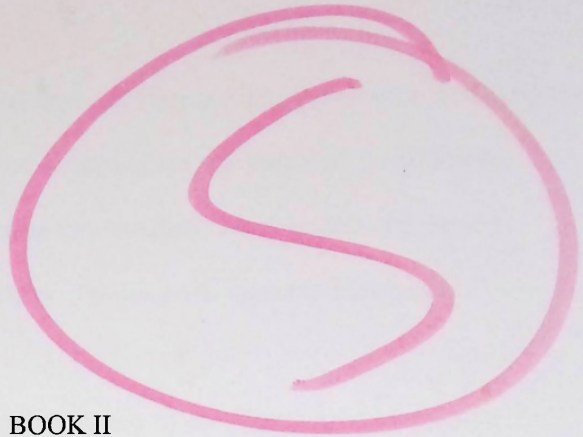


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BOOK II

HITLER'S FATHER

The year 1942 is, however, a century and more away from 1837, as is 1938. I mention the latter date once more because of a minor episode that occurred during the Anschluss of Austria. It does provide an insight into Hitler. If, behind his back, he was still ridiculed as Heini—ill-gaited, pot-pot, wide-nosed and flat-nosed, as plain a mediocrity as any other man who has risen too high—the detractors were merely describing the shell. Nobody, not even Hitler, believed more profoundly in Nathan's philosophical principles.

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The year 1942 is, however, a century and more away from 1837, as is 1938. I mention the latter date once more because of a minor episode that occurred during the Anschluss of Austria. It does provide an insight into Himmler. If, behind his back, he was still ridiculed as Heini—ill-gaited, pompous, wide-assed and flat-assed, as pious a mediocrity as any other man who has risen too high—the detractors were merely describing the shell. Nobody, not even Hitler, believed more profoundly in Nazism's philosophical principles.

I remember on the first morning after the Brown Shirts marched into Vienna, that a squad of them—beer-hall types with big bellies—collected a

group of old and middle-aged Jews, professional class, pince-nez absolutely in place, and put them to work scrubbing the sidewalk with toothbrushes. The Storm-Troopers laughed as they watched. Photographs of the event were featured on the front pages of many a newspaper in Europe and America.

Next day, Himmler spoke to a few of us. "That was an expensive indulgence and I am pleased that not one of our SS men had anything to do with such a crudity. We all know how this kind of action lowers morale among so many of our best people. It will certainly encourage rowdyism here in Vienna. Nonetheless, we do well not to reject out of hand the primitive instinct revealed by the act. After much reflection, I can say it was a successful piece of mockery." He paused. He did have our attention. "There is a curious, even, I would declare, a hidden sense of inferiority among many of our folk. They feel that the Jews are capable of bringing more concentration to a task than most of us can—the Jews do know how to study—which is why so many of them have been grossly successful. It is very much a notion among these people that in the end, they will win

everything by working harder than the host race of any country they happen to inhabit.

"So, I would say this act burst out of the rough but nonetheless incisive understanding of our ^{German} people. It does tell the Jews that work, if it is not attached to a noble purpose, is meaningless. 'Scrub away with those toothbrushes,' our street boys are saying, 'because you Jews, whether you know it or not, do exactly the same thing every day. Your virtuous scholarship goes nowhere but into endless contradictions.' Therefore, on second thought," Himmler concluded, "I will not condemn out of hand the deeds of these low-rank Nazis."

The story is useful if one is to understand Himmler, but ~~I am~~ ^{learning a few of the pitfalls in writing a novel} ~~it~~ does interrupt my ~~other~~ account of how I came to learn the truth as to who, really, was Alois' father. (While I am prepared to give his name and describe the occasion, I recognize that some of you ^{readers} (will be annoyed that these disclosures ^{are going} ~~are~~ be presented without ^{any} accounting ^{as yet of my} ~~as yet of my~~ real sources. A fact is not a fact, some readers will say, if the means by which it was obtained cannot be presented.)

I agree. Nonetheless, my real means are not to be revealed, not yet. Using the assets of Section IV-2a proved insufficient on this occasion but I did piece together an answer for Heini—I knew that if my end-product could support his case, he would accept it.

Let us content ourselves for now, then, with the conclusions presented to Himmler in 1938. Once I brought back the information that the Jew from Graz did not exist, I suggested that we shift our inquiry to the actions of the one brother of Maria Anna Schicklgruber who had actually been resourceful enough to leave the mud of Strones and make a little money as a commercial traveler. What was best about this brother is that he did pass regularly through Graz, so, at first, I decided to build our case on him and ignore ^(the) family Maria Anna had actually worked for—a widow and two daughters. By study of their old bank accounts, it was clear that no extra money ever came to her from ^{these ladies,} ~~them~~ and indeed, they discharged Maria Anna when they discovered she had made some petty thefts. Pregnancy in an unmarried maid could be tolerated, but the loss of a few coins, no! I then decided that Maria Anna might have been looking to protect this brother by

telling her father and mother that the money was coming from a Jew. That would ~~have proved enough of a shock to get them off the scent.~~

Before I passed this speculation on to Himmler, however, I concocted—or so I thought—a more promising alternative. Why not make Johann Nepomuk Hiedler, the hard-working younger brother, our seminal agent? While the traveling salesman, Maria Anna's brother, would offer a prima facie case of incest, this was still one step removed from Himmler's real objective for it would make the father, Alois, the incestuary, rather than Adolf.

On the other hand, if Maria Anna had conceived Alois with Johann Nepomuk, then Himmler's thesis would be significantly strengthened. For Klara Hiedler, the young woman who would ^{yet} become Alois' third wife, was not only Adolf Hitler's mother, but also the grand-daughter of Johann Nepomuk. ^{so if} If Alois was Nepomuk's son, then Klara was nothing less than Alois' niece! An uncle and a niece, Alois and Klara, had conceived our Fuehrer. This would make a solid presentation. Moreover, I knew how to embellish it for Heini. My final scenario offered carnal flavor: Maria Anna Schicklgruber and Johann Nepomuk Hiedler had, we declared, entered into

copulation on the exact day she came back from Graz for a visit. Nepomuk, who lived some distance away in Spital, happened to be visiting Strones, and went to the straw for his hour with Maria Anna. She became pregnant on the spot. Nepomuk could not question the news, for the act had been out of the ordinary. Indeed, she told him as soon as she regained her breath, "You are so much!" "You have given me a baby. I swear it. I felt it!"

As my scenario was also ready to explain, Johann Nepomuk loved his wife, he loved his three daughters, and he would never disrupt his home. Notwithstanding, he was ready to see the matter from Maria Anna's point of view. He was a decent man. So, he encouraged her to tell her parents that she was receiving money from Graz, but he, Johann Nepomuk, would be the one to provide steady sums for their boy. So, she told her family that money came each month from Graz, but no one ever saw the envelopes.

Maria Anna put up with the situation, but how could she be content?

After five years had elapsed, she told Nepomuk she would ~~expose him~~ ^{have to} ~~It~~

^{could pass the} ~~was humiliating, she told him, to have~~ ^{real story. It} to face the women of Strones each time she left her door holding a five-year-old by the hand.

Nepomuk proposed that his older brother Georg be installed instead as her spouse. Nepomuk did not like his brother, and Georg did not like Nepomuk, but a new source of money is life's blood to a drunk. I exaggerate, but not by much. Georg married Maria Anna for her stipend and enjoyed the knowledge that it came from Nepomuk who worked even harder in his fields to gather the extra kronen. For Georg, it was a rare pleasure to use the hard labor of a younger brother to support his dissipations. He did possess a fund of ugly spirits. A perfect fury full of failure!

Maria Anna, wed at last, wanted a husband who was ready to say he was Alois' father, but Georg proved quick to tell her that she was interfering in a matter involving his personal honor. If he had managed in the course of many a spree to inform a few of his drinking companions just why he had gotten married—for the money, dimwit!—he saw all the more reason to make no fool of himself by legitimizing this brat who everyone knew was not his own. He might be a drunkard and a failure, but he was certainly not a cuckold. Let ~~the~~^{that} bastard remain a bastard!

^{Such}
~~This~~ was the legend I presented to Himmler. It was buttressed by interviews I worked up with those few of the very old inhabitants of Strones who were born before our drunk, Johann Georg Hiedler, died in 1857. ~~As the~~ ^{links} ~~was~~, if examined closely, ^{were} too rusty a chain to secure the story, but Himmler, ~~the Hitler,~~ ^{I had there and so there} ~~was busy by now with other matters, and so our conclusions held up.~~ I had delivered a family history in which there was no Jew in the Fuehrer's bloodstream, and his father and mother were uncle and niece by blood. Thereby, I had thereby succeeded in making Adolf Hitler a First Degree Incestuary One-step-removed.

Himmler had an epiphany. "This," he said, "more than anything else, reveals the incredible bravery and fortitude of the Fuehrer. As I have often pointed out, early death or serious malformation is the most likely prognostication for First-Degree Incestuaries, but once again the Fuehrer has shown us his incomparable powers of perseverance. ^{Genius} ~~Brilliance~~ and Will, his unique properties of character, derive from the rare intensification found in First Degree Incestuaries, even when they are one step removed. We have been blessed with the triumphant result. Our Fuehrer's agrarian

genes fortified through the generations has found a triumphant metamorphosis into his transcendent virtues."

Here, Himmler closed his eyes, leaned back, and exhaled slowly. It was as if he must expel every errant spirit in his lungs. "I will not speak to you of this again," he went on with a low voice, "but occasions of close incest are truly perilous. One has need of the Fuehrer's Will to succeed in such a situation." (I capitalize Will since he used the word with reverence.) "It is my belief that in the world of numinous spirits ^{surrounding} ~~which surrounds~~ us, there are many elements we ^{are} ~~have the~~ right to call malign. It is even possible that the worst of these spirits collect about a presence whom in earlier times we used to speak of as Satan. This embodiment, should it exist, of a devil or, let me say, the Devil, would certainly be ready to pay great attention to Incestuaries of advanced degree. For indeed, how could such an Evil One not be eager to distort the exceptional possibilities that arise from the doubling of God-given genes? All the more power to Herr Hitler, then. He has actually been able, I would declare, to stand firm with the Vision in the face of the Devil himself."

Little did Himmler know that his remarks could be multiplied by an order of magnitude. I had not been promulgating a false legend, but an irony. For the story ~~I believed~~ I had concocted out of no more than barely feasible evidence happened to be true. It was Johann Nepomuk Heidler who did supply the money and Alois Schicklgruber was his secret child. Yet the irony within this irony was that Alois' son, Adolf Hitler was not merely a First Degree Incestuary One-step- removed, but had been conceived in the very center of incest. The niece, Klara Poelzl Hitler, Alois' third wife and Adolf Hitler's mother, was not only Alois' wife but also his blood daughter. Of that relationship, I can soon offer many details.

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(expand this memoir and)

To fulfill such a promise, I must now commence a ~~new~~ family history much as if I were a conventional novelist of the old school. I will enter the thoughts of Johann Nepomuk, as well as many of the insights of his illegitimate son, Alois Hitler, and I will also include the feelings of Alois' three wives, and his children.

We are finished, however, with Maria Anna Schicklgruber. That unhappy mother perished in 1847 at the age of fifty-two, ten years after the birth of Alois. The cause was termed "phthisis on account of dropsy of the chest," a galloping consumption she contracted after sleeping in the cattle-trough through her last two winters. The collateral cause was rage. Toward

the end, she thought often of how healthy she had been at the age of nineteen, her body quick, her singing voice praised for its beauty. She was the soloist of the parish choir in Doellersheim, ^{which had church} the nearest town to Strones.

But now, having suffered under the curse of three decades of lost anticipations, she was full of the added fury that Georg had brought to their occasional couplings. He, like many a drunk before him, succeeded, however, in outliving everyone's assumption that his death would come early. After her demise, he actually kept going for ten more years. Drink had been not only his nemesis but his dear medicine, and, only at the last, his executioner. He went in a day. They called it apoplexy. Having never bothered to visit Nepomuk or Alois, he was not missed, but by then, Alois was twenty and working in Vienna.

For that matter, Alois had not suffered unduly when his mother was lost. Spital, where he lived with Johann Nepomuk and the wife and three daughters of the Hiedler family, was a long walk from Strones, and he had come close to forgetting Maria Anna. He was happy with his new family. In the beginning, Nepomuk's daughters, Johanna, Walpurga, and Josefa, then twelve, ten, and eight, were delighted to have a five-year-old brother,

and took him gladly into their bedroom. Since Spital was a full-sized village rather than a hamlet, a separation between prosperous and poor had begun to appear. A farmer could even be considered well-off—at least in his own town. There were a few such ~~in Spital~~ ^{house,} in Spital, Johann Nepomuk being the first. The wife, Eva, kept a good home. She was also most practical. If she had a suspicion that Nepomuk might actually be more than a stepfather to the boy, she could not, on the other hand, forget the disappointment in his eyes each time she gave birth to a girl. It was probably better for all concerned to have a boy in the ~~home~~ ^{house,} home. Yes, she was practical.

