

Manuscript
The Castle in the
Forest (2007)

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THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST

A Novel

NORMAN MAILER

827pp

To Mike
No inscription can be
gracious enough to honor
the depth and interest
of our long working association
together.
Cheers, old buddy,

[Received from NM *Norman*
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BOOK I

THE SEARCH FOR HITLER'S GRANDFATHER

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 they gather here without spending for me, and I will say that as bleak a state does dispose one toward rebellion. Can this be why I am ready to write a book? Among my former associates, this was an activity we twice never to undertake. I was, after all, a member of a notorious intelligence group. Its designation was SS, Special Section IV-Ca, and we were directly under the supervision of Heinrich Himmler. Today, the name is dead as a moulder, and I

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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 without meaning for me, and I will say that so bleak a state does dispose one toward rebellion. Can this be why I am ready to write a book? Among my former associates, this was an activity we swore never to undertake. 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 literary intentions which are, I promise, not routine.

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The room that Himmler used when speaking to us as an elite group was a small lecture hall with dark walnut paneling and was limited to twenty seats raked upward in four rows of five. My emphasis will not often be, however, on such details, since I prefer to concern myself with Himmler's unorthodox concepts. That does oblige me to begin a memoir that will be distasteful to conventional belief. Let me put the premise directly: I am ready to sail into a sea of turbulence even as I, an accomplished veteran of mendacity, must try to recount the truth. What a cacophony erupts in my spirit! As intelligence officers, we often prefer to warp the truth. Mendacity, after all, possesses its own art. Now I am burdened with a contrary impulse: the desire to tell it—as Americans say— straight out! But then, I no longer know exactly why I find

myself where I am dwelling (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. This man, whose nickname, behind his back, was Heini, had become by 1938 one of the four truly important leaders in Germany. Yet his most cherished and secret intellectual pursuit was the study of incest. It dominated our highest-level research, and our findings were kept to closed conferences. Incest, Heini would propose, had always been rife among the poor of all lands. Even our German peasantry had been much afflicted, yes, even as late as the Nineteenth Century. "Normally, no one in learned circles cares to speak of this matter," he would remark. "After all, there is nothing to be done. Who would bother to declare that some poor wretch is a certified offspring of incest? No, every establishment of every civilized nation looks to sweep such stuff under the rug."

All ranking government officials in the world, that is, except for our Heinrich Himmler. He did have the most extraordinary ideas fermenting behind his unhappy spectacles. I must repeat that for a man with a bland and chinless mug, he certainly had a mind of his own. To us who worked closely

with him, his thought proved disruptive—such a frustrating mixture of brilliance and stupidity. He was not close to any comfortable category. For example, he declared himself to be a pagan. He predicted that there would be a healthy future for all when paganism took over the world. Everyone's soul would then be enriched with hitherto unacceptable pleasures. 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! For you could always see his face as it must once have been at a school dance, that bespectacled disapproving stare of the wallflower, tall, thin, a youth full of physical ineptitude. Already he had a small pot belly. There he was, ready to wait by the wall while the dance went on.

Yet he grew obsessed over the years 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. Why? Because Himmler subscribed to the theory that the best human possibilities lie close to the worst. Remember that! I will repeat it often. The best lies close to the worst! So he was ready to assume that rare but most special situations

could arrive when promising children were to be found in low, nondescript families. Such offspring were, all so often, incestuaries. The word in German, as he coined it, was Inzestuarier. He did not like the more common term of such disgrace, Blutschande, (blood-scandal), or as it is sometimes employed in polite circles, Dramatik des Blutes, (blood-drama).

None of us felt sufficiently qualified to say that his theory could be dismissed. Even in the early years of the SS, Himmler had recognized that one of our prime needs was to develop exceptional research groups. We had a duty to search into ultimates. As Himmler put it, the health of National Socialism depended on nothing less than these letzte Fragen (last questions). We were to explore problems that other nations did not dare to go near. Incest—count on it—was at the head of the list. The German mind had to re-establish itself again as the leading inspiration to the learned world. In turn—so went his unstated coupling—much recognition might be given to Heinrich Himmler for his profound attack on problems originating in the agricultural milieu. He would emphasize the underlying point: Husbandry could hardly be investigated 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 to employ—one prissy flip of the wrist. It was Heinrich's way of saying: "Now comes the meat. And with it—the potatoes!" Off he would go on a peroration. "Yes," he would say, "incest! This is one very good reason that old peasants are devout. We need not even refer to our special studies. We know! An acute fear of the sinful will display itself by one of two extremes: Absolute devotion to religious practice! Or nihilism! I can recall from my student days that the Marxist Friedrich Engels once wrote: 'When 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. That is also impossible to prevent. So, the peasant looks to keep himself devout." He nodded. He nodded again as if two good pumps of his head might be the minimum necessary to convince us that he was speaking from both sides of his heart.

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, the early advantage was soon

worn away by hard labor. Moreover, they reeked of the field and the barn. Their personal odors were at the mercy of hot summers. Under such circumstances, how could basic impulses not be subject to bestial inclinations? Moreover, there was the paucity of their social life. How, then, were they to acquire the ability 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 formed by three or four children in a bed, nor the ham-handed naturalness of the most agreeable work of all—that hard-breathing feverish meat-heavy run up the hills of physical joy. “That is why,” he declared, “more than a few in the agricultural sector come, willy-nilly, to see incest as an option. Who, after all, is more likely to find the honorable work-hardened features of the father or the brother particularly attractive? The sisters, of course! Or the daughters. Often they are the only ones. The father, having created them, remains the focus of their attention.”

Hand it to Himmler. He had been storing theories in his head for two decades. A great believer in Schopenhauer, he would also carry on about a word still relatively new in 1938—genes. These genes, he said, were the

biological embodiment of Schopenhauer's Will to Power. They had to be the seeds of this 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 its origins, to what I would call its primal Vision. Yes, gentlemen, its Innate Originating Vision. This Vision is at the core of our human existence. It is not language but Vision that separates us from the animals. From the beginning of our time on earth, we humans have been seeking to rise to the unseen heights that lie ahead. The noble and aspiring Will has been given to us by nothing less than Creation itself." A profound nod.

