## Mr. Harrington’s Washing

W. Somerset Maugham

Some years had passed since then and Ashenden had not seen Anastasia Alexandrovna again. He knew that on the outbreak of the revolution in March she and Vladimir Semenovich had gone to Russia. It might be that they would be able to help him, in a way Vladimir Semenovich owed him his life, and he made up his mind to write to Anastasia Alexandrovna to ask if he might come to see her.

When Ashenden went down to lunch he felt somewhat rested. Mr. Harrington was waiting for him and they sat down. They ate what was put before them.

‘Ask the waiter to bring us some bread,’ said Mr. Harrington.

‘Bread?’ replied Ashenden. ‘There’s no bread.’

‘I can’t eat without bread,’ said Mr. Harrington.

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to. There’s no bread, no butter, no sugar, no eggs, no potatoes. There’s fish and meat and green vegetables, and that’s all.’

Mr. Harrington’s jaw dropped.

‘But this is war,’ he said.

‘It looks very much like it.’

Mr. Harrington was for a moment speechless; then he said: ‘I’ll tell you what I’m going to do, I’m going to get through with my business as quick as I can and then I’m going to get out of this country. I’m sure Mrs. Harrington wouldn’t like me to go without sugar or butter. I’ve got a very delicate stomach. The firm would never have sent me here if they’d thought I wasn’t going to have the best of everything.’

In a little while Dr. Egan Orth came in and gave Ashenden an envelope. On it was written Anastasia Alexandrovna’s address. He introduced him to Mr. Harrington. It was soon clear that he was pleased with Dr. Egan Orth and so without further to-do he suggested that here was the perfect interpreter for him.

‘He talks Russian like a Russian. But he’s an American citizen, so that he won’t do you down. I’ve known him a considerable time and I can assure you that he’s absolutely trustworthy.’

Mr. Harrington was pleased with the notion and after luncheon Ashenden left them to settle the matter by themselves. He wrote a note to Anastasia Alexandrovna and presently received an answer to say that she was going to a meeting, but would look in at his hotel about seven. He awaited her with apprehension. Of course he knew now that he had not loved her, but Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Stravinsky and Bakst; but he was not quite sure if the point had occurred to her. When between eight and half-past she arrived he suggested that she should join Mr. Harrington and him at dinner. The presence of a third party, he thought, would prevent any awkwardness their meeting might have; but he need not have had any anxiety, for five minutes after they had sat down to a plate of soup it was borne in upon him that the feelings of Anastasia Alexandrovna towards him were as cool as were his towards her. It gave him a momentary shock. It is very hard for a man, however modest, to grasp the possibility that a woman who has once loved him may love him no longer, and though of course he did not imagine that Anastasia Alexandrovna had languished for five years with a hopeless passion for him, he did think that by a heightening of colour, a flutter of the eyelashes, or a quiver of the lips she would betray the fact that she had still a soft place in her heart for him. Not at all. She talked to him as though he were a friend she was very glad to see again after an absence of a few days, but whose intimacy with her was purely social. He asked after Vladimir Semenovich.

‘He has been a disappointment to me,’ she said. ‘I never thought he was a clever man, but I thought he was an honest one. He’s going to have a baby.’

Mr. Harrington, who was about to put a piece of fish into his mouth, stopped, his fork in the air, and stared at Anastasia Alexandrovna with astonishment. In extenuation it must be explained that he had never read a Russian novel in his life. Ashenden, slightly perplexed too, gave her a questioning look.

‘I’m not the mother,’ she said with a laugh. ‘I am not interested in that sort of thing. The mother is a friend of mine and a well-known writer on Political Economy. I do not think her views are sound, but I should be the last to deny that they deserve consideration. She has a good brain, quite a good brain.’ She turned to Mr. Harrington. ‘Are you interested in Political Economy?’

