizer for twenty-five years and never made any bones about it. Jarmila could have a villa and a car and plenty of shoes and clothes for Anna, but she won't even go out to dinner with this man, or to a night club, and you know what *that* means to Jarmila. She has no money to pay the rent and she lives from one day to the next by selling her clothes. I'll bet you when Marta told her you were here, she put on her last good dress and her only pair of nylons. A few weeks ago, this man got her an offer of a very good job, as assistant manager in a store. Of course, in order to get the job she would have to have a trade-union card, and to get the card she would have to join the Party. The man told her that it would be a mere formality, but Jarmila said no." Janda sighed. "I wish I had her strength of character," he said.

"But you have a wife and two kids," I said.

"This thing has brought out the best in a few people and the worst in the rest," Janda said. "No one has remained the same. I sleep very badly now, and when I'm lying there in the dark, I try to remember what my life was like before all this happened. My worst problems once were seeing Antonín through an attack of pneumonia and making Marta stick to her budget. I thought at the time I had worries enough, but what were they compared to the present? There was never a night when I went to bed and wondered, as I do every night now, whether I would

wake up as usual in the morning or whether they would come and get me before. They always come at dawn, to avoid attention. Remember that lawyer, Dr. M., who spent every spring in Monte Carlo? They came for him at dawn three weeks ago."

"Why?"

Janda raised his hands and let them fall in a gesture of despair. "There is no why," he said. "They just came for him, that's all. No one knows where he went—probably to one of the labor-and-correction camps, to be made into a useful member of Marxian society. If he's lucky, he'll be released in from three to six months. Meanwhile, his apartment has been given to new tenants and his furniture has been sold to them, and his paintings and books and silver have disappeared. When he comes back, he'll have to take a job in a factory, and his metamorphosis into a proletarian will be complete."

"But he must have done *some*thing," I said.

"Oh, sure. He was an enemy of the state. You see, a lawyer is no longer permitted to keep professional secrets. He must report to the authorities on his clients and their confidential affairs, and if a case is against what is called the interest of the nation he cannot take it on. A lawyer can't even handle an income-tax case, because that would be against the interest of the nation. Do you understand now why so many middle-class people have joined the Communist Party? They want to remain in the middle class. The middle class is the core of the Party. Party members get jobs, vacations, apartments, seats at the opera. And middle-class people who don't join the Party are proletarianized into the new working class, a secondary working class that has only duties and no privileges. And then they talk of the new classless society!"

THE front door opened and closed again, and Antonín entered the room. He was a tall, blond youth, and when he smiled, he reminded me of his father—of his father before the revolution. He had a friendly face and friendly eyes, and he had about him some of the lightheartedness that Janda once had. In his corduroy jacket and slacks, he could have passed for an American college boy. He pumped my hand and said it was great that I had come to visit them. "How is America?" he asked. "God, how I wish I could go there!" There was an awkward moment of silence, and

then he added lamely, "For a visit, I mean."

"I wish you could go there and stay there," Janda said quietly. "Only don't tell your mother."

"What happened to the jeep you had in the Army?" Antonín asked me. I said the government had probably disposed of it long ago. "What a car!" he said. "Remember when we went up that hill behind the viaduct in high? I think it would have run on water just as well as gas. I saw pictures of your new cars in a magazine at the United States Information Service. They're getting bigger all the time. How can you ever park cars like that?"

I said a lot of Americans were trying to find the answer to that one.

Marta called us into the dining room. As we gathered around the table, she brought in soup plates, and Jarmila followed with a tureen. Their eyes were red; Janda had been right. We all sat down, Jarmila beside me, Anna next to her, Antonín and Matilda opposite us, and their parents at either end of the table. "How is the handsome Marshal tonight?" Antonín asked his sister. "I hope you've had a talk with La Passionaria, here," he said to me. "She loves a marshal, and she doesn't mean Montgomery."

Matilda bridled. "Reactionary!" she said.

"Antonín! Matilda!" Marta said. The children subsided, and Marta changed the subject by telling me that in my honor she had set the table with her best china. "I used to keep it for extra-special celebrations," she said. "Once, Emma broke a cup, and I was heartbroken, but now I wouldn't care. We may as well use it before we have to sell it, like the piano."

"I don't have those worries any more," Jarmila said cheerfully. "I've sold everything already."

AFTER dinner, the women and the girls went to the kitchen to wash the dishes. Janda dug up another bottle of wine, and he, Antonín, and I returned to the living room. Antonín sat down with a Russian grammar and started to study. Janda said that at the *Gymnasium*, where Antonín was in the eighth grade, Russian was the most important foreign language, but that the boy was also taking Latin, English, and French.

Presently, Antonín looked up from his book. "They've finally found Karásek," he said to his father.

"In the same place?" Janda asked.

"Yes. His mother went there today

and wanted to give him a change of underwear and a little extra food, but they wouldn't let her."

"I hope you weren't mixed up in this," Janda said. He looked worried. "Your mother cried all one night last week, she was so upset about it."

"There's nothing to be mixed up in, Father."

"Just the same, I wish you'd keep away from those boys and stick to your work." Janda turned to me. "Three weeks ago, two of Antonín's classmates suddenly disappeared. Their parents were frantic, of course. Then, last week, word came from one of them. He was in a cell at police headquarters. You can imagine what *that* means. Now it seems the other boy, the one we're talking about, is there, too. Probably been questioned somewhere for days about anti-state activities."