And Alois was loved! By his father, by the girls, even by Eva. He was good-looking, and like his own mother, he could sing. As he grew older, he also demonstrated that he was ready to work in the fields. For a time, Johann Nepomuk even contemplated leaving the farm to him, but there was no balance to count on in his character. He was restless. He might not always be there to take care of whatever unforeseen obstacle, large or small, might settle unexpectedly upon the daily work. In contrast, Johann Nepomuk had so much love for his labors that on the best of days he felt as if he could hear the murmurs of the earth. While he was not at ease

with the long silences that hovered over the end of afternoon, a spell would often enter his dreams by evening. The sum of his fields, his sheds, his beasts and his barn became a creature equal to a demanding woman, cavernous, haunting, smelly, greedy, needy, ever extracting more from him. He would awake in full recognition that he could never leave the farm to Alois—Alois was the child of the woman in the dream. So, he gave up the notion. He had to. Such a gift would enrage his wife. She wanted a good future for her daughters, and the farm ^{was} ~~would~~ not provide more than two respectable dowries.

Over the years, new problems presented themselves concerning these dowries. For the first marriage, the oldest daughter, Johanna, was given only a pinched share of the land. But she had, after all, chosen to marry a poor man, a hard-working but unlucky farmer named Poelzl. When it came to the dowry for the second daughter, Walpurga, who was already twenty-one, Nepomuk was obliged to be more generous. The putative bridegroom, Josef Romeder, was a strong fellow from a prosperous farm in Ober-Windhag, the next village, and negotiations over the size of Walpurga's dowry were stiff. In the end, Nepomuk deeded over the richest portion of

his land. That left only a modest tract for the third daughter, Josefa, who was sickly and spinsterish. As for Eva and himself, he kept a fine small lodging in an orchard at the border of what was now Romeder's property. But the ^{small house in the} ~~orchard~~ was enough. He was ready to retire. Given the length and heat of the negotiations over the dowry, the ceremony to transfer the lands proved as much of an event as the wedding that had just taken place.

Nepomuk led his new son-in-law around the property, boundary line by boundary line, and stopped before every marker that established a separation between his fields and the land of the next farmer. Nepomuk would say, "And if on any day you gather fruit from this man's orchard, even the fallen fruit, may you labor under a black sky." After which he ^{would} ~~give~~ Josef Romeder a clout to the head. At each of those eight separate jogs along the boundary line, he repeated the act. Johann Nepomuk was full of the kind of woe that hangs like a dead-weight on one's back. He was not mourning the transfer of his farm, ^{so} ~~so~~ much as the absence of Alois. His dear adopted son Alois was not there because Johann Nepomuk had banished him three years earlier when the boy was thirteen and Walpurga eighteen. He had discovered them in the hay-loft of his barn, and it caused

him to think of the other barn where he had gone to the straw with Maria Anna on the afternoon that Alois had been conceived. A memory of the glory of this act of love with Maria Anna Schicklgruber had never left him. He had had only two women in his life and ^{Maria} ~~she~~ was the second, and not at all a village wench to him, coarse-grained and ass-bare in the hay, but a Madonna lit by sunlight, an image he had earlier acquired by way of the stained-glass window of the church in Spital. This image never failed to enlarge his estimate of the volume of his sin. He was living in sacrilege, that he knew, and yet he would not relinquish the image of Maria Anna's face in the stained-glass window. It was reason enough not to go to confession too often, and when he did go—because he knew he must—he would invent other sins for the booth, large ones. One time, he even confessed to coition with the farm mare, a deed he had never attempted—one does not make love to a large horse for too little!—and the priest in return asked how many times he had committed this sin. “Only once, Father.”

“When was that? How long ago?”

“Months, months I think.”

“And how do you feel now when you work with the animal? Are there similar urges?”

“No, never. I am ashamed for myself.”

The priest was middle-aged and had little to learn about the peasantry, so he could sense that Nepomuk was lying. Nonetheless, his preference was that the account be true because bestial sodomy, while as mortal a sin as adultery or incest, was to his mind less grievous. It would, after all, produce no offspring. He proceeded, therefore, to exercise his office without further questioning.

“You have degraded yourself as a child of God,” he told Nepomuk, “you have committed a serious sin of lust. You have injured an innocent animal. For your penance I give you five hundred Our Fathers and five hundred Hail Marys.”

That was identical to the penance he had given earlier that morning to a schoolboy who had treated himself to an underhanded spit-in-the-palm masturbation in class (a most stealthy act!) and then rubbed his spit and semen on the hair of the boy in front of him, a small boy.

Johann Nepomuk contented himself afterward by confessing to the same priest upon occasion that he still had lewd thoughts concerning the mare, but was careful to do nothing about it. That took care of confession, but the continuing absence of Alois caused Johann Nepomuk Hiedler to live in an agony of love. He had wept like a Biblical father and tore his shirt when he found his son and daughter in the straw. He knew that he had just lost the boy. The brightest light of nearly every one of his days, that lively young face, would have to leave. To the shock of the other women in the family, Alois was sent away that night to a neighbor's house and in the morning was put on a coach to Vienna.

Nepomuk did not tell Eva, but then, he did not have to, because Walpurga, at her father's insistence, was kept at home for the next three years. The young woman's marriage with Romeder, empty of courtship, had to be arranged. Yet Eva, while as alert to the chastity of her daughters as a drill sergeant ^{studying!} ~~studies~~ the precision of his platoon on dress parade, would still nag Nepomuk to allow Walpurga to walk on Sunday with a girl friend. 

"No," Nepomuk would say. "The two of them will wander into the woods. Then boys will follow them."

On the day he stalked the boundary line with Romeder, he was burdened each time he struck his daughter's new husband. What an injustice he was doing to his new son-in-law. Ergo, he hit him harder. A marriage was being founded on a lie. Therefore, it was crucial no trespasses be made on the land of the neighbor. That would be a sacrilege against the earth. How Nepomuk mourned the absence of his son!

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Alois did well in Vienna. With his good and agreeable face, he was taken on as novice in a shop that made cavalry boots for officers.

He now served young men who carried themselves as if their bodies, their uniforms, their decorations, their ^{footwear} boots and their souls had all been fabricated by some awesome source. Their confidence in their personal appearance had much to offer Alois. These men, he observed, were so at ease with the beautifully dressed ladies they escorted. On Sundays, he would rarely miss watching their promenade. The women's hats were ^{so} finely wrought ~~as the officers' boots~~. He had the passing thought that if he met a young milliner, they could open a shop and young couples of the best

and highest classes would visit their store hand in hand. Splendid boots, stylish hats. It was the only business concept he was to have for many a year, but he did play with such a dream because beautiful ladies stimulated him. He loved young women. He had had such contentment playing with his stepsisters, which is to say, as only Nepomuk knew, his half-sisters.

He met no young milliner, however, and the idea gave way to a better one. He could never be a cavalry officer since that depended on being born into a proper family, and he came from a place where more was known about a pig's habits than the scent a man should put upon his handkerchief. Alois would not aspire to what was not there. But one thing he knew—he was able to live on good terms with Vienna. No one back in Spital had been as ready to improve himself. Early on, then, he understood his own ambition—he wanted to spend his life in a decent uniform, and be admired for his posture.

At the age of eighteen, after five years in the boot shop, he applied to the Austrian Finance Ministry for a position in the Customs, and was accepted. By another five years, he had risen to the rank of Finanzwach Oberaufseher (Finance-Watch High Overseer) which was equal to no more

than Corporal, but already the uniform was impressive, and for that matter, it usually took ten years to rise even to this level, especially if you joined the Service with no connections.

He had written on several occasions to tell Johann Nepomuk of his progress, and at last, in 1858, a letter came back. Nepomuk's youngest daughter, Josefa, had died, a great blow to the family, and Nepomuk hinted that he would like Alois to visit.

In 1859, he returned to Spital looking exceptionally tall for a man of medium height: In the eyes of his family, his bearing was authoritative. He actually looked well-born.

It did not take long for Johann Nepomuk to realize that he had made a serious mistake in inviting Alois to visit, but Nepomuk was as bent by now as a tree that has ^{faced} ~~lived with~~ ^{for too many years,} too much wind. The death of Josefa throbbed in his side like the slash of an axe. He felt too tired to keep watch on Alois.

Indeed, what could he do? Johanna, the oldest daughter, seven years older than Alois, had been married at the age of eighteen, and for the last eleven years had been faithful to her husband, Johann Poelzl, ~~(yes, one more Johann!)~~ who even lived next door to Nepomuk ~~(with his part of the farm)~~.

and gave no one but Johanna any trouble for ^{who} Poelzl usually kept her pregnant. She had once been agreeable in appearance. Now her hands and feet were raw and her features had thickened ~~not only~~ from bearing six children, ^{and then} but ^(They) living with the memory of the first four ^{who} had all died early.)

If Johanna had once been cheerful in spirit, this state, long eroded, ~~now~~ revived at the sight of Alois. He had been her darling when he first came to the house. She used to fondle the five-year-old whenever she brought him to sleep in her bed. Through the years until he left, she would pull his hair and kiss his cheek, until once when he was ^{eight} ~~ten~~ and she was ^{fi. Steens} ~~seventeen~~, they had begun to roll together in the hay of the barn pretending to wrestle. But he was only ^{eight} ~~ten~~ and nothing had taken place.

This time, no question. At the first opportunity which proved to be the only one, Alois continued his father's tradition of apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw, and Klara Poelzl was conceived. There was no question in Johanna's mind. Each time, she had known the moment when Johann Poelzl, her husband, had put a child in her. But this occasion was superior. No small event took place in her body. "You have made me feel as I have not felt before," she said when they were done, and when Klara

was born, Johanna sent him a letter that he received in the midst of rigorous training for an examination to bring him up to Finanzwach-Respizienten, the highest position available to the lower ranks of the customs service. His attention, therefore, was not on Spital. Still, her letter lived with him through the years. It was only three words long (three words that Johanna had been certain of spelling correctly) and he read it over many times. "Sie ist hier." wrote Johanna in the pride of a momentous event (although she did not sign her name) and "She is here" took its place in the guardroom of his heart even if Alois' mind was on his career. In truth, he might not even have made love to Johanna on that visit if he had not already been with Walpurga all those years ago, and a year earlier with the youngest, Josefa, his favorite back when he was twelve (his first) and so he felt he owed it to himself now to have the remaining sister—how many men could boast of knowing three sisters so closely?

If he could measure himself by such deeds, it was in relation to the accomplishments of other low-rank officers in the Finance-Watch. His rise was remarkable for a young man with so sparse an education. Nonetheless, in four more years, he had another promotion, and still another by 1870

when at the age of thirty-three, he had worked himself up to Customs Collector. By 1875, he was Full Inspector and would write below his signature, on any government paper, the full weight and address of the title: "Official of the First Class Imperial Customs Post in the Railroad Terminal, Simbach, Bavaria. Residence, Braunau, Linzergasse."

All through his rise toward the highest official rank that was open for a man of his ~~restricted~~ beginnings, he never relinquished any of his good appetite for women. ^{While} ~~the~~ first principle of Austrian bureaucracy was to do your job, ^{but} ~~(the~~ more effective you became at such tasks, the less you had to fear for the little indulgences of your private life. This understanding he obeyed to the letter, and had an agreeable time. In those years, no matter ^{where} ~~to which town they~~ assigned him, he would stay at an inn. Before long, given his confidence, he would proceed to conquer the loosely defended bastions of the cooks and chambermaids in the hostelry. When he had gone through all of the available women, he would usually move to another large inn. Through the forty years of his career, his change of residence was frequent. In Braunau, for example, he moved twelve times. Nor did it bother him that his women were not elegant enough to walk with

cavalry officers. Not at all! Elegant women, he had come to decide, were too difficult—no doubt of that—whereas maids and cooks were grateful for his attention and would raise no ruckus when he moved on.

In 1873, he married a widow. Having developed an eye for the social stature attached to any woman presuming to pass for a lady—his occupation demanded, after all, some ability in that direction—he was not dissatisfied with his choice. He ^{stet}~~might be~~ thirty-six and the widow already fifty, yet he could respect her. She came from a worthy family. She might not be good-looking, but she was the daughter of an official in the Hapsburg tobacco monopoly that produced a share of the Crown's income, and the size of her dowry was agreeable. They lived well, they had a personal maid. His own salary was, by now, substantial—the principal of the highest public school in Braunau did not earn more. As his rank increased, so did his uniform generate an increase in gold trim and gold-plated buttons, and his cocked hat was entitled to sprout elegant official embroidery. His mustache was now worthy of a titled Hungarian, and his face came at you, jaw-first. His inferiors at the Customs Post were told they were always to use his correct title when speaking to him. With it all, he was putting on weight. Soon

after his marriage, and very much at his wife's urging, he shaved his mustache and grew sideburns on each side of his face. Given the care he afforded them, they soon became as imposing as castle-gates. Now, he not only looked like a customs official in the service of the Hapsburgs, but ~~Indeed~~ ^{resembled} he even looked like Franz Josef himself! There he was, a fair facsimile of the emperor, a full expression of duty, hard work, and an imperial face.

