

A n t h o n y T i a t o r i o

Dear Sandra

a n o v e l

TRAFFORD

• Canada • UK • Ireland • USA •

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For my wife
Judy

Dear Sandra

IT WAS OCTOBER 1976 and the garret was dark and dirty. Dust lay on dust, like a nightscape of gray snow. Packed tight between the studs of unfinished walls, as though never to be disturbed, were old Dr. Simonescu's books, letters and documents. Dr. Treppenwitz had searched the old attic library all day for some clue to help him explain the horror that had happened the night before. He hadn't yet dared go to the mortuary where Eichler had taken the boy, but he remembered vividly how difficult the limp and lifeless body had been to carry, even by two strong men, and for so short a distance.

He felt the fear begin to rise again in the pit of his stomach; suddenly he saw the bloodied tire iron Eichler had forgotten; he felt weak and helpless. He had always prided himself on his ability to cope with pressure, after all he was a doctor; he was accustomed to emergencies; he was trained to be calm, unemotional and calculated and it was also part of his nature. He knew all of this, yet he was seething within, panting almost uncontrollably. "Get a hold of yourself," he almost screamed, "breathe... exhale... all the way... that's it... now fight it... fight it... It's too late to turn back now!"

New thoughts came gushing forth without warning. "What else could I have done? I was trapped; God how did I get caught in this? Eichler was right; it would be tragic to waste a lifetime for a stupid mistake... after all... it... was an accident."

Perhaps they could have explained it away as self defense or bad luck; but the boy was so young and so prominent. Who would have believed them?

Suddenly his solar plexus spoke. "Did someone see us? How

can I be sure no one saw us?" Eichler's assurances, so convincing then, somehow seemed far away and worthless now. Why was he so calm and confident almost as though he had no conscience? Was that the reason he found himself following this man, whom he hardly knew, and against his better judgment? He seemed so sure, so confident. It was easier to let him decide. He just took charge and things happened so quickly.

HIDDEN IN A DARK ATTIC CORNER, forgotten beneath the burden of drying books, was an old oak dresser, its drawers jammed ajar where the warping of age had left them. The ornate and heavily framed mirror was tilted slightly downward and in it, reflecting from where Treppenwitz stood, was the path of his own footsteps in the dust. He wondered once more if he had made a mistake, if he could have decided differently. And then again his uncontrolled memory carried him back to the horrible happenings of the night before and, perhaps for the hundredth time, he relived it all, beginning with the telephone call.

"Hello... Dr. Treppenwitz?"

"Yes."

"This is Jim Eichler... across the street... the funeral director."

"Oh... Yes... Hello Mr. Eichler."

"Please... call me Jim; we're neighbors now you know." The breathy falsetto voice was a little too friendly, but Treppenwitz didn't notice. "Pretty convenient too don't you think, having a funeral parlor right across the street?" The pause was perfect, almost professional. "For referrals I mean." Somehow it seemed funny and both men laughed the polite little laugh which almost always accompanies introductions.

"Listen Treppenwitz, it's after six, why don't you quit whatever you're doing and come out to dinner with me? I know we'll have

a lot to talk about... after all we're both kind of in the same business... curing bodies!" Both men laughed again at the morbid pun. "I don't know Mr. Eichler, Mrs. Tikhonin is probably getting me something..."

Eichler instantly, almost too assertively, interrupted. "Are you kidding? It's Saturday night. She's long gone; she won't be back until after midnight. You knew she went off somewhere every Saturday didn't you? You're on your own my friend."

Treppenwitz remembered that Mrs. Tikhonin, who had been old Dr. Simonescu's housekeeper and nurse, insisted on having every Saturday free. When he convinced her to stay on he had agreed not to ever question her about it. He recalled her saying that she couldn't stay if she were not sure of her Saturdays. He had to promise never to ask her to give one up no matter how important he thought it was. It would be too hard for her to refuse she said.

That was odd he thought as the flash back of Eichler's words broke through. "What do you say now Treppenwitz?"

"Huh... Oh sure... Sounds great. Just give me a few minutes to..."

AS HE PACED SLOWLY IN THE ATTIC DUST Treppenwitz's memory seemed to fast forward like some kind of organic video machine probing for clues to help him unravel the horror of that fateful night. It recorded his surprise to see that Eichler was a man well into his sixties, big, but with soft puffy flesh and a half-grown, high-pitched, pre-adolescent voice, which seemed to cast him almost as a caricature. He remembered too that it had been a stormy night with heavy rain and gusty wind, but his memory discarded the traffic and the uneventful ride to the restaurant.

"Tell me Treppenwitz, what possessed you to take over old Simonescu's practice? You knew about the scandal, or... I should say, potential for scandal, didn't you?"

Treppenwitz welcomed the chance to learn more about the old doctor whose house and practice he had purchased and whose mysterious disappearance was still a topic of intense local interest. "I don't know. I needed a change I guess after twenty years in little clinics. What do you suppose happened to him?"

"Drowned most likely, at least that's what they say. The body was never found you know. He liked to swim alone at night, out to Quick's Point. He never wanted anybody with him. He did it to meditate. He said it made him free..." The vacuum of Treppenwitz's silence drew Eichler on. "...so he was probably right... about it making him free I mean... there was some speculation that Lotte murdered him. Can you believe that! She being so much younger and all... I guess it's just that she decided to sell the place and move out so quickly."

Treppenwitz's own mind was moving rapidly. "I'm surprised she left so much behind. I mean I expected the equipment and the furniture, that was part of the agreement, but she left all of the files, there's an attic full of books and personal papers."

"Trying to forget." Eichler's words slipped slowly, almost silently, out as if not meant to be heard.

"What did you say?"

"I said... Treppenwitz... tell me more about yourself and your life up until now."

"There isn't much to tell really, I stayed single, saved my money... not that I had many alternatives."

"What kind of deal did you get down here... if you don't mind my asking?" Like Treppenwitz, Eichler was probing for information, but with quite different motives.

"I just bought the place from Mrs. Simonescu. She said she would help me contact the old patients and..."

"Lotte," Eichler interrupted.

“Ah... Yes, Lotte; and Mrs. Tikhonin agreed to stay on and help me get...”

“Elsa,” Eichler said. “That’s Elsa, first names Treppenwitz... don’t be so damned formal, use first names, it makes people feel more comfortable. You’ll rebuild old Simonescu’s practice a lot quicker.”

TREPPENWITZ’S CONSCIOUSNESS SHIFTED back and forth between the now of the attic library and the memory of the previous night, every detail was still so vividly visible. He wondered about objectivity and reason, and why he didn’t bother to ask Eichler why deceit should yield such a high dividend. His breathing quickened as his mind began to mix the now with the then and the doubts he was having about his own behavior surfaced violently in a sea of guilt.

He searched for answers and hardly heard himself recall Eichler’s squeaky voice and sly advice. “Everyone acts on emotion Treppenwitz, people can’t stand complexity. The power of emotion, Treppenwitz...” Eichler’s eyebrows twitched.

Emotion... Treppenwitz thought... emotion... as his mind search began again. The beating windshield wipers were numbing and hypnotic. He could hardly separate the past from the present. Pain was gliding silently through the streets beside him. He began subconsciously to fill the memory gaps with his own doubts. Would self control and strength of character be strong enough to harness his cresting emotion? Would he be subject to a random accidental world? He wanted desperately to decide the direction of his own life and to determine his own fate.

Suddenly his recall came shockingly clear. “Someone’s up there Treppenwitz,” Eichler warned. “I saw a light moving, behind the shade, a flashlight.” There was a shrill urgency in Eichler’s voice

which sent a penetrating chill through Treppenwitz's body. Eichler quietly killed the engine and the headlights.

"Up where?"

"In your attic for God's sake, there's someone up there; somebody broke into your house Treppenwitz!"

"What... come on, are you sure? I don't see anything."

"I'm telling you; I'm positive. There's someone up there right now. Look... see the flickering light, there it is again, that's a flashlight. Someone's searching around up there. Have you got a gun Treppenwitz?"

"A gun... why would I have a gun?"

"To protect yourself, what the hell do you think, the world is full of slime, in case you haven't noticed. You're a doctor; you've got drugs up there and money... Here, take this lug wrench."

Treppenwitz was confused and frightened. He suddenly saw the moving light and instinctively clutched the cold iron. "Let's call the police," he pleaded, finding it preferable to be passive. "That's what we pay them for." How many times had he said that, he wondered, as his rational conscious mind allowed him a brief respite from his horrible reflections and a few seconds for thought? How sad it sounded now.

Eichler took charge again. "Shut up Treppenwitz, he'll hear you. Is there any other way out?"

"Yes, yes there is. I think there is an escape ladder, a fire escape ladder, down the back wall of the house." But he wasn't sure.

"That's probably not how he got in, but that's how he'll try to get out. You go in the front door Treppenwitz and act as though nothing is wrong... make enough noise, pretend that you're talking to me, then say: I'll prove it, let's go up in the attic library and get the book. Say it loud Treppenwitz so he will hear you and take off out the window."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll hide in the back and get a look at him when he comes out."

"You're not going to jump him or anything are you?"

"Do you think I'm crazy? He's probably high as a kite. I'll just watch. Hopefully I'll recognize him."

At this point Treppenwitz remembered that there had been doubt in his mind. It made him afraid and he began to vacillate once again between the present and the past. He didn't like the plan, it was a dumb plan, why did he do it, so many things could go wrong, he wanted to think longer and be more careful. Why was he walking up the confining steps, so circumscribed, the walls so close, saying the words just as Eichler told him? Then suddenly someone burst out of the darkness. "I tried to get out of the way, I tried... I didn't mean to hurt him but the staircase was so narrow," he screamed the words in relief as he relived the collision and falling.

What at that moment he could not have known was that Eichler had already seen that the fire escape ladder stopped at the second floor and didn't go near the third floor garret window. As Eichler ran back headlong through the dark driveway to the front door, he heard the collision and the bodies crashing on the steep attic stairway. There was a heavy dull thud and then silence. By the time he reached the house only his own footsteps down the hard pine hallway echoed in the emptiness. At the foot of the staircase he saw Treppenwitz's body heaped and unconscious.

Beside it on the stairs was a small reel of 16 mm film, which had partly spilled from its can. Eichler saw it and smiled, although he knew there wasn't time to pick it up yet. His mind flashed impulses, calculations; the passageway into the attic penetrated the floor in the center of the space. There was no door, only a railing around three sides. No one passed him; someone was still there, hiding. He stood motionless... seconds seemed eternal.

For the boy the silence, even for so short a time, was unbear-

able... and he panicked. Eichler instantly recognized him. It was Robby Simonescu. It all made sense now. He knew instantly what he would do. His teeth tightened. The boy was small and weak, only sixteen and never very robust or athletic. Eichler's thick fingers closed tight around the fragile throat. Robby Simonescu struggled for a few seconds and murmured and then, like a fawn caught in the wolf's grip, he resigned himself to die.

TREPPENWITZ COULDN'T UNRAVEL the muffled sounds somehow rushing slowly by him, maddening sounds, crashing sounds, almost words, but without syllables, only continuous incomprehensible sound. He felt water falling, dripping down, as though off dewy leaves, dripping on his forehead, flooding his face and then felt immersed in murky water, revolving weightless, but just beneath the surface.

"Get yourself together Treppenwitz," Eichler implored, slapping his cheeks with a wet towel and pulling him up by the lapels.

He first felt the cold of the floor tiles and hardly heard the words again. "Get yourself together Treppenwitz; we've got big trouble here and we don't have much time!"

Treppenwitz stood up, steadying himself against the sink. He was shivering and could feel pain and swelling around his eye, but pushed past it. "Did you see him? Did he get away?"

"Get away! Are you shitting me! You killed him Treppenwitz; you caved in his skull with the tire iron!" The words exploded everything else away.

"I didn't hit him Eichler; he charged out at me; I tried to get out of his way. It was dark; he knocked me down the stairs. I didn't hit him Eichler! I never touched him!" Treppenwitz's voice trembled, he felt faint and hungry, sweat surfaced all over his face and he thought he might fall.

"You hit him all right Treppenwitz, his head is bashed in and there's blood, skin, and hair all over the tire iron!"

"I didn't; how could I; I know I didn't; I tried to get out of the way." But he wasn't certain.

Eichler helped him, still trembling, to his feet and into the hallway. "Sure Treppenwitz... you stick to that story," he sneered with bitter sarcasm. "You just got scared and you whacked him. Face it!"

Treppenwitz could see the body, the blood. He didn't want to believe it but there it was. The conclusion was unavoidable.

"That's where I found him. I think he must have staggered that far before he dropped. I found the iron on the stairs."

"Have you called the police yet?" Treppenwitz asked meekly, not knowing which answer he really wanted.

"No way. Have you got any idea who that is?"

The boy was laying face down in the darkened hallway. Treppenwitz knew instinctively that he was dead and also, strangely, that he had seen him before.

"It's Simonescu's kid," Eichler grunted with the effort needed to roll over even so slight a body. The boy's eyes, frozen open, paralyzed the doctor, who made no effort to touch him, feel for a pulse or even listen for a faint breath.

"Oh God how did this happen? I can't believe it, this is terrible." Treppenwitz clenched his fists and fought the fear. Suddenly the past and present were one. "Exhale... Inhale... all the way."

Eichler, speaking from the depths of Treppenwitz's memory, increased the tension. "This is going to be tough to explain, we're going to have to be very careful about what we do, how we handle it."

Treppenwitz clung to the we, just as Eichler knew he would. "What should we do, Jim, how should we handle it? Why would he break into my house... his old house... what did he want?"

“Drugs, what do you think he wanted, he’s a doper hooked on his old man’s Demerol... He walked right in, used his own key before you had a chance to change the locks.”

That was right; he hadn’t even thought to change the locks. Treppenwitz tried desperately to keep events on an intellectual level, to avoid the chaos of uncontrolled emotion. “But why was he in the attic then?”

“Who the hell knows Treppenwitz, maybe he hid something up there... It doesn’t really matter does it? I mean considering he’s dead and all... One thing is sure, he made a stop at the narcotics cabinet on the way.”

Treppenwitz looked, still half-dazed at the open lock box. The broken vial and the torn wrapper from the disposable syringe were still on the stainless steel counter top.

“Here it is,” Eichler boasted excitedly, lifting the needle, still wet, from the almost empty wastebasket.

“Check his jacket,” Eichler ordered. Treppenwitz began obediently, almost robotically, to search the still body, never wondering why he hadn’t fought to reclaim this life, why he hadn’t administered mouth to mouth as he had been trained to do, or done a heart massage, injected adrenaline... done anything. Instead he searched the pockets for proof that this dead boy had been unworthy of life.

“You’re right Eichler, look at all this, syringes, needles, vials of morphine.”

THERE WAS ALSO A KEY, an old fashioned key with a round shaft, shaped like a small steel flag, too small for a door, a key to a cabinet or a box of some sort. Treppenwitz, not knowing why, concealed the key in the palm of his hand until it could be safely and secretly be transferred to his pocket. He never mentioned it to Eichler.

"I told you he was shit Treppenwitz; you did us all a favor, and people should thank you."

Here was a credible motive, surely enough to explain the break in, the confrontation and it could substantiate the death as accidental. "Are we going to call the police?"

"We sure as hell aren't going to call the police! Get that out of your head Treppenwitz."

"Why not, we can show..."

Eichler interrupted forcefully. "Yea, sure... some asshole lawyer will twist everything around, show what a sweet innocent misunderstood baby that slime was, and convince the jury that you planted the dope on him. Don't forget, he was just a kid, people around here loved his father, they feel sorry for his mother. You're an outsider, Treppenwitz, they won't believe you."

You're an outsider. They won't believe you... they won't believe you... Enough of it rang true. He never wondered why Eichler was so concerned and so intent on helping him. He paced nervously. He wanted to do something, anything, but to do it quickly.

"Grab him under the knees Treppenwitz," Eichler commanded. "I know how to handle this!"

At least he was not alone any longer; there was hope in that. "Where are we taking him?"

"To the dead house," the shrill voice replied.

Eichler lifted his end from the armpits and walked backwards through the hallway to the head of the stairs. "Put his feet down and help me hoist him up; roll him over goddamn it so I can get a grip on him." Treppenwitz heard a faint but gruesome groan as Eichler's shoulder pressed out the last damp breath of dead air from the boy's lungs. "Now go pull my car into the garage. I'll carry him down alone."

Treppenwitz was confused as he confronted another chance

to turn back. He wasn't sure; there wasn't enough time to think... there was never enough time to think.

"Hurry up Treppenwitz," Eichler growled. "It's after midnight; Elsa will be back any minute... Go Treppenwitz... Now! How do you think we're going to get him out of here without being seen?" Eichler's voice sounded unexpectedly soft and sinister. "Back in so I can just dump it in the trunk... and don't turn on the lights."

AGAIN TREPPENWITZ'S MIND SORTED THE IMAGES. Terror rose, terror now not so much of what he had done but of being caught. There was no way anyone could see, breathe in, no way, breathe out, the lights were off in the breezeway, in the garage, breathe in... breathe out. It was raining so hard, it was so late, so dark, no one would have been out in that, no way could anyone see.

"Get out of the car Treppenwitz; I can handle it from here. Go right back upstairs and clean up everything; wash the floor with bleach, then go to bed, and don't call me for a couple of days."

The drive across the street from garage to garage wouldn't look suspicious. It was raining so hard. It would be reasonable to do it. No one would wonder why. He hoped.

DR. TREPPENWITZ NEEDED THE HOT, almost steaming, shower to rinse the sleepiness from his still tired eyes. He had been awake all night, turning, and thinking... The six hours that had passed seemed so compressed that he must have slept, at least some, he thought. He leaned forward, pressing his palms against the star shaped chrome faucets and turned his face up into the pulsing rush of water. He felt it flowing hypnotically over his head, streaming steadily downward, an incessant, continuous reaching back, stretching to the origins of the earth. He stood as if in a trance, craving, almost worshipping sleep.

“Leave me Morpheus,” he whispered, smiling at this little residue of schooling. Then suddenly his memory screamed: “morphine”! And then, “morphine” burst out again, shocking him to consciousness. His eyes snapped open and he instinctively dropped his head downward away from the flowing water, focusing briefly on the whirlpool eddying endlessly into the drain beneath his feet. He saw himself struggling in a swirling abyss and shrinking ever smaller into its vortex. He seemed to sense how the force of life’s events was pulling him, with countless others, in directions and to distances beyond their control. He was not yet ready to reflect on this or to contemplate the causes of his own condition or actions. Perhaps deliberate concentration could have saved him, but he was not meant to meditate.

IT WAS VERY EARLY and Elsa was already in the kitchen cooking breakfast. She listened to the waste water from above sliding

through the pipe past her and waited for it to stop before continuing. She always started with hot water. It saved time she thought, and today she was running behind. She wanted to coordinate everything perfectly, the coffee, the eggs and bacon, home fries, just the way she did before. There was a proper sequence to any work, and a precise relationship between every breakfast combination and the upstairs sounds. She would have to learn this all over again, but she knew that the new doctor, just like the old one, would have his own immutable routine.

