

The Castle in the Forest

1.

You may call me Dieter. That name must do for now—now that I am in America, this curious nation. Time passes here void of stature.

If I call upon the art of patience, it is because I find myself in unfamiliar condition—I am ready for rebellion. The proof is that I am caught up with the awkward notion of doing a novel. It will be a book to consist of no more than an account given by one man to another in a small room at the edge of an uproar. A brouhaha is continuing through the night in a Konzentrationslager, a concentration camp that has just been liberated by American soldiers on the very last day of April, 1945.

As the two men converse, a pistol lies on the table. It belongs to the young American. He is a Jewish psychiatrist, a Captain in rank, a part of

the U.S. forces who reached the camp a few hours ago and were appalled by what they saw.

Despite his uniform, this Jewish officer is very much a pacifist in temperament. So he has done his immediate best to withdraw from the hideousness of the odors, the collective emaciation, the various other appalling sights and pestilential cries of those just-released prisoners. Indeed, he has ordered his opposite number, a resident German psychiatrist of the camp, a man considerably older than himself, to come with him into a small sentry room. There, through the dark hours that seem never to approach first light, they succeed in having a conversation that soon turns into a monologue by the Nazi.

In the course of this intolerably long conversation, as alone with each other as two souls on an island not large enough for three, the senior doctor, this SS Major attached most recently to the camp, attempts to explain his world view. Naturally, this does not occur quickly but, eventually, indeed it does, and for the Jew, it is an immeasurably unhappy experience. The account is fascinating in its details, and startling in its insights. If the SS doctor is rueful occasionally at errors that were made, still he is proud of

psychological explorations he has made into uncharted regions. His sense of superiority to this new-found psychological mate is much too evident.

The conversation is disruptive to the young Jew. Worse! The SS man is an intellectual and not without charm. Despite the downfall of every last one of his visions, he remains tall, quick, and witty. To give a further turn to the screw, he is even troubled by the excesses inherent in his achievements.

At the end of the evening, the young Jewish Captain can no longer listen. Dwelling beneath the pacifist—as one will invariably discover—lives the killer. That is why the person is a pacifist in the first place. Close to a whole loss of control at this assault upon his loyalties, the American unholsters his revolver, cocks it, and kills the SS man.

Such a novel has appeal for me. While I will probably not write it since I do not wish to be bothered with the close labors of making it believable (when, in truth, the real story is more interesting), I do have a title for such a project. I would call it The Castle in the Forest. Das Schlos im Wald! The name is not without irony, since the camp in question sits on the empty plain of what was once a potato field. Not many trees are in

sight, nor the hint of a castle, nothing of interest on any horizon. Yet Schlos im Wald would be exactly the sort of title given to the compound by the inmates of the camp. If there was one pride left to the prisoners—the best of the few surviving German prisoners, at least!--it was that they had not lost a sense of irony. They were from Berlin, after all.

If you are German and possessed of lively intelligence, irony is, of course, vital to speech. German came to us originally as the language of simple folk, good pagan brutes and husbandmen, tribal people. Rare was the early German not ready for the hunt. So, our language is full of the sounds of the stomach and the bowels of hearty existence, the bellows of the lungs, the hiss of the windpipe, the cries of command that one issues to domesticated animals, the roar that stirs in the throat at the sight of blood. Yet, given the demand required of this people through the centuries, the unrelenting historic imperative to enter Western civilization before it developed way beyond them, it cannot be surprising that a crucial portion of the German bourgeoisie who emerged from all those muddy barnyards sought to have voices as soft as the silk of a sleeve. That was a venture not always full of reward. For this newly become genteel German proved much

too sentimental. I will not even speak here of the long words to which they attached themselves like leeches, save that those long words were a precursor to our technological spirit today. No, I refer merely to the sentimental stuff. So many of the new sounds and phrasings came to no more than sweets and tears for a low-grade brain. Irony, therefore, became essential to a sharp German head.

Now, I recognize that this sort of disquisition can only lead us away from my proposed narrative. Yet, I have also to recognize that I am not being truthful to the level I have chosen. Or, to be more precise, the level is not sufficiently elevated, no, nowhere near to its real complexity. The SS Major, whom I also call Dieter (since for literary purposes he is a species of manifestation of myself), would be, according to the second level of the short novel I have just proposed, a member of an elite SS Intelligence group (whose title for those who care about such matters might be Special Section IV-2a) directly under the supervision of Heinrich Himmler. My first premise, then, was that Dieter had installed himself as one of the camp doctors most recently, and that was in order to conceal what had been his

role. Given the last down-crashing days in World War II, he had himself posted at Schlos im Wald to avoid immediate arrest.

My premise was, however, not artistically contrived. Much too shallow. Escape routes in those days for high SS officers were more sophisticated. From the start, therefore, this literary supposition that Dieter would be pouring out his still defiant heart to a relatively naïve young Jewish doctor was novelistically ill-balanced.

I did, however, make one sortie. I confess that I actually began the novel with a monologue by Dieter. I had him attempting to sketch out for our young, horrified, and silent Jew what it was like to work with the kind of formulations that emerged from Heinrich Himmler's brain. As a chapter, it may be worth presenting. It does bring us closer to my intentions. Those, I can promise you, are not routine.

2.

I have spent my life looking to distort the truth while enjoying the greater part of the lies I told. Now, to my surprise, I find I cannot go on with the proposed novel for a considerably more serious reason than that it is unconvincing. It is that the lies it would tell are at too low a level.

Mendacity must also make its demands on art. By the time one has arrived at my situation, it is better to recognize that the only lie still worth telling must be grander or subtler than any of the specialties you have fashioned before.

Some sense of this need can be glimpsed in the chapter I will now quote in full. As will be seen, it still presumes on the common sense of the reader, the readiness of the reader, if you will, to succumb to the fantasies of

an incredible situation. For example, our SS doctor never stops speaking and the Jewish doctor does not utter a word. Soon enough, I realized I was not interested in this particular Jew, indeed, I had a far better one waiting in the wings. My real desire, now evident to me as I write these words, was to discern what my own interest might really be. I expect it is for this reason that I have paid no homage to those narrative amenities which skillful writers employ when rounding out a plot that not only did not happen, but could never occur.

So, for example, I do not bother to describe the room in which the head of the SS, our all-too-infamous Heinrich Himmler, used to offer instruction to those of us who were his favorites, but then it should not be difficult to picture a small lecture hall with old walnut panelling. Nor will I present verbatim more than a good sample of Himmler's dialogue since that is not always equal to the actual life of his ideas. I could post up a few of the questions raised by one or two of his officers in this most particular Special Section IV-2a of SS Intelligence already mentioned. By choice, however, my emphasis is instead on the content of his thought. Right there lies the introduction to my intent—I wish to tell a tale I would be so bold as

to declare incalculable, a history so resistant to conventional belief that, of necessity, I can only approach it degree by degree.

The irony is that I, a consummate artist of mendacity, am now obsessed with recounting what is true. This inclination—to tell it straight out!—which for a serious intelligence officer is as fierce as the forbidden urge to destroy oneself, leaves me no longer knowing who I am, nor where I am exactly (other than for the gross fact that I am in America—good luck!)

Enough! Here is the chapter. It is now an orphan. I present it without quotation marks although Dieter is purportedly speaking to the poor silent Jewish officer he enrages to the point of murder.

You have, Captain, to accept the fact that incest was a signal point of interest for Himmler, an obsessive problem if you will. It stood out in our research as the true Gehenna of the poor, the very poor. Families in that—yes, I will say subhuman—category have been concealing such matters over thousands of years. We knew that our own German peasantry was much afflicted by it. Normally, no one would care to speak of this. In the first place, there is nothing to be done. How often, after all, can you declare that

so-and-so, whoever, is a certified product of incest? No, we swept it under the rug, as do ranking officials all over the world, all, that is, except Heinrich Himmler.

He, however, had the most extraordinary ideas fermenting behind his unhappy spectacles. For a man with a bland and chinless mug, he did have a mind of his own. It was disruptive to many of us in its mixture of brilliance and stupidity, but we did find ourselves listening. He was so much out of category. For instance, he declared himself to be a pagan. Can you conceive of an orgy where carnality would rise to such a pitch that you might find a woman ready to throw herself into a carnal roll with Heinrich Himmler? Not even in the spirit of the game! You could see his face as it must once have been at a school dance, that unconnected stare of the reedy wallflower, tall, thin, and embarrassed already by a little pot belly. There ready to do no more than wait by the wall until the dance is over. As a young man, he must already have had that small pot belly.

Yet he was obsessed with matters others would never bother to chart. He paid attention to mental retardation in its relation to genius—Himmler proceeded on the theory that the best human possibilities lie close to the

worst. Remember that! The best lies close to the worst! It was virtually routine for him to anticipate that exceptionally promising offspring were there to be discovered in poor large families who had a number of what he called incestuaries, (that is, inzestuars), the word he coined in German because he did not like the more common term of such disgrace, Blut-schande, (blood-scandal), or as sometimes used in polite society, Dramatik des Blutes, (blood-drama).

None of us felt qualified enough to say that his theory could be ignored. You must accept the fact, Captain, that Himmler had perceived in the early years of the S.S. that one of our first needs was to develop exceptional research groups, an elite above the elite, if you will, who were absolutely prepared to deal with the questions surrounding ultimates, or, by his choice, letzte Fragen—last questions. (The health of National Socialism depended, he would often say, on nothing less.) We were there to explore into the kind of problem that others did not care to go near. Incest, naturally, had to be one of the first forbidden subjects on his list. If the German mind must, as he would often repeat, become the leading influence upon the world, then—so went his unstated syllogism—give due

recognition to his, Heinrich Himmler's, earliest preoccupations. Himmler, after all, had been interested from the beginning in agriculture. He would emphasize the obvious: Problems of husbandry cannot be contemplated without comprehending the peasant. Yet to understand this man of the earth is to speak of incest.

Here, Captain, I promise you, he would hold up his hand in precisely that fussy little gesture Hitler used in the early days—a flap of the wrist! It was Heinrich's way of saying: "Here comes the meat and potatoes!" And on he would proceed. "Yes," he would say, "incest! That is one very good reason old peasants are devout. We, here, hardly need detailed studies to know that an acute sense of sin must sooner or later manifest itself in one of two opposed extremes: Either absolute devotion to religious practice! Or nihilism! Indeed, I can recall from my student days that the Marxist Friedrich Engels wrote this: Once the Catholic Church decided adultery was impossible to prevent, they made divorce impossible to obtain. A brilliant remark even if it comes from the other side! As much can be said for blood-scandal. Also impossible to prevent. So, the peasant must be kept

devout. Or, at least, this was true in the old days.” He nodded. He nodded again as if two good pumps of his head should be enough to convince us

How, he proposed to us, could the average peasant avoid these blood temptations? After all, peasants, he remarked solemnly, are not often the most attractive people. If they are born with good features, that is soon worn away by brutally hard work. Moreover, they reek of the field and the barn. Their personal odors are at the mercy of hot summers. How, then, can their impulses not be unruly? Given the paucity of their social life, it is not given to them to stay away from entanglements with brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters?

He did not go on to speak of the propinquity of limbs and torsos when three and four are in a bed, nor the ham-handed naturalness of the most agreeable work of all—that hard-breathing feverish meat-heavy run up the slopes of physical joy. “But, yes,” he declared, “given the hammer and anvil of peasant life, more than a few in the agricultural sector come to see incest as a most available option. Who, after all, will be more likely to find the honorable work-hardened features of the father agreeable than his daughters who so often are the only ones to regard their parents as the focus

of their attention. Sexual attraction is a function of highly focused attention."

Give it to Himmler. He had theories that he had stored in his head for two decades. Moreover, he had not immersed himself in Schopenhauer for too little. He was a great believer in the hegemony of the Will. Heinrich saw the genes—still a wonderful new word for us in 1938—as physical embodiments of this Will. "We know," he said, "that the Will seeks to be passed on from generation to generation because its nature is to remain true to what I will call Original Vision. Let us posit that the Will and its genes are direct manifestations of Original Vision. We need no more than the recent events of our German history to confirm the truth of this. We have been engaged from the beginning of human time in an effort to rise from Ur-depths to Transcendental heights, those very heights of potential human fullness we Germans happened to be the first to perceive.

"Of course, many impediments were in the way. The Vision had to be able to adapt to the specific frustrations of life. The intimate frustrations. Yet no matter the punishments that the strongest and best of these genes had to undergo, the most dynamic of these genes kept their ability to return to

the Original in-given Ur-depth Vision. Indeed, the best and purest of these genes were able to retain power and purpose precisely because of the privations, humiliations, disasters and tragedies they suffered in the transmission from father to son over the generations. Great leaders, I would tell you, are the product of ten generations, not one. We can measure their success by the degree of high frustration this noble desire is ready to endure from all directions, provided the Original Vision has never been bent too far out of shape, or altogether lost. It has to survive agonies and tortures of spirit from generation to generation, before one finds in a family of ordinary people one true prodigy. I will say at once that I, Heinrich Himmler, cannot feel ready to present myself as such a person. My roots, I confess, were given early and transcendental development in Heinrich the Fowler, that great German king of the early Middle Ages. You will recall he stood chest-to-chest against Charlemagne in combat. His prominence in my family line presents me with the obligation to seek to maintain such early family success. But the achievement that can impress us more, indeed, altogether, is the heroic rise of Adolf Hitler from a long line of modest peasant roots.

“Now,” said Himmler, “there are, of course, complexities facing the thesis that the Exceptional One will emerge, and can only emerge, from ten or even twenty generations of common stock.” Be it noted, Himmler preferred the use of “Exceptional One” rather than “Superman” since, by 1938, references to Nietzsche were running into confusions of attitude—a not unexpected result if you take cognizance of some confusions in Nietzsche himself.

Our Heinrich now posed the criticism we were beginning to form for ourselves. “How,” he asked, “can this continuance, this reproduction, of a family vision not be obstructed by the very mechanism of reproduction itself? Procreation brings together multimillions of sperm with the near-to-impossible mission of encountering one highly developed ovum.” Again, he nodded forcibly. Was it to suggest that in every difficulty resided the beauty of a most powerful solution? “I would propose, and by instinct I am confident of this, that the multi-million of sperm tend to have the same overall objective as a regiment of infantry on the offensive, and faithful in the main to the need to take a given ridge. So, it is possible for the vision of the man and the woman to be compatible provided her ovum is not too

much in dispute with the overall spermatic objective. I admit, however, that this is often not the case. Compatible enough for procreation, perhaps, but not on close terms with the Vision. When we speak therefore of the creation of the Exceptional One, we must be aware that not even one in a million families can produce such a result. Not even one, perhaps, in a hundred million. In the case of Adolf Hitler, the numbers may be even more astronomical.

“So, gentlemen, the exceptional case is one that offers a striking similarity of vision in the all-but-totally concealed genes of the man and the woman. Only then can we speak of these genes as reinforced, a vital reinforcement they need in order to remain true to the Original Vision.”

Who could not see where Heinrich was leading us? Incest was the answer. Incest offered the highest possibility for such accord, such striking similarity of purpose.

“Yes,” said Himmler, “but we also know that the products of inter-family fornication all too often parade before us in a host of early deaths, mental retardation, physical anomalies and various other monstrosities of maldevelopment.”