His wife, Anna Glassl-Hoerer, had lost, however, her appeal for him. This deficit occurred some two years into the marriage when he discovered that she, too, was an orphan and had been adopted. In turn, she also lost respect for his presence when he (grown weary of making up stories about an imaginary and somewhat fabulous Herr Schicklgruber, his father) confessed that there was no such man on the parental side of his natal ledger, merely a blank.

She began her campaign. Alois was to legitimize himself. His mother, after all, had been married. Why could that not be taken to mean Johann Georg Hiedler was the father? Alois knew it was unlikely, but now that Anna Glassl was making it an issue, he was not averse. He had, after

all, never enjoyed his last name, and Anna Glassl was not necessarily wrong when she judged that his career, despite its success, had been obliged to deal every day with the sound of Schicklgruber.

He travelled from Braunau through Weitra to Spital in order to see if Johann Nepomuk would help him. The old man, now turned seventy, misunderstood at first. When Alois told him that he wanted his last name changed to what it should be—Hiedler!—Johann Nepomuk's heart passed through a ~~quick and~~ scalding shame. He thought he was being named as the father. Immediately he was ready to argue that at this late date, what with his two remaining married daughters to think of, plus the grandchildren, and his remaining part of the farm, (plus his wife Eva to say the least!) how could he declare himself Alois' father? These excuses, however, did not reach his mouth. At the last instant, he realized that Alois was only asking for Johann Georg to be named as his sire. Whereupon—old men being as ready as young girls to move on the instant from one extreme of emotion to the other—he was furious at Alois. His own son did not want him, Nepomuk, to be thought of as the father. It took another moment to

recognize that Georg, having married Maria Anna, was the only one who could be used for this ^{legally} ~~legal~~ venture.

In a farm cart, pulled by two old horses, he journeyed with Alois and Romeder and two neighbors who had agreed to serve as witnesses all of the miles from Spital to Strones, then further on a few miles to Doellersheim, all of it close to a four-hour journey on a narrow meandering carriage-road full of many fallen limbs and a few uprooted trees, but still reasonably free of mud on this October day. (With mud, it might have taken eight hours). On arrival, Johann Nepomuk came face to face with the particular priest he had no wish to remember. There he was, a very old priest now, shrunken in stature, and smaller in station (for Doellersheim parish was not comparable to Spital), yet ^{here} ~~this~~ was the very priest who had scolded him for traffic with the vulva of a mare.

This recollection was shared by the two men even if not at all acknowledged. ^{There was} (No, not the smallest shift of expression between them). They were all there for the business at hand, Alois, Nepomuk, Romeder, and the two witnesses they had brought along from Strones. Since none of them but Alois knew how to write, the others signed the document with an XXX.

They said they had known Georg Heidler and that “in their presence and repeatedly” he had admitted to being the father of this child. The mother had stated the same. They swore to that.

The priest could see that, legally speaking, very little was correct. Each of the witnesses' hands had shaken with a good bit of godly fear as they put down their XXX. One of them, the son-in-law, Romeder, could not have been five years old when Anna Maria died. Of course, she would have told all to the five-year-old! Moreover, Johann Georg was also long dead. Given such a dubious case, a more careful ~~Legal~~ proceeding would be appropriate.

~~However, the priest~~
The priest did what he had been doing for years—he certified the paper, even as he kept smiling with his old and toothless mouth. He knew they were lying.

He would not, however, insert the date. On the yellow page of the old parish registry of June 1, 1837, he crossed out “illegitimate,” put Johann Georg's name in what had previously been the blank space, and smiled again. Legally speaking, the document was shaky, but it did not matter. Which church authority in Vienna would challenge such a ~~change?~~ *an alteration?* The

~~word from there~~ was to encourage certified fatherhood no matter how late in life it arrived. Already in some districts of Austria, illegitimacy was up to forty births per hundred. Of that forty, could even half be free of one or another unmentionable family matter? So, the priest, disapproving of these loose procedures even if he was bound to approve them, chose not to inscribe his own name. If it ever went wrong, he could disavow the paper.

Then, he spelled each of the witnesses' names by choice inasmuch as there was no agreement on orthography from province to province, (one reason why Hiedler eventually became Hitler.)

Now that Alois had his new name, he decided to stop off for an hour in Spital rather than continue on immediately in Nepomuk's cart to the

railroad station at Weitra. The change from Schicklgruber to Hiedler was

sufficiently for him to feel
(ageable indeed, and he felt an upsurge in the happy region below his navel.

This, from long experience, was, he knew, one of the gifts his nature had given him. He was as quick as a hound to sense when female company was near.

Was it Johanna who had put him on the alert? She did live next door to her father, and at this moment Alois glimpsed a woman looking out the

window. But, no, that could not be Johanna. This woman looked older than his wife. Now, he was in no hurry to visit. ~~So few gifts were offered by farm life to a woman's appearance.~~

Yet his steps took him to the door. Once again, the Hound had not betrayed him. ^{For} Yes, there in the doorway ^{might be} ~~was~~ Johanna, prematurely deep into middle age, but beside her was a girl of sixteen. She was the same height as himself with the nicest and most agreeable features, modest, well-formed, with a good head of abundant dark hair and the bluest eyes he had ever seen—they were as blue as the light that once reflected from a large diamond he had seen behind a glass in a museum exhibit.

So soon as he separated himself from the powerful hug and whole set of steamy kisses Johanna left with her honest saliva on his mouth, he took off his cocked hat and bowed. "This is your Uncle Alois," Johanna said to her daughter, "he is a wonderful man." She turned back to him and added, "You look better than ever—there is even more to the uniform now, yes?" And she pulled her daughter to her. "Here is Klara." ~~But for our only son in Vienna who is still alive, she is now my oldest~~ ~~the eldest.~~

Johanna began to weep. Klara was her seventh child. Of the others, four were now dead, one was a hunchback, and ^{her} ~~the~~ son, now nineteen, the oldest remaining, had consumption. "God never ceases punishing us for our sins," she said, at which Klara nodded.

Alois had no desire to hear about God. Spend a little time with Him, and the Hound could moan for shame. He preferred to enjoy the thought that he might soon see more of this niece.

He took a walk outside the village with the mother and daughter. They went to that part of Nepomuk's fields which now belonged to the husband, Johann Poelzl, who—no surprise to Alois—bore no resemblance to this rare blue-eyed Klara. Poelzl had gray clouded eyes and a face full of lines that drooped in concert with a ~~long~~ sad nose, and paper thin lips. ~~It is~~

^{It was} obvious that he had given up the once-enduring hope that sooner or later he would be certain to prosper because he was an honest farmer, ~~so honest!~~

Nor did Alois stay ^{long} ~~too long~~. Poelzl had the expression on his face of a man who still has a host of chores. On this day, scattered in the rows of stubble, were stray ears of corn not yet too rotten to feed to the pigs, and Poelzl stood on one foot and then the other ^{another} (as if to talk for ~~two minutes more~~).

would allow ~~few~~ ^{he was also} more of the remaining ears to spoil.) If ~~his~~ ^{impatience}

~~was due to his discomfort~~ ^{discomforted by} with the implicit prosperity of Alois' uniform,

Poelzl's mood took no ~~happy~~ ^{happier} turn when Alois remarked that his own wife

was not well and needed a maid who was pious, and of reliable ~~breeding~~ ^{family}

Background.

(Was it possible—not to rush things!—that Klara might be just that person?)

Poelzl could hardly say no when he was told of the amount his daughter would be able to send back. Cash not dependent on a crop was the best of crops, and, as always, he needed money. The alternative—to borrow further sums from his brother-in-law Romeder or his father-in-law Nepomuk, was unpleasant. Poelzl could hear the diatribe that would come from his wife's family. Johanna's disposition had become so sour that he often thought (very much in private) her blood must taste like vinegar. Nor did he wish to listen to the ~~brother-in-law~~ ^{loud sigh of his} as Romeder came up with some

Kronen. ~~And a loud sigh!~~ He certainly didn't want to hear the advice that would come from Nepomuk. That would insult his judgment. A farmer could have fine instincts for husbandry and still be ~~full of~~ ^{prayer to} bad luck—did that mean he must pay tribute twice by listening to others when he had already paid once by living with an insufficient return from his fields? So,

he accepted the fact that Klara would go to work for Uncle Alois, but his feelings turned over in him with the emptiest anger of them all—a rage that has lost its heat.

One week after Alois' return to his post in Braunau, Klara followed with a small chest filled with a modest cache of clothes and a few possessions.

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Alois and Anna Glassl had three rooms in the second-best inn of Braunau—the Gasthaus Streif. There was also a small room for Klara on the top floor where other maids and servants slept.

For a while, Alois entertained the happy notion that he might be able to spend a little time up there with Klara, but his niece did not welcome him, not exactly. It was evident to all including his wife that Klara was steeped in respect for her exceptional uncle, but it seemed no cause for concern to Anna Glassl—not yet! The girl was pious to a degree that would have seemed incomprehensible if one did not understand that death was her nearest relative. There were lights in those pale-blue eyes that spoke of

angels—godly angels and fallen angels. Her face was so innocent that one could ask in all honesty what she could know of fallen angels if not for that second sense which is there to tell us that devils hover like moths at the closing doors of life. Even the innocent do not always like to dream of the departed.

Alois could envision other dubious portals—the doors to Klara's chastity might open to an ice-house. So, he was charming to his niece, but made a point never to touch her. His wife, as unhappy by now as a crow with a broken wing, had put up early with his yen for maids and cooks, but then, about the time she began her campaign to expunge the name of Schicklgruber, she allowed her distrust of him to take on new force. Never had Alois encountered jealousy so passionate, so far-ranging, and so much to the point.

While he considered his first quality as a man to be dedication to his work—to the cleanliness of his personal appearance, to the neatness and well-written dispatch of his official papers, and every evidence he could give of his high respect for punctuality and performance in each and every working hour, he took equal pride in his skill as a custom's inspector. He

had not stood for years at a border post looking to root out the attempts of travellers and merchants to cheat the Hapsburg Crown of its tariff without learning a good deal about false presentation and outright mendacity, and now he was having to exercise such abilities himself in order to divert Anna from another girl he had taken to visiting on the top floor of the inn.

There was an old Viennese joke that to have a flourishing society, both the police and the thieves must constantly get better at what they did. ~~New~~ ^{He} thought often of the remark. It was true for Anna Glassl and himself. The more acute her sense of what he might be up to, the finer were his lies.

She had cause for distrust. There were days when he made love to each of the three women he could look upon as regulars. In the morning, full of the bounty of sleep, he would take care of his wife, and in the afternoon when Anna Glassl was napping and his off-duty time coincided with ^{an} ~~the~~ hour when ^{the} ~~their~~ chambermaid washed their floors, he usually enjoyed the coquetry of her hips as she, down on her hands and knees, slung a wet cloth from side to side—truth, he rarely saw her face at such times. And in the evening after Anna Glassl had gone to sleep, there was Fanni.

So if he was ready to wait for Klara Poelzl, it was because his nocturnal, and for the present, true interest was with this waitress at the inn, a nineteen-year-old named Fanni Matzelsberger, who was voluptuous but lithe, and—by every good measure—smoldering. He had learned to strip his eyes of all expression when she crossed the room, but she did have an irrepressible turn to her hips that spoke to him—Fanni was a good girl who did not want to be so good.

Indeed, as he soon learned by visits to her attic room, she was a virgin of the most tormented sort—a ^{maiden} ~~girl~~ in the old peasant tradition: She had kept the formal entrance to her chastity intact but the same could not be said of its neighbor. This was not all so agreeable for Alois. The Hound was too large to permit a good poke into “the smelly and the damned,” (or so he would characterize it). Fanni would moan in a very low voice (in order that the rest of the attic not hear) but they were both suffering. All the more intense became their embrace. In the heat of the hour, they loved each other, a not uncommon reaction when the carnal ore can be considered contraband.

He told himself that she was no more than a good-looking daughter of a prosperous farmer—she did have a decent dowry—but he also told her that he loved her. She said, “Enough to give up your wife and live with me?”

“I will give her up,” he said, “when you give me something else!”

No, she must remain a virgin. So soon as she was ready to do what he wanted, there would be a child. She knew. Then, there would be another child. Then she very well might die.

“How do you decide such things?”