For once in his life Mr. Harrington was speechless. Anastasia Alexandrovna gave them her views on the subject and they began to speak on the situation in Russia. She seemed to be on intimate terms with the leaders of the various political parties and Ashenden made up his mind to sound her on the possibility of her working with him. His infatuation had not blinded him to the fact that she was an extremely intelligent woman. After dinner he told Mr. Harrington that he wished to talk business with Anastasia Alexandrovna and took her to a retired corner of the lounge. He told her all he thought necessary and found her interested and anxious to help. She had a passion for intrigue and a desire for power. When he hinted that he had command of large sums of money she saw at once that through him she might acquire an influence in the affairs of Russia. It tickled her vanity. She was immensely patriotic, but like many patriots she had an impression that her own aggrandisement tended to the good of her country. When they parted they had come to a working agreement.

‘That was a very remarkable woman,’ said Mr. Harrington next morning when they met at breakfast.

‘Don’t fall in love with her,’ smiled Ashenden.

This, however, was not a matter on which Mr. Harrington was prepared to jest.

‘I have never looked at a woman since I married Mrs. Harrington,’ he said. ‘That husband of hers must be a bad man.’

‘I could do with a plate of scrambled eggs,’ said Ashenden, irrelevantly, for their breakfast consisted of a cup of tea without milk and a little jam instead of sugar.

With Anastasia Alexandrovna to help him and Dr. Orth in the background, Ashenden set to work. Things in Russia were going from bad to worse. Kerensky, the head of the Provisional Government, was devoured by vanity and dismissed any minister who gave evidence of a capacity that might endanger his own position. He made speeches. He made endless speeches. At one moment there was a possibility that the Germans would make a dash for Petrograd. Kerensky made speeches. The food shortage grew more serious, the winter was approaching and there was no fuel. Kerensky made speeches. In the background the Bolsheviks were active, Lenin was hiding in Petrograd, it was said that Kerensky knew where he was, but dared not arrest him. He made speeches.

It amused Ashenden to see the unconcern with which Mr. Harrington wandered through this turmoil. History was in the making and Mr. Harrington minded his own business. It was uphill work. He was made to pay bribes to secretaries and underlings under the pretence that the ear of great men would be granted to him. He was kept waiting for hours in antechambers and then sent away without ceremony. When at last he saw the great men he found they had nothing to give him but idle words. They made him promises and in a day or two he discovered that the promises meant nothing. Ashenden advised him to throw in his hand and return to America; but Mr. Harrington would not hear of it; his firm had sent him to do a particular job, and, by gum, he was going to do it or perish in the attempt. Then Anastasia Alexandrovna took him in hand. A singular friendship had arisen between the pair. Mr. Harrington thought her a very remarkable and deeply wronged woman; he told her all about his wife and his two sons, he told her all about the Constitution of the United States; she on her side told him all about Vladimir Semenovich, and she told him about Tolstoi, Turgenev and Dostoievsky. They had great times together. He said he couldn’t manage to call her Anastasia Alexandrovna, it was too much of a mouthful; so he called her Delilah. And now she placed her inexhaustible energy at his service and they went together to the persons who might be useful to him. But things were coming to a head. Riots broke out and the streets were growing dangerous. Now and then armoured cars filled with discontented reservists careered wildly along the Nevsky Prospekt and in order to show that they were not happy took pot-shots at the passers-by. On one occasion when Mr. Harrington and Anastasia Alexandrovna were in a tram together shots peppered the windows and they had to lie down on the floor for safety. Mr. Harrington was highly indignant.

‘An old fat woman was lying right on top of me and when I wriggled to get out Delilah caught me a clip on the side of the head and said, “Stop still, you fool.” I don’t like your Russian ways, Delilah.’

‘Anyhow you stopped still,’ she giggled.

‘What you want in this country is a little less art and a little more civilisation.’

‘You are bourgeoisie, Mr. Harrington, you are not a member of the intelligentsia.’

‘You are the first person who’s ever said that, Delilah. If I’m not a member of the intelligentsia I don’t know who is,’ retorted Mr. Harrington with dignity.

Then one day when Ashenden was working in his room there was a knock at the door and Anastasia Alexandrovna stalked in followed somewhat sheepishly by Mr. Harrington. Ashenden saw that she was excited.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked.

