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Hitler's Mother

Part I

1.

You may call me Dieter. For now, the name will serve—now that I am in America, this curious nation. If I draw upon reserves of patience, it is because time passes ~~here~~ ^{and that} void of any stature for me, which leaves my spirit so disposed toward rebellion that I am preparing to write a novel. Among my former associates, this was exactly what ~~not to~~ ^{we did not} do. I was, after all, a member of a matchless Intelligence group. Its classification was SS, Special Section IV-2a, and we were directly under the supervision of Heinrich Himmler. Today, the man is seen as a monster, and I would not look to defend him—he

turned out to be one hell of a monster. All the same, Himmler did have an original mind, and one of his theses—a most powerful concept!—does take me into my novelistic intentions which are, I promise, not routine.

2.

The room in which Himmler used to instruct us should not be difficult to picture since it was a modest lecture theatre with twenty seats and old walnut panelling. My emphasis will not often be, however, on such details, since I would rather concern myself with Himmler's more private ideas. There sits the introduction to my purpose—I wish to tell a tale resistant to conventional belief, or, to put it more directly, will voyage into a sea of {turbulence, a} cacaphony of new problems.

The first is that I, a veteran artist of mendacity, must now try to recount what is true. ^{*I must warn you: the*} when the habit of our occupation was not only to distort the truth ^{*best*} but know how to pick up momentum from the lies we promulgated. Mendacity, after all, is not without its ^{*own*} art. Now I am burdened with an

unfamiliar inclination: the desire to tell it—as Americans say, straight out! For a serious intelligence officer, this inclination is inadmissible. But then, I no longer know exactly where I am ~~by now~~ (other than for the gross fact that I am in America—good luck!)

Enough! Let me present Heinrich Himmler. You, the reader, must be prepared for no easy occasion since this man whose inadvertant nickname (much behind his back!) was Heini, had become by 1938 one of the four or five most important leaders in Germany. Yet his most secret intellectual devotion was toward the study of incest. It was more than a signal point of interest, it was, indeed, an obsession. It dominated our secret research. His closed lectures often returned to the invasiveness of this problem. Through the centuries, incest, he would propose, had been prevalent among the poor of all lands. Even our own German peasantry had been much afflicted, yes, even through the Nineteenth Century. "Normally, no one in learned society cares to speak of this," he would remark. "After all, there is nothing to be done. Who would bother to declare that some poor wretch is a certified product of incest? No, every establishment has swept it under the rug. Ranking government officials still do the same all over the world."

All, that is, except our Heinrich Himmler. He did have the most extraordinary ideas fermenting behind his unhappy spectacles. For a man with a bland and chinless mug, I must repeat that he did have a mind of his own. To us who worked closely with him, his thought invariably proved disruptive in its mixture of brilliance and stupidity. He was that much out of category. For example, he declared himself to be a pagan. He predicted that there would be a healthy and orgiastic future when paganism took over the world. Everyone's soul would then be rich. None of us could conceive, however, of an orgy where carnality would rise to such a pitch that you might find a woman ready to throw herself into a flesh-melting roll with Heinrich Himmler. No, not even in the most innovative spirit of the game! You could see his face as it must once have been at a school dance, that bespectacled disapproving stare of the wallflower, tall, thin, but embarrassed already by a skinny youth's pot belly. There he was, ready to wait by the wall until the dance was over.

Yet he became obsessed with matters others would hardly dare to mention aloud (which, I must say, is usually the first step to new thought!) In fact, he paid close attention to mental retardation. It had, he would propose,

a possible 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 on occasion the most exceptionally promising offspring could be found in low ~~level~~ families with many children. Such kids were ^{all so} often incestuaries. The word, as he coined it in German, was Inzestuarier. He did not like the more common term for such disgrace, Blutschande, (blood-scandal), or as sometimes employed in polite circles, Dramatik des Blutes, (blood-drama).

None of us felt sufficiently qualified to say that his theory was, of course, to be dismissed. Even in the first years of the S.S., Himmler had recognized that one of our prime needs was to develop exceptional research groups, an elite at one phenomenal level above the elite. We were to search into ultimates. As Himmler put it, letzte Fragen—last questions. (The health of National Socialism depended, he would often say, on nothing less.) We were to explore problems that others ^{nations} did not expect to go near. Incest—count on it—was topping the list. Once the German mind could re-establish itself as the leading influence in the learned world, then—so went his unstated syllogism—much recognition would be given to Heinrich Himmler for his

profound attack on world problems originating in the agricultural milieu. He would emphasize the underlying point: Problems of husbandry could not be contemplated without comprehending the peasant. Yet to understand this man of the earth was to speak of incest.

Here, I promise you, he would hold up his hand in precisely that little gesture Hitler used—one prissy flip of the wrist! It was Heinrich's way of saying: "Now comes the meat and potatoes!" And on he would proceed. "Yes," he would say, "incest! This is one very good reason that old peasants are devout. We, here, need not refer to our special studies in order to declare that an acute fear of the sinful in oneself will manifest itself sooner or later by one of two opposed extremes: Either absolute devotion to religious practice! Or nihilism! Indeed, ^{Heinrich would go on, "I can} I can recall from my student days that the Marxist Friedrich Engels ^{once)} ^{as "When the} 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 wrong mouth. As much can be said for blood-scandal. Also impossible to prevent. So, the peasant looks to keep himself devout. I guarantee you: this was altogether true in the old days."

He nodded. He nodded again as if two good pumps of his head might be the minimum necessary to convince us.

How, he asked, could the average peasant of the last century avoid these blood temptations? After all, peasants, as we all knew, were not the most attractive people. If born with good features, any such advantage was soon worn away by hard labor. Moreover, they would reek of the field and the barn. Heavy personal odors were at the mercy of hot summers. Would their basic impulses not be subject then to bestial inclinations? Given the paucity of their social life, how were they to acquire the inner power 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 children 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 steep short hills 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 an available option. Who, after all, is more likely to find the honorable work-hardened features of the father or the brother particularly attractive? The daughters, of course! Or the sisters. Often they

are the only ones. The father, having created them, remains the focus of their attention. The young brother, so often, lives at night in the same bed with the sister. Sexual attraction can, of course, be described as: highly focussed attention."

Hand it to Himmler. He had been storing theories in his head for two decades. Moreover, he had immersed himself in The World as Will and Idea. Heinrich was a great believer in Schopenhauer's assertions on the primal importance of the Will. He had, therefore, a great deal to say about the genes—still a wonderful new word for us in 1938. These genes, he said, had to be a biological embodiment of Schopenhauer's mysterious Will. "We know," he said, "that certain instincts are passed on from one generation to the next. Why? Because the nature of the Will is to remain true to what I call the Originating Vision. Yes, gentlemen, the Originating Vision. For we have been engaged from the beginning of human time in an effort to rise from our Ur-depths to the heights of human glory. We Germans were the first to perceive that this was the aim of human existence. The Will embodied in our genes is the ~~direct~~^{quency} presence of this Vision, ~~come~~^{by} to us ~~from~~ Creation itself.

