

What does Papa say? They will make war on Soviet Russia, you will see. I know—I've been over there. They're no good. Tyrants. They don't like socialism at all. They're afraid. The people might find out something. And Hitler! Ugh! What a monster! Look," she continued thoughtfully, "see what I do, you have this, carrots and this, a meatball, and a bit of tomato soup—will you eat, my darling? . . . What time do you get up? I get up at seven. They— young and sleep so late. Pooh! Look at my self-baster. Ah! that is something they have special in America. But in France I got this chopper. It's the best in the world. Well, each place has good and bad. But Hitler—there's something altogether bad—well, well—you are my angel. But you must work, Tootsy."

Grandmother, plump and young, in the possession of her chicken, was no longer the dusty hag of Audubon Avenue, but had become the self-respecting old lady of our London apartment.

## CHAPTER XXII

ONCE or twice out of kindness I went and stayed with Grandmother, when Lily Spontini was absent. Lily often spent nights with her girl friends.

I shared the sitting-room with Edie and slept on Lily's iron cot. It wore out my patience to stay in the dirty, wretched place, into which vermin crept and which was covered with street dust. It was hot in the heat, cold in the cold. Shouts and cries entered it on both sides. The bathroom and kitchen were not more than compartments in a dark passageway. These compartments, into which hardly any light came, were full of women's old dingy clothing, half wet or rough dry. The drains were clogged. Boys and men living in the house knew the trick of the broken door lock and could push it open. At night the girls pushed the bolt which hardly held in the eaten wood. Yet these apartments were considered of quite good rank, and there were even women who thought Grandmother well off having an apartment to herself which she could rent out.

It was intolerable to me. It was weeks since Edie had spoken a word to my grandmother, and after one night of it, I felt that way myself. Only a weakling would put up with it, I thought, despising Edie. I scolded Grandmother and told her to move out at once and send the news to my father. She must live decently.

Grandmother was broken with disappointment, and with the idea that "there were no more stops on the line; she was almost at her

terminus." I asked the English girl why she treated Grandmother so badly, and then she told me strange tales about the old lady, which I was unable to believe.

"She's a liar, a hypocrite, a cadger, and sly as a fox," said Edie. "She gets letters from her son every week and saves his money by sweating us. And that Lily is loose—gone to the bad."

This unlikely description of my dear little grandmother, and Cousin Lily, who were both merely poor strugglers, worried me. I thought: Am I mad, is she mad, or is Grandmother mad? Then the poor girl went on to tell me of her own troubles. She began to speak glowingly of the home she had left. She told about the home Grandmother had promised her in America. I think poor Jenny Fox had been dreaming of living with Grandmother Morgan.

"And I, who lived in luxury at home, was not satisfied," said Edie; "well, for instance, she told me that for a dollar here, only four shillings, you could be dressed like a princess, and at the same time wages were so high that every girl could save money and get a husband. Working girls went on world tours or to the Bahamas or to Paris. And, of course, I've seen them myself."

I said: "How could you believe such things? You must know if wages are high, prices are high. I thought your sisters were socialists. One of your sisters is even a communist. I know. I've seen her selling the *Daily Worker* in Baker Street, London."

She said: "I never troubled my head with such rubbish and I didn't think they should have. Attracting attention; making us look queer."

"I'm a communist," I said.

"You," she answered sharply, "what difference does it make to you? You've got two rich grandmothers and a wagonload of other relations. It's real selfish of my sisters to bring that trouble to the house. The police came once." She continued: "If you saw what we had at home. Axminsters, Chippendale furniture, and Wedgwood. We've an Adams door, and it's on one of those quiet, lovely squares—"

She went on with her dreamy description, breaking into it with her sharp notes, which made it very real.

"How long have you been living there?" I asked, in surprise.

"For years and years. My youngest sister was born there. I went away and lived with my married sister, but I came back to it. They were too selfish."

"Yes," I said, smirking.

"You see, married people get very small-minded. The least thing they flare up. To pieces, they go to pieces like an old chair; the dust

flies. Any little thing that goes wrong and they want to throw you out and it's all over. A fine friendship—finished. She's the same, your grandmother. It's the petty life. Just to go out and pick in other people's plates. That's not much of an aim in life, is it? That was theirs. And never took me. Out of the money I gave them for the rent, I got nothing, a bare roof over my head. Nothing like I had at home. They must have thought I was cracked. The village goose; born to be plucked. I always remember your father telling me, in London, you can fool the people the one time, but you can't fool them all of the time. Have you heard him say that? It is true. It is true. Isn't it?"