‘Unless this man goes back to America he’ll get killed. You really must talk to him. If I hadn’t been there something very unpleasant might have happened to him.’

‘Not at all, Delilah,’ said Mr. Harrington, with asperity. ‘I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself and I wasn’t in the smallest danger.’

‘What is it all about?’ asked Ashenden.

‘I’d taken Mr. Harrington to the Lavra of Alexander Nevsky to see Dostoievsky’s grave,’ said Anastasia Alexandrovna, ‘and on our way back we saw a soldier being rather rough with an old woman.’

‘Rather rough!’ cried Mr. Harrington. ‘There was an old woman walking along the side-walk with a basket of provisions on her arm. Two soldiers came up behind her and one of them snatched the basket from her and walked off with it. She burst out screaming and crying, I don’t know what she was saying, but I can guess, and the other soldier took his gun and with the butt-end of it hit her over the head. Isn’t that right, Delilah?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, unable to help smiling. ‘And before I could prevent it Mr. Harrington jumped out of the cab and ran up to the soldier who had the basket, wrenched it from him and began to abuse the pair of them like pickpockets. At first they were so taken aback they didn’t know what to do and then they got in a rage. I ran after Mr. Harrington and explained to them that he was a foreigner and drunk.’

‘Drunk?’ cried Mr. Harrington.

‘Yes, drunk. Of course a crowd collected. It looked as though it wasn’t going to be very nice.’

Mr. Harrington smiled with those large, pale-blue eyes of his.

‘It sounded to me as though you were giving them a piece of your mind, Delilah. It was as good as a play to watch you.’

‘Don’t be stupid, Mr. Harrington,’ cried Anastasia, in a sudden fury, stamping her foot. ‘Don’t you know that those soldiers might very easily have killed you and me too, and not one of the bystanders would have raised a finger to help us?’

‘Me? I’m an American citizen, Delilah. They wouldn’t dare touch a hair of my head.’

‘They’d have difficulty in finding one,’ said Anastasia Alexandrovna, who when she was in a temper had no manners. ‘But if you think Russian soldiers are going to hesitate to kill you because you’re an American citizen you’ll get a big surprise one of these days.’

‘Well, what happened to the old woman?’ asked Ashenden.

‘The soldiers went off after a little and we went back to her.’

‘Still with the basket?’

‘Yes. Mr. Harrington clung on to that like grim death. She was lying on the ground with the blood pouring from her head. We got her into the cab and when she could speak enough to tell us where she lived we drove her home. She was bleeding dreadfully and we had some difficulty in staunching the blood.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna gave Mr. Harrington an odd look and to his surprise Ashenden saw him turn scarlet.

‘What’s the matter now?’

‘You see, we had nothing to bind her up with. Mr. Harrington’s handkerchief was soaked. There was only one thing about me that I could get off quickly and so I took off my . . .’

But before she could finish Mr. Harrington interrupted her.

‘You need not tell Mr. Ashenden what you took off. I’m a married man and I know ladies wear them, but I see no need to refer to them in general society.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna giggled.

‘Then you must kiss me, Mr. Harrington. If you don’t I shall say.’

Mr. Harrington hesitated a moment, considering evidently the pros and cons of the matter, but he saw that Anastasia Alexandrovna was determined.

‘Go on then, you may kiss me, Delilah, though I’m bound to say I don’t see what pleasure it can be to you.’

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him on both cheeks, then without a word of warning burst into a flood of tears.

‘You’re a brave little man, Mr. Harrington. You’re absurd but magnificent,’ she sobbed.

Mr. Harrington was less surprised than Ashenden would have expected him to be. He looked at Anastasia with a thin, quizzical smile and gently patted her.

‘Come, come, Delilah, pull yourself together. It gave you a nasty turn, didn’t it? You’re quite upset. I shall have terrible rheumatism in my shoulder if you go on weeping all over it.’

The scene was ridiculous and touching. Ashenden laughed, but he had the beginnings of a lump in his throat.