He stood there sad and stern. "That is the price humanity must pay. If the best lies close to the worst, so does the worst occur more often. Not only are good tendencies encouraged in the child—bad ones are also accelerated. Inasmuch as the plus and the minus of all these inner traits come from the same pool of predisposition, we know that our mysterious friends, the genes, can also magnify less agreeable possibilities. With incest, instability is more than close. Mental retardation waits in the wings. We must recognize: The finer the possibilities for the future development of a great spirit, so too will excessive restlessness and impulsiveness be present. Obviously, that is bound to be punished by vast frustration. Social norms soon bend and oppress the putative proud spirit, and such massive obstruction can, by early childhood, unhinge the brain or induce early death." So spoke Heinrich Himmler.

I think it was obvious to all of us present that these remarks were directed toward our real inquiry. At this point, back in 1938, we were looking (in the greatest secrecy and precaution, you may be certain) to determine whether our Ultimate Leader was a first or second-degree incestuary, or neither. If the last, if neither, then Himmler's theory had to

collapse. Hitler was more than the best example—he was the proof itself.

Provided, of course, that he was a true product of incest.

3.

Now that we are finished with a chapter from a novel that will not be written, I am ready to approach the obsession I shared with Himmler. It was Adolf Hitler. I confess he was always at the center of my thoughts. Yet what is an obsession but the ongoing presence of a real question we cannot answer, a query so vital and so unanswerable that it prevents us from moving toward any further understanding of ourself. Count on it that for most Germans, our first obsessions is Adolf Hitler. Where is the German who does not try to understand him and never feels satisfied with the answer?

I do not have that obsession. I live with the confidence that I am in a position to declare my understanding of Adolf. If I dare. For the fact is that

I know him. I must repeat. I know him from top to bottom, from the inside, even. To borrow from the Americans, with their rough grasp of reality, their crude purchase on consummate vulgarity, I can say: "Yes. I know him from asshole to appetite."

Nonetheless, I am obsessed. My question is: Do I dare to go further? When I think of explaining how I know what I know, then I am seized by fear, a primal fear. Do I dare to dive into such waters from a height never before by me attempted?

Caution arises. So I will proceed as a coward. I will start with the comfortable and the given, that is, I will speak at first of Hitler from a distance, I will commence as a biographer, and look to his roots.

On these subjects, I have more than routine research to present. In Special Section IV-2a, we did work while observing the greatest secrecy—our lives were collateral to such precautions—it became our major project. Himmler was himself, after all, as The Successor. Before we were done, Section IV-2a knew more about Der Fuehrer's origins than any other cohort of researchers in our nation. We searched into the most dangerous questions. We lived with the fear there might be answers that could imperil

the foundations of the Third Reich. All the more reason to search. Once answers were found, we could invent the lies required to buttress any and all patriotic feelings that might be weakened by nauseating facts. You could say our uneasiness collected about one question which was directly dangerous, even explosive, far worse, indeed, than any certification of incest—it was to trace out to a certainty whether Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather had been Jew.

Extended Lindbergh proves to be a first-degree insanity, then all questions of monorchidism are answered. Monorchidism is, after all, a likely byproduct of first-degree insanity."

He assured. Where he could, Himmler would return the inquiry back to the Jewish doctor. Power, of course, being as vital to his well-being as blood, he was actually incensed by 4. that, at bottom, he was enough of a coward to lose his high office at a stroke. He kept hoping,

If that was one hell of a question, there were others as well. We made exceptionally delicate inquiries into the rumor of monorchidism: did our Fuehrer belong to that group of unhappy and hyperactive men who only possess one testicle? It was true that he was invariably shielding his groin with his hands whenever a flashbulb photo was taken, a classic gesture, understandably, if you are a monorchid. But it is one thing to fear such a possibility, another to verify it. The inquiry was too full of risk. The only conclusive approach could come by interviewing women who had intimate relations with him. But who could control the repercussions? What if word got back to Hitler that we in the SS were fingering his genital(s) so to speak! So we had to give up. This was by Himmler's decision: "If our

Esteemed Leader proves to be a first-degree incestuary, then all questions of monorchidism are subsumed. Monorchidism is, after all, a likely byproduct of first-degree incest.”

Be assured. Where he could, Himmler would return the inquiry back to his favorite theme. Power, of course, being as vital to his well-being as blood, he was naturally tormented by the fear that, at bottom, he was enough of a nonentity to lose his high office at a stroke. He kept hoping, therefore, that he possessed a creative mind (as if that could protect him!) Yet, he did possess originality. One had to respect the possibility that he might be correct. Was there, after all, a better explanation for the Will of the Fuehrer than those reinforcements of The Vision that inhered to Blood-Scandal?

Conceive, then, of how he loathed the idea that Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather was a Jew. This supposition had come to light as far back as 1930 when a personal letter came to Hitler's desk from a young man named William Patrick Hitler who happened to be the son of Adolf's older half-brother, Alois Hitler, Jr. In the nephew's letter were references to shared circumstances in our family history. That was a direct hint of

blackmail, and William Patrick Hitler could afford to suggest as much since he did not live in Germany but dwelt in England with his Irish mother.

These shared circumstances referred to the fact that for a number of years, Adolf's grandmother, Maria Anna Schicklgruber, used to receive small but regular sums of money directly following the birth in 1837 of Adolf Hitler's father, Alois Schicklgruber. In her peasant family, one dirty rumor thrived. It was that a well-to-do Jew who lived a distance away in the provincial city of Graz was the person sending the stipend. Alois' mother had worked as a maid in this Jew's house before she became pregnant.

While this scenario was but one among several scenarios as to who might be the father, there was no name for the progenitor. When Maria Anna Schicklgruber took the baby to be baptized, her parish priest wrote "Illegitimate" in the blank space, not an uncommon declaration in those parts in those years. The Waldviertel was known, after all, as the poorhouse of Austria. One hundred years later, following the Anschluss in 1938, some of us were even sent down to the region to—as American detectives say—"poke around." Allow me to skip over the etymology of our researches and offer results. Our close findings were, in fact, fascinating, but it is too soon

to talk about, if, in fact—I must assert once more—I even dare to do so. Let us say that fear rises like psychic smoke from my obsession. It will take a while before I know how much of the real methods of discovery I am prepared to present.

The results, then. That much I can offer now.

5.

Raabs, Rosenberg, Rappottenstein, Hardegg, Rosenau, and Alpe, Heidenreichstein and Litschau are castles in the Waldviertel, an Austrian province situated north of the Danube and south of Bohemia, a land of tall beautiful pines. Indeed Waldviertel can be translated directly as "the wooded quarter," and reticence rests in the dark hooded silences of the forests in contrast to the spring green of the occasional field. The soil, most unhappily, is not splendid for agriculture. So the castles, for the most part, are modest, and peasants are poor. The Hiedlers (who later became Hitlers) lived in Spital, and the Schicklgrubers, their cousins, lived in Strones, the latter a village small enough to be termed a hamlet. Be it stated that an Austrian hamlet in the back woods in those years confirms the meaning of

dirt-poor. Strones was mud-deep along its one lane, and, of course, had no inn. A few dozen huts with damp roofs of thatch stood there. If Strones was profuse in pig wallows around and about each dwelling, cow flop was more prominent in the town meadows. Here and there—to speak in relative terms—there was vibrant horse manure. I say "vibrant" to emphasize the value of dray-horses in an area where a peasant usually had to pull his own plow. When no snow covered the ground, there were various grades of mud, gumbo thick as lava, rivulets of silt, gravel washes, muck and slops, clods, rocks, common clay. Most of the peasants had never seen a castle. The nearest one, Weitra, was twenty-five miles away. For that matter, Strones did not even have a church. One went to the next hamlet, and there in the parish registry Maria Anna Schicklgruber had the name of her son inscribed as "Alois Schicklgruber, Catholic, Male, Illegitimate."

Maria Anna, born in 1795, was forty-two when Alois was born. Coming from a family of eleven children of whom five were already dead, it was possible, even likely, that she had cohabited with several of her brothers. One of them could certainly be the missing mate. (Himmler had, of course, no objection to that.) In any event, despite the abysmal poverty

of the Schicklgrubers who had lost their farm and now had to work for wages, and were thus even poorer than their neighbors, she dwelt for the next five years in her father's two small rooms. The money that came in from Graz helped to support the family.

Despite the likelihood of a trove of family clandestine copulations, we could hardly dismiss the Jew from Graz. Hitler had immediately dispatched the nephew's letter on to his lawyer, Hans Frank. That was back in 1930, and our Fuehrer, as some may no longer recall, did not come to power until 1933. Back then, three years earlier, Hans Frank, like many another close associate, was looking to reach the summit of the Party, and succeeded in becoming close to Hitler.

Frank had bad news to deliver on this occasion. The likelihood was that Alois's father was a nineteen-year-old, the son of the head of this Jewish family named Frankenberger. It was a detail that made for a good deal of unhappy sense. In the early middle of the nineteenth century it was never uncommon for the young scion of a well-to-do family to enjoy his first carnal outings with a housemaid, experienced, and usually not too young. This was accepted by the good bourgeois mores of a provincial city

like Graz as a more stable procedure than allowing the youth to consort with whores or find a sweetheart who was bound in such circumstances to be unsuitable.

Frank claimed to have seen conclusive evidence. His research, he told Hitler, had produced painful results. It seemed that there were letters from Herr Frankenberger to Maria Anna that promised to provide regular payments for Alois over the next fourteen years.

All through that year of 1930, Hitler was, however, immersed in his romance with Geli Raubal, Geli, his blood niece, daughter of Angela Raubal, Hitler's half-sister. Our Adolf did not need more complications. He told Hans Frank that the true story, imparted to him by his own father, Alois, was that the real grandfather was a cousin, Johann Georg Hiedler, who had married Maria Anna Schicklgruber five years after Alois' birth. "All the same," said Hitler to Hans Frank, "I am ready to examine these letters from the Jew to my grandmother."

Frank had seen them, he assured Hitler, but they were not available. The man who owned them was asking an inexcusably high price and could

not be budged, not by honey, not by threats. Besides, if any of the letters had been photographed, acquisition would be worth little.

"You have looked at them," Hitler stated.

"One by one, in his office. He had two big fellows standing there beside him. He also had a revolver on the table. What must he have been expecting?."

Hitler nodded. "Yes, one cannot even hope for his premature death. We can predict that the letters will be in one place and the copies in another."

There it remained, one more concern for Hitler to carry.

In 1938, however, our findings produced a variant to this story. It no longer seemed likely that Maria Anna had been receiving money for fourteen years. She and her husband, Johann Georg Heidler, were so poor after their marriage back in 1842 that they never had a home of their own. For a time they even had to sleep in an empty cattle trough in a neighbor's barn. Of course, there might have been a little money. Johann Georg could certainly have drunk it up. He was still a legend in Strones for the length and depth of his drunken stupors through which, incidentally, he kept

drinking. Such a fact could indeed mar the new hypothesis that there was no money. For why would a drunk like fifty-year-old Johann Georg marry a forty-seven-year-old unless she had some income? The likelihood, therefore, that he was Alois' father and our Adolf's grandfather, was reduced. Besides, he had made no objection when Maria Anna convinced Johann Georg's younger brother, Johann Nepomuk Hiedler, to take the boy in and raise him. Johann Nepomuk, a hard-working farmer, had a wife and three daughters, but he did not have a son.

This brother, Johann Nepomuk, seemed more likely then to be the unnamed father, but we were not ready to discount the other possibility, the Jew.

Himmler sent me to Graz and I took close measure of century-old records. No man named Frankenberger was named in such ledgers! I pored over the Kulturgemeinde of the Jewish Registry of Graz, and was confirmed. Back in 1496, the Jews had been expelled from the region. By 1836 when Alois was conceived, they had still not been permitted to come back. It took twenty more years. Moreover, Graz was the sort of small

Austrian city that catered to retired army officers on small pensions—of course, it was anti-Semitic. Had Hans Frank been lying?

I can say that Himmler explained it to me personally. Frank was bold and a gambler. Indeed, he did not acquire his final nickname for too little. (By 1942, he was known as the “Butcher of Poland.”) At the time of the nephew’s letter, he was, as already suggested, looking to establish himself in Hitler’s inner circle. As Himmler analyzed it, Hans Frank was inventing mythical letters to obtain a good enduring pressure point on his leader. Given the failure to produce evidence, Hitler could hardly know whether Frank was making it up, was telling the truth, or might actually be in possession of the letters. It would have been the end for Frank, if Hitler had sent a researcher to Graz, but the lawyer understood his client well enough to wager that Hitler did not really want to know.

Since Himmler was grooming me to become one of his first assistants, he also confided that he did not tell Hitler about my finding. He told Frank instead. I understood immediately. Could there be one official within the Nazi ruling group who was not searching for an enduring hold on the others? Frank, to an effective degree, was now in Himmler’s power.

With that mutual understanding, he served Himmler's will until 1942 when Hitler, nervous to the end about the Jewish grandfather, instructed our Heinrich to send a few good people to Graz. Himmler, in turn, looking to protect the manifold usefulness of Hans Frank now that he was Governor-General of Poland, reported that no results were found which could be called tangible. What with the pressure of the war and the ambiguity of the reports, the matter should be put to rest. Such was Himmler's advice to Hitler.

6.

The year 1942 is, however, a long way down the road. The same can be said for 1938, and I only mention this year again because of a small episode that occurred during the Anschluss of Austria. It will offer an insight into Himmler. If, behind his back, he was ridiculed by his Party enemies as Heini—ill-gaited, pompous, flat-assed, and as party-pious a Nazi as any mediocrity who has risen too high—his detractors were describing the outer shell, not the man. Nobody, not even Hitler, believed more profoundly in our philosophical principles.

I remember on the first morning after the Brown Shirts marched into Vienna, that a squad of them—beer-hall types with bellies either above or below their belts—collected a group of old and middle-aged Jews,

professional class, pince-nez absolutely in place, and put them to work scrubbing the street pavement with toothbrushes. The Storm-Troopers laughed as they watched, and that added to international attention. 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 about the episode. "It was a most expensive indulgence and I am pleased that not one SS man had anything to do with such a vulgarity. We all know this is the kind of action that can injure morale among the best of us. It will certainly encourage more rowdyism here in Vienna. Nonetheless, we do well not to reject altogether the primitive instinct revealed by the act. For it was, on reflection, a successful act of mockery." He paused. He did have our attention. "There is a curious, I would even say covert sense of inferiority among many of our folk that the Jews are capable of working with more concentration on a task than any of us—they know how to study—and that is why they have been so successful. It is very much a Jewish notion that they can win everything by working harder than the host race of any particular country they happen to be inhabiting.

“So, this act, I would say, erupted from the crude but often incisive understanding of the people. It tells the Jews that work, if it is not attached to a noble purpose, is meaningless. ‘Scrub away with those toothbrushes,’ the boys were saying, ‘because you Jews, whether you know it or not, do exactly the same thing every day with your so-virtuous scholarship that goes nowhere but into contradictions.’ So on second thought,” Himmler concluded, “I will not condemn out of hand the deeds of these low-rank Nazis.”

Again I have to recognize that I have interrupted my narrative. It is because I do not dare to tell how I uncovered the real truth of Alois’ conception. And I state this in the full recognition that nothing will irritate a reader more than to be offered a revelation that is without footing. At best, a fact is three-dimensional and consists not only of its own declaration on the page, but should also present the means by which it was obtained. Then it can offer resonance to our sense of reality.