“We have gypsies in my family. Maybe I am a witch.”

“What a remark!”

“No, you are a bad man and I am a witch. Only witches put their mouths in forbidden places. Now, I am afraid to go to confession.”

“Stay away from priests. They are there to suck your blood. They are the ones who will leave you weak and good for nothing.”

They argued round and round about whether she should or should not go to confession. She was tempted to let him win, and then, given the force of his desire, she did give it to him, she gave it up, and proceeded to tell him

one month later that she was pregnant. Had the time come, she asked, to tell his wife?

He no longer trusted Fanni. He did not think she would have become pregnant if she was really afraid of dying. Besides, he had been lying to his wife with so much skill that now he did not dare to confess. Prevarication, like honesty, is reflexive, and soon becomes a sturdy habit, as reliable as truth itself. Anna Glassl-Hoerer Hitler was fifty-seven and looked ten years older (although to his continuing surprise she could be a virago at dawn.) To lose her would ^{reduce} ~~lighten~~ his financial situation measurably. Moreover, he would be giving up a lady for a farm-girl, a most attractive farm-girl, but then he had decided long ago that in the end, a peasant was like a stone. Throw a stone high in the air—it will always come down. Whereas a lady was like a feather. A lady could tantalize you with her intelligence. He would hate to give up his ever-increasing skill as a liar.

Here is a sample from the dining room at the Gasthaus Streif:

Anna Glassl: I see you are looking at her again.

Alois: I am. You have caught me. If your eyes were not so beautiful, I would have to say that you own the eyes of an eagle.

Anna Glassl: Why don't you catch up with her after we eat? Just give her a good one for me.

Alois: Your mind is wicked. I like it when your tongue is so crude.

Anna Glassl: Cruder than it used to be.

Alois: Anna, you are exceptionally wise, but, in this case, you are wrong.

Anna Glassl: Look, my dear, I have put up with chambermaids and cooks. You have come to bed smelling of onions on many a night. And that is better than sniffing laundry soap. But I don't care, I tell myself. The man must remain amused. Only, why do you still try to insult my intelligence? We know the girl is beautiful. At least once in your life make love to a waitress who does not look like last night's pudding.

Alois: All right, I will tell you the truth. I like her looks, yes, a little bit. Although she is not truly my type. No, she is not. But in any case, I would not go near her. One hears the worst talk. I don't even want to tell you because you like her.

Anna Glassl: Like her? She's a tart. She's a tart in training. Your true type.

Alois: No, she is diseased. I have heard that she has an infectious disease between her legs. I would not go near her.

Anna Glassl: I do not believe you. I cannot believe that.

Alois: Do as you choose. But, I can promise you, she is the last girl for you to worry about.

Anna Glassl: Who then do you want me to worry about? Klara?

Alois: You have a splendid sense of humor. If we were not in public, I would laugh out loud, and then you know what I would do.

You are so attractive, so wicked. You would even send me out to kiss a nun.

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Finally, Fanni told Anna Glassl that she was two months pregnant and soon to show. For Anna, that was the end of the marriage. For Alois to tell her that the girl had a disease! When he knew she was pregnant! Unforgivable! Besides, Anna Glassl was more tired of Alois by now than of her fear of living alone. It was truly exhausting to muster up her remaining arts in order to pretend to be a virago at dawn. By now, she craved peace. She even decided that her jealousy had been some last inoculation against what was worse—precisely the chill distaste for a mate that seeps in even as jealousy loses heat. So, she moved out. Since they were Catholic, divorce was not possible. To obtain even a legal separation, Anna, by Austrian law,

had to declare not only their incompatibility but state in writing that she felt direct aversion to him. Alois was obliged to read this. The phrase stood out in the document like a boil on one's chin. It irked so much that he showed his copy to drinking friends. "Look, she speaks of a personal aversion. This is nothing less than outrageous. If not improper, I could tell you how much aversion was there. On her hands and knees so soon as I would say, 'Get ready.'"

They would laugh and move to other subjects. He was in a state of irritation these days for more reasons than Anna Glassl's departure. Fanni and he were now living together in the same suite of rooms at the Gasthaus Streif. That was fine with him—he was the first to say that he was never attached to the past. Then he discovered that Fanni was not pregnant—she had only thought she might be. Or was it that she had had an early miscarriage? She was resolutely unclear.

He thought that was a terrible lie to have told him, but what could he do? He had never known such pleasure with a woman. Of course, Fanni was soon as jealous as Anna Glassl, and her ears had perfect pitch when it came to hearing any trace of desire in his voice for another woman. Soon

enough, she stove a hole in the well-guarded vessel of his future plans.

Klara, she told him, would have to go. Otherwise, Fanni would.

This was too much disruption for Alois. Fanni would soon be truly pregnant, or so he expected given the hints he took from the declarative surge of her womb at the happiest moment, all of which billowed through him even as he was ~~streaming~~ *pushing full stream* into her—not the sort of conclusion he usually came to with other women. (Except once—so long ago—with Johanna.) Besides, he was certainly ready for a child, preferably a son, to carry on his name. Yes, when he was not in the midst of his best moments with Fanni, he thought often of the oncoming time when she would be six or seven months along, and it would be Klara's turn. The likelihood of future complications did not deter him. It was in the nature of his work to be able to handle more than one problem at once.

As for scandal, he did not worry. Not unduly. In Braunau, he was used to being a center of gossip. The townspeople might as well complain to the stars above that he was living with a common-law wife. For practical purposes, he saw himself as equal to a soldier garrisoned in a town to which he owed nothing. He received his money from the ~~Finance-Dept~~ *Finance-Dept* in

Vienna. So long as his work proved flawless, this far-away arm of the Hapsburg government would hardly care how he acted in his personal life.

Having risen to the highest level of the middle ranks, there he would probably remain. His job was secure. The Customs needed him. After all, it took years for an official to become as practiced as himself. In turn, he needed the Customs. How could he ever find another job that paid as well? He had developed into the perfect instrument for what he did, but that was not a skill to be used for anything else. He was fixed therefore into his job, and the ~~Financial~~ ^{Finance} Watch was locked in with him. So, devil take the townspeople. What they said might rankle, but it would not interfere with more interesting pursuits. One girl would bear his child, and the niece (who trembled in front of him when he spoke) would become his mistress. Of course, she would be more than ready when the time came. Why else did she quiver? It was because the niece knew he could teach her all the things she did not know, and did not even dare to think about.

This was the secret project into which Fanni intruded. No girl named Klara was going to keep working for them.

"You are mad," Alois answered. "Can't you see? Klara would be happier in a convent."

"Your interest is not in her happiness, but yours. She must go."

"Do not speak to me that way. You are young enough to be my daughter."

"Yes, I am, and I have heard the Polish people say that a father should never make love to his daughter or she will lose all respect for him."

Klara had to go. He could not relinquish what he now had in Fanni, not for the uncertain promise (when all was said) of a transformation from angel-nun to all-compliant madly-loving niece. No, that was hardly guaranteed.

Memories they had offered to each other. There had been much for both to learn—they were so close and so different. It ended, however, because Klara was not good at lying. She turned beet-red with embarrassment when Fanni would hint at what went on between Uncle Alois and herself. (Klara having called him Uncle, Fanni had taken on the habit.)

"Confess," Fanni would say, "you, too, want to be in bed with our Uncle."

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After Klara left, it was Fanni who suffered the most. Gone, now, were the confidences they had offered to each other. There had been much for both to learn—they were so close and so different. It ended, however, because Klara was not good at lying. She turned beet-red with embarrassment when Fanni would hint at what went on between Uncle Alois and herself. (Klara having called him Uncle, Fanni had taken on the habit.)

“Confess,” Fanni would say, “you, too, want to be in bed with our Uncle.”

“No,” Klara would reply, and feel as if her cheeks would blotch if she did not tell the truth. “There are times, yes, when, yes, please, I want that. But you must know I won’t, I never will.”

“Why?”

“Because he is with you.”

“Ach, that,” said Fanni, “would not stop me for a minute.”

“Maybe you, no,” said Klara, “but I would be punished.”

“This is something you know?”

“Please, I know.”

“Maybe you don’t,” said Fanni. “I told Uncle I would die if I let him give me a baby, but now I think in this other way. I want a baby, I am near to having a baby.”

“You will,” said Klara. “And trust me. I would never be with Uncle Alois. You are his woman. That is my vow.”

They kissed, but there was something within the aroma of the kiss that Fanni could not trust. Klara’s lips were firm and full of character, but not completely. That night Fanni had a dream where Alois made love to Klara.

Before she left, Klara wept just a little. "How can you send me away?" she asked. "I gave you my vow."

"Tell me," said Fanni, "what is the foundation of this so-holy promise?"

"I swear it by the peace of my dead brothers and sisters."

It was not the best reply. Fanni had the sudden thought that Klara might also be concealing a witch in herself—she could, after all, have disliked her brothers and sisters, some of them, anyway.

By way of the Finance-Watch, Alois made proper arrangements for Klara in Vienna. She would obtain clean and gainful employment in the house of a modest and elderly lady. (Alois was more than ready to protect her chastity.) So, now, after four years of good and honest work at the inn, sleeping each night in the smallest of the maid's rooms, Klara packed her belongings into the same modest chest she had brought with her on arrival, and left the Gasthaus for new employment in Vienna.

If Fanni was now more at ease with Alois, the best of moods could nonetheless vanish in no more than the interval it took to close her eyes and open them. How could she be certain that her distrust of Klara had been

honest fear? What if it came from spite as cruel as the pain of a bad tooth?

She knew she was full of spite. That was why she called herself a witch.

Even as she had foreseen, she was truly pregnant now. If that offered contentment, she continued nonetheless to feel remorse. She had banished the sweetest girl she knew, and so there were days when Fanni was on the edge of asking Klara to return, but then she would think: What if Alois comes to prefer Klara? Then she might not be faithful to her vow. How unfair that would be to the unborn child!

Fourteen months after Anna Glassl received the decree of separation, Fanni gave birth to a boy whom Alois without hesitation named Alois.

They could not, however, call him Alois-Junior—not as yet. The name still had to be Alois Matzelsberger, and this bothered Alois Hitler. He went through a period of remembering what he had taken pains to forget—that a child could feel as empty as an empty belly when he had to walk around with no more than his mother's last name. Now, Alois-Senior went to bed every night cursing Anna Glassl.

He was not a man to give all of himself to a curse. He considered such an act equal to spending a private horde of gold. Nonetheless, he

would deliver his curse every night, and it had venom to it. So, he was not all that surprised when Anna died. And most suddenly! This curious event did not occur until fourteen months after Alois' son was born and Fanni was very much pregnant again, but Alois still reckoned that his anathema might have had effect. He saw it as an expensive payment for a necessary conclusion—expensive because there could always be unforeseen consequences.

Indeed, Anna's death certificate stated that the cause was unknown. This convinced Alois that it was suicide. He did not like the thought. He was no superstitious fellow, not, at least, as measured by his disbelief in the near presence of God and the Devil. Rather, as he was ready to explain over a stein of beer, he placed his faith in the solid and intelligent processes of dependable forms of government. God, no matter how august and far away, would look, doubtless, upon government in the same manner that Alois did—as the human fulfillment of divine will, provided such will was exercised by scrupulous officials like himself. (Alois had not absorbed this idea from Hegel,) Alois had not read a word of

Hegel, but then, where was the need? He and Hegel were in agreement—

the power of this idea had to be there for all to breathe. To Alois, it was self-evident.

In accord with such a premise, Alois preferred, therefore, a clear-cut end to death. It could come from a burst appendix or by way of consumption, even as Maria Anna, his own mother, had ended that way. Suicide, however, left him uneasy—he liked to fall asleep quickly (as he put it to his drinking companions) "with a fart and a snore." Anna Glassl committing suicide was one thought to keep him awake. He would have gone to her funeral but he did not care to subject this new nocturnal uneasiness to the sight of her face in the coffin. So Alois stayed away. That was another tasty item for the town's gossip.

All the same, no matter how Anna Glassl had ended, she was, at least, no longer there. So he could marry his common-law wife, his new lady, Franziska Matzelsberger, which he did. The second child was now a good seven months along in the womb, and Fanni's belly was ^(beginning to) look ~~as~~ as big as the prize melon in a field. He was forty-six, she was twenty-two, and the wedding took place in another town, Ranshofen, four miles away and four more uncomfortable miles back for the pregnant bride.

She had sworn she would not have the ceremony in Braunau. It was not only the eyes of the women. Young men snickered as she went by.

Alois was annoyed. It cost extra to transport by hired carriage the two Customs officers he had invited. This was no serious expenditure but, all the same, needless. Besides, he was disappointed in Fanni. His new wife was not as ready to face other people as she ought to be—look, after all, at the fine husband she had caught!

