

RORY
CLEMENTS
NEMESIS

ZAFFRE

First published in Great Britain in 2019 by
ZAFFRE PUBLISHING
80–81 Wimpole St, London W1G 9RE
www.zaffrebooks.co.uk

Copyright © Rory Clements, 2019

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the
prior written permission of the publisher.

The right of Rory Clements to be identified as Author of this
work has been asserted by him in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and
incidents are either the products of the author's
imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, or actual
events is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

Hardback ISBN: 978–1–78576–748–7

Trade paperback ISBN: 978–1–78576–749–4

Also available as an ebook

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset by IDSUK (Data Connection) Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Zaffre Publishing is an imprint of Bonnier Zaffre,
part of Bonnier Books UK
www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk
www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

*For Emma,
with love*

JUNE 1931

CHAPTER 1

This was the best day of his life, watching his beloved boy, here in this ancient chamber of light.

Above him, his gaze drifted to the high, soaring fan vaults and armorial badges that made the great chapel celebrated throughout the world. On every side, he sensed the enclosing history of the mellow limestone walls, held tall and perpendicular by massive buttresses. And within these frames, he was dazzled by the coloured glass that filtered and split the heavenly rays, and told the story of his faith.

Candles flickered in glass sconces along the choir stalls. The choristers and choral scholars were ranged on both sides of the aisle in white surplices and red cassocks. In a few moments, their voices would well up and soar into the vast echoing space and dance off the tracery and the carvings.

Colonel Ronald Marfield knew now that even in the dark nights of war, God had never deserted him. This was His promise made good.

At his side sat his elder son, Ptolemy, slumped awkwardly in the pew, and his wife, Margaret, erect and dignified.

But it was the thirteen-year-old boy at the front of the choir who held his eye and his heart. The head chorister, his beautiful younger son, Marcus. Marcus with the perfect voice, the pale golden skin, the blue eyes and the tousled sandy halo of hair. Every father's ideal son; truly a gift from heaven.

King's College chapel was packed, but the congregation made not a sound. And then the organ broke the hush and the first haunting notes of Charles Stanford's *Magnificat* in G crept forth, *sempre staccato*.

Marcus opened his lips and his voice emerged. '*My soul doth magnify the Lord . . .*'

Every boy, every man in this fine choir sang wonderfully. But only one stood out. Marcus's treble notes were not just flawless, it seemed as if they rose on angel wings. Those watching and listening barely breathed.

Colonel Marfield's eyes were wet. How could he not weep at such perfection? At the divine sound of his own son?

He reached for his wife's hand, but they were clasped in front of her. Through eyes blurred with tears he looked at her, beseeching. She stared straight ahead, refusing to meet his gaze. Her eyes were dry.

AUGUST 1939

CHAPTER 2

For a man of fifty, the American was in reasonable shape: good teeth, breath sweet in a whisky way, a decent head of hair, though it was receding from his brow. And his round tortoiseshell spectacles lent him an intellectual air. Elina had made love to men half his age who had less going for them.

‘Take care of me, Elina,’ he said. ‘Take care of me and I’ll take care of you.’

‘It will be my pleasure, sir.’ She was undoing the buttons of his shirt, slowly, from the collar down.

With the last button popped, she drew open the shirt front and eased it off his shoulders so that he stood before her, naked from the waist up. A sportsman, no doubt about it; rode a lot, very little spread around the girth and muscle tone in the arms. A few curls of hair snuck up above his trouser line. Below, he was stirring. But she wasn’t going to touch him there. Not yet.

‘Now you,’ he said. ‘Let’s see what you’ve got.’

Elina Kossoff, known in this place as Elina Ulyanova, was no more than five feet four, with fair wavy hair. She stood on her toes and placed her full lips on his, then stood back, smiling. Teasing, tantalising, she removed her blouse slowly, and at last turned around so he could unhook her ivory-coloured bra. As it fell to the floor, she turned back to face him, still smiling. She let him feast his eyes on her breasts, full, with small pink nipples. ‘Well, sir?’

‘God damn it.’ He reached out and took them in the palms of his hands. ‘God damn it, and the Lord forgive my blasphemy.’