I, however, cannot do that. Not yet. My real means cannot be revealed so soon. Even the resources of Special Section IV-2a are not sufficient. We did piece together an answer, and were able to bend the

evidence in Himmler's direction—we knew that if our end-product would support his case, he would accept it. The irony, however, was that our conclusions turned out to be correct. That confirmation I only acquired by the exceptional methods of inquiry available to the exceptionally secret personnel to whom I actually belong. But that ultra-secret society, secret even within the most secret of societies, is an organization too evanescent for day-to-day measure. It is more than an intelligence group. Think of it rather as a nexus of Being ready to dwell within every matrix of society. Given the philosophical impenetrability of the previous sentence, I do not see how we can be at all ready for any close description of myself. In consequence, I am trapped by the method I have employed so far. My name, I would remind you, does not happen to be Dieter. (Although that is close enough.) I am tempted to add that I was never altogether in Special Group IV-2a. On the other hand, I was. Since an admission such as this can only add to the present confusion, I must repeat that I am not ready to reveal myself.

I think, then, we will have to content ourselves for now with the imperfect conclusions that IV-2a presented to Himmler in 1938. Once I had

brought back the news that the Jew from Graz did not exist, we studied the actions of the one brother of Maria Anna Schicklgruber who was actually resourceful enough to leave the mud of Strones and make a little money as a commercial traveler. For our purposes, what was best about this brother is that he passed regularly through Graz. This enabled us to declare that Maria Anna did, in fact, receive small sums mailed from Graz and so was able to tell her family that it came from a Jew. For a short time, this proved believable to Himmler.

We came to the decision, however, that to make Himmler feel confirmed on this matter, we would do better to choose Johann Nepomuk Hiedler, the good hard-working younger brother, as our seminal actor. While nothing would satisfy the end result but a prima facie case of incest, and Maria Anna's itinerant brother could satisfy that demand, we would then remain one step removed from Himmler's real desire for it would be the father, Alois, rather than Adolf who would be the incestuary.

On the other hand, if Maria Anna had conceived Alois with Johann Nepomuk, then everything we desired could be obtained—Himmler's thesis would be confirmed. That is because Alois' third wife, Klara, Adolf's

mother, was the granddaughter of Johann Nepomuk by way of his daughter Johanna. An uncle, Alois, and a niece, Klara, connected by blood would then be the parents of our Fuehrer. We knew that would give us a solid presentation to offer Himmler. So, we not only settled on this choice but embellished it. Our final scenario took on flavor: Maria Anna Schicklgruber and Johann Nepomuk Hiedler had, we declared, entered into copulation on each rare occasion when she came back from Graz for a visit. On her last trip, Nepomuk, who lived a long day's walk away in Spital, made a point of visiting his family in Strones, and went to the straw for his hour with Maria Anna. On that occasion, she conceived. Nepomuk was left in a dreadful state. He could not question the news since the act had been out of the ordinary, and she told him right after climax, "You have just given me a baby," but on the other hand, he loved his wife, he loved his three daughters, and he could not disrupt his home. All the same, he must respect the matter from the point of view of Maria Anna. And this he did. Under the cover of a story of money-received-from-Graz, he gave her sums to take care of the boy. In a few years, he promised, he would do his best to take Alois into his own house and raise him with his daughters.

Maria Anna put up with the situation, but how could she be happy? Five years went by before she declared her intention to expose Nepomuk. She was now forty-seven and it was humiliating, she told him, not to be married, and have to face the women of Strones each time she left her door.

Nepomuk proposed his older brother Georg as a substitute. Nepomuk did not like his brother, and the brother did not like Nepomuk, but a new source of money is as vital to a drunk as transfusion of blood to a hemophiliac. 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 a few extra kronen. For Georg, there was a rare pleasure in using the exertions of a younger brother to pay for his own dissipations. What a fund of ugly spirit he possessed, what a fury full of failure!

Maria Anna, wed at last, wanted Georg to say he was Alois' father, but he told 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 couple of his drinking companions why he had gotten married, he saw all the more reason to make no fool of himself by legitimizing this brat whom everyone

knew was not his own. He might be a failure, but he was certainly not a cuckold. Let the bastard remain a bastard.

This story we presented to Himmler. It was buttressed by interviews we worked up with the few very old inhabitants of Strones who were born before Johann Georg Hiedler died in 1857. It was, if examined closely, a dipalidated series of bridges on the way to a necessary destination, but Himmler was, of course, so busy most of the time that our conclusions were enough for him. We had delivered a family history in which appeared no Jew in the Fuehrer's bloodstream, and had established his own father and mother, Alois and Klara Hitler, as real uncle and niece by blood, We 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. Early death or serious malformation is the most likely prognostication for the fate of First-Degree Incestuaries, but the Fuehrer proved fabulous in his powers of perseverance. His brilliance and his Will, his unique properties of character and insight, were provided by this intensification of his genes which, I

repeat, occurred in the First Degree. And now we live with the triumphant result. His German agrarian genes proved able to find a metamorphosis into transcendental virtues.”

At this point, he closed his eyes, leaned back, and exhaled slowly as if to expel from his chest every spirit not free of dread. “We won’t speak of this too often,” he went on in a low voice, “but occasions of close incest can be truly perilous for those who lack the Fuehrer’s Will. It is my belief—I would rather say it is my belief at certain times—that in the world of numinous spirits that surround us, there are many elements I would call malign. It is even possible that the worst of these spirits collect about a presence whom in earlier times we spoke of as Satan. This embodiment, should it exist, of a Devil or the Devil, would give great attention to Incestuaries of advanced degree. Indeed, this ominous malignity would be looking precisely to pervert the force that arises 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 in the face of the Devil himself.”

Little did Himmler know that his remarks could be multiplied by an order of magnitude. Hitler was not a First Degree Incestuary One-step-

removed, he was at the core of incest. He was a bona-fide case of First Degree Primus. As I came to discover, by more exceptional and private means, the niece, Klara Polzl Hitler, Alois' wife, was not only his wife but also his blood daughter.

7.

Count on it. We are not done with family history. This time, however, I will not camouflage the source of my understanding with the pretense that it is a product of semi-honest researches conducted by Special Section IV-2a. Nor is there need to screen myself any longer behind Heinrich Himmler. Now, I can behave like a conventional novelist of decent but in no way remarkable talents who will (like most such novelists) be ready to enter some of the thoughts of such of his figures as Johann Nepomuk, Alois Hitler, the three wives of Alois Hitler, his two children from the second marriage, and two of the six from the last marriage with Klara. (The other four died early.)

We are finished, however, with Maria Anna Schicklgruber. She perished at the age of fifty-two, ten years after the birth of her son. The cause was termed "phthisis on account of dropsy of the chest," a galloping consumption she contracted after sleeping in the cattle-trough through two winters. The collateral cause was rage. Toward the end, she thought often of herself 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. So she died, then, with the curse of three decades of failed anticipations, full of a fury that had been passed on to her by Georg who had succeeded like many a drunk before him in outliving everyone's assumptions on his early demise. He stayed in existence for ten years after she was gone—drink had been not only his nemesis but his dear medicine, and, at last, his executioner. He went in a day. They called it apoplexy. Having never bothered to see Nepomuk or Alois, he was not missed, but then, Alois was twenty by then 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 daughters of the Hiedler family, was indeed a very long day's walk from

Strones, and he had come close to forgetting Maria Anna. He was happy with his new family. Nepomuk's three daughters, Johanna, Walpurga, and Josefa, then twelve, ten, and eight, were delighted to have a five-year-old brother, and took turns sleeping in the same bed with him, thus keeping in effect the previous arrangement of no more than two children in one bunk. Spital was a full-sized village rather than a hamlet, and the seeds of separation between prosperous and poor had sprouted. A farmer could even, by relative measure, be considered well-off. There were a few such in Spital, Johann Nepomuk the first among them. He had not one bedroom but two, and his wife, Eva Maria, kept their home well. She was most practical. If she had a suspicion that Nepomuk might 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.

Alois was loved! By his father, by the girls, even by Eva Maria. He was good-looking, and like his mother, he could sing. As he grew older, he also demonstrated that he was ready to do work in the fields. Johann Nepomuk contemplated leaving the farm to him, but there was no balance to

count on in the boy's character. He was restless. He might not always be there to overcome all the unforeseen obstacles large and small that can come down upon the daily work, whereas Johann Nepomuk had so much love for those ongoing labors that on the best of days he would speak to his beasts, he would listen to the earth. While he was not always at ease with the long silences that hovered over the end of the afternoon and the onset of evening, these silences did enter his dreams. The sum of his fields, his sheds, his beasts and his barn became equal to a creature, equal to a demanding woman, cavernous, haunting, smelly, greedy, needy, ever demanding more from him. He would wake in full recognition that he could never leave the farm to Alois—Alois was the child of the woman in the dream.

Moreover, such a gift would enrage his wife. She wanted good dowries for her three daughters, and the farm would certainly provide handsomely for one, would amount, in fact, to so full a dowry that Johann Nepomuk and Eva Maria could retire with free lodging on the premises.

Indeed, they did just that. The farm went to a strong young man, Josef Romeder, the son of a peasant who came from Ober-Windhag, the next village. In 1853, Josef married Walpurga, the second daughter, who

was then twenty-one, and the marriage contract not only deeded some lodging to Johann Nepomuk and Eva Maria, but gave them a portion of the farmland and an orchard. On the day that the title passed over, the ceremony of transfer proved more elaborate than the wedding.

Nepomuk led Josef, his new son, around the property, boundary line by boundary line, and stopped at every marker that denoted the separation between his fields and the land of the next farmer. Nepomuk would say, "And if on one day you gather any fruit from this man's orchard, even the fallen fruit, may you labor under a black sky." After which he gave his son-in-law a clout on the ear. At each of those eight separate jogs in the boundary line, he clubbed him thus. Johann Nepomuk was full of the kind of woe that hangs like weight on one's back. He was not mourning the transfer of his farm, so much as the absence of Alois. His 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 even as he had gone to the same straw with Maria Anna on the afternoon that Alois had been conceived. A memory of the glory of his last act of love with Maria Anna Schicklgruber had never left him, for he

had had only two women in his life and 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 often, and when he did go—because he knew he must—he would invent other sins for the booth, large sins. Once he 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 asked him in return 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 use the animal for work? Are there similar urges?"

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

The priest was middle-aged and had little to learn about the misdoings of the peasantry, indeed there had been a joke among us at Special Section IV-2a that all the devil needed to know about the people in any parish could be acquired by visiting the village priest in his sleep.

So the priest could sense that Nepomuk was lying, but he was hoping that the account was true because bestial sodomy, while as mortal a sin as adultery or incest, was in his mind less grievous since it would produce no offspring. He proceeded, therefore, to exercise the letter of 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 himself an underhanded masturbation in class (a stealthy act) and then rubbed his semen on the hair of the boy in front of him.

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. She was, however, a poor substitute for Madonna Maria Anna, and the continuing absence of Alois caused Johann Nepomuk Hiedler to live in an agony of love. He had wept like a Biblical father and had torn his shirt from his chest when he came upon 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 women in the family, Alois was sent away that night to a neighbor's house and in the morning was walked to Weitra and put on a coach to Vienna.

Walpurga suffered in his absence. Nepomuk did not tell Eva, but then, he did not have to. She knew why Walpurga was to be kept at home for the next three years. Her marriage with Romeder, empty of courtship, had to be arranged. Yet Eva, as concerned with the virginity of her daughters as a drill sergeant is exercised by the look of his platoon, would nag Nepomuk nonetheless to allow their girl to take a short walk on Sunday with a girl friend.

“No,” Nepomuk would say. “The two of them will go to the woods. Then the boys will follow.”

On the day he walked 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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dress, and then only because beautiful women surrounded him. For that
matter, only the ugliest and oldest women were not attractive to him. He
loved women. He had had such experiences playing with his stepdaughters,
which is to say, as only Napoleon knew, his half-sisters.

He met no young milliner, however. 8. and the idea gave way to a better
one. He could never be a cavalry officer since that depended on being born

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.

Now he lived with the sight of young men who carried themselves as
if their bodies, their uniforms, their decorations, their boots and their souls
all belonged to the same point of view, the same pledge. were given over to
a single pledge, had much to offer to Alois. These men, he observed, were
at ease with the beautifully dressed ladies they escorted. It pleased him to
look at their promenade. The women's hats were as finely wrought as the
officers' boots. He had the passing thought that if he met a young milliner,
they could start a shop and young couples of the best and highest classes
could visit their store hand in hand. Splendid boots, stylish hats. It was the

only business concept he was ever to have, but he only played with such a dream, and then only because beautiful women stimulated him. For that matter, only the ugliest and oldest women were not attractive to him. He loved 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 particular kind of family, and he was certainly from a place where more was known about mud and manure than the scent a man might put upon his handkerchief. Alois was sensible, he would not aspire to what was not there. But one thing he knew—he had been able to leave Spital and live decently in Vienna. No one back where he came from had been as ready to improve himself. So, he understood his own ambition early—he wanted to spend his life in a decent uniform, and be admired for his posture and his real importance.

At the age of eighteen, after five years in the boot shop, he applied at the Austrian Finance Ministry for a position in the frontier guards. He was accepted at the lowest level. Five years later, 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 good, and for that matter, it usually took ten years to rise to this post.

He had written on several occasions to tell Johann Nepomuk of his progress, and at last a letter in 1858 came back. His half-sister Josefa, the youngest daughter, had died soon after her marriage, a great blow to the family, and Nepomuk hinted that he would like Alois to visit.

In 1859, with his promotion to Finanzwach Oberaufseher already guaranteed, he went back to Spital looking exceptionally tall for a man of medium height: His uniform made him a figure of authority. Given his bearing, authoritative but graceful, he might as well have been a young Count.

Johann Nepomuk knew before long that he had probably made a serious mistake in inviting him to visit, but Nepomuk was now bent like a tree that has lived with too much wind. The death of his daughter Josefa so soon after her marriage throbbed in his side like the slash of an axe. He was 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, another hard-working peasant who even lived next door to Nepomuk and gave no one but Johanna any trouble for he usually kept her pregnant. She had once been agreeable in appearance, but now her hands and feet were raw and her features thickened. She was depressed by circumstance. She had had six children already, and the first four had died early.

Once she had been cheerful in spirit and this mood, long unfelt, returned at the sight of Alois. He had been her darling when he first came to the house, and she used to fondle the five-year-old and bring him to sleep in her bed. Through the years until he left, she would pull his hair and kiss his cheek, so forth and so forth, until once when he was ten and she was seventeen, they had begun to roll together in the hay of the barn pretending to wrestle. But he was only ten and nothing happened. Not quite old enough.

This time, no question. At the first opportunity which proved to be the only one, Alois continued the family tradition of apocalyptic intercourse

to the aroma of barn straw, and Klara Poelzl, later to be mother of Adolf Hitler, was conceived. There was no question in Johanna's mind. She had known the moment each time when Johann Poelzl, her husband, had put a child in her. But this time had been 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 which he received in the midst of rigorous training for an examination that would bring him up to Finanzwach Respizienten, the highest rank obtainable in the bottom half of the customs service. His attention, therefore, was hardly on Spital. Still, her letter lived with him through the years for it was only three words long (three words that Johanna was certain of spelling correctly). 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 his mind was wholly 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 ever boast of knowing three sisters equally well?

If he measured himself by his deeds, it was in relation to the accomplishments of other men, particularly other lower-caste officers in the Finanzwach. His rise was remarkable for a young man with his sparse 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."

Be it said that all through his rise to the highest official rank possible for a man of such restricted beginnings, he never relinquished his good appetite for women. The occupation was perfect in this regard. While the first principle of Austrian bureaucracy was to do your job, and do it most properly, the more effective you became at your border tasks, the less you had to fear for the specialties of your private life. This understanding he obeyed to the letter, and had an agreeable life. In those years, no matter in

which place they stationed him, he would live in 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 to his continuing satisfaction through all of the women, he would usually move to another inn. Through the forty years of his career, he was posted to only four border towns between Bavaria and Austria, to Saalfelden, Braunau (where Adolf would yet be born) Passau, and Linz, yet 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. No, elegant women were too difficult—no doubt of that—whereas maids and cooks were grateful for his attention and would raise no public ruckus when he moved on.