"Of course, there are countless impediments to such a transcendental development. It is never easy to protect what is best in oneself. ^{I would even say that} ~~Indeed~~ the purest of the genes were able to hold on to their hope of future power and high purpose only by rising above the privations, humiliations, disasters and tragedies the Vision will suffer in the course of being transmitted from father to child, generation after generation. Great leaders, I would tell you, are not the product of one father and one mother, but are to be seen as the descendants of ten frustrated generations. So, one has the right to ask—has the Originating Vision been warped out of shape by life's demands? ~~Worse,~~ ^{has it even} been lost? So often, the Vision is abandoned ^{altogether?} I can assure you: The noblest genes undergo agonies of spirit ^{in the course of passing} as they pass from one generation to the next. Yet, this ^{tortuous, may be} odyssey ^{road to deliver} is the only way to produce a true prodigy ^{out of} from a family of ordinary people. I will add that ^{I have not developed} ~~I have developed~~ these concepts through scrupulous observation rather than from personal ^{experience} ~~experience~~. ^{much as through scrupulous & generation. For} ~~example,~~ ^{Super-Mensch} ~~Super-Mensch~~ I, Heinrich Himmler, would not care to suggest that I qualify as such a ~~person~~. ^{To the contrary, my roots were given an early and} most advanced development by Heinrich the Fowler, that great German king of the early Middle Ages. You will recall he stood chest-to-chest in combat

against Charlemagne. His blood-relation to my family line obliged me, therefore, to make every effort to regenerate his great and early family achievements. At the risk of being immodest, I will submit that I do look *upon the work of my cancer so far* ~~upon that~~ as a most determined accomplishment. Let all proportions, however, be maintained. The only triumph to impress us to the point of *and readiness for whole devotion* absolute awe is the heroic rise of Adolf Hitler from a long line of the most modest peasant roots.

Our Heinrich now posed the precise objection we were beginning to form for ourselves. "How," he asked, "can the preservation of the Originating Vision not be obstructed by the process of reproduction itself? *must always be a way* Reproduction ~~is~~, after all, *(commingling)* Procreation *way* brings together multimillions of sperm, yet each one is faced with the mission near-to-impossible, *nonetheless* of travelling right *all the way* up to the ovum, that highly-developed and reclusive ovum of the female, large as a battleship to each lonely sperm cell swimming in the sea." Now, he nodded forcibly, and more than twice, twice and then twice again as if to propose that in every difficulty resided the *incomprehensible light* ~~beauty~~ of an exceptional solution. "I would maintain that the multi-million of sperm in one man's ejaculation can be imbued *throughout* with the power of

knowing absolute commitment)
 directedness toward the target even as the morale of a first-rate company of infantry can be brought to bear on the need to capture a preassigned ridge.

One can propose that sperm, during the act of coition, is able to act in just such purposeful fashion. But,"—he held up a hand—"will the genes within the woman, those genes so separately installed in her ovum—will they, we must ask, be compatible with the semen of the man? Or are they in dispute? Will they dicker over reductive details or even contravene the overall objective within his sperm? I would have to answer, yes, just about always they are much in dispute. Sperm and ovum, in the average case, can

sometimes prove sufficiently compatible to procreate. But hardly more. The man and woman so rarely share the same *necessities in* aspect of the Originating Vision. *They are now derived from* The variety of their separate experience *in life and that* has already affected their genes.

When we begin to speak, therefore, of the creation of the Superman, let us be *human to believe for ages & set* *will be able to procreate* ~~strikingly aware that not even one in a million families can present~~ a man and woman who are close enough in the precise articulation of their genes to bring forth such a miracle of a child. Not even one, perhaps, in a hundred million. No!"—again the upraised hand—"let us say, closer to a billion. In

the case of Adolf Hitler, the numbers may approach the awesome distances we encounter in astronomy.

"So, gentlemen, we have a right to propose that the Superman can only come forth from a mating of male and female genes who are possessed of exceptional similarity. Only then can such genes be not only compatible but ~~able to reinforce each other~~. That is the vital collaboration ~~which is~~ ^{we deem to be} altogether necessary if the genes are to carry out the aims of the Originating Vision."

Who could not see where Heinrich was ^{determined to take us?} ~~leading us?~~ (Incest offered the ^{nearest} ~~clearest~~ possibility for combining ^{bringing together} a striking similarity of purpose. ^{"In actuality, however"}

"However," said Himmler, "it is never ^{so} simple. We are all too aware of the poor human products that ^{usually} come our way from ^{who} (inter-family ^{those} fornication). Yes, we know. ^{So very} All too often, children who are a product of incest present a host of childhood ills and early deaths, ^{whole families} of mental retardation, ^{all too many} physical anomalies, and ^{various} other monstrosities of mal-development."

He stood there, ^{sad and stern}. "This is the price humanity must pay. If ^{be prepared to} the best lies close to the worst, so does the worst occur ^{the best} more often. ^{Most} ~~more~~ often. Not only are good tendencies encouraged in such a child's

^{but wish to}
 genes + bad ones ^{are also ready to} can be fused to each other. Our mysterious friends, the
 genes, ^{is to} then combine their less agreeable possibilities. Instability ~~can be~~
 expected, therefore, as a product of incest. Idiocy waits in the wings. We
 must recognize: The finer the possibilities for the future development of a
 great spirit, so too can we expect that ^{social} excessive restlessness ~~will be present~~
~~as well.~~ Social ^{can} inhibitions ^{can} rear up everywhere to oppress this would-be
 proud spirit. Vast frustration and ^{can} massive obstruction ~~can, by early~~
~~childhood,~~ unhinge the brain or ~~even~~ induce early death." So spoke Heinrich
 Himmler.

^{tendency}
 I think all of us present knew the ultimate ~~objective~~ of these remarks. At
 this point, back in 1938, we were looking (in greatest secrecy, you may be
 certain) to determine whether our Fuehrer was a first or second-degree
 incestuary. Or, neither. If not, 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 I am more ready to approach the obsession we shared with Himmler. It revolved around Adolf Hitler, whom, I confess, lived often in the center of my thoughts. It is certainly fair to say that we were obsessed. But then, what is an obsession but endless circling about a question that remains unanswerable? Our power to think is thereby rendered ~~a hint~~ more numb. You can expect it: For most Germans, the first obsession is Adolf Hitler. Who among us does not try to understand him? Yet, where is the man or woman who can feel satisfied with the answer?

Let me surprise you. I do not have this particular trial. I live with the confidence that I am in a position to understand Adolf. For the fact is that I

know him. I must repeat. I know him from top to bottom, from the inside, I ~~can actually say~~ ^{am actually dependent} ~~can actually~~ say. To borrow from the Americans, given their rough grasp of reality, their instinctive, even lemming-like approach to vulgarity, I say:

"Yes. I know him from asshole to appetite."

Nonetheless, I am obsessed. But with a different question. My never-ceasing quandary is: Do I dare to ^(provide such delineation?) ~~delineate him~~? When I think of explaining how I know what I do know, I am seized by a sharp sense of oppression. It is not easy to admit, but I can describe it as a fear comparable to diving at night into black water from ~~too great a height~~ ^{great} ~~a height~~. ~~Face dead!~~

Be it understood then that I ~~must~~ ^{will} proceed at a careful pace and ~~choose~~ ^{must} to start ~~therefore~~ ^{At present continue to} with the given. ~~At first~~ I will speak of Hitler from a distance.