When Anastasia Alexandrovna had left them Mr. Harrington sat in a brown study.

‘They’re very queer, these Russians. Do you know what Delilah did?’ he said, suddenly. ‘She stood up in the cab, in the middle of the street, with people passing on both sides, and took her pants off. She tore them in two and gave me one to hold while she made a bandage of the other. I was never so embarrassed in my life.’

‘Tell me what gave you the idea of calling her Delilah?’ smiled Ashenden.

Mr. Harrington reddened a little.

‘She’s a very fascinating woman, Mr. Ashenden. She’s been deeply wronged by her husband and I naturally felt a great deal of sympathy for her. These Russians are very emotional people and I did not want her to mistake my sympathy for anything else. I told her I was very much attached to Mrs. Harrington.’

‘You’re not under the impression that Delilah was Potiphar’s wife?’ asked Ashenden.

‘I don’t know what you mean by that, Mr. Ashenden,’ replied Mr. Harrington. ‘Mrs. Harrington has always given me to understand that I’m very fascinating to women, and I thought if I called our little friend Delilah it would make my position quite clear.’

‘I don’t think Russia’s any place for you, Mr. Harrington,’ said Ashenden smiling. ‘If I were you I’d get out of it as quick as I could.’

‘I can’t go now. I’ve got them to agree to my terms at last and we’re going to sign next week. Then I shall pack my grip and go.’

‘I wonder if your signatures will be worth the paper they’re written on,’ said Ashenden.

He had at length devised a plan of campaign. It took him twenty-four hours’ hard work to code a telegram in which he put his scheme before the persons who had sent him to Petrograd. It was accepted and he was promised all the money he needed. Ashenden knew he could do nothing unless the Provisional Government remained in power for another three months; but winter was at hand and food was getting scarcer every day. The army was mutinous. The people clamoured for peace. Every evening at the Europe Ashenden drank a cup of chocolate with Professor Z. and discussed with him how best to make use of his devoted Czechs. Anastasia Alexandrovna had a flat in a retired spot and here he had meetings with all manner of persons. Plans were drawn up. Measures were taken. Ashenden argued, persuaded, promised. He had to overcome the vacillation of one and wrestle with the fatalism of another. He had to judge who was resolute and who was self-sufficient, who was honest and who was infirm of purpose. He had to curb his impatience with the Russian verbosity; he had to be good-tempered with people who were willing to talk of everything but the matter in hand; he had to listen sympathetically to ranting and rhodomontade. He had to beware of treachery. He had to humour the vanity of fools and elude the greed of the ambitious. Time was pressing. The rumours grew hot and many of the activities of the Bolsheviks. Kerensky ran hither and thither like a frightened hen.

Then the blow fell. On the night of November 7th, 1917, the Bolsheviks rose, Kerensky’s ministers were arrested and the Winter Palace was sacked by the mob; the reins of power were seized by Lenin and Trotsky.

Anastasia Alexandrovna came to Ashenden’s room at the hotel early in the morning. Ashenden was coding a telegram. He had been up all night, first at the Smolny, and then at the Winter Palace. He was tired out. Her face was white and her shining brown eyes were tragic.

‘Have you heard?’ she asked Ashenden.

He nodded.

‘It’s all over then. They say Kerensky has fled. They never even showed fight.’ Rage seized her. ‘The buffoon!’ she screamed.

At that moment there was a knock at the door and Anastasia Alexandrovna looked at it with sudden apprehension.

‘You know the Bolsheviks have got a list of people they’ve decided to execute. My name is on it, and it may be that yours is too.’

‘If it’s they and they want to come in they only have to turn the handle,’ said Ashenden, smiling, but with ever so slightly odd a feeling at the pit of his stomach. ‘Come in.’

The door was opened and Mr. Harrington stepped into the room. He was as dapper as ever, in his short black coat and striped trousers, his shoes neatly polished and a derby on his bald head. He took it off when he saw Anastasia Alexandrovna.