In 1873, he married a widow. Having developed an eye for the social stature, or relative lack of it, in any woman who would presume to pass for a lady—his occupation demanded, after all, some ability to recognize a smuggler, large or subtle, as they passed through customs, he was not dissatisfied with his choice. He might be thirty-six and she already fifty, yet he could respect her. She came from a worthy background. 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: she elevated the presence he had begun to develop for himself. They lived well, and with a maid. His own salary was substantial—the principal of the highest public school in Braunau where Alois was now stationed, could not boast of earning as much. As his rank increased, so did his uniform rate more gold-plated buttons, and his cocked hat carry additional official embroidery. His mustache had a sweep 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 they spoke 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 like Franz Josef himself. There he was, a facsimile of the emperor, the full picture—duty, hard work, and an imperial face.

His wife, Anna Glassl-Hoerer, had lost, however, half of her appeal for him. This loss occurred some two years into the marriage when he discovered that she, too, was an orphan and had been adopted. In turn, she lost respect for his uniform 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 a campaign. Alois was to legitimize himself. His mother, after all, had been married. Why could that not be taken to mean that Johann Georg Hiedler was the father? Alois knew better, but now that Anna Glassl was making it an issue, he was not averse. He had, after all, never been proud of his last name, and Anna Glassl was not necessarily wrong when she judged that his career, despite its success, had hardly been helped by the piping sounds 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—he thought he was being named as the father 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 even as he started to marshall his arguments 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 the father? These excuses did not even reach his mouth however; they scorched his pride. Just soon enough he realized that Alois was asking instead for Johann Georg to be named. Whereupon (old men being as ready as young girls to go 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 legitimation.

In the event, he journeyed with Alois and Romeder in a farmcart pulled by two old horses all of the twenty miles from Spital to Strones, then on a few miles to Doellersheim, all of it close to a four-hour journey on a narrow meandering carriage-road full of fallen limbs 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 priest he did not

wish to remember. There he was, very old now indeed, and smaller in station as well as stature (for Doellersheim parish was not comparable to Spital), yet still the very priest who had scolded him for traffic with the vulva of a mare.

This recollection passed between the two men unacknowledged by word or shift of expression, they were there for the business at hand, Alois, Nepomuk, Romeder, and two acquaintances they had brought along from Strones. Since the last three were to be witnesses and did not know how to write, they each after their testimony 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 to them. They swore to that.

The priest could see that legally speaking, very little was right about this situation. Each of the three witnesses' hands had shaken as they put down their XXX. One of them, Romeder, could not have been five years old when Anna Maria had died. Of course, she would have told all to the five-year-old! Moreover, Johann Georg was also long dead and given such dubious cases, a legal proceeding was normally required.

The priest did what he had been doing for years—he certified the paper, while smiling out of an old man’s mouth. He knew they were lying.

He did not, however, insert the date. On the 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. The document was not legal, but it did not matter. Which church authority would challenge such a change? Certainly no one in Vienna. The word from there that always came back was to encourage certified fatherhood. 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 concealed family matter? So the priest chose not to inscribe his own name; he disapproved of these sleazy matters even if he was bound to improve them, and besides, if it all ever went wrong, he could disavow the paper.

Then he spelled each of the witnesses’ names by choice since there was no agreement from province to province, (one reason why Hiedler soon 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. There was an agreeable redolence at the change from Schicklgruber to Hiedler, and he soon felt an upsurge in the happy region below his navel. This, he knew, from long experience, was one of the gifts God had given him. He was as quick as a hound to sense when female company was nearby.

Was it Johanna who had put him on the alert? She did live next door to her father, and at this moment Alois felt her presence as if she were looking out the window, but no, it could not be Johanna. She was not as old as his wife, but he knew of course that few gifts were offered by farm life to a woman's appearance. He did not want to see her.

Yet his steps took him to the door. The Hound did not make a practice of betraying him. In the doorway was Johanna looking as plain as expected, 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 he had once seen in a large diamond behind the glass of a museum exhibit.

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

She began to weep. Klara was her seventh child but five were now dead, and the young man, now nineteen, 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 on 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 the fields that belonged to the husband, Johann Poelzl, who—no surprise to Alois—bore no resemblance to this rare blue-eyed Klara. Poelzl had gray misted-over eyes and a face full of lines that turned down in concert with his long sad nose and paper-thin lips. It is obvious that he had

given up the long-held hope that eventually he would prosper because he was an honest farmer. Nor did Alois stay 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 bottoms of 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 two minutes more would ruin a few more of the remaining ears.) If his impatience was due to his discomfort with the implicit prosperity of Alois' uniform, Poelzl's mood took no happy 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 she would be able to send back. Cash not dependent on a crop was the best of crops, and, as always, he needed money even more than he usually did. 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 the brother-in-law's sighs as Romeder came up with the 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 have bad luck—did that mean he must pay tribute twice by listening to others when he had already paid once by living with the insufficient return from his fields? So, he accepted the fact that Klara must work for Uncle Alois, and his feelings turned over in him with the emptiest rage of them all—anger that has lost its heat.

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

9.

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 lived with the happy notion that he might be able to spend some 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 to what degree death was her nearest relative. There were lights in the depths of 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 also envision other dubious portals—the doors to Klara's chastity might be as heavy as the gates of doom. He was charming to his niece, but made a point never to touch her. His wife, by now as unhappy 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 of official papers, and high respect for punctuality and performance in every working hour, he took as much pride in his other skill. 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 the 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 keep getting better at what they did. Now, he thought often of the remark because 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 the 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 took a long-range view of Klara Poelzl, it was because his nocturnal, and for the present, true interest was with the waitress at the inn, a nineteen-year-old named Fanni Matzelsberger, who was voluptuous but lithe, and—by his good measure—smoldering. He had learned to strip his eyes of all expression when she crossed the room, but that was not easy. She had 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 girl in the old peasant tradition: She had kept the entrance to her chastity intact but the same could not be said for the close neighbor in her private parts. That was not totally 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 heart-to-heart. In the heat of the hour, they loved each other, a not uncommon reaction when half of the carnal ore cannot be mined.

He told himself that she was no more than a good-looking daughter from 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 up something first!”

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.”

"Because of me?"

"You are a bad man and I am a witch. Only witches put their mouths in terrible places. Now, I am too 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 and that induced a vertigo in her. She was so tempted. It was not unlike drunkenness. Given the force of his desire, she gave 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. Lying, like honesty, is reflexive, and soon becomes as sturdy a habit as truth itself. Anna Glassl-Hoerer Hitler was now fifty-seven and looked ten years older (although to his continuing surprise she was still a virago at dawn.) To lose her would tighten his financial situation, although not critically. On the other hand, he would be giving up a lady for a farm-girl, a most attractive farm-girl, but then he had decided long ago in the end that a peasant was like a stone. Throw a

stone high in the air but 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 increasing skill as a liar.

Here is a sample from the dining room of 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 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: You are exciting me. Your mind is so wicked. I like it when your tongue becomes 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. I don't care, I tell myself. The man must amuse himself. But why do you try to insult my intelligence? Still, you do that. You 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. 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.

10.

Finally, Fanni told Anna Glassl that she was two months pregnant and soon to show. That was the end of the marriage. To say that the girl had a disease when he knew she was pregnant! Unforgiveable! Besides, Anna Glassl was more tired of Alois by now than of her fear of being alone. She had exhausted herself mustering up all of her dramatic arts in order to be a virago at dawn. Now she craved peace. She even decided that her jealousy had been her last defense against what was even worse—the cold and silent distaste for the mate that accompanies the end of jealousy. So she moved out. Since they were both Catholic, divorce by Austrian law was not possible. To obtain even a legal separation, Anna had to declare not only their incompatibility but her direct aversion to him. Alois had to look at this statement concerning him. It stood out there as bald as a boil on one's chin and irked him so much that he showed his copy of the document to his

drinking friends. "Look, she says that she has a personal aversion. If not improper, I could tell you how much aversion she had. On her hands and knees so soon as I would say, 'Get ready. I am in the mood.'"

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 not 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 hint of oncoming infidelity in his voice. 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 passed through him even as he was passing into her—not the sort of conclusion he had come 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 the family name, but when he was not in the midst of good things with Fanni, he thought often of the day when she would be six or seven months along, and it would be Klara's turn. The thought 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, and both women were attractive to him, yes, two of them and both truly attractive for once.

As for scandal, he did not worry. Not unduly. In every town to which he had been posted, he was always the center of gossip. The townspeople of Braunau might as well complain to the stars above that he was living so openly with a common-law wife. After all, what could they do? He was not unlike a soldier garrisoned in a town to which he owed nothing. He received his money from the Hapsburg government, from the Financial Watch, and that was far away in Vienna. They could hardly care how he acted in his personal life so long as his work proved flawless.

Having risen to the highest level of the lowest ranks, there he would stay. His job was secure. The Customs needed him. After all, it took twenty years for an official to become as practised as himself. In turn, he needed the Customs because he could never find another job that paid as

well. His training had made him as the perfect instrument for what he did but it was not a skill to be readily be used for something else. He was locked into his job, and devil take the townspeople. What they said about him might rankle, but it would not interfere with real pursuits. One girl would bear his child, and the other who looked like a nun (and 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 quiver? It was because she knew he could teach her everything she did not know.

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

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

"Nothing will stop you. She must go."

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

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

Klara had to go. He could not relinquish what he now had in Fanni for the uncertain promise (when all was said) of a possible transformation from angel-nun to all-compliant lady.

11.

After Klara left, it was Fanni, however, who suffered. She had liked Klara, and now that their friendship was lost, gone too were many confidences back and forth. Since each one had been so different from the other, there had been much for both to learn. It all ended, however, because Klara was not good at lying. She flushed 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 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 this other way. I want a baby, I am near to having a baby.”

“You will,” said Klara, “and I won’t go near 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.

Klara wept just a little before she left. “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 vow?”

"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 nice arrangements in Vienna. Klara 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 packing box she had carried on her 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 not been honest fear but 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 pregnant now. If that offered contentment, she continued nonetheless to feel remorse. She had banished

the sweetest girlfriend she ever knew, and so there were days when she was on the edge of asking Klara to return, but then she would think: What if Alois comes to prefer Klara? Then Klara 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 long taken pains to forget—that a child felt 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 an integral part of himself to a serious curse—not unless he was intent upon it. He considered that act equal to spending a private horde of gold. Nonetheless, he delivered his curse to the night. Therefore he was not particularly surprised when Anna died an even fourteen months after Alois was born. He reckoned that his anathema had

had effect, an expensive payment for a necessary conclusion—expensive, yes, because there could often be consequences sprouting from curses.

Indeed, her death certificate stated that the cause was unknown, which convinced him it was suicide. He did not like that. He was not superstitious, not, at least, as measured by belief in the near presence of God and the Devil (so common among the Strones and Spital folk.) He was, as he was ready to explain over any stein of beer, a man who believed in the solid and intelligent progress of dependable forms of government. If God was near at hand, He would look, doubtless, upon government in the same manner that Alois did—as the human instrument of divine will, at least when exercised by scrupulous officials like himself. Alois had not read a word of Hegel, but then, why did he need to? He and Hegel were in agreement—the idea was there for all to breathe.

So, Alois preferred a reasonable end. Death should come out of a burst appendix or from consumption even as Maria Anna, his own mother, had ended that way. But suicide left him uneasy—he liked to fall asleep, as he put it to his drinking companions, "with a fart and a snore," and that on the moment his head touched the pillow. But thoughts of her as a suicide

kept him awake. For the first time in years, he felt again like a peasant. He would have gone to her funeral but he did not care to subject this new uneasiness to the sight of her face in the coffin. So he stayed away. That was another notable item for the gossip of Braunau townspeople.

Nonetheless, no matter how Anna Glassl had gone, she was no longer there. So he could marry his common-law wife, his new lady Franziska Matzelsberger, which he did even as her belly was there full of a second child seven months along. She was looking as large as the biggest melon in a field. He was forty-six, Fanni was twenty-two, and the wedding took place in another town, Ranshofen, four uncomfortable miles away and four back for the pregnant bride.

She had sworn she would not have the ceremony in Braunau. It was not only the glances of the women. Some of the boys snickered as she went by.

Alois was annoyed. It cost an extra and needless amount to transport by hired carriage the two Customs officers he had invited. That was no vast amount 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, and

in addition 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, then, for him.

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 showed 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 waitress.

Now, however, 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 to her that they might call Klara back, Fanni screamed 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 a bad marriage, he decided. You should not have to get into the same fight every day of the week.

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, was all-too-knowing. 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 feel better.

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. The signs of a deepening disorder passed from fits of temper, to hysteria, to loss of interest in his body, and then an incapacity to take

proper care of their two children. She now had the beginnings of tuberculosis. Klara was brought back from Vienna to be with Alois, Jr., 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.

Alois did not bury Fanni in Braunau. He chose Ranshofen ("On-the-Brink-of-Hope") where they had been married. This was not from sentiment but annoyance. The word in Braunau was that he had bought Fanni's coffin months before she died because he had found a bargain (a coffin confiscated from a smuggler at the Customs gate.) In fact he had only bought the damned box ten days before her death. So, he could not forgive the gossip. Besides, death, so often, was like saying goodbye to a friend who has outworn his welcome. In truth, he did not plan to visit the cemetery too often. His eyes were on Klara. He had almost forgotten how intense was her presence. Her eyes! Those eyes!

12.

Klara had visited Fanni more often than Alois, and that mended—one must choose to put it so—the wound they had left in each other's heart.

Klara had fallen on her knees before the bed where Fanni rested, and said, "You were right. I do not know if I would have been true to my vow." In turn, Fanni wept. "You would have been true," she said. "Now I tell you to give up your vow. He is through with me."

"No," said Klara, "my promise must be stronger than ever." She had a moment when she thought she might have a true understanding of sacrifice and this left her feeling exalted. She had always been taught to search for just such a state of the soul. Those teachings had come from her father, that is to say, her father-in-name, old Johann Poelzl, who was sour on

all matters but Devotion. "Devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ is all of my life in each and every day," he would tell her—he was indeed more pious than any woman in Spital. At many a meal, after saying grace, he would tell Klara (especially once she passed the age of twelve) that to give up what one truly desired was the nearest you could come to the moment of knowing the glory of Christ. But to attain that hour, one must be ready to sacrifice one's dreams. After all, had not God sacrificed His Son?

Klara had been trying to relinquish her desire for Uncle Alois over many a year. It had gone on a full four years while working for Anna Glassl, then another four in Vienna serving an old lady who alternated between doting on her and counting the silverware. The old lady had the true fever of suspicion—it irritated her when the count was correct (as it always was) because paranoia that cannot be confirmed is more difficult to bear than outright theft. The old lady was proud of the manner by which this young servant who kept house for her in a vibrant clarity of neatness, but the honesty made her irritable.

Klara's mother, as if paying for her one cardinal sin with Alois, had changed from a slovenly housekeeper to a good one, and Klara had

responded to their house duties more than any of Johanna's remaining children. It was as if the mother and daughter believed that what was left of the family—given the ghosts of six dead children—depended on offering ceaseless attention to the daily skirmish against mud, dust, ashes, slops, and the needs of plates, cups, pots, and cutlery.

