The War Business

John Farrell

"Those are million dollar feet if they're worth a dime."

"I don't want million dollar feet," Randolph Peck protested, taking offense at the cynical attitude of the army medical inspector. "I want to serve my country."

"No with those feet," the doctor told him. "I've seen a lot of fellows who would envy *your* luck."

Secretly Peck would have admitted that the verdict didn't surprise him. He had long considered himself, for better or worse, a lucky man. With a father whose station in life was nothing more imposing than a small-town druggist's, Peck had managed, without too much of a struggle, to become a tenured professor of History at Amherst College at the venturesome age of twenty-seven. War was his subject, particularly the Great War. From a professional standpoint, the choice had been a lucky one, the topic of war having become all the more pressing with another conflict on the horizon just as Peck took his doctorate from Princeton. And though he sincerely regretted it, it was also lucky that Peck's career would not be interrupted by military service.

Peck's greatest luck came in graduate school when he met his wife, Anna, who was working in the Princeton admissions office. Anna was from rural Pennsylvania and shared many of Peck's attitudes and interests. He could make her laugh, which was gratifying since Peck was not known for his humor. And from the point of view of attractiveness, Anna was a catch. She had an elegant five foot five inch frame, thick brown hair, and winning dimples, whereas Peck, in addition to being flat-footed, was undoubtedly a little on the lanky side. Peck's parents were delighted with Anna, and his father was especially courtly toward her, which gave Peck a pleasure he had not been expecting.

The first months of Peck's romance with Anna were intensely happy. Anna's beauty and kindness pervaded his existence. Sex, however, changed things. When Peck met Anna he knew little more about the process than you could gather from reading D. H. Lawrence. Anna was no less innocent, and their couplings were stilted. Peck was grateful for Anna's willingness to make the experiment before marriage, and it was difficult for him to admit his discontent. Still, he was disappointed, and he suspected Anna was too. There were irritable exchanges between them, and after four months Peck told Anna that he needed to know more of life before he settled down with a woman. To his mortification, Anna made no objection and before long she had taken up with a chemistry graduate student named Carl. Peck was instantly miserable. His replacement was a bit older than he was, arguably better looking, and noticeably well-dressed, which was unexpected for a scientist. When introduced to Peck, Carl appeared friendly and unruffled. He looked Peck over without discomfort.

But all was not lost. When Peck ran into Anna on campus she remained friendly, so Peck never lost hope. During their brief encounters he noticed that whatever else was going on around them, she didn't turn her back on him. Meanwhile, Peck was having a fling with a precocious undergraduate named Sherry who was studying biology at Douglass, the women's division of Rutgers. Sherry went to bed with Peck right away and was sensual and playful in a way that delighted him. In other ways, though, Sherry was immature and often embarrassed Peck. Also, she was extremely bold intellectually, which posed challenges not entirely welcome in a younger girlfriend. There were even times she sounded like a communist. Peck could not imagine introducing her to his parents. He was still sore over Anna, and when he heard that she and Carl had broken up, he wasted no time getting back in touch with her.

It wasn't long before the relationship was reestablished and, somewhat to Peck's surprise, things in bed were very different now. It was obvious that Sherry had gotten him over some of his awkwardness, but it was equally obvious that Anna had benefited from her time with Carl. Peck enjoyed the change and did not dwell on how it came about. He was

happy, and in just a few months he and Anna were married. Later Anna told Peck that she had initially been dazzled by Carl and his knowing ways but that he had proven to be not only untrustworthy but intellectually shallow compared with Peck. He had not even read D. H. Lawrence.

During their first year at Amherst Peck and Anna had a child, Meredith, who promised to be a slightly fairer version of Anna, with the same warm brown eyes. Raising Meredith with the world going to pieces was a little daunting. It made Peck feel that he was bound to the future in a way he had not been before. But it also took away some of the sting of his 4F status. In some intangible way Meredith seemed like a respectable contribution to the war effort.

Amherst was always a quiet town, but during the war it seemed even farther from the center of things. War brought the community closer and gave everyone a lot to talk about. Peck enjoyed the company of his colleagues and Anna made friends among the faculty wives. The History Department had dwindled with the shortage of students and the enlistment of two professors slightly senior to Peck, so he could well see his way toward becoming chairman in the not too distant future.

One morning, as he was preparing for class, Peck got a surprise visit from the current department chairman, David Roper, a historian of the French Middle Ages, who told him that the administration had approached the History Department with an unusual opportunity. Thomas Knallstein, the distinguished Austrian historian who had been at Oxford through most of the thirties, had expressed an interest in coming to Amherst for at least the duration of the war. The president of the college, Ted Walters, was a friend of Knallstein and, having heard that he was looking for a post, had raised the issue of his joining the History Department. Peck was the one most likely to be affected by the proposition because Knallstein was a senior historian specializing in Peck's very own subject, the Great War. How would Peck react, the chairman wanted to know, to the idea of Knallstein being added to the

department? Roper assured Peck that Knallstein would not take any of his courses. Knallstein had a wide range of teaching interests and his recent research had shifted toward Anglo-German relations in the late nineteenth century, a subject it was possible to pursue based on sources outside Germany. Knallstein would be willing to teach any subject the department happened to need.

Of course Peck responded that it would be an enormous coup for Amherst to hire Professor Knallstein and that he personally would be the greatest beneficiary. Knallstein's book was a classic on Peck's subject. There was no one, he told Roper, from whom he could expect to learn more. It would be an honor to have Knallstein in the History Department.