"That's not quite it, but—yes."

"I've often thought——"

"But the sentiment is more or less right. It's this way——"

"True, right you are," said Edie, "not a truer word. Like I said to my brother-in-law. I am not as green as I am cabbage looking. I thought my society would suit them. What a nice compact you have. Is that real? Things are expensive here. . . . And there's no hot water here most of the time. I can't stand it, I tell you!"

"I'm darned if I would."

"You don't have to. Anyhow, I'm fed up with this gold coast. I'm going home. I've got things better at home. And no strange men coming in. I don't think it's right, if your grandmother does. A young man sleeping in the kitchen, with two young women here."

"What?"

"She says it's her nephew, Bert Hart. And a policeman on the opposite side of the street, all day, two days now, watching for him, because he did something. A nice young man, sweet she says; because he brought the old fool a cream cake."

"Say," I said, "don't talk about Grandma that way. She's old, but not a fool. What's this about a cop?"

It turned out that Bert, Lily Spontini's cousin, had climbed in at their front window in this apartment, nearly killed Grandmother with fright, and had slept on the floor of Grandmother's room until morning. They had come knocking at the door saying that a man had been seen climbing in at the window. Grandmother said no and looked such a frightened thing in her crumpled white flannel night-gown and her little white pig-tails, that they just gave an appreciative grin at the two girls in bed, and went out again.

But both the girls were wide awake with fear. They believed that Grandmother was harbouring a criminal intentionally. He hid in the flat and slept in the kitchen. He was a pretty boy, seventeen, dark-eyed, cowardly. He said he had taken some pictures from

someone's apartment. "They asked me to have them valued and now they say I stole; perhaps I misunderstood them."

He told Grandmother she had plenty of room and that he would move in till he found a job. He had a pretty girl, with a ten-thousand-dollar dowry, on a string, just round the corner and would bring her to see Grandmother any day now. He left the apartment by the back window at nightfall to go and visit his girl, and came back after the movies were out.

Grandmother sullenly hated Bert's elder brother, aged thirty-five, who was "a loafer and was pulling twenty dollars out of the air, on relief, just like that and would not have his young brother with him." This man had had the misfortune to visit poor Grandmother, without a cream cake.

This was not all. A foreign woman, old, but younger than Grandmother, was persecuting her every day, trying to get space in the flat. This woman was a White Russian. She had been a revolutionary, she told Grandmother (when she discovered that Grandmother was an old-time socialist), and had run away from home as a girl and gone to Moscow to learn what to do. Later on, a worker in a district council, she had met her husband, who had become a general under Denikin——

"Don't tell me another Russian General," I cried.

But Edie, in perfect good faith, went through to the end.

They had one son, aged ten, who sat all day on the toilet seat and read. No one could get in; but the boy was "brilliant and it was the only place he had to himself!" They were being dispossessed this week; the sidewalk was their next address. My grandmother must, must share her home with them. The woman elbowed her fiercely: "What right have you to a roof when others have none—think—an old man, a young child! Throw these boarders out. They have money! Make your son get you a larger place. You say he had a palace in London!"

Mrs (General) Rode was a woman of great force, a terrible pest; she would not go. Everything she wanted was not only her right, but part of a Bill of Rights for Mankind. The husband, a bent, mean creature, came for her sometimes. She spent the day in the flat, brow-beating Grandmother, and eating her poor victuals. When she went, Grandmother had not the strength to eat anything, but sat with dark circles under her eyes, a face of stone; and she became troubled in her mind.

The accusations that Mrs Rode invented against Solander took body before her. Thus she sometimes thought Solander was a libertine and wastrel who laughed at her and spent her hard-earned

money. This was nothing to what Mrs Rode said, for Mrs Rode could begin at nine in the morning (when she came with her husband for her morning tea), in the tone of a prosecuting attorney, and timed herself so well that her peroration would wind up exactly at six, when she was obliged to go and cook lentils for her husband. They went to bed without tea at night and without bread or light, simply because Grandmother refused to have them there. Jenny Fox was even glad of her nephew's presence in the flat. Mrs Rode had been a little easier to get away. But she told Mrs Fox that her nephew was a scoundrel, and would be in the jug in two weeks. She laughed to scorn the story about the ten-thousand-dollar dowry.

"He wants your money! Old women are afraid of burglars, and it is always their nephews who kill them."