Concerning his family roots, I do have ^{however} a few particulars, ~~and I can~~ ^{of general} ~~present them~~ ^{new interest}. In Special Section IV-2a, our work, ~~as I have indicated~~ ^{as I have indicated} always observed the greatest secrecy—our lives were collateral, after all, to such precautions. Yet, by the end, we knew more about Der Fuehrer's origins than any other cohort ~~of~~ ^{entrusted to be Hitler's private} researchers. ~~We did look into the most dangerous~~ ^{had to} ~~questions~~ ^{after all, were the ones to}. We lived with the fear there might be answers destructive enough

to imperil the foundations of the Third Reich. On the other hand, ^{we had the} ~~once we~~
~~confidence to know that once we~~
had some answers, it would be ~~less~~ ^{not} demanding to ~~invent~~ ^{choose} the lies we ~~might~~ ^{would}
need to buttress all those ~~hysterical~~ feelings of patriotism that live in fear of
nauseating facts. You could say our uneasiness collected about one question,
~~that~~ ^{It} promised to be directly explosive. Should the answer prove to be the one
we feared, it would prove far worse, indeed, than any certification of incest.
This most troubling question would ask whether Adolf Hitler's paternal
grandfather had been a Jew.

-4-

That was not ^{the} only dire possibility. ~~There were~~ minor ones we ~~also present that we could~~ ~~could nonetheless~~ hardly ignore. For a time, we considered an inquiry into a most delicate rumor. Monorchidism. Did our Fuehrer belong to that group of unhappy and hyperactive men who only possess one testicle? It was true that he invariably covered his groin with his hands whenever a flashbulb photo

was about to be taken, a classic gesture, understandably, if you are a ^{You do wish to protect the ~~one~~ remaining testicle.} monorchid. But it is one thing to note such a vulnerability, another to ~~verify~~ ^{proceed to verify} it. The investigation ~~itself~~ ^{after all} would be at risk. ~~Direct~~ ^{while direct} results could be obtained quickly by interviewing the few women who had had intimate relations with ^{Der Fuehrer} ~~him~~ ^{whom we} and were still alive, ~~but~~ ^{fall} how to control the repercussions? What if word

got back to Hitler that a couple of ^{officers} ~~bodies~~ in the SS were, so to speak, fingering his genital(s)? We had to give up the project. ~~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 to his~~ ^{like} cardinal theme, and ~~one~~ had to consider the possibility that ^{Himmler} ~~he~~ might be on to something. Could we find, after all, a better explanation for the legendary Will-of-the-Fuehrer than ^{intimacies} ~~precisely those reinforcements~~ of the Vision that might inhere to Blood-Scandal?

Conceive, then, how Himmler loathed the idea that Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather was a Jew. That would not only destroy his thesis, but present us with a major scandal. Nor was it that new a fear. The supposition had first come to light eight years earlier in 1930 when a personal letter came to Hitler's desk. The young man who had penned it was named William Patrick Hitler, and he turned out to be the son of Adolf's older half-brother, Alois Hitler, Jr. The nephew's letter could easily be seen as a lightly veiled threat of blackmail for it referred to shared circumstances in our family

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history. That would have been a dangerous letter to write if William Patrick Hitler lived in Germany, but he had only come forward with this bravado because he dwelt in England, safe with his Irish mother.

What, then, were these shared circumstances? We knew. William Patrick Hitler was speaking of Hitler's grandmother, Maria Anna Schicklgruber. After the birth in 1837 of her son, Alois Schicklgruber in a miserable hamlet called Strones in the province of Waldviertel, she used to receive small but regular sums of money from an unknown source. Yet this Alois was no less than the man who, at the age of 52, became Adolf Hitler's father. That was not until 1889, but back in 1837, and for many years after, one rumor stayed alive among Maria Anna's family and neighbors. It was that the stipend came from a well-to-do Jew who lived in the provincial city of Graz, a good distance away from Strones. According to the legend, Maria Anna Schicklgruber had worked as a maid in this Jew's house, became pregnant, and returned to the hamlet. What sustained the story was that there was no name for the father. When she took the baby to be baptized, her parish priest listed the birth as "Illegitimate," a common declaration in those parts. The Waldviertel was known, after all, as the poorhouse of Austria.

One hundred years later, following the Anschluss in 1938, I was even sent down to the region. Allow me to offer my results. The findings were, in fact, fascinating, but it would be premature to explain how I found out what I did. Let me say again that it will take a while before I know how much I am prepared to present of my real methods of discovery.

The results, then.

-5-

Raabs, Rosenberg, Rappottenstein, Hardegg, Rosenau, Heidenreichstein and Litschau are castles in the Waldviertel. This province, situated north of the Danube, is a land of tall beautiful pines. Indeed Waldviertel can be translated directly as the "wooded quarter," and the silences of the forests are dark and hooded in contrast to the spring green of the occasional field. The soil, however, does not welcome agriculture. So the castles are, for the most part, modest. The Hiedlers (who later became Hitlers) lived in Spital, a village of sorts, and the Schicklgrubers, their cousins, lived in the aforesaid Strones, a place certainly small enough to be termed a hamlet. Be it stated that in those years an Austrian hamlet in the

back woods confirmed the meaning of dirt-poor. Strones was mud-deep along its one lane, and, of course, had no inn, just a few dozen huts with roofs of thatch. If Strones was profuse in pig wallows around each dwelling, cow flop was more prominent in the town meadows. Here and there, the redolence of horse manure would speak of the value of dray-horses. This was, after all, an area where a peasant often had to pull his own plow. When no snow covered the ground, one slogged through various grades of mud. There was gumbo thick as lava, rivulets of silt, gravel washes, muck and slops, clods, rocks, common clay. Most of the peasants had never been near any of the Waldviertel castles just listed. The nearest, 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,"—and, as we know—"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 certainly possible that she had cohabited with any one of several of her brothers. One of them could be the missing mate. (Himmeler 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 and her son dwelt for the next five years in her father's two small rooms. The mysterious money that came in dependable installments helped to support him as well.

We were ready, even eager, to find an inner-family trove of copulations, but that did not allow us to dismiss the Jew from Graz. Inquiries, we understood (via Himmler) had been made eight years ago. Hitler on reading his nephew's letter, had sent it on immediately to his lawyer, Hans Frank. Our Fuehrer, as some may no longer recall, did not become Chancellor until 1933, and three years earlier, (which was not the best time for the Nazis), Hans Frank, like many another close associate, was looking nonetheless to work his way in a little closer to the Leader on the off-chance that Adolf Hitler would yet succeed.

Frank had unhappy news to deliver. The likelihood was that the father to Maria Anna's pregnancy was a nineteen-year-old, the oldest boy of a Jewish merchant named Frankenberger. It made sense. In those years, the scion of many a well-to-do family commonly enjoyed his first carnal outings

with a housemaid. Nor did she have to be anywhere near his age. Such provenance was accepted by the good bourgeois mores of a provincial city like Graz as proven in practice. It was seen as a good deal better than consorting with whores or settling too early on a sweetheart who, in such urgent circumstances, was bound to be unsuitable.

Frank claimed to have seen some conclusive evidence. He told Hitler that he had been shown a letter from Herr Frankenberger, the father of the boy, to Maria Anna. The letter 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 Johann Georg Hiedler, his own mother's second cousin, who had finally come around to marry Maria Anna Schicklgruber five years after Alois' birth. "All the same," said Hitler to Hans Frank, "I am ready to examine this letter from the Jew to my grandmother."

Frank told Hitler that the letter was not available. The man who possessed it was asking an impossibly high price and could not be budged to negotiate, not by honey, nor by threats. Besides, if the letter had been photographed, acquisition was worth little.