"Of course, there are impediments to such a great goal. And they are countless. It is not always possible to protect what is best in oneself. The most exceptional of our genes will only achieve their highest purpose by rising above the privations, humiliations, and tragedies the Vision must suffer, even as these genes are 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 rare descendant who succeeded in breaking through the carapace of ten frustrated generations. So, we have the right to

ask—has the Originating Vision been warped by life's cruelties? Has it been lost forever? For most humans, yes. Unhappily, yes. The Vision is usually abandoned in the face of too many agonies of spirit as it journeys from one generation to the next. Yet, this high road is the only one available to the exceptional person who would be a great spirit.

"I will say that I have not arrived at these concepts by personal experience, but from scrupulous observation. I, Heinrich Himmler, would never suggest that I qualify as an Über-Mensch. I will never be able to claim that I am a genius of the people. That honor belongs to Adolf Hitler. That is why the life-achievement that resonates most in our hearts is the heroic rise of the Fuehrer. He issues, as we know, from a long line of the most modest peasant stock. Let us never lose sight of so super-human an achievement. Absolute awe overwhelms us."

As intelligence agents, we were smiling within. This had been the peroration. Now, our Heinrich was ready to enter what Americans call the nitty-gritty. "How," he asked, "can the brilliance of the Vision not be dulled by commingling? That is implicit in the process of so-called normal reproduction. Near to infinite combinations possible, the very presence of

multi-millions of sperm. Yet, consider their duty. Each of these spermatozoa has knowledge of the mission. It is to travel all the way up to the ovum of the female, that highly-developed and reclusive ovum. To each lonely sperm-cell swimming in the ovarian sea, that ovum will loom as large as a battle cruiser." He paused before he nodded. "Yet, what, then, is the response of Creation? I would propose that Creation would say, 'No difficulty exists which cannot find its exceptional solution.' So, I also maintain that this multi-million of sperm in one man's ejaculation can be compared in spirit to one regiment of infantry. A first-rate regiment. The same readiness for self-sacrifice that will carry such men through an uphill attack on a forbidding ridge must exist in healthy sperm. Its essence of sperm is that it is ready to commit itself to just such immolation in order that one of this immense cohort will reach the ovum!"

He stared at us. Could we share his excitement? "Now," he said, "the next question is before us. Will the genes of the woman be compatible with the visionary semen which reaches her? Or can these separate elements be in dispute? Are they about to act like unhappy husbands and wives? Will the ovum look to dominate the sperm cell who reaches her? Yes, I would answer, dispute is the prevailing case. The two may prove sufficiently compatible for

procreation to occur, but the future intent of their genes are not likely to be in harmony.

"When we speak, therefore, of our human desire to create a Superman who can embody the Vision, we must consider the odds. Not even one in a million families can present us with a husband and a wife who are close enough in the inclination of their genes to bring forth a miraculous child. Not even one, perhaps, in a hundred million. No!"—again the upraised hand—"let us say, closer to a million million. In the case of Adolf Hitler, the numbers may approach the awesome distances we encounter in astronomy.

"So, gentlemen, logic would propose that any Superman who embodies the Vision, can only come forth from a mating of exceptionally similar genetic ingredients. Only then will these separate embodiments of The Vision reinforce each other. Reinforcement is the prerequisite."

Who among us could not see where Heinrich was leading? Incest offered the nearest possibility for such unity of purpose.

"Yes," said Himmler, as if to forestall all argument, "to be reasonable, we must also agree that life is not always ready to certify such a formula. It is debased human products who usually come our way from these intra-family

fornications. We have to recognize that products of incest usually suffer a host of childhood ills and early deaths. Anomalies abound, even exhibitions of physical monstrosity.”

He stood there, sad and stern. “That is the price. Not only are the strongest tendencies likely to be present in an incestuary, but the unhappy inclinations are reinforced as well. Instability is to be expected, therefore, as a common product of incest. Idiocy waits in the wings. And when a vital possibility exists for the development of a great spirit, such rare humans must still overcome a host of frustrations profound enough to unhinge the brain or induce early death.” So spoke Heinrich Himmler.

I think all of us present knew the subtext underlying these remarks. 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 would remain no more than a theory. But if our Fuehrer was a true product of incest, then he was more than a glowing example of the likelihood of the thesis, he might be the proof itself.

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Now I am ready to speak of the obsession we shared with Himmler. It revolved around Adolf Hitler, who, I confess, lived often in the center of our thoughts. But then, what brings a dark cloud to the mind more quickly than living with a question that will not return an answer? Not only for us then in Special Section IV-2a but for most Germans today, the first obsession remains Adolf Hitler. Who among us does not try to understand him? Yet, where can you find a man or woman content with the answer?

Let me offer surprise. 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 top to bottom. To borrow from the Americans, given their rough grasp of reality, their instinctive, even lemming-like approach to vulgarity, I am prepared to say: "Yes. I know him from asshole to appetite."

Nonetheless, I am obsessed. But by an altogether different problem. When I think of relating how I know what I do know, I am seized by an anxiety comparable to diving at night for a long way down into black water.

Let it be understood therefore, that in the beginning I will proceed with no more than what was available then to the S.S.

Concerning his actual family roots, there are particulars to offer. In Special Section IV-2a—as already explained—we preserved an immaculate secrecy concerning our findings. We had to. We were the ones most ready to look into the most unpalatable questions, and thereby had to contend with the fear of finding answers poisonous enough to imperil the Third Reich.

On the other hand, we had our special confidence. Once we obtained our facts, even should they prove nauseating, we would still be able to choose

the mistruths that would serve patriotic feelings in the populace. Of course, it could not be guaranteed in advance that every finding would be manageable. We might uncover an explosive fact. As one example: Had Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather been a Jew?

