

Sophia Nachalo and Yarostan Vocek

Letters of Insurgents (part 09/10)

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Contents

Yarostan's ninth letter	3
Sophia's ninth letter	29

Yarostan's ninth letter

Dear Sophia,

Your letter was as painful to read as it must have been to write. How can everything be over? How can workers without illusions about unions march back to work hailing their union's "victories"? How can a population that just woke up be back asleep?

We've been hearing rumors of an imminent invasion, of tanks massing at our borders, but those rumors disturb us infinitely less than the knowledge that "normal" life has resumed in your part of the world. We had begun to take it for granted that our fellow human beings in other parts of the globe were engaged in acts similar to our own. The council office and the commune, the occupied research center, the spreading general strike, had all become part of the geography of our world. You couldn't have shocked us more if you had told us a continent had sunk.

I was fascinated by Sabina's accounts and interpretations, but I have to admit I was shocked by her attitude to Titus Zabran. She treats him as George Alberts' confederate and as her enemy. When Mirna and Yara read your letter, they both acted as if their worst suspicions about Titus were confirmed, and they both subjected me to an extremely humiliating experience when I refused to join them in their condemnation of Titus. Both Jasna and I were so disturbed by Sabina's and your suggestions that we felt compelled to confront Titus directly. We learned that many of the facts Sabina revealed are true, but both Jasna and I are convinced that Sabina's totally negative attitude to the man is unjustified.

So much has happened here since Mirna and Yara returned from their excursion that I don't really know where to begin. The eagerness with which they greeted Sabina's "revelations" about Titus is due mainly to the fact that they seem to have argued with Jasna about Titus during their trip. Despite their enthusiasm about the excursion, the first thing Mirna and Yara talked about when they returned was Jasna's determination to marry Titus. Mirna told me indignantly, "Jasna seems set on destroying herself. Can you imagine what that man told her when she expressed admiration for Luisa, Vera and me? Those three women, he told her, don't deserve anyone's admiration, and certainly not yours. He then called all three of us shameless individualists who put their own personal satisfaction above the interests of their class!"

"What was Jasna's response?" I asked.

“She didn’t defend a single one of ‘those women.’ She proposed to him! She told Yara and me that Titus said such things only because he’s so lonely and isolated. She said as soon as she took him on an excursion like the one we were on, as soon as he saw what people were doing today, he’d stop being so bitter and contemptuous toward ‘those women.’ But I don’t believe it.”

“Mirna, are you sure you aren’t condemning Titus for having attitudes that you’ve only recently shed?” I asked. “During the first two years after my release all you ever told Yara was: ‘Stay out of trouble.’ Until your plant went on strike you seemed unable to imagine why anyone would want to go on strike. Zdenek even found reason to accuse you of being your own jailer. I’m sure Jasna is right. Titus will surely change when he realizes the extent of the changes taking place around him.”

“Why are you so defensive about him?” Mirna asked me. “Another thing he told Jasna was that Vera Krena isn’t really in love with that Povrshan man but with his wife.”

“That detail must have fascinated Yara.”

“It did,” Mirna told me, “But Titus didn’t tell Jasna that in order to fascinate Yara. He told it in order to prove that Vera wasn’t really a proletarian but a selfish individualist!”

Somewhat exasperated I shouted, “Vera Krena is not a proletarian; she’s one of the leading bureaucrats in this country! You seem determined on fitting whatever Titus said into Yara’s picture of him as Vesna’s murderer.”

Mirna’s response to my exasperation was, “An excursion would also do you a lot of good, Yarostan!”

The first result of my defense of Titus was that Yara and Mirna told me very little about their trip. I did learn that such excursions are not an isolated phenomenon. Mirna and her friends ran into other “workers’ delegations” wherever they went, and all of them seem to have been engaged in a similar search. Until your letter came, it seemed as if the human species were suddenly making a deliberate effort to discover itself, to explore the possibilities for starting anew. I also took part in this activity, although on a more limited scale, and my impressions were similar to theirs. I accompanied a delegation of carton plant workers to two other factories, and, contrary to what I told you in my last letter, the specifications for efficient carton production were neither my main interest nor that of my fellow “delegates.” The discussion of cartons was quickly displaced by questions about each other, our intentions, our analysis of our potentialities and our means. I also found certain things that disturbed me, both in Mirna’s and Yara’s brief account and among the workers I visited. I’ve often mentioned

Yara’s fascination with some of the leading bureaucrats. This seems to be extremely widespread. I met many workers who described reforms as enthusiastically as strikes comparable to the one that broke out at Mirna’s plant, and who praised reformist bureaucrats even while they were describing the possibilities for doing without them. This inability to distinguish the realization of one’s own desires from the “victory” of the representatives of “everyone’s desires” is particularly ominous in view of the disaster you’ve just described.

This willingness on the part of so many people to continue letting themselves be represented obviously allows the “representatives” of everyone’s liberation to remain at the “head” of a movement that seems to be on the verge of ending the history of representatives. Politicians with imagination, like our acquaintance Vera Krena, have been very agile, not only at keeping themselves from being dislodged, but at increasing their power. Krena has very successfully used an anti-political movement, a movement which is undermining the power of bureaucrats, to increase her own status and power. During the past week her “wing” of the bureaucracy accomplished a feat comparable to the puppet show in which you and I took part twenty years ago. A week ago today Vera Krena and several other members of the “reform” wing replaced several leading “conservatives” in important government posts. The hypocrisy of the slogans with which this “feat” was justified is comparable to that of the slogans we helped produce during the days you no longer remember so fondly. Vera was far less dishonest in the speech Jasna and I heard several months ago, when she had spoken of the need to democratize the bureaucracy by giving more power to people like herself. During last week’s events, when she finally acquired that power, she made public statements similar to those she had made during the radio broadcast I described to you. “It is not our aim to establish the iron dictatorship of a stratum of parasites, but to pave the way for the self-government of the producers,” she said, accepting a government portfolio. Among other “accomplishments” so far, the “new” bureaucrats have passed resolutions favoring the right to strike and the abolition of censorship, namely favoring activity that has been taking place for months. Another acquaintance of ours, Marc Glavni, has been demoted as a result of the recent “coup”, he is now a fourth secretary instead of a second secretary.

The day after Mirna and Yara returned from their trip, a vast demonstration took place, or rather a celebration of the “victory” of the reformist politicians. Almost all of the carton plant’s office workers and most of the production workers took part in this demonstration. Mirna and Yara went too. I stayed home. Your letter hadn’t come yet, but that day I already felt as if our former condition were being restored while we waved flags and shouted “victory.” The feeling was reinforced by what happened the following day. The radio announced that an “extraordinary session” of the heads of the military organizations of all the “fraternal countries” surrounding ours had been held. It was announced that the “fraternal countries” were surrounding ours with four million soldiers armed with the most modern weapons, including I forget how many tanks. This announcement is clearly a threat of invasion, an ultimatum: either reestablish authority in a situation which, in Glavni’s words, “threatens to get out of control,” or else authority will be reestablished by four million armed “brothers,” one for every three members of the population including children, old people, the disabled — probably a ratio of two armed “brothers” to every worker, a hundred tanks to every rifle ... Since we refused to heed Comrade Glavni’s counsel not to allow ourselves “to get out of control,” we will have to be “liberated” militarily for the second time by the same “liberators.” By demoting Glavni, the “reformers” seem to be more intelligent than he at implementing his own project. If this population is to be brought back “in control” without tanks and liberation armies, this can no

longer be done “under the leadership” of comrades like Glavni, but it can still be done under the leadership of reformers whose slogans refer to the most radical acts. Apparently the “fraternal allies” fear that this population is so far “out of control” that neither the conservatives nor the reformers will be able to reinstitute order. Their fear is of course my hope. What I hope is that the demonstrations of “solidarity” with politicians like Vera Krena are not renunciations of the willingness to move further, but confused affirmations of the desire for a society that doesn’t need politicians. I still think my hope is more than an empty wish. Among the people I’ve spoken to, even those who were unreservedly enthusiastic about the reformers’ governmental “victory” looked forward to more than the reestablishment of “order” decorated by the slogans of a revolution that failed to take place. I’m still convinced that the people around me want more than the seizure of power by their “comrades,” their union, their revolutionary tribunes. Maybe I’m nursing an illusion, but I’m convinced that below the enthusiasm for revolutionary demagogues there’s an undercurrent of desires which are seeking gratification, desires which cannot be vicariously satisfied, which cannot be carried by politicians the way programs can be carried. My own “education” in political “schools” has not done much to help me understand this undercurrent, but Mirna’s and Yara’s “insane behavior,” as well as your letters, have recently made me suspect that more was happening than I was able to see. But if I’m right, if this population can no longer be controlled either by the Marc Glavnis or the Vera Krenas, then what? A population out of control within “national boundaries” is like an animal in a zoo — it’s caged, imprisoned by zoo keepers; it isn’t a free population. The military apparatus surrounding us is like the tamer of a wild beast. Freedom inside a cage is still slavery. Our acts lose their human significance; we become freaks, monkeys. Those four million soldiers are workers like ourselves, they’re victims of the same repression. Yet they fail to recognize their likes inside the cage; their species-solidarity has either been blunted or removed; what they see is wild beasts “out of control.” Mirna’s excursion didn’t go far enough. Communication did take place, and in a cage larger than a circle of friends or even a factory — but still a cage. “Out of control” will become “freedom” only when there are no more cages, of any size; when the free human being becomes the “normal” human being. Your two previous letters had given us grounds to hope that the largest of cages, the “national” cages, had started to be destroyed. The events those two letters described suggested that our “lunacy” had started to become the “norm,” and the very act of exchanging letters with you suggested that it was possible to communicate across the most impassable of barriers. That’s why your newest letter dismays me more than the “fraternal ultimatum” broadcast over the radio. Your defeat reduces a struggle for life to a struggle for survival.

Ever since the announcement of the ultimatum I’ve sensed a certain “play-acting” not only at home, where I’ve come to expect it, but also in the carton plant. Unlike a previous occasion when tank maneuvers were announced, most people seem to be ignoring the announcement, acting as if the tanks weren’t real. But not only the tanks; the creative explorations in which we’re still engaged also seem to have lost their reality. For example at the carton plant, “delegations” have been leaving the plant daily, without any specific purpose; there seems to be

a determination to play out what is possible before the play ends. Mirna and Yara have carried this attitude to extremes; both seem determined to realize their wildest fantasies during a moment they already know to be finite. I have a feeling that the spirit has gone out of the exploratory activities, or rather that they are now being done in an altogether different spirit. We're no longer taking steps toward the creation of a new mode of social existence; we're acting as if we were on vacation from the old mode, as if we all knew, but didn't want to remember, that we would soon have to return to "normal life." For a population under continued military and police occupation for twenty-eight years, the tanks and occupation armies are "normal life"; the realization of desires is not part of "normal life"; dreams are realized only during vacations.

As if to confirm the fact that we were "only" on vacation, the city police have already started to act as if "normal" times were back. While reformist politicians are publicly calling for more "self-government," the police, who are now under the orders of "reformist" politicians, are already acting on the principle that "our fraternal allies" will accept the "reformists" into their fraternity only if the social order remains unreformed. We had a visit from the police (or rather I did, since Mirna and Yara were visiting Jasna) only two days after the ultimatum was announced, and they no longer behaved as they had several months ago, when the activity of their comrades in the political police was suspended. The police had visited us several months ago to inform us that our neighbor, Mr. Ninovo, had reported me for having "instigated" the demonstration at Yara's primary school; at that time they had apologized to me and had warned us about our neighbor. They weren't nearly as polite this time. Two officials came to the house last Saturday. They lectured to me about the fact that there was enough disorder in this society, and that consequently people did not need to add to it by "provocations and pranks against their own neighbors." They then told me two large snakes had been placed in Mr. Ninovo's house several months ago. Mr. Ninovo had immediately informed the police, but at that time the police were too busy to remove them. Thinking the snakes were poisonous, Mr. Ninovo moved to a hotel. The police eventually removed the snakes, but Mr. Ninovo would not return to his house until the police determined the origin of the snakes and "punished the evildoers." Mr. Ninovo told them he was certain "the Vocek girl and her criminal father" had placed the snakes in his house. The police told me they had recently traced the snakes to the Zoology Faculty of the university, but had not been able to determine how the snakes had gone from there to Mr. Ninovo's house. I laughed and told them neither Yara nor I had access to the university's snakes. Both policemen were offended by my laughter and told me the next time snakes were found in any of my neighbors' houses both Yara and I would be questioned, not at home but at the police station, "until the matter of the snakes is cleared up once and for all."

Your letter arrived last Saturday morning, about an hour before the police did. Yara and Mirna both rushed to Jasna's to invite her to another reading session; they hadn't seen Jasna since the three of them returned from their excursion. I read through most of your letter before lunch time, when the three joined me. Your harrowing arrest at Luisa's plant, as well as Sabina's comments about Luisa and Titus, were not in tune with the spirit in which Mirna and Yara returned from their excursion, but with the way I felt after the announcement of the ul-

timatum, and particularly after the unpleasant police visit about the snakes. Mirna and Yara both laughed when I recounted what the police had just told me, and Yara commented, “He deserved crocodiles.”

The police as well as the snakes are forgotten. As soon as Jasna arrives, she tells me exuberantly, “Titus and I are engaged. We’re going to celebrate our engagement two weeks from tomorrow, and I’m inviting all my friends. I hope by then you can talk Mirna and Yara out of their hostility toward him.” I congratulate her and promise to try.

Mirna plunges into your letter as soon as she’s back in the house. She reads while eating lunch and excitedly passes every sheet to Yara. Soon after she starts reading, Mirna exclaims, “Sabina didn’t even know about the strike at my plant until her strike was over! You’re talking about communication between continents, and Sophia isn’t even communicating with the person right next to her. How sad! She didn’t even know I was looking forward to art excursion across the sea. I wonder if she would have looked forward to seeing me.” Stopping at a later point in her reading, she tells me, “Sabina is right about that night we spent together. I’m the one who remembered it wrong. I’d think she could figure out why I changed it. I pretended to be Jan making love to Mirna, but what I remembered was the night when Jan made love to me, because that was the most wonderful night I spent with him.” Still later she tells Jasna, “You’ll smile less when you read the rest of this letter. You’re trying to convince yourself Titus is mean because he’s so isolated. Wait until you read what he was like when he wasn’t isolated.”

Jasna, who has also started reading your letter, is irritated by Mirna’s comment. “I can understand Yara’s hostility to him; it’s due to Titus’ misguided helpfulness in having Vesna taken to the hospital against Yara’s objections. But I can’t understand your hostility, Mirna, as anything more than jealousy. You loved him once, and that’s the only clue I have to your behavior. I should never have told you what he said about you, Vera and Luisa. He said those things only because he’s; isolated, lonely and unhappy. You know perfectly well unhappiness breeds bitterness toward other people’s happiness. As soon as I got back I described our trip to him, I told him about your strike and Yarostans strike, I told him he was isolated, removed from the experiences taking place and the people living them. I told him his goodness was turning into bitterness; he was becoming a spiteful hermit while I was becoming a spiteful old maid. And I told him I was sure that together we could find our way back into the stream of life. He responded by proposing to me. Don’t you see that his proposal is virtually a renunciation of what he’s become? He doesn’t want to be bitter and mean. He wants to rejoin us as our friend; he wants to break out of his isolation. Why are you so set on destroying our happiness?”

Mirna says, “Titus was released twenty years ago while the rest of you stayed in jail?”

“Zdenek saw him in jail twenty years ago,” I remind her. “He was told his arrest had been a mistake. It was undoubtedly his release that was a mistake. Maybe they let him out just to give the Nachalos the impression that all of us were being released.”

“Mirna, I’m not talking about things that happened twenty years ago,” Jasna pleads. “I’m talking about the happiness of two living people. Titus and I need each other, and we’re perfectly suited to each other; we’re both equally isolated; we’ve both sacrificed our lives for nothing.”

But Mirna is unmoved. “He wasn’t arrested with the rest of you eight years later either!”

“That’s surely a coincidence,” I suggest. “On the earlier occasion he was temporarily released to create an impression; on the later occasion he was arrested a few weeks later than the rest of us. That doesn’t exactly make him an ogre.”

“I don’t believe in coincidences!” Mirna shouts. “Sophia asks why he didn’t tell you about her letter when he visited you. She sent him a letter too, and even if he didn’t receive it he certainly knew about it because I told him it had caused your and Jan’s arrest.”

“Mirna, on that visit Titus told me about Yara’s birth, about Jan’s disappearance, about your mother’s hysteria and your father’s loss of his job,” I remind her. “Did you really expect him to remember to tell me about a letter none of us had ever seen?”

“Why do you want to Mil the joy of two people whose lives haven’t had much joy?” Jasna asks her. “Are you still playing that game you played on Yara when she returned from her excursion to the mountains? If you are, then I agree with Zdenek: you have a morbid streak. Do you still now believe happiness can only lead to suffering and death? Or are you still determined to force me to share the burden you had to carry by yourself for so many years? I don’t understand you, Mirna. When I’m miserable you say, ‘Poor Jasna.’ Yet now that I’m not ‘Poor Jasna’ any more you seem set on making me miserable again! Why?”

“Because you’re both lying to yourselves,” Mirna answers. “Sabina asks why Yarostan is so defensive about Titus. That’s what I’d like to know. Read the letter to the end, Jasna! Titus wasn’t the hero you thought him. He fought in an army that killed people like Yarostan, Jan and Yara, people like Sophia’s and Sabina’s friends Ron and Jose and Sabina herself. Jasna, you’re lifting a burden you’ll never be able to carry!”

Jasna drops your letter and leaves the house shouting at Mirna, “Don’t bother coming to my celebration if you still feel this way two weeks from now!” She slams the door.

I turn angrily to Mirna. “You did this to her once before, when she expressed enthusiasm for one of Sophia’s letters. I’m convinced she’s right: your hostility to Titus wasn’t brought on by anything Jasna told you during your trip, and obviously not by what you’ve just learned from Sophia’s letter. You and Yara were already hostile to him three years ago when I was released. Even earlier. Yara’s face was a mask of hatred during her last visit to me, when she told me about Vesna’s death. And I don’t quite agree with Jasna about the justifiability of Yara’s unforgiving hatred. I don’t justify what Titus did with Vesna, but I’m convinced very few people, if any, would have paid attention to Yara at that moment. Yara is at least consistent; she doesn’t flit from blaming Titus to blaming herself and her devil and your mother; she blamed Titus for Vesna’s death from the moment Vesna died; she still blames him; she was disappointed with me when I was released because I didn’t immediately see the monstrosity of Titus’ deed — ”

“That wasn’t all that disappointed her,” Mirna says sarcastically. “As soon as you came home she saw you had nothing in common with the Yarostan whose return Vesna had feared. Yara was disappointed because she saw that the passion with which I had frightened Vesna wasn’t in you; it was in me! Yara realized Vesna’s fear had been groundless; Vesna had played her game for nothing; there had been no reason for her to fear your release! Yara was disappointed,

not only because you agreed with Titus, but also because you were as passionless as he! You weren't the companion I had promised her."

Yara, still reading, looks up and says, as if to defend me, "I didn't compare him to Mr. Zabran. Even Sabina doesn't say that."

"And what if she did?" I ask Mirna. "I was even more like Titus before that prison term than after my release, yet you didn't throw the comparison in my face then." I'm not really sure that's true, just as I'm not sure Sabina's opposite picture of me is true. During my second prison term I reevaluated the theoretical insights I had learned from Luisa and from Titus, and I rejected many of those insights. But I didn't reject the approach to life I had learned from them, and I think that's what Mirna is pointing out. I was theoretically committed to the overthrow of the existing social order, and it had been Titus and Luisa who had taught me how to be theoretically committed. In this sense Mirna is probably right; I was more like Titus after my release than I had been before. Earlier I had made some kind of "synthesis" between my political goals and my personal desires; I've already told you Luisa and revolution were almost synonyms to me. It was precisely this "synthesis" that fell apart during my second prison term. After my second release I had some kind of theory and goal, but they were no longer linked to what Mirna calls my "passion." I also felt terribly isolated. I had hoped to discuss my theoretical re-evaluations with Mirna and also with Titus, but at that time Mirna was in no mood to discuss anything, and after two short visits Titus stopped coming to our house because of the cold reception he received from both Mirna and Yara.