‘Oh, fancy finding you here so early. I looked in on my way out, I wanted to tell you my news. I tried to find you yesterday evening, but couldn’t. You didn’t come in to dinner.’

‘No, I was at a meeting,’ said Ashenden.

‘You must both congratulate me, I got my signatures yesterday, and my business is done.’

Mr. Harrington beamed on them, the picture of self-satisfaction, and he arched himself like a bantam-cock who has chased away all rivals. Anastasia Alexandrovna burst into a sudden shriek of hysterical laughter. He stared at her in perplexity.

‘Why, Delilah, what is the matter?’ he said.

Anastasia laughed till the tears ran from her eyes and then began to sob in earnest. Ashenden explained.

‘The Bolsheviks have overthrown the Government. Kerensky’s ministers are in prison. The Bolsheviks are out to kill. Delilah says her name is on the list. Your minister signed your documents yesterday because he knew it did not matter what he did then. Your contracts are worth nothing. The Bolsheviks are going to make peace with Germany as soon as they can.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna had recovered her self-control as quickly as she had lost it.

‘You had better get out of Russia as soon as you can, Mr. Harrington. It’s no place for a foreigner now and it may be that in a few days you won’t be able to.’

Mr. Harrington looked from one to the other.

‘O my!’ he said. ‘O my!’ It seemed inadequate. ‘Are you going to tell me that that Russian minister was just making a fool of me?’

Ashenden shrugged his shoulders.

‘How can one tell what he was thinking of? He may have a keen sense of humour and perhaps he thought it funny to sign a fifty-million-dollar contract yesterday when there was every chance of his being stood against the wall and shot to-day. Anastasia Alexandrovna’s right, Mr. Harrington, you’d better take the first train that’ll get you to Sweden.’

‘And what about you?’

‘There’s nothing for me to do here any more. I’m cabling for instructions and I shall go as soon as I get leave. The Bolsheviks have got in ahead of us and the people I was working with will have their work cut out to save their lives.’

‘Boris Petrovich was shot this morning,’ said Anastasia Alexandrovna with a frown.

They both looked at Mr. Harrington and he stared at the floor. His pride in this achievement of his was shattered and he sagged like a pricked balloon. But in a minute he looked up. He gave Anastasia Alexandrovna a little smile and for the first time Ashenden noticed how attractive and kindly his smile was. There was something peculiarly disarming about it.

‘If the Bolsheviks are after you, Delilah, don’t you think you’d better come with me? I’ll take care of you and if you like to come to America I’m sure Mrs. Harrington would be glad to do anything she could for you.’

‘I can see Mrs. Harrington’s face if you arrived in Philadelphia with a Russian refugee,’ laughed Anastasia Alexandrovna. ‘I’m afraid it would need more explaining than you could ever manage. No, I shall stay here.’

‘But if you’re in danger?’

‘I’m a Russian. My place is here. I will not leave my country when most my country needs me.’

‘That is the bunk, Delilah,’ said Mr. Harrington very quietly.

Anastasia Alexandrovna had spoken with deep emotion, but now with a little start she shot a sudden quizzical look at him.

‘I know it is, Samson,’ she answered. ‘To tell you the truth I think we’re all going to have a hell of a time, God knows what’s going to happen, but I want to see; I wouldn’t miss a minute of it for the world.’

Mr. Harrington shook his head.

‘Curiosity is the bane of your sex, Delilah,’ he said.

‘Go along and do your packing, Mr. Harrington,’ said Ashenden, smiling, ‘and then we’ll take you to the station. The train will be besieged.’

‘Very well, I’ll go. And I shan’t be sorry either. I haven’t had a decent meal since I came here and I’ve done a thing I never thought I should have to do in my life, I’ve drunk my coffee without sugar and when I’ve been lucky enough to get a little piece of black bread I’ve had to eat it without butter. Mrs. Harrington will never believe me when I tell her what I’ve gone through. What this country wants is organisation.’