This man however came down before she was finished. "Good morning, Elsa," he smiled, inhaling deeply to take in the delicious blend of smells which reminded him so much of his childhood and home. It had been many years since someone had cooked especially for him. "You're up early," he continued.

"Yes, Dr. Treppenwitz, I get up every morning at five. I hope you like eggs," she said, lifting the last wrinkled piece of glistening brown bacon from the black cast-iron skillet. "I had no idea what you liked."

Treppenwitz tried to catch her eye so he could smile, but she was busy with her work. "I love eggs," he answered, remembering Eichler's advice, "... and, please... call me Frank." Elsa said nothing and Treppenwitz continued. "You've only set one place, have you already eaten?"

"No sir... I usually eat here in the kitchen."

He looked out through the archway at the big dining room table, the eight hardly used high-backed chairs, evenly spaced around it, and the one sad place set at the head. He needed her company and her words to help drown his surfacing guilt. Words were narcotic and they protected him from reality. "I wish you would eat with me Elsa."

The spattering sizzle of the home fries, freshly dropped into

the hot bacon fat, almost hid her hesitant response. "If you like... perhaps I will have coffee."

Treppenwitz moved his plate and cup to the kitchen counter. "Why don't we both eat in here?" he said, softening his eyes as they finally met her's. Elsa smiled too while she carefully poured his coffee. "How do you like your eggs?"

"Fried will be fine, thanks," he answered between swallows of hot, black and very strong brew. He needed the caffeine and already planned to reach a second cup even before the food was ready.

"I detect some sort of an accent, Elsa, but I can't tell what it is."

"Finnish," she said softly.

"Really... I don't think I've ever heard a Finnish accent before, were you born in Finland?"

"Yes... in Helsinki," she answered hesitantly.

Treppenwitz wanted to know about Simonescu and the dead boy, but he was not able to ask. "Tell me more about yourself Elsa... and about your family."

"My father died when I was very young, and my mother... and brother," she paused as if she were unsure of her words... "They were killed by the Russians during the war."

Treppenwitz saw the smile of anguish. "I'm sorry," he said sincerely, "that must have been tragic for you."

"Yes...yes it was," she answered sadly.

"When did you come here to America?"

"My uncle lived here, in New York, and sent for me right after the war... I worked, and learned English. I wanted to have friends and to go to school, but I was already too old. It was not a good time, those first years, at least not until I came here to work for Dr. Simonescu."

Treppenwitz could see her expression soften. "What year was that?"

“1947.”

“How old were you then Elsa?”

“I was already nearly thirty. Can you imagine, nearly thirty and already alone?” She knew she didn’t mean to say that she had been alone but rather that she had been very lonely then, but he would not have understood. It had taken her a lifetime to learn how to really be alone, to live without the one real relationship she ever wanted. To be close to him, and yet so distant, made her loneliness nearly unbearable. But she learned to live with it and as the only person who knew the truth of his life, she knew that he could not live without her. That had always been enough.

Treppenwitz mechanically wondered why she hid herself here for all those years, why she hadn’t married or made a career for herself. It seemed strange, but he didn’t ask. “You were happy here, though... weren’t you?” he asked gently.

“Yes, very happy. He was like family I guess. Or, perhaps I should say, like the family I wish I had had. I hardly had a chance to...” She stopped herself. It wasn’t really true, but that was how she felt, so she said it anyway. “We were a wonderful team... the Doctor and I, I mean.”

Treppenwitz could sense the deep feeling she had for Simonescu and deliberately dug deeper. “Tell me more about him Elsa, what was he like... then... in the old days when you first came here?”

“He was lonely then too. He was a sad man, a sensitive man, with so much of his own past to forget. The war left so many scars on so many of us.”

“... but he was married and had a son I believe?” The words forced forward images in Treppenwitz’s mind of the dead boy.

“Yes, he married Lotte, but that was much later, in the summer of 1960. He was already in his fifties. She was much younger.” Elsa suddenly looked at Treppenwitz, almost into his soul. She could sense something was troubling him. She felt the agony of buried

pain and had difficulty continuing, her mind making spontaneous connections which she couldn't yet fully comprehend. "He was a prisoner you know... of the Nazis... at Dachau." She knew she was being deliberately misleading but he was there... and he was a prisoner... if only of his own making.

"At Dachau... was he a Jew?"

"No." Her eyes dropped to avoid contact. "Horrible things happened. He could hardly talk about it." She paused briefly before continuing. "I have no right to say more. I'm sorry."

He instinctively reached out to touch her hand. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I didn't mean to pry... please... forgive me."

"There's no need, Dr. Treppenwitz, perhaps one day we will talk about this again."

Silence held sway for a few seconds before he went on. "What about you Elsa? You never married?"

"No," she answered without lifting her eyes and trying not to betray her intense sadness. "Are two eggs enough?" Treppenwitz nodded absently, gripped again by his sense of guilt about the boy and what he and Eichler had done. How hard it was to hide such acute thoughts. It was incredible how his uncontrolled conscience attacked him unexpectedly, seemed to toy with his emotions and taunted him almost as though it were not a part of him.

Or perhaps it was too much a part of him. Why did he do it? There seemed to be no logic, no shred of intelligence or argument which could adequately account for it. Fear ruled him and forced him into actions no sooner done than regretted. He had always believed that as a human being he had a free will and that he had the rational power to direct his own destiny. But now he was rushing robotically, mechanically, uncontrollably, toward what seemed like inevitable destruction. For the first time he stood apart and sensed his own undoing. There was still hope. It was only a faint hope that maybe it was not yet too late.

"Your eggs Dr. Treppenwitz...you haven't touched them. Is there something wrong?" There was genuine concern in her voice.

"No... of course not... I was just... day-dreaming I guess."

"More coffee?"

"Yes... please. Tell me more about the boy... Simonescu's boy... his name was Robbie you said?"

"Yes, that's right, Robbie," she answered. Something jogged her awareness but failed to enter.

He knew it too. He had said Robbie... was... his name. The knot in his solar plexus tightened. How easy it was to be exposed. He would be caught. He knew he would certainly be caught. He was no good at this, contriving lies, covering up, carefully measuring every word. She must have heard him. She'll surely remember later when it becomes known; she will know.

It was at this point that a horrible thought surfaced from his lower self. He would have to kill her too. No!... he screamed inside, his eyes reflecting the tension that flashed across his face as a higher power drove the idea away in relief, as if mere mention of the word could make it happen, or silence could somehow protect him.

"He's sixteen now... and so smart." But he was not a good son she thought to herself. Perhaps it was better that the doctor died before the boy broke his heart. He was always in and out of trouble, at school and with the police. And now the girl was pregnant. They're only babies themselves, not even out of high school, and all the talk about an abortion. He was lucky Lotte protected him from the truth about his son. It would have killed him.

When Elsa finally spoke again she said: "Robbie loved his father that much is certain, and he is taking his father's death very hard. He won't accept it. He is convinced that it was a murder."

The word shook Treppenwitz's entire being. "Murder... Why would he think that?"

"I don't know why, but he is obsessed with it. His mother can't

control him any more. He's out all night sometimes. Searching for the truth he says."

"The truth... What truth?"

"I don't know. I learned this little bit from Lotte. Evidently Robbie and his father had secrets together and this somehow made the boy suspicious. But I think it's guilt at having squandered his father's last years... never making him proud, never telling him that he loved him. I think Robbie wants to redeem himself somehow, but it's probably too late." Even as she spoke the words, Elsa sensed that he knew she was talking about herself and not about the boy at all. She too had secrets, hidden, inarticulate feelings that could never be expressed now.

Treppenwitz pressed on. "What sort of secrets do you suppose they were?"

"I really don't know. They talked a lot, sometimes deep into the night, in the attic library; they always talked up in the attic library. They spent so many hours up there especially in the last few weeks. Robbie needed to know about the war and the camp. But his father said over and over that he was not yet old enough to understand, that some day he would know the truth, but that he was still too young. Then, only recently, he began to tell him. These I think were the secrets."

"And so, somehow, these secrets led the boy to believe that his father had been murdered?"

"Yes."

"But I thought Simonescu drowned accidentally while swimming?"

"Yes," she answered in a tone that told more than the words themselves. "That was the official conclusion." Elsa opened the curtain which covered the big bay window behind her, gradually widening the view of ocean below the house and the outcropping of land, which curved along the horizon about a quarter of a mile away. The

sunrise, flowing through the window, hit flush against Treppenwitz's face blinding him for a few seconds. He noticed how dark the house suddenly became. It seemed like a capsule of shadows.

"That's Quick's Point, there across the water. It's an island when the tide's up, unreachable by land. There's nothing there, just sand and sea. He often swam out there in the evening, for exercise... and to be alone."

"The night he disappeared, did he swim out that night?" Treppenwitz asked with genuine interest.

"Yes, I saw him... as always."

"Was there anything different or unusual about that particular night?"

"Yes..." Elsa answered slowly. "He said something strange to me that night. He looked right at me and said, Elsa, the spider-shark is smiling at me. I asked him what he meant, but he just turned and walked down the steps to the beach."

"Could it have been some sort of... I don't know... suicide statement?"

"Oh, no... I don't think so." She was animated and obviously more than a little defensive and he wondered why. "It wasn't. I know it wasn't," she finished.

"Did you actually see him swim out that night?"

"Yes."

"And he never returned?"

Tears began to well up in her eyes as she answered. "Yes, that's right. It's so awful not to know exactly what happened, not to find him."

Perhaps he had pressed too hard, Treppenwitz thought to himself. He didn't mean to hurt her. "Maybe I will have some more coffee Elsa? It's great."

"Yes." She understood what he was doing, "of course."

"Do you have any idea what he meant by the words? What were they again?"

"He said, the spider-shark is smiling at me, and he had a strange look, or rather he said, *Der Spinnenhai grinste*. I thought it was odd that he spoke in German; he never used German. I discovered a clue to its meaning later when I found an old collection of his short stories."

"Short stories," Treppenwitz asked turning his head slightly with curiosity. "Really... He wrote short stories?"

"Yes ... although he said the stories just came through him and that he merely recorded the words."

"May I see them Elsa?"

"Of course," she said quietly standing. "Excuse me and I will get them."

TREPPENWITZ ROSE TO CLOSE THE CURTAIN. The early morning mist was beginning to burn off the calm surface of the protected cove, its peaceful quiet masking the tension inside the house. As, hearing Elsa's footsteps behind him, he turned back toward the table, his eyes came to rest on an old leather binder which held some loose manuscript pages, hand written, and bearing the inscription: *Erzählungen von R.*

Treppenwitz opened the cover slowly, almost reverently, hoping to begin here his search for Radu Simonescu and the truth behind the death of the unfortunate boy. There were seventeen pages, yellowed with age, and he turned each one gently. They were written in German, evidently decades earlier, and had been carefully preserved. The first story bore the title: *Der Spinnenhai grinste*.

"Here it is Elsa, the spider-shark smiles." The image intrigued him. "I wish I could read this."

"I can translate it for you if you like," Elsa said.

"You know German?"

“Yes, and I have read it before. But I must warn you though; he was a very mystical man and often spoke in strange meanings. The stories may not make much sense.”

“Please read it Elsa.”

She began deliberately to translate occasionally lapsing into the original to regain the feeling and flow of the prose. She didn’t mention, but he wondered, why the words were in German.

HE WAS PROPPED UPRIGHT ON THE HIGH SEA, half floating, and half drowning. *Langsam von hinten...* from behind him the waves rolled slowly and powerfully past, first pushing him up on the foamy crest then driving him down deep beneath the damp shadows into the valley below. He swung sometimes here, sometimes there... *plötzlich kam die Sonne...* suddenly the sun came glaring out...suddenly disappearing behind watery walls. The rhythmic passing of the sea stood in strange syncopation to his helpless up and down bobbing. Then suddenly, as if he were shot skyward, he could see himself in the foggy sea, far below, as row after row of waves flowed over him. Wave after wave... endless waves in the eternal sea.

The water swirled and soothed his exhausted body so wonderfully that he could have easily given up his life... *Aber das Sterben...* but death was not his destiny... It isn’t in the nature of man to abandon life so easily, and it was the same for him. Everything in him struggled to stop this ebbing energy. He wanted to live. It wasn’t willpower or determination which roused his tired body... *sondern ein uralter...* but an ancient... genetic instinct for survival.

He fought painfully to reach the safety of the shore, but by brute force alone he could make no progress. Despite all of his efforts he remained helpless and almost unnoticed. Only the spider-shark, alerted by the pulsing struggle on the surface, saw him, and waited... knowing that the man’s stubborn single-minded determi-

nation would eventually drive him into the jaws of the destroyer... and the spider-shark smiled.

THE EERIE AND UNEARTHLY WORDS frightened Treppenwitz. Elsa saw it but said nothing. He watched his knife slice back and forth across the soft center of his rapidly cooling fried egg. Some yolk oozed out and he stirred it absently together with some pieces of potato, smearing everything with sticky yellow. He ate without tasting and without looking up, thinking again about the tire iron Eichler had forgotten.

Elsa's mind too was miles away in time as well as place. Why couldn't he have known this then? She scolded. Why did it take so long? It was almost 40 years ago exactly, she thought. My God, forty years, how fast the time has flown, how much had changed since then.

"Dr. Treppenwitz!"

Her voice startled him. "Yes Elsa, I'm sorry; I'm just tired I guess."

"I'm tired too and I don't feel well today. If you'll excuse me I'd like to lie down for awhile."

"Of course Elsa. I hope you feel better soon."

She smiled politely but had no intention of resting, at least not then.

SHE BEGAN AGAIN TO LOOK AT THE PHOTOGRAPHS. They were old black and white box camera snapshots, which were all that was left of a life long ago and far away and of happiness that once was, happiness shattered in its youth. As much as she tried not to let herself remember bad things, to hold them down and not let them up to hurt her any more, it was, as always, of no use. She saw herself, almost as though by magic, as she was then, so young, so idealistic, so in love, and Rolf, so handsome, so strong, so confident. Everything seemed wonderful then; everything was wonderful then. She turned the pages of the old album slowly and carefully. Her father smiled up at her. He was happy too, at least for a time. There was work again and the cold hungry winters were gone. Oh, there's Michael's baptism and Katrina, and mama standing next to the big tile oven. The pictures, even in their shiny grey glare, were warm and loving. She looked again at her mother and remembered her words, so often repeated and so prophetic. "Be careful, this can't last, be careful."

The tattered pages slowly turned, Karnival, 1935. The streets were overflowing with celebration; the bridges over the Rhine were decked in decoration. What fun we had; there's Rolf... in his new white lab-coat with the name pin she gave him: Dr. Rolf Schilling. Her face softened. How proud she was of him. He was so smart and she was so in love with him then. How much and how often she wished it could have all stopped there, and have been frozen there forever, during Karnival, 1935.

She tried not to look at the buildings, at the windows with

the red and black banners of the crooked cross. It frightened her, even now; after over forty years it still frightened her. She heard her mother's words again. "Be careful." She tried to force back good memories. Rolf was home. At least they could be together for a few days, the last of the easy carefree days she thought. How difficult and complicated those days would become after that fateful last night of Karnival, 1935.

Her memory was so clear it was as though she were reliving it all again. The big railroad bridge over the Rhine from Deutz was well lit and they hurried over the pedestrian-walk toward the cathedral. A very light rain was falling, hardly enough to notice, at least not then, on his last night home.

"Hurry up Sandra, my train leaves in less than half an hour."

She pulled back against his hand gradually slowing him to a stop. He turned toward her and she wrapped her arms around his waist, pulling herself as tightly as she could against him and looked playfully straight up at him from under his chin.

"You want me to miss the train don't you?" he teased, pressing his chin down against the top of her head. She hid her nose and eyes against his neck. Beneath them the splashing hiss of a river barge fighting the current southward momentarily muffled her response.

"Hey!" he repeated tapping the top of her head with his chin. "You want me to miss the train?"

Suddenly she pulled her hands around and pressed them firmly against his chest pushing him backwards. She didn't want him to misinterpret her intent and she rightly sensed that he was doing just that. She had something troubling to talk about. She didn't want him to leave her without confronting it and it seemed best to just come right out with it.

"How could you let yourself get involved with them Rolf, you know we don't have anything to do with Nazis?"

Through the mist he could barely see the twin spires of the

cathedral and the main railroad station was some distance beyond that. Time was rapidly running out. "For God's sake Sandra, do we have to talk about this now?"

She said nothing but her expression spoke volumes.

"But you know I'm not ..."

"You kill people," she interrupted, emphasizing the kill and abruptly pushing him away again against the rusty old iron bridge railing.

"Sandra," he half pleaded, "look what you've done, this is all dirty."

"Good," she snapped. "It suits you." She pulled back as he reached forward to touch her. She seemed so sincere and he was lost for a response.

"You just don't understand Sandra... what else can I do? Besides it's got nothing to do with the Nazis... it's medical research... it's my career... our future." She said nothing and he felt compelled to press on with more reasons. "Don't you want me to get a good job? Finally make some money for a change?"

"But they're Nazis Rolf," she said in a biting accusatory tone. "You can't see it at all can you? You're just playing your little game but it's really their game and you just don't get it."

"Look," he said slowly, turning his head in a plaintive appeal for her to accept his judgment and stand by him. "Please Sandra, that's the way it is today. You can't know what it's like out there. You don't know what you're saying so just trust me please."

She turned away from him and began to walk toward the city. He followed still talking. "It's only a government research grant. They're the government and that's it. They control everything. What else can I do? It doesn't mean I kill people; where did you get that idea?"

Suddenly she stopped to confront him again. "How can you

say that after what happened to the club and to Heinrich? He's dead isn't he?"

"Yes, he's dead; but I didn't kill him. God knows how he died."

"You know how he died, those bastards beat him to death, those Nazi bastard friends of yours or better still your bastard Nazi bosses who pay your salary."

"There's no proof of that Sandra. Why do you get so carried away? Besides the club was illegal after the Hitler Youth took over, and so what, most of them were Communists, anyway who cares?"

"So what... they were your friends, that's what," she burst out angrily, almost vehemently. "They were your friends and now Heinrich is dead and you say so what... and it's worse, Rolf, you're in with them."

"Why do you keep saying that? You know it's not true; for God's sake Sandra, I'm not a Nazi."

"No that's right, you're worse, at least the Nazis are loyal."

"You're acting crazy," he pleaded. "Give them a chance. Everything is different now. Germany is strong again, the government is strong. There's a future for us finally. That's what I want, just a future for us. Is that so bad?"

She thought to herself that this was a future she did not want, but she loved him too much to hurt him any more so she sighed and said softly, "come on, we'll have to hurry or we'll miss the train."