I try to remind Mirna of that period. "You're being unfair, Mirna. You weren't an ideal companion either when I returned home after eight years in prison. If anyone was bitter during those days, it wasn't Titus Zabran but you. At that time you "blamed yourself for everything that had happened, not only to Vesna, but to me and Jan, to your father, to your mother. When did you start putting that blame on Titus? It wasn't Titus' bitterness that kept him from our house, but your and Yara's hostility. The first time he visited, a few days after my release, I returned the two books he had lent me when he visited me in prison. And that was the only courtesy of which any of us were capable. It wasn't he who was bitter during that visit, but we — all three of us. He thanked me for the books. He told us how sorry he was about Vesna's death."

"He was sorry the way someone is sorry about a hailstorm that destroys a year's crops," Mirna tells me. "He was sorry because Vesna died, not because he felt in any way responsible for her death. He had felt responsible for her health. But the doctors were responsible for her death, not he. If he hadn't felt so responsible for her health she might still be alive today!"

"If you felt that way about him, why didn't you tell me at that time?" I ask her. "I was full of gratitude toward him; was I a fool in your and Yara's eyes? I thanked him for everything he'd done for us, including his trying to save Vesna. And then I proceeded to ask him for yet another favor, while you and Yara simply stood by. I told him I was marked again. I was unemployable; I asked him to find me another job. Why didn't you tell me to be wary of any job Titus would find for me? On his second visit, when he came to tell us he hadn't been able to find a job for

me, you made him feel completely unwanted — ”

“He didn’t even look for a job for you,” she says. “Don’t you remember what he told you? It wouldn’t do your health any good to have a job right then. It also wouldn’t do Yara’s or my health any good if you went off to work every day. We would all be healthier if you stayed home and helped Yara with the housework. He obviously knew more about our health than any of us did, just as he had known about Vesna’s.”

“When did you find all this out, Mirna? When did you figure out that by feeling responsible toward our health Titus was in fact responsible for our ills? You certainly didn’t know that when I first came home, nor for at least two years after that. My opinion of you during all that time was that you were a self-repressed slave. And you didn’t only repress yourself. You told Yara: ‘Stay out of trouble! Don’t take part in any mischief!’ Yara responded with ‘Yes, mommy,’ and ‘No, mommy,’ carrying on her mischief behind our backs, telling neither of us anything until the day she came home wearing a sign. Then she described her demonstration to me, not to you. And Yara was perfectly right; if there had ever been mischief in you, it had completely disappeared. Your view then was that mischief, passion, life could only lead to suffering and death. When your mother died you became even quieter. Your mother had blamed you for everything that had happened; when she died you internalized all her “blame. That was the burden you’ve been carrying: your mother’s blame. You tried to become toward Yara what your mother had been to you: a censor. Stay out of trouble, repress passion, because you’ll cause Yarostan’s re-arrest, you’ll cause Mirna’s death, you’ll destroy everything you love.”

“That’s right, Yarostan, and when the police came to the house after Yara’s demonstration because Ninovo told them you had inspired it, I thought my mother had been right. I was sure the devil in me carried a sword and intended to destroy all of us. I remained convinced of that until the day when Yara told all of you there had been a devil inside Vesna too. That night Yara convinced me it wasn’t the devil that had killed Vesna, but the fear of the devil. It was the intrusion of the world Jan had hated, the world that makes our love impossible, Titus Zabran’s world, that killed Vesna. Yara showed me that what my mother had called the devil is what’s most natural in all of us, what we feel; it’s our desires and our passions; it’s what we are. No sword is needed to embed the devil in us; the devil is already there; it’s the removal of the devil that requires a sword. It was Zabran and my mother with their crystal palaces and heavens and gods that made Vesna fear her own self, her own desires, her devil.”

“That’s what you told me before you left on your excursion, Mirna. At that time it seemed like a fine justification for your excursion, for your strike, for your complete transformation since the day when you beat Yara for flaunting her love games. Vesna’s doctor succeeded in curing you. Was it also Yara who swung you to the opposite extreme, who shifted your hatred of yourself to a hatred of Titus and Jasna?”

Yara, who has been listening to our argument while trying to finish your letter, objects to my accusation. “I never shifted any blame to Jasna.”

“Am I right about Titus then?” I ask Mirna. “Until a few weeks ago you blamed yourself for Vesna’s death, as well as Jan’s, your father’s and your mother’s. You didn’t dream of missing a

day of work, nor of going on strike; you were opposed to the gratification of desires, not only your own but Yara's as well. Suddenly all the blame is on Titus Zabran's head. All Yara can actually prove to you is that Titus took Vesna to the hospital against Yara's wishes, and we all know that. Yet what you threw in Jasna's face was the suggestion that you now blame Titus for everything. Suddenly Titus is a devil who carries a sword — ”

“I've told you it's not the devil who carries the sword!” Mirna insists. “It's your friend Zabran and his friend Alberts! It's those who suppress their own devil and set out to murder it in everyone else. It's the ones building crystal palaces; the devil is in the way of such palaces; the devil loves trees and streams and sunshine — ”

“I don't think you understood Sabina's point,” I tell Mirna, although I'm not sure of that even as I say it, and both Mirna and Yara are going to make me regret telling Mirna that she had misunderstood Sabina. I nevertheless go on, “Sabina was talking about industrialization, not about the repression of desires. People were in Alberts' way. People are always in the way of industrial expansion. Sabina makes a great deal out of the fact that Alberts, as well as Titus, themselves took up arms against the human beings who stood in the way of their project. Now you're telling me both Alberts and Titus had something in common with your mother, that what all of them really opposed was the realization of one's desires, and that therefore your mother was ready to take up arms — ”

“Yarostan!” Mirna shouts; “I'm going to force you and Jasna to decide which side you're on, once and for all!” “You and your doctor!” I shout back. Mirna gives her hand to Yara and says, “That's right, me and my doctor! We'll show you who it is that takes up arms, and why.”

“And in the process you'll make at least two people miserable, two people who are desperately reaching for a little happiness — ”

“One of those two isn't reaching for happiness — ” Mirna shouts, but I rush to the bedroom and slam the door shut, tired of hearing about Titus' supposed guilt and responsibility. Mirna spends the night in Yara's room.

Mirna has already left the house when I get up the following morning. Yara has breakfast ready for me and is suspiciously friendly. “Isn't it a perfect day?” she asks, even though it's dark and cloudy. She acts as if she hadn't heard the previous day's argument. “Mirna promised to take me to an outing today,” she tells me.

“Just you and she?” I ask.

“Oh no, it wouldn't be complete without you and Zdenek,” she says.

“Where does she want to take us?”

“To the top of the mountain.” Yara's tone tells me she's in a very mischievous mood.

“Are you sure she wants to take me?” I ask. “We're not exactly on the best of terms; yesterday she told me I wasn't fit to be taken to the top of the mountain.”

“I'm taking you,” Yara says, “and I'll show her she's wrong. She's taking Zdenek.”

“I'm not sure I'm willing to go to the top of the mountain, Yara.”

“You have to go,” she tells me, climbing on my lap and kissing my cheek. “If you don't go you'll prove I was wrong and she was right.”

"I wouldn't want to do that, would I?"

"You'll go then?" she asks, pulling me out of my chair and throwing her arms around me.

"How could I turn down your invitation, Yara?"

"I knew you weren't what she said you were!" she shouts, running off to her room. A few minutes later she returns with her dyed black hair hanging loosely over her shoulders, and she wears the slacks and jacket that had made her look like Sabina at the dance at Mirna's plant.

"You liked me like this, didn't you Yarostan?" she asks me, extremely coquettishly.

"I like you even better as yourself, Yara," I tell her, embarrassed by her question.

"I'm almost exactly as old as she was when Jan made love to her in your room."

"But you're not Sabina, and I'm twenty years older than I was then, Yara."

"Up there years don't matter," she tells me.

Unfortunately the arrival of Mirna and Zdenek prevents me from pondering the significance of Yara's last statement. Mirna and Zdenek come laden with food and wine all of which must have come from Zdenek's apartment, since it's Sunday and the stores are closed.

"He's going! I told you he would!" Yara shouts to Mirna.

"Wonderful," Mirna says to me.

"Your outing wouldn't be complete without me," I tell Mirna sarcastically. "Are you bringing Titus too?"

Mirna turns her back to me and starts repacking the food with Zdenek.

Yara asks me, "Why don't you talk Jasna out of marrying that awful Mr. Zabran?"

"And what then, Yara?" I ask her. "Marry Jasna myself?"

"She loves you more than she loves him, and she'd listen to you," Yara tells me. Mirna laughs, and even Zdenek seems entertained by Yara's "joke."

"You're almost as clever as your mother, Yara," I tell her; she'll make me regret that statement later. "Titus and Jasna are perfectly suited to each other, and I have nothing against Titus except what he did to you and Vesna —"

"Nothing?" Yara asks. "Not even after Sophia's letter? Don't you see —"

"I only see you and Mirna jumping to far-fetched conclusions. Titus is my friend; he was my first teacher, I like him, and I admit I have much in common with him."

"That's what Mirna says, but I don't believe you have anything in common with him," Yara says firmly, as if she were determined to make her statement true. "Please don't be like him!"

"If the purpose of this excursion is to prove to me the villainy of Titus, then I think I'll change my mind —"

"That's not the purpose at all!" Yara shouts, embracing me again, her eyes begging. "It's just that it's such a perfect day for this outing."

"Is it your idea that this is a perfect day for an outing?" I ask Zdenek.

Smiling sheepishly at me, Zdenek admits, "It's not a perfect day at all; it looks like it's going to rain any minute."

Mirna places her arms around Zdenek's neck and tells him, "You well know there hasn't ever been a more perfect day."

Of course at this point I figure out that Zdenek is “in” on the plot, but I still don’t know just what the plot is. The closest I come is to suspect Mirna of wanting to “get even” for the previous night’s argument by using Zdenek to, rouse my jealousy, and I’m surprised by Zdenek’s willingness to be used that way. “You’re not going to let rain stop you, are you Zdenek?” I ask him sarcastically.

“I’m not sure I know what I’m getting into; are you?” he asks me.

“Whatever it is, I’m looking forward to it,” I tell him.

Each of us carrying a basket filled with food and wine, we set out on the two-tram journey to Mirna’s and Jan’s former neighborhood. When we leave the end of the second tram line, we don’t head toward her parents’ former house, but to the clearing where Mirna took me twice before. It’s still as abandoned and as “private” as it was the last time Mirna and I came here twelve years ago; I couldn’t have found it by myself; perhaps it’s so undisturbed because no one else found it either. The sky grows increasingly dark, but Mirna beams with satisfaction, sets her basket down on the ground and stretches out on the grass as if the sun were shining. Yara throws a cloth on the ground and starts setting the food on it, as well as one after another bottle of wine.

“And now would the three of you mind telling me what it is we’re celebrating on this cloudy and dark Sunday?” I ask impatiently.

“We’re not celebrating an event but a place,” Yara says; there’s a wild, absent expression in her eyes; I’ve seen such an expression before, in Mirna’s eyes. “We’re celebrating my birthplace. Long before I was born country girls my age ran to this clearing on moonlit nights; they drank down bottles of wine and danced naked in the moonlight until the moon stopped still in the middle of the sky at midnight. Then the devil stepped out of the dark forest and made love to every one of them. By that act they all became sisters and they lived only for the night of the full moon when they returned to this clearing once a month.”

“Are we going to have to stay until midnight waiting for your devil?” I ask her naively.

“They waited for that night because nothing was possible for them during the day. That single night became their only day; that full moon became their only sun. But we don’t have to wait until midnight because for us everything is becoming possible during the daytime. Soon even the clouds will be gone and we’ll be able to do everything we want and love everyone we love in the light of the sun.”

“You amaze me, Yara. You sound exactly like Jan — and like Sabina,” I admit to her.

“If we hadn’t been properly introduced, I would have thought those two sisters,” Zdenek announces after guzzling from a bottle of wine; he shows signs of being slightly drunk.

Mirna sits up, helps herself to the sausages and salads Yara displayed on the ground, and clinks a bottle of wine against Zdenek’s. “Do you realize we failed to celebrate Sophia’s success with her philosopher Pat?” she asks. “Imagine! A boy young enough to be her son, the same age as Sabina’s daughter! And in spite of all her previous expectations, she enjoyed every minute of it. And she couldn’t have staged it more perfectly if Yara had been there to help!”

“Yet you just told me it’s all over for Sophia,” Zdenek observes. “Which only proves my point, Mirna. Perpetual dancing and lovemaking may be the goal, but to reach that goal something like a union is necessary.”

Mirna jumps up and pours the remainder of her bottle of wine directly over Zdenek’s head. “This is all you’ll ever get from your union, Zdenek! When we get back you can read Sophia’s newest letter and see just exactly what the union did to her and to Sabina and Tissie and thousands of others who wanted only to dance and make love.”

Trying to crawl away from the pouring wine, Zdenek shouts, “You don’t prove your point that way, Mirna! How could a union have soaked those workers? In her previous letter Sophia gave the impression all those workers rejected the union!”

“She was wrong,” Mirna tells him. “It turned out the majority of those workers were more committed to unions and trains like the one you described than you ever were. They locked themselves into windowless compartments and let themselves be driven right back to prison!”

“If it took them to prison it wasn’t the kind of union I had in mind,” Zdenek objects.

“You obviously think your own train is the exception, but you’ll see that Sabina was infinitely more honest than you are. She admitted that her own train, the one she devoted her whole life to, led nowhere except back. Tissie was the only one who knew exactly what she wanted.”

Zdenek asks, “And what was it Tissie wanted?”

“Sabina’s love, Sophia’s love, the love of all the women in the world. For Tissie the devil had the shape of a woman, a beautiful young witch, with whom she was alone in a forest by a pond, lying naked in the sun, making love.” Mirna, who is on her second or third wine bottle, seems as drunk as Zdenek.

“And how did Tissie hope to reach what she wanted?” Zdenek asks her.

“Like this!” Mirna exclaims, reaching out for Yara. When Yara gets up to move toward Mirna I notice she’s drunk too; she swims toward Mirna, who pulls her down to the grass and falls on top of her. “How, Zdenek? Like this! It’s not a train, Zdenek. It’s mother with daughter, sister with sister, woman with woman. Is this position not included in your philosophy?” The two roll on the grass so that Yara is now on top of Mirna. “I couldn’t accept it into my philosophy either. Sabina told Sophia the truth. I carried my mother inside me. I distorted one of the most precious experiences of my life. I remembered it wrongly, I changed it so I wouldn’t offend my mother’s feelings. I told myself I let Sabina make love to me only because she pretended to be my brother. I lied to myself.” Saying this she rolls over again and presses Yara-Sabina to the ground. Zdenek and I stare, completely fascinated, at the intoxicated mother and daughter locked in a passionate embrace. “It was I who pretended to be Jan. I couldn’t bear to remember it that way, because I wanted to believe Jan had made love to me that night. Sabina told me Jan had showed her how he loved me, and I wanted to believe he loved me as a body, the way I loved him; the only way I could make myself believe it was if I remembered that Sabina pretended to be Jan and showed me how he had wanted to love me. I never knew he loved me that way until this letter came. When we’d slept together as children the initiative had all been mine.

Jan would lie perfectly still, I'd put my cheek on his, just like this. Then I'd slide down, undo his shirt, and kiss his chest and his stomach. He stroked my hair but didn't ever move on top of me. It was only from Sophia's letter that I learned how free he was with Sabina and with other girls he pretended were me. If I'd known then, I would have been the one who lived in his room with him, I would have been Jan's wife-sister until they came to separate us with rifles and tanks. Yes, I lied to myself about that night. I didn't really believe Jan loved me the way I pretended he did."

My dumb fascination turns to embarrassment when Mirna removes Yara's jacket and shirt and lets her lips wander from Yara's chest to her stomach.

"Sabina is right," Mirna continues. "I did to her what I wanted Jan to do to me, what he never did to me until we were forever separated and he was forced to substitute me. And she's right: it was beautiful exactly as it happened." She slides her lips to Yara's. "Every motion, every caress, every kiss I had ever dreamed of receiving from Jan I gave to Sabina, pretending she was I. I was as happy that night as I had ever been with Jan. That was all I wanted in life: the possibility to embrace those around me, all of them, to feel them, caress them, kiss them — " Mirna's head dangles above Yara's stomach and her hair sweeps across it in rhythmical strokes, like a broom. Drops of rain fall on Mirna's naked back.

Yara is panting, her hands frantically press Mirna down toward her thighs; she begs, "Don't stop Jan-Sabina-Yarostan — "

I turn my head away, confused, and I have to admit, disgusted. I announce, "It's starting to rain."

Mirna asks sarcastically, "Do you hear, Sabina? It's the woman with the broom." When I turn toward her angrily, she stops her stroking motions and pulls Yara up to sitting position. I'm afraid of the look in Yara's eyes: she's drunk, and stares wildly at me. "Yarostan thinks it's raining," Mirna continues. "We brought him with us so he'd make love to my mother who hadn't touched a man since I'd been conceived. But he can't go through with it because it's raining. For Yarostan the revolution means getting out of the rain, back to the safety of the carton plant, back to the meetings, back to his teachers Luisa Nachalo and Titus Zabran."

"He's not at all like that," Yara objects drunkenly. "I can see it in his eyes. He's not like the old woman or like that stiff Mr. Zabran. Yarostan is one of us — "

Mirna places Yara on all fours like an animal and pushes her toward me, telling her provocatively, "Prove it, Yara! Show us he's not like that."

While Yara crawls toward me, Mirna crawls behind Zdenek and pulls him down to the ground by his hair. Zdenek lies on the ground as if he were asleep or dead. Mirna starts to unbutton Zdenek's shirt and shouts to Yara, "Like this! Daughter with father! What could be more natural? What could be more beautiful? We're waiting, Yara! Show us who your father is like!" The rain increases. Mirna, suspended over Zdenek like an awning, shields his face and chest from the rain.

Yara, now behind me, starts imitating Mirna and I lose track of Mirna and Zdenek. Yara pulls with all her strength but instead of letting myself be pulled down to the ground I place

Yara on my lap and tell her, “You don’t know what you’re doing, Yara. You’re drunk.”

“I know what I’m doing,” she says drunkenly; “It’s the most natural thing in the world. Haven’t you ever seen how freely the animals do it? Rabbits, dogs, cats play love games whenever they feel the desire. Sister plays with brother, son with mother, daughter with father, always in each other’s company, without shame. Among animals it’s nothing to hide. Only people have shame, people like the old woman, people who don’t have desire, and you’re not like them!”

“I don’t know who I’m like, Yara.” My head is swimming.

“Earlier you said I was as clever as Mirna,” she remind me. “Were you lying? Don’t you like me?”

“I like you very much,” I tell her, kissing her playfully.

But Yara plunges her tongue into my mouth; her whole body writhes; she begs hungrily, “Open your mouth, father! Kiss me! Even Vesna could kiss!”

I turn my face away. “I don’t like you that way, Yara.”

“I love you, father!” she shouts, holding me with all her might; “Make love to me!”

“I can’t play your game, Yara.” I try to push her away.

“Yes you will!” Yara screams. She pushes me to the ground, tears my shirt open and throws her naked chest on mine. “You’ll play my game until it’s over! This is the revolution; it’s right here; there’s no other!”

I try to push her gently away from me. “Yara, stop, before I — ”

But the more I push, the more hysterical Yara becomes. “Love games in every possible combination, every possible place and time, that’s the revolution! You read that in Sophia’s letter describing Sabina and her garage — and you toasted to Sabina and to Tissie! Why are you being such a hypocrite?”