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That was one possibility. There were others almost as dire. For a period, we considered an inquiry into a more delicate rumor. Monorchidism. Did our Fuehrer belong to that group of unhappy and hyperactive men who possess only one testicle? It is true that he invariably covered his groin with a protective hand whenever a photo was about to be taken, a classic gesture, understandably, if you are ready to shield the remaining testicle. But it is one thing to note such a vulnerability, another to verify it. While results could be obtained easily enough by interviewing the few women who had had intimate

relations with Der Fuehrer and were still alive, how were we to control the repercussions? What if word got back to Hitler that a couple of officers in the SS were, so to speak, fingering his genital(s)? We had to give up the project. That was 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."

It was obvious. We had just been told to go back to the best explanation for the legendary Will-of-the-Fuehrer—Blood-Scandal!

Moreover, we all detested the possibility that Adolf Hitler's paternal grandfather might have been a Jew. That would not only destroy Himmler's thesis, but oblige us to bury a major scandal. Our uneasiness derived in part from a rumor that had begun to stir among us eight years ago, back in 1930, when a most personal letter arrived at Hitler's desk. The young man who 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 offered its hint of blackmail. It referred to shared circumstances in our family history. (The fool had gone so far as to underline the words.) That would have been a

dangerous letter to send if the nephew lived in Germany, but at the time he was dwelling in England.

What, then, were these shared circumstances? William Patrick Hitler was speaking of Der Fuehrer's grandmother, Maria Anna Schicklgruber. She had given birth in 1837 to a son, Alois Schicklgruber. Living then and thereafter in a miserable place called Strones, a wretched hamlet in the Austrian province of Waldviertel, she used to receive small but regular sums of money. Those near to her were ready to assume it had to come from the unnamed father of her boy. Yet this Alois, newborn in 1837, was no less than the man who, at the age of 52, became Adolf Hitler's father. That would not be until 1889, yet for the fifty-two years between, one story did manage to stay alive among the peasants in Strones. It was that the stipend came from a well-to-do Jew who lived in the provincial city of Graz. According to the legend, Maria Anna Schicklgruber had worked as a maid in this Jew's house, had become pregnant, and so had to return to her hamlet. When she took the baby to be baptized, the 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, and my findings proved, in fact, fascinating. While it would still be premature to explain how I learned what I did, I can, however, offer my conclusions. For now, that must suffice. I hope and I expect to have the courage to say more later.

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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 in contrast to the green of an 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 nearby in the aforesaid Strones. In those years an Austrian hamlet in the backwoods 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, and the redolence of horse manure was valued. This was, after all, an area where many a peasant had to pull his own plow. When no snow covered the ground, one churned 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. Even the nearest, Weitra, was twenty-five miles away. For that matter, Strones did not even have a church. The locals had to go to another hamlet, Doellersheim. There in the parish registry, the name of Maria Anna's son was inscribed as "Alois Schicklgruber, Catholic, Male,"—and, as we know—"Illegitimate."

Maria Anna, born in 1795, was forty-two when Alois was born in 1837. Coming from a family of eleven children of whom five were already dead, she certainly could have cohabited with any one of several of her brothers. (Himmler had, of course, no objection to that, since her bastard Alois was, I repeat, Adolf's father.) In any event, despite the abysmal poverty of Maria Anna's parents, the mother and her son dwelt for the next five years in one of

her father's two small rooms. The mysterious money that came in small but dependable installments helped to support these Schicklgrubers.

We were ready, even eager, to find a trove of intra-family copulations, but that did not allow us to dismiss the Jew from Graz. Already, eight years ago in 1930, inquiries had been made. As Himmler related it, 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, but three years earlier, Hans Frank was already looking to worm his way into the inside circle around the Leader.

Frank had unhappy news to deliver, however, about Maria Anna's pregnancy. The likelihood, he declared, was that the father had been a nineteen-year-old, the oldest boy of a prosperous merchant named Frankenberger who was, yes, a Jew. It made sense. In those years, the scion of many a well-to-do family found 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 reasonable if undiscussed practice. It was seen as a good deal better than allowing a well-to-do lad to consort with whores or settle too early on a sweetheart.

Frank claimed to have seen some conclusive evidence. He told Hitler that he had been shown a letter written by Herr Frankenberger, the father of the young man who had bedded down with Maria Anna. This letter promised regular payments to take care of Alois until he would be fourteen years old.

Our Adolf, however, told Hans Frank that the true story, imparted to him by his own father, Alois, was that the real grandfather had been Maria Anna's cousin, Johann Georg Hiedler, who had finally come around to marry her 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 he did not as yet possess the letter. The man who held it was asking much too high a price. Besides, the letter must have certainly been photographed. If so, acquisition was worth little.

"You have seen the original?" Hitler asked.

"I was able to look at it while 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. "One cannot even wish a sudden end for a man like that. The letter, after all, will be in one place and the photographic copy in another."

One more concern for Hitler to carry with him.

By 1938, however, our search had delivered alternatives. It no longer seemed certain that Maria Anna was still receiving steady money five years after Alois was born. Following her marriage in 1842, she and her husband, Johann Georg Hiedler, had been much too poor to have a home of their own. For a time they had had to sleep in a battered old trough once used to feed cattle in a neighbor's barn. Of course, that did not prove no money was sent. Johann Georg could certainly have drunk up the funds. In Strones, he remained a legend due to the extent of his tipping. Indeed, his large intake of liquor had to be at odds with the assumption that they were that poor: For why would a drunk like fifty-year-old Johann Georg marry a forty-seven-year-old with a five-year-old brat unless she had enough income to lead him to drink? Moreover, the extent of his boozing would hardly suggest that he had been Alois' father. Indeed, this Johann Georg Hiedler made no objection when Maria Anna asked 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 sober, hard-working farmer with a wife and three daughters,

but he did not have a son. Be it said, Johann Nepomuk did not drink, and could not have been more different from Johann Georg, the drunk.

So this younger brother, Johann Nepomuk, now stood out as a likely possibility. Might he not be the father? Yet, we were still not ready to discount the Jew.

Himmler sent me to Graz and I took some pains to examine the 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, in 1837 when Alois was born, the Jews had still not been permitted to come back. Such permission took another twenty years. Had Hans Frank been lying?