Indeed, the thought of meeting the author of *The Myth of Victory* and *Clio in Harness*, both of which had recently appeared in English, certainly intrigued Peck, and giving Roper any other answer would have made him look petty. Still, the prospect of having someone like Knallstein in his department wasn't entirely a comfortable one. Peck harbored quiet doubts about his own articles on the War, which depended more heavily than he would have liked on already published materials. He did not have anything like Knallstein's way with documentary evidence. Because of the political situation in Germany, Peck had spent a shorter time in the archives there than would normally have been part of a historian's apprenticeship. Besides, he had just gotten out from under the wing of his Princeton thesis director. Here was an even more intimidating source of supervision. Knallstein had a famously ruthless way of demolishing his intellectual opponents, a quality that was more than a little disconcerting to contemplate in a department colleague.

By the time he got home that evening, though, Peck had conquered his reservations, which already seemed foolish and unworthy. After all, he reflected, Knallstein was a gifted and urbane humanist who was looking for a position in a country far from home. The generosity would all be on Peck's part. There was bound to be some awkwardness in dealing with a person of Knallstein's grand stature, but that very stature was the reason so much

was to be gained from his acquaintance. And at all events Peck would have the genial Anna to help smooth any wrinkles.

Knallstein's first week at Amherst was marked by an inaugural lecture eagerly awaited by the entire community. As the book-jacket photos suggested, the Austrian was a tall man, silver-haired but surprisingly youthful. He stepped up to the podium in front of a packed lecture hall looking thoroughly at home and began by entertaining his audience with some wry, self-deprecating remarks in response to the glowing introduction by President Walters, who called him "one of the great historical minds of our time." Knallstein then announced his decision to speak on a large and speculative subject about which he claimed no specialist's expertise but which had been preoccupying him a good deal of late—what he called "the source of human harms."

Knallstein began by taking note of the substantial literature about fascism and communism. "Some people think they're perfect Manichean doubles," he stated, speaking with a very slight German accent and with the aid of just a single index card. "It has been said you couldn't have one without the other. But lately I've been thinking about this in relation to Hitler and Stalin and their private characters. I might say their personal styles as leaders, or even, to be more direct, their personal styles as killers. For the most part, I believe people would say that Hitler is a much worse man than Stalin, especially since Stalin is now apparently on our side." (Knallstein looked around for a reaction as he said this, but apparently none was discernable.) "Hitler," he continued, "seems to be possessed by megalomaniac dreams about the thousand year Reich and delusions about Jews and other bogeymen. He is a figure of pure hatred. There seems no limit to how far he will go to pursue his self-assigned enemies. The traits of self-glorification and the demonization of others as we see them in Hitler would appear to be the pinnacle of human destructiveness. But there is another side to it. Strangely enough, psychopath as he may be, there's no reason to think that the Führer is a danger to the people around him. He seems to have

sentimental loyalty and solidarity with his cronies, however corrupt and delusional all of them may be, and I understand he treats his staff with courtesy and even kindness. And although his accomplices are undoubtedly motivated by venality, by the spoils system of taking from your enemy, I see no evidence that Hitler himself is particularly corrupt. If anything he's willing to sacrifice for his ideals, mad and destructive as they are. Hitler is devoted to evil in the idealistic way other people are devoted to good. And of course he believes himself to be one of the good. He is on a heroic, grandiose, sacrificial quest. All of this is quite apparent if you read his book and take it seriously.

"Comrade Stalin, on the other hand, is quite a different animal. Though the ideals that he espouses—universal human brotherhood and so on—may in theory be admirable, while Hitler's are evil and absurd, Stalin has no compunction about killing his fellow Russians. He makes war on classes and clans and every kind of group. He exterminates whole categories of his own people, and it doesn't even matter if they actually believe devoutly in the ideals he claims to represent. In addition to this, he has no sense of personal loyalty. He takes his own cronies and puts them on trial, humiliates them in public along with their whole families, and has them executed with great fanfare, as we've seen in the last few years. He seems to lack human bonds, is scarcely human himself. Under the guise of the people's interests, he does anything that comes into his head, and it usually involves killing. Whereas Hitler has friends and enemies, Stalin seems to make no distinctions among people at all. All are equally expendable. We might want to say that this is the difference between scientific socialism and fascism, that fascism seeks to restore a lost ideal of human solidarity by destroying everything that doesn't conform to it while socialism looks forward to an unrecognizable future in which distinctions between people are leveled absolutely. That is one way of thinking about it. But I believe this difference between Hitler and Stalin itself cannot be merely one of ideology or the outcome of a system. I believe that here we are dealing here with a fundamental difference of human potentials in the deepest sense. It seems proper to call one of them the essence of human

evil, whereas the other one seems something even more strange, a total abandonment of humanity itself. These are the two forces that now dominate our world. In a sense they are working side by side despite their apparent opposition, but our greatest hope seems to be that they will destroy each other before they destroy us."

After this sober beginning, Knallstein drew out further differences between the two leaders and their regimes—that, for instance, Hitler talks incessantly on the radio and participates in endless national rituals and festivals, whereas Stalin is personally invisible, preferring to appear to his people in massive images, parodies of a religious idol or totem. The crux of the lecture came when Knallstein finally wound around to the character of the liberal democracies and the moral and spiritual forces they could marshal against the two kinds of opponent—evil and inhuman. Here Knallstein had nothing more to offer than vague platitudes of hope. All of the energy of his performance went into the formulation of the problem. For the solution he merely looked to the outcome of events. In the question period Knallstein showed little willingness to speculate about the future or to comment on the character of the American political system, which he discussed in a way that made it sound indistinguishable from the single figure of Roosevelt.

Knallstein's view of the alliance with Russia was not a comforting one, but Anna thought the lecture was one of the most exhilarating, fascinating things she had ever heard. It left Peck feeling depressed and anxious.