Losing all my playfulness, I push Yara away from me and shout, “That’s enough, you hear? You’re drunk! You don’t know what you’re doing!”

Shouting hysterically, “I love you! Don’t be Vesna!” she throws herself at me and pushes me back down to the ground. You could not have felt more shocked when you found yourself under Tissie.

“Stop it!” I command, but she has the strength of a frustrated wild animal attacking her prey; the expression on her face is completely deranged. I use all my strength to try to restrain her, to hold her at a distance.

But she still reaches for me, forces herself on me, shouting, “I want you, father, I want you!”

Suddenly I’m pulled down from behind and my arms are pinned to the ground by Mirna, while my legs are pulled straight by Zdenek. My violent kicks and twists prevent Yara from staying on top of me, but provoke her to keep trying.

Mirna, her face upside-down above mine, as drunk as Yara, tells me, “This isn’t right, is it, Yarostan? It’s natural, but it isn’t right. What’s natural is gentle; it takes place through a kiss, a caress, an embrace. But what’s right requires shouting and kicking and beating! What’s right requires the broom and the gun and the tank — ”

Yara, thrown off again, laughs as if I were playing a game with her. She dives at me again and clings to me with all her might.

I shout hysterically, “You’ve gone crazy, all three of you!” I pull one of my hands away from Mirna’s grasp, clench it into a fist and swing it into the side of Yara’s face. Then she flies off me, howling, covering her face with her hands. Zdenek lets go of my feet to examine Yara’s face, and I give him a kick. I get up shouting, “If this is your idea of enjoyment, then I agree with Titus. You need to be in the hospital, all three of you!” I put my shirt on and start to walk away from the “devil’s” clearing.

Mirna shouts after me, “My mother is watching and listening from her bed in the sky! Stop their games, she’s telling you! Kill them, she’s telling you! There’s no other way to stop their games, their passion, their desire to live! It’s not the devil who carries a sword, not I nor Yara nor Sabina. It’s she and you who carry it! It’s not passion that brings destruction, but the fear of passion! Lock the devil up, she’s telling you! Destroy the passion! Run from it! Or do what Vesna did: lock yourself up, destroy yourself — ”

“Is this what the two of you did to Vesna?” I ask angrily, continuing to walk away from the clearing.

“You’re worse than the old woman, you’re worse than Zabran!” Yara shouts after me.

“Yes, Yarostan,” Mirna shouts. “This is what the two of us did to Vesna! And Vesna grew rigid, her face became twisted with fear, just like yours!”

I place the palms of my hands over my ears and run to the tram stop. The tram isn’t there, so I run to the next stop to wait for it. My heart thumps; my whole body is filled with outrage, with revulsion and, yes, with fear and shame of a passion I don’t allow myself to feel, a passion I tried to stop the only way

I knew how: by violence. The tram finally comes and I do what Mirna said: I run from the passion. On the ride back to the city, I remember Mirna’s threat, “I’m going to force you and Jasna to decide which side you’re on!” Apparently she and Yara had disagreed about that, and I had proved Yara wrong, I had proved I wasn’t on Jan’s side, on Sabina’s side, I had proved that for me there were bounds, there were limits, everything was not allowed.

When I reached home, I went straight to bed but couldn’t sleep. I tried to convince myself I couldn’t have acted any other way. I heard Mirna and Yara return. Both of them rushed to the bathroom. When I heard Yara cry out with pain, it dawned on me that I had hurt her face seriously with the blow of my fist; my hand had gotten slightly cut, and the blood next to the cut was apparently Yara’s. I grew concerned; my heart pounded with guilt. But I couldn’t make myself face either of them. Then they became quiet; Mirna apparently put Yara to bed.

Suddenly Mirna rushed into our bedroom and held a mirror in front of my face. She had never before been so drunk. “Do you know what dead people look like?” she shouted at me. “Their faces are pale, their bodies are contorted, there’s a horrid lifeless fear in their eyes. Some of them breathe, but their breath has no life, nothing stirs inside them, they’re not moved by their own passions and desires, their limbs and organs aren’t able to respond to the fire of life because no fire burns inside them — ”

“Mirna, I couldn’t — not with Yara — ”

She disregarded my interruption. “ — Burned out themselves, they hit and beat and kill those whose bodies are on fire, putting out fires, healing, saving, jailing, sacrificing. Real people and real passions are in their way, they mess up their crystal palaces.” Working herself up into a drunken rage, Mirna throws the mirror on the floor and shatters it. “I’ve had enough God-worshippers in this house already! I won’t allow any more life to be sacrificed to gods! I built the shed for God’s priests and saints because I don’t want them stinking up my house with their purity! This is the devil’s house!”

I didn’t move to the shed. Mirna again spent the night in Yara’s room and left me “quarantined” in our bedroom. I didn’t sleep very much. I couldn’t make myself understand that Mirna had wanted me to go to the point of copulating with my own daughter. Surely that act is beyond the limits of the unrestricted freedom which had so attracted all of us when Sabina described it. Was I really what Yara had called me: a hypocrite who applauded at a great distance acts which I dared not undertake in my own home and neighborhood? Or was this whole episode to be explained as nothing more than a drunken spree?

I left the following morning before either Mirna or Yara were up. When I returned, they were both in the living room with Jasna. I immediately noticed a bandage around Yara’s jaw and started to walk toward her, but was stopped by a look of hatred identical to the expression on her face the last time she had visited me in prison. Yara stomped past me out of the house and slammed the front door so hard the whole house shook.

Jasna greeted me with surprise in her eyes and then turned to Mirna to ask, “Are you sure it was an accident?”

Mirna told her, “Yes, it was an accident.” She then asked me, with an incomprehensibly sweet tone, “Did you swing your elbow into Yara’s face intentionally?”

Her tone mystified me completely; it indicated that Mirna was already playing another game, a game with an altogether different point. But I have to admit I was relieved by her hypocritical sweetness. The previous night she’d threatened to ask me to leave the house and do what? Court Jasna? Mirna and Yara had apparently ascertained it no longer made any difference whether Titus or I courted Jasna, since they had proved Titus and I were “the same.” Yara’s door-slamming indicated she was still indignant about that “discovery,” but Mirna was apparently ready to move on to the next “scene.”

Jasna was too preoccupied with her own problems to be wary of Mirna’s new mood. “I just told Mirna I’ve confronted Titus with most of her suspicions,” she told me furiously. “Except for his brief period of military service, Titus never raised a hand against anyone. If you and Mirna and Yara are suspicious of him, confront him to his face, not behind his back! He’ll be glad to answer all your questions. He told me he was willing to answer history for all his acts. All his life he’s been devoted to something. Is that what you hold against him?”

“Yarostan holds nothing at all against him,” Mirna told her.

Jasna said angrily, “Last time I was here you accused him of having killed people like Yarostan and Yara and yourself! Why don’t you say that to his face? I know he served in

an army; I've known it ever since I first met him. But that army's task was to save democracy from fascism, not to kill people like you and Yarostan. You're unjust, Mirna. His whole life was lived in the service of working people; he never wanted anything for himself. Whether he was jailed after the rest of us or before, the fact is that he was jailed both times. It was when he came to see me after our second arrest that I first learned about you and Vesna. Titus felt so sorry for you; he told me you worked like an automaton all day long, only to return to two children and a crazy old woman. He helped me find my teaching position in the school. He helped Vesna get medical care the first time she was sick, when her heart murmur was discovered. He never told me about his amorous experiences with you, Mirna. He must have been too embarrassed; you were only half his age. He's obviously not the world's most passionate person, but neither am I; maybe that's why we've always been drawn to each other. But whatever he's lacked in passion, he's more than made up in solidarity and loyalty toward his friends. He's helped almost every one of us find jobs, starting with Yarostan and Jan. He even helped Marc Glavni and Adrian Povrshan toward social positions much higher than Titus ever aspired to. I know he helped once too often; I know he shouldn't have insisted Vesna be taken to the hospital the second time she got sick. But it was I who told him Vesna was ill again. And what was he to think when he found her in your mother's bed, feverish and hysterical? He obviously couldn't even imagine you held him responsible for Vesna's death. He came to see you twice after Yarostan was released. Titus told me Yarostan had asked for help in finding another job, but Titus didn't even try to find one; he told me Yarostan looked like a skeleton when he came out, and work-places were so policed that Yarostan would have gone insane even if he'd withstood the physical strain. That was three years ago. He hasn't offered his help to you or Yarostan or Yara since then. He knew you held something against him. Even his visits to me grew less frequent. It was only then that he became isolated, removed from events and from people. After a lifetime of helping the people around him, he was suddenly all alone. How could I turn against him now? How can you? If you suspect him of anything, tell him to his face!"

"You're absolutely right, Jasna," Mirna told her sweetly and contritely. "I have no reason to feel anything other than gratitude toward Titus. The first time I met him was after Jan's release fifteen years ago, before Yarostan came to our house when he was released the first time. Titus got Jan the job in the bus repair depot, and my father invited him to visit us. I haven't forgotten it was through Titus that Yarostan was hired as a driver, transferred to the depot and then hired in the steel plant after that fight with the foreman at the bus depot. I understand exactly how you feel, Jasna. Suspicion isn't in my nature at all, and I'm more than willing to meet with Titus and discuss everything openly."

"What if I tell him to expect us at his room tomorrow night?" Jasna asked.

"I'd like nothing better," Mirna told her. "During the past three years I had thought the good man had stayed away from our house because of his hostility toward us. Did he really think Yara and I were hostile toward him?"

"Mirna, you're —" Jasna began.

"You'll come for us tomorrow night?" Mirna asked, accompanying Jasna to the door.

As soon as Jasna was gone, I tried to complete the sentence she'd begun: "Mirna, you're a hypocrite, a liar, a faker —" "What nasty names to throw at your beloved," she told me. "My beloved! Yesterday you were ready to put me in your mother's shed until I died!"

"Your pretty young wife was drunk yesterday — on wine, on Sabina in Sophia's letter, on life, and today she can't remember what happened yesterday," Mirna told me with the same hypocritical sweetness. "She's forgotten every single detail, doesn't even know where she spent the night —"

"What about Titus?" I asked her. "You weren't drunk the day before yesterday, when you blamed him for everything that's happened to us for the past twenty years. Did you forget that too? You hadn't drunk a drop of wine then. When did he become the good man who mistakenly imagined you and Yara had something against him?"

Mirna's response to my anger was to put her arms around me and tell me, "If I ever lie to you, Yarostan, it'll be for one reason only: because I love you."

"That's not fair, Mirna," I protested. "I don't understand what happened yesterday. I don't understand your new attitude toward Jasna. You and Yara are up to something, and I'd like to know what it is."

"You'll know, Yarostan, soon enough." The following evening, Jasna was already at our house when I returned from the carton plant. The three of us took a tram toward the bus depot where I once worked. Yara had turned down Jasna's invitation.

Titus and I hadn't seen each other since the days immediately after my release from prison. We pumped each other's hands warmly. I congratulated him on his engagement and told him I was looking forward to the celebration.

Titus apologized to Mirna for the way he had behaved when she and Zdenek had surprised him before Mirna's dance. "I was a little stunned when you told me Tobarkin was your father; I didn't understand —"

"The misunderstanding was all my fault," Mirna told him. "I didn't know you and Zdenek had met before." Then Mirna went on with an irony that neither Titus nor Jasna seemed to notice, "My isolation in the present historical moment gave me a desire to surround myself with all the people who had ever been close to me: my father, brother, husband, friend —"

"Jasna clarified the meaning of your invitation," Titus told her. "I obviously understand the need for this type of regroupment of revolutionaries at a time of upheaval such as the present. But I didn't feel my presence at the dance would be a fruitful form of intervention. Perhaps I was wrong. The task of revolutionaries is to generalize understanding of the historical goals of the working class struggle at all times and in all situations."

"Especially during a period that seems to have so much in common with the excitement we lived through twelve years ago, at the time of the Magarna uprising," Mirna said to him, intentionally winding him up.

"There are certainly similarities between the two periods," Titus said excitedly. "The proletariat is once again regaining its own project, it is once again carrying its own historical task. The self-organization of the class, the exercise of power by the class as a whole, are once again

on the agenda. Not since Magarna has it been so urgent for revolutionaries to rejoin the stream of history.”

“You’ve put my innermost thoughts into the most perfect words,” Mirna told him with a sarcasm I considered completely unprovoked, but which neither Jasna nor Titus noticed. “The proletariat is regaining its project and revolutionaries are rejoining the stream of history. What a perfect way to describe my hopes twelve years ago and my activity today. You say it with such conviction that you boost my confidence. Only a few days ago Yarostan and I asked Jasna if you had also been infected by the activity unfolding around us, and I can see that you have. Your desire to rejoin the stream of history must be as intense as it was at the time of the Magarna rising.”

Jasna interceded, “Titus told me it wasn’t only the social situations that were similar, but also his personal relationship to them. During the years before the Magarna rising Titus had become a functionary in the trade union apparatus, a simple cog. The work was repetitious and bureaucratic; there seemed to be no point to it other than to reproduce the bureaucratic apparatus.”

“For me the autonomy of the class has always constituted the indispensable condition for its revolutionary activity,” Titus added. “The trade union council was not an instrument of that autonomy. The work wasn’t only repetitious; it had no historical significance; that apparatus did not carry any part of the proletarian project. Instead of being an instrument of class action, the apparatus had substituted itself for the class and tried to move history by itself and in the face of the proletariat’s opposition. But revolution cannot be made against the masses. The Magarna rising was a fresh wind — ”

“Was it the proletarian project the Magarna workers were carrying?” Mirna asked, pretending naivete about Titus’ meaning. “The authorities accused them all of being agents of foreign reactionary circles — ”

“I remain convinced the strikes and the councils were genuine attempts of the proletariat to regain its project,” Titus told Mirna. “Workers conscious of their own historical mission are immune to such influences.”

“What about Yarostan and Jan?” Mirna asked. “Were they arrested for carrying the proletarian project, for rejoining the stream of history? Why were they arrested before other workers who had engaged in class activity? Why were they arrested a year before you were?”

“They weren’t arrested because of the political activities in which they were engaged,” Titus told her, “but because of a police bungle with a letter that supposedly came from a foreign spy ring.”

“Oh yes, that letter; I had forgotten about it. Was that really the reason Yarostan and Jan were arrested?” Mirna asked. Her shameless lie — she’s thought about that letter every day for the past twelve years — made me jittery, and I forgot to ask Titus the question you had asked in your postscript, namely why he hadn’t told me about that letter when he’d visited me in prison.

Jasna responded to Mirna’s hypocritical question. “I’ve asked Titus all about that letter, Mirna. The first time he ever heard of anyone being arrested because of it was when he visited

you after you left a message for him at his office. He immediately went to the police to try to see if Yarostan and Jan could be released, since he was convinced they had been arrested by mistake, but he got no further than to provoke them to arrest him.”

“I spent hours arguing with the police right after you told me about the arrests,” Titus told Mirna, “but to no avail. They tried to deal with questions of consciousness by means of arrest and imprisonment. They completely failed to understand that the consciousness of a minority, no matter how clear, is not sufficient for the realization of the proletariat’s historical task, which requires the constant participation and creative activity of all members, of the class as a whole. Generalized consciousness is the sole guarantee of the victory of the workers’ councils. It’s obvious that the class must use violence to reach its goal, but violence by a minority separate from the general movement is absolutely foreign to the methods of the class and constitutes a manifestation of petty-bourgeois despair; this diminishes the confidence of the class in itself and impedes the road to its self-emancipation. Those arrests were a mistake, a major bungle.”

“Isn’t it amazing,” Mirna asked with mock astonishment, “that the bungling of the police had similar consequences for Jan as the bungling of the doctors had for Vesna?”

Jasna and I were startled, and we both looked at Mirna suspiciously.

But Mirna went on, “Of course your intentions were pure both times. You tried to do what was best for Vesna, and for Jan, and for the proletariat. You’re really a very generous person. Yarostan told me that once, long ago, all your comrades were arrested and charged with having connections with a notorious spy, and that apparently your arguments convinced the police to release the spy himself. Were the police more receptive to your arguments at that time than they were at the time of the Magarna rising?”

“What are you driving at?” Jasna asked Mirna with undisguised hostility.

But Titus turned to Mirna calmly and told her, “Oh yes, you’re referring to George Alberts’ release. Jasna has given me a summary of Yarostan’s correspondence with Alberts’ stepdaughter. The fact is that those arrests were motivated by the same erroneous conception. Of course I urged them to release Alberts; we had been comrades several years earlier. Alberts had become a reactionary, but he was not a spy. The point was to isolate his position, not to arrest him.”

“What was it about his position that had to be isolated?” Mirna asked.

“Jasna hasn’t told me exactly what Sophia has written you,” Titus said. “Alberts was a revolutionary when I first met him; he was completely committed to the proletarian project. But certain influences made him turn against the organization necessary for the realization of the project, and by turning against the organization he turned against the project itself. This happened during the war, and especially after the war. He failed to see that there were only two alternatives: the naked rule of capital, or the victory of an organizational form that, no matter how deformed, still carried the kernel of the proletarian project. I tried to help Alberts understand that the point was not to side with capital, but to give reality to the organizational form, to infuse it with spontaneity, to help create the autonomous movement which was capable of realizing the historical task of the proletariat. But the police obviously made no effort to help anyone understand anything. He was treated with unbelievable cynicism and brutality. During

the war the resistance organization recruited him to do certain scientific work abroad. After the war the same organization attacked him for having done this work abroad; they labelled him a spy and even accused his so-called family of being his collaborators. This was highly incorrect, but it wasn't the incorrectness or the hypocrisy that convinced the police to release him. Retaining him in prison would have created an international incident."

"But why did they arrest the rest of us?" I asked. "We didn't have anything to do with Alberts."

"Because the police substituted itself for the class," he told me emphatically; "because a minority gained precedence over the class as a whole, that's why. As I said, the point was to isolate a position, not to arrest a section of the working class! The working class is a historical class and cannot be replaced. The organization of a part of the class is insufficient. Only the entire proletariat can undertake the revolutionary transformation of society. The police is not the agent of the historical project of the proletariat. We have to absorb that lesson. Our task as revolutionaries is to help the class understand its own interests, to help it carry its own project with its own energy, to raise ourselves to a clear understanding of the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate results of the proletarian movement. The point is not to incapacitate the class by jailing its most combative elements, as was done when the entire production group of the carton plant was arrested. It is the class in and of itself that is revolutionary; without it there's no revolution. What makes this class revolutionary is its position at the heart of the production process; only this position makes the class capable of resolving the contradictions of capitalism."

I was surprised by the way he ended that statement, although I don't think I would have noticed this earlier. "You say the task of the proletariat is to resolve the contradictions of capitalism?"

"Precisely, and this is what you and Jan Sedlak never understood," he said excitedly. "Capitalist social relations become a fetter to the further development of the productive forces capitalism itself created. Those relations become an obstacle to the further development of social capital. This is what makes proletarian revolution inevitable. The historical task of the proletariat is to remove those fetters and to make possible the further development of the productive forces. This is the general interest as well as the final goal of the movement."

My head started swimming. I remembered Sabina's comments about the contradiction between my friendship with Jan and my admiration for Titus. "And is this what you've devoted your life to?" I asked him. "To remove the obstacles to the development of objects? What do those objects have to do with your own life?"

"That's a funny way to put it," Jasna said with some annoyance. "If Titus devoted his life to the development of objects, he certainly doesn't have much to show for it. Ever since I've known him he's wanted no personal power, no wealth, no high posts in the government. He always considered himself as nothing more than a humble servant of history, he's always been single-mindedly devoted to the working class — to you, Jan, Luisa. His pay has never been larger

than that of any factory worker; he's a lowly functionary, a cog in an enormous apparatus; he files repetitious, bureaucratic reports day in and day out — ”

“I didn't mean to accuse Titus of seeking personal gain,” I told her with embarrassment.