They made love on the single bed, in a small room tucked beneath the eaves – a servant’s room, assigned to Elina when she arrived at this great Palladian mansion two days earlier with the invented title of ‘general assistant’ in the estate office. It was common knowledge that whenever this particular guest was entertained at weekend house parties he would take one of the servants into his bed. And if they pleased him, he would be generous, might even arrange to see them again. Elina would make sure he did just that.

When the sex was over, she was surprised that it had been good. The old man knew what he was doing.

‘So, Elina, where are you from?’ He lay back on the pillows, the fingers of his right hand idly playing between her legs.

‘My parents brought me over here from Moscow as a child. They escaped the Bolsheviks.’

‘Like so many others. Those Reds have made a mess of a fine country . . .’ He turned to face her. ‘Elina – I want you on my staff. Full time, starting today. I’ll pay your notice. I take it you’ve got Pitman’s?’

She laughed out loud. ‘No, I don’t do shorthand. A little two-fingered typing, that’s all.’

‘Two fingers is plenty good enough for most everything in life. Anyway, who cares? You’re coming with me wherever I go. I’ll buy you a car. What car do you want?’

She kissed Joe Kennedy’s cheek and pressed her sex into his delving hand, demanding more. So far, so good.

CHAPTER 3

It was Lydia who noticed the man in the street outside the villa. He was bedraggled and foot-weary, but that didn't mean much these days when half of France seemed to be on the move. Refugees travelling in all directions, seeking safety without being at all sure where that might be; soldiers on the roads eastwards to the frontiers of Italy and Germany. The *paniquards* and the reluctant squaddies. None of them wanted a war, not when there was a harvest to be brought in.

'He's probably a beggar,' said Wilde. 'I imagine he saw our car outside, reckoned we must have money.'

'He's been hanging around all day. I've seen him several times from the bedroom window. He was still there when I went upstairs just now. Won't you go and see what he wants?'

Wilde, who was enjoying the wine and the warmth of the evening, reluctantly put down his glass. He turned out his pockets. 'I don't suppose you have some change to send him on his way?'

'There are a few francs in my purse – in the kitchen, on the table.'

They were on the courtyard terrace, soaking up the last of the sun. The air was hot and dry, but it was beginning to lose its intensity after the fierce heat of the day, and there was still time to sit outdoors with a bottle or two of chilled wine.

Wilde turned to their host. 'See the way she orders me about, Jacques?'

'This is only the start, Tom. It's all downhill from here.' Professor Talbot, tall and languid, fished in his pocket and brought out a handful of coins. 'Do you wish me to deal with the fellow?'

'No thanks, Jacques. I'm under orders.'

'Here then, give him these. That should be enough for bread and wine.'

Wilde nodded, took the money and sauntered out to the front of the house. It was on the outskirts of the small village of Aignay, to the east of Toulouse in the south-western corner of France. A weathered old manor with small windows, it was cool in summer, warm enough in winter. It gave nothing away from the exterior, but was large and airy inside, leading on to a lush courtyard at the back, with a central fountain and fruit trees:

lemons, olives, oranges, just waiting to be picked. And behind them, a vineyard stretching across endless acres of France.

The road at the front, by contrast, was dusty and dry. Across the way, two women in black peasant dresses, their faces lined like old parchment, trudged along, slowly and silently. There wasn't much here in Aignay – a boulangerie, a bar for the *paysans* and another for those with a little money and education – doctor, lawyer, landlord, owners of the vineyards – and that was it.

A man was sitting on the ground at the base of a fig tree. As Wilde approached, he stood up. He had no cap and his greying hair was razored almost down to the scalp. His beard was grey stubble, yet his heavily tanned, dirt-streaked face suggested he was no more than thirty. Of average height, in working man's blue shirt and threadbare trousers, his boots were wrapped with rags in place of soles. The dead butt of a hand-rolled cigarette clung to his lips. One of those nomadic types who travelled the land at this time of year to earn a crust harvesting grapes.

Wilde held out the coins. '*Pour vous,*' he said in his excruciating accent. He had hated French at school and hadn't bothered to put things right in the intervening years; his German had been rather more passable.

'Monsieur Wilde?' The man did not remove the cigarette from his mouth.

'How do you know who I am?' Taken aback, Wilde reverted to his native tongue.

'I have been looking for you.' The man spoke accurate but strongly accented English. This was no peasant. 'I was led to believe you had come to this village. I guessed this must be the house. The fine car . . .'