When he left them Ashenden and Anastasia Alexandrovna talked over the situation. Ashenden was depressed because all his careful schemes had come to nothing, but Anastasia Alexandrovna was excited and she hazarded every sort of guess about the outcome of this new revolution. She pretended to be very serious, but in her heart she looked upon it all very much as a thrilling play. She wanted more and more things to happen. Then there was another knock at the door and before Ashenden could answer Mr. Harrington burst in.

‘Really the service at this hotel is a scandal,’ he cried heatedly. ‘I’ve been ringing my bell for fifteen minutes and I can’t get anyone to pay the smallest attention to me.’

‘Service?’ exclaimed Anastasia Alexandrovna. ‘There is not a servant left in the hotel.’

‘But I want my washing. They promised to let me have it back last night.’

‘I’m afraid you haven’t got much chance of getting it now,’ said Ashenden.

‘I’m not going to leave without my washing. Four shirts, two union suits, a pair of pyjamas, and four collars. I wash my handkerchiefs and socks in my room. I want my washing and I’m not going to leave this hotel without it.’

‘Don’t be a fool,’ cried Ashenden. ‘What you’ve got to do is to get out of here while the going’s good. If there are no servants to get it you’ll just have to leave your washing behind you.’

‘Pardon me, sir, I shall do nothing of the kind. I’ll go and fetch it myself. I’ve suffered enough at the hands of this country and I’m not going to leave four perfectly good shirts to be worn by a lot of dirty Bolsheviks. No, sir. I do not leave Russia till I have my washing.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna stared at the floor for a moment; then with a little smile looked up. It seemed to Ashenden that there was something in her that responded to Mr. Harrington’s futile obstinacy. In her Russian way she understood that Mr. Harrington could not leave Petrograd without his washing. His insistence had given it the value of a symbol.

‘I’ll go downstairs and see if I can find anybody about who knows where the laundry is and if I can, I’ll go with you and you can bring your washing away with you.’

Mr. Harrington unbent. He answered with that sweet and disarming smile of his.

‘That’s terribly kind of you, Delilah. I don’t mind if it’s ready or not, I’ll take it just as it is.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna left them.

‘Well, what do you think of Russia and the Russians now?’ Mr. Harrington asked Ashenden.

‘I’m fed up with them. I’m fed up with Tolstoi, I’m fed up with Turgenev and Dostoievsky, I’m fed up with Chekov. I’m fed up with the Intelligentsia. I hanker after people who know their mind from one minute to another, who mean what they say an hour after they’ve said it, whose word you can rely on; I’m sick of fine phrases, and oratory and attitudinising.’

Ashenden, bitten by the prevailing ill, was about to make a speech when he was interrupted by a rattle as of peas on a drum. In the city, so strangely silent, it sounded abrupt and odd.

‘What’s that?’ asked Mr. Harrington.

‘Rifle firing. On the other side of the river, I should think.’

Mr. Harrington gave a funny little look. He laughed, but his face was a trifle pale; he did not like it, and Ashenden did not blame him.

‘I think it’s high time I got out. I shouldn’t so much mind for myself, but I’ve got a wife and children to think of. I haven’t had a letter from Mrs. Harrington for so long I’m a bit worried.’ He paused an instant ‘I’d like you to know Mrs. Harrington, she’s a very wonderful woman. She’s the best wife a man ever had. Until I came here I’d not been separated from her for more than three days since we were married.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna came back and told them that she had found the address.

‘It’s about forty minutes’ walk from here and if you’ll come now I’ll go with you,’ she said.

‘I’m ready.’

‘You’d better look out,’ said Ashenden. ‘I don’t believe the streets are very healthy to-day.’

Anastasia Alexandrovna looked at Mr. Harrington.

‘I must have my washing, Delilah,’ he said. ‘I should never rest in peace if I left it behind me and Mrs. Harrington would never let me hear the last of it.’

‘Come on then.’

They set out and Ashenden went on with the dreary business of translating into a very complicated code the shattering news he had to give. It was a long message, and then he had to ask for instructions upon his own movements. It was a mechanical job and yet it was one in which you could not allow your attention to wander. The mistake of a single figure might make a whole sentence incomprehensible.