They ran, holding hands, across the square in front of the cathedral's huge gothic facade toward the main station. Ugly gargoyles perched high on the roof's ridge, like an evil presence lurking on the edges of life waiting for a way to enter, glanced down and saw two souls disappear into the night and fog. As they climbed the stairs to the platform, she felt his hand open and his fingers slip from her grasp and before she could reach back and catch him he had disappeared into one of those little flower kiosks that lovers seem

to find everywhere in Germany. She knew what he was doing and that made it impossible for her to tell him now about the different directions their lives were taking. It bothered her because she knew at that moment that they were growing apart, that a deep schism was widening between them. She couldn't close it, or cover it, for now she could only pretend it wasn't there.

"Oh ... they're beautiful Rolf," she said sincerely, smiling up at him.

"I'm sorry you're so stuck on this," he said softly, tightening his lips and raising his eyebrows still not comprehending the depth of difficulties between them. "We get so little time together now. I miss you so much when I'm away that it seems a shame to..."

She caressed his cheek gently with the knuckle of her forefinger and smiled a strange sad smile as she stretched to reach his lips. They kissed briefly and before she could cry she turned her head aside brushing her cheek against his chin and pressed her tears against his collar. He felt her tremble in his embrace. Neither spoke. There were no words left. She waved briefly while she walked beside the departing train until the platform ended and he disappeared into the darkness.

THERE WAS NO TIME NOW TO STAND STARING down the empty track, no time now for laments or might have beens; her train was boarding on a different track, about to embark in a very different direction. She fumbled in her pockets as she ran; the ticket, the instructions, and the identity papers, they were all there. She was scared. It was the first time they had trusted her to make the run. She was proud, as much now even after all those years, as she was then. A faint smile fell across her face as she recalled her first meeting with the cell leader in Aachen. It was February, 1935. A meeting of about two hundred youth group leaders in Berlin shortly after the takeover by Hitler led to an underground resistance movement all

over Germany. Safety forced them to operate in small cells of four or five, and they often relied on foreign contacts for financing and support. Sandra's father had been a socialist and a low-level labor leader who joined such a cell after the Nazis dissolved the unions and all of their youth groups became illegal. Everyone was told to join the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls. Some, especially those like Sandra, didn't.

The winter was mild. She remembered it so well. There were no photographs of course, it would have been much too dangerous. They were only then beginning to realize the danger. After all of the arrests in Frankfurt, over a hundred, the beatings and brutal Gestapo interrogations, it was no longer possible to mount any kind of general demonstration. All protests were smashed; spies were everywhere. It was barely possible to keep the spirit alive and to wait. Do the little things; help the hunted to escape; hide them; get them across the frontier. Print and distribute pamphlets, print the truth so people will know, and wait. Wait and do what you can; be careful; don't get caught.

The sun was well above the horizon when her train entered the ancient city of Aachen. It was a beautiful city, once the jewel of all Europe when Charlemagne called it his capital. It symbolized so well the romantic past and everything which was wonderful about Germany and about being German. Everything the Nazi's exploited and perverted she thought to herself. So many were taken in by it, especially the young, by the promise of greatness, to serve society, to rebuild the fatherland. She wondered briefly why she had not been. But of course it was because of Papa. She quickly turned back the pages to find his photo once more. It was the last image she had of him before he disappeared. She remembered the frantic efforts to find out where he was, what had happened. She remembered her mother crying. Of course it was because of Papa. "Those Nazi bastards," she said quietly, "rotten bastards."

Her mind returned to Aachen and her apprehensions during the long walk from the station to her meeting with the priest. It seems so unusual now to be meeting with a priest, but the Catholic Church, especially west of the Rhine, had a long history of anti-government activity and their monasteries and churches were often used as safe houses in the struggle against the Nazis.

"So you're Sandra," he said with a mechanical smile. "How are you?"

"Fine," she answered not sure of how to respond beyond that. "I hope I'm not late."

"No, not at all... in fact we have a little time to talk."

She knew he was testing her, probing to see if she could be trusted, feeling for leaks which would inevitably spill from naïve newcomers. It was so easy to be brought down. Resistance was very solitary and not safe beyond groups of four or five. Only the bold or desperate dared to contact others, especially strangers. The Gestapo was relentless and the society, slowly sinking into acquiescence, ever more intolerant of dissent.

"Why do you want to do this? It is very dangerous."

She wasn't sure what kind of answer he wanted and she really had no deep philosophical convictions; for her it was personal. It was for Papa. Most of all it was for Papa. "I have to do something. I just want to take some action, to hurt them for what they've done, to stop them."

He nodded as though he knew things he couldn't have known and continued. "How old are you now?"

"I'm eighteen."

"You're very young and very passionate, maybe too passionate. Have you finished school?"

"Yes."

"Arbitur?"

"Yes."

"And why not the university now, why not just do that then? Go to the uni, perhaps you can get involved in some other way. There's still a chance a dissenting voice will get through."

"Politics," she almost sneered. "Politics is how we got into this; politics is madness."

"Really," he said in a rising tone. But she continued not letting him interrupt. "I know that sounds like Nazi talk but it's true. Why can't we find connectedness? Why do we always over-analyze everything? My father was a socialist, a Social-Democrat. He believed in politics, he was a Weimar man. He hated Communists and the Communists hated him. Of course they both hated the Nazis but they had no relationship with each other, no connections, you see, and when the Nazis crushed the Communists my father thought it was good."

"So what's the answer then?"

"I don't know, but I know there's no point in politics."

"Do you know what Neuwied is?" he asked blandly, changing the subject, or seeming to.

"No."

"It's a concentration camp." He paused to look into her eyes. "Just for people under twenty, people like you Sandra. If you're caught you'll probably end up there."

"I won't get caught," she answered firmly.

"And if you do, and you're interrogated by the Gestapo, what will you say?"

She really had no answer. She knew by heart her carefully worked out story about her mother's illness and why she was traveling alone to Amsterdam but, if she were caught, well... she really had no answer.

"And if you're tortured to tell who I am and who your friends are, what will you do then?"

"I don't know. I hope I'll be strong, but I don't know." There

was no false bravado or macho boasting and he was impressed because he knew that there really were no answers to his questions.

“Do you understand your mission?”

“Yes, I think so. I’m to meet Theo in Amsterdam and pick up the money.”

He continued for her. “And you can explain that money. Just stick to the story if you have to. But there’s more. In the lining of your jacket you will sew a packet of false identity papers to help get people out of here. Also there will be several anti-Nazi articles from the English, French, and Dutch presses. These will be translated and reprinted here in Germany. Getting this outside information back in is very important and the Gestapo is determined to stop it. If they catch you with this material,” he added gravely, “they will kill you.”

She said nothing.

THE HOUSE WAS OLD, stately and well cared for. Tiled floors and white painted walls in the work rooms at the back gave it a clinical and almost antiseptic look, which stood in stark contrast to the thickly upholstered and carpeted viewing rooms at the front. The windows were frosted white, which whispered privacy and hinted at the traditional secrecy of most morticians.

“For God’s sake, what are you doing here?” Eichler growled. “I told you to stay away from me.” Treppenwitz, captured by the intensity of his own mission, did not notice Eichler’s blood stained smock.

The tire iron was neatly wrapped in newspaper; and he had carried it carefully and inconspicuously across the street to the funeral parlor. He felt very self-conscious and, even though he had planned and practiced his first words, he had difficulty speaking. “I had to get rid of this. It’s your lug wrench, you left it.” And without looking up, he began mindlessly to open the package.

“You’re incredibly stupid... do you know that?” Eichler bristled, pulling Treppenwitz abruptly through the open doorway. More words, surrounded by escaping air hissed out menacingly. “Get in here before someone sees you. Do you have any idea how stupid that looks, wrapping a lug wrench in newspaper like it was some kind of bouquet?” Treppenwitz saw the fury in Eichler’s eyes and didn’t answer. “We don’t know if the kid will be traced to your house, we might have to answer questions. The last thing we want to do is to look suspicious or do stupid things...”

Do stupid things. The words echoed mechanically in the doc-

tor's mind. He wanted to remain cool and calm, to be composed and in control. "Nobody saw me," he almost apologized.

"You hope... nobody saw you," Eichler responded. The pause was powerful.

"What are we going to do? I'm worried. What have you done with the body?" Treppenwitz could feel his fear begin to rise and his breath quicken. He steadied himself against a chair. Eichler saw this only as weakness, exhaled curtly through his nostrils, nodded almost imperceptibly, and answered cruelly, almost whimsically, "nothing."

"Nothing!"

Eichler smiled strangely, it was an odd, outlandish smile, and Treppenwitz avoided eye contact. Eichler then reached out and pinched Treppenwitz's face between his fingers and thumb, compressing his cheeks, and forcing his lips to curl into a pucker. "Nothing yet anyway," he said softly, his flinty eyes searching for a reaction. "I need your help first." The force of Eichler's grip was painful, but Treppenwitz didn't dare move or breathe.

"Relax, you look like shit." The sudden shift in Eichler's manner instantly calmed Treppenwitz's turbulent emotions.

"What do you mean you need my help?"

"Just what I said... You're a doctor aren't you?" The words were accompanied by an almost imperceptible little smile.

"Follow me," Eichler commanded turning and walking slowly toward what at first appeared to be a small closet door. The door was padlocked and it took Eichler several seconds to open it. He didn't once look back to see if Treppenwitz was there. The yellow light from the single sixty-watt bulb unmasked a passageway down. "Watch your head," Eichler warned. A strong sickening odor of formalin was everywhere as they started down the steep stairway to the basement laboratory. Then suddenly the sweet smell of cold cream struck Treppenwitz's senses. Memories of medical school flashed

through his mind, repulsive memories of the pathology lab and of dissecting heavily preserved two or even three year old cadavers.

“Here, rub this on your hands, it’ll protect your skin from the chemicals. I’m almost done.” Eichler’s high pitched tone was suddenly leaden and lifeless. It left Treppenwitz unprepared. It was at that moment that he saw the boy’s uncovered body, soaked in raw embalming fluids, head blocked, his body flat on its back on the stainless steel stretcher table. A long incision neatly, and recently, opened from the sternum to the groin exposed the entire abdominal cavity.

Treppenwitz was instantly and wholly paralyzed with shock. He stared at the gaping wound and tried desperately to avoid looking at the boy’s face. He couldn’t move or speak. Eichler obviously enjoyed his misery but Treppenwitz didn’t notice. He wanted only to cover the boy’s face. He forced himself not to look at the eyes. These were the features of personality, which mark a human identity, and which could tell that this was more than a routine medical exercise, they were the signs of truth that this was a boy, a murdered boy, the boy... he truly believed he had murdered. He concentrated on the gaping incision and the exposed, but hardly recognizable, abdominal organs, bloodied as they were, and laced with fat.

Within seconds Eichler was back at work beside the table, his ungloved hands again deep inside the violated torso pulling violently, lifting the frail frame almost completely from the table. “Come on... get out of there...” he grunted, pulling loose the last resisting sinews of flesh. “There!” Eichler exhaled triumphantly lifting the long mass of interconnected organs out of the abdominal cavity, like a stringer of fish, holding them up, boastfully smiling. “Look at this, a perfect Rokytanski.” Eichler proudly lifted the gruesome prize higher, almost as though posing for a picture. “What’s the matter Treppenwitz, you’ve seen dissected human bodies before, I’m sure of that...” The sound of human flesh half falling, half slid-

ing, into the big plastic pail of formalin sent a wild chill along the doctor's spine.

"Please don't do this to me Eichler, I can't stand this... Why are you doing this to me?" Treppenwitz panicked and turned to run, to run anywhere, to get away; but there was to be no escape. He had hardly reached the door when he knew.

"Why am I doing this to you?" Eichler goaded. "You've got to face it Treppenwitz, you're the murderer... you... do you understand that... you killed this kid... caved in his skull; now you've got to do whatever it takes. Look at him Treppenwitz, look at his face; see the gash here where you bashed his head in? Where... you... bashed his head in Treppenwitz... Look..." Eichler screamed, "look!"... holding the lifeless head up off the table by the hair, then dropping it with a hideous thud.

"Now get over here and help me!"

Treppenwitz was sobbing uncontrollably despite his most valiant efforts at self-control. He had no capacity to cope with these circumstances. His whole body was trembling from the core. Sweat ran ruthlessly across his face and he obeyed almost robotically. He had no more power to resist.

"Look Treppenwitz, here's the plan..." The words were logical, unemotional, cerebral and comforting. Treppenwitz eagerly immersed himself in this cognitive realm, this realm of the rational intellect where he felt safe. He listened thankfully. "We're going to bury this body, and all of our problems with it, in the same coffin with Josh Watson. We're going to soak it and stuff it in a body bag and pack it at the foot of Watson's casket. What a stroke of luck for us when Watson dropped dead last night, had a heart attack in the thunder storm his wife said. He was petrified of lightning and it scared him to death." Eichler laughed. "You might say that was a bolt of luck for us Treppenwitz, real luck. You need that sometimes."

Treppenwitz stood there nearly catatonic and only half hearing Eichler methodically outline his plan. "The wake is tonight. It's perfect. It's a Protestant service, no church tomorrow, just straight to the cemetery. He'll be six feet under before anyone even knows he's missing. I used a half-couch casket and we'll roll him on a church-truck. The pall bearers won't have to lift the casket and unless the damn bier tips over or we crack up the hearse..." He laughed at the thought of it. "It'll be a piece of cake." Eichler laughed again louder.

Without knowing why, Treppenwitz moved a little closer to the table. "There's only one hitch," Eichler squinted slyly. "We've got to make him fit."

The words sliced into Treppenwitz with the efficiency of the scalpel Eichler was slipping into his hand. "And you're going to help me cut him down to size!"

"No! God no! I can't... I can't touch him... I won't do this..."

"Yes you can, and you will," Eichler raged, grabbing Treppenwitz by the back of the neck forcing him forward against the stretcher, pushing it sideways across the floor. Bloody fluids splattered against Treppenwitz's shirt as the stretcher crashed into a corner. "Touch him," Eichler growled forcing Treppenwitz's face closer to the loathsome abdominal incision. Treppenwitz was terrified and fought as hard as he could, pulling back from the body, but Eichler tightened his grip. "You may not like it, my man, but you'll get used to it."

"There must be some other way," Treppenwitz pleaded. "Please...why can't you use a bigger casket... God, there must be some other way."

"There is no other way," Eichler retorted, forcing Treppenwitz back to the table. "An oversized casket would look odd. You don't want to raise suspicions and get caught do you?" Eichler pushed the doctor's hand down against the boy's shoulder. The building

pressure within him was unbearable. Rokytanski... Treppenwitz remembered... Rokytanski... murmured quietly... the word was soothing and Treppenwitz began to relax.

"Take the knife and do what you're told," Eichler ordered.

Again matters moved so rapidly that there was no time to think. The fear of detection, and finally even of Eichler, dominated. He took the blade.

"Just prepare the right leg as you would for a mid femur amputation and I'll cut it off. Pretend it's somebody else Treppenwitz... pretend it's nobody."

Treppenwitz, still shaking, slowly placed the fingers of his left hand on the cold and already yellowed skin covering the boy's thigh. He felt a strange chill, one which started behind his forehead and ran back across his head and down his spine. He closed his eyes tightly to try to control the throbbing in his temples. His mind was blank. It was a simple surgical procedure. Somehow he had erased the reality of what he was about to do. He was back in medical school, in orthopedics, in the operating room assisting in an amputation. It was a woman, an old fat woman, at least eighty years old. He remembered how much he hated fat. It lay in gooey globules beneath the skin, a disgusting greasy white which got in the way of everything. He concentrated on how much he hated fat. The scalpel sliced silently through to the bone.

"You may as well do both anteriors and then we'll roll him over." Treppenwitz hardly heard and later hardly saw the flesh folded back neatly for the saw.

Worse only than fat, he remembered, he hated sound, especially the sound of surgical steel teeth chewing, grinding, and grating into bone. The saw slid back and forth... back and forth... back and forth. The seconds seemed forever.

"Grab it Treppenwitz; I'm almost through. Don't let it fall on the floor."

The leg was heavier... much heavier... than Treppenwitz expected. How could such a small leg be so heavy he wondered?

"Here, put it in here." Eichler motioned with his chin toward the rubber body bag. "Now start on the arms, and hurry up about it, we don't have all day."

Treppenwitz went on almost routinely, his mind insulated by the ability to put fantasy in the place of this unacceptable reality. Later he would wonder if he had actually known what he was doing. It was too horrible to accept, too horrible to admit. He wouldn't have been strong enough to stay sane if he had admitted it. That much he did know. It was better to pretend.

The parts were packed tight, almost needlessly neatly into the rubber pouch and soaked in the end by the pail of viscera and formalin. Wrapped and tied, it made a surprisingly small, but heavy, package.

"I've cut the Styrofoam bed out of the foot of the casket," Eichler remarked as the two men carried the bloody remains of Robbie Simonescu to its ignominious hiding place.

EICHLER SOUNDED CONFIDENT AND SELF-ASSURED, but he worried that the risk of being caught was still great. More precautions needed to be taken. Watson wore rings, valuable diamond rings and they were to be buried with him. That was stupid he thought, but he had no choice. It was how his wife wanted it. He had already ordered a concrete vault to encase the casket, which, he hoped, would discourage an unscrupulous grave digger from going back into the coffin after them and accidentally uncovering the crime. He knew that once the heavy concrete cover was lowered into place, it would be impossible for even three or four strong men to lift it.

"I haven't got the make-up ready yet, and he's got to look good doesn't he?" Eichler laughed and looked with disgust at Treppenwitz

who was still badly shaken. "Now you listen to me," Eichler hissed. The subtle change in his grating tone digging quickly and deeply into Treppenwitz revived momentarily his numbed consciousness. "I'm not going to let you blow this now."

Eichler forced Treppenwitz backward across the room and down into one of the heavy wooden chairs that lined the wall. "You are going home... straight home. Do you understand that?"

Treppenwitz nodded without looking up and said nothing until he felt a sharp pain tearing through his scalp as Eichler rented his head backward by the hair, forcing his face upward leaving his eyes, exposed and vulnerable, less than an inch from Eichler's mouth.

Eichler exploded, emphasizing each word separately. "Pay... attention."

Tears blurred his focus and Eichler's lips, surrounding and almost devouring Treppenwitz's eyes, seemed huge and hideous.

"Go straight home... take a shower... and... keep... your mouth... shut."

Treppenwitz stared straight ahead, but stopped seeing. He felt Eichler's hands lifting him from the chair and ushering him along the corridor to the bulkhead door, which opened into the car port.

"Go back to bed... give yourself some kind of sleeping pill... and stay away from here."

TREPPENWITZ DIDN'T HEAR THE DOOR CLOSE behind him or see the sidewalk pass slowly beneath his feet. He was still in a state of shock. His mind was clear, but he couldn't think. It was as though he were caught in some strange kind of semi-conscious state. The horror of it gradually overwhelmed him, and suicide seemed to be his only escape. The ocean beckoned him.