'Who are you?'

'I am Honoré.'

'Just Honoré?'

'It's enough. This is not about me, but someone you know. He needs your help. Please.'

'Who needs my help?'

'*El Cantante*. He is sick . . . he may die. He *will* die if you do not help him before the war comes.'

'I have no idea what you're talking about. Don't you think you should explain?'

El Cantante – that is his nom-de-guerre. We were comrades in the Spanish struggle, but now he is beyond my help. He has spoken of you, monsieur. He needs to get back to England or he will waste away and die. The French government – Daladier and Reynaud, Bonnet and Laval and the rest of the fascist swine’ – he spat on the ground – ‘they do not care. We are all dirt to them.’

Realisation struck. Wilde had little enough Spanish, but even he could work out that *El Cantante* meant ‘the singer’. ‘Are you by any chance talking about Marcus Marfield?’

‘*Oui*, monsieur, I believe that is right. He told me your name and spoke of Cambridge. You were his teacher – his *professeur* – yes?’

Wilde had indeed been Marfield’s supervisor at Cambridge. And Marfield had been a noted choral scholar. But when, like several of his contemporaries, he had disappeared in March 1937 – almost two and a half years ago – to join the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, Wilde had never expected to see him again. He would not have been the first undergraduate to lose his life in that bitter conflict.

‘I still don’t understand how you found me here.’

The Frenchman shrugged. ‘I have friends in England.’

That didn’t really explain it, but Wilde let it pass for the moment. ‘Where is he?’

‘He is in the internment camp at Le Vernet, south of Toulouse. I would say he is in a bad way. A very bad way.’

Wilde hadn’t heard of Le Vernet. But he had been desperately sorry when Marfield, one of his best history students, left Cambridge. Marcus Marfield, the beautiful youth with the voice of an angel and the world at his feet. At times he had served as crucifer – cross-bearer in the chapel choir. It was said that in his treble days as a King’s chorister his Stanford in G could make the hairs at the nape of your neck stand on end and bring a tear to the hardest of eyes. His voice since breaking had developed into a most remarkable tenor. His disappearance had seemed a tragic waste. If Marcus was alive . . . well, that would indeed be wonderful news.

‘How long to drive there?’

‘Two hours, perhaps three.’

Wilde looked at the sky. The sun was low, he had been drinking and the roads in this part of France were treacherous at the best of times. 'You say he's in some sort of camp – I assume he'll still be there in the morning, yes?'

'He will not get out without your help, Monsieur Wilde.'

Wilde moved back towards the door, but the man did not follow him. 'Please, come in . . .'

'No, I must go.'

'I'm sure we could find you some food and a glass of wine. You can tell us everything you know.'

'I have told you everything you need to know. You will find Le Vernet on the map, on the way to Pamiers. Follow the stench.'

'Why not come with me? Take me there.'

The Frenchman shrugged his broad shoulders. 'And be put back inside? No thank you, monsieur. Give *El Cantante* my fraternal greetings, if you would. He is in Hut 32.'

As Wilde watched, he turned and shuffled away, without a backward glance.

CHAPTER 4

Talleyrand Bois was drenched in sweat but his right hand, clutching the revolver beneath his jacket, was steady. He wiped his left sleeve across his brow, then took the scrap of newspaper once more from his pocket and studied it. The cutting was from a newspaper from the previous year with a photograph of Sigmund Freud on the platform at Paris's Saint-Lazare station as he made his escape from Vienna to England by way of France. At his side was an aristocratic woman who meant nothing to Bois and, more importantly, a man in a pale hat, wearing a buttonhole and holding a cigarette. That was the man Bois stared at; a man wearing a suit so expensive it would have kept a poor family in food for a year.

Bois held the picture close, trying to imprint the image of the man in the pale hat on his brain. Then he looked out across the dark green beneath the trees, to the far side of the grand chateau where the early morning sun threw long shadows across the vast lawns. This was unfamiliar territory. Chantilly, with its racecourses and palaces, built on the blood of the working man for the parasites of the ruling class, was everything he despised about his country. *Merde*, how he hated the bourgeoisie.