Afterwards the Pecks hosted a welcoming party for the new professor and his wife. Knallstein displayed an affable manner and was quick to laugh at any hint of irony toward the ways of professors and, especially, administrators. The latter surprised Peck a little given the newcomer's close relation to President Walters. Still, it was easy to make small talk with him on this basis. Peck took an immediate liking to Knallstein's wife, Eva, a small and extremely good-looking woman with a round, sympathetic, very pale face and a quick, nervous manner. Peck found it hard to make a connection with her, though, in spite of her

friendly demeanor. She was evidently uncomfortable surrounded by her husband's new colleagues and seemed not to talk with anyone for more than a couple of minutes.

Knallstein was gracious about Peck's articles, calling them "impressive," but Peck found it hard to draw him out on historical subjects. Looking for an opening, Peck made an awkward comment about the causes of war in modern society, and Knallstein actually chuckled over it. "The causes," he said, tapping his chest, "are right in here. We historians fuss around with the symptoms and the consequences. But the causes are closer to home." Peck felt taken down by this remark.

Being the guests of honor, the Knallsteins stayed till the end of the party, and as they were leaving, Anna, who Peck had noticed was looking particularly lovely that evening, asked the Knallsteins if there was any way she or her husband could ease the Knallstein's transition to life at the college. Knallstein mentioned he was actually looking for someone to take dictation for a series of articles he was writing for a British journal. Eva, he said comically, was "quite useless for such purposes," and Knallstein was hoping Peck could put him in touch with a student who wanted to make a little extra money four or five hours a week. Before Peck knew it, Anna had volunteered herself for the assignment, announcing that she had excellent secretarial skills and would be delighted to help the professor. "You must have your own professor to take dictation for," Knallstein said, but Anna assured him this was not the case. Peck did not need her help. So it was agreed that Anna would come to Knallstein's house three mornings a week for an hour or two while Peck was home looking after Meredith.

Though Peck was more than a little disconcerted by Anna's offer to Knallstein, he was curious to hear how the first session went. Knallstein, she reported, having left the front door ajar, was waiting for her to knock and gave a very friendly greeting. He told her to call him Thomas and offered her a cup of coffee, which she declined. Then he showed her into his office, which was small and already stuffed with papers and books, and they settled very

quickly down to work. Eva was nowhere to be seen, and since Thomas said nothing about her, Anna didn't ask. Knallstein dictated rapidly from a legal pad covered with a tiny, angular script. The article he was writing was highly technical and had to do with trade regulations in England in the 1890s. Anna found it impossible to follow. It was interesting, though, to see how quickly Thomas could revise his words when they didn't suit him. Occasionally he would ask her help with an English expression and would be demonstratively grateful when she came up with the right one.

Anna's sessions with Thomas very quickly became routine. Peck, meanwhile, came to enjoy the time he spent alone with the three-year-old Meredith, a rather quiet, pensive child who would sit on the floor playing with a wooden horse while Peck read at his desk or smoked a cigar in his rocking chair. He knew he was going to remember these times when his daughter was grown and wondered if any of them would survive in her memory.

Anna said little more about her meetings with Thomas, though the process was intensifying. She was staying out longer and coming home a bit worn out, needing to lie down, which annoyed Peck a little. Peck also couldn't help wondering if Thomas wasn't exerting a certain amount of influence on Anna. Some of her opinions exhibited a bleakness previously uncharacteristic of her. When Peck made a humorous remark about saving up for Meredith's wedding, Anna responded, "Assuming she gets to her wedding." Peck took this as a reference to the war and didn't ask her to explain it, but she had never been so pessimistic before. New England hardly seemed under threat from the Nazis, at least not at the moment. On another occasion, when they were discussing what it meant for husbands and wives to be separated in wartime, Anna remarked that "Sex is only a metaphor after all." Was this a psychoanalytic observation? Peck was suddenly on the defensive with his wife. Before he knew it, the moment was past when he could gracefully ask what she meant.

Later that week Peck ran into Knallstein at the department. "I've been thinking," he told him, "about something you said about history at the party the other week. You said

that historical causes are in here, in the soul. I suppose you meant that we historians only gain access to the external details and consequences of people's actions, not the motives. But it made me wonder why you wanted to be a historian. If all you have to do is point to the human heart to understand the great events of the past, what do you think is the point of historical research?"

Knallstein listened to this speech with a somewhat quizzical, rhythmical nodding, as if he were following the completion of a well-known routine. "My dear fellow," he said, looking at Peck, "we have to put bread on the table, don't we?"

"Yes, but there lots of ways to do that, lots of ways easier and more lucrative than delving in the archives."

"The archives keep us out of trouble. Some of us like it underground."

"Well, but I suppose they didn't keep you out of trouble, if you don't mind my saying so. Otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"A fair point," Knallstein said. But in Austria there was so much trouble to go around. Even hiding in the archives didn't help. Not for a fellow like me. My wife agrees with you. She thinks historians should be able to come up with some kind of solution, some way of avoiding the trials of history, which would make all the trouble of being human worthwhile. But I suspect that, from a professional point of view, that would be cheating. After all, you can't teach the chess king a new move, can you? He can't start hopping around like a knight. You have to play with the pieces on the board. Don't you agree?"

"You make Hitler and Stalin representatives of human nature," Peck replied, "but they're both monsters, aren't they? They don't explain what goes on in most people's minds."

"A lot of people seem to go along with them, though," Knallstein said. "The going-along people, who are inspired by their so-called ideals, or who don't mind confiscating other people's property if somebody comes up with a reason to put them in a camp. I didn't

get around to them in my lecture, but they're not a heartening phenomenon either. They're another candidate for the bottom of the muck heap, don't you think?"