Titus himself added, “Neither personal gain nor historical significance. Only the class can remove those fetters, Yarostan. I've devoted my life, not to removing the fetters, but to a much more modest work of theoretical reflection and elaboration, a work which permits the proletariat's activity to be based on an understanding of its past experience and future course. But it is only the class itself that undertakes the historical task. Without the activity of the class, my own activity amounts to nothing more than the reproduction of an empty shell, an apparatus that only stands in the way of the proletariat's task.”

I agreed with Jasna's description of the modesty of Titus' own engagement, and I hesitated before asking him, “Why did you and George Alberts enlist in the so-called popular army during that uprising Luisa romanticized for all of us?”

“I know exactly what you're driving at, and it's an experience I don't like to remember,” he told me. “At the time of that uprising I was a second-year university student. I was already committed to the task of contributing to the generalization of understanding of the goals of the working class struggle, to making the proletariat's historical lessons explicit. Those workers seemed to be attacking the entire established order, not merely locally but on a world scale. The fascists received international support, and it was urgent for the workers to receive it in far greater measure, since the proletariat is an international class; its struggle can ultimately be victorious only on an international level. Out of the chaos of political groupings reflecting the isolation and the divisions of the petty bourgeoisie, I finally found revolutionaries who understood the fundamental aspects of the struggle of the proletariat: the importance of political priorities, the importance of organization, as well as the unitary character of the revolutionary struggle of the class.”

“Was George Alberts one of those revolutionaries?” I asked him. “Was the popular army the organization you found?”

“Only in appearance,” he said, “but appearances are often misleading, and practice is the only test of the truth of appearances. I believed that the self-organization of the class struggle and the exercise of power by the class as a whole was the only historical road of the proletarian struggle. But I also believed that denying the need for organization and intervention by revolutionaries condemned one to non-existence, turned one into an agent of a withering of class consciousness. In other words, I saw the need for clear programmatic intervention in the proletarian struggle. In appearance the popular army seemed to be an organization which put forward the general interests of the class and the final goals of the movement, and to be an integral part of that struggle. I thought I was among revolutionaries who had not only raised themselves to a clear understanding of the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement, but who also participated in the struggle of the class and distinguished themselves by being the most determined and combative elements in those struggles.”

“But that military machine was obviously — ” I started.

“It was not a revolutionary organization,” he said abruptly.

“When did you figure that out?” I asked him.

“I was as aware then as I am now that the historical task of the proletariat cannot be carried out by a conscious minority,” he told me. “Generalized consciousness is the sole guarantee of the victory of the revolution. The activity of the class cannot be replaced by an apparatus. I’ve never identified the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of an army, a party or a union. As a part of the class, revolutionaries can at no time substitute themselves for the class, neither in its struggles within capitalism nor in the exercise of power.”

“If that was what you thought, then your activity in that military apparatus becomes even more incomprehensible to me,” I said.

“I told you I had to learn the truth from practice. I saw that the popular army had a substitutionist character as soon as we reached the front. The revolutionary minority was given precedence over the class as a whole. This tended to diminish the confidence of the class in itself and as a result impeded the road to its self-emancipation.”

“Couldn’t you see right at the start that such an organization would inevitably ‘take precedence over the class as a whole’?” I asked him.

“No, Yarostan, I couldn’t see that, and I still can’t,” he told me. “That’s something Luisa learned from her first husband, and she communicated it to you and to Jan Sedlak even though she herself never believed it. You’ve never understood that unlike other classes, the proletariat has no basis of power in capitalist society; its only material strength is its organization; the organization is the decisive and fundamental condition for the proletariat’s very existence.”

“I had thought the point of the struggle wasn’t the proletariat’s existence but its disappearance, its replacement by a human community,” I objected.

“The class struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat will mean the emancipation of all humanity only when the organization of the proletariat is adequate to that task, and this requires an organization which is politically coherent, which has a clear orientation; this requires a proletarian consciousness which grasps reality without distortions. Only such consciousness enables the proletariat to liberate all of society from exploitation. The popular army was a mistake, Yarostan, but not in and of itself, not as an organization, but because of the social and political situation in which it arose. The emerging movement in which it arose was characterized by immaturity of consciousness and insufficient understanding of the needs of the class struggle.”

“Yet it was that movement, it was those workers who built the barricades, fought in the streets, and defeated the fascist army in a single day,” I reminded him.

“I don’t deny that,” he insisted. “Those workers were people like you and Jan; they were workers whose actions reflected the class’s implacable hatred of capital, its will to struggle against the entire bourgeois order, its repudiation of class collaboration. What I’m saying is that what guided those workers was class instinct and not proletarian theory. And instinct is not enough for the proletariat. In order to liberate itself and to emancipate humanity, the pro-

letariat requires organization and consciousness. The popular army did not fill that need. The organization of the proletariat has to be a secretion of the class itself; it cannot be imported from outside as the popular army was. That's why those workers and their organization remained separate; that's why the organization substituted itself for the class, that's why the organization ultimately opposed itself to the class and destroyed its most profound, most combative elements."

At this point Mirna reentered the conversation. "I think I caught the drift of what you've been saying, Titus, although I didn't understand all the intricacies. Do you think the same thing is happening today? Are the most combative workers being guided by instinct instead of being guided by proletarian theory?"

"I certainly do," he told her. "If that weren't the case, there wouldn't be such a drastic separation between the combative sectors and the conscious elements of the proletariat; revolutionaries would not be so cut off from the class, so isolated."

Mirna simulated great interest in what Titus was saying. "That sounds extremely important to me, Titus. I have several friends who I'm sure would want to learn about that separation, especially if you have suggestions about how it can be overcome. Do you suppose you might find the time to meet with them?"

Jasna carelessly suggested, "Why don't you bring those friends to my house? We could combine it with a meal; I could easily entertain ten or twelve people."

Even Titus was interested. "How about combining it with the celebration we're going to hold two weeks from now? We could transform a trivial event into a fruitful political meeting."

"Wonderful!" Mirna exclaimed. "I'll invite several people who are at least as eager as you and I to rejoin the stream of history. They'll all want to share your profound political insights."

At this point Jasna heard the sarcasm in Mirna's tone, but Mirna got up to leave, and Titus shook her hand very cordially; it was obvious he hadn't heard the sarcasm.

Jasna left with us. On the tram she asked Mirna, "What are you up to? Another prank? Why did you tell that lie about having forgotten the letter Sophia sent us at the time of the Magarna rising?"

"Did I lie?" Mirna asked. "I must have gotten confused. When I had first told Titus about those arrests twelve years ago, he had assured me that neither Jan nor Yarostan could have been arrested because of a letter they didn't receive. So when he said they were only arrested because of that letter, I got confused —"

"I thought he explained those arrests very clearly!" Jasna said definitively.

I agreed with Jasna. I told Mirna, "I don't agree with him. Or I should say, I no longer agree with most of what he has to say. But I certainly don't find him suspicious in any way."

Mirna didn't respond, and we rode the rest of the trip in silence. I could tell that Jasna was suspicious of Mirna. afraid of her next prank.

At home I asked Mirna what she had in mind with the so-called interested friends she intended to invite to Jasna's and Titus' celebration.

Instead of answering, she asked me, “Did you see the expression in his eyes whenever he spoke of history and the proletarian project?”

I repeated my question angrily, “What pranks do you have in mind, Mirna?”

“Didn’t you recognize that expression?” she asked me. “It’s the same expression that covered my mother’s face whenever she spoke of her Lord! And the tone with which he described workers guided by instinct! She spoke the same way about people possessed by the devil!”

“Mirna, what are your intentions? If you’re planning to destroy Jasna’s and Titus’ happiness because of the superficial similarities you think you see — ”

“Remember when Jan and Sabina asked you to make love to the Queen of the Peasants?” she asked.

“I don’t see what connection — ”

“Remember the revolution Jan expected to result from your lovemaking? Morality, the family, the peasant village were all going to disintegrate, the revolution was going to begin.”

“So that’s what you have in mind!” I exclaimed. “Something similar to what you and Yara did to me in your clearing! Mirna, If you do anything like that to — ”

“Similar, Yarostan, but not the same,” she told me; “and I’m not going to do anything at all. I’m only going to bring a few Mends, very old friends, to the celebration — not my friends but yours and Jasna’s and Titus’ - If any games or pranks result, it won’t be because of me. Titus and his own Mends will make them happen. If Yara and I are right about Titus, then morality, history and the proletarian project are going to disintegrate all by themselves, and you’ll see what a revolution you might have made if you’d gone through with Jan’s and Sabina’s prank and made love to the Queen.”

“Whom do you intend to Invite?” T asked her.

“His whole train, Yarostan: the passengers, the ticket-takers as well as the engineers.”

Maybe I should have waited two weeks before writing you.

Yarostan.

Sophia's ninth letter

Dear Yarostan,

Or should I address my letter to "Poor Yarostan"? As I read your letter I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I'm certainly not the one who has any right to pass judgment on you. Thank you for not waiting two weeks to write me. In two weeks you would have figured everything out, you would have seemed so sure of yourself, and I wouldn't have had a chance to see you as I've never seen you before: lost, confused, unsure of yourself. I felt much closer to you than I ever had before. For the first time since we've written to each other you weren't my life's hero but someone like me, someone who is drifting and waiting, who isn't quite included in the activities of those closest to him. I see now that it makes sense for you and me to be writing to each other; we have much more in common with each other than either of us do with Mirna or Sabina.

A few weeks ago we were so close to something, yet neither of us knew what it was. Now we're both trying to find out what we really wanted, and it isn't easy, is it? I don't think you did very well in your confrontation with Titus Zabran. I had a similar confrontation with Luisa only three days ago, and I think I did much better than you in coming to terms with her and with my own past. She's been at least as much to me as she and Titus were to you. Her independence, her refusal to submit to externally imposed authority, and especially the unity between her beliefs and her behavior have been my life's model. My problem wasn't so much to free myself of my model as to learn why, with such a model before me since my birth, I spent my life drifting. The fault lay in me as much as in her. And that's what you're learning only now. During your second prison term you reevaluated Luisa's stories in the light of Manuel's and you reexamined her experiences in the light of your two prison terms. But you never reevaluated what you had become along the way thanks to Luisa and Titus. You stopped your critique before it was complete. You apparently rejected Luisa's contribution to your life but retained Titus', and your unconvincing and apologetic defense of Titus shows that you're not willing to carry your critique to its conclusion.

I'm somewhat surprised and disappointed by your attitude to Titus. Sabina says you and Jasna are willfully blinding yourselves about him the same way Luisa did. You seem impressed by his admission that the popular army was a "mistake." But he's not actually admitting any

mistakes. He told you it wasn't that army "as such" that was a mistake, but the circumstances in which it arose, and working people like Nachalo and Margarita were among those circumstances. In other words, it wasn't his popular army but the working population that was a mistake. His attitude is almost identical to George Alberts' attitude: the population consisted of hotheads, hoodlums incapable of industrializing themselves. The only difference Sabina or I can see between them is that Alberts special field was technology whereas Zabran's was politics. That's why Alberts characterized the "reactionary population" as saboteurs and hooligans who endangered the economy, whereas Zabran characterized them as being animated by "instinct instead of political theory" and thus of being dangerous to the all-important political organization.

Sabina and I are both anxious to learn what prank Mirna and Yara have in store for you and Jasna. Sabina told me she's learning from them what Margarita Nachalo might have been like if she had lived. Sabina said that "Yarostan's virtue" is that you never learned what Luisa tried to teach you, you never tried to "tamper" with Mirna's and Yara's lives the way Luisa did with Nachalo's and with yours. Your "virtue" is that you never became the organizer Luisa tried to turn you into. Consequently it's all the more surprising that you're so uncritical of Titus. In your second letter to me you attacked me for my attachment to my "key experience" and my "original community," for speaking of opportunists and manipulators as "our fellow revolutionaries." Yet what are you and Jasna doing now? Apparently both of you did learn something from Luisa, and you seem unable to undo the effects of the lesson. For both of you, as for Luisa, Titus still expresses the ideas of "out movement" and he's therefore "our comrade," and we don't apply the same critical standards to him as we do to "enemies," do we?

Sabina and I discussed very few of the questions you raised in your letter. One of those questions had to do with Alberts. At one point Titus told you that, at the time of our arrest twenty years ago, the police should not have arrested the entire production crew of the carton plant; instead they should have "isolated" George Alberts' "position."

"Read that again and tell me what sense it makes," Sabina told me. "As if Alberts' views had anything at all to do with the production crew of the carton plant! How can Yarostan be so uncritical? The first connection between Alberts' views and the production crew of the carton plant took place after the arrests, when the police accused Yarostan and the others of being confederates in Alberts' spy ring!"

Sabina convinced me there was something extremely bizarre about Titus' whole explanation of the carton plant arrests. There was no earthly reason for him to introduce "Alberts' position" into that explanation, because there was no way his views could have affected anyone in the carton plant.

"During the early part of the war Alberts apparently worked with the underground resistance organization," Sabina told me. "He locked himself into his room with papers; he didn't want me to tell either Luisa or you or anyone else about his coming home with papers. He may have been helping smuggle people abroad, or he may already then have been engaged in scientific espionage for the allied military. I obviously didn't figure out what it was since I was only

seven, but I do know the only person who could have known about this activity was Zabran. A year and a half before the war ended Alberts told me he had been given an assignment abroad, and I later learned this assignment had something to do with the development of the atomic bomb, though he never told me any details. No one in the carton plant knew anything about it except Zabran. Luisa didn't learn a thing about his activities until he returned after the war. The production crew that was arrested three years after the war were all hired when Alberts was abroad — except Titus and Jasna, and Jasna never met Alberts, nor was she in any way influenced by his views. I think Zabran is doing exactly the same thing the police did: he's making a scapegoat out of Alberts. He can't accept the fact that his Pygmalion, Yarostan, simply didn't function, and he can't accept the fact that Jan Sedlak, a person Zabran considered an ignorant peasant, made more of an impression on Yarostan than Zabran's theoretical wisdom. He's trying to convince himself that only a theoretician, an intellectual like himself, could have messed up his plans, not a peasant like Jan, and obviously not Yarostan, an anti-intellectual undisciplined lumpen, on his own. He'd expected Yarostan to be disciplined by a few years of work in the carton plant; he'd thought Luisa's influence would turn Yarostan into an organizer, a cadre, with a smattering of theory. Yarostan's 'combativity' was thus to be channeled into what he calls the "self-activity" of the proletariat realizing its own historical task; Yarostan was to be something like a controlled Nachalo. But when the big moment came, Yarostan didn't function; instead of pulling 'the base' in Zabran's direction, he pulled Jasna as well as Vera and Adrian in Jan's direction. In other words the proletariat didn't move the way it was 'inevitably' supposed to move. How was Zabran to explain this? Certainly not in terms of the fact that Yarostan had remained his own person, certainly not in terms of the fact that Jan made more sense to Yarostan than Zabran did. There had to be an outside influence: Alberts. If his views had been isolated in time, the production crew wouldn't have been influenced by them. What he failed to tell Yarostan was how and when Alberts' views influenced the production crew, and I would have expected Yarostan to have the sense to ask."

"He did say his head swam as he listened to some of Titus' explanations," I reminded her.

"I'm not trying to tear into Yarostan," she told me. "My head's been swimming too. The irony of it is that Yarostan helped me clear up things he seems unable to clear up for himself. It was Yarostan who made me see the incompatibility of my friendship with Jan with my commitment to Alberts' project. It was he who helped me understand the contradiction between my rebellion against an inhuman social order and my desire to build an inhuman social order with the lowest strata of society. Yet he seems so mule-headed about his own contradictions — as if he'd suddenly gone deaf and blind. But then I suppose it's that very mule-headedness that made him such a miserable disciple and tool."

I'm as bothered as Sabina by your "mule-headedness," and I'd like to know what it is that you're defending, and why. As I told you when I started this letter, Yarostan, I'm not interested in judging you; I don't have a vantage point from which to do that. I'm trying desperately to understand what's happened to us, why we're again so strange to each other. Only a few weeks ago you wrote about the possibility of your voyaging here with Mirna; you even let a tender

feeling toward me slip into your letter. Yet now you seem so closed, so defensive, so much like what I'm trying to stop being. You seem to be no stronger than I am. I suppose what upsets me about that is my realization that I can no longer lean on you. Apparently I still feel the need to.

Something very strange has happened since I last wrote you. Ted and I have become very close friends. He's staying with Sabina and me. Tina and Pat still haven't turned up. Ted has moved into Tina's room. It seems so strange, after the horrid things I thought and said about him, for Ted to be sleeping in Tina's room. And still more strange: I think I love Ted in a way I've never loved anyone before.

A few days after I sent my previous letter Minnie telephoned to arrange for a time when we could get together; she'd promised to visit me on the day when she'd helped me get out of jail. I told her Ted was in jail and asked her help in getting him out. Ted was released almost as soon as Minnie investigated the case. She learned that the only charge against him was "loitering," and that charge was dropped when she presented herself as his defense lawyer. Sabina waited for him when he was released, and they took a taxi to his place. The print shop looked as if a tornado had gone through it, and Sabina insisted Ted's life would be in danger if he returned there; she's sure the police intend to "finish off" the printer whose equipment was used for the production of so many of the radical publications of the strikers. She didn't even let him go upstairs for his personal things; she simply brought him directly to our house.

I hadn't seen Ted since he'd driven Pat and me back to the university after our visit to the research center. I must have looked shocked when Sabina walked into the house with him.

"Do you mind my coming here?" was the first thing he asked, standing in the doorway.

I grabbed his hand and pulled him into the house. "Of course I don't mind, Ted. I hope you don't mind my being here."

He smiled sadly and told me had had nowhere else to go and no other friends in the world, since both Tina and Tissie had disappeared.

Ted quickly learned that Tissie was back in the prison hospital. Sabina had of course suspected this, but she hadn't picked up the phone to confirm the fact. The day after he moved in with us, Ted went to visit Tissie; he was terribly depressed when he returned. He told us Tissie was convinced she wouldn't ever be released again; she'd spoken to him of dying in the hospital, "among my only friends." Sabina went to her room and shut her door; she didn't want to learn what Tissie had done after they'd gotten separated at the research center. After the police had cleared everyone out of the research center, Tissie had gotten a ride to the university. She went to the print shop and found it wrecked. There was no sign of Tina or Ted or me. "My mind went blank," she told him. She wandered away from the campus and went from bar to bar, until she finally found a heroin dealer. She spent the night sleeping on a street until she was picked up by the police. Ted cried while telling me this. I was profoundly moved by his attachment to the beautiful, spiteful urchin who never had and never would reciprocate his love for her. I felt so sorry for him, so guilty toward him. For two whole days I did nothing but try to make up to him for my horrid behavior in the garage. I was really a blind nitwit when I ran from the university co-op to the garage twelve years ago. I was such a stupefied tourist; it was

all so exotic to me. If I'd been more sensitive to the people I had moved in with, my past twelve years might not have been as empty as they've been.