Thick black clouds hung on the horizon, like a curtain concealing the storm which raged and churned the sea behind it. The blinding bursts of lightening and the rolling wind blown growl of

thunder, muffled by the damp darkness, lurked just below the horizon. Something out there, something in the sea seemed to be calling to him. He remembered the story about the spider-shark and he suddenly felt a strange fellowship for Simonescu. He was driven by this base urging toward the beach and to the spot where the old doctor had drowned.

He walked, hypnotically and almost unnoticed, back across the street to the wooden walkway which led from the house through the sand dunes to the beach below, and although he desperately tried to think, to organize and explain events, all of his efforts could not unmask a single useful thought. The depth of his depression riveted his fixed and almost comatose gaze on the waves, and their rolling rhythm only deepened his trance. He didn't feel the cold salt sea rising around him until his toes no longer touched and the first swell flooded gently over his face. He tasted the salt and wanted to die, but the sea, refusing to take him, ruthlessly swept him back to the advancing shore. Each time he tried, the rhythmic flood responded, finally leaving him on the beach prostrate, exhausted and unconscious.

ELSA SAT, AT THAT MOMENT, BY THE DYING LIGHT of a kitchen window whose eastern exposure framed the sad scene in the swelling sea below; for a time at least she would not look up. Simonescu's old leather binder still lay open on the table where they had left it. She had decided, mostly for her own sake, to translate the stories, and was determined to understand the emotion as well as the meaning of the words. She sighed to herself and without once looking up began to translate slowly: *A Very Lonely Man*. Sadness came over her as she read the first page.

It was late every night before the last train carried the lonely man home. No one cared about him, his job, where it was or what he did there everyday. A gray sky which threatened snow covered the

city, and the road down which he walked... grell Gelb beleuchtet... glowed with a frightening gleam from the blinking street lights.

He was a very lonely man. No one knew him. Niemand wollte... no one wanted to know him. Even his own shadow, which nightly reflected against the wall beside him, seemed to try to get away into every passing doorway. The man saw his shadow's efforts to escape and hurried away himself hoping to hide, only to have the shadow catch him again as he crossed the next corner. He could not explain the quest of the shadow to flee or even his own sad attempts to assist it.

Finally, as he always did, the lonesome man came home... in die finstere Sackgasse... to the dark dead-end of his existence, where the sudden dissolution of the shadow was inevitable. And so on this day, as on all of the others, his attempts to lose his shadow were in vain.

Elsa laid down her pen and, almost as if directed by some higher power, felt compelled to look out toward the sea, and on the beach below saw Treppenwitz's sand coated silhouette lying like a driftwood at low tide, a few feet from the water's ebbing edge.

“**H**ERE HE IS. He’s still alive.” The spurting voice was harsh and penetrating. “Get out of the way, don’t touch anything. I’ll take care of him until the ambulance gets here.”

Treppenwitz’s eyes were closed but he could sense that people were beginning to gather around him; and he could hear. He felt hands, rolling him over, opening his shirt, loosening his belt. Suddenly everything was different, how could he have let himself sink to this? He didn’t dare to speak; he needed time to sort it out, to explain it and to get out of it if he could. The embarrassment would be almost unbearable. He couldn’t cope with it now, silly as it seemed considering all that had recently occurred. He needed time. Panic paralyzed him. He waited and he listened.

“Do you recognize him Miss Tikhonin?”

“Yes... of course I do...” Elsa answered, obviously uneasy. “That’s Doctor Treppenwitz, my god what has happened, is he alright? ...Shouldn’t we get him to a hospital?”

“Don’t worry, he’ll be fine, his breathing is good and his signs are good. An ambulance is on its way.” The detective was supportive and she sensed that she knew him. “But I would like to ask you a few questions if I may?”

“Yes, of course, detective...?”

“Sullivan.”

“Yes... of course. Jim isn’t it?”

“Yes Miss Tikhonin, that’s right. How are you?”

“Fine, Detective Sullivan ...What can I do?”

“Well when we get on this kind of a case quick it helps our chances.”

Elsa intuitively sensed something more, something hidden behind his words. “What do you mean by this kind of case?” she asked.

“Looks like a simple mugging,” Sullivan answered in a matter of fact tone. “His wallet is missing. I would guess he was walking along the beach about two hours ago. I think this would have been the water’s edge then... right about here.”

Elsa knew that she had seen Treppenwitz’s wallet on the dresser in his bedroom when she changed the bed sheets that morning, but she said nothing. Treppenwitz heard the words too and quietly began to fashion his alibi.

Sullivan paced about, as detectives do, apparently looking for clues, perhaps footsteps in the sand, even though he knew it was futile. “Somebody came up behind him and... well you can see the blood on his shirt there... no struggle though by the look of the sand... of course the waves washed everything down as the tide rolled out so it’s real hard to read.”

Sullivan rolled his head slowly around like a hound on the scent. “Someone may have seen him alone on the beach from the road up there. He must have had a car or he wouldn’t have chanced it. He parked, walked down... back up and drove away.” Sullivan was thinking aloud, as he constructed a scenario in typical police fashion, a pattern to help sort the facts and interpret any evidence which could be uncovered.

“Unless someone knew he would be down here today,” he added as an afterthought. “What time did Dr. Treppenwitz leave the house this morning Miss Tikhonin?”

“About ten-thirty.”

“Did he tell you where he was going?”

“No.”

"Do you know where he went?"

"No."

"Do you have any guess as to where he may have gone?"

"The only thing I noticed was that he was carrying a package, something wrapped in newspaper. And he didn't drive."

"Was it a big package?"

"No ...well yes, it was rather long, and narrow, like an umbrella." She motioned with her hands, "about that big."

"Too big to fit in his pocket?"

"Oh yes... far too big."

"He walked from the house at ten-thirty with something about so big..." The words ran like a river of fear through Treppenwitz's body. He tried desperately to stop the trembling which he knew was sure to be noticed. "He must have had a destination near here since he didn't take the car." Sullivan, who was overly suspicious, even for a police detective, often pursued a line of questions which oddly enough he actually believed to be purposeless. "The package is gone. Do you have any idea what was wrapped in the newspaper?"

"No," Elsa answered quietly, already realizing that Treppenwitz was conscious, and beginning to wonder why he hadn't yet spoken, why he was afraid. It made her afraid too. She didn't want to worsen his plight.

"Well it hardly matters at this point anyway. We can find out where he went and whatever he had in the newspaper later," Sullivan said turning toward the two uniformed patrolmen. "We're going to want to question him as soon as he wakes up. You stay here," he nodded to one; "Manny, you come with me."

It was shortly after that, with the detective some distance away, that Treppenwitz made his move. He wanted to avoid the hospital emergency room and the inevitable examination and x-rays. How could he explain the boy's blood? "Ohhhh," he moaned softly, turn-

ing and holding his head, “ohhhh,” he moaned again opening his eyes. “Elsa... help me.”

“I will Dr. Treppenwitz; we’re all here to help you, the ambulance is coming to bring you to the hospital.”

“No... please... I don’t need a hospital. I want to go home. Take me home Elsa.”

“I don’t think you should stand up sir,” the young patrolman warned. “Please wait for the ambulance.” Even as the policeman spoke, Elsa found herself helping Treppenwitz to his feet, intuitively sensing how much he wanted to escape and wanting to help him out of this trap she didn’t even begin to understand. “There you see... I’m alright. It takes more than a little bang on the head to send me to any hospital.”

“What happened?” Sullivan said hurrying, half sliding, down the sandy hillside from the highway.

“I don’t know really.” Treppenwitz’s response sounded rehearsed but only Elsa heard it. “Somebody hit me from behind. I don’t really remember much. I must have been robbed.” He knew he had said the right thing. “I didn’t see anything.” Treppenwitz made an obvious effort to feel his back pocket. “He was after my money, credit cards I guess. He took my wallet.” Elsa knew he was lying, but she couldn’t pass judgment on him. She didn’t know the context of his needs; she also knew that Sullivan would believe him.

“Do you think you could answer a few questions Dr. Treppenwitz?” Sullivan asked satisfied that his instincts had been confirmed.

“Really, Detective Sullivan,” Elsa interrupted. “Couldn’t that wait, at least until tomorrow?”

Treppenwitz took advantage of the opportunity to force the issue. “I’d like to go home now and rest. I’ll come down to your office tomorrow and help you all I can.” He turned to Elsa. “I think, with a little help, I can make it up to the house.”

Elsa was confused as she guided Treppenwitz along the wooden walkway to the long staircase. She knew he had lied because he was afraid. His deceit puzzled her, but his weakness caused in her an irrepressible need to help him, and she knew well the need to sometimes hide behind stories.

LIFE WAS SLOW ALONG THE NEW ENGLAND COAST at that time of year, especially on Sunday. Barely above the whitecaps, a single sea gull fought the wet wind homeward or at least to Elsa it seemed to be hurrying home. The four policemen hardly noticed the two shadowy figures disappearing beyond the hilltop. There was still a little daylight left and detective Sullivan was not yet done.

"Notice anything unusual about all this Manny?" Sullivan often asked questions without expecting or even listening for responses from rookie detectives, so Manny Mota only followed closely behind and listened.

"Here's the spot where we found him." Sullivan, who was lately beginning to show more of his advancing middle age, bent down as far as he dared before losing his balance as he tried to trace a nearly invisible track in the shifting sand. "Here's the spot where the tide stopped. Now if he was mugged like he said... and fell here... and this was the water's edge, which it must have been since he was all wet..."

Mota usually knew better than to interrupt Sullivan's serpentine thought patterns with anything more serious than an occasional grunt, but for some reason today was different.

"The tide's been going out," Sullivan finished.

"So what?" Mota dared.

"So what?" Sullivan said surprised and with a hint of happiness in his voice. "So if he fell here and didn't drown... damn it Manny he was completely coated with sand as though he had been rolling

around in it... and there was sea weed in his pants... all the way up in his crotch!"

Sullivan smiled to himself. He loved to overwhelm Mota with a deluge of data and rapid fire conclusions. "His belt was tight so the only way sea weed could have gotten in there would have been to float up his pant's leg. If enough water washed over him to push sea weed all the way up to his crotch he should have drowned."

Sullivan hardly changed his expression as he remembered first finding Treppenwitz and his initial impression. "In fact he looked an awful lot like he did drown."

"Except he ain't dead," Mota replied.

"He sure ain't, Manny," Sullivan echoed emphasizing the ain't. "Now if a man almost drowned, why would he lie about it?"

Mota was never sure if he should answer these kinds of questions or not, but Sullivan's inquisitive squint drew him in. "He's got something to hide?"

"Good Manny...very good... But what?" Sullivan asked turning away.

Mota knew well enough that this was not an invitation for him to offer any more suggestions and so he just shrugged his shoulders and began to empty the sand from his shoes.

Sullivan's mind was already on something else anyway. "While we're here Manny we might as well chase down that missing person report."

"The Simonescu kid?"

Sullivan nodded. "Lotte thinks he might have come down this way."

"It's only been twenty-four hours," Mota resisted, "and you know what the old man says."

"I know what he says... but Lotte is really worried; and I promised her I'd start right away."

"Start on what?" Mota shrugged. "There ain't nothin to start on. The old man is gonna be pissed."

Already angered by Mota's recent boldness, Sullivan emphasized every word. "While we're here, we'll, just, make, a few, inquiries, around the neighborhood."

"I think we should call in and cover ourselves, the old man is gonna be pissed," Mota said again.

"Good idea Manny," Sullivan quipped. "Go ahead... say we're going to dinner. We wouldn't want the old man to be pissed now would we?"

Mota looked at Sullivan but decided not to say any more.

"I'm going to head over to that funeral parlor across the street," Sullivan added filling the silence and sidetracking the tension which was beginning to rise between them. "What's that guy's name?"

"Eichler, I think, or something like that, it's on the sign."

"Eichler," Sullivan said to himself as he began the climb from the beach. "Bring the car around and meet me there."

Mota half shouted after him. "He's got a wake you know."

Sullivan, who was already beginning to refocus his thoughts, had to force himself to answer. "I know... it's Josh Watson's."

AS HE WALKED SLOWLY ALONG THE NARROW PATH, which scarred the dune's crest, Sullivan reached into his pocket and took out the handkerchief he had earlier removed from Treppenwitz's jacket. It was neatly folded, but badly stained with blood. Whose blood was it he wondered looking at the small square of cotton. It was amazing how fast night fell on an overcast evening late in autumn, and all Sullivan's concentration could hardly distinguish the red from the white. It was surely not blood caused by the alleged mugging, not dried on a handkerchief and then neatly folded and put away. Did Treppenwitz leave the house with it already bloody he thought. It didn't seem likely, and besides there was also some

blood on his shirt. Sullivan saw no lacerations or wounds and he was certain that the blood wasn't Treppenwitz's and that the stains were made between the time the doctor left the house and the time he reached the beach. He couldn't wait to see the lab report, and to spring this new twist on his partner.

Sullivan stopped on the dark side of the street and waited for Mota to park the unmarked police sedan. They crossed the street together. People, talking in quiet tones, and trying to look respectful, had already begun to gather on the porch of the funeral parlor. The two policemen nodded politely toward recognizable faces when eyes met, but went directly through the sitting rooms to the office in back.

"Can we talk to you for a few minutes, Mr. Eichler?"

"Sure, come in and sit down; I'll be with you in a second." Eichler knew immediately that they were police and hurried off pretending to have something important to do. It was an instinctive reaction to danger intended to make time to think. He wasn't sure what to expect. He knew Treppenwitz was weak. Maybe they knew. But if they knew, would they just let him walk off like this? He hoped not.

Sullivan's eyes instinctively scanned the rather roomy but sparsely furnished office. Oddly, there was no place to sit. The one window directly behind the cheap and badly cluttered steel desk was locked. There were several black filing cabinets along the inside wall and what looked like a movie projector on a rolling steel table. Except for an official looking framed diploma, the rest of the walls were bare.

"Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?" Eichler said, hardly looking up, as he returned with two folding chairs. "Sorry for this but I moved all of the furniture out for the family. Everything is a rush nowadays. One evening wake and interment tomorrow. Hardly have time to breathe."

"My name is Sullivan," the detective said at the first opportunity, opening his ID, "and this is my partner, Detective Mota. I know this might be a bad time for you but we were in the neighborhood and it will only take a few seconds."

Eichler was enormously relieved by these words, but his expression stayed set. He was expecting the inevitable investigation, although not this soon. "I'm all ears."

"You know Robbie Simonescu don't you?"

"Sure, why... what's up?"

"Well, at this point, we'd just like to talk to him, but we can't find him."

"That's not surprising," Eichler answered sensing a chance to throw them off the scent.

"Really," Sullivan said, adept at letting the interview flow even though he suspected nothing.

"He's kind of a wild kid isn't he?" Eichler added.

"Why do you say that?"

"Just what I hear... that he's into drugs... you know the typical stuff."

"Go on," Sullivan said.

"I've seen him with that... Raphael, what's his name."

"Ortiz?"

"Yea, Ortiz... that's him... Raphael Ortiz." Eichler's plan was to confuse the details of Robbie Simonescu's recent life, to associate him with the seamiest side of the illegal drug underworld, where murders and disappearances were common and where straight information was hard to come by. Ortiz was a destitute drug addict, a junkie, strung out on everything and anything available. He was a sad loser, and a perfect choice Eichler thought. Ortiz would agree to anything and remember nothing.

"What do you know about Raphael Ortiz?"

"I know he's a junkie and I've seen young Simonescu with

him." Eichler worried that perhaps he was pushing too hard; but it had to be done.

"Recently?" Sullivan asked.

"Not so much since the old doctor died, but before that he came around here quite a bit."

"We heard Robbie was around here today."

"I don't know about that; I've been busy with this Watson wake all day...why, what's he up to now?"

"We just want to ask him a few questions."

"Who saw him down here?" Eichler dared to probe.

There was something about the undertaker's interest which irritated Sullivan, who saw it as nosiness and decided not to go any further. "You've got a pretty good crowd out there; I didn't know old Josh Watson was that popular."

"Well it was so sudden. You know how that affects people. And then he was struck by lightening. That brings people out."

"Were there any burns on him?" Mota asked, trying to at least involve himself in the banter.

"No," Eichler quipped with a twitch of his eyebrows. "But I had a hell of a time getting his eyes to stay shut!"

The three men laughed a little too loudly and a few heads turned in the adjacent sitting room. Eichler felt confident that he was safe.

"Let's go take a look at him Manny." The two men mustered their most serious expressions and took their place at the end of the slow line to view the body. When they finally kneeled together at the narrow railing in front of the open half-couch casket Mota said, almost inaudibly, hardly moving his lips, "boy he looks good, you'd think he was about to talk. It's uncanny."

Sullivan made a sign of the cross and pretended to be praying, but his mind returned to Treppenwitz's handkerchief and the mystery on the beach.

"What's his wife's name?" Mota whispered.

"Huh?" Sullivan said half hearing.

"Watson's wife... what's her first name?"

"Ellen... I think."

But neither was sure and so they both nodded and said nothing as they left.

IT WAS ALREADY VERY DARK. A distinct chill was in the air, which also said that summer was fading fast. As they crossed the quiet street both men noticed that a third floor light was on in the old Simonescu house and, although the shade was drawn, they could see Treppenwitz's shadowy figure moving about.

"I'm going up and ask Elsa a few more questions," Sullivan said smiling, knowing how much it vexed Mota. "Go warm up the car. I'll only be a minute."

Mota stood in the street staring his disapproval as Sullivan, who didn't even notice, walked up the hill to the house.

"It's only me again. May I come in?"

"Certainly," Elsa answered. "But Dr. Treppenwitz has gone to bed." She, too, knew that he was pacing in the attic library, and had been since they had come in, but she said nothing about it.

"That's alright; actually I wanted to talk to you if I could?"

"Please come in," Else said, and then added automatically, "would you like coffee?"

"No thanks," Sullivan answered and then quickly added, "has Robbie Simonescu been around here today or last night?"

"No, he hasn't. I spoke to his mother on the phone earlier. She seems to think that he came here too, searching for something. He's obsessed with the idea that his father was murdered you know."

"Yea... I've heard that," Sullivan said with a petulant tone. "But you haven't seen him?"

"No, I haven't."

"What do you know about Raphael Ortiz?"

"Raphael Ortiz!" Else reacted obviously surprised. "Nothing."

"Do you know Ortiz?"

"Yes, he came here occasionally. Dr. Simonescu often cared for people like him. He tried to help them. Many poor people suffer alone in this world and have no place to turn. Dr. Simonescu was always very kind to them."

"Did Simonescu give, or sell, Ortiz drugs?"

"Oh no... I don't think so... no, of course not." Else Tikhonin's anger was evident in her voice as she recognized the implication in Sullivan's remarks. "There were many homeless derelicts that came here for help, not just Raphael Ortiz. Dr. Simonescu felt sorry for them."

"Yes, I'm sure he did," Sullivan said with a rising voice, sensing that she could read his words the wrong way and not really knowing himself why he was harassing her.