“You have, of course, seen the original,” Hitler stated.

“I was able to look at it in his office. He had two big fellows standing beside him. He also had a pistol on the table. What must he have been expecting?”

Hitler nodded. “In a case like this, one cannot even hope for a premature death. The letter will be in one place and a photographic copy in another.”

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

In 1938, however, our findings came up with a variant to this story. It no longer seemed so certain that Maria Anna had been receiving money for fourteen years after 1837. Following her marriage back in 1842, she and her husband, Johann Georg Heidler, had even been too poor to have a home of their own. For a time they actually slept in an empty cattle trough in a neighbor's barn. Of course, there might still have been money coming in

because Johann Georg could certainly have drunk it up. In Strones, he remained a legend for the depth of his drunken stupors. (Through which, incidentally, he kept drinking.) Indeed, such a need for liquor marred the assumption 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 income to offer? The likelihood that he was Alois' father and our Adolf's grandfather was thereby reduced. Besides, Johann Georg Hiedler made no objection when Maria Anna convinced Johann's younger brother, also named Johann, (but, in this case, Johann Nepomuk Hiedler), to take the boy in and raise him. Johann Nepomuk was a hard-working farmer with a wife and three daughters, but he did not have a son.

This brother, Johann Nepomuk, might well be the real father. Yet, we were still not ready to discount the Jew.

Himmler sent me to Graz and I took close measure of some century-old records. I could find no man named Frankenberger in the ledgers! I pored over the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde of the Jewish Registry of Graz, and was confirmed. Back in 1496, the Jews had been expelled from the region. Three hundred and forty-one years later, back in 1837 when Alois was born,

the Jews had still not been permitted to come back. Such permission actually took another twenty years. Moreover, Graz was the sort of small Austrian city that catered to retired army officers on small pensions—of course, it would not be congenial to Jews. Not now and not one hundred years ago. Had Hans Frank been lying? Was he so careless or callous as to make a play on his own name?

It was Himmler who explained it to me. Frank was bold. Indeed, he did not acquire his final nickname for too little. (By 1942, he would be 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. The way Himmler saw it, Hans Frank had invented the existence of the letter for that would provide him with a pressure point on his leader. Given the absence of the purported document, Hitler could hardly know whether Frank was, one, making it up; two, telling the truth; or, three, might actually possess such a letter. It could have been the end for Hans 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 close assistants, he also confided that he did not tell Hitler how there were no Jews in Graz back in 1837. He told Frank instead. I understood immediately. Could there be one official within our ruling group who was not searching for a grip on the others? Frank, to an effective degree, was now in Himmler's grasp. Given that mutual understanding, he did serve Himmler overtly and well. Then, in 1942, when Hitler, nervous to the end about the Jewish grandfather—had he had a bad dream?—instructed our Heinrich to send a good man 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 tangible evidence was found. What with the pressure of the war and the ambiguity of the reports, the matter could be put to rest. Such was Himmler's advice to Hitler.

-6-

The year 1942 is, however, a long way down the road from 1837. If the same can be said for 1938, I mention that year once 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 still ridiculed by his Party enemies as Heini—ill-gaited, pompous, wide-assed and flat-assed, as pious a mediocrity as any other man who has risen too high—his detractors were describing the outer shell. 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 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 street pavement with toothbrushes. The Storm-Troopers laughed as they watched. It became an episode to create 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. "That was a most expensive indulgence and I am pleased that not one of our SS men had anything to do with such a vulgarity. We all know this kind of action can lower morale among many of our best people. It will certainly encourage rowdyism here in Vienna. Nonetheless, we do well not to reject altogether the primitive instinct revealed by the act. For it was, I would say, after much reflection, a successful act of mockery." He paused. He did have our attention. "There is a curious, even, I would declare, a hidden sense of inferiority among many of our folk who feel that the Jews are capable of offering more concentration to a task than any of us—they do know how to study—and that is why so many of them have been so successful. It is very much a Jewish notion that in the end, they can win everything by working harder than the host race of any and every country they happen to be inhabiting.

“So, I would say this act burst forth from the crude but nonetheless often incisive understanding of our people. It speaks to the Jews. It tells them 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. Your virtuous scholarship goes nowhere but into more talk and more contradictions.’ Therefore, on second thought,” Himmler concluded, “I will not condemn out of hand the deeds of these low-rank Nazis.”

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

I agree. Nonetheless, my real means are not yet to be revealed. Even the resources of Section IV-2a were not sufficient for me on that occasion. I

did piece together an answer, however, and bent the evidence to please Himmler—I knew that if my end-product could support his case, he would accept it. The irony, however, is that my manufactured conclusion turned out to be correct. I will say it was acquired by exceptional methods of inquiry and employed certain ultra-secret personnel with whom I am allied. But this society within the SS extends to other endroits unknown even to Section IV-2a. I would say it is more than an intelligence group inasmuch as we are ready to dwell within every fold of society. Since this last remark comes all too close to sociological impenetrability, I can only repeat that I am not ready at this point to give a closer description of myself. For that matter, my name, I would remind you, is not really Dieter. (Although that is close enough.) I am tempted to add that I was never exactly and altogether in Section IV-2a. On the other hand, I was. Once again, I will apologize.

Let us content ourselves for now with the conclusions IV-2a presented to Himmler in 1938. Once I brought back the information that the Jew from Graz did not exist, we shifted our inquiry to the actions of the one brother of Maria Anna Schicklgruber who had actually been resourceful enough to leave the mud of Strones and make a little money as a commercial traveler. For

our purposes, what was best about this brother is that he passed regularly through Graz. If we decided to use him, we could declare that Maria Anna had, in fact, received small sums mailed from Graz. (The family she actually worked for in that city happened to be Catholic and consisted of a widow and two daughters.) By study of their old bank accounts, we knew definitely that no money ever came from them and indeed, they discharged Maria Anna when they discovered a few petty thefts. Pregnancy in an unmarried maid could be tolerated, but the loss of a few coins, no! We then decided that Maria Anna had been ready to protect this brother by telling her own family that the money came from a Jew. That proved enough of a shock to get them off the scent. To these peasants, Jews were agents of Satan.

Before we passed this speculative story on to Himmler, we came, however, to a more promising alternative. Why not make Johann Nepomuk Hiedler, the good hard-working younger brother, our seminal actor? While Maria Anna and her own travelling brother would offer a prima facie case of incest, the result was still one step removed from Himmler's real desire. It would be the father, Alois, rather than Adolf, who would then be the incestuary.

On the other hand, if Maria Anna conceived Alois with Johann Nepomuk, then Himmler's thesis could be enhanced. For the woman who became Alois' third wife, Klara, happened to be not only Adolf Hitler's mother, but was also the daughter of Johann Nepomuk's own daughter, Johanna. An uncle and a niece, Alois and Klara, connected by blood, would then be the parents of our Fuehrer. That gave a solid presentation. Moreover, we embellished it. Our final scenario offered carnal 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 Strones, and went to the straw for his hour with Maria Anna. On that occasion, she conceived. Nepomuk could not question the news. The act had been out of the ordinary. Indeed, she told him so soon as she regained her breath after climax, "You have given me a baby."

On the other hand, went our scenario, Johann Nepomuk loved his wife, he loved his three daughters, and he would never disrupt his home. Notwithstanding, he had to respect the matter from Maria Anna's point of view. He was a decent man. So, he went into collusion with her on a fable.