During the two days after he joined us I learned more about Ted than I'd learned during all the months I had lived in the garage. Sabina had told me some things about him, but I had never been able to piece the fragments together into a picture that made sense to me. His childhood was almost identical to Tissie's. He didn't know who his father was. His mother brought a different man home daily. Ted spent all his days and most of his nights in the street. When he was eleven he started hanging around a garage where stolen cars were repaired. One night he was beaten, for no reason, by one of his mother's boyfriends, and he managed to slip into the garage and spend the night there, probably much the same way you found your way into the carton plant. (Yes, it's the same garage in which I joined him, Tina and Sabina years later.) When the proprietor found him there the following morning, Ted begged to stay in the garage permanently. The proprietor accepted him, not as a person for whom he felt compassion, but as a potential tool; he taught Ted to open car locks, to hot-wire cars, to dismantle them. By the time he was thirteen Ted was an experienced car thief and driver, although he obviously didn't have a licence. His boss would make him break into the car and start it; the boss could flee if the police arrived and Ted would be the one who got caught; while telling me this, Ted explained that he would "only" have gone to reform school whereas the boss would have gone to prison. This was when he met Tissie. She was ten, fatherless, and equally homeless; her mother was perpetually drunk and had no use for her. Ted offered her what his boss had offered him: a place to stay, and an activity; he also shared his meager income with his new friend. Although Ted didn't quite say it, I gathered that Tissie was bored while he worked. She resisted learning what he wanted to teach her, and after a few days with him she spent only her nights in the garage, returning to play in the streets during days. He tried to stimulate her interest in his activity by inviting her to join him on his first attempt to steal a car by himself and in broad daylight. One morning he and Tissie took a bus to a wealthy suburb and Ted broke into and drove off with an expensive sports car. Both were immensely proud as he chauffeured Tissie all over the city in a vehicle which probably belonged to a corporation owner's son. This was the escapade Ron had wanted to tell me about when he and Sabina had come to visit me after his release from reform school. Of course the inevitable police siren stopped the pair of ghetto children, one thirteen, the other ten, and both were sent to reform school. Ted for two years, Tissie for half a year. Ted met Ron in reform school: they became friends immediately. Ron, son of the "class-conscious" Debbie Matthews, patiently explained to Ted that he was being exploited by his boss. The idea of starting a cooperative, non-exploitative garage was Ron's. The project Ron described to Ted in reform school included three other people: obviously Ted included Tissie, and Ron mentioned only Jose and me! Sabina had told me this long ago, but I couldn't quite believe it; I still can't. I was to take care of "the books as well as the thinking." Ted was released long before Ron, and he didn't believe anything would come of Ron's plans. When he returned to the garage he found it closed down. His boss had apparently become so dependent on Ted that when he'd been left on his own he'd gotten caught and sent to prison for a year. Ted found him when he got out

and learned he was giving up the garage. Ted's former boss offered to rent the garage to Ted for an exorbitant sum. and Ted accepted; he wasn't able to bargain. When he asked his boss what had happened to Tissie, the man told Ted, "Get yourself another girlfriend, kid; that one ain't for you." Ted didn't understand; he spent hours walking around the neighborhood hoping to find her. He bought himself a suit and a hat, and he did all his stealing at night, mainly from the section of the city where Ron had wrecked his father's car.

"One night I got back with a new car and there was a lady at the garage door, a woman with a fancy dress, heels, a hair-do, rings and bracelets. I just couldn't believe it was Tissie. She'd been just a kid two years earlier. She said she'd heard the place was my own. No, I told her, I'm just renting. Then she asked: 'Got room for me?' I couldn't believe she actually wanted to stay in the garage. 'Well I ain't got no other home,' she told me."

Ted made no demands whatever on Tissie. Her presence in the garage probably excited him, but he seems to have made no advances to her. He made it clear to me that his idea of sexual relations was what he'd seen between his mother and the men she brought home; to Ted it was equivalent to violence, and he feared every form of violence. Tissie went out almost every evening and she returned long after midnight. She told him she'd taken up a trade she had learned from a girl she'd met in reform school. Ted had no idea what kind of trade Tissie had learned in reform school, but he didn't ask. Late one night, shortly after Tissie had returned for the night, there was a loud knocking on the garage door. Ted opened the door and a wealthy-looking older woman burst in, found Tissie, and ran to her shouting, "Why did you run away from me, baby? Don't I pay you enough? I'll pay you whatever you ask, baby! Just say how much!" Tissie hid behind Ted and begged him to get the woman out of the garage. That was how Ted learned about Tissie's trade, and also about Tissie's sexual interests. Some days later he asked Tissie, "Would you quit your work if I had lots more money?" She told him, "Yes! I wish I didn't have to do it for money!" "With other women?" Ted asked her. "I sure as hell wouldn't do it free with men!" she told him. While telling me this, Ted expressed neither shock nor indignation. That was how Tissie was, and that was how he learned about her, that's all. It wasn't long after this episode that Ron was released from reform school; he and Sabina visited Ted immediately after their visit to me.

"I asked if Sabina was the girl Ron had told me about in reform school," Ted told me. "Ron said no, that girl was miles away. When I told him I was renting the garage, he scolded me for getting myself exploited worse than before. Now the boss does nothing at all and gets paid, he told me. Then he told me about Jose, and about this friend of Jose's who could buy the whole garage. I asked why this guy would buy the garage and why he'd let us use it the way Ron saw us using it, cooperatively. He told me about Seth selling dope and needing a steady place. Ron tried to make it sound better by telling me he wouldn't sell dope from the garage; he just needed a place for making contacts. But I didn't want anything to do with that. That's when Sabina turned me inside out. She said there's no difference between stealing cars and selling dope because you get locked up for both. She knows the difference now but she didn't then. We were still arguing about it when Tissie came home around midnight. She liked Sabina as soon

as she saw her, and I guess it was Tissie who pulled me into going into it with them. She told me she'd quit working if I did what Sabina wanted."

Tissie blackmailed him the way she was going to blackmail Sabina later. In the beginning Ted thought he'd been wrong. The project seemed to be a success. He liked and trusted Jose. They all worked enthusiastically on the transformation of the house behind the garage, and for several months Ted worked with Sabina.

He remembered those months fondly. "Sabina and I stole together, we dismantled together, we built most of the inside of the house. She's the best person I ever worked with except Tina. She learned fast, and she told me all kinds of things about machines I didn't know. It was during those months that Sabina and I built the machine shop in the basement and the lofts upstairs. When I did a painting she liked it so much that I spent hours every day painting ever since then. But she had a blind spot. She couldn't see the whole thing was no good. It wasn't built by our own hands but by dope. Seth did his dealing right in the garage. Tissie became a dope addict. The garage became a front. And I became a boss and exploited kids the way Ron had told me I was exploited when I worked for a boss. Those months didn't last. Ron got himself killed in the war. Tissie might as well have gotten herself killed. She became like a dead person, a thing; she became Seth's tool, Jose knew the difference between heroin and stealing, but lose couldn't argue with Sabina. No one could. Jose got sucked into the idea of the bar because he thought the bar would get the heroin out of the house and the garage. But the bar made everything worse. Tissie took up her trade again, this time with men as well as women. All her money went to Seth. And Sabina stayed blind.

After she brought Tina, Seth wanted Tissie to take Tina to the bar. Tissie wanted to teach Tina what she'd learned in reform school. I couldn't take that. Tina liked the garage work, she liked to paint and to make things; I put myself in Tissie's way. That's when Tissie, my first and my best friend, started to hate me. Sabina didn't see any of that. I couldn't talk to anyone there. When the bar started, Sabina convinced Jose it had solved all the problems. That's when you came, Sophie. I was sure you'd be a friend that first night when you returned from the bar and told us you got scared and ran away. But you confused me the next morning when you told Tissie how you'd loved what you'd done the night before; I couldn't know you were ashamed to tell Tissie you hadn't done anything. You started to act funny. The night you went to Tissie's room I was sure you were on an errand Seth sent you on; I was sure you and Tissie were going to take Tina to the bar that night. I'm sorry, Sophie. Jose thought the same thing I did. It was hard to think anything else."

"I know, Ted. It was impossible to imagine how abysmally stupid I was to be so surprised by Tissie, to know nothing at all about Sabina," I admitted. "But I did learn one detail from Tissie during the day I spent with her at the research center. That night you thought we were acting as Seth's agents and plotting against Tina — that night Tissie wasn't Seth's agent, and she wasn't interested in Tina. Tissie loved me."

Of course Ted couldn't have known that either. By that night he distrusted everyone in the garage except Tina. "It was only when Alec moved into the garage that I had any friends

besides Tina,” he told me. “Alec understood the difference between dope dealing and all the other things we did. All your friends understood the difference, and I guess they made you see it too the last time they came. They opened Jose’s eyes too. Not that he was ever blind, but he couldn’t make himself go against Sabina. Jose and I became friends after you left. We talked about leaving, but we couldn’t leave without Tina, Tissie or Sabina, and Sabina’s whole life was in that bar and garage. I guess that’s why Jose got himself arrested; he didn’t know how else to get out of it. With Jose gone, Seth thought his chance had come to get Tina into the bar and even on heroin. Jose and I together could have stopped him, but I didn’t see how I could do it alone until Seth himself showed me how. Seth got the idea that Sabina was trying to take over, and when he asked me about that I told him it was true. I even told him she had plans to get rid of him. Seth was afraid of Sabina; he hadn’t ever dealt with her except through Jose. When he got convinced Sabina wanted to get him out of the whole thing, he got so furious he couldn’t see straight. He didn’t even talk to her; he just pointed his gun at her and told her to get out and take Tina with her. That was what I’d wanted for years. I would have moved into this house with you if you hadn’t felt about me the way you did, and if Tissie had left the garage too. But I couldn’t leave Tissie to Seth. To me she was still the kid who’d asked if I had room for her in the garage. She’d trusted me. You don’t throw someone who trusts you down a sewer, no matter how many excuses you’ve got. But Tissie was in bad shape after Sabina left. She blamed me for getting rid of Sabina and Tina, and she was right. She really hated me for that. For some reason she also blamed Jose. She made herself believe Jose wasn’t in prison but had gotten you out of the garage and then Sabina and Tina. Before Jose was released I rented a place, the same one where Tina and I later started the print shop. I kept hoping Tissie would change, I kept thinking she’d want to move to the new place when Jose was released, or that she’d want to move with you and Tina and Sabina. But Tissie got worse all the time; she started talking about killing me and about killing Jose when he got back, and I wasn’t just sure she couldn’t do it. Jose came right to the garage the day he was released, got his things, and we both drove to the new place I’d rented. He talked about you a lot, Sophie, He’d changed a lot too. We went upstairs. Then he went out to the car to get more of his things and he never came back.”

I had learned the rest from Sabina a few weeks ago, and I didn’t let Ted tell me about Jose’s death all over again. How ironic that it should have been I and my “academic friends,” particularly Hugh, who had finally turned Jose against Sabina. How ironic that Jose should have started to define his struggle in terms identical to Nachalo’s and Margarita’s in response to books I had carried to him in prison. How ironic that Jose should have thought he had to prove himself as a guerrilla in order to live up to me.

Only a day or two after my long talks with Ted, from an altogether unexpected source, I learned yet more about the garage, and about yet another “guerrilla fighter” who occupied a place in my own life. Minnie came to see me a few days after she helped get Ted out of jail. Lawyer or no lawyer, I couldn’t keep myself from throwing my arms around her when she walked into our house. I had always liked Minnie a lot. Ted and Sabina were both out when she came.

“What have you been doing lately besides getting arrested?” she asked me. “Daman told me this was the second time you’d been in jail during the past two months.”

“Isn’t that enough for a committed revolutionary?” I asked.

“I can’t tell you how glad I am that you can still tolerate me, Sophie. You’ve always fascinated me. My life seems so drab, so uniform, compared to yours. When I left you in front of the garage ten years ago you had gone as low as I could imagine a person going. Then I learned from Daman that you were teaching university courses; suddenly you turn up fighting hundreds of police in a factory yard. You’re an absolute wonder.”

“I’ll be grateful to you forever for saying that, Minnie, but I know perfectly well you wouldn’t say it if you’d kept closer watch. If you knew how undecided, how fickle, how dependent I was — ”

“That’s precisely my point, Sophie; I do know you, much better than you think. I’m almost your negative; I’m decisive, consistent, independent — and drab, dull, routine, a deadly bore. The most exciting moments in my life were those I spent with a person who had everything in common with you, who could have been your twin — ”

“Namely who?”

“None other than Alec. He could no more function without ‘his woman’ than you could without ;your man’ — ”

I was stunned. “Are you being sarcastic, Minnie?”

“On the contrary. I envy you, both of you, both equally undecisive, both dependent, both so fickle you continually landed in the most terrible isolation, yet both the most fabulous people in my life. I was wildly in love with him, Sophie; I remained close to him until he was killed. I’m not being sarcastic. I’m fascinated, awed by something I don’t understand.”

“Please tell me about him, Minnie. Tell me about yourself too. I was so used to linking ‘Daman and Minnie,’ I have a hard time even imagining you with Alec. What about your political group? When did you give that up?”

“I’ve managed to combine it all, Sophie. Law school, politics and Alec all passed through my life while I remained unchanged.”

“Did Alec turn to you after he left the garage?”

“Earlier, Sophie. He turned to me before he ever moved into the garage. He called me the day he learned you had disappeared from the cooperative dorm. He was absolutely frantic. He was sure you had disappeared in order to shock the people who had kept us off the Omissions staff. I told him you’d been evicted from the dorm precisely because you’d helped distribute that paper, and the fraternity boys had made a fuss about it and gotten us arrested. He apparently expected me to walk all over the city with him looking for you. I suggested calling your relatives. That was easy. There was only one Nachalo in the phone book. But when your mother told us she hadn’t heard from you either, I became as frantic as Alec. We visited your mother. She was awfully nice to us, but she wasn’t at all concerned about your disappearance; she was much more concerned that we kept referring to her as your mother. When we left her house Alec asked me if I’d go out with him that weekend. He knew that I was about to break up with

Daman. Hugh, Daman and I had all graduated; Hugh and Daman intended to go directly to graduate school. I decided to get a temporary teaching job in a high school instead of going on. We had a big argument about that. But there's no need to go into that. I didn't accept Alec's invitation; I knew I'd be hurt. And I was right. It was on that weekend you telephoned him, and he forgot all about me and rushed to the garage to see you. He was terribly fickle, but I think he never stopped loving you, Sophie. He called me again right after his first visit to you. He told me excitedly that you had rejoined the working class, and he wanted me to go to his room to learn all the good news. I naively called Daman and Hugh to tell them you'd been found, and all three of us went to Alec's. As soon as we walked in I knew he had expected me to come alone. He pulled me to his kitchen and asked jealously if Daman and I were together again. I lied and told him we were. I sensed his jealousy; something inside me started to stir, but I didn't let it. I rejected his advances, not out of any consideration for you, but because I didn't want to be your second; I was much too possessive. So Alec told all three of us about what he called your 'bootstrap' operation. Hugh was immensely impressed. I think it was Alec's account of what you were doing in that garage that made Hugh change his mind about enrolling in graduate school. After that meeting, Alec didn't call for several weeks. During those weeks I waited for him to call. I had never been wanted that way, Sophie. When he finally did call my heart jumped. But that time he didn't want me. He wanted the four of us to visit you in the garage. On that first visit to you I was sure I'd never be anything more to Alec than your second, and I was relieved I hadn't let anything start. I couldn't make any sense out of what you were doing, but Alec was full of enthusiasm for all of it. He quit his job and moved to the garage. I thought he had moved in with you and had definitively walked out of my life. I plunged back into the political activities of my organization; I even saw Daman two or three times outside of organization meetings. And then, several weeks after our first visit, Alec called from the garage. He said he had to see me and he seemed awfully upset. He told me he hadn't touched you since he'd been in the garage, and that he was lonelier than he'd ever been in his life. As soon as he was in my apartment he kissed me as if we'd been lovers for years, and before saying anything he started making love to me. I had dreamed of that happening to me ever since I had sensed that he wanted me. I started to let myself go until he stirred up my jealousy with something he said. 'Oh Jesus, Minnie, we should have done this years ago,' he told me. I angrily asked him, 'When, Alec? When you were an errand boy for Rhea and her organization? When you were running after Sophie?' I told him I had been deeply hurt when my best friends had banned me from the Omissions staff, and I didn't want to be hurt again so soon by Alec, who'd had nothing to do with that stupid exclusion; I wanted to have at least one friend who hadn't been a bastard toward me. He let go of me right away. He acted as if I had unravelled a puzzle for him, and I was once again relieved I hadn't let myself go; I saw that you were all he had on his mind. I was nothing but a temporary consolation. 'So that's it, the Omissions staff! Sophie is overreacting again!' he exclaimed as if everything were suddenly clear to him; she's expressing her spite against her former friends the same way she expressed it earlier against Lem and Rhea by dating that reactionary asshole Rakshas!' He'd been thinking about you all the time his arms

had been wrapped around me; I was green with envy. He spent the whole rest of the evening trying to convince me to visit the garage again. I refused at first, but he drew such an awful picture for me. He told me that !in response to your exclusion from Omissions' you had thrown yourself into a situation in which you couldn't survive. He told me all about the heroin and the prostitution. He didn't have to convince me you were too frail to survive that kind of life for very long. He suggested that Hugh, Daman and I drop in on you, casually as it were, to try to make you grasp what you were doing to yourself, to !save' you. That's how we were drawn into that terrible confrontation. I thought your sister such an unscrupulous beast, Sophie; I'm glad that even she finally figured out what you were all doing to yourselves. All my jealousy left me, Sophie. I felt so sorry for you. When you lay on the floor begging Hugh to carry you away, I was sure you were gone. And once outside you shouted at me to get away from you. You didn't even recognize me. I walked away crying. I didn't walk far. I was sure you'd return to the garage, and I waited for Alec. I suppose my jealousy returned when I saw you walking away from the garage, with Alec tagging behind you. All my envy returned when I reached my apartment, alone, and it stayed with me and tortured me for the following two years. I waited and waited for Alec to call, but he never did; I had saved you for him. I hope they were happy years for you, Sophie. I spent almost two years with him after that, and those were the happiest years in my life."

"Minnie, who told you I spent those two years with Alec?" I asked her.

"You don't have to spare my feelings now, Sophie; I'm obviously not jealous now! When he left you. Alec came to me; we loved each other — "

"I saw Alec once, at a distance, a few days after I left the garage, Minnie, and I never saw him again."

"That's impossible, Sophie! He was living at your house when he started seeing me again."

"My house! I was staying in a dingy downtown hotel, Minnie! I had a job in a fiberglass factory. I never saw Alec again; I hated him when I left the garage. Did he tell you he was with me during those two years?"

"Oh my God, Sophie! No, he never talked about you, and I never asked. He only talked about your mother — "

I started laughing hysterically. "Minnie! Alec must have lived with Luisa for two years! And I had thought — "

She interrupted me. "Do you mean to tell me you didn't know?"

"Honestly, Minnie! I moved to a hotel, and later I came to this house with Sabina and Tina. I didn't see Luisa again until last year, and she hasn't told me anything — "

"I should have guessed!" Minnie exclaimed. "She was so upset when we spoke of you as her daughter that time Alec and I visited her. I could see why. She looked young enough to be your sister, and she was terribly interested in Alec."

"Already then, Minnie? Right after I was evicted from the co-op?"

"That was the only time I ever visited her. It wasn't I who noticed, Sophie; I'm not that perceptive. It was Alec who noticed. He bowed to her, kissed her hand, praised her house and

made a complete ass out of himself. To me she was your mother! I couldn't have imagined Alec was going to live with her for two years! So it wasn't because of you that I spent all that time waiting!"

"Is that all you did, Minnie: wait? Those years must have been similar to mine; I waited for Jose's release from prison."

"I broke up with Daman once and for all."

"Why just then, Minnie? Wasn't it then that Daman finally got a job in a factory? Wasn't that what you had wanted him to do after you both graduated?"

"I was surprised when I learned you were close to him, Sophie. I hope this doesn't offend you. but it took me all those years to figure out that Daman was a jerk. Yes, he got a factory job, after he got his doctorate in philosophy. And as soon as he started working he caused a split in the organization. He suddenly became the world's greatest authority on the working class. His former comrades, including me, were suddenly bourgeois intellectuals with no roots in the working class. He started bringing his one recruit to the meetings, a complete ignoramus who got his politics from television sports announcers. Daman insisted on absolute silence whenever his baseball expert felt like making a comment. The meetings became weekly lectures on batting averages, but not for long. There had been eight of us; three people quit politics altogether; four of us started getting together at my apartment; Daman and his recruit apparently continued to hold weekly meetings; I wasn't even interested enough to find out what happened to our former meeting place. Alec started attending the meetings at my apartment. He was like a bomb. He finished off what was left of the organization."

"Alec left Luisa because he became interested in your organization?" I asked.