Himmler analyzed my findings. Frank was bold, he declared. Indeed, he did not acquire his final nickname for too little. (By 1942, he would be known as the "The Butcher of Poland.") In 1930, at the time of William Patrick Hitler's letter, he, Frank, was just one more lawyer, but as Himmler delineated it, he had invented Herr Frankenbereger's epistle in order to provide himself with a close relation to his leader. Given the absence of the document, Hitler

could not know whether Frank was making it up, telling the truth, or, worst of all, might actually possess such a paper. It could have been the end of Hans Frank, if Hitler had sent a researcher to Graz, but the lawyer must have been ready to wager that Hitler did not want to know.

Since Himmler was grooming me to become his close assistant, he also confided that he did not use my 1938 research to tell Hitler that there were no Jews in Graz back in 1837. Rather, he told Hans Frank. We laughed in unison for I understood immediately. Could there be one official within our ruling group who was not searching for a dominant grip on any and all of the others? Frank was now in Himmler's grasp. Given this mutual understanding, he did serve Himmler well. In 1942, when Hitler seemed nervous again about the Jewish grandfather and asked us to send a good man to Graz, Himmler, looking to protect Hans Frank, told the Fuehrer that he had sent an agent and no tangible evidence was found. Given everyone's preoccupation with the war, the matter could be put more or less to rest. Such was Himmler's advice to Hitler.

BOOK II

HITLER'S FATHER

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

I remember on the first morning after the Brown Shirts marched into Vienna, that a squad of them—beer-hall types with big bellies—collected a group of old and middle-aged Jews, professional class, pince-nez absolutely in place, and put them to work scrubbing the sidewalk with toothbrushes. The Storm-Troopers laughed as they watched. Photographs of the event were featured on the front pages of many a newspaper in Europe and America.

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

notion among these people that in the end, they will win everything by working harder than the host race of any country they happen to inhabit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

spot. Nepomuk could not question the news, for the act had been out of the ordinary. Indeed, she told him as soon as she regained her breath, "You have given me a baby. I swear it. I felt it!"

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

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

Nepomuk proposed that his older brother Georg be installed instead as her spouse. Nepomuk did not like his brother, and Georg did not like Nepomuk, but a new source of money is life's blood to a drunk. I exaggerate, but not by much. Georg married Maria Anna for her stipend and enjoyed the

knowledge that it came from Nepomuk who worked even harder in his fields to gather the extra Kronen. For Georg, it was a rare pleasure to use the hard labor of a younger brother to support his dissipations. He did possess a fund of ugly spirit. A perfect fury full of failure.

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

Such was the legend I presented to Himmler. It was buttressed by interviews I worked up with those few of the very old inhabitants of Strones who were born before our drunk, Johann Georg Hiedler, died in 1857. The links, if examined closely, were too rusty a chain to secure the story, but Himmler liked these conclusions and so they held up. I had delivered a family history in which there was no Jew in the Fuehrer's bloodstream, and his father

and mother were uncle and niece by blood. Thereby, I had thereby succeeded in making Adolf Hitler a First Degree Incestuary One-step-removed.

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

Here, Himmler closed his eyes, leaned back, and exhaled slowly. It was as if he must expel every errant spirit in his lungs. "I will not speak to you of this again," he went on with a low voice, "but occasions of close incest are truly perilous. One has need of the Fuehrer's Will to succeed in such a situation." (I capitalize Will since he used the word with reverence.) "It is my belief that in the world of numinous spirits surrounding us, there are many elements we

are right to call malign. It is even possible that the worst of these spirits collect about a presence whom in earlier times we used to speak of as Satan. This embodiment, should it exist, of a devil or, let me say, the Devil, would certainly be ready to pay great attention to Incestuaries of advanced degree. For indeed, how could such an Evil One not be eager to distort the exceptional possibilities that arise from the doubling of God-given genes? All the more power to Herr Hitler, then. He has actually been able, I would declare, to stand firm with the Vision in the face of the Devil himself."

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

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

We are finished, however, with Maria Anna Schicklgruber. That unhappy mother perished in 1847 at the age of fifty-two, ten years after the

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

For that matter, Alois had not suffered unduly when his mother was lost. Spital, where he lived with Johann Nepomuk and the wife and three daughters of the Hiedler family, was a long walk from Strones, and he had come close to

forgetting Maria Anna. He was happy with his new family. In the beginning, Nepomuk's daughters, Johanna, Walpurga, and Josefa, then twelve, ten, and eight, were delighted to have a five-year-old brother, and took him gladly into their bedroom. Since Spital was a full-sized village rather than a hamlet, a separation between prosperous and poor had begun to appear. A farmer could even be considered well-off—at least in his own town. There were a few such in Spital, Johann Nepomuk being the first. The wife, Eva, kept a good home. She was also most practical. If she had a suspicion that Nepomuk might actually be more than a stepfather to the boy, she could not, on the other hand, forget the disappointment in his eyes each time she gave birth to a girl. It was probably better for all concerned to have a boy in the house. Yes, she was practical.

And Alois was loved! By his father, by the girls, even by Eva. He was good-looking, and like his own mother, he could sing. As he grew older, he also demonstrated that he was ready to work in the fields. For a time, Johann Nepomuk even contemplated leaving the farm to him, but there was no balance to count on in his character. He was restless. He might not always be there to take care of whatever unforeseen obstacle, large or small, might settle

unexpectedly upon the daily work. In contrast, Johann Nepomuk had so much love for his labors that on the best of days he felt as if he could hear the murmurs of the earth. While he was not at ease with the long silences that hovered over the end of afternoon, a spell would often enter his dreams by evening. The sum of his fields, his sheds, his beasts and his barn became a creature equal to a demanding woman, cavernous, haunting, smelly, greedy, needy, ever extracting more from him. He would awake in full recognition that he could never leave the farm to Alois—Alois was the child of the woman in the dream. So, he gave up the notion. He had to. Such a gift would enrage his wife. She wanted a good future for her daughters, and the farm might not provide more than two respectable dowries.

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

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

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

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

“When was that? How long ago?”

“Months, months I think.”