"But surely you wouldn't say there are no good people in the world."

"Of course there are, to make us see the horror of the others."

Peck was surprised by the bitterness of Knallstein's irony. "That's a hopeless way of thinking about it," he told him, "and I might also say a bit on the dramatic side."

"Granted," Knallstein replied, "but without a sense of theater, we might not last very long."

Peck had been silenced for the moment.

It was seven past nine in the morning. Anna was late for her first session of the week with Knallstein, and she found him in his chair ready to go. After several weeks his bearing toward her remained courtly but business-like. Occasionally she asked him small questions about his way of working, questions in response to which he paused and chose his words carefully, as if the situation demanded a precise answer. Once or twice they talked about the war, and sometimes Knallstein asked about Meredith, but not about Peck who, presumably, he saw at the department. Eva still did not appear and her absence was not mentioned on either side. Anna knew that Eva's general invisibility had raised speculation at the college. She remembered being struck on the night of the party by the bald way Knallstein had stated that his wife was "useless" to him in his work. But having gotten a taste of the rather dry business that was now Knallstein's work, Anna could understand why Eva was not eager to be involved. This morning Knallstein hardly took notice of his assistant. As she settled into her seat with her pencil and pad, he began to rattle off a list of titles for his bibliography. Then there came a long pause until he looked over at her and said, as if reading her mind, "Aren't you terribly bored by this endless parade of dry details I'm honored to call my work? People must think you are quite mad to be helping me so diligently."

"It *is* a lot of fine details," Anna answered on the spot. "They don't make much sense to me, it's true. I only get a piece of the picture. I don't have the background. But that doesn't mean I think there's nothing there. Whatever the purpose is, I'm sure it's an important one."

"But can you really be so sure? Has it ever occurred to you to wonder if all these endlessly important tasks we men busy ourselves with aren't just a routine for exploiting the generous nature of good women like yourself, who have to take it all on faith?"

"That would be paying us an awfully big compliment, wouldn't it, if we were worth fooling at so much trouble and expense."

Knallstein laughed at this. "It isn't all that much trouble, really, at least not for me. Hundreds of thousands of men are out there digging trenches, putting up bridges, marching, shooting each other, while I'm in here rummaging around among old records. You might think you're getting a rather small return on your faith."

"But you don't do it all for us, do you? Obviously you care about the thing for its own sake, and about showing your colleagues what you can accomplish. That's why it has to be perfect down to the last detail. You want to affect how people think. My husband says your books are very important."

"He has to say that, being a historian himself. You're right, though, about impressing the colleagues. Showing off is a key part of the game, and of course, skewering them the second they show the tiniest chink in their scholarly armor. We Viennese are especially good at that. Still, I'm afraid my esteemed countryman Doctor Freud had it right. Woman's faith and all that comes with it, that's the goal of our researches, and we ourselves can hardly tell if the whole routine is a trick or not."

Anna was thinking that Knallstein had a rather grand way of putting this cynical thought, which she did not entirely understand. "I'm sure your wife admires your work," she said, but Knallstein shook his head quickly. "She knows enough about it to know what she thinks." He obviously found this all very funny. But then he looked at Anna, pausing for the

right words. "You are a lovely woman, Anna, and full of good faith. I'm sure your husband deserves his fortune."

Anna made no reply to these thrilling words. She and Knallstein went back to work, but she was glad when he broke off the session early. Knallstein's compliment was, for the situation, an unusually direct and emphatic one, perhaps even improper, and the reference to her husband, which might have passed for an attempt to keep her marital status in view, had the opposite effect. Knallstein had hinted that his own wife didn't value his work and that such recognition from women was important to him. Was this a confession of discouragement? Could a person of Knallstein's fame and distinction be feeling unappreciated? The thought interested Anna deeply, and she kept going back to the question of why Eva never appeared. Could she be such a drinker as to be unpresentable at ten in the morning?

When Anna got home that day, she went into Peck's office where she had seen Knallstein's two recently translated books. She opened them and looked at the acknowledgements. The first was an older monograph, originally published in the twenties and containing a simple dedication to Knallstein's mother and to the memory of his father. The acknowledgements written for the English edition thanked Theodore Walters, President of Amherst College, for his advice and support. The more recent collection of essays was dedicated "To the eternal Eva—she stands near." Anna paused over these words. "Eternal" made Eva sound like a fixture of life, but with a hint of weariness. And "she stands near" was quite enigmatic. Did Eva actually stand by Thomas or was she more of a by-*stander*? Anna wondered if Eva had enjoyed this dedication.

Of course Anna didn't mention any of this to Peck, being certain that, if nothing else, the remark about deserving his luck would be irritating. Besides, Anna's idea was that luck was something you didn't necessarily deserve. Still, she was surprised at the effect Knallstein's remark had on her. She should not have been too surprised, though. Thomas, despite being a good twenty-five years older than her husband, was still a handsome,

imposing fellow. More than that, her knowledge of his fame and the hieratic nature of his labors combined with his humorous way of discounting their value amplified the importance of his opinion quite far beyond what Anna could explain to herself. After the compliment, another channel of communication seemed to open up between the two of them. Now, when Thomas thanked her for her help or praised her kindness, there was something behind it.

Occasionally Anna tried to probe Thomas for details of his past life, but with little success. Once she asked him what he thought of American women. "They are women," he said with a dry laugh. Anna was treading on the brink. The next time they met Thomas got up in the middle of a sentence, took her hand, drew her up to him, and put his arms around her, and she immediately knew this was what she had been hoping for.

In bed later that morning Anna asked Thomas how it felt to be an exile.

"Exiles have their opportunities," he said.

"Do you miss Vienna?"

"I miss the Vienna that no longer exists."