"Well in fact yes and no, Sophie. I ran into him by chance at a major political rally. I hadn't seen him for two years. I saw people there whom I hadn't seen for even longer. Lem Icel was there too. I even looked for you. Lem and Alec had apparently just seen each other when I saw the two of them. Alec was introducing Lem to your mother. I greeted all three of them as old acquaintances, and that was that. Alec asked me what Daman and I were doing, and I told him I was very involved in the activity of a new political tendency and no longer saw Daman. A few days later he called. He didn't apologize for having dropped me so completely two years earlier. He didn't express interest in me but in the organization I had briefly mentioned. He told me he was ready to become seriously involved in political activities; he wanted to do more than attend rallies. He told me he'd been reading about the third world and about the ghetto, and that he was sick of just reading about it. I told him when our group met. I also told him I didn't care to have anything to do with him outside the political meetings. And I meant it. I was sure his sudden political commitment was nothing but an act, and I was furious. He started coming regularly to our meetings. He was by far the most dynamic member of the group. I thought you had somehow transformed him. I had never seen him so concentrated, so logical or so eloquent. He came to four or five meetings and made no advances toward me. But one night he stayed after everyone else left. He told me he wanted to clarify some political questions that were bothering him. I lost my head, Sophie. Alec had been on my mind ever since that evening in

his kitchen, when I'd learned he wanted me. I don't remember what it was he wanted to know; I don't think I knew even then. I had to consummate what I'd interrupted two years earlier. I asked him to stay longer. I talked to him about anything that come into my mind. I wanted to find out if he was still loyal to you, if he'd spend a few hours away from you. I hoped he was still fickle; I no longer cared whether or not I was your second. He stayed. We talked about Omissions, about the garage, about heroin, about your mother, about everything and everyone except you. He told me he had retained contact with Ted after he'd left the garage, that Ted as well as Jose had turned against the heroin pusher, and that Jose had been arrested. He also told me how intelligent and well-read your mother was; he seemed surprised that someone who had spent her life working knew so much about so many things. It got very late, and Alec asked if he could stay yet longer. I had been waiting for that question for years. I told him I only had one bed. I had always imagined that your love affairs were filled with animal passion, and I had always envied you Sophie. Alec moved in with me; our love lasted for almost two years. Those years were sexually the fullest years of my life. Until today I had thought Alec had left you when he'd moved in with me, and saying these things to you fills me with excitement. Please forgive me, Sophie — ”

“I'm glad I found you again, Minnie. Please don't stop.”

“I really can't go on, Sophie, In a way I can understand why you went from Alec to Daman. In spite of his rigidity, Daman was always so considerate, so gentle, and above all so scrupulously fair. Alec was a monster. He took everything out of me, left me completely drained. I don't just mean sexually. Politically too. Something had happened to him during the two years before he moved in with me. He kept telling me that the turning point in his life had been the confrontation he'd had with Sabina the first time he'd visited you in the garage. She had characterized him as a slave to any capitalist who bought him. It obviously wasn't the thought that was new to him, but the beastly way in which she must have said it to him. He told me it was because of Sabina's characterization that he'd quit his job and moved into the garage. And it continued bothering him after he saw through Sabina and her 'bootstrap operation.' He apparently decided that the only meaningful human activity was the total destruction of the capitalist class in all its manifestations, in the colonies as well as the ghettos. That attitude coincided perfectly with our tendency's political program. The fact is that when he'd started coming to the meetings, he had been drawn to the organization more than to me. That's ironic too, isn't it? He was the only one of the nine people in the group who had no job. He spent all his time reading and attending meetings. Of course he automatically became the editor and distributor of the tendency's newspaper. Before long it was Alec's organization. Alec stopped consulting the other members before he made major decisions, and this caused another split — or rather, the majority of the group : purged' Alec for making himself a 'dictator.' Only three of the nine stuck with Alec: I, Eric, who is still a friend of mine, and a sixteen-year old girl, Carmen, who was connected with a group that eventually destroyed the little that was left. He had met Carmen while distributing the tendency newspaper. Her brother was one of three rebels who tried to start a radical bookshop in the heart of the ghetto. They were continually

harassed by the police. Alec learned that one of the three dealt in dope. He made a scene about it, arguing that the radicalizing effect of the books was negated by the dope. Carmen agreed with Alec immediately, and her brother wavered. They were directly affected, since they lived right above the bookshop. Carmen started to attend organization meetings. Alec walked her home after the meetings, and he always returned to my apartment. But I had to make a stupid scene. I knew my two years were up. I blew up as soon as he returned one night. I told him I could support him with my teaching job, but I couldn't possibly support his friends. I just went silly. Carmen and her group were completely self-supporting, and the fact that I shared my bed and my meals with Alec had never been a burden to me. Alec rightly interpreted my outburst as a defense of wage labor, and he made that a perfect pretext for ending our relationship. He calmly told me he had experienced similar outbursts before — from his father, whom he'd hated since his boyhood. He acted as if I'd evicted him. He packed his little bag righteously and walked out of my life as if we were enemies."

"Poor Minnie! He did to you what I had done to him the night I left the garage. I spat on him and threw a bottle at him. Did you ever see him again?"

"I never rid myself of him, Sophie, any more than he ever rid himself of you. I think the radical bookshop, the campaign against heroin and even Carmen herself were all connected in his mind with you. He moved in with Carmen above the bookshop, and he and Carmen continued to attend the organization meetings. Alec took an interest in the bookshop and he succeeded in getting the heroin dealer out of it. One night Carmen called me from jail. She, her brother and Alec had been arrested and charged with being heroin dealers. I went to the trial. Although I knew nothing at all about law then, I knew that trial was an absolute scandal. They were defended by a court-appointed lawyer. Nothing at all was found upstairs or downstairs. One witness testified he had once bought a joint in the bookshop. But the prosecutor ranted and raved about the radical books; he listed one after another title; he read long excerpts about peasants collectively beating or hanging landlords, policemen and informers. The defense lawyer raised no objections. All three were sentenced to six months without a shred of evidence. When the three of them were released, they attended only one more meeting of the organization. They had prepared a skit before coming. Carmen announced dramatically that the time to talk had ended and the time for action had come. Alec said action meant armed action, and Carmen's brother opened the box they had brought and gave a rifle to every one in the room! I called them a 'suicide squad' and ran to my room crying. Eric joined them, What would you have done?"

"I would have run to my room crying, Minnie. Do you even have to ask?"

"I had never been so alone in my whole life, Sophie. For the first time since I'd started college I was without an organization, without friends, without any activity except that stupid teaching job. I spent my days policing kids and got home exhausted and disgusted with myself. I couldn't stand what I was becoming. That was when I decided to enroll in law school. I know exactly what you think of lawyers, Sophie. I agree completely. I agreed then too."

“I can’t judge you, Minnie, not any more. I was drifting back to school around the time you started law school, and I drifted with many less scruples than you must have had — ”

“They weren’t exactly scruples, Sophie, but something less. I still agreed with Alec, I still thought the only worthwhile activity was to destroy capitalism in any way possible, but I didn’t translate that to a practice of chasing down and shooting dope dealers or fighting cops in the street; that kind of activity seemed too much like swatting flies off garbage cans without removing the garbage. But the fact is that I didn’t know how to translate my political ideas into any kind of practice — ”

“I had almost the same experience with Jose. Maybe the suicide squad was the only way our commitments could be translated into practice — ”

“If so, then I’ve become as much of a reformist as Daman. I never wanted to believe that, Sophie. I had always thought some kind of political activity other than suicide, organized activity, could be meaningful and genuinely radical. I never shared Daman’s illusion that one could function meaningfully within the system, preaching to future bosses about the revolution at the point of production. But I can’t even say that honestly. I had some illusions when I started law school. I was sick of policing kids. I had been enormously impressed by the foul treatment Alec, Carmen and her brother had received in court. I told myself my function could be less explicitly a police function, my time could be more my own — ” “And is it less of a police function?” “You know damn well it isn’t, Sophie. I’m part of an enormous apparatus. I move by its rules, not it by mine. My time is less my own now than it ever was before. I started practicing a year and a half ago, about six months before the riot. During the riot I defended victims of police harassment, illegal entry, illegal arrest, beatings. I found other so-called radical lawyers and joined the cooperative I’m still with. We worked with a group that called itself a committee against repression — ”

“Luisa was on that committee!”

“Really? I never ran into her. I had just barely started that work when I was struck by a blow that incapacitated me for months. I don’t think I can tell it without breaking down; it was so awful — ”

“Is it about Alec? You don’t have to — ”

“I do have to, Sophie. I can’t go on keeping it locked up inside me, and you’re the only person in the world I can share the pain with.”

“Don’t make me cry before you even start, Minnie. But please tell me. I want to know.”

“After the meeting when Alec, Carmen and her brother broke up the organization, Eric moved in with them above the bookshop. Eric was the only one of the group who visited me periodically. They did exactly what they advocated. They constituted themselves into an armed self-defense group. Next time the police would raid the bookshop they’d have to shoot it out with ‘urban guerrillas,’ as the four called themselves. They spent a whole year trying to convince people in their neighborhood to arm themselves against what Alec called ‘the occupation forces,’ by which he meant the police. According to Eric, Alec also kept track of all the heroin dealers in the neighborhood, and he paid specific attention to one dealer who supposedly ‘serviced’ the

entire region from a bar protected by the police. They spoke of heroin dealers as rats. When the riot broke out Alec announced the time had come to rid the neighborhood of all the rats. The bookshop was near the heart of the riot area and was left completely unharmed by the crowds that looted and burned all the shops on both sides of it. All four of them had the impression the revolution had broken out, and they were eager to take part in it; they spent a long time arguing about the form their participation should take. Alec settled the argument by grabbing a handgun and shouting, 'This is how I'm participating; I'm going to get him!' Carmen's brother hesitated; he said he didn't want to hurt innocent people. Carmen stuffed a gun into her purse, pulled Alec out of their apartment and shouted at the other two, 'You're already too late, and there won't be a next time!' Carmen and Alec walked through excited crowds toward the bar where the regional heroin dealer did his business. Eric and Carmen's brother followed them. There were no police protectors near the bar; that day they were busy elsewhere, and the heart of the riot area was not the safest place for them. Alec and Carmen moved toward the bar shouting, 'Get the dope pushers!' and 'Clear out the rats!' At the bar entrance they both pulled out their guns and shouted, 'This is the origin of all the heroin' and 'here's the biggest rat in the community.' An enormous crowd gathered in front of the bar. Some people shouted encouragement; most people stared curiously. Alec and Carmen entered the bar waving their guns. But the crowd attracted the attention of the forces of law and order. A tank and a national guard unit were provoked by it. The tank aimed its gun at the heart of the crowd, and the soldiers started beating people, forcing them to disperse. Eric was separated from Carmen's brother but kept his eyes glued to the entrance of the bar. He saw Alec and Carmen come out grinning victoriously, still waving their guns. Eric shouted as loudly as he could to them, pointlessly. Alec and Carmen turned and started to run back into the bar. They were shot down by machine guns."

"Minnie, that's awful —"

"Eric still has nightmares about it. That was an awful thing to see. Carmen's brother committed suicide a few days later."

Minnie was shaking. I helped her lie down on the couch and put a blanket over her. I was crying.

"I shook this way for days when Eric told me about it, and I still shake whenever I think about it. I had opposed Alec's vigilante terrorism from its origins, but I disintegrated when Eric told me how Alec and Carmen died. Maybe you're right; maybe that was the only way to translate our commitment into practice. I can't help admiring their courage. Fickle as he was, Alec remained true to the one goal he set himself. Ever since his encounter with Sabina he had convinced himself he couldn't coexist with the ruling order, and he lived and died for that conviction. Eric wanted to commit suicide too. He felt he had no right to be the only one alive. He had pledged himself to the group, and he felt he had betrayed Alec and Carmen by letting them venture out by themselves. He knew that if he and Carmen's brother had stood guard outside the bar, they would have known about the arrival of the national guard, and they'd have warned Alec and Carmen in time; they could all have escaped by the bar's rear entrance. Instead they had let Alec and Carmen emerge proudly into what they expected to be a cheering

and welcoming crowd, the grateful community. Eric tortured himself with guilt; he knew that the same thoughts had led Carmen's brother to kill himself."

I revived Minnie somewhat with a drink and asked, "Where's Eric now?"

"Eric and I live together," she told me. "We have since the riot. He works in an auto plant, and he's one of the five people in the new political tendency we started several months ago. He's a very gentle and considerate person, and very scrupulous about sharing the work as well as the burdens. I'm sure you'll like him."

Before Minnie left I asked her if she knew what had happened to the other people we had known during our university days, and I told her all I knew about Lem, Rhea as well as Daman.

"I never heard of Thurston or Bess again," she told me. "I read about Hugh in a newspaper sometime recently. He's some kind of authority in one of the sciences; I think the article was about a lecture he was to deliver at a suburban college —"

"Hugh' — a lecturer?"

"I'll try to look him up, Sophie. If I find him and he's nearby, should I ask if he could get together with us?"

"I'd love that, Minnie!"

I tried not to cry any more until Minnie left. Her account of Alec's life and his horrid death stirred up a great deal in my life too. I had been so vicious to him. In the end Alec, like Jose, had tried to act out, at least in some practical form, the project I had only dreamed about. In his own way Alec had been a Nachalo and had died like him. When Minnie and I parted, we both knew we were going to be seeing a lot of each other from now on.

Your letter arrived two days after Minnie's visit and Daman telephoned later that day. As I've learned to expect, Daman forgot everything that's happened recently except the fact that I'm out of a job. "It's an opening that doesn't call for any higher credentials than a master's degree; I thought you might be interested, in case you're still out of a job."

"I'm out of a job. Daman, and out of a project, but I'm not interested in another teaching job. How about coming over just to talk, about old times, about Alec for instance?"

"I can't, Sophie," he told me. "I've suddenly got more things to do than I have time. I thought I had recruited Luisa, but it turns out she recruited me to that committee of hers —"

"The repression committee?" I asked. "If you won't come over to talk, then how about giving Ted and me a ride to the repression committee? He still hasn't gotten his car back; it was impounded by the police. And he'd love to see you again. He was so impressed by you ten years ago, he still remembers you —"

Except for an excursion he'd taken with Sabina to try to get his car back, Ted had been spending his days the same way I had: moping around the house with nothing to do. Ted had in fact told me he'd like to see the people who had visited me in the garage; he had liked Alec a great deal, and he'd thought they were all like Alec. But Ted must have been disappointed. Daman came, shook Ted's hand showing no sign he had ever seen Ted before, and told him, "Nice seeing you again; how many years were you in jail because of that heroin business?" Ted and Daman had nothing more to say to each other on the way to the repression committee.

In the car I asked Daman if he knew how Alec had died.

“Of course,” he told me. “He was gunned down in last year’s not.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I’m sorry, Sophie. I learned about it about a month after it happened, and I didn’t see you for almost a year after that. I guess I forgot — ”

“But you never forget to tell me about openings for college instructors!”

“I said I was sorry, Sophie! And what’s so odd about my telling you about job openings when I know you need a job?”

“Nothing, Daman, absolutely nothing! You have a perfect sense of timing!” I was referring to something he’d told me a year ago, right after I’d been fired from the first job he’d helped me find. He didn’t seem to recognize the reference.

Daman is such a bizarre person. He seems to have a different set of standards and pattern of behavior for each of the compartments in which he lives his life. I tried to get close to him during my year in graduate school. I felt very lonely among students who were ten years younger than I. Their concerns and interests had little in common with mine, I’ve never been spontaneously sociable, and until a few weeks ago the possibility of forming a liaison with a lover ten years younger than I never crossed my mind. Daman told me about interesting political events; he chatted briefly afterwards, but he didn’t once pick me up or take me home. He didn’t become a friend until I got my degree three years ago, when he helped me get my first teaching job. I became his “colleague” and therefore also his friend a year and a half after I first enrolled in his course. I was hired to teach one course. His teaching day began at noon, and I taught my course on Tuesdays and Thursdays, in the afternoon. From the first day of classes he picked me up and drove me to school; I read on the grass or in the library until his teaching day ended, and then he drove me back home. One Tuesday afternoon he invited me to dinner at his apartment. I learned what it was that Minnie, and later Luisa, liked about him. In the privacy of his apartment he was an altogether transformed Daman. All his personal and political rigidity were gone. He was the most thoughtful and considerate man I’ve ever been close to. I learned that he always cooked supper for himself, not to save money, but because he preferred his own meals to anything he could order in restaurants. And the meal he prepared for me really was splendid; Luisa is a good cook, but not compared to Daman. He washed all the dishes as soon as we were done eating, and that first night he didn’t even let me dry them. After coffee and a brief chat he volunteered to drive me home, “Unless you’d like to go out on the town” — which of course I did. We went to a movie that was shown in a university auditorium. When we came out I put my hand in his and had him retrace the walk we had taken exactly ten years earlier, when we’d carried the coffin of the dead university newspaper. He didn’t realize we had retraced the path of that mock funeral until the very end, when we stopped before the closed entrance of the building in which the newspaper office was located. He looked at me sadly. “I know how much that meant to you, Sophie; it meant a lot to me too.” I asked him, “Would you mind taking me back to your apartment?” I had fallen in love with Daman’s apartment and with Daman’s behavior inside it. His apartment was clean and modest yet extremely comfortable;

it was an absolute contrast to Art's filthy little reading room with an unmade bed. Daman did all his work in his office in the university. He used his apartment for cooking, eating, reading and sleeping, and everything in his apartment was perfectly arranged to make these activities as enjoyable as they could be. He had a double bed, but I didn't ask if anyone had shared it with him before me. He had broken up with Minnie long before he had been able to afford that apartment. Since all his acquaintances were political, and since he didn't mix politics with his private life, I didn't see how he could have had a sexual relationship with any other woman, unless she had invited herself as I had. Daman's compartments were so mutually exclusive that he didn't keep any political or philosophical books in his apartment. His single shelf contained only literary classics and, of all things, books of poetry. I had never imagined Daman sitting in his apartment reading poetry, but I had never imagined the rest of his "private" life either. For slightly less than a year (I was fired before the end of the school year) I "lived" with Daman two days out of every week, from Tuesday at noon, when he picked me up for my first class, to Thursday afternoon, when he drove me back after my last. I remember those days with a certain nostalgia. Unlike Art, Daman took nothing for granted. Every Tuesday afternoon, before driving to his apartment, he scrupulously asked, "Where to?" He sometimes let me help cook, but I didn't once cook alone, and I never did the shopping. I washed dishes only when he wasn't home for dinner, which happened very rarely, and on those occasions he left a prepared meal for me in the refrigerator! Unlike any other man I've known (I've never lived with you), Daman understood that not knowing how to cook or clean or wash dishes presupposed the existence of "proletarians" — women proletarians — who knew how to do all these things. He did all this for himself, not ostentatiously but quietly and matter-of-factly. His entire apartment was spotless whenever I stepped into it. I never once even had a chance to make the bed; he hurriedly did that while I brushed my teeth. In his apartment he was the most decent and thoughtful person I've known. But as soon as his "social role" was in question, or what he took to be mine, he became insupportable.