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

“No, never. I am ashamed for myself.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the age of eighteen, after five years in the boot shop, he applied to the Austrian Finance Ministry for a position in the Customs, and was accepted. By another five years, he had risen to the rank of Finanzwach Oberaufseher (Finance-Watch High Overseer) which was equal to no more than Corporal, but already the uniform was impressive, and for that matter, it usually took ten

years to rise even to this level, especially if you joined the Service with no connections.

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

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

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

Indeed, what could he do? Johanna, the oldest daughter, seven years older than Alois, had been married at the age of eighteen, and for the last eleven years had been faithful to her husband, Johann Poelzl who usually kept her pregnant. She had once been agreeable in appearance. Now her hands and

feet were raw and her features had thickened from bearing six children and then but living with the memory of the first four. (They had all died early.)

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

This time, no question. At the first opportunity which proved to be the only one, Alois continued his father's tradition of apocalyptic intercourse in barn straw, and Klara Poelzl was conceived. There was no question in Johanna's mind. Each time, she had known the moment when Johann Poelzl, her husband, had put a child in her. But this occasion was superior. No small event took place in her body. "You have made me feel as I have not felt before," she said when they were done, and when Klara was born, Johanna sent him a letter that he received in the midst of rigorous training for an examination to bring him up to Finanzwach-Respizienten, the highest position

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

If he could measure himself by such deeds, it was in relation to the accomplishments of other low-rank officers in the Finance-Watch. His rise was remarkable for a young man with so sparse an education. Nonetheless, in four more years, he had another promotion, and still another by 1870 when at the age of thirty-three, he had worked himself up to Customs Collector. By 1875, he was Full Inspector and would write below his signature, on any government paper, the full weight and address of the title: "Official of the

First Class Imperial Customs Post in the Railroad Terminal, Simbach, Bavaria. Residence, Braunau, Linzergasse.”

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

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

customs official in the service of the Hapsburgs, but he even resembled Franz Josef himself! There he was, a fair facsimile of the emperor, a full expression of duty, hard work, and an imperial face.

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

She began her campaign. Alois was to legitimize himself. His mother, after all, had been married. Why could that not be taken to mean Johann Georg Hiedler was the father? Alois knew it was unlikely, but now that Anna Glassl was making it an issue, he was not averse. He had, after all, never enjoyed his last name, and Anna Glassl was not necessarily wrong when she judged that his career, despite its success, had been obliged to deal every day with the sound of Schicklgruber.

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

In a farm cart, pulled by two old horses, he journeyed with Alois and Romeder and two neighbors who had agreed to serve as witnesses all of the miles from Spital to Strones, then further on a few miles to Doellersheim, all

of it close to a four-hour journey on a narrow meandering carriage-road full of many fallen limbs and a few uprooted trees, but still reasonably free of mud on this October day. (With mud, it might have taken eight hours). On arrival, Johann Nepomuk came face to face with the particular priest he had no wish to remember. There he was, a very old priest now, shrunk in stature, and smaller in station (for Doellersheim parish was not comparable to Spital), yet here was the very priest who had scolded him for traffic with the vulva of a mare.

This recollection was shared by the two men even if not at all acknowledged. (There was not the smallest shift of expression between them.) They were all there for the business at hand, Alois, Nepomuk, Romeder, and the two witnesses they had brought along from Strones. Since none of them but Alois knew how to write, the others signed the document with an XXX. They said they had known Georg Heidler and that "in their presence and repeatedly" he had admitted to being the father of this child. The mother had stated the same. They swore to that.

The priest could see that, legally speaking, very little was correct. Each of the witnesses' hands had shaken with a good bit of godly fear as they put

down their XXX. One of them, the son-in-law, Romeder, could not have been five years old when Anna Maria died. Of course, she would have told all to the five-year-old! Moreover, Johann Georg was also long dead. Given such a dubious case, a more careful proceeding would be appropriate.

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

He would not, however, insert the date. On the yellow page of the old parish registry of June 1, 1837, he crossed out “illegitimate,” put Johann Georg’s name in what had previously been the blank space, and smiled again. Legally speaking, the document was shaky, but it did not matter. Which church authority in Vienna would challenge such an alteration? The word was to encourage certified fatherhood no matter how late in life it arrived. Already in some districts of Austria, illegitimacy was up to forty births per hundred. Of that forty, could even half be free of one or another unmentionable family matter? So, the priest, disapproving of these loose procedures even if he was bound to approve them, chose not to inscribe his own name. If it ever went wrong, he could disavow the paper.

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

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

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

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

they were as blue as the light that once reflected from a large diamond he had seen behind a glass in a museum exhibit.

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

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

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

He took a walk outside the village with the mother and daughter. They went to that part of Nepomuk's fields which now belonged to the husband, Johann Poelzl, who—no surprise to Alois—bore no resemblance to this rare

blue-eyed Klara. Poelzl had gray clouded eyes and a face full of lines that drooped in concert with a sad nose. It was obvious that he had given up the once-enduring hope that sooner or later he would be certain to prosper because he was an honest farmer. Nor did Alois stay. Poelzl had the expression on his face of a man who still has a host of chores. On this day, scattered in the rows of stubble, were stray ears of corn not yet too rotten to feed to the pigs, and Poelzl stood on one foot and then the other (as if to talk for another two minutes would allow more of the remaining ears to spoil.) If he was also discomfited by the implicit prosperity of Alois' uniform, Poelzl's mood took no happier turn when Alois remarked that his own wife was not well and needed a maid who was pious, and of reliable breeding. Was it possible—not to rush things!—that Klara might be just that person?

Poelzl could hardly say no when he was told of the amount his daughter would be able to send back. Cash not dependent on a crop was the best of crops, and, as always, he needed money. The alternative—to borrow further sums from his brother-in-law Romeder or his father-in-law Nepomuk, was unpleasant. Poelzl could hear the diatribe that would come from his wife's family. Johanna's disposition had become so sour that he often thought (very

much in private) her blood must taste like vinegar. Nor did he wish to listen to the loud sigh of his brother-in-law as Romeder came up with some Kronen. He certainly didn't want to hear the advice that would come from Nepomuk. That would insult his judgment. A farmer could have fine instincts for husbandry and still be prey to bad luck—did that mean he must pay tribute twice by listening to others when he had already paid once by living with an insufficient return from his fields? So, he accepted the fact that Klara would go to work for Uncle Alois, but his feelings turned over in him with the emptiest anger of them all—rage that has lost its heat.