"Why are you implying that Dr. Simonescu did something wrong? He never charged those poor people a single penny; and he never turned anyone away."

"I'm not implying anything Miss Tikhonin. I'm only curious to know why someone like Ortiz would come here so often."

"I told you why," she said curtly. "Besides, what does that have to do with Robbie?"

Sullivan let his spleen answer. "We have reason to believe that young Simonescu was mixed up with Ortiz."

"Quatsch!" she said spontaneously.

"What?" Sullivan asked.

"That's nonsense; Robbie had nothing to do with Raphael Ortiz."

Sullivan knew that she was angry and that the interview was over, but he wasn't sorry that he had been pushy and insulting.

“Have Dr. Treppenwitz call me tomorrow; I want to ask him a few more questions,” he said flatly.

DR. TREPPENWITZ ENTERED THE ATTIC LIBRARY for the second time, and once again he followed his own footsteps through the dust to the spot where the boy had been searching and to the box of old letters and papers, which had been spilled in his rush to escape. Treppenwitz knew there was something hidden in the letters, something which could explain the events that threatened to destroy his life. He gathered them together, gently blowing the dust away. His fingers followed the words: Medizinische Fakultät der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität. It was dated: Bonn, den 17. Mai, 1936. It was a letter written to someone named Sandra, "liebe Sandra" it started, and it was signed "R." They were all letters to Sandra. The R was no doubt for Radu, he thought. But, who was Sandra, and what would the letters tell?

He could decipher the words: medical faculty of the Friedrich Wilhelm University. Evidently Simonescu had studied there in the thirties, he thought. It would explain his German. There were ten letters, all to Sandra and written between 1934 and 1939. There was no address. His eyes scanned the page, here and there a word seemed familiar, but beyond the letterhead he could not translate a single complete sentence. He needed Elsa's help and started down the stairs to find her. For a few minutes at least this new interest covered his churning conscience. But, as his footsteps passed the place on the attic stairs where the bloodied lug wrench had lain, his heart began to pound; and then, his feet flew faster when he saw the place in the hall where the boy had fallen, and finally faster still to escape

the spot where Eichler had hatched the grisly plan. He was almost running when he reached the kitchen door.

“Dr. Treppenwitz?” Elsa was startled. “Are you alright?”

“Yes... I’m fine.” The words sounded like staccato punctuation for his almost panting breath. “Look what I found... in the attic... a set of letters... from the thirties. Could you to translate them for me.”

“Letters,” she said, straining to see what they were. “But, first I think you should rest. Why didn’t you stay in bed? You’ve had a very trying day.”

Treppenwitz suddenly realized that his excitement must have seemed very strange to her, and even suspicious. “I’m fine Elsa.” He began again, trying to restructure the unwanted impression. “I couldn’t sleep. So I went up to the attic library to poke around, and... well, I found these old letters... and they looked interesting that’s all.”

“Where did you find these?” Elsa asked seriously.

He almost said that they had been strewn about the attic floor, but he caught himself in time. “They were stored in a box in the library. Why... do you recognize them?”

“Yes... yes I do... Is this all you found in the box?”

“Yes... why... are there more?”

“There are many more, but these were the ones Dr. Simonescu wanted to reread and study. He thought they could help him to understand his own past, and why so many, like him, made such terrible mistakes. It was a way for him to reassess his life, I guess.”

“The letters were written by Dr. Simonescu then?”

“Yes... before the war.” She paused briefly, unsure of whether to tell him more. “He paid a high personal price for what he did during the Nazi time. It troubled him, and he wanted desperately to understand how he could have done those things... why he made certain decisions. He needed to know that he had done the right

things or at least to be able to forgive himself. He had to settle this in his own mind before he died. He had to be sure that nothing he could have done then would have changed anything. The letters, he thought, would help him to understand his own state of mind during the turning points of his life.”

“So he recovered the old letters from Sandra?”

“Yes, along with other writings from his past, the short stories, which you saw, other documents and a diary which he kept during the war.”

Treppenwitz didn’t yet consciously realize it but he was drawn by the similarity which undeniably existed between Simonescu’s past and his own tragic present. He was beginning to nurture a powerful emotional need to learn far more about the old doctor, but to do so without arousing Elsa’s suspicions. He didn’t realize that Elsa too had a need to remember and would readily help him in his search for Simonescu. “This is incredibly intriguing Elsa. Please read them to me.”

Elsa decided not to tell him until morning about Sullivan’s second visit. “It’s very late Dr. Treppenwitz.”

“Please Elsa,” he implored. “It’s still early. I’m alright; I promise.”

“I will pour some coffee first,” she said turning back into the kitchen. While she was gone Treppenwitz sat down at the dining room table, arranged the letters by date, and waited, trying to fill his mind with thoughts to tranquilize his threatening apprehension.

“Black?” She asked anyway, even though she already knew the answer.

“Yes, thank you,” he said absently, turning the small stack of papers toward her. He didn’t look up to see the sadness in her eyes as they flew across the first faded page.

“This letter was written from medical school in May of 1934,” she began. “Dear Sandra... I’m really sorry not to have been able to

get home for the holiday, but I've been recently... nur so mit Arbeit eingedeckt... swamped with work... I guess is a good translation. I have so much to do in fact that it's tough to find time to breathe."

"He has this next sentence underlined as though there is some significance to it," she commented, trying to offer insights.

"What do you suppose it means?" Treppenwitz asked.

"I'm not sure, but he often said that there was never enough time to think then, that things happened so fast, that one was swept away by events." Treppenwitz said nothing but he understood and once again he began to feel the kinship he had with Simonescu.

"Shall I go on?" Elsa added.

Treppenwitz nodded, finding himself increasingly captive to the feeling that somehow knowing about Simonescu's tragic past could protect him from his own uncertain future.

He didn't look up, and Elsa went on reading from the first letter. "There always seems to be some new duty to do and, for the most part, they all seem to be foolishness. It's incredible how we are getting involved in this situation. Studies, reports, and questionnaires, as if we have nothing else to do."

"The next sentence is also underlined. I'll try to translate it carefully. Mir raucht der Kopf... My head is spinning. I've had it with racial studies. Das ist doch nur alles Quatsch... It's all nonsense."

"What racial studies Elsa?"

"When the Nazis came to power in 1933 so did their racial theories, and the universities were expected to give scholarly support to them."

"Theories?" Treppenwitz knew almost nothing about Nazism and his vague notions assumed it to have been antithetical to logic and scholarship.

"Genetics was the darling science of the early twentieth century and many people firmly believed that the white race was in decline

because of the influx of inferior genes. There was much support for measures to prevent this. Even here in America.” Treppenwitz listened with fascination, so occupied with his own plight that it didn’t occur to him to ask how she came to know so much.

“Shall I continue with the letter?” she asked.

He nodded silently.

“Have you heard? Brunies was fired this week. Or rather, I should say, as a Jew he was forced into retirement as a result of that stupid new law. Why do they have to interfere with us? We’re not political.”

Treppenwitz interrupted. “Evidently he was against the Nazis... wouldn’t you say, Elsa? He seems to have been annoyed by them.”

“Yes,” she said aloud... but she thought to herself that he was not annoyed enough to do more than complain. “It’s very hard to overcome the petty importance of one’s own life,” she added aloud to soothe her own feeling of guilt at having attacked him so viciously in her mind.

“What law is he referring to Elsa? Do you know?”

“In 1933 the Nazis passed a law, I have forgotten what they called it, there were so many, which forced all Jews out of civil service jobs. The law went into effect at the start of 1934.”

“The last sentence seems very sad,” she went on. “Something about these savage times sends a chill down my spine.”

“Perhaps he was something of a prophet,” Treppenwitz said smiling, but Elsa already knew the story too well to be amused.

“The next two letters seem to be related,” Elsa began without looking up. “They are clipped together and are both from late 1936. The first is dated November 9th and the second is,” she paused, briefly searching, “December 3rd.”

“Dear Sandra, once again I must tell of the need to make unpleasant decisions. It seems now to be best not to associate any lon-

ger with Friedl. I withdrew my application. Schindluder mit ihr treiben... this is difficult to render but I think he means I didn't want to use her... then he says, but what else could I do."

"Do you remember Hans, the one who was living with Friedl for the last couple of years? Well, incredibly enough, he's been accused of having an illicit affair with a Jewess."

"What?" Treppenwitz's eyes squinted questioningly.

"It was also illegal for Aryans to marry, or have sexual relations with, Jews. This was all part of the Nazi scheme to protect the racial purity of the Germans. Jews were considered the most dangerous polluters of the gene pool."

"What happened to him then?"

"Well it says in the letter here that Hans lost his passport and was scheduled to go to court. Then it says: I wouldn't want to be in his shoes; he's broke and has lost his job."

Jobs, careers, she thought to herself unable to forget, though so many years had passed, the excitement in Rolf's voice as he first told her about his dreams and schemes and the incredible opportunities before them. She saw the look in his eyes. It meant so much to him and so she said nothing.

Her streaming memory screamed back his words in a relentless barrage: I've got a chance to go to Berlin with Verne Heyde I told you about him he's just been named Area Chief for the Racial and Political Office... but I thought you hated politics that you were sick of racial studies in your letter you said... this is a big chance Sandra it's genetic and basic biological research at K-2 you know he's only in his early 30s and he's already a chief physician it's my big chance to get into the inner circle Sandra do you know what that could mean don't you see this is the fast track right now... Elsa finally looked up, brought back to the present by Treppenwitz's motion for her to continue.

"Rudi was right. As long as I can get out of this little difficulty,

I can have that job with Heyde. What do you think of that? I'd really like to get the chance to work with him...aber wenn tatsächlich alle Stricke reissen... I guess would be... if it falls through... then hopefully I will find something else."

"What do you think of all the headlines about the Pope being mixed up with the Spanish Communists? It's funny, isn't it? I'm convinced that there must be some truth to it. I mean they couldn't just say that if it weren't true. But who knows?"

"The last paragraph has been circled and was evidently meaningful to him. It says: 'Who has time to dwell on such nasty things.'"

"Is that all?" Treppenwitz asked repeating the words to himself, without fully understanding their significance. Who has time to dwell on such nasty things?

"Well, it's signed: Love, R," Elsa said softly.

"What?" Treppenwitz asked.

"Nothing," she said turning to the next letter.

"This was written less than a month later, on December 3, 1936. 'Dear Sandra. Nun ist guter Rat teuer... literally says, good advice is valuable. I think he means, I'm not sure what to do. In order to get the job with Heyde I must swear an unconditional oath of allegiance to Hitler. The research laboratory itself actually falls under air force supervision. I've got twenty-four hours to decide. I don't know why, but somehow I feel as though my life is hanging by a thread. Many people here say that the oath is only a formality that it means nothing, but I'm not so sure. They think I'm an alarmist.'"

"The next sentence is underlined. No one dares whisper even a syllable of criticism. In my opinion this is only the beginning. But nobody here seems to think things are all that bad. Honestly, I really don't know. We'll just have to wait and see."

Treppenwitz couldn't help mixing Simonescu's words with his own thoughts. Wait and see he repeated. Wait and see. Wasn't that what he was doing, waiting, hoping, being carried away by events,

which he only deluded himself into thinking were under his control. He began to ponder the part fear and uncertainty played in his choices, and the power of other people's opinions. Once again Treppenwitz saw his own face in the mirror of Simonescu's past.

Elsa read on and her voice gradually broke through his mental barrier. "But that's enough about that. Have you heard anything recently from Hans? Rudi told me yesterday that he was back with Friedl again. That's hard to believe. I heard that he was over a thousand Marks in debt. I can't imagine what gives with him; but I guess that's his business."

"That's where it ends. He says: sorry, Sandra, but I have to go. I have a splitting headache, R."

"Read the next one Elsa. I'm really getting involved in this." Treppenwitz knew she was tired, but he needed more time before he would dare to try to sleep.

"Alright, but just this one more and then you must promise to go to bed."

"Two more," Treppenwitz negotiated smiling.

Elsa smiled too. "Alright, but only two."

"The next letter is dated July 2, 1936, and is from Nuremberg and a place called the Institution for Hereditary Disease Research."

"Dear Sandra. You asked me how I could have done such a thing. It's not as bad as you make out. But then you always did make... aus einer Mücke..." Elsa laughed mysteriously to herself. Treppenwitz asked with his expression.

"Well it means mountains out of molehills."

"What is he referring to Elsa, do you know?"

"No," she answered with obvious hesitation and then continued.

"I went to the city hospital again yesterday with my department head to examine the women we're using in our X-ray sterilization experiments. They are all either mentally retarded or have given

birth to babies with terrible birth defects. They've been carefully selected for these experiments. Actually there's no problem performing sterilization with X-rays. The problem we're working on is how to do it faster and at lower cost. God knows why!"

Elsa looked up and added quietly, "the sterilization of certain people was a major part of the Nazi racial plan. The medical community was employed to find efficient and fast ways to do it."

Treppenwitz began, "you mean Simonescu was..."

But Elsa anticipated his question. "He was unwittingly involved. Don't forget this was July of 1936. How could anyone have known then where all of this would lead?"

"No one could, I guess," Treppenwitz said, thinking about how events were slipping out of control in his own life; he hardly heard her begin again.

"It's not my idea of a meaningful job, but it must be important to someone and... aus der Reihe zu tanzen... getting out of line is, at the moment, rather dangerous. You should understand better than most. Besides it's all legal. But that's all water under the bridge. I have something really new and exciting to tell you. My group got a grant from the Reich Committee for Hereditary Disease to do research on Hydrocephaly. What do you think of that! It opens a lot of new opportunities. Tomorrow, I go back to Bonn for a few days. I may get a chance to get home."

"Don't worry about me! Life goes on. Give my love to everyone, R."

"Wait a minute Elsa," Treppenwitz said suddenly. "If his home is near Bonn he must... have been German. But I thought he was a Rumanian or something."

"Yes." She looked up into Treppenwitz's eyes and decided that there was no longer any need to hide it. "He was German; he lived in Cologne."

"Tell me more about him Elsa. I know you know much more,"

Treppenwitz urged, but she declined, saying only that the old doctor could speak for himself.

“I will translate one more, as I promised, and then you promised to rest.”

Treppenwitz nodded.

“Dear Sandra, I’ve been invited to a film premier at the Uva Pavilion in Berlin. Isn’t this great? You’ve got to come. It’s very important. Everyone will be there. You know how much weight they put on marriage and family. It’s important for the right people to know we are engaged and will soon be married. Gerhard Wagner is going to deliver a lecture on the prevention of hereditary disease through sterilization. And then we will see the world premier of the film, *Victim of the Past*, which will soon play all over Germany. You must promise that you’ll come.”

It was barely evident but Elsa was crying as she finished. She read without hesitation but her eyes hardly moved, so vivid was her memory of that weekend in Berlin.

BRAIDS WERE WILDLY POPULAR THEN, she remembered. Young girls naturally just let them hang down behind their heads as pigtails, but young women had to somehow make them look mature and elegant. She could have wrapped a single braided strand around the back of her head as many older women did, but that looked too matronly, and besides it would accent her ears and that she knew would be a mistake. She decided instead on two braids, turned in circles around each ear. It was perfect, very peasant German, very traditional and very in. Her straight blonde bangs fell like a curtain over her forehead and were long enough to cover her eyebrows, which she also always thought of as being ugly. In truth she radiated that sense of youthful athletic vigor and health, which was seen then as so ideal.

“You look beautiful,” he said letting his eyes obviously flow over her, sweeping downward non-stop along the curve of her simple white tight satin gown. “Really, really beautiful,” he repeated, as if eager to reconfirm his earlier judgment.

She smiled, visibly flattered, slowly turning to show him the back line, which plunged deeply down to the base of her spine. A lace train cascading from the narrow shoulder straps spilled in a small puddle of pure white. She continued turning slowly as if she were on a pedestal. She was stunning. A simple string of black pearls, one loop pulled tight around her neck and a second falling loosely to her waist was a striking accent.

“Do you like it?” she asked, widening her eyes in an expression of real expectation. “I really wasn’t sure what I should wear.”

"Wow!" he responded. "I can't wait to introduce you to everybody. After the film there is a reception at the von Heyde estate in Dahlem. Everyone will be there."

"I hope I don't let you down Rolf," she said seriously, fumbling to find a way to stand and position her hands. She felt clumsy and self-conscious.

"What are you talking about? How could you do that?" he responded, still stunned by her radiance, unable to stop looking at her. Something she herself hardly perceived.

"Well, I mean, I don't know how to talk to these people."

"Don't worry about that; you won't have any problem. Just smile and have fun."

It wasn't the kind of answer she had hoped for, but she could see how excited he was and she hoped she could. At least she would be beside him, to support him, and that was very important to her. "I will," she said feigning a strong upbeat emphasis.

FUR COATS FLOODED A LOBBY lit by white candles standing in ornate candelabras. An eerie flickering light played against the heavy ponderous medieval tapestries, which covered the walls. As the furs were checked, jewels were evident, diamonds everywhere, on necks, fingers, ears, even in the hair, on crowns, on chokers and shoulder straps. They flowed briefly together with the crowd, which for Rolf was a massive obstacle through which he sought the easiest route. He naturally took the lead and, holding her hand, he began to weave a hesitant but purposeful course. His immediate short-term goal was clear and beyond it he saw nothing.

She, on the other hand, even in those few short seconds saw everything, especially the other women. There was a strange kind of sound, a gray hat on tight finger waves with nylon net covering a face with far too much make-up. Little dots of black velvet danced around red lips. She smiled secretly to herself as they brushed past

and into a younger woman in a dark blue stripped, wide lapel, and double-breasted, man-tailored suit. She wore no blouse and had only a white silk scarf tight to her throat and brought down along the sides of her lapels. It left her entire cleavage and her upper abdomen clearly visible down to the waist. Sandra instinctively looked down. She could hear the woman talking and laughing and wanted to look up at her, but genuine modesty mixed with more than a little embarrassment prevented it. She had actually never before been away from home, much less to Berlin. She really didn't feel very sophisticated and had no strong desire to pretend that she was. She pulled herself closer to Rolf and wrapped both her arms around his, pulling herself towards him.

He looked down at her and smiled absently. "Do you want to get some wine or champagne before we sit down?" he asked, almost as an afterthought.

"No, let's just go right in," she answered, seeking some escape from the uncomfortable crowd.

"What's it called again Rolf, the film?"

"Victim of the Past. It's a documentary which is part of our campaign to get support for compulsory sterilization for people with incurable hereditary diseases and conditions."