Money-received-from-Graz—altogether untrue. He simply gave her sums to take care of the boy. In a few years, he promised, he would do his best to bring Alois into his own home and raise him with his daughters.

Maria Anna put up with the situation, but how could she be happy? Five years elapsed, but then she declared her intention to expose Nepomuk. She was now forty-seven and it was humiliating, she told him, to be unmarried, and be obliged to face the women of Strones each time she left her door.

Nepomuk proposed that his older brother Georg be installed in his place. Nepomuk did not like his brother, and Georg did not like Nepomuk, but a new source of money is as vital to a drunk as blood transfusion 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 the extra kronen. For Georg, it was a rare pleasure to use the hard labor of a younger brother to support his dissipations. He did possess a fund of ugly spirit! A perfect fury full of failure!

Maria Anna, wed at last, wanted Georg to say he was Alois' father, but he was quick to tell her that she was interfering in a matter involving his personal honor. If he had managed in the course of many a spree to inform a couple of his drinking companions just why he had gotten married—for the money, dimwit!—he saw all the more reason to make no fool of himself by legitimizing this brat 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 legend was what we presented to Himmler. It was buttressed by interviews we worked up with those few of the very old inhabitants of Strones who were born before Johann Georg Hiedler died in 1857. It was, if examined closely, a dipalidated set of bridges on the way to a necessary destination, but Himmler was, of course, so busy most of the time with other matters that our conclusions held up. We had delivered a family history in which there was no Jew in the Fuehrer's bloodstream, and had established that the Fuehrer's own father and mother, Alois and Klara Hitler, were 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. As I have often pointed out, early death or serious malformation is the most likely prognostication for First-Degree Incestuaries, but once again the Fuehrer has shown us incomparable powers of perseverance. His brilliance and his Will, his unique properties of character and insight, derive from the intensification implicit to the state of First Degree. Now we are able to live with the triumphant result. His simple agrarian genes fortified through the generations found a triumphant metamorphosis in the end. This man, our Fuehrer, has transcendental virtues."

Here, Himmler closed his eyes, leaned back, and exhaled slowly. It was as if he must expel every errant spirit in order to be free of dread. "We will not speak of this often," he went on in a low voice, "but occasions of close incest are truly perilous. One has need of the Fuehrer's Will to succeed in such a situation." (I capitalize Will since he used the word with reverence.) "It is my belief that in the world of numinous spirits which surround us, there are many elements we have the right to call malign. It is even possible that the worst of these spirits collect about a presence whom in earlier times we

used to speak of as Satan. This embodiment, should it exist, of a devil or, let me say, the Devil, would certainly be ready to give great attention to Incestuaries of advanced degree. For indeed, how could such a Satan not be ready to distort the exceptional possibilities that are ready to arise from the doubling of God-given genes, are compatible in their near-symmetry of Vision. 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. As I came to discover by more extended means, we at IV-2a had been promulgating an irony rather than a legend. The story we believed we had concocted out of no more than feasible evidence happened to be true. It was Johann Nepomuk Heidler who did supply the money and Alois Schicklgruber was his secret child. Yet the irony within this irony was that the reality was more extreme than the verified legend. Hitler was not merely a First Degree Incestuary One-step- removed, but had been conceived in the very core of incest. He was a bona-fide case of First Degree Primus. As I came to discover, by these more private means, the niece, Klara Poelzl Hitler, Alois' third wife and Adolf Hitler's mother, was not only Alois' wife

but his blood daughter. Of that relationship, I will be able to tell quite a few things.

PART II

-1-

Yes. We have begun a family history. This time, however, I need not post myself behind Heinrich Himmler. Now, I am ready to behave like a more conventional novelist. I will even enter some of the thoughts of Johann Nepomuk, and many of the insights of Alois Hitler, plus his three wives, plus the first two children from Alois' second marriage, and two of the six from his 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 her last 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. But, having gone on to live with the curse of more than three decades of lost anticipations, she was full of all the added fury that had been passed on to her by Georg. He, like many a drunk before him, succeeded, however, in outliving everyone’s assumption that his death would come early. After she was gone, he actually stayed in existence for ten more years. 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 he turned ten and his mother was lost. Spital, where he lived with Johann Nepomuk and the wife and three 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. In the beginning, Nepomuk's daughters, Johanna, Walpurga, and Josefa, then twelve, ten, and eight, were delighted to have a five-year-old brother, and took turns sleeping in the same bed with him, thus keeping in effect a species of precaution—no more than two children to each bunk. Spital, we may recall, was a full-sized village rather than a hamlet, and so the sense of separation between prosperous and poor had begun to appear. A farmer could even, by relative measure, be considered well-off in his own town. There were a few such in Spital, Johann Nepomuk the first among them. He had not one bedroom but two, and his wife, Eva Marie, 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 Marie. 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. For a time, Johann Nepomuk had even 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 whatever unforeseen obstacle, large or small, could settle unexpectedly upon the daily work. In contrast, Johann Nepomuk had so much love for his labors that on the best of days he felt as if he could even hear the muttered murmurs (and grunts) of the earth. While he was not at ease with the long silences that hovered over the end of afternoon and the onset of evening, a spell would often enter his dreams. The sum of his fields, his sheds, his beasts and his barn became a creature equal to a demanding woman, cavernous, haunting, smelly, greedy, needy, ever 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. So, he gave up the notion. Such a gift would enrage his wife. She wanted a good future for her three daughters, and the farm would certainly provide handsomely, would amount, in fact, to an attractive dowry for them.

Years passed, the daughters grew up, and new problems presented themselves concerning the size of these dowries. When it came to the oldest, Johanna, she was given a somewhat pinched share of their land, but then she had married a poor man, a hard-working but unlucky farmer named Poelzl. When it came to the dowry for the second daughter, Walpurga, who was

already twenty-one, Nepomuk was obliged to be more generous. The putative bridegroom, Josef Romeder, was a strong young man from a more prosperous nearby farm in Ober-Windhag, the next village, and negotiations had to take place over the size of the dowry. In the end, Nepomuk deeded over the richest portion of his land, which left only a modest portion for the third daughter, Josefa, who was sickly and spinsterish. As for Eva Marie and himself, he kept a fine small lodging on Romeder's new property to which was attached an orchard. It was enough. He was ready to retire. Given the length and heat of the negotiations over the dowry, the ceremony of transfer of the lands proved more intense than the wedding that had just taken place.

Nepomuk led his new son-in-law around the property, boundary line by boundary line, and stopped at every marker that established the separation between his fields and the land of the next farmer. Nepomuk would say, "And if on any day you gather fruit from this man's orchard, even the fallen fruit, may you labor under a black sky." After which he gave Josef Romeder a clout on the ear. At each of those eight separate jogs in the boundary line, he clubbed him. 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 dear adopted son Alois was not there because Johann Nepomuk had banished him three years earlier when the boy was thirteen and Walpurga eighteen. He had discovered them in the hay-loft of his barn, the same barn where he had gone to the straw with Maria Anna on the afternoon that Alois had been conceived. A memory of the glory of his last act of love with Maria Anna Schicklgruber had never left him. 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 in return asked how many times he had committed this sin. “Only once, Father.”

“When was that? How long ago?”

“Months, months I think.”

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

“No, never. I am ashamed for myself.”