The man he had come to find was over there, walking alone. Bois shaded his eyes and stared at him and then looked back at the picture. The face was right, but he had looked leaner in the photograph. In the black-and-white picture and wearing a hat, it was impossible to discern the colour of the man's hair; this man, bare-headed, had short fair hair with a sharp parting on the right. But the face *was* the same, he was sure of that. William Bullitt, America's ambassador to France. Bois, hardened by a lifetime of physical work, began to move towards him.

Bill Bullitt was taking the early morning air. He loved it out here in the countryside of Chantilly, to the north of Paris. He'd have to nip into the city later, to the embassy at the corner of the Place de la Concorde, where it would be as hectic as always, but doubly so with the crisis. He needed

his hours here every day, riding out, swimming a few lengths in the pool, playing tennis – or just walking alone, minding his own business, as he was doing this fine, sunny August morning.

Bullitt had saved this place from ruin, and it had been worth every goddamned cent. Paris wasn't always easy, but it was a glory of the world compared to Moscow, his last posting, and the murderous bunch of criminals who ran the place. Now the Red swine had shown their true colours: forging an alliance of shame with that other lethal crew, the Nazis. He stopped by the trees, took a deep breath of the beautiful air, then lit a Virginia cigarette. Yes, this was better than Moscow or Berlin, war or no war.

Bois was only a hundred yards away. He could almost shoot the man from here. But the instructions had been clear. He must be within a metre of his target: one bullet to the chest then, as he goes down, the other five in his head.

'*Oui*, of course.' Bois knew how to fire a gun well enough. Spain had taught him that, though he had used a rifle, not a pistol, until now. But what was the difference? They both had triggers, they both pumped pieces of metal into men.

The man, almost within touching distance now, nodded to him and smiled. '*Bonjour, monsieur.*'

Talleyrand Bois pulled out the gun and shot his target in the heart. The man did not go down, but looked with astonishment at Bois and then clutched his chest. Bois fired again and the man's knees began to buckle. Four more bullets flew; each one went into the man's head. As blood spewed from the dying man, Bois threw down the gun.

Walk away slowly and steadily, don't look back, don't panic. That's what he had been told.

But no one had told him what to do if a gendarme appeared.

Bois panicked. He should have saved bullets: four to kill the man, two to defend himself. He began to run south towards the road. The first shot caught his shoulder and Bois spun, and then tumbled forward to his knees. A second shot hit him in the lower back and he fell flat, chin crunching into the earth. I survived Spain, he thought, but this is where

I die. At least I have done my duty. At least I have rid the world of an American bourgeois dog.

A few hundred yards away, in the shadow of his beloved Chateau de St Firmin, Bill Bullitt heard six shots. They came from somewhere to the west, in the area of the palatial and much larger Chateau de Chantilly. In his head he had been composing a cable to FDR. The President needed to know that the French were still deluding themselves; still convinced that America would ride to their rescue against Hitler. But the shots put all thoughts of the cable out of his head. At first he imagined someone must be out there shooting partridge, but then he shrugged. No, that wasn't a shotgun.

He considered going to investigate, but thought better of it. It was French business and none of his. And there were more important things to think about: the cable, and what he was going to say to the French prime minister when he saw him later today. He had to find some way to disabuse Daladier and the rest of the French government that there was any hope of salvation from across the pond. He took a last draw of fine American smoke from his cigarette, then tossed the butt into the grass.

As he strode back towards his grand house, he heard two more shots.

Wilde had been up since dawn, closely followed by Lydia and their hosts, Professor Talbot, his wife, Françoise, and their young son and daughter.

'So then,' Wilde said as he sipped his coffee. 'Who's up for a drive down to this holding camp?'

'Well, I could come . . .' Lydia said without enthusiasm.

'Jacques? Françoise?'

'Of course,' Professor Talbot said. 'You'll need me to show you the way, otherwise you will get horribly lost.'

Wilde and Lydia had been in France for three and a half weeks, sometimes staying with friends, other times at hotels. It was the last day of August now and they would be wending their way home in a couple of days' time.

They had travelled slowly down the east of the country on their planned honeymoon, stopping only one night in Paris, then on to Burgundy for

three days, calling in at vineyards, feasting on the local food. Next came the Haute Savoie – Geneva, Chamonix, Mont Blanc, Lake Annecy. A lot of mountain walking; it was the region Wilde liked best.