It was the kind of topic she found difficult to discuss with him. Their perspectives seemed so different. For her it was always a matter of contexts, situations, and personal relationships. She saw no sense in unreal statistical structures; abstract arguments about hypothetical possibilities annoyed her. She had to know about real people, particular people. What about them, how does it affect them and those who love them? She would never sacrifice her own for any notion of abstract justice. But a feeling of responsibility to society and to others often confused this. It was on this very sense of responsibility that the film and its propaganda would play. She hated the confusion it caused in her need to decide. There were

never universal answers, only different contexts requiring personal responses. Why couldn't he see that, she thought, as the film began laying its inevitable logic traps? "All life is a struggle..." It droned behind scenes of every kind of species seeking its survival at the expense of some other. "Everything which is weak will be destroyed by nature. This is God's law; it is nature's way. Every animal, every insect understands this. But we humans have sinned against God's law and nature's way by allowing the weak and unworthy to multiply and their offspring look like this!" The music fell into a low foreboding as suddenly the screen was flooded by the sad vacant stares of severely retarded and mentally ill souls wandering in a seemingly hopeless, starkly lit black and white mass, talking a drooling gibberish, with animated gestures to unseen others, some sitting tied in chairs along long walls, still others acting out repetitious idiotic rituals. These lives, hanging hopelessly between life and mere existence, were unworthy of life it screamed in silence.

She watched in almost disbelief at the utter contempt it showed for the weak as slowly the mindless mass transformed itself, through the mixing of superimposed images, into a seemingly purposeful sub-human horde of demonically mad faces marching inexorably toward the audience, while the narrator warned: "In the last fifty years the general population of Germany has increased by only fifty percent, but the number of these worthless living corpses has grown nine times faster and is now threatening to overwhelm us." The point was made painfully clear. Compulsory sterilization alone could save the nation from the evil of hereditary disease.

DURING THE BRIEF DRIVE FROM THE THEATER to the reception she hardly spoke, thinking to herself how terribly sad it was. He, on the other hand, felt compelled to fill the silence with words. "I know it was kind of heavy handed," he began, not looking at her, "but he's right in advocating sterilization, we have pain-

less procedures, and... besides... I mean you heard some of those statistics. To let that go on, well, that would be wrong, don't you think?"

"It's just so sad," she answered.

"It is. But hereditary disease is like an exploding grenade wreaking havoc in all directions. Wagner showed in an article in one of the medical journals a couple of years ago how the cost of maintaining programs and institutions for these people will ultimately bankrupt society. We need to make people aware of the severity of this problem, I might even say crisis. That's part of the reason this film was made. People need to know."

"What people?" she interrupted, in part to make a point, but more to stop his fool's barrage of reasons.

"The German people," he answered, happy to have engaged her at last.

"No, I mean, you said programs and institutions for these people will ultimately bankrupt the country. What people do you mean?"

"Insane people, retarded people."

"How do you know who they are?"

"Well, anyone who can't do a job, or who can only do mechanical or repetitive tasks. That's how they judge. There's a scale of educability which..."

Again she blocked out the drone of his words by looking into the hypnotic lights of passing cars and tried not to think. She couldn't help knowing that these were human beings, that they were somebody's children; after all, somebody loved them. He's talking about them as if they weren't even human, not people at all but just things to be discarded. There was so much she could have said, should have said, she lamented, remembering it as though it were only yesterday. But she was still young then and unsure, so instead she stayed silent. She wanted to protect her relationship with him

and decided that it could wait, at least for now. She feared that he was caught in his own web of reasons and she hoped that it was not a terrible mistake. That fear was well founded and that this was only the beginning soon became frighteningly clear.

WHITE PAPER CHINESE LANTERNS covered light bulbs, which created a soft glow all through the opulent lawns and gardens. She remembered how beautiful sounds from the string ensemble on the balcony above sang down like a serenade to hide the horror happening around her. As she walked, trance-like on his arm, smiling, toasting, words were everywhere. She tried not to let herself listen, but too often they broke through.

“Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*, have you read it darling ... well he says way back then, at least 10 years ago, that the strong would ultimately eradicate the weak as was nature’s way.”

I can’t believe they are talking about people she thought to herself trying not to notice, to move on, not to get involved, knowing how important this was to Rolf, and what part was hers.

Another voice slipped through. “Well we already have a sterilization law, don’t we? Someone who’s hereditarily sick has no right to pass that on. Think of the poor children.”

She wanted to scream. Her mind ran away with thoughts. How do they decide? Do they even know? What are the chances? I mean don’t they think people are concerned about these things when they decide to have children?

Another voice: “Look, it’s well known that a direct correlation exists between mental illness and crime, as far as retardation, well, who can say, but those children are always in trouble with the police.”

God... she reacted to herself, I hate these statistics, who came up with them anyway? Maybe it’s just because nobody loves them, nobody helps them.

Again: "People may have no right to kill, but do we have a right to prolong meaningless lives? It's a Jewish plot to destroy Christianity, the 5th Commandment I mean. What do you think about that, Reverend Dr.?"

"Yes, I've heard that before. I can't say I agree with everything they do. I mean I am personally opposed to sterilization and abortion too as a matter of fact, but aren't we bound by our duty as citizens to obey the constitutional authority? We don't have to agree but, well, what happens to the prisoners and the institutionalized, that's another matter. Remember Matthew: Blessed are the poor in spirit..."

"Yes, but it's a ridiculous misinterpretation to use that to justify preserving an existence without a life. After all, to get to heaven one must first die."

The laughter violated every fiber of her being, she felt faint and desperately wanted to go home. These people were all sick and twisted she remembered thinking to herself, but she was caught in the conversation and couldn't escape.

"We need laws that support nature, not oppose it. It's truly human to allow a painless end to a useless existence. Wouldn't you agree Dr. Heyde that what we really need is a euthanasia program?"

"Well, that's been discussed, but from an ethical perspective it presents certain problems. For example, even an insane adult has a personality and is conscious of his existence ... this is a moral dilemma in mercy killing of adults. It's my feeling that an idiot child or infant is oblivious to its own existence, more like an animal, and doesn't present the same problem, from an ethical perspective that is... well, well, hello Rolf, welcome, I'm glad you could come. This must be Sandra." He bowed to kiss her hand in the most debonair Prussian manner, still chic even then. She heard the clicking heels of his jackboots.

You bastard, she thought to herself as she mustered her most

disarming smile. It is a helpless baby, but then, ethically speaking, it's just fine to kill babies. You bastard, she thought again as Rolf interrupted with more than a little exuberance. "S.S. ... Werner, you joined the S.S.?"

"I like the uniform," he chuckled with a tight smile, nodding repeatedly.

"I'm sorry, Sandra, this is Werner von Heyde, my boss, Chief Physician... and what are you now, with the S.S. I mean?"

"I don't know," he said shrugging his shoulders, "ober something or other, it's all a big game anyway. Can I get you something Sandra? ... champagne?" He motioned for a waiter without hearing an answer. She, intently watching Rolf's face, didn't notice.

"I can't believe you joined the S.S.," he said with too much child-like adoration.

"The S.S. is where it's at, my boy. They've got the money, all the authorizations. Anyway, all you have to do is trace your Aryan heritage back for four generations. No problem. You should look into it."

"I will," he answered and her back stiffened. She looked intently at his face, reading his reactions and was relieved to realize that he was only acting.

"So, Sandra, when is the big day, or haven't you got this guy to propose yet?"

Rolf answered, "well, we haven't announced it yet but..."

"Hey, Schilling's going to get engaged! Congratulations!" He bowed again to kiss her hand and again she heard the crack of jack-boots through the tinkle of tapping glasses.

UNABLE TO SLEEP Dr. Treppenwitz had been listening for hours to the hypnotic beat of the heavy rain and in his mind he could see countless millions of drops crashing relentlessly, everywhere around him. At first he had welcomed the protection of the roof and the window panes, but then he began strangely to believe that the rain was meant to cleanse his sins. He opened the window to let the wind blown water wash across his face; his eyes strained to see through the stormy night and, for a few seconds at least, he felt forgiven. The same relentless rain, reaching outward from where he stood, watched other faces try desperately to escape its touch.

VINNIE RUSSO HATED SHORT NOTICE BURIALS, even though he knew it would mean a bigger tip, and even more than that, he hated digging in the rain. "It's bad enough that I gotta get up at this ungodly hour," he grunted. His wife, who was always up before him, knew he would complain all morning and threaten to quit, and that it would be useless for her to say anything.

"Besides, there's no real reason to plant his ass so damn quick. They could wake him one more day." Russo was animated and spoke as articulately with his hands as he did with his tongue.

"Do you want me to get your rain coat dear?" the woman dared.

"You know goddamn well, that shit rubber suit makes you sweat so bad you get as soaked inside as you do outside." Russo liked to instruct his wife on things she had heard a thousand times before and had long ago learned to ignore. "Might as well not even

put it on... unless your just gonna stand around, and I sure as hell ain't gonna do that now, am I?"

Russo had labored so long at this low end of the human experience that he knew no measure beyond it and his spirit was no longer able to rise above it. "I'm supposed to get forty-eight hours notice for a burial, not twelve. And that damn back lot, you know that's a bitch." Russo was also practicing to convince the funeral director, although he knew Eichler was usually generous. "I don't think they knew how big trees grew back then or that they had roots; and they had absolutely no goddamn rules about the size of the stones." Russo shook his head and the mix of toast and coffee in his mouth muffled his words. "I'll never get the machine in; it'll be hand shovels all the way." He swallowed deliberately and finished firmly. "It better mean at least fifty bucks."

It was already after five and Russo's helper, who was nearly seventy, was standing in the driveway waiting for him, his yellow hooded rubber rain gear glinting in the dim early morning light. Russo watched him through the window as he rinsed his mouth with the last of his quickly cooling coffee. "That useless son of a bitch," Russo railed. "He'll just stand there until you tell him to move; all he does is what you tell him; you don't tell him nothing, he don't do nothing." Russo's huge gut forced him to sit at arm's length from the table and his wife instinctively lunged out to save her tea cup as he rocked back once and stood up.

"He knows we need the hand tools, the pick and grub hoe, the square shovels and the round shovels, but will he go get them, hell no, he'll just stand there and wait for me to tell him."

Russo pulled on his boots and rumbled through the house without saying goodbye to his wife, who followed quickly behind him to close the doors.

"Why the hell are you standing there scratching your ass? Start loading the truck. We're digging."

“Shit,” the old man said.

“Shit is right. I’ve already been back there and there’s no room for the machine.” The old man frowned and shook his head disapprovingly and as usual it annoyed Russo. “This ain’t like digging no water trench...you can’t just keep going back...you gotta put the jack pads down and stay put. You need seventeen or eighteen foot, and we ain’t got it back there.” Russo was talking more to confirm the fact that he was in charge, and to set his mood for the funeral director, than to convince the old man, who was still frowning and wasn’t listening anyway.

Russo couldn’t help wondering why there was so much rush to get this guy in the ground, and why he would need such a big oversized vault. It’s the jewelry he thought, it must be a fortune; what other reason could there be for such a monstrous vault?

“Get the planks and the plywood,” he ordered. “It’s wet and we’re gonna get ruts and that means more headaches for us later.”

Russo’s mind kept returning to Watson’s hasty wake. Why else would he need that big vault? There was definitely something funny going on, he thought, and it convinced him to get a look inside that casket if he could.

“Slice the sod line for a nine foot hole,” he grunted, “and don’t cut your foot off.” Ordinarily the hole was eight feet and four inches; but Russo had a plan. He would need a little extra space to swing the vault cover forward in order to break the seal. That cover weighed over a thousand pounds and, with the suction, the tractor would never be able to lift it straight up. But, if he had room to jog it forward; that might do it! He also knew that he would have to get rid of the vault truck driver, and the old man, when the time came.

Cutting and rolling strips of sod in the rain is a dirty and demanding job. Wet sod weighs more than wet shit Russo liked to say and he always had the old man carry it. “I know you gotta put

it back, but don't pile it there asshole... put it behind the monument."

Ordinarily, it should take about two hours to dig a grave, but this one would take much longer. The two men worked methodically and without much talking, making a neat pile of top soil right next to the hole. The first foot and a half always went easily, but just below the loam line they always hit gravel and with it the inevitable tree roots, which were woven tight like a net to protect the soft sand beneath it, as though they were meant to defend the earth from these intrusions.

Suddenly Russo, who was precariously balanced on the loose web felt his foot sink down and his ankle seize between the sinewy strands. He twisted his bulky body around in a violent effort to escape, but he found instead that he only slipped deeper down. "Son of a bitch," he said with powerful emphasis, pulling back violently. "They're like a rat trap or something... get your bar... hurry up." Russo hated the feeling of being caught and it almost caused him to panic. As soon as he was free his reaction was revenge.

"Get the grub hoe and chop away all you can... I'll get the saw." Russo was relieved to be out of the deepening hole and he walked to the truck and waited, slowly changing to the short bar, sharpening the chain and adding oil while his helper worked. When it was time to use the saw Russo would always send the old man for coffee and today would be no exception. He'll reach in there when you're not looking and you're liable to cut his arm off Russo would always say. "And hurry up about it; we got a lot a gravel to go."

Thus the hours passed, swinging from silence to strife. The vault truck was already winding up the gentle slope to the grave site by the time the hole was squared. Russo noticed that the flatbed truck was carrying three grave boxes in addition to Watson's big bronze lined vault. He knew the driver would be in a hurry. Vault

truck drivers are always in a hurry and this could be turned to an advantage.

"You might as well just start unloading it," Russo yelled. "There's no way I'm letting you back that truck in there."

"Come on, cut the shit. That'll take an hour!"

"Just get out the carrier and the tripods. With all those boxes on there you'll sink right down to the hubs, and then where will we be? I'll put the planks down; and hurry up about it; we only have about an hour." Russo then added slowly: "I'll take care of the cover." He knew those were the words the driver was hoping to hear.

After the vault was in place, the vault company contract required the driver to wait until the funeral service ended, to lower the cover into place and to certify that the vault was sealed. This might mean hours of delay and a late day, and the drivers never wanted to do it. He was happy, as Russo knew he would be, and the two men made the usual small talk as they maneuvered the vault into the grave.

"Just set the cover down along the lane there," Russo said motioning toward the vault cover which was still hanging off the back of the truck by the chain fall. "I can get it with the front bucket on my tractor."

"Wait until I put a couple of two by four's down under it so that damn sealing tar won't stain the grass."

As the cover came slowly down, Russo artfully pressed four small stones, no bigger than marbles, neatly into the sticky black tar at each corner of the cover. They would keep the seal from forming, he hoped, and make it possible for him to lift off the cover again later.

They had hardly finished when the flower car arrived. Russo hated flowers. There must be over forty arrangements he thought. That was a month's pay for him. Rich bastards he thought. Then they would hang around afterwards and pick the best flowers to

bring home. Cheap bastards he thought. He always made the old man throw the flowers down.

"Get the greens first," Russo barked as he took the towel from the truck and tried to clean up his hands before greeting the funeral director, who was arriving with the pall bearers. Pall bearers! Why did he bring the pall bearers? It wasn't like Eichler to do anything to make the job of the caretaker any easier. And now he was bringing pall bearers to carry the casket from the hearse to the grave.

Everything was rushed now, the mats, the chairs, rake up the stones, look rushed, look busy and build the tip was Russo's routine. "Hello Mr. Eichler; we're almost ready... cover that pile of sod more neatly Mr. Williker... This was a tough job Mr. Eichler; you didn't give me much time."

"Don't worry about it Vincent," Eichler said, "I knew you would be pressed; everything looks fine; take a break; we'll get the casket."

Something was definitely wrong Russo thought. Maybe he was trying to get out of leaving a good tip. Bullshit, he complained almost aloud. This is a fifty dollar day and I damn well better get it. What's he trying to pull?

Then Russo remembered the new rules. "Wait; hold it I gotta get the rollers on."

"Rollers?"

"Yea, we got new insurance and now we gotta use rollers on the lowering device."

Eichler knew that the rollers, which would hold the casket above the lowering straps during the sometimes long grave side services, were intended to prevent the possibility of a strap breaking. He also knew that the rollers had to be removed when the ceremony ended, and that this meant that Russo would have to lift the casket again to get them out and set the coffin down on the lowering straps. He would surely recognize the unusual weight.

"We don't have time to waste Vincent," Eichler interrupted. "What are you worried about? When was the last time you had a strap break?"

"No way man, it could mean my ass. And besides, I didn't bother to bring the check chains. Set it on the rollers and slide it into place over the straps and I'll take it from there," Russo said to the pall bearers who were already at the edge of the grave, straining with the heavy casket carrying Josh Watson and the hidden and hideous remains of Robbie Simonescu.

There was nothing Eichler could do. Fate had foiled his plan to keep Russo from feeling the weight of the coffin. He quickly discarded the idea of any further efforts to prevent this from happening. He was still confident that he could rely on the heavy self-sealing vault to guard his secret.

As soon as the coffin was in place, Russo and the old man walked quickly to the truck. "Drop me off at the house and I'll get the tractor," Russo said motioning for the old man to drive. He had already rightly calculated that the rain would shorten the ceremony and he decided to put his plan into motion immediately. "Then go home and get some dry clothes... and bring back some coffee... not that same shit you bought this morning, go across town to Betty's... and... don't get lost, you got a lot of backfilling to do." Russo knew that this would keep the old man away for at least an hour and would also provide a credible answer to Eichler's inevitable question about why the backfilling couldn't begin immediately.

NO ONE WAS COMPLETELY SURE if Josh Watson believed in God, but it was certain that no regular clergy appeared at the grave site. An old woman that no one seemed to know finally stood to speak and although she looked right at him, Russo had difficulty distinguishing her words from the drone of rain drops drumming on the backs of black umbrellas.

“When a man knows his face is dirty,” she began, “he goes to the sink, but he cannot wash because he cannot see where the dirt is. The man searches everywhere until he finds a mirror through which he can see his own soiled face; only then can he wash himself clean...”

It began to rain harder and Russo was angry and uncomfortable. “What the hell is she talking about?” he ranted to no one in particular and then shook his head mechanically.

The short grave site ceremony seemed interminably slow and Russo worried about the old man and the rapidly shortening time. His mind was so preoccupied that he never heard the rest of the woman’s words, which may well have been meant for him; and being unused to wrestling with rollers, he never noticed the extra weight of the coffin, which had worried Eichler so much. He did see Eichler’s more than normal interest in the vault cover, watching carefully as it slowly sank into place, looking along the edge for the ooze of sealing tar.

“Thank you very much Mr. Russo,” Eichler said slipping him the customary small envelope.

“Thank you, Mr. Eichler,” Russo responded politely. The two men shook hands and, behind sly smiles, they each believed that everything was working perfectly.

RUSO COULD HARDLY WAIT until Eichler’s car disappeared beyond the side gate. The back lot, the big trees and big monuments, they were all allies now, and the rain, the wonderful rain, would mask his crime. It was dangerous, but he had done it before. This was definitely the best time, right away. It only took a few seconds to attach the spreader chain to the vault cover, hook it and wrap it around the nose of the front bucket. The old tractor strained to lift the half-ton load when a deft, and practiced, outward push of

the bucket broke the imperfect seal and slammed the cover forward into the front wall of the hole with a dull thump.