Grandmother lived in horror. But Mrs Rode was not a vampire. All she had in mind was to get a little bit of Grandmother's floor space for herself.

Grandmother was flattered because the woman next door often knocked on the wall to know if she could come in and talk to her. She was a lovely young wife, Grandmother thought, with two beautiful children; "a pleasure to look at them". But what did she really want? She wanted to keep the children's clothes in one of the two unpainted wooden closets the girls had put in; "I have so many children and there is no closet space in these miserable apartments."

I listened to this, lying on my back, with my eyes on the ceiling. I could not let Edie see my feelings. I was puzzled, too. I knew now Edie was a liar. She must have forgotten that I had once been with Grandmother to the place she lived in, in London. It was in a black street, one block long, off Wardour Street. On one side was a brick wall, enclosing a yard. On the other were narrow tenement houses in very bad condition. It was one of those slums, rich in returns to ducal owners. In the basement of one of these, completely below ground-level, was a two-room flat running back and front. In the front room, Edie's respectable and honourable family had attempted to arrange a friendly sitting-room. It was clean; a fire was generally necessary in the grate on account of the damp and cold; and two little china vases stood on the mantelpiece. The sisters grouped themselves round the mantelpiece and people looked at the vases. On a bookstand were the usual English classics: Bunyan, Shakespeare, the Bible, one volume from the *International Scientific Series* (this was *Hummingbirds*), something on the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, a novel about the Indian Mutiny, some Dickens, and some socialist classics. On the mantelpiece were communist pam-

phlets and standard works. A red cloth covered the table. Apart from tables and chairs this was all they owned.

The father was dying of tuberculosis, and one of the daughters had it. The mother was dead. The girls filled the room with life and one was quite plump, but Edie had sat mournfully to one side, dark, slender, and dissatisfied with everything; ashamed, as I now knew. As for me, I despised them all. I never could stand anything poor, wretched and ugly. If I am a socialist, it is just because of that.

I came home to tell my mother about all these would-be boarders. We both wrote very indignant letters to my father. Why should Grandma live in this misery? Where was her money? He must come back and get her a better apartment.

### CHAPTER XXIII

HERE is the last letter I received from Jacky before she rejoined us. She had now left the Aunt and come home to Green Acres to live with Grandma Morgan. Grandma was holding another pow-wow there, because she had received a marriage proposal, by air mail, from an aged physician in California. My belief is that Grandma never intended to marry, at her age, but used these romances as a means of keeping her by now middle-aged and married family round her in her declining years. Jacky's letter ran:

Green Acres Inn, New Canaan  
Oct. 20, 1936

DEAR LETTY,

Here I am! Merry Hallowe'en! I am sending you a parcel (an Indian doll) and wish you the best, as, to become the secretary of an American Stalin. If I haven't written to you, here's the reason. Aunt Phyllis and her latest husband, Bob, were here at our place, Green Acres, for the week-end. When your letter came, everyone wanted to read it. "Letty is so cute." If you recall the text—it wasn't showable! Pretending to hand it to Aunt Phyllis, I dropped it in the frog pond by accident—only, by the same accident, the letter became quite smeary and I forgot where you would be for Hallowe'en, and Mother only just got here. Here is the reason for my silence. Mother's visit is dull and of course they discuss family affairs. They ask: "How are we to live?" Grandma paid up at Santa Fe! We only have the money Papa sends us and he is not a money-maker. Mother has money from Grandfather's estate, but

cannot get it from Grandma Morgan's brothers, as they want it for the business. We have so many expenses and poor Mother, as you know, spends up to the hilt. And yet we do not live like princes and do not throw it around and Mother just dresses in that black and white and is absolutely white-haired. I myself don't see why she doesn't dye it, as they all say, but she thinks it would look as if she wished to marry again, which, of course, would be shocking. They say she had a dreadful life; Grandma and Grandpa were so busy making money they had not a moment and Grandma lived twenty-three hours a day, only not for the children. Mother says when she wanted money for a new dress, at eight years old, she used to go to the pinochle room and pull Grandma's dress: Grandma always just answered: "I meld," or something. We are supposed to be going to *Mexico* with Dora and Uncle Philip next year in spring. It is very high (Mexico City). Philip chose this because we will all be rich with the exchanges. Mamma says it is because the girls are so pretty. Philip says he wants to help Papa; he is fond of Papa and says Papa is a very good, kind man. He told me privately he *knows Die Konkubine!* He has known her since the beginning, but Mamma does not know this! Philip says she (D.K.) is nice! But I know now he sees everything from the standpoint of his own moral weakness. Consider this!