They had soon become used to the constant army manoeuvres, the march of uniformed men, the trundling of armoured vehicles ever eastward along roads both small and large, sometimes blocking their way. At first there had been few refugees on the roads, but every day brought a different story. One day war was imminent, the next day peace was assured. The people who lived on the frontier with Italy didn't know whether to stay at home or make their way west. Wilde and Lydia had carried on south regardless.

The Riviera was gorgeous, and they had spent ten days there at a spectacular villa on Cap Ferrat with ten acres of coastline and first-rate company. It was the home of a famed English author, an old friend of Lydia's family, and they were among a diverse group of his acquaintances: various beautiful young men, including an Italian they took to be the author's lover. The author said that the Nazis could come, but he wasn't going. Anyway, he rather admired their uniforms, he added with a mischievous twinkle.

A female American writer with an acerbic column in a New York rag did her best to monopolise the dinner table conversation, and a jazz musician who had been playing his way along the coast played for them. Oh, and there was a former beauty who gave her profession as 'gold-digger', but whose gold-digging days must have been waning before the Great War had even begun.

It had been idyllic. The sound of the waves, the continuous inrush and retreat of the sea against the shore, the movement of their bodies in the heat of the afternoon, him inside her, sighing and moaning, breathing in the heady scents of salt water and wild herbs. The window was open and their sweat-slicked bodies moved with the sea.

And from there, the drive to this ancient stone house in this village of dust and wine near Toulouse. The first leg of their trek back to the northern coast and the ferry home. Jacques Talbot held a history chair at the University of Toulouse. He and Wilde had met when he visited Cambridge on a lecture tour the previous summer. His favoured subject,

the House of Guise, dovetailed neatly with Wilde's own interest in the late-Tudor era and they had quickly become firm friends.

'Well,' Françoise said in halting but correct English. 'I will stay here with the children, otherwise we will have to take two cars.' She was a woman of warmth and rare beauty; plump and well-rounded with a smile that shone with almost every word she uttered.

As they stood around Wilde's rented blue Citroën – a fine touring car – Lydia shook her head. 'Tom, even if I go into the back and Jacques takes the front passenger seat, we're going to be pushed to get Marfield in here. Assuming he's even there, of course. I'll stay with Françoise. You two go.'

The drive was easier than Wilde had feared. To the west, they saw the dark green foothills of the Pyrenees. 'The fighters' route to freedom,' Jacques Talbot said with an edge of bitterness. 'Some freedom, huh?'

'From the Spanish war?'

'When the Republicans lost back in the spring, they streamed across the mountains. Our government was woefully ill-prepared for their arrival. Hence the internment camps. It was always obvious to me that this would be the outcome. Why were we not ready to help?'

On the way, Talbot had told Wilde what he knew about the place. 'It was originally an army barracks, but in recent months they have been putting the refugees here and in similar camps all over this corner of France, right down to the beaches in the south. Some say almost a million men, women and children have fled the Falangists and their fascist allies. I suppose they had to put them somewhere and feed them. But I don't like it. We are French, not Nazis; this is not how democracies should treat people.'

'They had to do something with them, surely?'

Talbot wouldn't have it. 'They call the places "assembly centres", but that is a euphemism. They are concentration camps by another name – and they are a stain on our country, just as Dachau is on Germany. Le Vernet and the other camps are France's dirty little secret.'

They made good time and arrived on the outskirts of Le Vernet before eleven. Wilde stopped the car, his heart sinking. The day was burning

hot and the place was nothing but a remote railway siding with barracks attached, all enclosed in barbed wire, a wasteland of dust and rock. Jacques was right – this was not a refugee camp, but a prison. And the smell was overpowering.

At the entrance, two armed members of the *Garde Mobile* stood in front of a small guardhouse built of stone. A wooden gantry over the roadway bore the words *Camp du Vernet*. Beyond this, an endless vista of basic barrack blocks. This place could hold tens of thousands of men.

Wilde sniffed the air and grimaced. A stinking miasma spoke of disease.

‘This is horrible,’ Talbot said.

One of the sentries walked casually towards them. In one hand he held a rifle, with the other hand he curled his fingers slowly but insistently, tilting his unshaven chin towards the sky, signalling to them to get out of the car.