Suddenly his door was burst open and Anastasia Alexandrovna flung into the room. She had lost her hat and was dishevelled. She was panting. Her eyes were starting out of her head and she was obviously in a state of great excitement.

‘Where’s Mr. Harrington?’ she cried. ‘Isn’t he here?’

‘No.’

‘Is he in his bedroom?’

‘I don’t know. Why, what’s the matter? We’ll go and look if you like. Why didn’t you bring him along with you?’

They walked down the passage and knocked at Mr. Harrington’s door; there was no answer; they tried the handle; the door was locked.

‘He’s not there.’

They went back to Ashenden’s room. Anastasia Alexandrovna sank into a chair.

‘Give me a glass of water, will you? I’m out of breath. I’ve been running.’

She drank the water Ashenden poured out for her. She gave a sudden sob.

‘I hope he’s all right. I should never forgive myself if he was hurt. I was hoping he would have got here before me. He got his washing all right. We found the place. There was only an old woman there and they didn’t want to let us take it, but we insisted. Mr. Harrington was furious because it hadn’t been touched. It was exactly as he had sent it. They’d promised it last night and it was still in the bundle that Mr. Harrington had made himself. I said that was Russia and Mr. Harrington said he preferred coloured people. I’d led him by side streets because I thought it was better, and we started to come back again. We passed at the top of a street and at the bottom of it I saw a little crowd. There was a man addressing them.

‘“Let’s go and hear what he’s saying,” I said.

‘I could see they were arguing. It looked exciting. I wanted to know what was happening.

‘“Come along, Delilah,” he said. “Let us mind our own business.”

‘“You go back to the hotel and do your packing. I’m going to see the fun,” I said.

‘I ran down the street and he followed me. There were about two or three hundred people there and a student was addressing them. There were some working men and they were shouting at him. I love a row and I edged my way into the crowd. Suddenly we heard the sound of shots and before you could realise what was happening two armoured cars came dashing down the street. There were soldiers in them and they were firing as they went. I don’t know why. For fun, I suppose, or because they were drunk. We all scattered like a lot of rabbits. We just ran for our lives. I lost Mr. Harrington. I can’t make out why he isn’t here. Do you think something has happened to him?’

Ashenden was silent for a while.

‘We’d better go out and look for him,’ he said. ‘I don’t know why the devil he couldn’t leave his washing.’

‘I understand, I understand so well.’

‘That’s a comfort,’ said Ashenden irritably. ‘Let’s go.’

He put on his hat and coat, and they walked downstairs. The hotel seemed strangely empty. They went out into the street. There was hardly anyone to be seen. They walked along. The trams were not running and the silence in the great city was uncanny. The shops were closed. It was quite startling when a motor-car dashed by at breakneck speed. The people they passed looked frightened and downcast. When they had to go through a main thoroughfare they hastened their steps. A lot of people were there and they stood about irresolutely as though they did not know what to do next. Reservists in their shabby grey were walking down the middle of the roadway in little bunches. They did not speak. They looked like sheep looking for their shepherd. Then they came to the street down which Anastasia Alexandrovna had run, but they entered it from the opposite end. A number of windows had been broken by the wild shooting. It was quite empty. You could see where the people had scattered, for strewn about were articles they had dropped in their haste, books, a man’s hat, a lady’s bag and a basket. Anastasia Alexandrovna touched Ashenden’s arm to draw his attention: sitting on the pavement, her head bent right down to her lap, was a woman and she was dead. A little way on two men had fallen together. They were dead too. The wounded, one supposed, had managed to drag themselves away or their friends had carried them. Then they found Mr. Harrington. His derby had rolled in the gutter. He lay on his face, in a pool of blood, his bald head, with its prominent bones, very white, his neat black coat smeared and muddy. But his hand was clenched tight on the parcel that contained four shirts, two union suits, a pair of pyjamas and four collars. Mr. Harrington had not let his washing go.

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