Moreover, she was a nervous mother—she insisted on having the second baby in Vienna. The midwife would not be as spiteful there, she told him. Who, in her situation, asked Fanni, could trust any woman from Braunau? More expense.

Anna Glassl, with all her faults, had been a lady—he could, he decided reluctantly, never be able to say the same for Fanni. It was not that he expected it of her, not a farmer's daughter, but still she had once shown progress in such directions. Now, it was all going backward. When he first knew her, she moved well, she was quick, she charmed the guests of the inn even as she served them. He thought she was a most witty creature for a waitress.

Now, she yelled at the servants—all the fire in Fanni had gone to her temper. Their rooms at the inn were not properly taken care of. When he suggested that they might call Klara back, Fanni carried on for all of one evening.

“Yes,” she told him, “then you can do to Klara what you did to me. Poor Anna Glassl.”

Poor Anna Glassl! He came to realize that Fanni must now be dreaming about Anna. Could they not move forward as husband and wife? It was not the best marriage, he decided. You should not have to get into the same fight every evening.

She spent two weeks in Vienna before their daughter, Angela, was born, and in that time he had to pay for a nurse to take care of Alois Hitler, Junior. Before the week was out, Senior had seduced the nurse. She was fifteen years older than Fanni, heavy-set, a hard worker once he got her to bed, but he could sleep because she got up in the middle of the night without complaint when the boy was crying for his mother.

Up until then he had been faithful to Fanni. Now, the only way to make the nurse more palatable was for him to alternate her with the cook.

Fanni came back from Vienna looking weak and tired and, before long, knew all about it. She did not scream at him. She wept. She was not well, she confessed, and there he was without patience to wait for sick people to mend. He was a brute, she told him.

They had been living together for close to three years before they could marry, but, now, by the time Angela was a year old, Fanni was seriously ill. Signs of a deepening disorder were everywhere. She would pass from fits of temper, to hysteria, then to loss of interest in his body, plus an incapacity to take proper care of their two children. A doctor told her that she had the beginnings of tuberculosis. Klara was brought back from Vienna to be with Alois-Junior, and with Angela, even as Fanni moved out of the inn to a small town called Lach there in the midst of a forest called Lachenwald, Laughter-in-the-Woods, but neither the name nor the good forest air had the power to restore her. In Lach she stayed for the ten months before her end.

Book II

Revision: April 11, 2006

-1-

The year 1942 is, however, a century and more away from 1837, as is 1938. I mention the latter date once more because of a minor episode that occurred during the Anschluss of Austria. It does provide an insight into Himmler. If, behind his back, he was still ridiculed as Heini—ill-gaited, pompous, wide-assed and flat-assed, as pious a mediocrity as any other man who has risen too high—the detractors were merely describing the shell. Nobody, not even Hitler, believed more profoundly in Nazism's philosophical principles.

I remember on the first morning after the Brown Shirts marched into Vienna, that a squad of them—beer-hall types with big bellies—collected a

group of old and middle-aged Jews, professional class, pince-nez absolutely in place, and put them to work scrubbing the sidewalk with toothbrushes. The Storm-Troopers laughed as they watched. Photographs of the event were featured on the front pages of many a newspaper in Europe and America.

Next day, Himmler spoke to a few of us. "That was an expensive indulgence and I am pleased that not one of our SS men had anything to do with such a crudity. We all know how this kind of action lowers morale among so many of our best people. It will certainly encourage rowdiness here in Vienna. Nonetheless, we do well not to reject out of hand the primitive instinct revealed by the act. After much reflection, I can say it was a successful piece of mockery." He paused. He did have our attention. "There is a curious, even, I would declare, a hidden sense of inferiority among many of our folk. They feel that the Jews are capable of bringing more concentration to a task than most of us can—the Jews do know how to study—which is why so many of them have been grossly successful. It is very much a notion among these people that in the end, they will win

everything by working harder than the host race of any country they happen to inhabit.

“So, I would say this act burst out of the rough but nonetheless incisive understanding of our German people. It does tell the Jews that work, if it is not attached to a noble purpose, is meaningless. ‘Scrub away with those toothbrushes,’ our street boys are saying, ‘because you Jews, whether you know it or not, do exactly the same thing every day. Your virtuous scholarship goes nowhere but into endless contradictions.’ Therefore, on second thought,” Himmler concluded, “I will not condemn out of hand the deeds of these low-rank Nazis.”

The story is useful if one is to understand Himmler, but does interrupt my account of how I came to learn the truth as to who, really, was Alois’ father. (While I am prepared to give his name and describe the occasion, I recognize that some readers will be annoyed that these disclosures will be presented without accounting for my sources. A fact is not a fact, some readers will say, if the means by which it was obtained cannot be presented.)

I agree. Nonetheless, my real means are not to be revealed, not yet. Using the assets of Section IV-2a proved insufficient on this occasion but I

did piece together an answer for Heini—I knew that if my end-product could support his case, he would accept it.

Let us content ourselves for now, then, with the conclusions presented to Himmler in 1938. Once I brought back the information that the Jew from Graz did not exist, I suggested that we shift our inquiry to the actions of the one brother of Maria Anna Schicklgruber who had actually been resourceful enough to leave the mud of Strones and make a little money as a commercial traveler. What was best about this brother is that he did pass regularly through Graz, so, at first, I decided to build our case on him and ignore the family Maria Anna had actually worked for—a widow and two daughters. By study of their old bank accounts, it was clear that no extra money ever came to her from these ladies and indeed, they discharged Maria Anna when they discovered she had made some petty thefts. Pregnancy in an unmarried maid could be tolerated, but the loss of a few coins, no! I then decided that Maria Anna might have been looking to protect this brother by telling her father and mother that the money was coming from a Jew. That would get them off the scent.

Before I passed this speculation on to Himmler, however, I concocted—or so I thought—a more promising alternative. Why not make Johann Nepomuk Hiedler, the hard-working younger brother, our seminal agent? While the traveling salesman, Maria Anna's brother, would offer a prima facie case of incest, this was still one step removed from Himmler's real objective for it would make the father, Alois, the incestuary, rather than Adolf.

On the other hand, if Maria Anna had conceived Alois with Johann Nepomuk, then Himmler's thesis would be significantly strengthened. For Klara Hiedler, the young woman who would yet become Alois' third wife, was not only Adolf Hitler's mother, but also the grand-daughter of Johann Nepomuk. So, if Alois was Nepomuk's son, then Klara was nothing less than Alois' niece! An uncle and a niece, Alois and Klara, had conceived our Fuehrer. This would make a solid presentation. Moreover, I knew how to embellish it for Heini. My final scenario offered carnal flavor: Maria Anna Schicklgruber and Johann Nepomuk Hiedler had, we declared, entered into copulation on the exact day she came back from Graz for a visit. Nepomuk, who lived some distance away in Spital, happened to be visiting Strones,

and went to the straw for his hour with Maria Anna. She became pregnant on the spot. Nepomuk could not question the news, for the act had been out of the ordinary. Indeed, she told him as soon as she regained her breath, "You have given me a baby. I swear it. I felt it!"

As my scenario was also ready to explain, Johann Nepomuk loved his wife, he loved his three daughters, and he would never disrupt his home. Notwithstanding, he was ready to see the matter from Maria Anna's point of view. He was a decent man. So, he encouraged her to tell her parents that she was receiving money from Graz, but he, Johann Nepomuk, would be the one to provide steady sums for their boy. So, she told her family that money came each month from Graz, but no one ever saw the envelopes.

Maria Anna put up with the situation, but how could she be content? After five years had elapsed, she told Nepomuk she would have to confess the real story. It was humiliating, she told him, to face the women of Strones each time she left her door holding a five-year-old by the hand.

Nepomuk proposed that his older brother Georg be installed instead as her spouse. Nepomuk did not like his brother, and Georg did not like Nepomuk, but a new source of money is life's blood to a drunk. I

exaggerate, but not by much. Georg married Maria Anna for her stipend and enjoyed the knowledge that it came from Nepomuk who worked even harder in his fields to gather the extra Kronen. For Georg, it was a rare pleasure to use the hard labor of a younger brother to support his dissipations. He did possess a fund of ugly spirit. A perfect fury full of failure.

Maria Anna, wed at last, wanted a husband who was ready to say he was Alois' father, but Georg proved quick to tell her that she was interfering in a matter involving his personal honor. If he had managed in the course of many a spree to inform a few of his drinking companions just why he had gotten married—for the money, dimwit!—he saw all the more reason to make no fool of himself by legitimizing this brat who everyone knew was not his own. He might be a drunkard and a failure, but he was certainly not a cuckold. Let this bastard remain a bastard!

Such was the legend I presented to Himmler. It was buttressed by interviews I worked up with those few of the very old inhabitants of Strones who were born before our drunk, Johann Georg Hiedler, died in 1857. The links, if examined closely, were too rusty a chain to secure the story, but

Himmler liked these conclusions and so they held up. I had delivered a family history in which there was no Jew in the Fuehrer's bloodstream, and his father and mother were uncle and niece by blood. Thereby, I had thereby succeeded in making Adolf Hitler a First Degree Incestuary One-step-removed.

Himmler had an epiphany. "This," he said, "more than anything else, reveals the incredible bravery and fortitude of the Fuehrer. As I have often pointed out, early death or serious malformation is the most likely prognostication for First-Degree Incestuaries, but once again the Fuehrer has shown us his incomparable powers of perseverance. Genius and Will, his unique properties of character, derive from the rare intensification found in First Degree Incestuaries, even when they are one step removed. We have been blessed with the triumphant result. Our Fuehrer's agrarian genes fortified through the generations has found a triumphant metamorphosis into his transcendent virtues."

Here, Himmler closed his eyes, leaned back, and exhaled slowly. It was as if he must expel every errant spirit in his lungs. "I will not speak to you of this again," he went on with a low voice, "but occasions of close incest

are truly perilous. One has need of the Fuehrer's Will to succeed in such a situation." (I capitalize Will since he used the word with reverence.) "It is my belief that in the world of numinous spirits surrounding us, there are many elements we are right to call malign. It is even possible that the worst of these spirits collect about a presence whom in earlier times we used to speak of as Satan. This embodiment, should it exist, of a devil or, let me say, the Devil, would certainly be ready to pay great attention to Incestuaries of advanced degree. For indeed, how could such an Evil One not be eager to distort the exceptional possibilities that arise from the doubling of God-given genes? All the more power to Herr Hitler, then. He has actually been able, I would declare, to stand firm with the Vision in the face of the Devil himself."

Little did Himmler know that his remarks could be multiplied by an order of magnitude. I had not been promulgating a false legend, but an irony. For the story I had concocted out of no more than barely feasible evidence happened to be true. It was Johann Nepomuk Hiedler who did supply the money and Alois Schicklgruber was his secret child. Yet the irony within this irony was that Alois' son, Adolf Hitler was not merely a

First Degree Incestuary One-step- removed, but had been conceived in the very center of incest. The niece, Klara Poelzl Hitler, Alois' third wife and Adolf Hitler's mother, was not only Alois' wife but also his blood daughter. Of that relationship, I can soon offer many details.

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To fulfill such a promise, I must now expand this memoir and commence a family history much as if I were a conventional novelist of the old school. I will enter the thoughts of Johann Nepomuk, as well as many of the insights of his illegitimate son, Alois Hitler, and I will also include the feelings of Alois' three wives, and his children.

We are finished, however, with Maria Anna Schicklgruber. That unhappy mother perished in 1847 at the age of fifty-two, ten years after the birth of Alois. The cause was termed "phthisis on account of dropsy of the chest," a galloping consumption she contracted after sleeping in the cattle-trough through her last two winters. The collateral cause was rage. Toward

the end, she thought often of how healthy she had been at the age of nineteen, her body quick, her singing voice praised for its beauty. She was the soloist of the parish choir in Doellersheim, which had the nearest church to Strones. But now, having suffered under the curse of three decades of lost anticipations, she was full of the added fury that Georg had brought to their occasional couplings. He, like many a drunk before him, succeeded, however, in outliving everyone's assumption that his death would come early. After her demise, he actually kept going for ten more years. Drink had been not only his nemesis but his dear medicine, and, only at the last, his executioner. He went in a day. They called it apoplexy. Having never bothered to visit Nepomuk or Alois, he was not missed, but by then, Alois was twenty and working in Vienna.

For that matter, Alois had not suffered unduly when his mother was lost. Spital, where he lived with Johann Nepomuk and the wife and three daughters of the Hiedler family, was a long walk from Strones, and he had come close to forgetting Maria Anna. He was happy with his new family. In the beginning, Nepomuk's daughters, Johanna, Walpurga, and Josefa, then twelve, ten, and eight, were delighted to have a five-year-old brother,

and took him gladly into their bedroom. Since Spital was a full-sized village rather than a hamlet, a separation between prosperous and poor had begun to appear. A farmer could even be considered well-off—at least in his own town. There were a few such in Spital, Johann Nepomuk being the first. The wife, Eva, kept a good home. She was also most practical. If she had a suspicion that Nepomuk might actually be more than a stepfather to the boy, she could not, on the other hand, forget the disappointment in his eyes each time she gave birth to a girl. It was probably better for all concerned to have a boy in the house. Yes, she was practical.