‘Let’s do as the man says, Jacques.’

As they got out, around twenty men approached the gateway from the central area of the camp, heads shaven, bare against the scorching sun. Their bodies were hung with rags and their feet wrapped in scraps, as Honoré’s had been. They carried spades at their shoulders in the way that marching soldiers carried rifles. A couple of bored-looking *Garde Mobile* officers, carrying riding crops, accompanied them: ‘Left-right, one-two, one-two . . .’

‘Good God.’ Wilde looked at the men with dismay. He watched the work party pass along the road at the edge of the rail track.

Talbot turned to the sentry.

‘What crime have those men committed?’

The guard wiped sweat from his brow and shrugged. ‘Their crime? They lost a war.’

It was not a conversation worth pursuing. ‘We wish to speak with your commanding officer.’

‘You think he has nothing better to do than take tea with tourists? Who are you, monsieur, that the CO should speak with you?’

‘I am someone who can make your life very difficult if you seek to impede me.’ Greying and handsome, Professor Talbot had the unmistakable air of authority.

The guard suddenly looked less confident. 'Name?'

'Talbot. Professor Jacques Talbot.'

'What organisation do you represent?'

'It is a private matter concerning one of the internees. I will discuss it with the camp commandant, no one else. But you can tell him that I am a very good friend of Maurice Sarrault.'

The guard shrugged. The name meant nothing. He nodded towards Wilde. 'And who is he?'

'His name is Wilde. Professor Thomas Wilde. He is an American citizen.'

'Wait here.'

CHAPTER 5

Within five minutes they were inside the camp commandant's office. To Wilde, the CO looked like the caricature of a nineteenth-century French military man: extravagant moustache, proud chin, a belly that told of a great love of food.

He introduced himself as Major Cornet and grudgingly offered them seats.

Talbot did the talking. 'We believe there is an Englishman here among the refugees from the Spanish war. He is an undergraduate at the Cambridge college of Professor Wilde, my companion here. We would very much like to see him and find out if there is anything that can be done to repatriate him.'

'An Englishman? There are no Englishmen here.'

'Well, we believe he is and we intend to find him.'

'Monsieur, there are nine thousand men in the camp, I cannot know them all. What is this man's name?'

'Marcus Marfield. He is in Hut 32.' Wilde spoke in halting French.

'Hut 32? They are mostly German communists. International Brigaders. What makes you think he is here?'

'We were told this.'

'By whom?'

'I cannot say, but that is not the issue.'

Cornet tutted. 'One moment.' He pulled back his shoulders and left the office, his boots clicking on the stone floor. Wilde and Talbot could hear him addressing a subordinate. A minute later he returned. He looked less sure of himself. 'My adjutant tells me it is possible there is an Englishman in the camp. He doesn't speak and won't give his name, so we don't know who he is – but others say he is English.'

'May we see him, Major?' Talbot asked.

'These are dangerous men, messieurs. They are all communists and anarchists. Whatever your student was before, he will not be the same person now. I can promise you that.'

‘Still, we would like to see him.’

‘You told the sentry you know Monsieur Sarrault, the editor and proprietor of *La Dépêche de Toulouse*?’

‘Indeed.’

The major blinked, weighing the matter up. One should not cross people such as the Sarraults; they wielded great influence.

Talbot continued. ‘Maurice Sarrault is a close family friend. And I am sure you know, too, that he is the elder brother of Albert Sarrault, minister of the interior.’

The officer began to sweat. ‘Perhaps a glass of wine, gentlemen? I will have the Englishman brought in short order. But you know it will not be possible for him to leave Camp du Vernet? Not without the proper permissions.’

‘First things first, major,’ said Talbot. ‘Let us meet the fellow.’

‘It may take a little while to locate him.’ Major Cornet sounded uneasy. ‘I am told he has suffered an injury and is in the camp sanatorium.’

Talbot stiffened. ‘Injury? What kind of injury?’

‘He was shot, monsieur.’

Even shaven-headed, in rags, limping and bruised, his left arm in a filthy bloodstained sling, Marcus Marfield was immediately recognisable.