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

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

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

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

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

While he considered his first quality as a man to be dedication to his work—to the cleanliness of his personal appearance, to the neatness and well-written dispatch of his official papers, and every evidence he could give of his high respect for punctuality and performance in each and every working hour, he took equal pride in his skill as a customs inspector. He had not stood for years at a border post looking to root out the attempts of travelers and merchants to cheat the Hapsburg Crown of its tariff without learning a good

deal about false presentation and outright mendacity, and now he was having to exercise such abilities himself in order to divert Anna from another girl he had taken to visiting on the top floor of the inn.

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

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

So if he was ready to wait for Klara Poelzl, it was because his nocturnal, and for the present, true interest was with this waitress at the inn, a nineteen-year-old named Fanni Matzelsberger, who was voluptuous but lithe, and—by

every good measure—smoldering. He had learned to strip his eyes of all expression when she crossed the room, but she did have an irrepressible turn to her hips that spoke to him—Fanni was a good girl who did not want to be so good.

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

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

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

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

"How do you decide such things?"

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

"What a remark!"

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

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

They argued round and round about whether she should or should not go to confession. She was tempted to let him win, and then, given the force of his desire, she did give it to him, she gave it up, and proceeded to tell him one month later that she was pregnant. Had the time come, she asked, to tell his wife?

He no longer trusted Fanni. He did not think she would have become pregnant if she was really afraid of dying. Besides, he had been lying to his wife with so much skill that now he did not dare to confess. Prevarication,

like honesty, is reflexive, and soon becomes a sturdy habit, as reliable as truth itself. Anna Glassl-Hoerer Hitler was fifty-seven and looked ten years older (although to his continuing surprise she could be a virago at dawn.) To lose her would reduce his financial situation measurably. Moreover, he would be giving up a lady for a farm-girl, a most attractive farm-girl, but then he had decided long ago that in the end, a peasant was like a stone. Throw a stone high in the air—it will always come down. Whereas a lady was like a feather. A lady could tantalize you with her intelligence. He would hate to give up his ever-increasing skill as a liar.

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

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

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

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

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

Anna Glassl: Cruder than it used to be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stove a hole in the well-guarded vessel of his future plans. Klara, she told him, would have to go. Otherwise, Fanni would.

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

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

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

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

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

“You are mad,” Alois answered. “Can’t you see? Klara would be happier in a convent.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Why?”

“Because he is with you.”

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

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

“This is something you know?”

“Please, I know.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If Fanni was now more at ease with Alois, the best of moods could nonetheless vanish in no more than the interval it took to close her eyes and open them. How could she be certain that her distrust of Klara had been honest fear? What if it came from spite as cruel as the pain of a bad tooth? She knew she was full of spite. That was why she called herself a witch.

Even as she had foreseen, she was truly pregnant now. If that offered contentment, she continued nonetheless to feel remorse. She had banished the sweetest girl she knew, and so there were days when Fanni was on the edge of

asking Klara to return, but then she would think: What if Alois comes to prefer Klara? Then she might not be faithful to her vow. How unfair that would be to the unborn child!

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

He was not a man to give all of himself to a curse. He considered such an act equal to spending a private horde of gold. Nonetheless, he would deliver his curse every night, and it had venom to it. So, he was not all that surprised when Anna died. And most suddenly! This curious event did not occur until fourteen months after Alois' son was born and Fanni was very much pregnant again, but Alois still reckoned that his anathema might have

companions) "with a fart and a snore." Anna Glassl committing suicide was one thought to keep him awake. He would have gone to her funeral but he did not care to subject this new nocturnal uneasiness to the sight of her face in the coffin. So Alois stayed away. That was another tasty item for the town's gossip.

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

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

Alois was annoyed. It cost extra to transport by hired carriage the two Customs officers he had invited. This was no serious expenditure but, all the same, needless. Besides, he was disappointed in Fanni. His new wife was not

as ready to face other people as she ought to be—look, after all, at the fine husband she had caught.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Up until then he had been faithful to Fanni. Now, the only way to make the nurse more palatable was for him to alternate her with the cook. Fanni came back from Vienna looking weak and tired and, before long, knew all about it. She did not scream at him. She wept. She was not well, she confessed, and there he was without patience to wait for sick people to mend. He was a brute, she told him.

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

BOOK III

HITLER'S MOTHER

In those months, Klara visited Paula more often than Aunt Eda, and the women they had left in each other all too needed. On the first visit, Klara had fallen on her knees before the bed where Paula rested, and said, "You were right. I do not know if I would have been true to my vow." In time, Paula said, "You would have been true," she said. "Now I ask you to give up your vow. He is through with me."

"Yes," said Klara. "my promise was annulled. It has to be annulled from now on." She had a moment when she thought she might at last have a true understanding of justice. This left her feeling excited. She had been taught

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In those months, Klara visited Fanni more often than Alois did, and the wound they had left in each other all-but-healed. On the 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 remain! It has to be stronger than ever." She had a moment when she thought she might at last have a true understanding of sacrifice. This left her feeling exalted. She had been taught

to search for just such a pure 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 knowing the glory of Christ. But to attain to such moments, one must be ready to sacrifice one's dreams. After all, had God not sacrificed His Son?

Klara was soon trying to relinquish her desire for Uncle Alois. That fever had not gone away during the four years she worked for Anna Glassl, nor over the next four years serving the old lady in Vienna who alternated between doting on Klara and counting the silverware. She 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 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—yet the honesty made her irritable.

Years earlier, in payment for her one cardinal sin with Alois, Johanna had turned into a very good housekeeper, and Klara had responded to such house duties. 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 crusted plates, cups, pots, and cutlery.