"And the people, society?"

"I didn't come from society. My father was a policeman." This was not what Anna had pictured.

"He must have been very proud of your achievements."

"He was proud of my marks in school. That was all he lived to see. He was killed on the job."

"Stopping a crime?"

"He was engaging in pacification. It was more or less an accident. So we were told."

"Did your mother remarry?"

"No. I was an only child. She took care of me."

"You had her all to yourself?"

"Yes, very dangerous. It's a wonder I'm not a homosexual."

"So when did Eva come along?"

"Eva, you know, was my second wife. I was married quite young and spent ten years with my first wife."

"You left her for Eva?"

"No, we just didn't understand each other very well. My first wife was not an educated woman and didn't sympathize with my career. I married her to establish my independence."

"From your mother?"

"I suppose you could say that. By the time I met Eva I was a well-known scholar. I had a professorship. Eva took all that for granted. For my first wife it was all very difficult. She needed a lot of attention."

"All these times I've wondered why I don't see Eva."

"She is in the vicinity," he told her, turning away. *She stands near*, Anna thought.

When Anna arrived two mornings later Thomas was back in his seat looking as if he were about to start dictating, but she went right over and gave him a good-morning kiss. After that they would go to bed as soon as she arrived, and if there was time at the end they would do a little work, but work itself had become a tender bit of afterplay and the tiny office a humorous extension of the bedroom. "Yes, Herr Professor," she would say to him when Thomas made a request. "Danke, Frau Anna," he would reply. They would talk as if she had been serving him faithfully for years. "May I compliment you, Herr Professor. From my humble perspective I believe this is the finest of your works."

"May I say, Frau Anna, that your assistance has never been more valuable."

"If there is anything more I can do, Professor."

"I cannot imagine what that would be, gnadige Frau."

Anna took deeper and deeper pleasure in these meetings. They unfolded in a world completely apart from her usual one, a world she was making up as she went along, with no obligations to perform or expectations to live up to. There was nothing particularly

extraordinary about making love with Thomas, and sometimes they did nothing more than lie on the bed and touch. But some days their meetings were passionate and moving, and it was difficult for her to leave. Still, neither of them suggested that they meet outside the schedule of Anna's secretarial duties. Anna knew that her life would change drastically if Peck found out she was having an affair, and she resisted imagining the calamity that would result if it became known at the college. Such eventualities didn't seem entirely real. They were part of a smaller, less substantial domain. Thomas had brought the wider world of the war much closer to her than it had been before. He was firmly convinced that, as he put it, "the free world is finished," that it would not be long before even a place like Amherst would be uninhabitable and that people who couldn't endure being under the control of Nazis or communists would be moving to the ends of the earth. When she put her arms around Thomas, Anna felt as if she were consoling him somewhere in the neighborhood of Tierra del Fuego.

There was a formidable bleakness in Thomas's outlook, but he opened Anna's mind about people's lives and the way they played their roles in them. It was exciting and a little dangerous no longer to take people just for what they seemed to be but to look behind their motives, to imagine the types and personalities that filled the world. Anna was only beginning to master this game.

Peck was on his way back to his office after class one afternoon when he ran into Richard Malley, a classically red-faced Irishman and a talented gossip who presided over the Philosophy Department. "How do you like your Kraut colleague?" he said to Peck.

"He's Austrian, actually, and Jewish."

"Let's not quibble, my boy. I hear he's a lonely man. His wife spends all her time at the president's house."

"Is she friends with Mrs. Walters?"

"Victoria has been on a long visit with her family in Virginia. They've had some losses. Have you met Mrs. K.?"

"Yes, lovely woman," Peck said.

"Loveliness in a foreign clime. And a good deal younger than her husband."

"Not surprising given his eminence."

"The charms of eminence can wither with age," Malley pronounced.

"Is that Dryden?"

"No, and it's not Pope either. Do you see much of the eminence?" It was impossible to put Malley off.

"Not really," Peck admitted, "but my wife is helping him with his manuscripts."

"Really, and what does the dear Anna think of him?"

"He's a hard-working fellow, as you would imagine. And of course the war has hit him pretty hard."

"Well, neither of you can complain, being in the war business."

For no apparent reason Peck was on the defensive in this conversation about Knallstein. That evening he asked Anna if she knew about all the time Eva was spending at the president's house.

"No," she said, "but I'm not surprised. I've still never seen her at Knallstein's, and he hardly mentions her."

"Don't you find that odd?"

"Yes, but I don't make inquiries."

"Malley tells me that Victoria has been out of town for weeks but that Eva is there all the time."

"Is that a college rumor?"

"Apparently."

"They are old friends, after all, Ted and the Knallsteins."

"Still, you would think the Knallsteins would both be spending time with Walters if Vicky's away."

"You would think so. But Thomas does work awfully hard, and he has deadlines to meet. We are working right now on a paper he'll be giving in New York next week. I don't think socializing is the main thing on his mind."

Later that week Peck spotted Knallstein's office door open and stuck his head in. After some chat about the upcoming lecture and Anna's invaluable services, Peck inquired after Eva. "Is she keeping busy here in Amherst?"

"Oh, yes," Knallstein told him. "She's a busy soul."

"Do you see much of the Walters?" Peck was looking for a reaction but Knallstein answered without hesitation.

"Oh, we are old friends, but these are hectic times. At least presidents and worthies give that impression. And Victoria is visiting her family."

As usual, Knallstein was courteous and good-humored toward Peck but didn't prolong the conversation.