And Alois was loved! By his father, by the girls, even by Eva. He was good-looking, and like his own mother, he could sing. As he grew older, he also demonstrated that he was ready to work in the fields. For a time, Johann Nepomuk even contemplated leaving the farm to him, but there was no balance to count on in his character. He was restless. He might not always be there to take care of whatever unforeseen obstacle, large or small, might settle unexpectedly upon the daily work. In contrast, Johann Nepomuk had so much love for his labors that on the best of days he felt as if he could hear the murmurs of the earth. While he was not at ease

with the long silences that hovered over the end of afternoon, a spell would often enter his dreams by evening. The sum of his fields, his sheds, his beasts and his barn became a creature equal to a demanding woman, cavernous, haunting, smelly, greedy, needy, ever extracting more from him. He would awake in full recognition that he could never leave the farm to Alois—Alois was the child of the woman in the dream. So, he gave up the notion. He had to. Such a gift would enrage his wife. She wanted a good future for her daughters, and the farm might not provide more than two respectable dowries.

Over the years, new problems presented themselves concerning these dowries. For the first marriage, the oldest daughter, Johanna, was given only a pinched share of the land. But she had, after all, chosen to marry a poor man, a hard-working but unlucky farmer named Poelzl. When it came to the dowry for the second daughter, Walpurga, who was already twenty-one, Nepomuk was obliged to be more generous. The putative bridegroom, Josef Romeder, was a strong fellow from a prosperous farm in Ober-Windhag, the next village, and negotiations over the size of Walpurga's dowry were stiff. In the end, Nepomuk deeded over the richest portion of

his land. That left only a modest tract for the third daughter, Josefa, who was sickly and spinsterish. As for Eva and himself, he kept a fine small lodging in an orchard at the border of what was now Romeder's property. But the small house in the orchard was enough. He was ready to retire. Given the length and heat of the negotiations over the dowry, the ceremony to transfer the lands proved as much of an event as the wedding that had just taken place.

Nepomuk led his new son-in-law around the property, boundary line by boundary line, and stopped before every marker that established a separation between his fields and the land of the next farmer. Nepomuk would say, "And if on any day you gather fruit from this man's orchard, even the fallen fruit, may you labor under a black sky." After which he would give Josef Romeder a clout to the head. At each of those eight separate jogs along the boundary line, he repeated the act. Johann Nepomuk was full of the kind of woe that hangs like a dead-weight on one's back. He was not mourning the transfer of his farm so much as the absence of Alois. His dear adopted son Alois was not there because Johann Nepomuk had banished him three years earlier when the boy was thirteen

and Walpurga eighteen. He had discovered them in the hay-loft of his barn, and it caused him to think of the other barn where he had gone to the straw with Maria Anna on the afternoon that Alois had been conceived. A memory of the glory of this act of love with Maria Anna Schicklgruber had never left him. He had had only two women in his life and Maria was the second, and not at all a village wench to him, coarse-grained and ass-bare in the hay, but a Madonna lit by sunlight, an image he had earlier acquired by way of the stained-glass window of the church in Spital. This image never failed to enlarge his estimate of the volume of his sin. He was living in sacrilege, that he knew, and yet he would not relinquish the image of Maria Anna's face in the stained-glass window. It was reason enough not to go to confession too often, and when he did go—because he knew he must—he would invent other sins for the booth, large ones. One time, he even confessed to coition with the farm mare, a deed he had never attempted—one does not make love to a large horse for too little!—and the priest in return asked how many times he had committed this sin. “Only once, Father.”

“When was that? How long ago?”

"Months, months I think."

"And how do you feel now when you work with the animal? Are there similar urges?"

"No, never. I am ashamed for myself."

The priest was middle-aged and had little to learn about the peasantry, so he could sense that Nepomuk was lying. Nonetheless, his preference was that the account be true because bestial sodomy, while as mortal a sin as adultery or incest, was to his mind less grievous. It would, after all, produce no offspring. He proceeded, therefore, to exercise his office without further questioning.

"You have degraded yourself as a child of God," he told Nepomuk, "you have committed a serious sin of lust. You have injured an innocent animal. For your penance I give you five hundred Our Fathers and five hundred Hail Marys."

That was identical to the penance he had given earlier that morning to a schoolboy who had treated himself to an underhanded spit-in-the-palm masturbation in class (a most stealthy act!) and then rubbed his spit and semen on the hair of the boy in front of him, a small boy.

Johann Nepomuk contented himself afterward by confessing to the same priest upon occasion that he still had lewd thoughts concerning the mare, but was careful to do nothing about it. That took care of confession, but the continuing absence of Alois caused Johann Nepomuk Hiedler to live in an agony of love. He had wept like a Biblical father and tore his shirt when he found his son and daughter in the straw. He knew that he had just lost the boy. The brightest light of nearly every one of his days, that lively young face, would have to leave. To the shock of the other women in the family, Alois was sent away that night to a neighbor's house and in the morning was put on a coach to Vienna.

Nepomuk did not tell Eva, but then, he did not have to, because Walpurga, at her father's insistence, was kept at home for the next three years. The young woman's marriage with Romeder, empty of courtship, had to be arranged. Yet Eva, while as alert to the chastity of her daughters as a drill sergeant studying the precision of his platoon on dress parade, would still nag Nepomuk to allow Walpurga to walk on Sunday with a girl friend.

"No," Nepomuk would say. "The two of them will wander into the woods. Then boys will follow them."

On the day he stalked the boundary line with Romeder, he was burdened each time he struck his daughter's new husband. What an injustice he was doing to his new son-in-law. Ergo, he hit him harder. A marriage was being founded on a lie. Therefore, it was crucial no trespasses be made on the land of the neighbor. That would be a sacrilege against the earth. How Nepomuk mourned the absence of his son!

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Alois did well in Vienna. With his good and agreeable face, he was taken on as novice in a shop that made cavalry boots for officers.

He now served young men who carried themselves as if their bodies, their uniforms, their decorations, their footwear and their souls had all been fabricated by some awesome source. Their confidence in their personal appearance had much to offer Alois. These men, he observed, were so at ease with the beautifully dressed ladies they escorted. On Sundays, he would rarely miss watching their promenade. The women's hats were so finely wrought. He had the passing thought that if he met a young milliner, they could open a shop and young couples of the best and highest classes

would visit their store hand in hand. Splendid boots, stylish hats. It was the only business concept he was to have for many a year, but he did play with such a dream because beautiful ladies stimulated him. He loved young women. He had had such contentment playing with his stepsisters, which is to say, as only Nepomuk knew, his half-sisters.

He met no young milliner, however, and the idea gave way to a better one. He could never be a cavalry officer since that depended on being born into a proper family, and he came from a place where more was known about a pig's habits than the scent a man should put upon his handkerchief. Alois would not aspire to what was not there. But one thing he knew—he was able to live on good terms with Vienna. No one back in Spital had been as ready to improve himself. Early on, then, he understood his own ambition—he wanted to spend his life in a decent uniform, and be admired for his posture.

At the age of eighteen, after five years in the boot shop, he applied to the Austrian Finance Ministry for a position in the Customs, and was accepted. By another five years, he had risen to the rank of Finanzwach Oberaufseher (Finance-Watch High Overseer) which was equal to no more

than Corporal, but already the uniform was impressive, and for that matter, it usually took ten years to rise even to this level, especially if you joined the Service with no connections.

He had written on several occasions to tell Johann Nepomuk of his progress, and at last, in 1858, a letter came back. Nepomuk's youngest daughter, Josefa, had died, a great blow to the family, and Nepomuk hinted that he would like Alois to visit.

In 1859, he returned to Spital looking exceptionally tall for a man of medium height: In the eyes of his family, his bearing was authoritative. He actually looked well-born.

It did not take long for Johann Nepomuk to realize that he had made a serious mistake in inviting Alois to visit, but Nepomuk was as bent by now as a tree that has faced too much wind for too many years. The death of Josefa throbbed in his side like the slash of an axe. He felt too tired to keep watch on Alois.

Indeed, what could he do? Johanna, the oldest daughter, seven years older than Alois, had been married at the age of eighteen, and for the last eleven years had been faithful to her husband, Johann Poelzl who usually

kept her pregnant. She had once been agreeable in appearance. Now her hands and feet were raw and her features had thickened from bearing six children and then but living with the memory of the first four. (They had all died early.)

If Johanna had once been cheerful in spirit, this state, long eroded, revived at the sight of Alois. He had been her darling when he first came to the house. She used to fondle the five-year-old whenever she brought him to sleep in her bed. Through the years until he left, she would pull his hair and kiss his cheek, until once when he was eight and she was fifteen, they had begun to roll together in the hay of the barn pretending to wrestle. But he was only eight and nothing had taken place.

This time, no question. At the first opportunity which proved to be the only one, Alois continued his father's tradition of apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw, and Klara Poelzl was conceived. There was no question in Johanna's mind. Each time, she had known the moment when Johann Poelzl, her husband, had put a child in her. But this occasion was superior. No small event took place in her body. "You have made me feel as I have not felt before," she said when they were done, and when Klara

was born, Johanna sent him a letter that he received in the midst of rigorous training for an examination to bring him up to Finanzwach-Respizienten, the highest position available to the lower ranks of the customs service. His attention, therefore, was not on Spital. Still, her letter lived with him through the years. It was only three words long (three words that Johanna had been certain of spelling correctly) and he read it over many times. "Sie ist hier," wrote Johanna in the pride of a momentous event (although she did not sign her name) and "She is here" took its place in the guardroom of his heart even if Alois' mind was on his career. In truth, he might not even have made love to Johanna on that visit if he had not already been with Walpurga all those years ago, and a year earlier with the youngest, Josefa, his favorite back when he was twelve (his first) and so he felt he owed it to himself now to have the remaining sister—how many men could boast of knowing three sisters so closely?

If he could measure himself by such deeds, it was in relation to the accomplishments of other low-rank officers in the Finance-Watch. His rise was remarkable for a young man with so sparse an education. Nonetheless, in four more years, he had another promotion, and still another by 1870

when at the age of thirty-three, he had worked himself up to Customs Collector. By 1875, he was Full Inspector and would write below his signature, on any government paper, the full weight and address of the title: "Official of the First Class Imperial Customs Post in the Railroad Terminal, Simbach, Bavaria. Residence, Braunau, Linzergasse."

All through his rise toward the highest official rank that was open for a man of his beginnings, he never relinquished any of his good appetite for women. The first principle of Austrian bureaucracy was to do your job, but the more effective you became at such tasks, the less you had to fear for the little indulgences of your private life. This understanding he obeyed to the letter, and had an agreeable time. In those years, no matter where assigned, he would stay at an inn. Before long, given his confidence, he would proceed to conquer the loosely defended bastions of the cooks and chambermaids in the hostelry. When he had gone through all of the available women, he would usually move to another large inn. Through the forty years of his career, his change of residence was frequent. In Braunau, for example, he moved twelve times. Nor did it bother him that his women were not elegant enough to walk with cavalry officers. Not at all! Elegant

women, he had come to decide, were too difficult—no doubt of that—whereas maids and cooks were grateful for his attention and would raise no ruckus when he moved on.

In 1873, he married a widow. Having developed an eye for the social stature attached to any woman presuming to pass for a lady—his occupation demanded, after all, some ability in that direction—he was not dissatisfied with his choice. He might be thirty-six and the widow already fifty, yet he could respect her. She came from a worthy family. She might not be good-looking, but she was the daughter of an official in the Hapsburg tobacco monopoly that produced a share of the Crown's income, and the size of her dowry was agreeable. They lived well, they had a personal maid. His own salary was, by now, substantial—the principal of the highest public school in Braunau did not earn more. As his rank increased, so did his uniform generate an increase in gold trim and gold-plated buttons, and his cocked hat was entitled to sprout elegant official embroidery. His mustache was now worthy of a titled Hungarian, and his face came at you, jaw-first. His inferiors at the Customs Post were told they were always to use his correct title when speaking to him. With it all, he was putting on weight. Soon

after his marriage, and very much at his wife's urging, he shaved his mustache and grew sideburns on each side of his face. Given the care he afforded them, they soon became as imposing as castle-gates. Now, he not only looked like a customs official in the service of the Hapsburgs, but he even resembled Franz Josef himself! There he was, a fair facsimile of the emperor, a full expression of duty, hard work, and an imperial face.