From the political point of view! I am nearly fourteen, am very proud, have got fat, have great hopes not well defined, how could you expect me to be a communist? Isn't that for the depressed? I don't understand political views except on the part of the wretched, of snobs, or of people like you, with a vague hope of success. Think it over a bit; you think it's wonderful of you to fuss about the unfortunate, you want to give them a sovietical happiness. Put yourself in their place instead! Would you like to lead a life regulated from one end to the other, work from this hour to that on this day or that without any choice on your part? Would you be happy? Wouldn't you go mad thinking that the entire world had a life built on your design, hour for hour, day for day? To be forced to stay where you were, never to travel, to be tied to one job, one set of meals, one type of entertainment (oh, I saw some agitprop—I won't say a word of what I think), to belong to a political club, to be bored to death with political duties and the impertinence of one hundred thousand citizen critics and commissars coming to tell you how to draw and write: and all your equals! I invent *nothing*. I met a boy whose father and mother were there. They have nothing to fear, they are rich liberals and can pay for everything; they had the best of everything; just the same, the food was

terrible, and the bedbugs (I have to write this awful word), in the hotels: and—much worse, I cannot write it. They took away their photographs for *inspection!* But this is not the main thing, I admit. I deny the beauty in a soviet government. Literature—art—where are they? Aren't they life? Otherwise we are ants and bees. Read—you'll realize—the poetry and prose are nothing. Of course, I put this old trickster Gorki on one side, he's a dilettante, who does not believe, who goes from place to place and is fêted everywhere, has no rent to pay. When they asked Baudelaire the source of his genius, he replied—leisure, liberty—where could you find piquancy, originality in your infernal Russian paradise? Genius is not an automaton which produces, salivates, and digests at regulated hours when you press a button. How could you describe the world if it's unknown to you (because *the world* doesn't punch the clock)? What reasonings could a writer or artist have in Russia? False, based entirely on his imagination! Our world, he doesn't know. Their world is inhuman. And why write? All writing would be identical! What is writing? It is to see the "cases" around you and make a book about them explaining the causes of suffering and love; it is not to support political doctrines. I simply state that I don't care for the exasperating "benefits" of communism. I prefer to suffer and beg.

You foresaw this, and you said to me—Fascism would be equally intolerable to me. I am an American, in other words, quite incapable of putting up with any such systems. That's true. Now, I admire Stalin as much as Mussolini, Gorki as John Dos Passos, Leonardo da Vinci as Delacroix. I am not prejudiced. A friend of these people we know—who went to Russia—have a house in 55th Street and have Delacroix, Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse, Van Gogh, Cézanne originals, also some El Grecos of dubious authenticity, but one certain Rembrandt—you see they have no *axe* to grind, they have everything—they have a friend in Paris who was a high official in the Veterans' *Croix de Feu*, and who knew a communist who had much protection in high official circles (can you imagine it?) and he spent 150,000 francs yearly on 15 casual mistresses, one queen of the harem and one legal wife, the whole regiment lived very well—and that, Letty, is a communist! Very nice. I don't doubt it appealed to him. But that is Mormonism! I don't think you'd care to be even the legal wife in such a *garrison* of women. You must look *reality* in the face. And this golden calf, which you would have adored, once elected, you can imagine, how he will fill his pockets! Well, he'll have to!

You say you know the theory and I don't know a word of it.