One night, while Thomas Knallstein was away giving his lecture in New York, Eva Knallstein had a dream about Meredith Peck. In the course of it, after a number of confused, indistinct scenes, a strange impulse toward secrecy enters the child's mind. She wants a place of ultimate safety and goes looking for it all through the house. First she tries the chimney; then several closets; then, having strayed into the basement, she somehow manages to get up on a chair and climb into an old icebox sitting up on a high table, seemingly out of reach. It is the perfect size for a child to hide in forever. Eva looks on, terrified. She can see that the icebox is only made out of cheap wood painted green, like something from the nineteenth century, but that doesn't remove her sense of danger. Meredith disappears inside and Eva knows the child is trapped, though there is no sound. Then for hours, having entered the scene herself, she watches Peck and Anna run around the neighborhood calling,

ringing doorbells, looking everywhere for their missing daughter. Eva trails behind them in a state of distress, her heart going wild as their voices move in various directions, but she never thinks of telling them where to look. Finally they come back to the house and she watches them get closer to Meredith. Peering into the basement, Peck notices the chair that has been pushed over to the table with the icebox and realizes what it means. Anna is in hysterics and Peck looks frightened of what he is going to find. When he opens the door, which falls apart in his hands, Meredith is lying on the bottom crumpled on her back with her feet pushed up one of the sides. She is already stiff, but her face and neck are still wet from crying. Anna runs out. Eva goes over to Peck, puts her arms around him and holds him for a long time. Then, some hours later, Eva and Peck are talking on a park bench. "My mind is cycling," he tells her. "I miss my little girl. Then I think of the horrible way she died. Then I feel guilty for allowing it to happen. And the worst thing is, I've had that icebox since I was a child. It was my favorite object in the world."

This confession does not strike Eva as odd. She goes on searching her mind for a reply, seemingly for days, before she realizes it was only a dream.

Peck knew he was being irrational, but he felt certain that Anna was having an affair with Knallstein. The odd combination of grimness and buoyancy that had come over his wife in recent weeks proved that something otherwise unaccountable was going on, and the strange abdication of Knallstein's own wife, which apparently made no impression upon Anna, seemed a sure proof of his fears. Peck felt he should want to thrash Knallstein, but Knallstein's position in the world had its effect on him. Peck was intimidated. If it became known that Anna was having an affair with Knallstein, the world would express shock but still think it predictable that the "eminence" would have his privileges, especially while his own wife was exercising hers. Peck felt the weight of what he pictured as a sophisticated European circle of which Ted Walters was apparently a part, and he wondered if Vicky Walters knew what was going on. Sitting alone with Meredith while Anna was off taking

dictation, Peck obsessively reviewed the possibilities. But he could not bring himself to confront Anna, having no concrete reason to distrust her. Even if her attitudes had been affected by her contact with Knallstein, that did not mean she was having an affair with him. And the mere suspicion, based largely upon gossip, that Eva was having an affair with Ted Walters didn't mean that anything was going on between Knallstein and Anna. Peck had bits and pieces of evidence that intuitively seemed to add up, but he was enough of a scholar to be wary of such intuitions. He didn't want to make a complete fool of himself.

About a week later Peck was coming out of the Pleasant Street Post Office when he met Eva Knallstein going in. He had hardly seen her since the welcoming party when she first arrived. Eva was a little paler than usual but very smartly dressed in a blue knit outfit with a matching yellow hat and scarf. Even more than before Peck was struck with how truly beautiful and charismatic she was. Her small frame seemed to mirror Peck's lanky one as she cocked her head toward him while he talked. Her rapid, nervous movements were utterly sensitive and responsive to his own, and yet the strain of this total concentration meant that she was quickly on her way again, leaving Peck with only a pleasurable chuckle that she produced with but the slightest hint of humor. Peck was so completely charmed that he forgot all about his ulterior motives for being interested in Eva and wished he had some excuse to go back to the post office and renew the encounter. Looking over his shoulder, he saw that Eva had already finished her business and was skittering off in the other direction. It occurred to Peck that he could follow her, and before he knew it he was retracing his steps. Eva moved quickly and had already gotten a good distance ahead, but in no time Peck, with his long, flat-footed strides, would be close behind her. Not for years, since his college days, had Peck had followed a woman like this. He had forgotten the odd combination of anxiety and exhilaration it produced. He did not know if he would actually have the nerve to catch up to her. *We seem to be going in the same direction*—that giveaway sentence was forming in his head. But after all, Peck was married, and so was

Eva. That was just the problem. Still, an unaccountable impulse was pushing Peck forward, and he was about to be on the same block as his quarry when a shiny black Packard pulled up beside Eva and swallowed her into the front seat. It was the president's car. Cheated of his adventure, Peck turned away having witnessed what he felt was a revelation.

It was strange, but Peck's broken encounter with Eva put a new spirit into him. The excitement of glimpsing her pale beauty and the manner of her departure made it a little easier to face the loss of Anna. Peck was going to find out what was up with his wife. That evening, after dinner and the dishes, instead of retiring to his easy chair and the newspaper, Peck sat down next to her on the sofa. "I've been thinking," he said, "about Knallstein's distinction, evil versus the inhuman. I don't think he could have come up with that if he hadn't found one or the other of those types in himself, don't you think? Which one could it be?"

Anna did not know what to make of this. "It's impossible for me to think of Thomas as evil or inhuman," she told him. "He's no dictator, after all. He's been chased out of his home by a dictator."

"No, no, Anna. I'm not saying he's a dictator or that he's evil in any sense, never mind inhuman. I'm just suggesting that there must be something personal about an intellectual creation like that. I know I couldn't have come up with it. Undoubtedly I'm too naive and trusting of my fellow men."

"I think Thomas was just going on what he's observed. Isn't that what you historians do? You pose a problem and then you look for evidence that sheds light on it." Anna was doing her best to take this conversation in stride, but Peck could tell she wasn't enjoying it. Her husband was revealing unsuspected resources.