There... it was free! Slowly up, but not out, only enough to crawl under and jimmy the lock with his pocket knife. Russo wasn't surprised when both ends of the half couch casket came open. The diamond rings and gold chains were already his before he saw the black bag at the bottom of the coffin. Jackpot, he thought, his heart pounding when he felt the weight and realized he could never lift it out. God it must be more gold he said to himself as his ambitious blade once again went to work. Then, suddenly, in the eerie half-light of the shaded grave, the bloated but recognizable face of Robbie Simonescu burst forth from the bloody bag.

Later, when the old man returned, he didn't dare ask why the grave was already backfilled, or why Russo silently sent him home.

FOR THE THIRD TIME since he first entered the house, Dr. Treppenwitz, carrying the key he had taken from the dead boy's pocket, climbed the narrow staircase into the attic library. The bare wooden risers ascended at an abrupt angle, and he could feel the need to lift his entire weight nearly straight up with each stride. Somehow he knew that the answer he so desperately sought was buried in the paraphernalia above him, hidden among the personal possessions of Dr. Simonescu's past.

The boy had been searching there for something, something his father wanted kept secret, something important, and it became steadily more vital for Treppenwitz to find it. He fought back the flash of fear which instantly exploded through his body. He knew it would happen again and again until he brought his mind to peace. Murderer, it said from its unseen lair... murderer. No Isis would reassemble those bloody parts he thought, unable to restrain his racing mind, understand its references, or why they arose. To be caught, and exposed, humiliated and punished, that would be worse... far worse it whispered.

Why can't I control my own thoughts, he asked himself. Why do they attack me without warning? How can I say that I really control my own life; how can I rule myself; is it possible to be both the master and the slave? Treppenwitz's mind was a battleground of doubt. The instinct for survival, and not the pursuit of truth, seemed to have the greatest power. God, he thought, certainly not the pursuit of truth... of course, the appearance of truth, now that's an altar to worship on. Why was it always so important to seem

virtuous, to contrive an excuse, to erase the thought of crime, and never enough merely to escape? How could he know what was right and what was wrong when thoughts are so ruthlessly ruled by emotions? When the drive to survive dominates, truth is twisted, twisted by torrents of emotion, twisted to suit any circumstance, until a lie becomes virtue.

He looked at the key, which seemed to shine in a reflected light from across the half lit library room. Around him shadows danced everywhere among alien shapes. He could smell the old carpet and the cloth covered couch. The sharp penetrating beam from his flashlight cut a tiny tunnel through the night illuminating a narrow slice of the attic space. His eyes chased the searching light across the floor, over half filled cardboard cartons to the opposite wall.

The glass doors of an old corner cupboard caught his eye; he walked directly to it. Through the panes he could see books, old books, relics from a tragic past, he thought, prisoners aching to be free, he felt. The door was locked. His hand shook in time with his turbulent thoughts as he slipped the key into the ancient lock. In the mirrored sheen of the glass doors, formed by shadows from within, Treppenwitz, for the first time, clearly saw the slaughter of Robbie Simonescu; saw himself, his hand on the scalpel, hacking... bloodied flesh falling. The ceaseless tapping of rain on the roof grew into a roar. His fingers squeezed tight around the slender shaft of the small key; it turned silently, effortlessly; the squeaking door swung slowly open. Treppenwitz stood sweating, shaking, and struggling to force back the grisly specter. He felt like a wild animal running for its life.

Was there something here, something in the books, something in the books that could save him? He had to find out. His eye flew frenzied over each volume, Kafka, Rilke, Friedrich Nietzsche... until at last it came to rest against a familiar word, Englisch... Englisch-Deutsch it said. It was a dictionary, an old dust covered dictionary

whose English entries were defined in German; the binding was broken and the pages exhausted from heavy use. He took it into his hands; it began to deteriorate almost immediately under his touch, as though, its work done, it wanted only to rest. Words, he thought, thousands of words, tens... hundreds of thousands of words held in his hands. How much they really are our thoughts, our beliefs, and our truths.

It seemed to calm him and he began to cry, softly at first and then gradually in uncontrollable spasms. Strangely he didn't think about what he had done to another human being, but rather what would, in the end, happen to him. He clutched the open dictionary, pressing it hard against his face to muffle the sobbing sounds until its pages were wet from his tears and his eyes were sore and swollen.

Several minutes passed and when he finally slipped the book back into its darkened slot, he saw, blurred, beside it on the shelf what seemed at first to be another, newer, copy of the same work. He stared at the spine for several seconds before bringing the word into focus... Wörterbuch... his eyes darted to the left, Deutsch-Englisch! Both books bore the imprint: Stuttgart, 1947; only one was worn. Deutsch - English, now Englisch - Deutsch, opposites he thought. Doesn't everything have its opposite, happen in opposites, be given meaning by its opposite?

Again he dragged his tired eyes across the many books which closely packed the cabinet shelves and once again one, uncannily suspicious, leaned forward. Did fate place the translator's tool in his hand at this moment he wondered, turning the pages feverishly to find the meaning of each word? At last he traced with his finger in the desktop dust: "Beyond Good and Evil." The words flowed over him like a cool wind and seemed to free his soul. He took the book down closing his eyes as he opened the cover as though awaiting a miracle. But the book was only an empty shell, a cavity hollowed

out, a carefully fashioned camouflage of sorts, cut to remove every word, and to create an artful retreat. Cloaked within was a small package wrapped in tissue. When the mask fell away, Treppenwitz, his face still soaked with tears, saw a small, black, leather bound diary; he opened it, his hands shaking. There was no name, but he knew that it had to have belonged to Simonescu and that it had likely been a target of the boy's fatal search. It began to assume an almost religious significance for him, and he knew he could not rest until he had read it.

THE NOTATIONS WERE IRREGULAR and seemed short and abrupt. So many words, unknown words, covert words, meanings concealed in strange sounds and syllables. The entries began in 1940 and ended in 1947. On the first page he found a poem. He knew Simonescu had written it and he felt an unquenchable urge to know its meaning. He tried slowly to sound out the words. The seductive sound and the rhythm of the German sang softly to him, drew him toward it, and drove him blindly onward. He sat down at the small carrel-like desk which abutted the bookcase, lit the small reading lamp and pushed aside its clutter to make a spot for his work. He seemed obsessed and, using the unused half of Simonescu's dictionary, translated each word, writing its English equivalent with no concern for style or syntax.

Down on the spiral staircase,
Jump the children two by two;
Ghostly dancers, silently stepping;
Feet the from floor fly like wheels
In circles spin, and down again,
Down on the spiral staircase.

The poem frightened Treppenwitz and he read the result over

and over before returning the diary to its secret nest, only vaguely beginning to sense its significance for his own suffering.

“DR. TREPPENWITZ... DR. TREPPENWITZ... Are you all right?” Elsa rarely went up into the attic, not even when the old doctor was alive and once again she stood, as usual, at the foot of the stairs, her gentle voice straining to reach the floor above. “Dr. Treppenwitz... can you hear me? It’s getting late.” She lifted her weight up on her toes, stretching her body upwards, as if getting a few inches closer would make all the difference. “You have an appointment with Detective Sullivan. Don’t you remember?”

“What time is it?” he asked almost automatically, struggling desperately to gain control of his emotions.

“It’s already after seven.”

Treppenwitz suddenly remembered the incident on the beach, and his promise to appear that morning for an interview. An unrestrained apprehension came over him. “I can’t go through with this today,” he began before sensing his lack of composure and forcing himself to relax. “I mean... I know I told him I would go down there and answer questions.” He found it increasingly easy to take refuge in lies, “but I don’t really feel up to it. Can’t we call it off or postpone it or something?”

Elsa was unsure how to answer. “Well... I suppose we...” Her hesitating words had hardly formed when Treppenwitz pushed past them, partly for reasons even he could not yet explain.

“I want to talk to you some more about Simonescu. I want to know more about him. Can we read more of his letters?”

Treppenwitz didn’t notice the incongruity of his request, or realize how it must have sounded to her. “Now?” she said surprised, still unable to see his face in the darkened staircase, although she sensed something moving quietly toward her.

“Yes,” he answered like a ghost from the shadows. He was

closer to her than she realized, and his voice startled her. She heard the tone of immediacy in it and didn't dare to refuse him, although it seemed important to at least protest. "But... Dr. Treppenwitz, couldn't that wait? You really should speak to Detective Sullivan as soon as possible. He's expecting you."

Treppenwitz could hardly separate what was real from what was contrived, what was true from what was a lie. "Please, Elsa... read me one more story... one more letter, only one..."

The seeming insanity of his words only enhanced the anguish his barefoot, disheveled and downtrodden appearance evoked in her. She knew something was drastically wrong, but was unsure of what to say. "Why are you so interested in this?" she asked. "You never even knew Dr. Simonescu."

"But, I feel as though I need to know him now." Treppenwitz responded in a way which convinced Elsa not to trifle.

He spoke in short panic stricken, almost panting spurts. "He seems... alive to me... I've got to know the truth... I can't explain it... I just need to know." His glassy eyes stared straight into her. "Please help me," he pleaded.

She could feel his body shivering as he passed in front of her into the second floor bedroom hallway. "Yes... yes, of course I will," she said trying to comfort him. "There's a terrible chill in the house for so early in the season," she added trying to ease away from the tension.

Treppenwitz turned slowly back toward her. "You will help me... won't you Elsa?" He almost begged.

"Tonight," she answered quietly, "I will tell you about him tonight."

“OH MAN...WHAT IS THIS SHIT, MAN?” Raphael Ortiz wailed as Sullivan pushed him against the blackened alley wall behind one of the rundown triple-deckers that covered the hillside along the river. Sullivan held his head back to avoid the stench of port wine mixed with ale.

“You’re moving up in the world, Ortiz? I thought you were living in cardboard.”

“I didn’t do nothin man,” Ortiz moaned, spreading his feet and pressing his palms against the wall.

“Unpack him Manny,” Sullivan growled stepping back.

“He’s clean,” Mota reported after a quick, rough frisk.

“You got a real heavy rep Ortiz,” Sullivan quipped, half smiling, while spinning the little man around by the shoulders. “The way we hear it you’re holding for a big uptown score.”

“What’a you tryin to run on me man?”

“We just want a little information, and when we get it we’ll forget about the snow.”

“What’a you talkin about man? I ain’t holdin nothin...” Ortiz suddenly saw the smile on Sullivan’s face and knew he was being set up. “Oh shit man... I must have my head up my ass man... Why me man?”

“Because you’ve got an ear for the action, Raphael.” Sullivan was still smiling. “Why don’t you tell us what you’ve been hearing.”

Ortiz was a junkie who always seemed to need a fix and who had lately been living on cheap booze. He was scared and didn’t want to sweat it out in the tank. His voice betrayed his desperation;

but this impression was practiced, and at least partly done by design, since he was accustomed to being roused and pushed around and he knew how to escape through any available opening. "About what, man?" he appealed.

"You been getting any good dope lately Ortiz, real clean stuff... the kind that comes from drugstores and doctor's bags?"

"Look... man, somebody's been snappin your ass... man... I ain't got no bread for that shit." Ortiz almost cried as he saw the small clear plastic bag of pure white powder in Sullivan's palm. "Shiiiiit man...you gonna plant that on me?"

"Count on it sucker," Sullivan said hefting the weight of the package. "What do you think Manny?" The two men exchanged glances.

"Intent to sell for sure," Mota answered, already adept at playing his part.

"Shiiiiit man... that's bullshit man."

"I got your junkie ass, Ortiz," Sullivan said in a low threatening tone, "and you're going to sweat and squirm unless you start chirping. You got that?"

Ortiz never thought of life as being fair or just, only relentless and brutally real, requiring constant effort to adapt and survive. "Hey man... it's cool man; I can dig it... it's cool..."

"Don't give me that junkie jive; this is where it's at." Sullivan spoke with his teeth clenched tightly together as he opened the back door of the unmarked police sedan. "This is my scene. Now get your ass in there."

"Keep cool baby... I can dig it." Ortiz's instincts and lifetime of manipulation, in the end, made him more than a match for Sullivan. "Listen man..." Ortiz said leaning forward, "can we haul ass on outta here, I can't take this fall out?"

Sullivan nodded to Mota who pulled the car into traffic. He

then turned slowly toward the back seat. "We hear somebody's been getting good stuff out of the doctor's bag."

Ortiz knew he had to talk, say anything, read the cues, say something, and hope it was the right thing. "I've been seeing a lot of Percs on the street," he offered.

"Where are they coming from?" Sullivan asked with obvious interest.

"I don't know, man..." No... That was wrong... he had to know... but what was it that he had to know? Just keep talking he told himself. "There's too many for the little scams. Must be out of town." Ortiz, who was beginning to come apart, paused, praying for more clues.

"We were thinking about a hometown source."

"You want me to get wasted man? I can't finger no local fountain." That's right, Ortiz thought to himself, make him think you know what he wants but don't give it up too easy... don't give it up too easy.

"What if the fountain is dry?" Sullivan said bluntly.

"Whata ya mean dry?" Ortiz asked.

"I mean dead, asshole."

Ortiz was shaking frantically; his fingers were twitching as he tried to steady his hands against the back of the front seat. "Dead... Hey man... I don't feel like gettin racked man. I don't need no murder shit."

"We were thinking of a doctor source, a doctor source that dried up, or got blown up... A doctor source that was good to you Ortiz."

"What'a you talkin about, man?"

"What did you do when the action broke Ortiz?"

"What action, man?" Ortiz knew he couldn't stall much longer and he was losing control when the clue finally came.

"The action you got from old Doc Simonescu before he disappeared. You remember that, don't you Ortiz?"

"Simonescu ..." Although his brain was blurred, Ortiz struggled to sort it out. "He set me up a couple a times man, that's all... I don't no nothin about no murder man."

"Was Simonescu murdered Ortiz?"

"Like I said man, he set me up a couple a times, that's all."

"How did he die? What do you know about that?"

"Nothin man...He drowned man... I can't hack no more of this shit...I didn't do nothin."

Ortiz was beginning to breakdown fast and Sullivan knew how to keep the pressure on. "We don't buy that drowning deal Raphael; we think he was wasted and we think you know all about it."

"Why are you on my ass man...I'm nobody man...I don't know nothin."

"You know you got good stuff from Simonescu don't you Ortiz and you know that when it all ended you got it from his kid. How close is that?"

Ortiz, reaching desperately for a foothold, retreated into the realm of lies and half-truths which was his scene, and where Sullivan would be his victim. "Listen man... this asshole is stupid man...he gives the shit away, man... and all the time he's cryin and sayin some shit...I only made a couple a hits, man, only when I was really strung out. It's righteous man... I didn't trust him, man." Ortiz was shaking and sweating uncontrollably.

"You look like shit Raphael."

"I'm sick man," Ortiz whined, "I want to split this scene man."

"Maybe we ought to ride you around for a couple more hours and see what else you puke up."

"Look, man..." Ortiz began again but this time Sullivan spun around slamming the back of Ortiz's head against the side window.

"I'm tired of your bullshit, you understand? I'm going to run your ass in for possession with intent. Let's go Manny."

"Hey man... no sweat... I got the news... I got the news, man." Ortiz knew he had to give Sullivan something. He wasn't sure what the detective wanted but was willing to try anything.

"Tell us about Robbie Simonescu," Sullivan said.

"He pushes a little, mostly pills... uppers man, kid's shit... school kid's shit man," Ortiz answered spontaneously.

"What did he feed you, Raphael?"

"The kid had the old man's pad man... he knew the words man... he looked clean, he scored clean." Ortiz looked for a reaction. Not a word of it was true... but it worked.

"Heh, prescriptions on the old man's narc number. So that's what was hatching the Percs, heh Ortiz?"

"You got enough, man?" Ortiz asked, hoping that it was.

"I've almost got it all now Ortiz, only I need the kid."

"Shit man," Ortiz began to whine again, "you can find him... I don't know where he... is... man."

"When did you see him last Raphael?"

"I don't know... a week... maybe two... I don't know man."

Sullivan seemed sure that Ortiz had nothing more to offer. He turned slowly toward Mota and said disdainfully: "Dump the garbage Manny."

The car's abrupt stop jarred Ortiz away from his rising self pity. "We'll keep in touch," Sullivan said with a smile. Raphael Ortiz stepped back onto the street six miles from where they started; but he said nothing, thankful to be free.

As he pulled the car back onto the highway Mota asked: "do you think we should have pumped him a little more?"

"He was about to puke all over you Manny. Besides, he shit his load." Sullivan was prone, like most men, to believe anything that seemed to confirm his own convictions. He never believed the

theory that Simonescu had drowned. Now he had a plausible motive for the disappearance, and it tied in with the boy's disappearance as well. "I think we're going to stake out the street Manny. The kid will show."

"Where do you think he is?"

"Out filling scripts I'd say. The circle's getting wider. He's probably got to go a hundred miles by now to get to a new mark. He's writing paper for Percodan. Doctors give that all the time, but usually no refills. As long as you write for small amounts nobody gets suspicious, but you start to run out of drug stores. He'll show on the street when he needs cash." Sullivan had mental compartments for everything and conclusions, especially hasty ones, came quickly. "Head over to Simonescu's old place I want to catch that new doctor... what's his name... step-in-shits... before he gets too comfy."

SULLIVAN DIDN'T SAY A WORD for the fifteen minutes that it took to drive across town to the affluent beach front drive where Treppenwitz lived. His mind was preoccupied with confused loyalties and didn't notice the long wait while Josh Watson's funeral wound passed. He had known Robbie's mother since grade school. She had been his first adolescent love and even though they had hardly spoken in over twenty years, he felt a strong need to protect her. He had hated it when she married Simonescu, who was old enough to be her father, and after the old doctor was legally declared to be dead Sullivan even flirted with the idea of seeing her again. She never knew this. Now, he was convinced that Robbie was a small time drug dealer; it explained everything; but he was unsure of how to handle it. He knew that if he got to Robbie first, before anyone else knew, he could fix it. He wanted to fix it for her. Somehow it furthered his childhood fantasies about her and what might have been.

"Do you want me to come in?" Mota asked, nudging Sullivan to consciousness.

"Eh... no, stay here and monitor the radio, this will only take couple of minutes." As he approached the front door, Sullivan tried to reorder his thinking and remember the details of Treppenwitz's case. Strange situation he thought, his mind still captured by the boy and his mother. He had not yet begun to put it all together.

Sullivan stood very close to the front door and listened, as usual, to determine if the door bell was ringing inside the house. He could hear muffled voices. He was sure he heard Treppenwitz say, "tell him I'm not here," or something like that.

"Good morning Detective Sullivan, what can I do for you?" Elsa said opening the door only enough to expose her face, the two halves of the sentence connecting a little too closely and convincing Sullivan that he had heard correctly.

"Good morning, Elsa. May I come in?"

Elsa nodded, stepping aside without speaking.

"Since I was in the neighborhood, I thought I'd save Dr. Treppen...witz a trip down town and get this interview over with."