By now, Klara was never lax. Each household task required respect for the labor even when one knew how to do it well. Sacrifice, however, was different from such work. Sacrifice was an ache she felt next to her heart. If she wanted Alois, if she dreamed of Alois, she was still obliged to find a way (once Fanni's two children had been put to sleep) to keep him 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 before returning 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. The recesses of her body were soon fingered by his imagination. Her thighs burned, her cheeks burned, her breath wanted to inhale his breath. If one of the children cried out in sleep, she would jump up. The sound was equal to a cry from Fanni come to her all the way from Laughter-in-the-Woods.

Afterward, however, a cramp of disappointment would be sure to follow.

Alois was often on the point of describing to his drinking associates how he loved her eyes. They were so deep, so clear, so full of the desperation to have him.

Why not? Alois kept to his view that he was one exceptional fellow. Whom did he know besides himself who was as ready to claim his indifference to religious fear? That was its own kind of bravery. He often made a point of declaring that he never went to church. Nor would he confess to a priest. How could a run-of-the-mill priest be equal to him? He had his allegiance to the Crown and he needed no more than that. Would God be about to punish those who served the State so well?

Just the week before, a cousin had inquired whether his son, now of age, would be happy working on the Finance-Watch. Alois had written back,

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

Naturally, he felt equal to the sentiments in the letter, nor did he have to think about "those who lead immoral lives." Immorality, Alois knew, was not to be confused with the details of 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. What, after all, was the point of being a woman if you could not lie with skill? Sie ist hier! True, or not true?

All the same, she might be his daughter.

Alois knew why he didn't have to go to church, nor to confession, he knew why he was brave. He was ready to take the same forbidden road that drunken peasants and adolescents blundered into while sharing a bed. But he,

unlike them, 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, his proud bulge 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 garments, and corsets all the way to the nest of hair she had so long concealed. And there it was, much like feathers—downy—much as he had expected. Half her body was on fire, but half was locked in ice, the bottom half. If not for the Hound, he might have stalled at the approach to such a frozen entry, 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 with woe and fright and worse—in shame for the one throb of exaltation that shivered through her at a bound and was gone. She knew that this had been the opposite of sacrifice. Nor could she stop kissing him. She 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. 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. She could not stop weeping. Nor could she stop smiling.

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So, Klara was now his lover, his cleaning woman, and the nursemaid to Alois-Junior, 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 in the onlookers that he could sit there as if he were Franz-Josef himself, ready to claim, “In company with the Emperor, I, too, have a lovely mistress.” On any night that he took her downstairs to dine, it never failed—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, "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 be punished."

"Who the hell cares?" he would growl, and that brought her closer to the unholy pleasure.

Invariably, she would weep when it was over. It was all she could command not to scream at him. Inside her was all the over-squeezed congestion of all that had not quite come to pass. Besides, she was so guilty.

Now, it was Klara's turn not to go to Mass. She was working for the Devil (so she knew!) She felt as if her finest impulses were now bringing her nearer to the Evil One, yes, even the loving care she gave to Alois-Junior, and to Angela. The more she adored them, the worse it must be. Her tainted presence could pollute their spirit. And when she thought of her dead brothers and sisters, she had to fear what she might now be doing to them.

Then, there was Fanni. Klara had not told her and knew she must. Because if Fanni did not know now, she would certainly find out so soon as

her life ended and she could watch from 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 grip 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 interred, a very long day, since Alois did not bury Fanni in Braunau. He had chosen Ranshofen ("On-the-Brink-of-Hope") where they had been married. This was not from sentiment but annoyance. The word in Braunau was that he had bought Fanni's coffin months before she died. The townspeople were saying no less than that he had found a true bargain in advance (a mahogany job confiscated from a smuggler at the Customs gate.) In truth, he had only bought the damned crate ten days before her death. He

had not sat on it for months but for days. So, he could not forgive the gossip. Moreover, the tragedy of death was overrated. So many times, it was like saying goodbye to a friend who has outworn every welcome. In truth, he did not plan to visit the cemetery too often. His eyes were on Klara for tonight. By evening, after the funeral, he could not stop looking at her. Those blue eyes—so much like the diamond in the museum!

In bed on that hot August night, Klara's life received another life. She felt it travel directly to her heart, or so she felt. For her soul seemed now to reside right there beneath her heart, and she came close to falling into darkness from the pleasure—except that the pleasure went on and on. Now, it did not stop. She belonged to the Devil. He had dug into her with the most evil enjoyment she had ever known, and so her guilt in the morning was as heavy as a water-logged tree. She had a dreadful moment on realizing that part of her delight had come 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 and so nasty joy that she could at last release 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 be able to learn from experience. Only by this, should he be judged." So Alois knew that he must be responsive to this new duty.

Besides, he wanted to get married. The displeasure of the good people of Braunau had begun to itch. Literally. An intolerable itch now bothered him and sometimes would last for as long as an hour. It had to be the thoughts of the townspeople. For the first time, he considered the possibility that all these anonymous letters they were writing to the Finance-Watch were not necessarily going to be thrown away by desk officials. 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 due to the size of her belly. That would put no honey into the letters sent to the Finance-Watch.

He could also say to himself that for the first time he did have some liking for the woman he would marry. Anna Glassl had satisfied his sense of rank—no question there—but he did not enjoy the pale smell of her perfume. 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.

In any event, what with children dying so often, a large family was the necessary insurance against tragedy. Lose a few, and you still had others.

On the other hand, technically, they were cousins. When Alois made his first inquiries at the Braunau parish house, he discovered that he would have to file an application.

Now, Alois had to worry about 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. Could that day 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 might be too close. If he would now claim that Johann Georg was in no way his father, he would have to go back to being Alois Schicklgruber. Not to be contemplated! So, he and Klara would have to take the long step of asking for an ecclesiastical decision.

In Braunau, the incumbent of the parish church, Father Koestler, proceeded to study the problem. After a month, came a discouraging response: The power to grant dispensations in cases such as Herr Hitler's did not reside in him. Klara and Alois would have to apply to the Bishop of Linz. Father Koestler would help him to write the letter.

-3-

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 a good idea to leave a stone in 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 receive nice surprises. From good women who are not as high and mighty 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 must now 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 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 visible months by then.

"It's a big fellow we have here," said Alois.