"You're right," Peck said after a moment, "we historians pose a problem, we inquire, we look for evidence, but the evidence doesn't speak for itself. We have to interpret it. We have to give it shape. We're like storytellers, and our stories show something about our

characters. Could you more easily imagine Thomas as a grudging paranoid character, let's say, brooding over his enemies, like Hitler, or would he more likely be a detached manipulator, like Stalin? All of us must be a little closer to one of those types than to the other, don't you think?"

"I think you are closer to the brooding, resentful type at the moment."

"And Thomas is more the detached manipulator?"

"The whole premise is absurd," Anna said, finally becoming animated. "Thomas is a harmless scholar who rummages among tax schedules and legislative records looking for something to write about."

"You make him sound harmless, but he weighs the souls of dictators pretty handily, and presidents too. What motivates him, do you think, to keep publishing at that alarming rate? What more recognition can he get for it at this point?"

"I don't think he's doing it for recognition. He's doing it because he's a scholar."

"A scholar is a scholar the way a beaver is a beaver, plugging a hole in the dam whenever he sees one?"

"That's not a very nice way of putting it, you know."

"I'm just trying to speculate a little."

"It keeps him out of trouble, he says."

"Yes, so he told me. But it didn't help, did it? He got into a lot of trouble and that's why he's here."

"It was hardly his fault. You know his father was killed on the job when Thomas was only a boy. This war wasn't the beginning of his troubles. And if he has a little something to teach us about trouble, I don't think we should blame him for it or find something wrong with him. After all, you're a student of war too. What enables you to understand war and write about it?"

"Maybe I don't understand it, which is why Thomas is so much better at it than I am. What it is that gives him his insight?"

"The only thing I can see is that he's at it day and night, as if nothing else mattered."

"Have you gotten any sense of whether or not he thinks we're going to win the war?"

"He thinks we're all going to wind up in Argentina."

"Evil is going to triumph over the inhuman?"

"I would say Thomas thinks they'll come to the same thing."

"And that will be the end of it for us."

"Yes, because democracy is weak."

"So we'd be better off with a little dictatorship of our own?"

"I didn't say that."

"Does he have a theory about Roosevelt?"

"Let's not torture Thomas any more." Anna got up from the couch and the conversation was over. Peck didn't want to push her any further. She could tell that his attitude toward her had changed, that he had gone from being suspicious to being certain, or nearly so.

The following evening Peck didn't wait till after dinner to go on the attack. He started during the meal, over roast beef and mashed potatoes, with Meredith at the table in her high chair. "I saw Eva Knallstein the other day," he said.

"How was she?"

"Extremely lovely, I must say. Knallstein is a lucky man."

"He must be."

"What do you think goes through the mind of a woman like that?"

"Like what?"

"Well, she's very beautiful, very elegantly dressed, dressed to impress, it seems, and yet she doesn't show herself to anyone. She seems invisible. When you see her she's perfectly pleasant, but before you know it she flits away with a charming little laugh, and that's the end of her. The Knallsteins never entertain, she's never there when you arrive in the morning, and the only social activity we ever hear about is her friendship with Ted

Walters. So what keeps her going, what makes her tick? As a woman you must have some idea."

"Does her aloofness bother you?"

"I'm curious, that's all."

"I sense that Eva is far from home and has made a place here for herself, but it is a little far away, a little hard to locate, even though she is right here. She is close by but hard to find. Perhaps she is waiting for the next part of her life to start. I don't know. I have to think she must be damaged in some way. That night she was here she had a frightened look to her, a kind of fear that she turns into charming, nervous laughter. She was more comfortable with Meredith than with the rest of us."

"She does have a skittish laugh. Almost like an oriental titter. What can have damaged her? Could it be Knallstein himself?"

"How can I know? He never mentions her."

"Don't you have any intuition about what he might be like with a woman?"

"How could I know that?" Anna's voice was very cold.

"Does he say anything about women?"

"Are you writing a book on this, Randolph?"

"No, of course not, but he is becoming an interest of mine. It's the fact that he doesn't speak to me directly which makes me curious about him. After all, he's the most famous historian I've ever met."

The next morning Thomas could see right away that something was wrong with Anna. "My husband knows about us," she told him. "Or he strongly suspects. He's started probing me about your inner nature and about you and Eva, and I can see what he's getting at. He doesn't want to ask me directly, so he's inquiring into your understanding of Hitler and Stalin, as if it were all a matter of history. But it's not really about history at all."

"That's the sad thing," Thomas said. "It never is about history anyway."

"What am I going to do?"

"It depends on what you want."

"I want to come here and spend time with you. Then I want to go home and raise my daughter and be with my husband. I don't want just one or the other. I don't want to choose."

"You probably won't get a choice."

"I have a choice right in front of me now. If I continue seeing you, Randolph's inquiries will become more and more insistent and bizarre, and I'll have to go on pretending we're really talking about Hitler and Stalin, or Eva's secret nature, and sooner or later it will break and that'll be the end of my life as I've known it, and all I'll be left with is my secretarial duties with this man who has his own mysterious wife in the closet and is writing distinguished articles for British journals that don't pay anything."

"These pay in their own way."

"Don't play with me, Thomas. I'm serious."

"Please excuse me, Anna." Thomas waited, seeing how upset she was. "I want just what you want, my dear, that things should go on as they are. But now they can't, if Randolph knows."

"I doubt he actually knows."

"Which is good. It means his vanity is on your side. You haven't shamed him."

"Do you want our time together to be over?"