The priest was middle-aged and had little to learn about the misdoings of the peasantry, indeed there had been a joke among us at 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. Nonetheless, 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. It would, after all, 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 treated himself to an underhanded spit-in-the-palm masturbation in class (a stealthy act) and then rubbed his spit and semen on the hair of the boy in front of him, a small boy.

Johann Nepomuk contented himself afterward by confessing to the same priest upon occasion that he still had lewd thoughts concerning the mare, but was careful to do nothing about it. 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 sensed why Walpurga was to be kept at home for the next three years. The young woman's 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 step of his platoon, would nag Nepomuk to allow their girl to take at least 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!

-2-

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

He now lived as a menial in the presence of young men who carried themselves as if their bodies, their uniforms, their decorations, their boots and their souls were all given over to a single pledge. Such dedication had much to offer Alois. These men, he observed, were at ease with the beautifully dressed ladies they escorted. On Sunday, 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 to have for many a year, but he only played with such a dream because beautiful women stimulated 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 came from a place where more was known about pig's habits than the kind of scent a man should put upon his handkerchief. Alois would not aspire to what was not there in him. But one thing he knew—he was able to live on good terms with Vienna. No one back in Spital had been as ready to improve himself. Early on, then, he understood his own ambition—he wanted to spend his life in a decent uniform, and be admired for his posture.

At the age of eighteen, after five years in the boot shop, he applied at the Austrian Finance Ministry for a position in the frontier guards, and was accepted. 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 even to this level.

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

In 1859, 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. In the eyes of his family, given his bearing, authoritative but graceful, he might as well have been the son of a Count.

It did not take long for Johann Nepomuk to know that he had 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 Josefa throbbed in his side like the slash of an axe. (He had offered her such a mean dowry.) 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 Johann!) who even lived next door to Nepomuk (with his part of the farm) 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 had had six children, and the first four had died early.

If once she had been cheerful in spirit, this happy state, long unfelt, long worn down, now 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, 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.

This time, no question. At the first opportunity which proved to be the only one, Alois continued the family tradition of apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw, and Klara Poelzl, later to be mother of Adolf Hitler, was conceived. There was no question in Johanna's mind. Each time, she had known the moment when Johann Poelzl, her husband, had put a child in her.

But this occasion 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 that he received in the midst of rigorous training for an examination to bring him up to Finanzwach-Respizienten, the highest rank obtainable in the lower ranks 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 had been 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 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

Finance-Watch. His rise was remarkable for a young man with so sparse an education. Nonetheless, in four more years, he had another promotion, and still another by 1870 when at the age of thirty-three, he had worked himself up to Customs Collector. By 1875, he was Full Inspector and would write below his signature, on any government paper, the full weight and address of the title: "Official of the First Class Imperial Customs Post in the Railroad Terminal, Simbach, Bavaria. Residence, Braunau, Linzergasse."

All through his rise to the highest official rank that was possible for a man of such restricted beginnings, he never relinquished his good appetite for women. The occupation could accommodate 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 little specialties of your private life. This understanding he obeyed to the letter, and had an agreeable time. In those years, no matter to which town they assigned him, he would stay at an inn. Before long, given his confidence, he would proceed to conquer the loosely defended bastions of the cooks and chambermaids in the hostelry. When he had gone through all of the available women, he would usually move to another large inn. Through

the forty years of his career, he was posted to only two border towns connecting Bavaria and Austria, to Braunau (where Adolf would yet be born) and Passau, 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. Not at all! 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, attached to any woman who would pass for a lady—his occupation demanded, after all, some ability in that direction—he was not dissatisfied with his choice. He might be thirty-six and the widow already fifty, yet he could respect her. She came from a worthy family. She might not be good-looking, but she was the daughter of an official in the Hapsburg tobacco monopoly that produced a share of the Crown's income, and the size of her dowry was agreeable. They lived well, and with a maid. His own salary was, by now, substantial—the principal of the highest public school in Braunau did not earn as much. As his rank increased, so did his uniform generate an increase in gold-plated buttons, and the cocked hat

sprout more elegant official embroidery. Alois' mustache now 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 speaking to him. With it all, he was putting on weight. Soon after his marriage, and very much at his wife's urging, he shaved his mustache and grew sideburns on each side of his face. Given the care he afforded them, they soon became as imposing as castle-gates. Now, he not only looked like a customs official in the service of the Hapsburgs, but indeed he even looked a little like Franz Josef himself! There he was, a fair facsimile of the emperor, the full expression—duty, hard work, and an imperial face.

His wife, Anna Glassl-Hoerer, had lost, however, half of her appeal for him. This deficit occurred some two years into the marriage when he discovered that she, too, was an orphan and had been adopted. In turn, she 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 her 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 enjoyed his last name, and Anna Glassl was not necessarily wrong when she judged that his career, despite its success, had probably not been furthered by the sound of Schicklgruber.

He travelled from Braunau through Weitra to Spital in order to see if Johann Nepomuk would help him. The old man, now turned seventy, misunderstood at first. When Alois told him that he wanted his last name changed to what it should be—Hiedler! Johann Nepomuk's heart passed through a quick and scalding shame. He thought he was being named as the father. Immediately he was ready to argue that at this late date, what with his two remaining married daughters to think of, plus the grandchildren, and his remaining part of the farm, (plus his wife Eva to say the least!) how could he declare himself Alois' father? These excuses, however, did not even reach his mouth. At the saving point, he realized that Alois was only asking that Johann Georg 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 a farm cart, pulled by two old horses, he journeyed with Alois and Romeder all of the twenty miles from Spital to Strones, then further on a few miles to Doellersheim, all of it close to a four-hour journey on a narrow meandering carriage-road full of many fallen limbs and a few uprooted trees, but still reasonably free of mud on this October day. (With mud, it might have taken eight hours). On arrival, Johann Nepomuk came face to face with the particular priest he had no wish to remember. There he was, a very old priest now, shrunken in stature, and smaller in station (for Doellersheim parish was not comparable to Spital), yet this was the very priest who had scolded him for traffic with the vulva of a mare.

The recollection passed between the two men unacknowledged by the smallest shift of expression. They were all 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 signed the document with an XXX. They said they had known Georg Heidler and that “in their presence and repeatedly” he had admitted to being the father of this child. The mother had stated the same. They swore to that.

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

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

He did not, however, insert the date. On the yellow page of the parish registry of June 1, 1837, he crossed out “illegitimate,” put Johann Georg’s name in what had previously been the blank space, and smiled again. Legally speaking, the document was shaky, but it did not matter. Which church

authority would challenge such a change? For sure, no one in Vienna. The word from there was to encourage certified fatherhood whenever—even late in the day. 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 little family matter? So, the priest, disapproving of these sleazy procedures even if he was bound to improve them, chose not to inscribe his own name. Besides, if it ever went wrong, he could disavow the paper.

Then he spelled each of the witnesses' names by choice inasmuch as there was no agreement on orthography from province to province, (one reason why Hiedler 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. The change from Schicklgruber to Hiedler was ageeable indeed, and he felt an upsurge in the happy region below his navel. This, from long experience, was, he knew, one of the gifts his nature had given him. He was as quick as a hound to sense when female company was 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 was in no hurry to see her.

Yet his steps took him to the door. The Hound did not make a practice of betraying him, and, yes, there 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 set of 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 more up on high than ever—there is more to the uniform now, yes?" And then she pulled her daughter to her. "Here is Klara. But for my only son in Vienna who is still alive, she is now my oldest."