On the job he helped me find three years ago I was supposed to teach a conventional course in introductory sociology. I immediately turned it into the only study of society that interested me: the study of its overthrow. I had been told to use one of two "standard" textbooks, but I didn't read or assign or discuss either textbook. I gave out a list of books containing most of the titles I had taken to Jose in prison. The classroom sessions were political arguments about revolutions and liberation movements. In the record books I gave all students the highest mark whether or not I had ever seen them. I quickly gained a reputation as a "faculty radical," and students not enrolled in my class started to attend in order to engage in political arguments. Members of student political groups asked me to be the faculty "sponsor" of their organizations, a formally which was needed for them to have access to university facilities. I also attended some of the meetings of the groups I "sponsored," and I learned something about the unromantic side of the "student movement." I saw the politicians and manipulators transforming rebellious students into passive tools; I saw what you've called the grand puppet show. But I didn't generalize from such insights and experiences. I vaguely agreed with Daman that the genuine

revolutionary movement would in any case not begin among students but in the factories, “at the point of production.” I had learned that from Luisa. I didn’t figure out that the “organization” of the working class which was going to make that revolution possible, the union in all its various shapes and forms, played the same role in the factories as the politicians Mid manipulators played among the rebellious students. I only learned that very recently, and largely from you, although last year’s riot gave me some clues. Everything that was “organized,” from the State to the tiniest “radical” sect, was opposed to the spontaneous carnival atmosphere that suddenly took hold of this city. The riot broke out when my second teaching term was half over. I thought what I’d always waited for was at last happening. Massive rebellion broke out in the streets; whole blocks of buildings burned; carefully priced commodities circulated as freely as confetti. I wanted to be part of it all and drifted into it in my usual style. A man trying to run with two television sets shouted to me to grab one of them. I ran home with it as proudly as if I’d carried out a revolutionary act. When I next met with my class I was almost angry at students who hadn’t taken part in the looting. As I told you in one of my first letters, I was promptly fired. And when I lost my job, my relationship with Daman ended in a bitter argument. I wasn’t particularly upset about losing the job, since the pay was scandalously low and I hated being part of the academic bureaucracy. But Daman was flushed with anger. “A classroom isn’t the best place to carry picket signs!” he shouted at me when I told him why I’d been fired. I told him angrily, “I wasn’t carrying picket signs! I was encouraging students to loot, riot and steal instead of sitting in that stuffy room listening to an idiot like me!” He retorted, “The revolution isn’t going to break out in a university classroom!” I told him I didn’t expect anything at all to happen in a university classroom. That was when he told me, “You have a bad sense of timing, Sophie!” I blew up. “Totally unlike you, Daman! You have a perfect sense for timing and placing and cataloguing! You have a different mask for every cubby hole you move through: anger for political meetings, condescension for classrooms, courage for strikes, submissiveness for meetings with superiors, kindness for animals and decency only in the privacy of your apartment. You’re not a human being but a filing cabinet!” He tried to respond patiently, namely condescendingly, “Sophie, if you’re going to keep a teaching job —” I broke in, crying with frustrated anger, “Don’t you understand what the not meant? People expressed in acts just how they feel about the precious institutions you serve! They hate those institutions, they feel oppressed by them, they’d like nothing better than to burn them all to the ground. Don’t you feel the slightest bit ashamed to parade in front of that classroom exercising authority given to you by the state?” He walked away from me; his face expressed shocked disbelief. I called him about a month later to apologize for my outburst and to thank him for all he had done for me. I didn’t hear from him again for over a year.

When Daman had called four days ago to tell me about yet another job opening I had told him I wanted to talk to him, and that Ted was eager to see him again. But neither Ted nor I said anything to him for the rest of our trip to the building where the repression committee has its offices. It was only when we were inside the building that it occurred to me to ask, “Why did Luisa recruit you into this committee, Daman? What in the world do you do here? Stuff

envelopes?"

He told me, "Luisa feels the committee's work lacks political direction. She thinks I can help provide a certain amount of coherence by taking part in some of the activities, for instance by contributing a certain amount of research and simply by engaging in some of the discussions."

I commented sarcastically, "So you're sort of an ideological director of the enterprise."

Daman snickered but missed my sarcasm altogether. "I suppose you could call it that."

"Something like the minister of the committee's ideological department," I went on.

He said, almost with pride, "I wouldn't go quite that far —"

"No. I suppose you don't expect to reach the stage of government portfolios until after the revolution."

"It's not a question of revolution here but of repression," he told me, adding the expected, "The question of revolution is going to be resolved on the shop floor —"

"What are you doing here then?" I asked him. "I thought the only task of a revolutionary was to —"

Daman didn't respond. We had both heard each other's arguments before. He escorted Ted and me to a room full of people, the room I had walked into after last year's riot. Luisa came rushing toward Daman. "This is Ted, the printer," Daman told her.

Without even looking at me, Luisa shook Ted's hand eagerly and told him, "I really enjoyed my lesson in printing, and I can't tell you how glad I am that you came here. The committee acquired a printing press a few days ago, but no one here is able to get it going." She was called away to the telephone. While talking on the phone she asked Daman if he had finished an article. He handed it to her; she glanced at it continuing her phone conversation, and then handed it to a young woman who was typing. When she got off the phone she asked Ted, "Would you mind having a look at that printing machine?"

I had rarely seen Luisa "at work." I wondered if this was the Luisa you had known in the carton plant, if this was the Luisa who had recruited Nachalo into the "genuine workers' organization." She seemed just like a political boss. The activity in that room was identical to the activity that had finally repelled me years ago. when I had tried to escape from the drudgery of my job in the fiberglass factory. Yet Luisa didn't seem at all bored. I suppose the fact that she's held the same factory job for twenty years indicates that her tolerance for boredom is infinitely higher than mine. But she didn't seem merely to tolerate the boredom. She seemed to enjoy it, to be fulfilled by it, the way monks and nuns seem fulfilled while performing dull tasks. The gratification doesn't come from their senses, but from the knowledge that every moment of drudgery is yet another service performed for the Lord, or in Luisa's case, for the Organization. It struck me that the room I was looking at was something like a microcosm of all of Luisa's "organizations." The activity in and of itself is the dullest, most repetitious activity performed in the bureaucratic society. But this activity is transformed into something gratifying and enjoyable the moment a Daman, an Alberts or a Zabran define its "political direction." The purpose of her organizing has been to provide the political directors with staffs of flunkies. How ludicrous it is that Daman, that caricature of a fragmented human being, himself a patchwork

of contradictions, himself unable to connect his politics with the other closed compartments that compose his life, should be the one to provide “political direction” to others! And how scandalous that Luisa should have sacrificed her own life to the task of recruiting independent spirits to the service of such gods.

When I had asked Daman to take Ted and me to the repression committee, I had forgotten that Art Sinich might be there: it was in that very room that I’d seen Art after last year’s riot. And of course Art was there, and he rushed over to me as soon as he saw me. I wasn’t glad to see him, but I shook his hand and asked if he had time to accompany me to a nearby coffee shop for a chat. I wanted to learn just how Art had come to be living in my room at Luisa’s house until a few weeks ago.

I ended up treating Art to lunch and several cups of coffee. It turned out that Art’s life was far more intertwined with mine than I had ever imagined. I learned yet another time that the “radical community” in this city with millions of people is like a closed, incestuous family, and by now I probably know every member of it; I also got a view of yet another ugly underside of that “community.”

Art had met Luisa long before I had ever walked into the peace movement building. When I saw them both in the repression committee last year I thought they had met there; I didn’t imagine they had known each other during the years when I hadn’t seen Luisa. Art met Lem Icel as long as seven years ago. Lem had just returned from his harrowing prison experience after trying to deliver my letters, and was living with Debbie Matthews. Art was already involved in peace movement activity when Lem first walked into the peace center. “I met Luisa at a third world rally,” Art told me. “Lem introduced me to a university friend of his, and Luisa was with this friend.” That friend, of course was Alec. Everyone I knew must have been at that rally; I was in the fiberglass factory when it took place. “It’s funny the three of you didn’t run into each other when you came to the peace center,” he said. “I must have seen Lem at least four or five times during the weeks when you came to the peace center. But Lem didn’t bring Luisa there until after you did me the favor of looking up the maid service phone number for me. He introduced me to Luisa again, although I remembered her from the rally. Of course Lem didn’t know I knew you, and I couldn’t know Luisa was your mother. Eventually Lem dropped out of peace movement activities altogether, but Luisa got more and more involved. Luisa and I found that we understood each other much better than she and Lem ever had. He started to look for ways to escape from responsibilities that we can’t run away from, but neither of us could help him understand that. He wanted to be a hermit, and since one of my relatives owned an abandoned estate, Luisa and I took him to the type of environment he said he wanted. Luisa was generous enough to invite me to replace Lem in her house. Even then I didn’t know I was in your house, Sophie;

there wasn’t a single photograph of you in it. She helped me understand a lot of things correctly, but she couldn’t get me to understand that the people she called workers, people who filled their houses with material things, could be called oppressed. I didn’t really understand the meaning of oppression until after last year’s riot, when this committee got started. When I

saw you last year I had just left the peace movement after almost ten years of involvement.”

When I saw Art last year I had just been fired from my first teaching job. The money I had saved when I'd worked in the fiberglass factory had run out during my year in graduate school, and I hadn't been able to save any of the money I had earned from my teaching job. I wasn't worried about starving to death, but I didn't want Sabina or Tina to pay my bills. So I took advantage of one of the indirect benefits brought about by the riot. Immediately after the riot, state institutions which dispensed relief to the poor (ironically called “welfare”) became temporarily flexible as well as “generous.” I had drawn a small amount of unemployment compensation after I'd been fired from the fiberglass factory, but being fired from a teaching job didn't “qualify” me for that type of subsidy. So I went on “welfare.” And it was in a welfare office that I received a leaflet announcing a demonstration sponsored by the “Committee Against Repression. Inc.” There were many strange things about the leaflet besides the name of the sponsor, but it did condemn the wanton killings carried out by the police, and it rightly pointed out that the police were the only ones who had rioted during the “riot.” This had been perfectly clear to me; the redistribution of consumer goods had been carried out in a very orderly and cooperative manner, in the spirit of a feast or a carnival, certainly not a riot; yet all the newspapers had described the events with words that suggested uninterrupted and limitless violence. There were many fires, but they were systematically limited to enterprises that were known to practice the worst exploitation and extortion. I went to the demonstration on the date announced on the leaflet. The event attracted thirty demonstrators, if that many. The group took a two-hour walk along city sidewalks carrying signs with terribly unimaginative slogans; more than half the demonstrators left along the way. I stayed with the group, more out of curiosity, than conviction. Imagine my surprise when someone behind me grabbed my arm, and I turned and saw Luisa. I hadn't seen her since the night when I'd returned home after hunting for Hugh and discovered her on the living room couch with Alec. “In another seven years I wouldn't have recognized you!” she told me. She invited me to visit the group's office, and proudly gave me a tour around the envelopes, the addressing machine and the stacks of mimeographed leaflets marked “press release”; it was similar to the envelope-stuffing room at the peace center. I imagined that the advertising offices from which the ruling class manipulates the society of consumers must also be similar, only a lot less messy and with swept floors, since they could afford to pay their proletarians. We weren't very friendly to each other, we both remembered how we'd parted, and we both remembered the brief phone conversation we'd had shortly after we parted, when neither of us had expressed any interest in seeing each other again. I asked sarcastically when she had graduated from shopfloor organizing to working with a “Committee Incorporated.” She told me she had become politically active again two years after I had left her, when “a young man by the name of Lem” introduced her to the peace movement. “But the politics of those people were atrocious, and this committee's work is much more like the work I'd like to do.” I asked her what she'd done during the riot, and the vehemence with which she opposed it amazed me. Among other things, she shouted, “Wanton attacks on the productive forces are not a revolution! The workers I fought with aimed to appropriate the productive forces, not to

destroy them!" She had stayed home during the riot listening to her radio. "It sounded awful," she told me; "a vast release of pent-up frustration without any political direction or program." She'd gotten interested only when the repressive forces of the state had transformed the "riot" into a real riot. "We're exposing the fact that property is valued far higher than human life," she started to tell me. but someone called her away to the phone, telling her, "This is your department, Luisa; some radical union caucus." She excused herself and picked up the phone. I smiled to her coldly, indifferently, as I backed out of the Committee Against Repression Incorporated, out of the building and out to the street. Just as I reached the fresh air I ran into Art Sinich on his way into the same building. At that time I didn't connect him with Lem or with Luisa and I didn't ask him how or when he had moved from the peace movement to the repression committee. We stood by the building entrance and chatted briefly. He wanted to invite me back up to the "office," but I told him I had already seen it. Neither he nor I knew that the bed in which he spent his nights had once been mine.

I was much more curious about Art when I invited him to coffee four days ago. I asked him how he had managed to reconcile his peace philosophy with the significantly different outlook of the repression committee.

"I still don't condone violence," he told me. "But Luisa helped me understand that the violence of the oppressed isn't the same as the violence of the oppressor. She helped me understand that liberation can only be achieved through organization. The Committee is devoted to the belief that oppressed races carry the seeds of liberation — "

"You learned that from Luisa?" I asked with disbelief.

"Luisa doesn't agree with every one of the organization's positions," he told me.

I was relieved to learn that. I asked him how Luisa's positions differed from the organization's. He launched into a tirade that made my head swim.

"Ever since she asked me to leave her house she's been acting funny toward me and toward the rest of the committee," he told me. "She claims to bring that politics professor to the committee in order to give the committee political direction, but in my opinion she's trying to wreck the committee. It's becoming clear to me that she doesn't really understand the problem of oppression. She doesn't understand that every race of people must struggle for their survival and freedom. And she doesn't understand the real purpose of the committee. She and her professor friend seem to be stuck on the old belief that the key to revolution is some kind of mass movement. They don't know that the key to revolution today is race, racial movements. They don't see that we won't ever become a mass movement. We seek to maximize the power and influence we can exert as an organized minority. We serve the needs of other organizations and we serve to educate the public at large. We aim to coordinate the activities of organizations expressing the will of national and racial minorities — "

I hurriedly paid the bill and rushed out of the coffee shop. The hodgepodge that constituted Art's new philosophy had a familiar, ugly ring to it.

I returned to the repression committee and looked for Ted. I had a headache and wanted to go home with him. I went to the "press room" behind the office to look for him. Suddenly

I froze in my tracks. What I felt must have been similar to what you felt twenty years ago when you stopped behind a pillar and watched Luisa walk out of the carton plant with her arm in Marc Glavni's. Ted was bending over the press, tightening or loosening something with a wrench. Luisa was "learning" by holding on to Ted's waist with her left hand, her whole body leaning over Ted's, her cheek almost rubbing against his. Yes, of course I was jealous; intensely so. But it wasn't only jealousy that infuriated me. I suddenly saw Luisa's entire life project, I suddenly understood Luisa's "union," I suddenly grasped how and why Luisa had so successfully combined her sexual with her political activity. Daman the researcher, Daman the spokesman of our movement, Daman the shepherd, was in the other room providing "political direction." But some of the sheep, namely Art and his friends, were already under the tutelage of a different shepherd, and the political director was on the verge of being left without followers. The shepherd's dog was using her entire body to recruit a new sheep into the flock, to provide her political director with a new follower. This was Luisa's revenge for the scene I had made with Pat. I trembled with fury as I moved toward them.

Luisa turned her back to me as soon as she saw me. She told Ted, "We could sure use the talents of an experienced printer around here. Would you be willing to continue my lesson some other time, and to show the rest of the staff how this machine works?"

Ted acquiesced. "Sure. I don't have many other things to do right now."

Luisa started to walk past me out of the room. I grabbed her arm and told her, "If you think you're the one who has a gripe against, me, Luisa, get it out of your head this minute — "

She shook herself out of my grasp and pulled me through the office and out to the hall. "All right, Sophia! Let's have it out once and for all! Why did you ruin my relationship with Daman?"

"I only wish I had ruined it!" I shouted. "But I obviously failed to ruin your relationship to your authority, your god! I just caught you in the act of sacrificing another victim to him!"

Luisa pulled me all the way out to the street, where she shouted, "We're going to have it out, you and I, but you're not going to embarrass me one more time!" She hailed a cab, pulled me inside, and told the driver to take us to her house. "All right, now holler all you want!" she told me in the back of the cab, releasing me.

"Don't you accuse me of destroying anything, Luisa! You've devoured countless human lives for the sake of those beloved authorities of yours, those professors with the working class project in their heads! Leave Ted alone, would you? Didn't you have your fill with Nachalo and Yarostan and Alec — "

"You're feverish with jealousy, Sophia! You're the most conventional, spiteful, narrow — "

"I used to think you loved Nachalo. I admired you for that love. But you destroyed him! You've dragged everything he stood for through mud!"

"Stick to your present jealousy, you idiot, and don't talk about things you don't know anything about!" she shouted. She paid for the cab and I followed her into her house.

"How long did you expect me to go on knowing nothing about Nachalo?" I asked her. We both sat down in the living room where I had so recently flaunted my independence from her.

“I know that Ted is another Nachalo to you. Sabina told me all about what Nachalo stood for, and I now know he had nothing in common with that organization you served, or its so-called popular army. George Alberts told her — ”

“Whatever George Alberts told her was a lie!” she shouted, “He spent his life justifying his betrayal of his comrades at the front.”

“When did you decide Alberts was lying?” I asked her. “When Titus Zabran returned from the front and told you Nachalo had died like a hero fighting alongside Zabran and Alberts in the popular army? That conflicted with what Alberts told you, didn’t it? Alberts told you he and Zabran had fought against people like Nachalo, didn’t he?”

“You’re raving about things you can’t know anything about, Sophia. Alberts couldn’t have told Sabina anything until ten years after the event! And he couldn’t have remembered anything. When he returned from the front, he was delirious; I thought his mind had been affected. He ranted senselessly about a firing squad, and about having shot into the air. As for Titus: I didn’t visit him until several weeks after George returned. I knew George was lying — hallucinating, if you prefer — the moment he got back from the front. The only thing I did believe was that he’d shot into the air. I was sure he had deserted, and his lies were designed to cover up his cowardice. He had been the one who had stayed home when the rest of us had gone out on the barricades several months earlier. In his ravings, he called Nachalo a reactionary; he called him everything short of a defector. He said he and Titus had run into Nachalo at the front, and Nachalo hadn’t greeted his former friends as comrades, but as ‘red butchers.’ He acted as if Nachalo were the enemy — ”

“Then you admit that the apparatus Alberts and Zabran and you served was opposed to what Nachalo and his comrades in the militia were fighting for — ”

“I admit nothing of the sort, Sophia! The so-called conflict between the militia and the popular army was a lie spread by the fascists. They were both in one and the same army, the union’s army, the armed working class, the most devoted, most revolutionary workers. Everything we did in the rear, even my activity as a transportation delegate and tram driver, was a contribution to the popular army’s victory, the union’s victory, Nachalo’s victory, which were all one and the same victory. The militia was nothing but the first detachments of the popular army.”

“That’s not true, Luisa! The popular army absorbed the militia into itself the same way you absorbed Nachalo into the union, and it destroyed all those it couldn’t absorb. That’s why Nachalo called Alberts and Zabran ‘red butchers.’”

“You knew more about it when you were ten years old! ‘Red butchers’ is what the fascists called the entire working class! George learned the term from the fascists and he used it to excuse his desertion. I went to see Titus in the hospital as soon as he was allowed visitors. He told me neither he nor George could have had a conversation with Nachalo at the front. Titus also told me he had learned from Nachalo’s comrades that Nachalo had died bravely, heroically, fighting the fascists; he died exactly as he had lived. The unit was defeated because of overwhelming odds against them, because of fascist sabotage in the rear, and also because of

some defections. All he said about George was that he had done the best he knew how to do, but I already knew what George could and couldn't do, so he didn't have to tell me more. When I told him what rumors George was spreading among Nachalo's friends, Titus grew alarmed. He thought, and I agreed, that such rumors could destroy the morale of fighting workers and do untold harm. As soon as he came out of the hospital, Titus and I arranged a memorial meeting for Nachalo. It was the last union meeting held in my apartment. All of Nachalo's and Margarita's comrades who had remained in the rear attended the meeting; none returned from the front. Titus gave the main oration. He admitted he had never met Nachalo, but he told everything he had learned from Nachalo's comrades. Nachalo had died like a working class hero, fighting alongside his comrades. The victory of the popular army had been his first priority, and he had urged sacrificing everything for the sake of that victory. He was determined to die before allowing a single fascist soldier to encroach on the accomplishments of the workers. Alberts said nothing during the entire meeting. He never again repeated those rumors about Nachalo. I'm amazed he was so shameless as to repeat those rumors to Sabina years later."