Slender, fair-haired with sea-blue eyes and golden skin, he lit up the room the same way he had at Cambridge. He had an aura that defied description but which none could ignore: in chapel, in lectures, in Hall and in supervision, but most of all singing, with a voice as pure as bells. To Wilde, he had always had a little of the look and ethereal romanticism of a young T. E. Lawrence. And yet, as with Lawrence, there was, too, a steely determination.

And yet now he was so weak, the guard was holding him upright. Wilde leapt out of his seat and took the boy’s uninjured arm, which, like the rest of his body, was shaking as though he had a fever. Marfield stumbled forward, and then his eyes met Wilde’s and flickered in recognition.

Marfield sat down and slumped forward, breathing heavily, his left hand flopping on his thigh, quivering. His face had retained its luminescence, but his hands were those of a farmhand, swollen, red and calloused.

Wilde turned to Talbot. 'Jacques, this is appalling. Marfield needs medical attention. He has a fever.'

The major tried to explain the bullet wound. 'Someone took a potshot through the wire. By chance this man was hit – but it could have been anyone.'

'Who shot him?' Wilde demanded.

'Most certainly, a local man.' The major shrugged. 'The villagers are angry about this camp. They do not like all these fighters held so close to them and their women.'

'I don't believe him,' Wilde said to Talbot in English.

The French professor turned to the major and spoke quickly and angrily. 'One of your guards has done this.'

The commandant threw up his arms. 'No, no, monsieur, that is not so! We cannot patrol every centimetre of our fence. Nor are we nursemaids. We have a pittance from the government to feed nine thousand exhausted fighting men. There are bound to be . . . incidents.'

'I want to use your telephone,' Talbot said. 'Get me a line. Call *La Dépêche*. The operator will provide the number.'

The real reason Lydia had opted out of the journey was that she couldn't face the drive. She didn't feel at all well and wanted nothing more than to lie in the cool of her room – but not wishing to appear rude to her hostess, she compromised by stretching out on a reclining chair in the courtyard. She had offered, half-heartedly, to help with the chores, but Françoise had refused all offers of assistance. And so Lydia read poetry and dozed in the shade while her hostess busied herself around the house.

Of all the people they had met these past weeks, Françoise and Jacques were her favourites. Françoise was in her mid-thirties – a little older than Lydia and about ten years younger than her husband. She not only ran a busy home but also had a career – she was that rarity in French hospitals, a female doctor. While she worked, the children had a nanny. But now Françoise was on holiday, and so was the nanny, who had returned to her family in Nantes for a few days.

Lydia was asleep when she felt a touch on her shoulder. She woke with a start.

'Would you care for a little lunch, Lydia? I have some fresh sardines and tomatoes from the market. Perhaps with some bread? And I thought you might like a lemon cordial to cool off?' She spoke in her own tongue, because Lydia's French was good. They only reverted to English when Wilde was about.

'Yes to the drink, Françoise, but I'm not awfully hungry yet.'

Françoise smiled. 'How long is it?'

Lydia frowned, not sure how to reply.

'I'm sorry. Perhaps I am intruding but I think that you are suffering from *le mal de matinée*. It is much the same expression in English – morning sickness – is it not?'

'How did you guess?'

Françoise laughed, enveloping Lydia in her comfortable bosom. 'I am a mother and an obstetrician. How could I not know?'

'Please, don't tell Tom. I haven't said anything yet. It is only a few weeks. Maybe ten or eleven.'

'He will need to know quite soon. Especially if you are suffering with the sickness.'

'He lost his first wife in childbirth. The baby, too.'

'Ah, I see. You are worried because you do not know how he will take the news. But, Lydia, your husband is a good man. Nothing mends a heart better than the arrival of a child – especially when it is your own.'

Lydia knew all this, and yet there was more, wasn't there? What about the coming war? Why would anyone bring a baby into such a world? So much for bloody Dutch caps and Volpar gels.

There was another reason she didn't want to tell Tom yet: she still hadn't ruled out abortion. There was that society abortionist in London who did the debts, the one whose number was in all the Girton girls' address books. Was he still practising? Easy enough to find out.

'Don't worry, *cherie*,' Françoise soothed. 'I will say nothing. It is your place to break the good news.' She patted Lydia's hand. 'Tell me,' she said briskly. 'Do you have this sickness every day? You must find these long car journeys a great trial.'

'Oh, it hasn't been so bad. I'm quite strong.'