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

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

He took a walk outside the village with the mother and daughter. They went to that part of Nepomuk's fields which now belonged to the husband, Johann Poelzl, who—no surprise to Alois—bore no resemblance to this rare blue-eyed Klara. Poelzl had gray clouded eyes and a face full of lines that drooped in concert with a long sad nose and paper-thin lips. It is obvious that he had given up the once-enduring hope that eventually he must prosper because he was an honest farmer, so honest! 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. The alternative—to borrow further sums from his brother-in-law Romeder or his father-in-law Nepomuk, was unpleasant. Poelzl could hear the diatribe that would come from his wife's family. Johanna's disposition had become so sour that he often thought (very much in private) her blood must taste like vinegar. Nor did he wish to listen to the brother-in-law'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 an insufficient return from his fields? So, he accepted the fact that Klara would

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

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

-3-

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

For a while, Alois entertained the happy notion that he might be able to spend a little time up there with Klara, but his niece did not welcome him, not exactly. It was evident to all including his wife that Klara was steeped in respect for her exceptional uncle, but it seemed no cause for concern to Anna Glassl—not yet! The girl was pious to a degree that would have seemed incomprehensible if one did not understand 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 envision other dubious portals—the doors to Klara's chastity could prove as formidable 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 and well-written dispatch of his official papers, and every evidence he could give of his high respect for punctuality and performance in each and every working hour, he took as much pride in his direct skill as a custom's inspector. He had

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

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

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

So if he took a long-range view of Klara Poelzl, it was because his nocturnal, and for the present, true interest was with this waitress at the inn, a nineteen-year-old named Fanni Matzelsberger, who was voluptuous but lithe, and—by every good measure—smoldering. He had learned to strip his eyes of all expression when she crossed the room, but 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 formal entrance to her chastity intact but the same could not be said for the close neighbor to those private parts. That was not so agreeable for Alois. The Hound was too large to permit a good poke into “the smelly and the damned,” (or so he would characterize it). Fanni would moan in a very low voice (in order that the rest of the attic not hear) but they were both suffering. All the more intense became their embrace was truly heart-to-heart. In the heat of the hour, they loved each other, a not uncommon reaction even if only half of the carnal ore can 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 tempted. It was not unlike drunkenness. Given the force of his desire, she did give it to him,

she gave it up, and proceeded to tell him one month later that she was pregnant. Had the time come, she asked, to tell his wife?

He no longer trusted Fanni. He did not think she would have become pregnant if she was really afraid of dying. Besides, he had been lying to his wife with so much skill that now he did not dare to confess. Lying, like honesty, is reflexive, and soon becomes as sturdy a habit as truth itself. Anna Glassl-Hoerer Hitler was fifty-seven and looked ten years older (although to his continuing surprise she did remain a virago at dawn.) To lose her would tighten his financial situation measurably. 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 that in the end, a peasant was like a stone. Throw a stone high in the air—it will always come down. Whereas a lady was like a feather. A lady could tantalize you with her intelligence. He would hate to give up his 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 so beautiful, I would have to say that you own the eyes of an eagle.

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

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

Anna Glassl: Cruder than it used to be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alois: You have a splendid sense of humor. If we were not in public, I would laugh out loud, and then you know what I would do. You are so attractive, so wicked. You would even send me out to kiss a nun.

-4-

Finally, Fanni told Anna Glassl that she was two months pregnant and soon to show. For Anna, that was the end of the marriage. For Alois to tell her that the girl had a disease! When he knew she was pregnant!

Unforgiveable! Besides, Anna Glassl was more tired of Alois by now than of her fear of living alone. She had exhausted herself by mustering up all of her remaining arts in order to be a virago at dawn. Now, she craved peace. She even decided that her jealousy had been some last inoculation against what was worse—precisely the cold and silent distaste for a mate that seeps in to the end of jealousy. So, she moved out. Since they were Catholic, divorce by Austrian law was not possible. To obtain even a legal separation, Anna

had to declare not only their incompatibility but state in writing her direct aversion to him. Alois was obliged to read this outrageous phrase. It stood out in the document like a boil on one's chin. It irked him so much that he showed his copy to 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 oncoming time 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 Braunau, he was always the center of gossip. The townspeople might as well complain to the stars above that he was living 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 Finance-Watch and that was clearly equal to the Hapsburg government, far away in Vienna. So long as his work proved flawless, they would hardly care how he acted in his personal life.

Having risen to the highest level of the middle ranks, there he would stay. His job was secure. The Customs needed him. After all, it took a good many years for an official to become as practised as himself. In turn, he needed the Customs. How could he ever find another job that paid as well? He had developed into the perfect instrument for what he did but that was not a skill to be used readily for anything else, no, he was locked into his job, and the Financial Watch was locked into him. So, devil take the townspeople. What they said about him might rankle, but it would not interfere with more real and interesting pursuits. One girl would bear his child, and the other (who trembled in front of him when he spoke) would become his mistress. Of course, she would be more than ready when the time came. Why else 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? Klara would be happier in a convent.”

“No. Your interest is not in her happiness, but yours. She must go.”

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

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

Klara had to go. He could not relinquish what he now had in Fanni, no, not for the uncertain promise (when all was said) of a possible transformation from angel-nun to all-compliant lady.

-5-

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. Different from each other, there had been much for both to learn. It 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.

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

“Tell me,” said Fanni, “what is the foundation of this so-holy 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 small chest she had brought with her on arrival, and left the Gasthaus for new employment in Vienna.

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

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

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

Even as she had foreseen, she was truly pregnant now. If that offered contentment, she continued nonetheless to feel remorse. She had banished the sweetest 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 could feel as empty as an empty belly when he had to walk around with no more than his mother's last name. Now, Alois, Senior, went to bed every night cursing Anna Glassl.

He was not a man to give too much of himself to a curse. He considered such an act equal to spending a private horde of gold.

Nonetheless, he delivered his curse to the night, and it was so full of intent and outright venom that he was not particularly surprised when Anna died suddenly. That curious event did not occur until fourteen months after Alois' son was born and Fanni was very much pregnant again, but Alois still reckoned that his anathema had had effect, possibly. He saw it as an expensive payment for a necessary conclusion—expensive? Yes, because there could often be unforeseen consequences sprouting from one's curses.

Indeed, her death certificate stated that the cause was unknown. This convinced him it was suicide. He did not like that. He was no superstitious fellow, not, at least, as measured by belief in the near presence of God and the Devil (all too common among the Strones and Spital folk.) Rather, as he was ready to explain over a stein of beer, he believed in the solid and intelligent processes of dependable forms of government. God, no matter how august and far away, would look, doubtless, upon government in the same manner that Alois did—as the human instrument of divine will, provided such will was exercised by scrupulous officials like himself. Alois had not read a word of Hegel, but then, where was the need? He and Hegel

were in agreement—the power of that idea was there for all to breathe. It was so obvious.

Alois preferred, therefore, a reasonable end to death. It 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. Anna Glassl as a suicide was a thought to keep 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 untried uneasiness to the sight of her face in the coffin. So Alois stayed away. That was another notable item for the gossip of the townspeople.

Nonetheless, no matter how Anna Glassl had ended, she was, at least, no longer there. So he could marry his common-law wife, his new lady, Franziska Matzelsberger, which he did. Her belly was now full of the second child a good seven months along, and Fanni was looking as large as the biggest melon in a field. He was forty-six, she 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—look, after all, at the fine husband she had caught!