By now, Klara never had to hesitate before a task. It required no more than respect for the labor one knew already how to do well. Sacrifice, however, was apart from such work. Sacrifice was an ache she felt near her heart. If she wanted Alois, and dreamed of Alois, she now had to find a way, once the two children by Fanni had been put to sleep, to keep Alois apart from her. There was not a night in the best inn of Braunau, the Pommer Inn (to which they had moved) that Alois was not staring at her open-faced and slightly drunk from the three steins of beer he took into himself each evening after work with one or another of the Customs Officers with whom he worked. Back at the Pommer Inn to eat the meal Klara had cooked in the kitchen of the hotel and brought up to their lodgings, he would nod, and eat with full gusto saying not a word, just nods to demonstrate his enjoyment. Then he would stare at her in the privacy of

their sitting room, his eyes open as if to share his thoughts. She felt all that was valuable in the recesses of her body was being fingered by his hands. Her thighs burned, her cheeks burned, her breath wanted to reach forward with an offering. She would jump up in relief if one of the children cried out in sleep—she heard it as a cry from Fanni's throat come all the distance from Laughter-in-the-Woods. Afterward would come the small cramp of disappointment.

Alois would not have been capable of describing to his drinking friends how he loved her eyes. They were so deep, so clear, and more than full of the desperation to have him.

Why not? Alois kept to the elevated view that he was superior to others. What other fellow from the Waldviertel would be ready to claim his indifference to religious fear? That was bravery. He often made a point of declaring that he never went to church. Nor would he confess to a priest. They could not be equal to him. He had his allegiance to the Crown and more than that, no man needed. God was not about to punish those who would serve the State.

He had written just the week before to a cousin who had inquired whether his son, now of age, would be happy working on the Finance Watch. Alois had written back, "Don't let your boy think it is a kind of game because he will be quickly disillusioned. He has to show absolute obedience to his superiors at all levels. Second, there is a good deal to learn in this occupation, all the more so if he has had little previous education. Heavy drinkers, men who get into debt, and gamblers and those who lead immoral lives cannot last. Finally, one has to go out in all weather, day or night."

Naturally, he felt equal to the sentiments in the letter, nor did he have to think about those-who-lead-immoral-lives. Immorality, Alois knew, was not to be gauged by your private life. Immorality was failing to pay attention to one's work whereas private life was much too complicated for judgment. He did not know to a certainty that Klara was his daughter—after all, he did not have to trust Johanna Hiedler Poelzl's word completely. What, after all, was the sense of being a woman if you could not lie with skill? Sie ist hier! Sie ist hier? True, or not true?

All the same, he would assume she might be his daughter. Already, she called him Uncle, and he sensed enough about these matters to feel that that made her desire him in a way she would never consider if she thought of him as a man rather than a relative.

He knew why he wouldn't go to church, or to confession, he knew why he was brave. He was ready to travel in the same forbidden direction that drunken peasants and adolescents on top of one another in a bed, might blunder into. But he would not look back in fear and penitence, he would just do it, yes, he would fuck his daughter. Yes.

Which he finally did at the end of a short evening that had been much like all the other dinners when he had looked at her with no deceit in his expression and no activity but to stand up now and again with his pants in full profile thrust forward in that bulge which is always ready to speak for itself. Then, he would poke the fire and sit down and look at her again. On this one night, however, he did not say goodnight as she put her hand on the door to the children's room where she slept, but instead, strode forward, caught that hand, kissed her on the mouth, and brought her to his bedroom and his bed, where he proceeded to lay a track with his hand, veteran now at

wrestling through the defenses of inner garments, all the way to the nest of hair so long concealed, and it was downy, much like feathers, much as he had expected. Half her body was on fire, half locked in ice, the bottom half. If not for the Hound, he might have stalled above such a threshold, but then her mouth was part of the fire and she kissed him as if her heart was also on her lips, so rich, so fresh, so wanton a mouth (and all despite herself) that he exploded, exploded even as he entered her, ripped her hymen altogether, and was in, deep, and in, and it was over even as she began to sob in woe and fright and some wrong kind of exaltation, altogether the opposite of sacrifice. Nor could she stop kissing him. It went on and on like a child raining kisses on the face of the great adult beloved, and then there were other kisses, softer, deeper, as she learned to use the mouth of a woman just-born. He was the first man she had ever kissed as a man and not as a relative of the family, yes, the wrong kind of exaltation.

13.

So, Klara was now his lover, his cleaning woman, and the nursemaid to Alois, Jr., and to Angela. On many a night she was also his cook—unless (having hired a maid to sit with the children for an hour) they went downstairs to the dining room of the Pommer Inn, there in full display as uncle and niece, the middle-aged customs officer in uniform and his demure young mistress. No one in Braunau was fooled, no matter how often she might call him Uncle. It was enough to stir a full boil of outrage that he could sit there like Franz-Josef himself, as if to say, “In company with the Emperor, I, too, have a lovely mistress.” It never failed that on any night that they went downstairs, he would make love when they came back, his

voice so hoarse he could hardly speak. "I am your bad uncle," he would say in the thick of the embrace.

"Yes," she would say.

"Your very bad uncle."

"Yes, yes, my bad uncle," and she would cling to him, hardly able to distinguish pain from what was seeking to become pleasure—a most unholy pleasure—"Oh," she would cry out, "we will both be punished yet."

She would weep when it was over. There was all the direct congestion of all that had not come to pass in her, and all that might never. She was, after all, so guilty.

Now, it was Klara's turn not to go to Mass because she could not enter Confession. She was working for the Devil—so she knew!--and Satan was a master to instruct her in subtlety—a terrible subtlety. She felt as if her finest impulses kept bringing her nearer to the Evil One, yes, even the loving care she gave to Alois, Jr., and to Angela. The more she adored them, the worse it must be. Such love, now tainted, must pollute their nature by her presence itself. And when she thought of her dead brothers and sisters, she wept within for what she was doing to them. She could not

even trust her concern for all those wrongs she was committing against everyone, because to take such an important view of herself was but another sin.

Then, there was Fanni. Klara had not told her and she knew she must. Because if Fanni did not know now, she would find out so soon as she went over to the other side, and thereby would be left with the thought that Klara never cared enough to tell her.

Yet, in the last week of Fanni's life when Klara did confess, the answer was brief: "This is my punishment for sending you away four years ago. That is fair."

"I will take care of the boy and girl as if they were mine."

"You will take better care than I would," said Fanni, and turned her face away. "It is all right," she said, "but you must not come to see me any more."

Then Klara knew once again that she lived in the grasp of the Evil One. Because if at first she was hurt, she soon felt furious that Fanni could send her away again, and this anger was still with her on the night of the day Fanni died. In bed that night—a hot August night—she had an experience

unlike anything she had known before. Her life received another life. She felt it travel directly to her soul, or so she felt. For her soul seemed to reside right there beneath her heart, and she came close to falling into darkness from the pleasure. That pleasure went on and on. She belonged to the Devil. Completely! He had dug into her loins with the most evil enjoyment she had ever known. Never again would she feel it so much (but once more), indeed never would dare to feel it again (but once more). Her guilt in the morning was as heavy as a water-logged tree. She had a dreadful moment of realizing that her delight had come in part because Fanni was gone. Yes. All the love she had felt for the long-sick friend had vanished into this unholy glee, that long-withheld nasty joy she could feel because the woman who banished her was dead. Now, she could be the wife.

She became pregnant. No surprise.

She never indicated that she wanted him to marry her, but he knew. "A man can be a fool on many matters," Alois liked to say, "yet he must learn from the experience he has had. Only on such matters, should he be judged. Does he learn or does he not?" So Alois knew that if he was not

responsive to this new duty, Klara would join Anna Glassl and Fanni in the gloom of that last box where you say goodbye.

Besides, he wanted to get married. The displeasure of the good people of Braunau had begun to itch. An intolerable thicket of itching skin had begun to bother him (even on duty!), and sometimes would last for as long as an hour. It had to be the venom of the townspeople, there in full discharge against him. For the first time, he considered the possibility that all these anonymous letters they were writing to the Finance Watch were not going to be thrown away by desk officials, no! Inquiries could well ensue. Such matters moved slowly, but now that Klara was pregnant, it could prove an offensive sight if, in four or five months, she could not step out into the street for the size of her unmarried belly. That would put no honey into the letters sent to the Finance Watch.

He could also say to himself that for the first time he did have some liking for the woman he would marry. Anna Glassl had satisfied his sense of rank—no question there!---but he did not enjoy the pale smell of her perfume. That could remind him in advance of the coffin she went to. And Fanni, to say the least of the worst, was like a wild woman in her shifts of

mood. Klara, however, was calm and knew where she came from. He had to like how she took care of his children, and if she gave him a big family, well, nothing too terrible about that. It would shut the mouths of the townspeople.

At worst, what with children dying all the time, a large family was your only insurance against tragedy. Lose one or two, and you still had others.

Suspecting that cousins might encounter church impediments when seeking to marry each other, he made his first inquiries at the Braunau parish house and discovered that was most certainly so. Indeed, he was reminded of similar obstructions in Customs work—when he wished to harass a man who travelled back and forth a suspicious lot between Braunau and the German side, he knew how to delay him with one or another new declaration to answer, yes, test the smuggler's patience.

Now, Alois had to wonder whether the Church was looking on him as their species of smuggler. The lie that had been certified on that day near to nine years ago when he had travelled to Strones with Johann Nepomuk and the three witnesses now stood in the way of a quick marriage: On official

paper he was Johann Georg Hiedler's son, and therefore, Klara's cousin one-step-removed. By Church ordinance, that was too close. If he would now claim that Johann Georg was not his father, that would make him Alois Schicklgruber again. Not to be contemplated! Klara and he, therefore, would have to take the long step of asking for an ecclesiastical dispensation. Whether they were uncle and niece, or first cousins one-step-removed, they were, either way, too close by blood for the marriage laws.

In Braunau, the incumbent of the parish church, Father Koestler, proceeded to study the problem. After a month he gave forth the discouraging response that the power to grant dispensations in such cases as Herr Hitler's did not reside in him. They would have to apply to the Bishop of Linz. Father Koestler would help him to write the letter.

14.

Most Reverend Episcopate:

Those who with most humble devotion have appended their signatures below have decided upon marriage. But according to the enclosed family tree they are prevented by the canonical impediment of collateral affinity. They therefore make the humble request that the Most Reverend Episcopate will graciously secure for them a dispensation on the following grounds:

The bridegroom has been a widower since August 10th of this year, and he is the father of two minors, a boy of two and a half years (Alois) and a girl of one year and two months (Angela), and they both need the services of a nurse, all the more because he is a customs official away from home all day and often at night, and therefore in no position to supervise the education and upbringing of his children. The bride has been caring for these children ever since their mother's death, and they are very fond of her. Thus it may be justifiably assumed that they will be well brought up and the marriage will be a happy one. Moreover, the bride is without means, and it is unlikely that she will ever have another opportunity to make a good marriage.

For these reasons, the undersigned repeat their humble petition for a gracious procurement of dispensation from the impediment of affinity.

Braunau am Inn, 27 October, 1884

Alois Hitler, Bridegroom

Klara Poelzl, Bride

Alois had become friends with Father Koestler's housekeeper, a plump middle-aged woman with a light in her eye.

With a matching light in his eye, he showed her the letter and said, "There is no mention of a very important reason for our marriage. The bride is pregnant."

"Oh, we know that," she said, "but it is not such a good idea to put a stone into the document."

After a digestive pause, Alois said, "That is fine advice. It is well-seated," and he put his hand on her behind as if to test the center of her wisdom. She gave him a crack across the face.

"How could you do that?" he asked.

"Herr Hitler, don't you get slapped a lot?"

"Yes, but I also find women who are not so unwilling as you."

She laughed. She could not help herself. The cheeks of her face must be as red as the place where he had left his compliment. "Good luck with the Bishop of Linz," she said, "he is a timid fellow."

Word did not come back from Linz until a full month had passed. The Bishop of Linz would not grant the dispensation.

If Alois had had little liking for the Church, now he could despise it. "Churchmen wear black cassocks," he said to himself, "to cover their lily-white asses."

To Father Koestler, he asked respectfully, "What, then, Father, is the next step?"

"The letter containing your plea could be translated into Latin by the diocesan scholars in Linz. That would allow us to send it to Rome. I think the papal court will be more receptive. They usually are."

Yes, thought Alois, they will be far enough away not to worry about an Austrian man and woman. To the priest he said, "I thank you for your wisdom. I learn much from you, Father. I think in Rome they will see that the act of providing a decent mother for my two children will constitute good Catholic virtue. That is a virtue I seek to acquire."

His hints were not small. He was one sinner who might be ready to return to the mother fold.

Father Koestler was sufficiently pleased to offer up good economic advice. Since the translation into Latin could prove expensive, it might be wise to sign a Testimonium Pauperatis.

"That is, a declaration of poverty?" Alois did not have to know Latin to translate that for himself.

"It will remove the obligation, Herr Hitler, to pay for the translation."

Herr Hitler restrained himself from remarking that as an officer of the Crown, he considered himself well-to-do, thank you. Instead, he accepted the advice. He was not so removed from the wisdom of the earth as to wish to pay a tithe that one could avoid.

Three weeks later, close on Christmas, 1884, Rome granted the dispensation. But Alois and Klara still had to wait. No marriages could be solemnized until two weeks after the anniversary of the Holy Birth. This further delay proved unhappy for Klara, since the belly would be four months pregnant in size by then.

"What a big fellow he will be," said Alois.

"I hope that is so," she said. What came out of mother who was far away from God on a crucial night? Or, if the child did live, might it be marked? The thought would haunt her wedding.

Like many of the nuptials of Customs officials, the day was divided into two parts. As Klara would in years to come: "We were standing by the altar at six in the morning, and by seven Uncle Alois was right out there on duty at his post. It was still dark when I came back to our rooms."

That night they had a reception at the Pommer Inn and Johann Nepomuk came from Spital to Braunau as well as one of Klara's two remaining sisters. Named after her mother, Johanna Poelzl, "Little Johanna" was a hunchback and this occasioned corner-of-the-mouth humor between two of the Customs officials. "Yes," said one, "the question is whether Alois will think it is good luck or bad luck to rub her hump."

"Don't talk so loud," said the other. "I hear this hunchback has a terrible temper."

There was music. An accordion was played, and Alois and Klara did their best to dance, but Alois was stiff-legged. To stand in one place for hours on a cold day did not make you an artist on the dance floor.

Others followed. Customs officials and their wives. One of them had a son old enough to dance a vigorous polka with the recently-hired maid for the newlyweds, a girl with crimson cheeks and merry eyes named Rosalie, and this Rosalie had also prepared a roast leg of veal and a roast suckling pig for the center of the wedding feast.

She had also thrown too many logs on the fire. The rest of the dancers soon gave up. They had to. The room had become fearfully hot. Half in annoyance and half in exuberance, Alois kept teasing Rosalie, "Oh, you are the one who is in a hurry to burn up a man's goods, are you not?" and Rosalie would cover her cheeks with her hands and giggle.

Rosalie's eyes would open wide when she was teased. It was no small matter that her breasts were undeniably full, and were still heaving in the aftermath of the polka. It did not need even that much to convince Klara that Alois was ready for his next diversion. She would remember this night for all the years to come, those years of sorrow when the child Gustav she was carrying on this night and the two who were to follow, Ida and Otto, were all to die in the same year, Gustav at two, Ida at one, and Otto only a few weeks old.

Johann Nepomuk also noticed the warmth of the room and the look in Rosalie's eye. "Get rid of that maid," he whispered to Klara, but she did no more than shrug. "The next one could be worse," she whispered back.