"Anti-state, hell!" said Antonín. "They found some American magazines and passed them around in the classroom, and the Latin teacher saw them. That's all there was to it. That teacher pretends to be a reactionary, but we think he's just a stool pigeon for the police. He found out about the song, too."

I asked what song.

"Half our class is against the Communists," the boy replied. "When we want to needle the other guys, we sing the song. Want to hear it?" I nodded, and he grinned and started to sing a Czech translation of "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't sing that—at least not so loud," Janda said. "I wish you'd be more careful."

"I *am* careful, Father," said the boy. "But what's the use? You can't fool *them*. They know I'm a Westerner." He started to hum the Air Force song.

Janda said to me, "Antonín is treated unfairly in school. Last year, when there was some sort of public celebration, he and his friends who aren't members of the Communist Youth Organization had to stay and clean the schoolhouse while the other boys went off to watch the fun."

Matilda came in. Antonín stopped humming. "Careful, men," he said mockingly. "La Passionaria is back."

The girl sat down. "I know all about Antonín," she said to the room at large. "He's a member of the reactionary group in his class. I know about his song, too."

"Matilda!" shouted Janda.

"I've been listening behind the door!" she said triumphantly, stamping

on the floor. "Yes, I have, I have, I have!"

Janda got up. I had never seen his face so sharp and white, and I thought he was going to strike the child. "You go to your room and don't you dare come out!" he said to her. "I don't want to see you any more tonight. That's for listening behind doors. Out!"

Matilda crossed her legs deliberately, and then uncrossed them. "All right, all right," she said at last. "I'm going." She stalked out.

Janda stood rigid. The veins in his temples were pulsing. Then he sat down and rubbed his face with his palms. "The happy Janda family, you used to call us," he said to me. "Well, you've seen the happy family."

"Matilda is silly, Father," Antonín said. "The other day, she threatened to denounce me and—"

"Shut up!" Janda shouted. "Shut up and study your Russian!"

Marta and Jarmila came in. They said they had put Anna to bed in Marta's room. "What's the matter with you?" Jarmila asked Janda. "Had another argument?"

Janda didn't answer. He went into the kitchen, and came back with a bottle of brandy. He filled a glass, sat down, and took a big swallow. Antonín went off to study in his bedroom. The rest of us talked about old friends who had gone abroad or disappeared or were "sitting," meaning that they were in jail.

THE doorbell rang. Janda sat up stiffly and looked apprehensively at his wife. "Who's that?" he asked.

Marta said, "Oh, my God!"

Jarmila stood up. "I'll see," she said. "Don't worry, Karel." She went out and opened the front door. There were voices, and then Jarmila came back, followed by the janitress, who had a shawl around her shoulders and was still in her bedroom slippers. Jarmila winked at me. "Mrs. P. was wondering," she said to Janda.

"Wondering?"

"Whether you'll take Pepík down when he leaves and lock the door after him. She's going to bed now."

Janda looked puzzled. "Why, of course I'll take him down," he said. "I always take our guests down and lock the door after them, Comrade P."

The janitress looked around the room. "It's a regulation, Comrade," she said. "They don't want to have to worry about doors being left open." She stared at me. "Especially when there are strangers around."

"But he's no stranger," Marta said.

"Don't you remember him? He's been here before."

"How about a glass of wine?" said Janda. "Good Moravian wine."

"A good idea," the janitress said. She took the glass and at once lost interest in me. "To your health!" She drank, and put the glass down. "Well, I'm going to bed. Good night. Be sure to lock the door, Comrade Janda."

We heard the front door close. Marta got up, looked into the hall, and came back. "She's gone," she said, almost in a whisper.

"The dirty informer!" Jarmila said.

"Yes," said Janda. "Tomorrow everybody will know that Pepík was here."

Marta said, "Have a little more wine, Pepík. And how about an apple?"

I said thanks, but I thought I'd better be going, because I had an appointment early in the morning. I said good night to the women, and then Janda and I walked downstairs. He unlocked the street door and stepped outside with me. The street was dark and deserted.

"How long am I going to be able to stand this life?" Janda said softly, as if to himself. "Another year—eighteen months at the most—and my savings will be gone. They'll throw us out of the house. Maybe they'll throw us out before. Maybe we'll all be split up." He took a deep breath. "Good night," he said. "I'd better go up now. I'll phone you."

He went back into the hallway and shut the door. As I started down the lonely street, I heard him turn the key in the lock. I knew he wouldn't phone me, and he knew he wouldn't, and he didn't. —JOSEPH WECHSBERG

•

The bride attended Orcas High School and is a permanent member of the young set.—*Sedro-Woolley* (*Wash.*) *Orcas Islander.*

Oh, it always seems that way.

•

She began at the Kansas state line and rode until she came to Enid. With a cry of triumph she slid from her badly lathered horse into a dead faint.—*Sausalito* (*Calif.*) *News.*

A welcome change.

•

NO COMMENT DEPARTMENT

[*From Opportunity*]

It's an ill wind that blows no one any good.

International tension over Korea is spurring buying and recent reports from the field show that direct sales are really zooming.