"Of course I don't. But I don't have anything more to offer you. I'm a man in exile from his own country, which no longer exists. I do have a wife, whom I don't want to abandon, because there's no one else to take care of her. And you have your daughter and your husband and are better off with them. I'm not a good long term investment."

"And what if there is no long term?"

Knallstein shrugged his shoulders. "We've been very, very lucky up till now," he said. "We've been able to take advantage of one of those strange opportunities that open in the

cracks when the world is falling apart. They don't last forever, but until it all comes crashing down, maybe they're the best things."

Anna couldn't look up. "I don't know how to explain it," she said, "but going back to my marriage now, and having that alone, it seems as if I'll have to forget everything I've learned."

"But you won't forget anything. That's the problem. Why don't we take our last happiness, however much it is, while we still have time?"

Anna didn't answer. She could see it was over.

"So what is actually going on with Eva?" she asked him. "Why don't I ever see her here? Is she with Walters? Is she a lunatic, shut-in, drunk? What kind of a wife is she?"

"Do you really mind my wife being out of the way when I'm making love to someone else?"

"So you were making love to me all along?"

"A little." Anna had not thought of herself as being seduced.

"When you wrote the dedication to your book," she said, "To the eternal Eva, she stands near, was that a joke of some kind?"

"Not at all," he said, raising his eyebrows but not sounding as surprised as she expected. "I was just saying the truth. Eva stands near to me. She still does."

"Like an angel? Devil? Inhuman?"

"In fact more like a saint. That's the peculiarity of our love story."

"I'd love to hear your love story," Anna said with an edge. For the first time she was feeling jealous of Eva.

"Well, it's an odd story, I admit, but you'll understand it. I met Eva. She was very beautiful, a beautiful feminine nature, and very intelligent, a woman of strange understanding, but elusive, an elusive person to pursue, not because she was flirtatious but because she has a real discomfort being with other people. She is a natural fugitive, I tell her, perfectly suited to exile. But gradually I got to know her, overcame her shyness to

some extent. Eventually I proposed to her, at which time she told me that her health made marriage and children impossible. Her heart murmured and her doctors said that even sexual excitement might be dangerous for her."

"But you felt sorry for her and married her anyway."

"Not exactly. One doesn't feel sorry for Eva. There is a sense in which her condition suits her. In any case we remained close, and when it came time for me to leave Austria I didn't want to go without her."

"You are married, then?"

"Yes, that simplified things. And I think of her as my wife. But we give each other a certain leeway."

"What does she do with hers?"

"She likes to take long walks, which are perhaps good for her health, perhaps not, and there is a friendship or two."

"With Ted Walters?"

"He is an admirer of hers."

"And you don't mind that?"

"There is nothing to mind. And it has made our lives a good deal easier."

"I see."

"It's just the way things work out when you're an exile."

"An exile and a fugitive," Anna said, a little angry. "So I had a well-understood part in this scheme of things."

"Aren't the relations between men and women pretty well understood?"

"I certainly wouldn't have guessed your love story with Eva."

"Would you rather I was betraying my wife with you?" he asked her.

Anna didn't know how to answer that. "Why didn't you tell me this sooner?" she said.

"I have a delicacy about Eva. Also, I thought it might make things more serious if you knew that my relations with her were somewhat partial. But that is misleading, too, since

she is truly my wife. That's why your judgment is right. It's better that you won't come any more now, Anna. We've given each other a lot already. You won't forget anything and neither will I."

Knallstein looked at her and then down at his pipe. "I'm so very grateful to you, Frau Anna," he said. "We've done some good work together, and we've been good to each other."

After this conversation Anna could not go home. Instead she tramped aimlessly around the neighborhood. It was a lovely spring day and it had just been raining, but she was oblivious to her surroundings. Until now Anna had not thought seriously about the future and the choices it would bring. It had never occurred to her that being with Thomas implied there was anything lacking in her marriage or that she had anything to apologize for. The quiet home with her husband and her daughter was a safe haven from the problems of the world and until Randolph's recent offensive she had been perfectly comfortable there. Anna had remained innocent. Part of this innocence, though, was that until today Thomas and his wife had remained a mystery. Anna had felt invisible, both to Peck and to Eva, holding a mystery of her own. Now all the mysteries were gone, but she still had no idea what to make of Eva, who had known about her all along and whose beautiful feminine nature strangely suited her non-amorous condition.

The minute Anna got home Peck was ready to take up the chase. "Do you know what's interesting," he asked her, "about Hitler and Stalin?"

"What now?"

"That neither of them seems to be particularly lascivious. They take their pleasures, but it's not about women. It's about killing."

"Women are a mixed blessing, aren't they?"

"Oh yes they are. Nothing makes us happier when we're not miserable."

Anna paused. "You have no reason to be miserable, Randolph," she said, looking him right in the eye, and he was the first to look away.

"What do you think of our daughter these days?" he asked her.

"These days?"

"Yes, what are her prospects?"

"Well, she's in good health and has two loving parents. That's most of what a child can have at her age, isn't it?"

"But given the way the world is going, will that be enough for a decent existence? What if we lose the war, as your friend thinks we will? What if some pro-German faction winds up running the country?

"You know, Randolph, I've come to believe it's a mistake to think about the future and about happiness. We've been happy so far and Meredith has a good start. Let's not speculate any further. As for the Knallsteins, I'm finished with them."

"Really?" Peck said. He played innocent, but she could tell he was delighted with his luck. "Is he done with his researches?"

"No, but I'm done with mine. I've gotten my fill of evil and the inhuman. I'm ready to go back to small talk at the dinner table, so you'll have to conduct the rest of your inquiry on your own."

"Did you learn anything from him?"

Anna couldn't say what she had learned and neither could Peck, but there was no doubt that once again she had returned to him improved.