Nepomuk had a terrible nightmare after the wedding party and his heart felt ready to burst. He could have died that night in his bed, but instead he lived for three more years. There is no hide more resistant to rupture than the heart of a tough old peasant. Nonetheless, he never felt the same, a cruel punishment for an old man who is trying to hold on to what he has left. Death, when it arrived for him at the age of eighty-one, was by the same epidemic that took away the children—diphtheria.

15.

Diphtheria came into their family like the Black Death.

Mucus welled up from the throat of the two-year-old and the one-year-old, an endless up-pouring that transmogrified into green phlegm, thicker, heavier, than the mud of Strones. Noises rasped forth from the boy and girl, sounds uttered with the tortured authority of an old man and an old woman working the galleys of their lungs to clear a straw's width of passage. Gustav died first, Gustav, always sickly, a two-and-a-half-year-old who looked like the ghost of Klara's lost brothers and lost sisters, then Ida went, Ida, fifteen months old, certainly the blue-eyed image of Klara, going three weeks after Gustav. Both deaths lay upon the mother during the after-blow of Otto's death—Otto, three weeks old!---lost to a galloping colic that

gutted him inside-out. The stench of a baby born to die in its first weeks of life settled upon Klara.

She had no doubt whose fault it was. Alois had been close to the Evil One—that, for certain!—before she had even been born. But such a matter she could understand. A boy in Vienna all alone and he always wanted so much. Of course! But for herself, there was no excuse! She had desired a family where children did not die but grew to their full age, and yet she had been unfaithful to the Lord God Almighty on the night Gustav was conceived, yes, and that secret pleasure she still looked to find on nights when Alois chose to make love as a change in his diet from the present affair with the new cook at the Pommer Inn.

She hated him. But then, she also learned that this kind of hatred was treacherous to herself. It seemed to increase her desire. Whereas on those nights when she felt a moment of love for Alois, all such good life turned to ice below. Alois would grumble when the act was done even as she was kissing him in a fever to set things right.

“Your mouth gives promises you do not keep,” he would tell her.

It did not feel as if she were married. Anna Glassl and Fanni were always in her mind. If she had begun as a maid, and then became a nurse to Fanni's children, and then a stepmother, now her own children were dead. Alois, Jr., and Angela had been sent to Spital when the diphtheria commenced, and they lived, they were back with her now, the Hitler family rooms at the Pommer Inn still redolent of the fumigation that followed each death—the odor lived on her clothes after the three separate days of the three services at the cemetery. She knew how small a coffin could be—she had learned as much from the losses in her own family—but the miniature coffins of her own three children had been equal to three slashes upon her heart. It aroused the love she had not dared to feel when her children were alive. She had been too terrified of the evil she could bring to those souls, so new-born, so unprotected. It was only after the death of Gustav that she realized she had loved him, so charming a little boy on those rare days when he was not feeling sickly—the hump on Johanna's back seemed more pronounced after Gustav was gone. Bitter, horrid-tempered, forever angry, little Johanna, her sister, had loved the child even more than she did.

Klara had worked hard for Gustav, Ida, and Otto, had washed their swaddling clothes in the morning and again at night. The acts had served to lift her disposition as she worked. Every stain bleached out by the force of her hands might be a small payment for the debt of her sins.

Alois, however, had decided not to forgive God. To his friends at the tavern near the Customs House, to the men he would drink with after duty, and to the newcomers, young Customs officials, he would speak with the authority of his three decades in the Finance Watch. "It is the Emperor who has the power to guide us," he would remark. "Real power is there. God does nothing but kill us off."

"Alois," said his oldest friend, "you speak as if you are not afraid of going upstairs."

"Upstairs or downstairs, the Big One comes in only at the end," said Alois. "The importance for me is Franz Josef. He is more important than God, yes!"

"And the Devil?"

"Forget the Devil. Who builds the ships? Who makes the railroads? Not God, not the Devil. Men make these things!"

"You go too far," said his oldest friend.

By the time he reached home, Alois was usually in a bad mood. The beer wore off in a sour cloud of aftertaste. He would scold Alois, Jr., he would upbraid Angela, he would not say a word to Klara. Now, no more often than once a week (and he was furious at how much these three deaths had taken from his vitality) he would look at Klara again as he had on their first night, and he would try to conceive of how to introduce her to specialites de maison. He did not speak French but he knew all he needed to know about those three words. One of the Customs Officers, a man hardly to be relied on for telling the truth about his personal life, would brag that he had been to Paris in his youth. There in a brothel, he claimed, he had learned more in two nights than from the rest of his life.

Alois refused to be impressed. Some of the details were not foreign to him. He had also indulged. Fanni, for one, liked to put her mouth all over the place, and Anna Glassl was no lady when you got down to it. And once in a while with one of the maids or the cooks, they would give him a nice wet surprise.

Now, he had this frightened bird whose body heat could scorch him even if her thighs were as cold as a snow bank. She made love, yes, when he could actually get all the way into her, she was as strong as the Hound, yes, so much like bitches he had seen snarling and snapping at a male dog's genitals. Klara did not snarl or snap, she just jumped up on the altar, alone, alone, always alone, she was so private that he wanted to wet his mouth where she was most private, and then he would put the Hound in her mouth. He would show her where the real Church was located.

Yet on this night when he tried against the strength of her closed legs, pushing with all the force of his arms, there came a moment when his breath overtook him with a startling pang. For one mighty instant, he felt as if he had been felled by thunder. Was it his heart? Was he the next to die?

"Are you all right?" she cried out as he lay beside her seeking to breathe again, all his wind going in and out with the terrible rasp of the two children struggling against their end.

"All right. Yes. No," he said, and then she was on him. For she thought he was going to die and the same spite, sharp as a needle, that had come to her after Fanni's death was with her again. Now, astride him, she

turned head to foot, her other mouth so full of sin set itself down on his hard-breathing lips, and his old battering ram near her face was now as soft as a coil of excrement. Even as she said this to herself, she took it in her mouth with an avidity that could come only from the Evil One himself—that she knew as she had known nothing before, there, the two of them, both heads in the wrong place, doing the two-backed beast, although not two were there, but three—the Evil One never closer, and by this time, the Hound had come to life right in her mouth, and Alois was stronger, and meaner and full revived, a man again, he told himself, and began to kiss Klara's mouth, her first mouth, with all the juice of her second mouth still on his lips, how much was he ready at last to shit upon her piety and all piety—damned churchmouse, damned church!—he was back from the dead, some kind of miracle had rescued him, yes, he was there and they could go on and on, never before a night like this, better than a storm at sea, and for one moment, and then for another, then another until it went on beyond all the moments, she—the most angelic woman in Braunau—gave herself over to the demon and was mad with that prime lust which would engorge the world, and I knew this, knew all of this, for I was with them in the caterwaul

of coming together into the womb of Klara Poelzl Hitler, knew the moment within the moment when new time is created, and I, too, now dare to speak, I was there for the Evil One, I was present at the conception of Adolf Hitler, yes, I can say that even as the Angel Gabriel was the servant of Jehovah one historic night, so was I the agent of the Evil One on another.

Now, I am ready to reveal more of what I know. I am indeed an agent of the E.O., a tried and trusted officer in the finest intelligence service that exists.

2.

It is safe to say that I know a good deal. I can, as I have just remarked, enter into many a mind, I can recover, if necessary, the concealed, even the long-buried memories of the particular client to whom I am assigned. While this consumes much Time (which for us is a resource comparable almost exactly to the way money serves as the basic matrix for humans), I am, if necessary, able to inhabit people's dreams. My power of insight when brought to focus upon a single person is close to complete, whereas the average human has, at best, a memory that manages to function in one or another impaired state. My sense of recollection, moreover, is free of the usual distortions that serve the human ego since I exist within an absolute set of strategic commands. No need therefore to develop a

forceful ego. That is reserved for those humans who are determined to work up their own major endeavors—from which derives the tyranny of their memory. Such memory can afford to retain only what is of the most direct use to them no matter how misremembered or damnably untrue.

In contrast to such men and women, I have a simple life. For the most part, I look to obtain success for my clients. In our Company, that produces reliable results. Sooner or later, one is promoted. Over many periods, I have had clients whom I was able to develop sufficiently to be of use in one or another of The Maestro's larger projects. The majority of humans, however, caught in the push-and-pull between their guardian angel and myself, end by producing little that is salient for us. Indeed, in a few unhappy situations, my attempted conversions were lost altogether. The guardian angel who was my opposite number gathered in such spoils.

At one period, not so long ago, as a result of several successive defeats, my position suffered. For a time, thereafter, I was assigned clients of petty origin or sadly modest achievements. I oversaw, for instance, waitresses of a carnal disposition who broke up dull marriages and thereby ruined the amorous head of a half-happy household. (Alois does come to

mind.) I encouraged common soldiers to hurt the morale of their company by desertion. I served workers and peasants who looked to stir up revolutions, but turned corrupt. I knew a few priests in small towns who got into trouble with little boys or mayors who pilfered funds. I served petty barons and counts as they gambled away the last of old holdings, and I could list petty suicides, petty thieves, drunken louts, unfaithful wives, flotsam and typical jetsam. I had indeed a horde of clients, but only a few could offer an interesting problem to my skills. I had all too many now nameless men and women who were born out of little and proceeded to less. It could have been cause for despair. I admit that only large projects appealed to me even as any recognition from a social summit gives real life to a snob. While I could never know if The Maestro was using me for too little, or waiting for me to enlarge my experience, I did, on occasion, hear from him. He had not lost his eye concerning me, and remarked once that I might seek high rank again and could yet be assigned to a venture comparable to the epic encounters of the Company during the first three centuries of the Church in Rome. All that might be there for me once more, if I would keep the faith—that is, pay unremitting attention to my present

wretches, thugs, and drunks. I learned then that the E.O. had selected me to oversee the work of other agents concerning a young client whose potentialities might be immense. Insignificant at present was this person and his family, but there were ancestral fault-lines that happened to be full of the intoxicating stink of our old friend, blood-scandal. The boy in question, now a young man, was stricken with timidity, had quit school too early, was an avaricious reader who remained hopelessly superior to what he read (particularly when he could not understand it), was, in addition, lazy, prone to temper tantrums, and possessed of an ego comparable to the size of a swollen limb. All the same, he was desperately afraid of virtually all meetings with other humans. Yes, this boy was an absolute and unmitigated mess.

I did not dare to ask, but of course I could not hide my reactions from the E.O. any more than any of my agents could conceal their active thoughts from me. At this point, the E.O. actually spoke to my thoughts with his thoughts, couching them in his characteristic irony: He said: "Why this boy? Can it be that he possesses the largest ambition one could possibly encounter in a young man who is not already insane? I may propose that

you take him on. But, remain at ease! It is still no more than a project. It could certainly fail. He will need endless instruction. His terrors must be bolstered with the most confident experiences you can arrange for him. And you must guard him from early and crushing defeats to his ego. In time, if he develops the greater part of his potential promise, he could become your only client. Must I say more? We are looking at a project worthy of a major effort.”

I did not dare to ask: What if I fail? Many of our projects do. Particularly the major ones. They are such outrageous gambles. Our Source is not unlike God in that regard.

I was depressed. The new project was at present a backwater, and would certainly need good fortune—which is to say, times that would prove historically favorable to us. There was no sign of the felicitous conditions needed for a venture so much in need of accelerating magnifications of possibility. (The First World War and the disasters that fell upon Germany had not yet occurred.) My role, as I saw it, would seat me as jockey on a horse running against unbelievably long odds. I could foresee further demotions for myself.

All this is not of consuming interest any longer. We know, after all, what happened to the horse. And I who rode the boy (with occasional help from the Master) and rode him all the way up to glory (and down again—which is half the matter, the other half being why I now propose to tell the tale) can at least explain how the short novel I contemplated writing about the SS officer and the Jewish doctor lost my interest about the time I recognized that it was too small. I knew too much, I could not content myself with that. If I seemed ready to break the first of the rules of our society, then it was certainly incumbent upon me to explore further and even further into what I know of Alois and Klara now that Adolf has been conceived on that night when I did speak of myself as present, there as a Black Gabriel for the Evil One.

In truth, I was not literally in that bed of unfettered carnality, no, certainly not on that occasion, nor did I have to be. Yet, in stating that I was there, I was also telling the truth.

The explanation, if one is ready to follow, is considerably less difficult than Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. Spirits live in a relation to Time that is not comparable to human perception of that mysterious word.

Ingesting the experiences of other demons, we are able to vault back and forth through periods of Time that can only be recognized by humans through more linear fashion. So, I did not have to be present on the night that Adolf was conceived in order to have the exact experience of it.

Another devil (of lower rank) had been consigned to Alois' bed that night. By order of the E.O., he (or it, if you prefer) had entered the act. I must say that this is always an option for any of the E.O.'s cohort. We can enter any and all cohabitation. So can the angels. Since the resources of God and the Devil are not—believe it if you will!—infinite, the insertion must be not only desired but purposeful. It was on this historic night, this irrevocable copulation, and on my demand, the devil present that passed the experience over to me with a completeness of detail and carnal feeling that can be called absolute. You could say that it then happened to me.

For all practical purposes, then, I had been there. (To have an exact experience is equal to being present.) So, I also knew from the intensity of the occasion that the E.O. had joined with his agent for one instant (even as Jehovah had been with Gabriel during another exceptional event.

While I would not be formally attached to Adolf Hitler for many years, the E.O. had placed him nonetheless in my share of the Overview—the devils who worked with little Adolf were there to pass their experiences on to me. Over a period of time, his life and small deeds as a boy were sent to me. Then, as the hour approached when I would look to take possession of him, so did my concentration upon the sense-offerings of the minor devils in my command take on more prominence until I was as steeped in the life of the boy and young man as if I had been alone with him over all the years of his childhood and adolescence. For that reason, it is available to me to write about his life with an insight no biographer could attempt without being barred from his profession.

It is in part this profound desire to share what I have learned that may now impel this incontestable readiness to betray the E.O. But then, I have begun to understand why I must be doing it. Profound experience that is communicated to no one will scourge the soul. I, who have lived so long with the firm belief that I am no more and no less than a spirit, now have to face a seismic disruption. Somewhere within, I sense the remnants of a soul, a virtual model of the truncated ends, let us say, of nerves long lost to

an amputated limb—which nerves insists nonetheless on promising the body that the limb can grow again.

A recognition of this dimension is too sizable to come at so early a moment in our biographical endeavor. It will take all of a book I may never be able to finish to absorb the meaning of this last insight. So, I seek to quiet the disturbance that my thought arouses in me by returning again to the present, to these years now of living in an America I can hardly comprehend. If I am a presence who consists of no more at this instant than a devil without a serious assignment, I sense that I must (may it be the saving imperative!) return to the premise with which I began—that an account of the life of my former client will establish, at least, a rough representation of that terrain in which I search for the remaining oddments of my soul.

3.

In setting down these explanations, I will say that it is one of our ongoing missions to convince the majority of the new technological world that there is no such entity as the Devil and—this is crucial—nothing near to two divine and opposed spirit orders. By the purview of the new technological world—NTW—the universe is subject to reason, nothing else. God, alone, as a solitary mystery, may be acceptable in some quarters, but not the Evil One. One mystery, not Two! (Indeed, at the insistence of the E.O. we do not capitalize our endeavors, only Theirs.)

There need be no surprise, then, that the general understanding of Adolf Hitler's personality is dim. He is, after all, a third mystery, the most mysterious human of the century, a man, when all is said, who was all-too-

human, if, it will be agreed, the average man or woman does possess large funds of the inhumane. Nonetheless, over the years, I grew able to comprehend his psyche better than my own. How can I not take pride in this? As a specimen of the human, he was close to unmeasurable, and developed without question into the wild beast of the century, this client whom in the beginning I belittled for much too long as “little Adolf,” yes, I knew him when we still referred to the young man who grew out of the boy as “little Adolf with the big ideas.”