His wife, Anna Glassl-Hoerer, had lost, however, her appeal for him. This deficit occurred some two years into the marriage when he discovered that she, too, was an orphan and had been adopted. In turn, she also lost respect for his presence when he (grown weary of making up stories about an imaginary and somewhat fabulous Herr Schicklgruber, his father) confessed that there was no such man on the parental side of his natal ledger, merely a blank.

She began her campaign. Alois was to legitimize himself. His mother, after all, had been married. Why could that not be taken to mean Johann Georg Hiedler was the father? Alois knew it was unlikely, but now that Anna Glassl was making it an issue, he was not averse. He had, after all, never enjoyed his last name, and Anna Glassl was not necessarily wrong

when she judged that his career, despite its success, had been obliged to deal every day with the sound of Schicklgruber.

He travelled from Braunau through Weitra to Spital in order to see if Johann Nepomuk would help him. The old man, now turned seventy, misunderstood at first. When Alois told him that he wanted his last name changed to what it should be—Hiedler!—Johann Nepomuk's heart passed through a scalding shame. He thought he was being named as the father. Immediately he was ready to argue that at this late date, what with his two remaining married daughters to think of, plus the grandchildren, and his remaining part of the farm, (plus his wife Eva to say the least!) how could he declare himself Alois' father? These excuses, however, did not reach his mouth. At the last instant, he realized that Alois was only asking for Johann Georg to be named as his sire. Whereupon—old men being as ready as young girls to move on the instant from one extreme of emotion to the other—he was furious at Alois. His own son did not want him, Nepomuk, to be thought of as the father. It took another moment to recognize that Georg, having married Maria Anna, was the only one who could be used legally for this venture.

In a farm cart, pulled by two old horses, he journeyed with Alois and Romeder and two neighbors who had agreed to serve as witnesses all of the miles from Spital to Strones, then further on a few miles to Doellersheim, all of it close to a four-hour journey on a narrow meandering carriage-road full of many fallen limbs and a few uprooted trees, but still reasonably free of mud on this October day. (With mud, it might have taken eight hours). On arrival, Johann Nepomuk came face to face with the particular priest he had no wish to remember. There he was, a very old priest now, shrunken in stature, and smaller in station (for Doellersheim parish was not comparable to Spital), yet here was the very priest who had scolded him for traffic with the vulva of a mare.

This recollection was shared by the two men even if not at all acknowledged. (There was not the smallest shift of expression between them.) They were all there for the business at hand, Alois, Nepomuk, Romeder, and the two witnesses they had brought along from Strones. Since none of them but Alois knew how to write, the others signed the document with an XXX. They said they had known Georg Heidler and that

“in their presence and repeatedly” he had admitted to being the father of this child. The mother had stated the same. They swore to that.

The priest could see that, legally speaking, very little was correct. Each of the witnesses' hands had shaken with a good bit of godly fear as they put down their XXX. One of them, the son-in-law, Romeder, could not have been five years old when Anna Maria died. Of course, she would have told all to the five-year-old! Moreover, Johann Georg was also long dead. Given such a dubious case, a more careful proceeding would be appropriate.

The priest did what he had been doing for years—he certified the paper, even as he kept smiling with his old and toothless mouth. He knew they were lying.

He would not, however, insert the date. On the yellow page of the old parish registry of June 1, 1837, he crossed out “illegitimate,” put Johann Georg's name in what had previously been the blank space, and smiled again. Legally speaking, the document was shaky, but it did not matter. Which church authority in Vienna would challenge such an alteration? The word was to encourage certified fatherhood no matter how late in life it arrived. Already in some districts of Austria, illegitimacy was up to forty

births per hundred. Of that forty, could even half be free of one or another unmentionable family matter? So, the priest, disapproving of these loose procedures even if he was bound to approve them, chose not to inscribe his own name. If it ever went wrong, he could disavow the paper.

Then, he spelled each of the witnesses' names by choice inasmuch as there was no agreement on orthography from province to province, (one reason why Hiedler eventually became Hitler.)

Now that Alois had his new name, he decided to stop off for an hour in Spital rather than continue on immediately in Nepomuk's cart to the railroad station at Weitra. The change from Schicklgruber to Hiedler was sufficiently agreeable for him to feel an upsurge in the happy region below his navel. This, from long experience, was, he knew, one of the gifts his nature had given him. He was as quick as a hound to sense when female company was near.

Was it Johanna who had put him on the alert? She did live next door to her father, and at this moment Alois glimpsed a woman looking out the window. But, no, that could not be Johanna. This woman looked older than his wife. Now, he was in no hurry to visit.

Yet his steps took him to the door. Once again, the Hound had not betrayed him. For there in the doorway might be Johanna, prematurely deep into middle age, but beside her was a girl of sixteen. She was the same height as himself with the nicest and most agreeable features, modest, well-formed, with a good head of abundant dark hair and the bluest eyes he had ever seen—they were as blue as the light that once reflected from a large diamond he had seen behind a glass in a museum exhibit.

So soon as he separated himself from the powerful hug and whole set of steamy kisses Johanna left with her honest saliva on his mouth, he took off his cocked hat and bowed. "This is your Uncle Alois," Johanna said to her daughter, "he is a wonderful man." She turned back to him and added, "You look better than ever—there is even more to the uniform now, yes?" And she pulled her daughter to her. "Here is Klara."

Johanna began to weep. Klara was her seventh child. Of the others, four were now dead, one was a hunchback, and her son, now nineteen, the oldest remaining, had consumption. "God never ceases punishing us for our sins," she said, at which Klara nodded.

Alois had no desire to hear about God. Spend a little time with Him, and the Hound could moan for shame. He preferred to enjoy the thought that he might soon see more of this niece.

He took a walk outside the village with the mother and daughter. They went to that part of Nepomuk's fields which now belonged to the husband, Johann Poelzl, who—no surprise to Alois—bore no resemblance to this rare blue-eyed Klara. Poelzl had gray clouded eyes and a face full of lines that drooped in concert with a sad nose. It was obvious that he had given up the once-enduring hope that sooner or later he would be certain to prosper because he was an honest farmer. Nor did Alois stay. Poelzl had the expression on his face of a man who still has a host of chores. On this day, scattered in the rows of stubble, were stray ears of corn not yet too rotten to feed to the pigs, and Poelzl stood on one foot and then the other (as if to talk for another two minutes would allow more of the remaining ears to spoil.) If he was also discomforted by the implicit prosperity of Alois' uniform, Poelzl's mood took no happier turn when Alois remarked that his own wife was not well and needed a maid who was pious, and of reliable

breeding. Was it possible—not to rush things!—that Klara might be just that person?

Poelzl could hardly say no when he was told of the amount his daughter would be able to send back. Cash not dependent on a crop was the best of crops, and, as always, he needed money. The alternative—to borrow further sums from his brother-in-law Romeder or his father-in-law Nepomuk, was unpleasant. Poelzl could hear the diatribe that would come from his wife's family. Johanna's disposition had become so sour that he often thought (very much in private) her blood must taste like vinegar. Nor did he wish to listen to the loud sigh of his brother-in-law as Romeder came up with some Kronen. He certainly didn't want to hear the advice that would come from Nepomuk. That would insult his judgment. A farmer could have fine instincts for husbandry and still be prey to bad luck—did that mean he must pay tribute twice by listening to others when he had already paid once by living with an insufficient return from his fields? So, he accepted the fact that Klara would go to work for Uncle Alois, but his feelings turned over in him with the emptiest anger of them all—rage that has lost its heat.

One week after Alois' return to his post in Braunau, Klara followed with a small chest filled with a modest cache of clothes and a few possessions.

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Alois and Anna Glassl had three rooms in the second-best inn of Braunau—the Gasthaus Streif. There was also a small room for Klara on the top floor where other maids and servants slept.

For a while, Alois entertained the happy notion that he might be able to spend a little time up there with Klara, but his niece did not welcome him, not exactly. It was evident to all including his wife that Klara was steeped in respect for her exceptional uncle, but it seemed no cause for concern to Anna Glassl—not yet! The girl was pious to a degree that would have seemed incomprehensible if one did not understand that death was her nearest relative. There were lights in those pale-blue eyes that spoke of

angels—godly angels and fallen angels. Her face was so innocent that one could ask in all honesty what she could know of fallen angels if not for that second sense which is there to tell us that devils hover like moths at the closing doors of life. Even the innocent do not always like to dream of the departed.

Alois could envision other dubious portals—the doors to Klara's chastity might open to an ice-house. So, he was charming to his niece, but made a point never to touch her. His wife, as unhappy by now as a crow with a broken wing, had put up early with his yen for maids and cooks, but then, about the time she began her campaign to expunge the name of Schicklgruber, she allowed her distrust of him to take on new force. Never had Alois encountered jealousy so passionate, so far-ranging, and so much to the point.

While he considered his first quality as a man to be dedication to his work—to the cleanliness of his personal appearance, to the neatness and well-written dispatch of his official papers, and every evidence he could give of his high respect for punctuality and performance in each and every working hour, he took equal pride in his skill as a customs inspector. He

had not stood for years at a border post looking to root out the attempts of travelers and merchants to cheat the Hapsburg Crown of its tariff without learning a good deal about false presentation and outright mendacity, and now he was having to exercise such abilities himself in order to divert Anna from another girl he had taken to visiting on the top floor of the inn.

There was an old Viennese joke that to have a flourishing society, both the police and the thieves must constantly get better at what they did. He thought often of the remark. It was true for Anna Glassl and himself. The more acute her sense of what he might be up to, the finer were his lies.

She had cause for distrust. There were days when he made love to each of the three women he could look upon as regulars. In the morning, full of the bounty of sleep, he would take care of his wife, and in the afternoon when Anna Glassl was napping and his off-duty time coincided with an hour when the chambermaid washed their floors, he usually enjoyed the coquetry of her hips as she, down on her hands and knees, slung a wet cloth from side to side—truth, he rarely saw her face at such times. And in the evening after Anna Glassl had gone to sleep, there was Fanni.

So if he was ready to wait for Klara Poelzl, it was because his nocturnal, and for the present, true interest was with this waitress at the inn, a nineteen-year-old named Fanni Matzelsberger, who was voluptuous but lithe, and—by every good measure—smoldering. He had learned to strip his eyes of all expression when she crossed the room, but she did have an irrepressible turn to her hips that spoke to him—Fanni was a good girl who did not want to be so good.

Indeed, as he soon learned by visits to her attic room, she was a virgin of the most tormented sort—a maiden in the old peasant tradition: She had kept the formal entrance to her chastity intact but the same could not be said of its neighbor. This was not all so agreeable for Alois. The Hound was too large to permit a good poke into “the smelly and the damned,” (or so he would characterize it). Fanni would moan in a very low voice (in order that the rest of the attic not hear) but they were both suffering. All the more intense became their embrace. In the heat of the hour, they loved each other, a not uncommon reaction when the carnal ore can be considered contraband.

He told himself that she was no more than a good-looking daughter of a prosperous farmer—she did have a decent dowry—but he also told her that he loved her. She said, “Enough to give up your wife and live with me?”

“I will give her up,” he said, “when you give me something else!”

No, she must remain a virgin. So soon as she was ready to do what he wanted, there would be a child. She knew. Then, there would be another child. Then she very well might die.

“How do you decide such things?”

“We have gypsies in my family. Maybe I am a witch.”

“What a remark!”

“No, you are a bad man and I am a witch. Only witches put their mouths in forbidden places. Now, I am afraid to go to confession.”

“Stay away from priests. They are there to suck your blood. They are the ones who will leave you weak and good for nothing.”

They argued round and round about whether she should or should not go to confession. She was tempted to let him win, and then, given the force of his desire, she did give it to him, she gave it up, and proceeded to tell him

one month later that she was pregnant. Had the time come, she asked, to tell his wife?

He no longer trusted Fanni. He did not think she would have become pregnant if she was really afraid of dying. Besides, he had been lying to his wife with so much skill that now he did not dare to confess. Prevarication, like honesty, is reflexive, and soon becomes a sturdy habit, as reliable as truth itself. Anna Glassl-Hoerer Hitler was fifty-seven and looked ten years older (although to his continuing surprise she could be a virago at dawn.) To lose her would reduce his financial situation measurably. Moreover, he would be giving up a lady for a farm-girl, a most attractive farm-girl, but then he had decided long ago that in the end, a peasant was like a stone. Throw a stone high in the air—it will always come down. Whereas a lady was like a feather. A lady could tantalize you with her intelligence. He would hate to give up his ever-increasing skill as a liar.

Here is a sample from the dining room at the Gasthaus Streif:

Anna Glassl: I see you are looking at her again.

Alois: I am. You have caught me. If your eyes were not so beautiful, I would have to say that you own the eyes of an eagle.

Anna Glassl: Why don't you catch up with her after we eat? Just give her a good one for me.

Alois: Your mind is wicked. I like it when your tongue is so crude.

Anna Glassl: Cruder than it used to be.

