

As we walked around the large fountain in front of the Opera, on one side of which was my hotel, he suddenly asked if I knew many people in this city . . . I did not know anybody, I said, but of course the people in the hotel knew who I was. He talked about other things for awhile and then abruptly inquired where my bodyguard was. I told him that I had none and was travelling quite alone; I could not imagine that anybody wanted to murder me. But Comrade Vishinsky had had a bodyguard when he had visited Stalinabad. But he was Vishinsky, I replied, and the Foreign Minister. Well, don't you suppose Mr. Dulles has a bodyguard when he travels, he asked. He probably had, I said, but he was a very important man. Ahmed thought ambassadors were important people too and would all have bodyguards, but I assured him that none of the ambassadors I knew in Moscow had any. I hope I did not disillusion him with the profession.

Like all intelligent young Soviet citizens, Ahmed was avid for outside contacts and thrilled at the mere idea of travelling abroad. He asked innumerable questions about Canada and when I showed him pictures from the farm, he thought the countryside looked very beautiful. Maybe he would come and visit me on my farm in Canada some day, he said daringly. I assured him that he would be most welcome. Wouldn't he be arrested because he came from the Soviet Union? Not if he came on a proper visa, I said. The Soviet Embassy had a large staff in Ottawa and Soviet artists and doctors had visited Canada recently and had told me that they had received a cordial welcome. The old brick farm-house struck him as very large and he said he supposed I must be some kind of aristocrat. On the contrary, I said, I was a peasant or at most a *kulak*. He looked around, as if to make sure that nobody had heard, and laughed.

American jazz

Ahmed just loved American jazz, he said, and all the students listened to it on the radio. I admitted that I was not a fan. But it was so wonderful to dance to, he said: the rhythms simply made your blood boil. (In general, I imagine, the boiling-point of Central Asian blood is low.) It seems clear from this that American musical programs, perhaps from German stations, are not difficult to hear in Central Asia and are not jammed. There was no point in asking Ahmed about news broadcasts, as he knew no English. He had had two years of German and planned to go on with it and also to begin English. On the whole, the students in Central Asia were behind the Russian average in Western European languages, perhaps because they had had to spend so much time on Russian. Most of them seemed to have had two years in English, French, or German and to have learned about as much as our high-school students do in the same length of time.

Had I ever heard Paul Robeson sing, Ahmed wanted to know. I had heard him several times and had also seen him act the role of Othello. Ahmed had not known that he was an actor but he was a marvellous singer and even sang in Russian. He had sung several times in the Soviet Union but according to the papers he was not allowed now to leave the United States. Ahmed had read, too, that the Americans had recently suppressed the Communist Party; he supposed it would go underground. Was there a Communist Party in Canada? Were there Communist newspapers in Canada? What was the Government? The Communist parties in Canada, Britain and Scandinavia might be very

small, but he knew that they were not so small in France and Italy. How did people live in Canada and in Western Europe? Was there any unemployment? What was a Canadian farm like? Was agriculture highly mechanized? Did we grow much cotton? What kind of grains and fruits had we? When I pointed out that it seemed odd to us that there should only be one political party in the Soviet Union, he gave the stock answer that the Communist Party represented the interests of the workers and peasants and that covered the whole population.

Ahmed thought it very interesting that the different nationalities in the university should have such different temperaments. The Uzbeks were very free and easy; an Uzbek spoke to a child just as he would to a grownup person. The Tadjiks were more reserved, and the Pamirs were taciturn and sarcastic. The Pamir I had met in the group was a good example. He was an excellent student, worked very hard and took good marks, but was not very sociable, spoke little, and when he did speak was uncomfortably sharp. The Russian in the group (a dark dapper young man with a Charlie Chaplin moustache) was superficial and even silly. Why had he wanted to lead the conversation on to the subject of sports? Just so that he could boast that the Russian team had beaten the Canadians in hockey. It was quite out of place, Ahmed thought, and positively embarrassing. But the Russians were like that.

It was getting late when Ahmed reluctantly said goodbye and got on to his trolley.

Crimea

John's last trip, before being posted to Ottawa in 1955, was to the Crimea in the company of two Russian friends — Alexander, an adviser to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, and Ivan, a poet. They decided to take the trip by car:

After we had been on the road a couple of hours the next day, the engine began sputtering and my driver decided that the gas he had got in Oryol had not been of high enough quality and that it would be better to add some from one of the cans in the back. Also the accelerator pedal had come off and needed to be screwed on again. We decided to have lunch under a tree by the roadside sitting on the rich carpet of grass, clover and wild flowers of many kinds. The driver soon discovered that, in the rush of getting ready (he had just returned from leave), he had forgotten to bring either a screw-driver or a piece of hose. So he began to "vote", as he expressed it, and waved his hand in the air at every car and truck that passed. Most of the drivers paid no attention and the two who stopped could not help. Finally a shiny new green *Pobyeda* with sheer, pale-green curtains pulled up. An exceptionally tall, slender, smartly-dressed young lady got out, and the driver announced in jubilant tones that at last he had found a "good soul" who was willing to help him.

With the young lady was a tall, fair, athletic-looking young man who could have been a Swede but, since both were talking with the driver, we decided that they must be Russians and walked over to satisfy our curiosity. Ivan brought out his best line, for which he is renowned and teased among his friends, and it worked so well that the young lady accepted an invitation to have a cup of coffee with us. The young man rather rudely and sourly declined, saying that he drank only milk, and refused to come and join us under the tree even when his cousin, as he said she was, called him. The young lady had light-brown curly hair cut fairly short, large deep-blue eyes with long dark lashes,