I can state that as a newborn he was a most typical Klara Poelzl Hitler product. He was most unhealthy, and terrified Klara with every time a bubble of sputum popped from his infant lips.

It is probably true that she was ready to die if he did not live. Devils are sound at anticipating motive—the more sordid, the better—Anality Rex!—but our predictive attempts weaken at the borders of mortality. Man proposes, the Devil imposes, and the Lord disposes, is not accurate for all cases, but we are obliged to recognize that God does decide on the timing of the death of every human. To take an extreme example—an airplane, let us say, which we have brought into malfunction (a most difficult process!)

will when it crashes not kill everyone unless Our Adversary so determines. Usually, in such cases, He will accept what we have succeeded in doing because it is too costly to countermand us—do not assume that it takes nothing exceptional for God to save a human on the lip of extinction, indeed, He could not even save His Son, (as we are never tired of reminding our clients!) but there are occasions when a death we looked to create did not ensue. From time to time, God still disposes. Of course, He and His Angels, like The Maestro and his devils, also look upon Time as equal to Money.

Be it understood, then, that the question comes down to expenditures. We are fighting a war with each other. Needless to say, all wars are determined ultimately by the cost to each side. Even as we are not all-powerful as devils, because He is our Adversary, so is He not all-powerful because of the cost of warring with us. To keep this understanding alive, the E.O. insists that we never speak of the Lord as God, but only as the D.K. (What D.K. means, I would prefer not to translate immediately.)

This explanation given of my presence in these matters, let me take up Klara and the condition of her state that she is now again a mother.

The attention she gave to the early days of her fourth child would have been seen as hysteria in any woman who had less cause for concern, but Klara, of course, was living at the edge of an abyss. She had had nine months and ten days to contemplate earlier years with Alois, all the way in memory from recollections of their first illicit bed to the rancid smell of the sickroom as Otto, Gustav, and Ida were lost one by one in the same few months of the same year. She had prayed devoutly to God to save them. He had chosen to ignore her. As she saw it, that rebuke could only confirm the evil of her condition. In such cases, the victim, naturally obsessed, does go back to the beginning, which in her case is to try to comprehend her reaction on the day Alois came to visit in Spital. She was sixteen then and had never seen a man who disturbed her as much—she took a full step backward on their meeting at the door. She might as well have received a blow at the sight of him. Yet she also admired Alois, and immensely, and at once. Her mother had an expression on her face Klara had not seen before. For one instant, there in full pride and longing, Johanna had seemed beautiful. On the next moment, Klara shared the same feeling, a closeness to her mother that was more than their everyday animal sense of sharing the same bed-rags

of existence, no, it was as if she inhabited her mother's heart for the blink of an eye, and then took in the full force of the pang that followed. In truth, Klara had had a devil's visitation. The only joy we demons can know occurs in the instant we invest our spirit in the man or woman who is to be our client. Johanna was not much of a devil (only for a day could one say that she had been more or less invested) but it was enough for Klara to share her mother's desire.

We need not, however, travel again along the back and forth of Klara's passion for Alois, nor repeat our understanding of her piety. By the time Adolf was born, she would wash her mouth every morning with laundry soap, a natural act given her mate's predilection for putting her head into his groin and keeping it right there, one big hand on her neck.

No surprise then if her love was for the baby. So soon as Adolf gave, in the midst of all his early illness, some real signs of living—after two weeks he could smile with delight at the approach of her face—she began to believe that God might be kind to her this time, that He could even be ready to forgive if she would be perfect. Would He spare this child, His Wrath assuaged? Perhaps He had even given her an angel—such was the nature of

secret hope! An angel, however, required that she have nothing to do with her husband. Not in bed!

Alois soon had to face the possibility that a will of iron, when properly forged by prayer, is more powerful in a woman than in a man. He could not at first believe that her refusal to let him touch her was neither a whim nor a new species of drawn-out enticement. "You women go back and forth like a dog chasing its tail," he told her in exasperation. Then, deciding it was a revolution to be crushed, he seized her buttocks with one hand and a breast with the other.

She bit him on the wrist, did it hard enough to draw blood. Whereupon he cuffed her, leaving Klara with a bruised eye he was obliged to beg her to conceal. (What a nasty scandal if she decided to go out and face all those women of Braunau who lived by their windows!) So she could not go out. For a week, his hand bandaged, he did the shopping early in the morning and after work—no tavern ale for those nights. After that, her discoloration no longer visible, he gave up what he considered to be his irrevocable rights and continued to sleep in a lump on his side of the bed.

Since this state was to be maintained for close to three years, it will certainly be worth returning to Alois and the solutions he found to lift a few of the privations of matrimonial siege. But, for now, we stay close to Klara. An intensity of emotion is always attractive to a hard-working devil, even as farmers dream of black soil for future crops.

It need hardly be underlined that the death of the Little Trio, Otto, Gustav and Ida proved useful to us even if we did not effect it. Obviously, it intensified Klara's love for Adolf past any usual measure of large maternal love. When he began to cry out as she kissed him, she even came to understand that it was the odor of lye on her mouth. Since Alois was now driven to his side of the bed, she no longer had to wash her mouth in the morning. Therefore, she could kiss Adolf to her full content even as he gurgled all obligingly.

To the degree that the E.O. had us paying attention to this birth, we were pleased. Excessive mother-love could be as productive for the sort of garden we were looking to cultivate as even the whole absence of mother-love or a cruel distortion of it. We were keyed to look for excess of every kind, good or bad, loving or hateful, in the experiences of our clients, every

distortion, every warping of honest sentiment, even the over-intensification of good sentiment, contributed to the mix we desired.

If the E.O. and the D.K. are generally obliged to ignore the majority of men and women (either for their inborn limitations or because of the stalemate our warring interest in them usually creates, it becomes then extraordinarily important to us that we select figures in childhood. For then, a large investment is possible before the Lord (whom, to remind you, we will call the D.K.) or His Angels (the Cudgels) become aware of our infiltration. That, as has been indicated, is always a gamble. The E.O. chose Adolf early, by the reliable steadfast rule that an incestuous procreation followed by swarms of mother-love is certainly a favorable beginning. Here, however, there is, as we know, even more. The event was powerfully fortified by the presence of the E.O. at the conception, a rare, even transcendental occasion. There was then every reason to expect that the child would prove extraordinary. If it lived. We lose so many.

Nonetheless, when mother-love is not only all-embracing but an all-preserving force, it can come as no surprise that so many artists, gargoyles, ogres, geniuses, killers, and an occasional savior come forth as the final

product. The first element of mutual recognition in the struggle between the D.K. and the E.O. is probably the understanding that no single splendid human quality can ever prevail by itself, unaltered by us or Them. Even the noblest, most self-sacrificing and generous mother can produce a monster if we get there first. We are always on the alert for candidates who are loved outrageously in early childhood.

By the time he was a year old, Klara called the boy Adi, never Adolf or Dolfi. (Dolfi was much too close to Teufel for comfort.) "Look," she would say to her stepchildren, "look, Alois, look, Angela, isn't he an angel, a little god?" Since the baby had a round face, big round eyes as blue as hers, and a small mouth, and therefore looked to them like any other baby, they nodded with easy obedience. She was a good stepmother and that was all right with Alois, Jr. and also with Angela since they had heard from Alois, Sr. that their own mother was crazy.

Klara did not wish to speak with such exaggeration to her stepchildren about their new half-brother, but she could not help herself. Adoration welled forth with every indication Adi gave that, yes, he would still be there tomorrow, he would live.

She was certain she would keep him alive. Breast-feeding gave her the incontestable virtuous sense that she was putting her own strength into him. Her nipple was never far from his mouth. Minor devils, out at night in that region would report that her prayers were more heartfelt than any one of the near-thousand mothers of Braunau they passed in the dark. Devils, obviously, have minimal attachment to the sentimental, let alone the heartfelt, but one or two were bothered by her, yes, even haunted a bit. Her prayer was so pure: "Oh, Lord, take my life if it will help to save his." Other women, being more practical, complained to the D.K. about what was missing in their lives. The most greedy and stupid were always looking to grab and gorge—a better house, more money, even a lover, "yes, if you permit it, Lord."—there was no comfort for which they did not lust. She looked to give comfort to the child, and there was her breast, count on it, always in his mouth.

While the E.O. was in general not sympathetic to breast-feeding since its absence stimulated an essential if ugly energy in our future clients, his attitude was ready to reverse itself in cases of first-degree incest. For such situations, the closer the mother to the child, why, the better for us.

The same was true of excretory dramas. A dirty butt on a baby, if found daily, made the mother a potential client for us. No chance of that with Klara. If she had always kept a clean house, her rooms at the Pommar Inn were now as spotless as any rich merchant's home. The furnishings gleamed. So, too, did Adi's pip-squeak of an anus. It was kept as immaculate as a small glistening pebble, and of that, too, did the E.O. approve—an incestuary must always be aware of the importance of his or her own excrement, a Diktat that was never quite explained to us although it did offer a hint of explanation merely by being stated. Our basic instruction was that every rule, no matter how generally effective, was there to be reversed in special cases. Sometimes I would even think that the E.O. judged our potentiality to improve by our sensitivity to just this nuance—always be ready for the special case.

4.

Not long after Adolf was born, Alois decided to leave the Pommer Inn. This move added up to his twelfth change of address in Braunau over fourteen years. But, Alois had good words for the Pommer: "It has elegance. I don't know that I would use such a word for anything else in this little city. He had a dozen such remarks to enliven a hundred situations of small talk. Two he used not infrequently were: "Women are like geese—you can recognize them from behind." Or, when speaking to fellow professionals: "To pick out a smuggler is easy. They are too good to be true. They dress too well, they speak too well, and they work too hard at looking you in the eye."

When asked, however, why he had moved from the Pommer Inn after residing there for four years, he would shrug. "I like to move," he would say. The truth was that he had used up the few waitresses, chambermaids and cooks at the Pommer who were not too old or too ugly, and he could have added (and did to one or two friends), "when a woman goes dry on you, change your house. That can put a little oil in their juices." He could even have given the real reason—no matter where he lived, a restlessness came upon him sooner or later that was intolerable.

On the day, however, that the Hitler family left the Pommer Inn, he had a most uncharacteristic thought. It was that the forces of the universe might yet choose him for high position. I will remark that his idea of this high position was promotion to Chief Customs Official in the provincial capital of Linz; indeed he was to be given that post before he retired. Never superstitious (except when he was) Alois decided that this last position came in good part because of the move from the Pommer Inn to a rented house on Linzerstrasse. He and Klara both agreed that they needed more room, and now they had it. Of course, there were no females in the attic, but he could manage with that. He had nosed out a woman who lived

on his route home from the tavern. He had to pay for the privilege by giving her a gift time to time, but then the rent on Linzerstrasse was low. It was a dreary house.

All the while, he fought against falling in love with his wife. She infuriated him. If ants were like bees and had a Queen for whom they labored, then Klara was Queen of the ants, for his skin would crawl, his crotch would itch, and his heart toll in his chest as he would take in the presence of Klara lying in silence on her half of the divided bed. He would keep thinking of how she had looked on the night of her wedding. She had worn a dark rose silk dress with a white collar—that much white she allowed herself as a bride—and on her white forehead which he considered well-shaped, she had teased some charming curls. At her breast was pinned the one piece of jewelry she owned, a small green cluster of glass grapes looking real enough to mislead a man enough to reach for one. And then there were her eyes—no mistake! He had to fight against falling in love with a woman who kept the cleanest house in Braunau just for him and for three kids, a woman always as polite to him in public as to an emperor, a woman who never complained about what she had and didn't have and

never nagged him about finances, a woman who still had only one good dress, the one she had had made to wear at her wedding party, and yet if he laid a finger on her, she would have bitten it off. He wondered if the difference in their age was what it was about. Better than marrying her, he should have put her in a nunnery. Yet his skin itched at the thought of how she would not let him near.

Drinking at the tavern, he would look to regain his pride. His dislike of the Church had by now become a conversational instrument. He expressed a superior scorn. Yes, he could say he knew a few things. He would occasionally page through a section of an anti-clerical volume he had found in an antique bookshop in Braunau, indeed, the store owner, Hans Lycidias Leipziger, would meet him on many an evening for beer, and while the bookseller kept himself at a scholarly level above the Customs Officers' discussions by offering no more than a nod of his head from time to time, his wise presence, his shaven chin and upper lip, his full sideburns, his peephole spectacles, his half-bald head of burgeoning white hair, offered a slight but legitimizing resemblance to Arthur [CK sp] Schopenhauer whose portrait was occasionally printed in the Braunau Zeitung, and so gave

support to Leipziger's smallest assent, just enough to bring the other Customs Officers around the more bruising turns of Alois' argument. While they were hardly to be counted as church-goers, "No good man wants to be neutered," most were ready to say, they were still officials, and could hardly feel at ease when a prestigious institution was mocked, let alone the Holy Roman Church.

Not Alois. He felt no fear in declaring that he had no fear. "If there is a Providence larger than Franz Josef's power to provide for us, I have not encountered it."

"Alois, not everything comes up to a man with a printed sign," said the officer closest to him in rank.

"Yes, it is all a mystery. Mystery, mystery, mystery, and the Church keeps the keys, they are the caretakers, yah?"

The others laughed uneasily. But Alois was thinking of Klara and how her piety left a hot rock in his stomach. He would grind this rock to powder. "In the Middle Ages," he said, "do you know? The whores, they were more respectable than the nuns. They even had a Guild for themselves alone! I have read about a convent in Franconia so stinking bad the Pope

had to investigate. Why? Because the Whores' Guild complained about the competition."

"Come now," said two drinkers at once.

"True. It is true. Absolutely true. Hans Leipziger here can show you the text." Leipziger nodded slowly, reflectively. He was a little too drunk to be certain on which side his authority should fall. "Yes," said Alois, "the Pope says, 'Send a monsignor to look into it.' What does he report? Yah? Half the nuns are pregnant. This is the sober fact history must live with. So, the Pope takes a real look at the monasteries. Orgies. Orgies of homosexuals." He said it with such force that he had time to take a large draft of his tankard.

"That, of course," said Alois, once new breath had been ingested, "need not surprise us. To this day, half of the priesthood are momma's boys. We know that."

"No, we don't," muttered one of the younger officers. "My brother is a priest."

"In that case, I tip my hat to him," said Alois, "if he is your brother, he is different. But that was then. And I assure you: The priests who were

real men did worse. You ever hear this saying of the Pope? From the same Pope. He said, 'No priest needs to marry so long as the peasant has a wife.'"

The force of his voice insisted that they be ready to applaud with laughter. So, they laughed. "It was exactly like that," he said. "'The poor merchant has one wife, the priest has ten, and the Bishop cannot enter heaven—too many wives to count.'"

"Which Bishop?"

"The Bishop of Linz, don't you know?"

Alois had not forgotten the Bishop of Linz who, six years ago, had refused his application to marry Klara. In order to defray the expenses of translating his letter into Latin, Alois had been forced to declare that he was a pauper. Six years ago. It still rankled.

On the walk home, his mood was foul. He had come to the conclusion that the days of enjoying open tirades against the Church might be coming to a close. He was fifty-four years old, and for the last thirty years, had never worried about his position in life. He had known he could and would rise in the ranks open to him, and no higher.