Alois: Anna, you are exceptionally wise, but, in this case, you are wrong.

Anna Glassl: Look, my dear, I have put up with chambermaids and cooks. You have come to bed smelling of onions on many a night. And that is better than sniffing laundry soap. But I don't care, I tell myself. The man must remain amused. Only, why do you still try to insult my intelligence? We know the girl is beautiful. At least once in your life make love to a waitress who does not look like last night's pudding.

Alois: All right, I will tell you the truth. I like her looks, yes, a little bit. Although she is not truly my type. No, she is not. But in any case, I would not go near her. One hears the worst talk. I don't even want to tell you because you like her.

Anna Glassl: Like her? She's a tart. She's a tart in training. Your true type.

Alois: No, she is diseased. I have heard that she has an infectious disease between her legs. I would not go near her.

Anna Glassl: I do not believe you. I cannot believe that.

Alois: Do as you choose. But, I can promise you, she is the last girl for you to worry about.

Anna Glassl: Who then do you want me to worry about? Klara?

Alois: You have a splendid sense of humor. If we were not in public, I would laugh out loud, and then you know what I would do.

You are so attractive, so wicked. You would even send me out to kiss a nun.

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Finally, Fanni told Anna Glassl that she was two months pregnant and soon to show. For Anna, that was the end of the marriage. For Alois to tell her that the girl had a disease! When he knew she was pregnant! Unforgivable! Besides, Anna Glassl was more tired of Alois by now than of her fear of living alone. It was truly exhausting to muster up her remaining arts in order to pretend to be a virago at dawn. By now, she craved peace. She even decided that her jealousy had been some last inoculation against what was worse—precisely the chill distaste for a mate that seeps in even as jealousy loses heat. So, she moved out. Since they were Catholic, divorce was not possible. To obtain even a legal separation, Anna, by Austrian law,

had to declare not only their incompatibility but state in writing that she felt direct aversion to him. Alois was obliged to read this. The phrase stood out in the document like a boil on one's chin. It irked so much that he showed his copy to drinking friends. "Look, she speaks of a personal aversion. This is nothing less than outrageous. If not improper, I could tell you how much aversion was there. On her hands and knees so soon as I would say, 'Get ready.'"

They would laugh and move to other subjects. He was in a state of irritation these days for more reasons than Anna Glassl's departure. Fanni and he were now living together in the same suite of rooms at the Gasthaus Streif. That was fine with him—he was the first to say that he was never attached to the past. Then he discovered that Fanni was not pregnant—she had only thought she might be. Or was it that she had had an early miscarriage? She was resolutely unclear.

He thought that was a terrible lie to have told him, but what could he do? He had never known such pleasure with a woman. Of course, Fanni was soon as jealous as Anna Glassl, and her ears had perfect pitch when it came to hearing any trace of desire in his voice for another woman. Soon

enough, she stove a hole in the well-guarded vessel of his future plans.

Klara, she told him, would have to go. Otherwise, Fanni would.

This was too much disruption for Alois. Fanni would soon be truly pregnant, or so he expected given the hints he took from the declarative surge of her womb at the happiest moment, all of which billowed through him even as he was rushing full stream into her—not the sort of conclusion he usually came to with other women. (Except once—so long ago—with Johanna.) Besides, he was certainly ready for a child, preferably a son, to carry on his name. Yes, when he was not in the midst of his best moments with Fanni, he thought often of the oncoming time when she would be six or seven months along, and it would be Klara's turn. The likelihood of future complications did not deter him. It was in the nature of his work to be able to handle more than one problem at once.

As for scandal, he did not worry. Not unduly. In Braunau, he was used to being a center of gossip. The townspeople might as well complain to the stars above that he was living with a common-law wife. For practical purposes, he saw himself as equal to a soldier garrisoned in a town to which he owed nothing. He received his money from the Finance-Watch in

Vienna. So long as his work proved flawless, this far-away arm of the Hapsburg government would hardly care how he acted in his personal life.

Having risen to the highest level of the middle ranks, there he would probably remain. His job was secure. The Customs needed him. After all, it took years for an official to become as practiced as himself. In turn, he needed the Customs. How could he ever find another job that paid as well? He had developed into the perfect instrument for what he did, but that was not a skill to be used for anything else. He was fixed therefore into his job, and the Finance Watch was locked in with him. So, devil take the townspeople. What they said might rankle, but it would not interfere with more interesting pursuits. One girl would bear his child, and the niece (who trembled in front of him when he spoke) would become his mistress. Of course, she would be more than ready when the time came. Why else did she quiver? It was because the niece knew he could teach her all the things she did not know, and did not even dare to think about.

This was the secret project into which Fanni intruded. No girl named Klara was going to keep working for them.

"You are mad," Alois answered. "Can't you see? Klara would be happier in a convent."

"Your interest is not in her happiness, but yours. She must go."

"Do not speak to me that way. You are young enough to be my daughter."

"Yes, I am, and I have heard the Polish people say that a father should never make love to his daughter or she will lose all respect for him."

Klara had to go. He could not relinquish what he now had in Fanni, not for the uncertain promise (when all was said) of a transformation from angel-nun to all-compliant madly-loving niece. No, that was hardly guaranteed.

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After Klara left, it was Fanni who suffered the most. Gone, now, were the confidences they had offered to each other. There had been much for both to learn—they were so close and so different. It ended, however, because Klara was not good at lying. She turned beet-red with embarrassment when Fanni would hint at what went on between Uncle Alois and herself. (Klara having called him Uncle, Fanni had taken on the habit.)

“Confess,” Fanni would say, “you, too, want to be in bed with our Uncle.”

"No," Klara would reply, and feel as if her cheeks would blotch if she did not tell the truth. "There are times, yes, when, yes, please, I want that. But you must know I won't, I never will."

"Why?"

"Because he is with you."

"Ach, that," said Fanni, "would not stop me for a minute."

"Maybe you, no," said Klara, "but I would be punished."

"This is something you know?"

"Please, I know."

"Maybe you don't," said Fanni. "I told Uncle I would die if I let him give me a baby, but now I think in this other way. I want a baby, I am near to having a baby."

"You will," said Klara. "And trust me. I would never be with Uncle Alois. You are his woman. That is my vow."

They kissed, but there was something within the aroma of the kiss that Fanni could not trust. Klara's lips were firm and full of character, but not completely. That night Fanni had a dream where Alois made love to Klara.

Before she left, Klara wept just a little. "How can you send me away?" she asked. "I gave you my vow."

"Tell me," said Fanni, "what is the foundation of this so-holy promise?"

"I swear it by the peace of my dead brothers and sisters."

It was not the best reply. Fanni had the sudden thought that Klara might also be concealing a witch in herself—she could, after all, have disliked her brothers and sisters, some of them, anyway.

By way of the Finance-Watch, Alois made proper arrangements for Klara in Vienna. She would obtain clean and gainful employment in the house of a modest and elderly lady. (Alois was more than ready to protect her chastity.) So, now, after four years of good and honest work at the inn, sleeping each night in the smallest of the maid's rooms, Klara packed her belongings into the same modest chest she had brought with her on arrival, and left the Gasthaus for new employment in Vienna.

If Fanni was now more at ease with Alois, the best of moods could nonetheless vanish in no more than the interval it took to close her eyes and open them. How could she be certain that her distrust of Klara had been

honest fear? What if it came from spite as cruel as the pain of a bad tooth? She knew she was full of spite. That was why she called herself a witch.

Even as she had foreseen, she was truly pregnant now. If that offered contentment, she continued nonetheless to feel remorse. She had banished the sweetest girl she knew, and so there were days when Fanni was on the edge of asking Klara to return, but then she would think: What if Alois comes to prefer Klara? Then she might not be faithful to her vow. How unfair that would be to the unborn child!

Fourteen months after Anna Glassl received the decree of separation, Fanni gave birth to a boy whom Alois without hesitation named Alois. They could not, however, call him Alois-Junior—not as yet. The name still had to be Alois Matzelsberger, and this bothered Alois Hitler. He went through a period of remembering what he had taken pains to forget—that a child could feel as empty as an empty belly when he had to walk around with no more than his mother's last name. Now, Alois-Senior went to bed every night cursing Anna Glassl.

He was not a man to give all of himself to a curse. He considered such an act equal to spending a private horde of gold. Nonetheless, he

would deliver his curse every night, and it had venom to it. So, he was not all that surprised when Anna died. And most suddenly! This curious event did not occur until fourteen months after Alois' son was born and Fanni was very much pregnant again, but Alois still reckoned that his anathema might have had effect. He saw it as an expensive payment for a necessary conclusion—expensive because there could always be unforeseen consequences.

Indeed, Anna's death certificate stated that the cause was unknown. This convinced Alois that it was suicide. He did not like the thought. He was no superstitious fellow, not, at least, as measured by his disbelief in the near presence of God and the Devil. Rather, as he was ready to explain over a stein of beer, he placed his faith in the solid and intelligent processes of dependable forms of government. God, no matter how august and far away, would look, doubtless, upon government in the same manner that Alois did—as the human fulfillment of divine will, provided such will was exercised by scrupulous officials like himself. Alois had not absorbed this idea from Hegel, Alois had not read a word of Hegel, but then, where was

the need? He and Hegel were in agreement—the power of this idea had to be there for all to breathe. To Alois, it was self-evident.

In accord with such a premise, Alois preferred, therefore, a clear-cut end to death. It could come from a burst appendix or by way of consumption, even as Maria Anna, his own mother, had ended that way. Suicide, however, left him uneasy—he liked to fall asleep quickly (as he put it to his drinking companions) "with a fart and a snore." Anna Glassl committing suicide was one thought to keep him awake. He would have gone to her funeral but he did not care to subject this new nocturnal uneasiness to the sight of her face in the coffin. So Alois stayed away. That was another tasty item for the town's gossip.

All the same, no matter how Anna Glassl had ended, she was, at least, no longer there. So he could marry his common-law wife, his new lady, Franziska Matzelsberger, which he did. The second child was now a good seven months along in the womb, and Fanni's belly was beginning to look as big as the prize melon in a field. He was forty-six, she was twenty-two, and the wedding took place in another town, Ranshofen, four miles away and four more uncomfortable miles back for the pregnant bride.

She had sworn she would not have the ceremony in Braunau. It was not only the eyes of the women. Young men snickered as she went by.

Alois was annoyed. It cost extra to transport by hired carriage the two Customs officers he had invited. This was no serious expenditure but, all the same, needless. Besides, he was disappointed in Fanni. His new wife was not as ready to face other people as she ought to be—look, after all, at the fine husband she had caught.

Moreover, she was a nervous mother—she insisted on having the second baby in Vienna. The midwife would not be as spiteful there, she told him. Who, in her situation, asked Fanni, could trust any woman from Braunau? More expense.

Anna Glassl, with all her faults, had been a lady—he could, he decided reluctantly, never be able to say the same for Fanni. It was not that he expected it of her, not a farmer's daughter, but still she had once shown progress in such directions. Now, it was all going backward. When he first knew her, she moved well, she was quick, she charmed the guests of the inn even as she served them. He thought she was a most witty creature for a waitress.

Now, she yelled at the servants—all the fire in Fanni had gone to her temper. Their rooms at the inn were not properly taken care of. When he suggested that they might call Klara back, Fanni carried on for all of one evening.

“Yes,” she told him, “then you can do to Klara what you did to me. Poor Anna Glassl.”

Poor Anna Glassl! He came to realize that Fanni must now be dreaming about Anna. Could they not move forward as husband and wife? It was not the best marriage, he decided. You should not have to get into the same fight every evening.

She spent two weeks in Vienna before their daughter, Angela, was born, and in that time he had to pay for a nurse to take care of Alois Hitler, Junior. Before the week was out, Senior had seduced the nurse. She was fifteen years older than Fanni, heavy-set, a hard worker once he got her to bed, but he could sleep because she got up in the middle of the night without complaint when the boy was crying for his mother.

Up until then he had been faithful to Fanni. Now, the only way to make the nurse more palatable was for him to alternate her with the cook.

Fanni came back from Vienna looking weak and tired and, before long, knew all about it. She did not scream at him. She wept. She was not well, she confessed, and there he was without patience to wait for sick people to mend. He was a brute, she told him.

They had been living together for close to three years before they could marry, but, now, by the time Angela was a year old, Fanni was seriously ill. Signs of a deepening disorder were everywhere. She would pass from fits of temper, to hysteria, then to loss of interest in his body, plus an incapacity to take proper care of their two children. A doctor told her that she had the beginnings of tuberculosis. Klara was brought back from Vienna to be with Alois-Junior, and with Angela, even as Fanni moved out of the inn to a small town called Lach there in the midst of a forest called Lachenwald, Laughter-in-the-Woods, but neither the name nor the good forest air had the power to restore her. In Lach she stayed for the ten months before her end.