‘Yes, I see that. But, Lydia, you can confide in me while you are here. Now, as your hostess I will fetch you that lemon cordial. And as a doctor, might I suggest a little less wine in the evening?’

‘Am I being lectured?’

‘Professional advice, nothing more.’ Francoise laughed. ‘I smoked and drank through my own pregnancies, so what can I say?’ She turned to go, but Lydia put out her hand.

‘Can I ask you something, Françoise?’ she said. ‘I’m interested in training to be a doctor, but I’m almost thirty, so am I too old? Would it be possible if I have a baby to care for? I am particularly interested in psychiatry.’

‘Cherie, if this war comes, there will be a great need of doctors of all kinds.’ Francoise smiled. ‘I don’t know the situation in England, but if any woman can make it happen, I’m sure you are the one.’

The wire arrived from the office of the Ministry of the Interior in the late afternoon:

Release authorised from Camp du Vernet of internee Marfield, Marcus, into the charge of Professor Talbot of University of Toulouse, conditional on the internee’s removal from France by September 3.

A. Sarrault, minister.

‘So, *messieurs*, he is yours,’ the major said.

In the hours of telephoning back and forth, first to Maurice Sarrault in Toulouse and then to the ministry in Paris, Wilde had requested some sort of mattress be brought for Marcus. When Cornet saw the way things were going, he ordered a straw palliasse. As an afterthought, he called out to the lieutenant: ‘Make sure it is clean!’

The stench was everywhere. Wilde did not want to imagine what conditions must be like inside the barrack blocks, nor the quality of the food. His former undergraduate, stretched out, shivering, was evidence enough.

Wilde helped Marfield to his feet and, with Talbot’s assistance, walked him slowly towards the front gate. All around them men wandered

aimlessly, their work details finished. As they got closer to the fence, a man in his fifties approached them and said something in German, before switching to broken French. Talbot stopped and spoke to him, then turned to Wilde.

‘This is Wilfrid Zucker. I have heard of this man, Tom; he is a composer. His work has been performed in Paris and Salzburg.’

‘Why is he here?’

‘Because he is a refugee. These are not all Brigaders or fighting men.’

The composer was holding out his left hand and shadow-writing on it with his right. Talbot fished inside his jacket for a scrap of paper and a pencil. With a trembling hand the man wrote down his name, and another name – Gerhard Sankte – with a London address. Talbot took it. ‘He says this man Sankte in London will vouch for him and asks that we contact him.’

‘I’ll take it,’ Wilde nodded. He had enough German to understand what Zucker had said.

Other men were now clustering around, grabbing at their coats. Some tore pieces of cigarette packs and playing cards, fighting for the pencil to write down their names and the names of contacts. They spoke in myriad languages and stank of overflowing latrines. More than anything, thought Wilde, they stank of neglect and desperation. He took all their pieces of paper.

Major Cornet bustled up, shooing the inmates away, as he escorted the visitors and Marcus Marfield to the main gate. The men looked on like beaten dogs, a sad, defeated bunch.

With some difficulty, Wilde and Talbot helped Marfield into the Citroën and made him as comfortable as they could on the rear bench seat. Cornet ordered a guard to go to Hut 32 to see if there was any property to accompany the released man. Marfield himself had not yet spoken a word.

A woman walked past at a leisurely stroll. She was small and wore a long dark skirt and a billowing white cotton shirt, with a cotton neckerchief knotted about her throat. Her hair was long and dark, her skin bronzed by the Mediterranean sun. She stopped and looked at them through black eyes, then spat at Wilde’s feet and moved on.

‘Good God, Jacques, what was that about?’

Talbot shrugged. ‘As the major suggested, I don’t think the locals like having these camps on their doorstep.’

The guard returned five minutes later with a small, tattered book in a red leather cover. Wilde took it and flicked through the pages. It was a well-thumbed copy of the Book of Common Prayer, a school prize for poetry awarded to Marcus Marfield in 1931. So the communist revolutionary hadn’t quite given up on religion. Wilde smiled for the first time that day.

In the distance, in the lee of an overhang, the small dark woman squatted on her haunches, watching the scene unfold through binoculars. A rifle lay by her side.

She felt a grim satisfaction. She had a good idea where they would be going, and she would be there, waiting.