Now, however, his stomach was most unsettled. From a respected friend in the Finance Watch, he had been told that in Vienna there was talk of a promotion for Alois Hitler up to Chief Customs Officer at Passau. Given his lack of respectable education, that would be a true rise in rank. "However, you must watch yourself, Alois," the friend had said. "This is still a year away. You must keep a good name."

He had always seen himself as exceptional, afraid of no one (except for certain superiors in uniform), possessed of a genuine magnetism for women (how many men could say that much for themselves?) and up from the ranks. Moreover, he had never been timid about public opinion. Nobody else he knew could say as much for himself. He was no coward.

But now this respected friend who had his ear in the councils of the Finance Watch was saying, "Watch out for the townspeople in Braunau."

That was one pang to travel right to the hilt. Because Alois could not decide whether to trust this friend. He was a practical joker. In fact, he was the same one who had told him years ago: "The townspeople are nothing. You can put your thumb to your nose at them." Alois had indeed put together a good many habits around this remark, but the truth now was that

tonight he had said too much, absolutely, what with this rumor of being moved to Passau. Now, he was learning how much ambition he had, an ambition that he had never admitted to himself. He couldn't. It would have been like a river breaking through a levee. But now he could recognize it. If he wanted to stay afloat, he had to stop pissing on the Church.

Yes, in this sense, his wife, a cold tit to him and a jug of warm milk to the baby—what a guzzler! never off of the tit. But, to get by all that!—she was a useful wife. Good for the children, good cook, very good with the Church.

Now, he, personally, was not going to be caught at a High Mass except for State occasions, holidays. He did not wish to live with a new itching attack, no, he did not see the confessional box for himself. His skin prickled. A serious official of the Crown having to bare his soul (and some of the private stuff below the belt!), no, not to one more priest. Let them find food somewhere else for tonight's masturbation. Never!

Women, however, should be seen in church. It was time to accept that as a fact. The people in Braunau must not be able to say that he didn't allow his wife to go through the portal.

5.

Within the Company, we look upon ambition as a force that is at our disposal. At least, usually so. While we are obliged to accept the not-happy likelihood that human emotions only originated in men and women through God's choice, even as He gave necessary instincts to the animals, nonetheless, we look upon all human feelings as available to us for adaptation to our purposes. Of no intense states is this more true than ambition, and its corollary, avarice. (You may be certain that it was the E.O. who developed the concept of money.) Yet we do not consider avarice to be quite the same as greed. Rather, we look upon it as the vehicle of greed, just as ambition, taken in the same light, can be described as the vehicle of Vision. That is why God, in the beginning, while interested in

putting serious restraints upon behavior, did encourage ambition. (I cannot speak with certainty on this point, but I would suggest that the D.K. not only had His Vision of what humankind should become, but He also desired that each man and woman be ready to fulfill an arduous part of that Vision.)

I must assume that God's demands proved too arduous. Be certain that the E.O. knew enough to appropriate his portion of the new human structure. I speak with authority on this matter for good reason: Both sides of the equation make sense. In order that the Vision be effective, God had to grant great power to human ambition, human will to succeed. In doing so, He left the E.O. room to capture a rich field of clients. It may be sacrilege to some, but I would even argue that God miscalculated, and seriously so. Ambition is not only the most powerful of the emotions but the most unstable. Assuredly, it is susceptible to distortion and can hardly bear defeat. Almost always defeat creates a putative client for us—that is, someone who hates God for not giving him a fair share of good luck.

Personal ambition, therefore, is what we seek to capture in our likeliest candidates. The D.K.—who, I must emphasize—was always a prodigious optimist—had not foreseen that the only men and women to

promulgate the Vision through the intensity of their ambition would have to be saints. Of course, few humans developed into saints. To be blunt, it is likely the D.K. made some serious miscalculations on the potential for good in human nature. The E.O. had a better comprehension of men and women, particularly the perverse dynamics of growth and change.

As was the case with Alois, ambition is often the most secret of the emotions. Once loosed, it is ready to tear to shreds long-guarded vanities about one's own purity, honor, and pride. It is then that ambition reveals its real integument—the blind force of the frustrated heart.

Let it come as no surprise then that Alois was not the only one in the family to suffer this disruption. Ambition, being a true germ, is infectious. If Klara now had a child who was actually giving a few vital signs of staying alive, this was due, she believed, to her milk. Her breasts were suffused with the most generous joy she had ever known. So, Klara now wanted everything for Adi. And to such a degree, indeed, that she was even ready to contemplate forgiveness for her husband, a bit of forgiveness in any case—enough maybe to allow him to cross the middle of the bed.

So, their second courtship began. It was not at all like the night when Gustav was conceived. Here, she was still breast-feeding Adolf and so there was no question of a pregnancy. That would have to wait. What inspired her interest, is that she could recognize how Alois had built the strongest of foundations for the future of Adolf. Even as Alois had risen from the mud of Strones and Spital to the high honor of a uniform in the service of the Emperor Franz Josef, one could now begin to measure the heights to which Adolf might ascend if his ability to go beyond his origins was equal to the vigor of the father.

For that, however, he would need a father who could love him. Once, in her gentlest voice, she had said to Alois, "Sometimes I must wonder why you never hold Adi."

"It will just make the other two jealous," he answered, referring to Alois, Jr., and Angela. "Jealous kids are not to be trusted with babies."

"They hold him all the time," she said. "They are not jealous. They like him."

"Let us keep it that way."

"No, Alois, sometimes I am afraid he is not very important to you."

She had gone one step beyond the last step she had thought to take. Bad enough for him that he had only half a bed, and now she was looking to nag him. "Important to me?" he said. "That I can answer. He is not yet important to me. I want to see if he will live."

She did not weep often, but this time she burst into tears. The worst had happened. She felt weak before him again. She was not free of loving him.

At that moment, the dog began to bark. Alois had bought a hound at a low price from a farmer he knew. Since they were living in a house, rather than an inn, the purchase could be considered an added protection worth the cost. But the dog, whom he named Luther, proved disappointing. While Luther worshipped Alois and quivered before his master at every shift of tone, he did not seem otherwise alert. Moreover, he had nervous habits. Even as Alois shouted at him to be silent, poor Luther urinated on the floor.

Afterward, Alois would have his regrets. The hound, after all, did adore him. But first he began to whip the beast. The dog's bottom became soaked in its own outpourings as it tried to crawl away all the while howling its terror. The uproar woke the children, Alois, Jr., first, then Angela, Adi at

the last, not yet two years old, but agile enough to get out of his low bed and totter into the midst of this. Klara leaped up to seize him. She was ready for the worst, she hardly knew what—that the child would step into the urine, that he would weep for her breast, that Alois might strike them both—she had seen the look in her husband's eye when Adi was too greedy on her tit. None of this happened, however. To the contrary, the child stood there and looked with solemn interest at the whimpering dog, then at the flailing hand of the father, and the child's eyes had a gleam she had seen before, a look of remarkable intensity for one so small. She had seen it on his face when suckling him. He would stare at her with an expression equal to the same look on Alois' face, the rare tender expression of a lover overwhelmed for a moment by the equality of flesh upon flesh, soul to soul, the very communion of being able to speak without a word. At such instants, she felt as if this child was closer to her and knew more about her than anyone in her life.

Now, as Adolf stared at the wet dog and then the over-flushed face of the father, there was no tenderness in this look, but much comprehension.

Klara no longer wept, but she felt an odd panic as if she must now startle the little boy into weeping so that she could give him her breast and thereby remove him from the room. Indeed, she succeeded. Adi burst into a rage as she took him up and force-fed him her breast. Indeed, armed with his first tooth, he nipped her enough for Klara to cry out, whereupon he stopped bawling long enough to give a deep and hearty chuckle. They were back together again.

From the room she had just quit, she could hear Alois bellowing at Alois, Jr. and Angela to clean up the puddles.

“That dog can’t even shit right,” he cried out of his own pain at the awful turn the evening had taken. Luther was bleeding at the mouth from blows he had received full-face on his muzzle, but in turn, Alois’ palm had a small but ugly laceration from raking one fierce slap across a broken incisor in the sad beast’s front teeth.

Fatueh
to Jwr
1/30/06

Epilogue

The Castle in the Forest

1.

In the beginning I said that you

You may call me Dieter. For now, the name will serve — now that I
It was the name I used when in the body
am in America, this curious nation. If I call upon the art of patience, it is
and person of an SS man, and I chose to
because time here passes void of stature for me, and so I feel somewhat
keep the name at the end of the war
disposed toward rebellion. The proof is that I am preparing to write a novel.

~~In 1945 when I decided to close to I was~~
That is not done among my people.

while impersonating another SS officer who was
a psychoanalyst. That indeed was how I
This novel would consist of an account given by one man to another

came to be alone

(in a small room at the edge of an uproar. An impromptu (and ghoulish)

~~celebration~~ ^{was} outside) ~~outside in that~~
white a celebration is continuing through the night in a Konzentrationslager, a

in a concentration camp that has just been liberated by American soldiers on the

very last day of April, 1945.

In this small ~~room~~ ^{a large} office I was
engaged in conversation with a
psychiatrist from the ~~United States~~ ^{armed forces of the}
~~Army~~ a Captain who ~~appeared~~
~~to be Jewish~~. A pistol lay on the table

between us. It belonged to the American.

As the two men converse, a pistol lies on the table. It belongs to the, ~~who was~~ ^{doctor,} American. He is a young Jewish psychiatrist, a Captain in rank, who ~~was~~ ^{was} with ~~when they~~ ^{needed} accompanied the U.S. forces who reached this camp a few hours ago, and ~~and~~ were appalled by what they saw.

Despite his uniform, this Jewish officer, a pacifist by temperament, has done his immediate best to withdraw from the immediate surroundings.

The worst human odors ~~are~~ ^{were} an ongoing product of ~~the collective~~ ^{the collective} emaciation of the camp prisoners. ~~There is all the hideousness of their~~ ^{(which, of course, were also unwashed.) So,} ~~There was considerable~~ pestilential cries of joy. Yes, it is so bad that the American ~~has~~ ^{we,} ordered his

opposite number, a Nazi psychiatrist, to come with him into a small sentry room. There, after midnight, they commence a conversation—call it an interrogation—that soon turns into a monologue by ~~the German~~ ^{we,}.

In the course of this, as alone with each other as two souls on an island not large enough for three, the resident doctor, an SS Major recently attached to the camp, seeks to explain his world view. For the Jew, that

becomes an immeasurably unhappy experience. The account proves too startling in its details, and even more so in its insights. If the SS doctor is

rueful occasionally at some unhappy errors, still he is proud of his

now," he said, "let well be moving our operations to America now that Adolf is kaput. I will ~~not~~ ^{not} call on you again once I have come to a few more determinations over what to do in America." So, I (X)

I pretended to explain the world view of the Jews among whom I had served, in the US de facto opposite number, a Nazi psychiatrist, we had begun, we, the German, I confess that I played with him. It was a time of defeat for me, I was almost out of spirit, so the doctor had just recently relieved me of my intimate service. "Thank you very much" (X)

ex Nazis had taken
psychological ventures into uncharted regions. A tone of superiority is
evident.

Moreover, I was / This Dieter
The SS man is an intellectual and not without charm. Despite the—
had been a charming SS man,
collapse of every last one of his projects, he remains tall, quick, blond, blue-
eyed, and witty. To give a further turn to the screw he is even troubled. He
I spoke a whole counterforce of concerning
speaks with what seems genuine feeling of the damnable excesses in his,

that and also be found in our / achievements. Outside the room, the inmates were
rampaging up and down the parade field. How

By the end of this night, the Jewish Captain can no longer endure his
own situation. Dwelling in the depths of the average pacifist—as one will

invariably discover—lives a killer. That is why the person becomes a
pacifist in the first place. Given such an assault upon his comprehension of

what he had believed were his / had given my subtle
human values, the American unholsters his revolver, cocks it, and kills the
and shot me.

~~SS man~~ Over the centuries I have been
had to vacate a body more than once.

The novel I have just proposed has appeal for me. While I will
HIT If the reader, having come up to
probably not do it since I do not wish to be bothered with the close labors of
the point of Adolf Hitler's early adolescence
making its surface believable (when, in truth, the real story I have to tell is
would now ask, "Dieter, why do you choose
more interesting), I do have a title already. I would call it The Castle in the
this title, "The Castle in the Forest," when there
Forest. Das Schloss im Wald! The name is not without irony, since the

So, I moved on, I travelled to America. (p4)
I spoke to the Maestro long enough
for him to say to me, "yes that Jewish
Captain showed the way in
a in the Arabs and the Israelis before!" (HIT)

has been no castle in your book, I
 would reply that the name was its irony
 and that is a wretched far good devil. Bless
 camp in question sits on the empty plain of what was once a potato field. (irony!)
 is
 title

Not many trees are in sight, nor any hint of a castle, nothing of interest on

the horizon. ^{So Das} Schloss im Wald ^{just} is the kind of title the inmates of the

camp might give to their compound. One pride ^{was maintained to the} had been reserved for the

^{end of the} prisoners—at least ^{among} for the best of the few surviving German prisoners. ~~the~~

^{It was} that they ^{had} have not lost all sense of irony. Needless to say, ^{the} these prisoners

^{who originated this piece of call} who went in for nomenclature were from Berlin.

If you are German and possessed of lively intelligence, irony is, of course, vital to speech. German came to us originally as the language of simple folk, good pagan brutes and husbandmen, tribal people. Rare was the early German not ready for the hunt. So, our language is full of the growls of the stomach and the wind in the bowels of hearty existence, the bellows of the lungs, the hiss of the windpipe, the cries of command that one issues to domesticated animals, even the roar that stirs in the throat at the sight of blood. Given, however, the demand required of this folk through the centuries—that they be ready to enter Western civilization before it grew altogether away from them—it should not prove surprising that many of the German bourgeoisie who graduated into city life from

German
 is Das
 Schloss
 in
 Wald
 and
 the
 that
 was
 the
 name
 given
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 prisoners
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 on the

[I] She was an attractive young blond and he adored her. How ~~local~~ a remark with which ~~to conclude~~ but it does seem as if muddy barnyards, did their best to speak in voices as soft as the silk of a sleeve. Particularly the ladies. Much of this new and genteel German ~~turned sentimental~~. I do not speak here of our long words which were a precursor to our technological spirit today, just the syrupy sounds, ~~sweets~~ ^{lachrymose sweets} and tears for a low-grade brain. ~~For every sharp German, therefore, irony~~ ^{particularly the Berlingian irony} became an essential corrective.

even
Lucas
was
its
own
integrity!
End

Now, I recognize that this disquisition leads us ~~away from the~~ ^{we have just traversed} narrative I just proposed. Of course, that is what I wish to do. The story ~~enables me to return to our beginning~~ ^{even further} chosen, I have decided (even as I begin to tell it) will not bring me near enough to the complexity of my subject. The SS Major, whom I shall also ~~name Dieter~~ ^{when was} (since for literary purposes he is a manifestation of myself), would be a member of ~~an elite SS Intelligence group~~. Its classification (for those who care about such matters) might as well be Special Section IV-2a, directly under the supervision of Heinrich Himmler. ~~My initial premise for~~ ^{Nudless}

the novel just abandoned was that Dieter had recently installed himself as one of the camp doctors in order to conceal what had been his real role as a Nazi. Given the last down-crashing days of World War II, he had had himself posted at Schloss im Wald to avoid immediate arrest.

to remark, it is my hope that we have indeed come a long way since. It is the act of ~~the~~ betraying the Maestro does not consume me, perhaps.

I may resume this account of my share of the early years of Adolphe. It flew up to at least the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s because in that period Adolphe was the last of a pair of twins, and it was with Geli Raubach (the who was Adolphe's daughter).