Well, that's true, but fortunately, I know the *practical*! If the U.S.A. or England become soviet, my child, the best I can wish an enthusiast like you, is that you will be one of the ones on top. At least better for my sister Letty, just the same, to oppress, than to suffer things like that! I am getting an autograph of *James Joyce*, and will give it to you for New Year's. He is nearly blind and walks very slowly with a stick, but pretends he can see. Oh, the God of eyes, he is not a kind God. I must confess I don't like what I said to you about this last year; I do not believe any more in the God of eyes. How childish I was. Look at the paper I am using! I got it from the Green Acres desk just now; I love the gold initial, but alas, it is not mine. I read Gorki, Gide, Merejkowski, Dostoevski, Napoleon, Goethe, Dos Passos, Dreiser—so much. I am half mad with the excitement and joy of living. You see, I could not bear for them to take it away from me and put me in a factory. I read from morning to night—I get quite breathless and pale, but don't stop. "Look out for your eyes! My eyes are wonderful!" I read Delacroix's journal. Now I am *sure* I am an artist. I got all the books I saw mentioned in the Columbia University year-book for the first year (I mean I am getting them one by one) and I am reading them all. Oh, the thirst for knowing things! I love it, I adore my life. When I go there, I'll say: "Put me in Second Year!" Of course, they won't. Imagine I am to go to Hunter and I will know so much more. I am swallowing the classics alive; Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, bad art, no art, socialist art, I should say; what a sickly creature she is, and of course she marries well—pooh! Yes, and I myself a year ago was talking about princes—according to myself then, he (V.H.) is right, young girls are sickly and I was one. Then Jack London (I like animals), *Life of Talleyrand*; Spinoza, I am trying to understand and think I can, but it is the beauty of man and Spinoza's style more than his ideas, though I am now become an atheist and *understand* this. Then I am collecting gramophone records, Tetrizzini, Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, Nellie Melba, Emma Calvé; and I have ninety-eight autographs. I write to them, as soon as I read a review or critique (good or bad, for some famous people have started out with *bad* reviews), but it is only if the critique, good or bad, gives me that glorious burning feeling of the soul that tells me, I am in the presence of genius. Oh, genius! It is my life. I am living only for it. One day I will meet a genius, or more than one, male and female. I have seen all the plays in New York this month and every new movie. (Here followed a list, with annotations upon the love relations and marriages of all the actors and actresses, as well as glowing commendations of all the roles she

had seen them in.) Martha Graham, etc., etc. I am saving every penny I can to get the autographs of some of the *illustrious dead*, like Napoleon (that's impossible, unless I charm some of the possessors of unique collections, like Prince Wolkowski—but he did not give me a fencing-foil, after all), Duse, Oscar Wilde, Duncan—you see how ambitious I am! Life is really maddeningly *delicious*! All this makes me mad with enthusiasm for things as they are now. I do not find life dreary, you see, and long for some other system—and I can't believe that you do. No need for any revolution. I read Paul and Virginia; how delicious it is, how true, this beautiful, pure, dazzling, innocent love like brother and sister—I could feel that; that is how we wish to feel. Look how Shelley suffered! Yet I suppose there is a great temptation to really physically love and the probing of a love to its depths, however bitter, must be *unlike any other human experience*. But I will be quite satisfied with a noble friendship, with some great and glorious, or noble and splendid man; I would be quite satisfied to find a man, or rather a young man, who could feel this with me, utter equality, and at the same time, rapturous love on his part, unconscious, exalted gallantry! I love, that is the secret: he loves, that must be the secret. So you see I have no time for conventions, processions, placards, meetings, reports to the secretary-general and all the dreary paper-shifting which you *ignore*, for you are just inflamed by your own speeches. You simply wish to feel the excitement of crowds as I wish to feel this grand, splendid, etc., etc., love; and will you ever feel like me? I do not know.

I will visit New York from top to bottom next week, and all by myself; they have agreed I can now go about alone! I am going to all the museums and all the art shops and visit all the shops, to know what is going on and get to know everything, but do not think I am supine; I have resolved *not to follow anyone*; I must not even admire the old masters, nor take the classics for granted. I am myself an artist, I must accept nothing. I must get to the bottom of everything. What is the basis of criticism? I have so much to talk to you about—about life, what will happen to us in a few years. We are women! That is important in our lives. I have thought about it, things one cannot write. People read your letters to me and I must warn you certain things have come out without any fault of mine. You are so dizzy, you write about "romantic contacts, emotional experience, and a casual kiss which I can't forget"—as if it were necessary to write this. Aren't we much alike on this side? I'll ask you about your work, life, friends, theatre, cinemas, books, grandmas, and others but not all others, unless we are

alone—and even about politics, if you must and if you don't try to convert me; above all, we will talk of the sexual life but not in public. We'll have a long serious conversation about it—it's necessary, for we are beyond where grandmas and mammas can help us—and of course, it's profoundly fascinating. Don't bring up politics at our first meeting! I only saw you once in these recent months and you brought it up. It was so strange. I had a feeling we didn't get along. Terrible. Perhaps politics will separate us for life! If I saw any chance of that, I would *pretend to be on your side*; and what advantage would that be to you? I mean, I am thinking of your *political honour*. We are all well: we'll soon be together again. I am looking forward to it—and afraid. Oh, I hope our separate experiences have not separated us already. I get on well everywhere; why not with you?

Your JACKY.