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

Anna Glassl, with all her faults, had been a lady—he could, he decided reluctantly, never be able to say the same for Fanni. It was not that he expected it of her, not a farmer's daughter, but still she had once shown progress in such directions. Now, it was going backward. When he first

knew her, she moved well, she was quick, she charmed the guests of the inn even as she served them. He thought she was a most witty creature for a waitress.

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

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

Poor Anna Glassl! He came to realize that Fanni must now be dreaming about Anna. Could they not move forward as husband and wife? It was 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, knew all about it. She did not scream at him. She wept. She was not well, she confessed, and there he was without patience to wait for sick people to feel better. He was a brute, she told him.

They had been living together for close to three years before they could marry, but, now, by the time Angela was a year old, Fanni was seriously ill. Signs of a deepening disorder were everywhere. She would pass from fits of temper, to hysteria, then to loss of interest in his body, plus an incapacity to take proper care of their two children. A doctor told her that she had the beginnings of tuberculosis. Klara was brought back from Vienna to be with Alois, 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.

-6-

In the last months, Klara visited her more often than Alois, and that healed—one must choose to put it so—the wound they had left in each other. Not long after her first visit, 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 God not sacrificed His Son?

Klara was trying then to relinquish her desire for Uncle Alois. That fever had gone on a full four years while working for Anna Glassl. Then there had been another four years in Vienna serving an old lady who alternated between doting on Klara and then counting the silverware. The old lady had the real heat of suspicion—it irritated her when the silver count was correct (as it always was) because paranoia that cannot be confirmed is even more difficult to bear than outright theft. The old lady was secretly proud of the perfection with which this young servant kept house for her—it spoke of respect for her mistress—but the honesty made her irritable.

Klara's mother, as if paying for her one cardinal sin with Alois, had turned into a very good housekeeper, 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 all those dead children—depended on offering ceaseless attention to the daily skirmish against mud, dust, ashes, slops, and all the crusted plates, cups, pots, and cutlery.

By now, Klara was never afraid of a household 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 still had to find a way, once Fanni's two children had been put to sleep, to keep Alois at arm's length. There was not a night in the inn, the best inn of Braunau, the Pommer Inn (to which they had moved) when 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. After which back to the Pommer for the meal Klara had cooked in the kitchen of the hotel and brought up to their lodgings. He would eat that meal 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. It seemed as if all that was valuable in the recesses of her body was being fingered by his imagination. Her thighs burned, her cheeks burned, her breath wanted to reach forward to his breath. She would jump up in relief if one of the children cried out in sleep—she heard it as an appeal from Fanni that had whipped over in a flash from Laughter-in-the-Woods. Afterward, a small cramp of disappointment would follow.

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 his 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 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 taking a bribe from a smuggler, whereas private life was 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, he strode forward, caught that hand, kissed her on the mouth, and brought her to his bedroom and his bed, even as she begged him in a low uncertain voice to do no more, "please, no more," whereupon he proceeded to lay a track with his hand, so veteran at insinuating his fingers through the defenses of inner garments, all the way to

the nest of hair so long concealed. And there 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 frozen threshold, but then her mouth was part of the fire and she kissed him as if her heart was also in 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 that she knew at once was 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 rather than as a relative of the family, yes, the wrong kind of exaltation.

-7-

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 one of the hotel maids 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 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 when they went downstairs, he would make love as soon as 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, could pollute their breath. By her presence itself! And when she thought of her dead brothers and sisters, she wept within for what she might be doing to them—wherever they were! She could

not even trust her own concern for all these wrongs she was now committing, because to take such an important view of oneself was but one more sin.

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

Yet, in the last week of Fanni's illness 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 this time as well, and the anger was still present on the day that Fanni was buried, a very long day, since Alois did not bury Fanni in Braunau. He had chosen Randshoffen ("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, having found a true bargain in advance (a mahogany job confiscated from a smuggler at the Customs gate.) In fact he had only bought the damned crate ten days before her death. He had not sat on it for months but only for days. So, he could not forgive the gossip. Besides, the tragedy of death was so often overrated. Usually, it 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 for tonight. In the afternoon of the funeral, her presence had become so intense. Her eyes! Those blue eyes! So much like the diamond in the museum!

Whereas, for Klara, a night followed unlike any until now. In bed on that hot August night, 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 she 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, this long-withheld nasty joy that she could feel at last because the woman who banished her for four years 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," Alois liked to say, "yet even a fool must learn from the experience he has had. Only on this, should he be judged. Does the fool 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 the container, that cold box where you have to say goodbye forever whether you visit the cemetery or not.

Besides, he wanted to get married. The displeasure of the good people of Braunau had begun to itch, yes, 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 into the street for the size of her unmarried belly. Everyone would hear. 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 this was so. He would have to file an application. 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 would look on his application as the presentation of a smuggler. The lie that had been certified near to nine years ago on the day when he had travelled to Strones with Johann Nepomuk and the three witnesses was there to stand 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 in no way his father, it would turn him back to 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.

-8-

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.

Given the 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 envelope."

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 that way. 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, he could now 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 had certainly picked up enough 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 he 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; her belly would be up to four months pregnant by then.

“What a big fellow we have here,” said Alois.

“I hope that is so,” she said. What could come out of a mother who was so far away from Devotion on the most 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 say in years to come: “We were standing by the altar before six in the morning, but by seven Uncle Alois was 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 all the way from Spital to Braunau in company with Klara’s remaining sister. Named after her mother, Johanna Poelzl, “Little Johanna” was a hunchback. This occasioned a bit of 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 to place in 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 but 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 heaving in the aftermath of the polka. It did not need even that much to convince Klara. 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. 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.

-9-

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 of 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 came back upon the mother in the blow that soon followed of Otto's death—

Otto, just 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, Rosalie, 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 had lived. They were back with her now, even if the Hitler family rooms at the Pommer Inn stayed redolent of the fumigation that followed each death. The odor lived on in her clothes through 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 family—but the miniature coffins of her own children proved 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. Now, the hump on her sister 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.

Alois, in his turn, had decided not to forgive God. To his friends at the tavern near the Customs House, and to the men he would drink with after duty, especially 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 remarked one hot summer night. "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 only importance for me is Franz Josef. He should mean more to us 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 no good 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 specialités 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, 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 hot summer 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 a terrible rasp that sounded much like the sounds of the children struggling for breath to the 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, 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 it certainly happened that she felt what it was like for such life to return to her man then, and now, Alois was stronger, and soon meaner and before long, full revived, even to himself, a man again, he even told himself, and began to kiss Klara's mouth, her first mouth, with all the juice of the second with which she had bestraddled him still on his lips, how much was he ready at last to shit upon her piety, yes, on all piety—damned churchmouse, damned church!—he was back from the dead, some kind of miracle had rescued him, yes, he was there and never before a night like this, better than a storm at sea for one moment, and another, and then it went on beyond all the moments, she—the most angelic woman in Braunau—gave herself over to the demon and with a prime lust ready to engorge the world, and I knew this, I knew all of this, for I was with them in the caterwaul of coming together with Alois into the womb of Klara Poelzl Hitler, yes, I knew the moment within the moment, a new creation was there, and I, too, can now dare to speak, I too was there and serving for the Evil One, yes, I was present at the conception,