"I hope that is so," she said. What could come out of a mother like herself who had felt so near to the Evil One on such a crucial night? Or, if the child did live, might it be marked? The thought would haunt her wedding.

Like many of the nuptials of Customs officials, the day was divided into two parts. As Klara would say: "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, now a widower, came all the way from Spital to Braunau in company with Klara's sister, Johanna, named after her mother, Johanna Poelzl. "Little Johanna" was a hunchback. This occasioned some 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 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. The room had become much too 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 now 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 on for three more years. There is no organ more resistant to rupture than the heart of a tough old peasant. Nonetheless, he never felt the same, a cruel punishment for an old widower who was trying to hold on to what was left for him. Death, when it arrived at the age of eighty-one, came by the same epidemic that took away the children.

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Diphtheria had come 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 their lungs like galley-slaves 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. That was Otto's

death—Otto, just three weeks old!—lost to a galloping colic that gutted him. The stench of a baby born to die in its first weeks of life settled into Klara's memory.

She had no doubt whose fault it was. Alois had been close to the Evil One. 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 for such acts. But then, she also learned that this kind of hatred was treacherous. 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-Junior, and Angela had been sent to Spital when diphtheria assaulted the younger children, and escaped infection. They were back with her now, even if the Hitler family rooms at the Pommer Inn were still reeking 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 the Poelzl family—but the miniature coffins of her own children were 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 these newborn souls, so unprotected. It was only after the death of Gustav that she realized she had loved him.

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. “The real power is right there. God does nothing but kill us off.”

“Alois,” said an older 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 friend.

By the time he reached home, Alois was usually in no good mood. The beer wore off in a sour cloud. He would scold Alois-Junior, 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 would try to conceive of how to introduce her to specialite’s de maison. He did not speak French but he knew all he needed to know about those three words. One of the Customs Officers would brag that he had been to Paris in his youth.

There, in a brothel, he claimed, he had learned more over two nights than in all the rest of his life.

Alois refused to be impressed. Some of the details were not foreign to him. Fanni, for one, liked to put her mouth into many a place, and Anna Glassl was no lady when you got down to it. And now and again with one of the maids or cooks, he would receive a nice wet surprise.

Of course, these days he was with a frightened bird whose torso 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—not often—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 her altar, alone, always alone, she was so private that he wanted to put his mouth where she was most private, and then he could slip the Hound into her mouth. He would show her where the real Devotion was located.

Specialites de maison!

Yet, on this hot summer night when he tried to open her closed legs, pushing harder than ever with the force of his arms, there came a moment

when his breath overtook him. A startling pang! For one instant, he felt as if he had been felled by thunder. Was that his heart? Was he the next to die?

“Are you all right?” she cried out as he lay beside her, his breath going in and out with a rasp that sounded as terrible as the last winds of their lost children.

“All right. Yes. No,” he said. Then, she was on him. She did not know if this would resuscitate him or end him, but the same spite, sharp as a needle, that had come to her after Fanni’s death was in her again. Fanni had told her once what to do. So Klara turned head to foot, and put her most unmentionable part down on his hard-breathing nose and mouth, and took his old battering ram into her lips. Uncle was now as soft as a coil of excrement. Even as she said this to herself, she sucked on him with an avidity that could come only from the Evil One—that she knew. It was from there that the impulse had come. So, now they both had their heads at the wrong end, and the Evil One was there with them. He had never been so close before.

The Hound began to come to life. Right in her mouth. It surprised her. Alois had been so limp. But now, he was a man again! She felt such power. His mouth lathered with her sap, he turned around and embraced her face with

all the passion of his own lips and face, ready at last to grind into her with the Hound, drive it into her piety, yes, damn all piety, thought Alois—damned churchmouse wife, damned church!—he was back from the dead—some kind of miracle, he was all there, his pride equal to a sword. This was better than a storm at sea! And then it went beyond such a moment, for she—the most angelic woman in Braunau—knew she was giving herself over to the Devil, yes, she knew he was there, there with Alois and herself, all three loose in the geyser that came out of him, and then out of her, now together, and I was there with them, I was the third presence, and was carried into the caterwauling of all three of us going over the falls together, Alois and myself filling the womb of Klara Poelzl Hitler, and indeed, I knew the moment when creation occurred. Even as the Angel Gabriel served Jehovah on a momentous night in Nazareth, so, too was I there with the Evil One at this conception on this July night nine months and ten days before Adolf Hitler would be born on April 20, 1889. Yes, I was there, an officer of rank in the finest intelligence service that has ever existed.

BOOK IV

THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

-1-

Yes, I am an instrument. I am an officer of the Evil One. And this trusted instrument has just committed an act of treachery: It is not acceptable to reveal who we are.

The author of an unsigned and unpublished manuscript can attempt to remain anonymous, but the margin of safety is not large. Whenever we are in the presence of the Maestro, he has the capacity to read our thoughts.

If, from the beginning, I have spoken of my fear at undertaking this work, it is because I knew that sooner or later I would have to reveal myself. Now, however, that I have offered this disclosure, there is a shift in the given. I can no longer be envisioned as a Nazi officer named Dieter. If I happened in 1938 to be a trusted aide to Heinrich Himmler (by the means, yes, of inhabiting a real SS officer's body) that was temporary—an assignment. We are always ready to inhabit such roles when so commanded.

I know that these remarks can hardly be altogether accessible to most of my readers. Today, given the authority of the scientific world, most well-educated people are ready to bridle at the notion of such an entity as the Devil. They have even less readiness to conceive of an ongoing conflict between Satan and the Lord. The modern tendency is to believe that such speculation is a medieval nonsense extirpated centuries ago by the Enlightenment. The existence of God may still be acceptable to a minority of intellectuals, but not the notion that there is an opposed entity equal to God or nearly so. One Mystery might be allowed, but two, never!

There need be no surprise, then, that the world has such an impoverished understanding of Adolf Hitler's personality. Detestation, yes,

but comprehension, no—he is, after all, the most mysterious human being of the century. Nonetheless, I would say that I can comprehend his psyche. He was my client. I followed his life from infancy all the way into his later development as the wild beast of the century, this all-too-modest-looking politician with his snippet of a mustache.