"You're the one who's shameless, Luisa! You're lying! You've been lying to yourself for thirty years. Yarostan asked Titus about the popular army only a few days ago. Titus called it a mistake, a big mistake! What Titus told Yarostan didn't conflict with what Alberts told Sabina. It conflicted with everything you're telling me! The popular army was a monster that devoured revolutionaries; it turned against the very workers who initiated that struggle, just like the union — "

"I don't know what you're talking about Sophia, and I'm losing interest. Your lifelong friendship with Sabina hasn't made you very bright. When I first met Nachalo he was an isolated individualistic terrorist. I know Sabina admires that type of person, but I didn't know you did. It was thanks to me that Nachalo became a devoted union militant admired by thousands of his fellow workers. He became a virtual myth to them, the very symbol of the collectivist worker united with his comrades in the uncompromising struggle of the class for its liberation. I can't imagine what Titus might have told Yarostan. I'm not surprised that it conflicted with what I'm saying. Titus and I disagreed about many things, especially about the form that the unity of the working class should take. I emphasized the union; he emphasized councils and other political forms. But there was one thing we didn't disagree about, and that was the need for organization. We were both collectivists first of all; we both knew that the struggle was a class struggle, not an individual's struggle."

"So you lured Nachalo into an apparatus that turned against his struggle, an apparatus that ultimately destroyed him. You lured him with your body, but you didn't do it for yourself, for your own gratification; you didn't do it out of any love for him. Nachalo was no more to you than Yarostan was, than Ted is. You took Yarostan to the stockroom and then to your bedroom for the sake of the organization!"

Luisa, flushed with anger, jumped at me, pinned me back against the couch, and hissed at me, "You're asking for it, Sophia, and you're going to get it! If you stare like a deaf mute, or if I see a tear in your eye, I'm going to send you flying out that door for good! You're so green

with jealousy you can't even keep your topic straight. Hypocrite! You're not the one to lecture to me about drawing a line between love and politics! You're the one who draws that line, not I! You were a political bureaucrat already before you lost your first teeth! If I had your life's experience behind me, I wouldn't have the nerve to lecture about the division between private and political life. I've never in my life drawn such a line! Yes, I wanted Nachalo for his political potentialities, and I simultaneously wanted him in bed, just as I wanted Yarostan in the stockroom or wherever I felt like it! I was a free and independent person in political and union matters; I was also free and independent in sexual matters. I was no one's wife, woman or servant. When some people considered me George Alberts' wife, I made it perfectly clear with Yarostan just what I thought of wifery. When I became disgusted with Yarostan's lumpen politics I got simultaneously disgusted with his lovemaking, and I left him as freely as I had gone to him. And that's what you can't stand, Sophia: the freedom, the independence. You've started the wrong argument with me, Jose's Woman! I know too damn much about you, and I no longer have any reason to keep it inside me. I don't know where the hell you came from. Don't you lecture to me about Nachalo! You've never even wanted to taste freedom and independence. You're completely shameless to bring up Yarostan. For at least a year I didn't touch him; I left him completely alone. He was at our house at least twice a week, and I could see your whole body shaking with desire; you must have been like jelly inside. But you didn't make a move on your own. You just stared with that cowardly, longing, absent look, like a dog begging to be fed, like a slave waiting to be carried off, like a spineless thing waiting to become Yarostan's Woman. Don't interrupt until I'm finished! It so happens that your friends kept me informed of the fact that you never changed, you remained a spineless coward. Lem gave me a complete picture of your daring affair with that high school hoodlum Ron. The daring was all exhausted in his petty thefts and antics. You were Ron's Girl, a pliant thing, his shadow, the woman behind the he-man. Alec completed a picture I hadn't wanted to believe when I'd first seen it. I can't tell you what intense shame I felt when I learned that my daughter, Nachalo's daughter, had become Jose's woman, Jose's slave, Jose's rag. Don't you talk to me about living up to what Nachalo stood for! How depraved could you get? Nothing in your life forced you to negate your freedom, your self-respect, your independence so completely. Yet you talk about drawing lines! You, who degraded yourself so despicably for your bedfellows, turned into a passionless prude for your political comrades. Jose's Woman, the sex-bomb, was all wit and sexless intellect with Daman and Alec. Yes, Alec told me, and even if he hadn't I would have guessed it from Daman's unbelieving shock at your display of sexuality with your newest tamer, that boy — ”

I bit my lip during the entire tirade; the desire to respond by crying left me before Luisa was through. “You're absolutely right. I gave myself to Jose, completely, all of me. I desired him for myself, my insides longed for him from morning to night — for myself, Luisa, not for my project, my politics, my organization! I'd be happy to be Jose's woman today!”

“I'd die of shame before I admitted having any such desire!” she hissed.

“Because you've never had any real desires!” I shouted as I moved across the room from her.

“All you’ve ever had inside you was the organization! I admit my desire and I admit it proudly, Luisa. I didn’t become independent of you until I admitted having my kind of desire, my kind of love. Don’t shove your type of independence in my face any more because I no longer want it. I killed Jose by transforming my kind of love into yours, by replacing my passion with politics, by feeling ashamed of being Jose’s Woman, by dragging Jose into battles I wasn’t able to fight just as you dragged Nachalo — ”

“You can’t hide your depravity with such vicious attacks, Sophia; they all miss their mark!”

“You’re the one who’s depraved, Luisa! I couldn’t become independent until I figured that out. You picked Nachalo and Yarostan off the street. Lumpen, you called them; individualistic terrorists! And you fixed them up. You funneled them into your organization, your so-called union, that thing you served that was greater than your own life. You didn’t love them but it; your only desire was to make them serve it. I didn’t serve Jose and I didn’t make him serve. I loved Jose! *You* never loved anything but an abstraction in the mouth of a Daman, an Alberts, a Zabran — ”

“You’re marvelous at playing with words, Sophia! That’s all you’ve ever been good at!”

“I’ve never outdone you at playing with words, Luisa! You’re the organizer, not I! You’re the one who mystified language for me as far back as I can remember! You always spoke of working people and you made me think you actually had working people in mind. But you never had real people in mind at all, but something abstract, something religious people call god! Sabina and Margarita called you a priestess, and I was always too dense to understand what they meant. I finally understand, Luisa! I finally grasp the meaning of those words you played with, words like working people and union and we ourselves and labor movement. To you they were all synonyms for the ultimate authority. Your freedom and independence were synonyms with slavery, with submission to the ultimate authority. In practice you used the word union to mean submission to the spokesmen of the union, the carriers of the idea of the workers, submission to bureaucrats like Titus Zabran and Daman Hesper, submission to technocrats like George Alberts and — ”

“Your malicious distortions can’t justify your submission to a Jose, your total and shameless self-abandonment to a petty tyrant — ”

“You have to use the word petty, don’t you Luisa? Because the tyrants you served weren’t petty tyrants; they were just tyrants with a big T. They were institutional tyrants, people whose social slots gave them the power to manipulate and destroy human lives. It’s not hard for me to imagine what Alberts and Zabran would be today if their popular army had been victorious, and it can’t be very hard for you. One of your authorities actually made it to the top. You must have sensed as far back as twenty years ago that you had come across another high priest when you reached out for Marc Glavni — ”

“I obviously knew he wasn’t going to spend his life working in that plant, Sophia — ”

“You said it, mother! And that’s what appealed to you about him! You knew he was moving straight to the top, and the top is what you’ve always worshipped and served!”

“Alec told me how irrational you could become, Sophia; he even told me you tried to kill him with a bottle once. I didn’t believe him! Alec was right! You’re a raving maniac!”

“I was just coming to Alec! How dumb I was! I thought he was taking advantage of you just to spite me, and I felt sorry for you! It’s taken me all these years to see who you are! What was Alec to you, Luisa? Was he a Nachalo or an Alberts? Was he a lumpen to organize, or an authority for whose sake you organized?”

Luisa put her hands to her ears and shouted, “Stop this idiocy, Sophia! There’s neither reason nor logic in anything you’re saying. I honestly didn’t know you were still attached to Alec when you made your dramatic exit ten years ago!”

I shouted, “You didn’t take Alec away from me! You took him from Minnie. You must remember Minnie. She’s the lawyer who got you out of jail. She came here once with Alec, and you told me later what nice people my friends were. Minnie loved Alec the way you never loved anyone. What did you want with Alec? What were your plans — ”

Luisa, still holding her hands to her ears, got up and ran to her bedroom; I thought I saw tears in her eyes. I ran after her shouting, “Answer me! What purpose could Alec have served in your apparatus?”

Luisa lay on her bed sobbing, her face buried in her pillow. I felt tears rushing to my eyes. All my tension suddenly snapped, my fury seemed to flow out of me. I sat down next to her and felt sorry for her.

Luisa mumbled into the pillow. “I’m afraid of you, Sophia.” -

I couldn’t hold my tears back any more. “How do you expect me. to react to that?” I asked her. “That’s so unfair, Luisa. You wanted me not to stare or cry. For once in my life I didn’t — only to be told you’re afraid of me. I didn’t force myself on you, Luisa; you pulled me here.”

Luisa sat up next to me and wiped the tears from her eyes. “You’re right, Sophia. I brought you here. I always wanted you to be proud and defiant. But I guess I can’t take the defiance when it’s aimed against me. You hurt me, Sophia, far more than you seem to think. Alec was of no use to me or to my politics or to my organization. I loved him. It was as simple as that. I had no Machiavellian motives. I only wanted to be loved by him.”

“But he rushed into this house looking for me — ”

“Only the first time, Sophia, when he and Minnie came to tell me you had. disappeared from the university dormitory. Alec wanted to call the police, but I begged him not to; I told him they’d have called me if something had happened to you. Your friends thought I was terribly nonchalant when I told them you’d turn up eventually; I obviously suspected you’d gone back to your high school friends. Alec came again two weeks later, on a Sunday. He told me he had found you, and that you would telephone me. He looked me up and down. I wasn’t used to it and I was flattered; I didn’t know then that he looked every woman up and down. I asked him in. He told me about the newspaper work you had both done. I asked him to come again. He called me a week later and told me he wanted to talk to me, he wanted to learn all about me. It had been so many years since anyone had wanted to know anything at all about me. I invited him to dinner. I spent that whole Saturday preparing for his visit. We ate by candlelight. He

told me you had joined Sabina and her friends. I thought your pal Ron was still among them, and I spoiled that evening for myself by telling Alec that Ron had been your boyfriend in high school. Alec thought I meant Jose and he became intensely jealous. He left before he even finished the meal. I begged him to stay; I cried; I felt old and abandoned.”

I wiped tears away from Luisa’s cheeks and told her, “I’m sorry I included Alec; I didn’t know anything about your relationship with him; I didn’t know that you could love someone in that way.”

“I never reached the point of wanting to be Alec’s woman,” she said without hostility. “But I’m not being honest about that either. I wanted to be desired; I craved Alec’s love, even more than Nachalo’s. Maybe Alec came here looking for you. Maybe he even came to me so as to spite you. But he found me, Sophia, and he loved me, for two wonderful years. He phoned me two or three times during the week when you had decided to move back into your room. He asked about you, but he never asked to talk to you. I invited him to dinner again. I told you I was expecting a visitor on that Saturday night. You told me you were going to a movie and might not be back all night. As soon as Alec knocked I started shaking with passion. We embraced in the doorway. I asked if he wasn’t hungry. ‘Starving!’ he told me. So was I. As soon as we were done eating I told him he could learn everything about me he wanted to know. He was very concerned that you might return. I told him, ‘I don’t interfere with her life and I suppose she feels the same way about mine; after all, this is my house too!’ He told me I looked and acted like your younger sister. And he meant it! I hadn’t been loved since we’d moved into this house. I let Alec learn everything he wanted to, on the living room couch. I didn’t expect you to reappear so suddenly, nor to stare at us so stupidly with your hand on the doorknob. You made us both feel so indecent. But you didn’t spoil my night, Sophia. That was my most wonderful night since my first night with Nachalo. The following morning you were gone. What could I call you except a puritan and a hypocrite? The fact is, I was relieved, and I think Alec was too. We spent that Sunday outdoors, picnicking and running through a park. I learned that Alec had lost his job and had no place to stay. ‘This is an immense house, and it’ll be empty again,’ I told him. He asked. ‘Don’t you expect her to come back?’ ‘Eventually, in three or four years,’ I told him. ‘Don’t you care?’ he asked. I told him, ‘I care very much; I care most for her sudden arrivals and departures; they’re the only sign that she has anything in common with me.’ He stayed, not in your room but in mine. Maybe you’re right about my other relationships. I know that my relationship with Alec was different from all the others. I suppose you could call it pure love, or pure sex; there was nothing political in it. I hadn’t engaged in any political activities since we’d emigrated. And maybe you’re not altogether wrong about my combinations of love with politics. I know that as soon as politics entered into our relationship, our love was over. Alec read all the books I had, even the ones I’d brought over; that was his first language too, you know. Toward the end of his second year here he started asking about Nachalo and the popular army and the barricades; he also became very talkative about himself; that was when he told me about you and Jose, and about Sabina’s enterprise. The more he read and talked, the more impatient he became to throw himself into some kind of political activity.

I no longer had anything to offer him; my politics seemed sentimental and archaic to him. He learned about an anti-imperialist rally and asked me to go there with him. Alec ran into several of his university friends at that rally; it was there that he introduced me to Lem. That rally only increased Alec's desire to throw himself into political activity. During his last weeks here he'd spend hours pacing. He was like a caged animal. He said all he wanted was to help make a revolution, with his gun in his hand, and not to talk about it or read about it or support it at rallies or demonstrations. He apparently met people with similar views, and he started going off to political meetings. One day he simply failed to return. I made no attempt to find him; we were free individuals. But my heart broke. Maybe it was only because I felt myself growing old; I really don't know why; but I never loved anyone so much. Ever since he left me I haven't been able to live alone; I had to have someone's love, no matter how modest or flawed. Last year, in the committee office, I came across Alec's name on a list of people killed during the riot. I couldn't bear it, Sophia. You must know how I felt; you loved him once too — ”

“I didn't love Alec until a few days ago, when Minnie told me how he died.” I summarized what I had so recently learned from Minnie. “He was shot down by machine guns when he tried to run back into the bar.”

Luisa put her head in my lap and cried. “I know what you're thinking, Sophia, but this time you're far away from the truth. I didn't encourage Alec to live or die like that; I didn't organize him or educate him; the kind of politics he and I talked about had nothing in common with that.”

“I know, Luisa. He died for the kind of politics I talked to him about, almost exactly the same way Jose died two years earlier. I'd like to think I was in Alec's heart the day he died, but I don't think I was. You're right about the line I've drawn. Alec was never more to me than a political comrade, a colleague on the newspaper staff. We almost became husband and wife once, but we could never have been lovers — ”

“You're staring, Sophia — but don't stop! I'm going to admit something to you. I love you just a slight bit more than I hate you, even when you stare. I'll admit something else. When I saw Alec's name on that list last year, I stared for weeks; I stared at work, I stared at the walls of this house and the walls of my empty bedroom, and I cried my eyes out. I hadn't cried so hard since George had returned from the front and told me Nachalo had died after calling his comrades Ted butchers.' And I'll even admit one more thing. After Titus' memorial oration for Nachalo, I turned myself into Nachalo's woman. I suppose I could have turned myself into Alec's woman. You infuriated me before and I lied to you. I don't think it was my principles, my commitment to independence, that stopped me, What bothered me about Alec was the social class from which he came — ”

“I knew he was born in one of the neo-colonies; he still spoke with a slight accent when I first met him. What bothered you about that?” I asked.

“I suppose he wouldn't have told you; he wasn't proud of his class origins. He came from a family of wealthy landowners. His father worked as an army doctor during the war, and afterward started a successful practice here; then Alec and his mother settled here. Alec attended

high school at a private boarding school. It was there that he was introduced to politics by the daughter of one of the wealthiest lawyers in this city, a girl called Rhea. It was for love of her that Alec started to turn against his class, and he apparently continued moving in the same direction until the day he died; I was no more than a station along the way — ”

“If Alec’s class origins bothered you, how could you possibly stand Lem Icel after Alec left you?”, I asked. “Lem’s class origins were the same as Alec’s, and Lem’s personality was so revolting! I found him insupportable already in high school.”

“I was far lonelier after Alec left me than I had ever been before he’d come here. But that wasn’t the only reason. Sophia. At first I found Lem interesting. And in the end I did exactly what you threw in my face; I tried to make something out of him, something political. Alec introduced me to Lem at that rally he took me to. Some weeks after Alec left me, Lem knocked on the door. He introduced himself as Alec’s friend and your one-time university friend, and started asking me all kinds of questions: had I known George Alberts, did I know Alberts was a spy, did I know you had been responsible for Lem’s imprisonment and nearly his death? I was stunned and invited him in. Then he told me a horrendous story about a letter you had sent with him which had caused his imprisonment. I imagined you had tried to send a note to one of your former comrades and the police had intercepted it; I knew how hysterical that police was about communication from emigres. I told him I’d had nothing to do with Alberts for over ten years, and tried to tell him you couldn’t have intended to harm him with your note. But he seemed convinced that you as well as his other former comrades had turned against him, betrayed him; he spoke already then about wanting to escape from what he called civilization. I felt sorry for him and asked him to visit me again. He came the very next day and invited me to join him at an event he called a ‘witness.’ We stood for several hours in freezing cold weather. I missed the point. I brought Lem home to ask him about the peace movement. I learned his father had completely disowned him. I told him your room was free and he moved in. In your fury you placed your finger into an open sore, Sophia. I know how revolting Lem was. I moved into your room with him, and I shared your room with him for over a year. I didn’t love Lem. At first I felt sorry for him. Later I despised him. But still I went to him. I thought I was helping him; I thought I was making him useful to the movement, the peace movement since nothing else was available at that time. I thought I was encouraging him to remain politically active. But you’re wrong if you think that by using my body I always succeeded. Lem never became useful to anyone or anything. He became increasingly irrational, mystical. He hallucinated about rustic solitude. He stopped taking part in any of the peace movement activities. He just sat with his leg on the kitchen table and called me his jailer. I started attending peace movement activities without him; I got to know Art...”

It was long past midnight. I called Ted to learn how he’d gotten home from the repression committee, and to tell him I was spending the night at Luisa’s.

“So you thought I wanted to take Ted from you,” Luisa commented. “I didn’t know you loved him. Not that I cared. I was still fuming about the scene you’d made in front of Daman.”

"I used to hate Ted," I told her. "We share a house, but not a bed. I didn't know I loved him until I saw you bent over him."

Luisa and I had breakfast the following morning before she left for her job. I took a taxi home. I apologized to Ted for having left him stranded in the repression committee office. He told me he'd gotten a ride home with Daman. He asked why I had thought it necessary to call him the previous night.

"Do you remember what you thought I intended to do to Tina the night I ran naked from Tissie's room?" I asked him.

"I don't understand," he said sadly.

"Yesterday I was convinced Luisa wanted to do the same thing to you, Ted. But you're not seven, and I didn't feel any Urge to protect you. What I felt was jealousy, intense jealousy. I thought Luisa was going to ravage a person I loved very much."

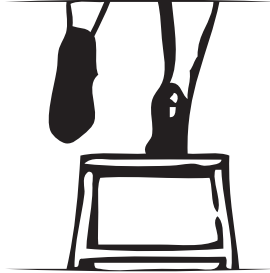
Ted stared at me with tears in his eyes. "No one ever said anything like that to me, Sophie."

I think I love Ted, but I'm not sure I can distinguish my love from guilt and pity. I feel guilty because I had thought him seven-year old Tina's lover, and even more because I had thought myself responsible for keeping them apart. I've felt pity toward him ever since I learned of his life-long unreciprocated devotion to Tissie. My life would have been very different if I had become Ted's friend in the garage twelve years ago, the friend he sought so desperately. I can't describe him better than Sabina described him to me then. He's lucidly aware of the difference between people and things. He's satisfied when he's shaping his environment with his companions, and has no desire to shape his companions or be shaped by them. I don't want to be either his "mentor" or his "woman," but I haven't learned to be anything else. The "liberating politics" you and I learned didn't leave either of us very liberated. Please let me know what Mirna and Yara do to make you aware of that fact. I'm on their side, Yarostan, but only because I'm far away; from here it's easy to be on their side. I still love you, but no longer as a god. I feel just a little bit sorry for you.

Your Sophia.

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