"I'm afraid Dr. Treppenwitz is not up yet Detective Sullivan." Elsa answered without looking into his eyes. "Perhaps I can help you?" Lying did not come easily to her.

Sullivan knew Treppenwitz was in the next room listening and he loved cat and mouse games, even though he didn't really understand this one. "Tell Dr. Treppenwitz to call me later today; we think we have a witness who may have seen what happened on the beach," Sullivan said, only a little too loudly, knowing that small, but well laid, lies often yielded productive interviews.

"Certainly."

"Oh, by the way... there is something I'd like to discuss with you... if this isn't inconvenient," Sullivan added trying to make it

look like an obvious afterthought, although it was the real reason for his visit.

“Of course, would you like to sit down?”

“No, but I would like you to step outside. It will only take a minute.”

Elsa, who thought it might involve the incident on the beach, did not seem surprised at the request and followed Sullivan out the front door.

“It’s about Robbie and some new information which has come to light,” Sullivan said softly. “You knew we got a tip that the kid has been hanging with Raphael Ortiz. Well, we questioned Ortiz today and we think that it’s pretty solid that Robbie’s up to his neck in this and maybe about to go over his head.”

“Are you certain Detective Sullivan? This is very hard to believe,” Elsa asked, clearly astounded. “Robbie never went to the Dockside.”

“I’m afraid so. Now look... for Lotte’s sake... I think we can fix this, but I may need your help.”

“Of course, I’ll do what I can, but I don’t understand. What has Robbie been doing?”

“Let’s just say we think he’s involved with illegal narcotics and I think the trail will lead back to his father’s death. I think I can get to the bottom of it on the quiet and save a lot of embarrassment and reputations, but not if I have to open an official investigation.”

Elsa knew that there had been something between Lotte and Jim Sullivan in the distant past, but was somewhat surprised by his remarks. “I still don’t understand what I can do.”

“I want to see all of Dr. Simonescu’s files for the past few years, business accounts, patient files, everything.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not? Aren’t the files still here?”

"Yes, they are, but they've been transferred to Dr. Treppenwitz and they're confidential."

"I can get them through the court if I have to Elsa. Don't make me go that route. All I need is an hour in those filing cabinets. No one will ever know."

"I can't do that Detective Sullivan. I just can't."

"Of course you can Elsa. You have the key."

"You say it traces back to Dr. Simonescu's disappearance?"

"Yes. Didn't you think there was something suspicious about that? Don't you want to get to the bottom of it?"

Elsa did need to know what happened to the doctor; she wanted to help the boy and to protect Lotte, but she could not force herself to go along with a plan which would betray so many people. She stood silently until Sullivan spoke again. "Take this card; it has my unlisted number. Think about it Elsa. But don't take too long."

Elsa hardly heard the door open behind her before she felt the wisp of warm air bathe the back of her neck. She turned and saw Dr. Treppenwitz looking past her toward Sullivan.

"I thought I heard voices out here... Why didn't you invite him in?" he aimed back at Elsa who said nothing, conditioned as she was to adapting to serpentine turns of event.

THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN TREPPENWITZ and the detective was short and repetitive. Since Sullivan was occupied with other thoughts, he even forgot his own recent little lie about the nonexistent witness. The only point which held his interest was the length of time between Treppenwitz's departure from the house, at about ten-thirty, and his discovery on the beach, late in the afternoon.

"First I went across the street to say hello to Jim Eichler," Treppenwitz began, "I had only met him the night before. But, he was about to begin an embalming... Mr. Watson's, so I walked around

awhile. I don't remember exactly where I went... But I ended up on the beach."

Walked around for nearly three hours Sullivan thought to himself, placing the occurrence on the beach, because of the tides, at after two. He was suspicious, but decided to smile and say nothing.

"I really didn't see anything," Treppenwitz went on. "I don't even know how ..."

"I'd like you to stop by the office today," Sullivan interrupted, "to make out an official complaint." Something about the story still bothered him and he was more than a little curious to see the lab report on the blood stained handkerchief.

DR. TREPPENWITZ SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY in his office reviewing patient files in preparation for reopening Simonescu's practice. He had agreed to continue all of the old doctor's commitments and took the responsibility to prepare himself seriously. He wondered about earning a living with so many unpaid accounts and volunteer hours at the free clinic. He tried to concentrate but his mind ran back repeatedly over every aspect of his remarks to the detective. He worried about saying that he had stopped to see Eichler. But what else could he do? What if someone had seen him go in? He had to be prepared. What would Eichler say if Sullivan asked him? Would Eichler's answer support his? Could contradictory stories both be true? How many angles and facets there were. How mobile the memory had to be to negotiate the labyrinth of lies. Just as he settled one fear, another arose. Why didn't Sullivan mention the witness? What did the witness see? Hours passed before his concentration was broken again.

"Dr. Treppenwitz, are you ready for dinner?" Elsa asked. "It's getting late, you must be tired. You should stop for today."

"Elsa," Treppenwitz said in a serious and altered tone. "Why did you and Detective Sullivan step outside today?"

Elsa was surprised by the sudden question and stumbled through her response. "He... wanted... to ask about Robbie."

"Not about me?"

"No... he said Robbie was mixed up in some sort of drug deals, with Raphael Ortiz."

"Who is this Ortiz?"

"He was a patient of Dr. Simonescu's, a drug addict. He lives in the Dockside. It's very dangerous there. He came here occasionally and Sullivan thinks somehow he and Robbie are," ... she shrugged. "I don't really know what he thinks... I can't imagine Robbie going to the Dockside."

Treppenwitz wanted to unravel the causal relationships which had led Robbie Simonescu to his death. He thought Ortiz could be the key and he was beginning to weave his own web of rationalizations, build his own refuge from guilt, and was preparing himself to be convinced that the boy deserved his horrible fate, brought it on himself, and even did it to himself.

“THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN from the Institute for Hereditary Disease Research in Nuremberg,” Elsa said, looking up at Treppenwitz who seemed to be staring into space, almost unconscious and oblivious to her words. “It’s dated November 10, 1938.” She paused again, and added, “shall I translate it for you?”

“I’m sorry,” Treppenwitz answered. “I was thinking... about something... Yes, please.”

Elsa slowly began to translate the last of Simonescu’s letters.

“Dear Sandra, I told you I rented a little attic room in the Bahnhofstrasse. It is directly under the roof and there’s a little ... Giebelfenster,” Elsa noticed Treppenwitz’s quizzical look and added, “ah...well it’s a little round window, something like a porthole. I don’t know what you’d call it in English, usually with geometrically shaped panes of glass, like you see in a kaleidoscope. It’s in the gable, right near the peak of the roof. Anyway, he says through it he could see out onto the Heuplatz.”

“Last night I saw, through that window, one of the most terrifying spectacles, which may be beyond my ability to describe. About eleven o’clock, before I went to bed, I heard such a wild commotion breakout that I was driven to look to see what was going on in the street below.” Elsa paused almost absently and added, “it’s so frustrating; the German always translates so stiffly. I’m sorry; I’ll go on.”

“SS men were running here and there with hatchets in their hands smashing everything and anything which came into their path. I heard window glass shattering directly below me, and then I

looked down to see an old woman, running into the street screaming and trying, naturally in vain, to stop the men from smashing her things. I recognized her as Frau Stein, the old Jewess who rented the apartment just behind me.” Elsa paused to inhale. “I’m sorry about that,” she said again aside, “but German sentences can be so protracted.”

Treppenwitz smiled and she continued. “Clothes, furniture, books... ihr ganzes Hab und Gut... it seemed like all of her possessions were thrown into the street and mixed with... dem dunkel glänzenden Glassplittern,” she paused for what seem an eternity, and closed her eyes, before continuing, knowing where the words were leading and trying to fashion something literate, “...der zerbrochenen Fensterscheiben... mixed with the smashed shards from the broken windows. It was unbelievable. I can’t describe how frightened I was. There must have been thousands of men, some of them with torches, marauding through a blinking landscape of broken glass.” She sensed how surprised he sounded in the letter; but she had warned him.

“For at least an hour and a half the riot raged until, finally, the Synagogue on the corner seemed to become the main target. In the middle of the uproar someone set a barrel of kerosene on fire and then smashed it against the building. Evidently others had also been busy within because in a matter of only a few seconds the whole structure was engulfed in flames. Its glow tinted the scene a bloody red. Then came the most unimaginable! Zwei SS-Kerle kamen auf das Haus zu... Two SS thugs came into the house where I was and I could hear clearly through the floor the screaming and destruction in the rooms below me where the Jews lived. I wanted to help them but I didn’t dare. They might have thought that I was a Jew too! I hid under the bed and prayed that they wouldn’t find me. I was lucky. They didn’t come up. Why do the Jews stay here? I read today in the morning papers that spontaneous demonstrations broke out

all over Germany against Jews and that the attacks against them will continue. I wish I knew exactly what went on. Did anything happen there? Write back right away!"

"What did occur that night Elsa? Do you know what he is talking about?" Treppenwitz asked, happy to be once again immersed in another's troubles.

"Yes," she answered, "that was the Kristallnacht, the so-called night of broken glass. Hatred and violence against the Jews swept all across Germany. The Nazis tried to make it look like a sudden instinctive rising of the German people, but in reality, it was very well orchestrated and carried out by the SS."

"But why didn't people protest? How could good people just stand by and let these things happen?"

"Good people did more than let it happen," Elsa answered in a way that frightened Treppenwitz. "Good people did it."

Treppenwitz wanted to escape from the pressure her words had created and he quickly interrupted. "Read the next one Elsa."

"The next letter was written from Brandenburg an der Havel on July 15th 1939. It is also from the Foundation for Institutional Care and begins... as usual, with Dear Sandra."

"Yesterday afternoon I went to Leipzig with Heyde. It all had to do with a special order we received to observe a congenitally crippled child whose father had requested, directly from Hitler himself, that his son receive a painless death. The child had no arms or legs, was severely retarded and blind. I have never seen anything so sad and this was not the only case there of that type. All in all I counted ninety-one horribly afflicted children. It's unbelievable. It is utterly unimaginable" she added for emphasis, "...how depressing it is to have to look at their distorted bodies. The doctors here are in quiet agreement with us that euthanasia is the only charitable answer to the hopeless tragedy of these lives which were not meant to live. Euthanasia should be carried out right away in the maternity hospi-

tals and wards according to many of the doctors here... ohne dass man weiter darüber spricht..." She repeated the words again "... ohne dass man weiter darüber spricht... I'm sorry," she said, "it just sounds so sad. I think he means, so that this endless discussion of morality at the expense of awful suffering would not go on."

Treppenwitz said nothing and after a few seconds Elsa continued with the translation. "I'm having great difficulty ordering my thoughts on this. I simply don't know any more. I guess everyone must follow his own conscience and act according to his own convictions. I know that, at least up until now, I have not deliberately hurt anyone. I will try to write and tell you everything that happens, but today there is simply no more time. See you soon. Love, R."

Treppenwitz tried to think of something to say, to combat the uneasiness, but couldn't, and Elsa, eager herself to retrace the sad story pushed on. "The next letter is very short and is also from the Foundation for Institutional Care in Brandenburg an der Havel. It is dated October 2, 1939."

"The war broke out in September," Treppenwitz quickly offered.

"Yes, and this letter was written about a month after that. Shall I begin?"

"Please."

"Dear Sandra, Damn! Hitler's edict, that none of us can be held legally responsible is now official. The judges in Berlin have actually agreed. There doesn't seem to be any way out. I can't say any more now. We definitely have to meet... Sunday as usual? Don't let me down. Love, R."

"Do you understand this Elsa?" Treppenwitz asked obviously puzzled.

"Yes...yes I do," she answered. "It's a very twisted story though."

"Will you explain it to me?"

"If I can," she said and then slowly began. "It was well known that Hitler believed that as soon as the war broke out it would be possible to begin the euthanasia program in earnest. It was all a natural outgrowth of Nazi racial policies. Euthanasia was only the beginning... They were all sworn to secrecy. There was a meeting in Berlin. Many doctors attended, especially those who were attached to hospitals which handled severely retarded and other profoundly disabled children. They were told that Hitler had issued an edict to begin the routine elimination of these lives, which they called *Lebensunwertesleben*..." Elsa paused and then went on without being asked. "It means lives unworthy of life."

Something in those words reminded Treppenwitz of Eichler and sent a chill of fear into him. He quickly spoke to cover it, "and was Simonescu among these doctors?"

"Yes, and you can tell from his words that he was bothered about the oath of secrecy which he took."

"Read the last letter and see what more he says," Treppenwitz urged.

Elsa began to translate again. "This is also from the Foundation for Institutional Care in Brandenburg an der Havel and is dated October 12, 1939."

"Dear Sandra. Thank you for the wonderful birthday present. The workmanship in the tooled leather cover is beautiful. It will be my conscience from now on and ...ich ...hoffe zu tiefst..." Her words were hesitant and insecure. "I deeply hope that I will have nothing but good to write." She paused to strengthen her voice and went on deliberately. "I know that you don't agree with my decisions, but I don't see any alternatives. In any event my work will fulfill my legal military obligation." Ever optimistic, always justifying his actions, she thought as she remembered. "By the time you get this letter I will already be training at T-4. The situation is very problematical. I certainly can't turn back now. From now on we

cannot write. It will be too dangerous. Have patience with me. You have no way of knowing what we face. I have only you to thank for the fact that I have not yet gone insane. Love always, R.”

“What does he mean by T-4 Elsa?”

“T-4 is an abbreviation for an address in Berlin, Tiergartens-trasse Vier. It was the location of the Ministry of the Interior... or what ever they called the one that was responsible for the secret measures surrounding the euthanasia program. I don’t remember exactly.”

“How could they hope to get away with this?” Treppenwitz asked with genuine disbelief. “I mean they had to tell the relatives and family of these children something.”

“They had an elaborate scheme of camouflage,” Elsa answered, “and it was all very official. Remember those who were going to carry it out were ordinary doctors and other medical workers. They weren’t all SS or even Nazis.”

“This is incredible Elsa and almost impossible to believe.”

“It all began at a meeting in Berlin when the doctors were told that they had been authorized to end the life, through mercy killing, of any person who was deemed incurably ill. They were told that this was an edict of Hitler’s and that it had been reviewed at the highest judicial levels. In fact, not only could they not be held legally responsible for the deaths of those selected for liquidation, the law required them, under pain of punishment, to participate. And further they were ordered to secrecy as a matter of national security with the threat of the death penalty for treason if they told anyone about it, or resisted. There were many well known and respected doctors there who took the oath. It was described as an important war time measure. It was a trap from which there seemed to be no escape.”

Treppenwitz identified with the doctors. He too believed that euthanasia should be available to the medical profession as an avenue

for the prevention of suffering. It was not unusual for physicians. The Nazis had taken opinion polls and they knew that a majority of German doctors also favored some kind of medical mercy killing. "I can see how this could happen, but where were the boundaries, where were the limits, who was going to decide?" he asked.

"Yes... these were the questions they asked too. There are always conditions and logical ways of doing things, aren't there?" she said in a biting accusatory tone while looking right into Treppenwitz's eyes. "There was a system for deciding which involved three separate independent steps. Questionnaires were collected on the children in various custodial care institutions and these were sent to Berlin to be independently reviewed by three different doctors before the final decision was made. Surely satisfactory safeguards... wouldn't you say?" Again Elsa paused before continuing.

"Special ambulance companies were set up to transfer the children to observation stations and finally to take them to the euthanasia institutions themselves."

"And this was all done under the umbrella of this so called Foundation for Institutional Care?" Treppenwitz asked.

"Yes."

"How many of these Euthanasia Institutions were there?"

"I'm not sure, four or five, I think."

"Was one of them Brandenburg an der Havel?"

"Yes," she answered sadly.

Treppenwitz seemed to need to get the details straight, almost to lose himself in them. "So then, questionnaires were filled out by the doctors at all of the places where these children were cared for, and then these were sent on to Berlin, to this T-4, to be reviewed by the top Nazi doctors who decided which ones would be"...he paused searching for a word... "transferred?"

"Yes," she said with a dropping tone which showed the sadness in her soul. "And then papers would be sent, and the child would be

officially... transferred, and almost immediately picked up by the secret ambulance company.”

“And this was all a covert operation of the government?”

“Yes.”

“And no one knew, not the child or the family?”

“No.”

“Surely there couldn’t have been too many cases, Elsa.”

“I believe the number approached 100,000 by 1941.”

“Unbelievable!” Treppenwitz said, shaking his head. “How did they explain these deaths to the families?”

“They wrote them a letter.”

“A letter?”

“Yes, official letters, of course, so many were sent, and they sounded so much alike that people finally began to suspect and to protest.”

“Have you ever seen such a letter Elsa?” Treppenwitz asked.

“Yes... it was all very authoritative, very authentic, and very bureaucratic. It said your daughter or son, and then it would give the name,”...Elsa paused again, obviously shaken... “had to be transferred to a special hospital because of a contagious disease, usually encephalitis or meningitis or some such thing, and then suddenly without warning the child died. The letter said it was all for the best because of the suffering that was saved, and that the body had been ordered cremated by the local police because of the danger of epidemic. The letter then asked where the urn with the ashes should be sent and warned the family not to come there because of the official quarantine. It was all so neat.”

“How were these killings carried out? Was there any particular method?”

“Do you mean a preferred way?” she asked.

“Well,” Treppenwitz stumbled.

“Lethal injections... or poisoned gas,” she finished flatly for him.

“And people began to suspect when so many of these letters began to appear?”

“Yes, it became quite a scandal by late 1940. Children who lived near the euthanasia institutions would point, as the transport busses drove by, and sing little ditties like, *werden wieder welche vergast*.

Treppenwitz frowned inquisitively and Elsa paused to fashion a translation which would convey some of the feeling of the child’s chant. “There they go to the gas again,” she offered.

Treppenwitz seemed relieved: “so a protest did arise.”

“Oh yes, so much so that Hitler was forced to issue a secret order to suspend the secret program.”

“And that was the end of it then, in 1940?”

“No!” Elsa answered with obvious emotion, “God, no... it was only the beginning.”

TREPPENWITZ THOUGHT HE HAD FOUND a fortress in bed, and he hid there earlier and earlier each evening. At first he felt safe, tucked away, deep beneath the covers, lying alone in the darkness, like a caterpillar in its cocoon. But, unlike a caterpillar, Treppenwitz waited for his metamorphosis in vain.

As the nights passed, the numbing narcotic of sleep began regularly to dissolve into a troubled trancelike vision, and this night was no different. He could feel its silently approaching power gradually peel away the layers of insulation, which waking reason had heaped up to hide his accusing conscience. It was in this cruel tumultuous twilight of half sleep, unprotected by the shield of logic and so-called sanity, that Treppenwitz was caught.

An intense struggle smoldered within him, between reason and an intuitive urge toward the truth, which was striving to free itself from the shackles of his structured thought. He turned, first left, then right, ravaging the bed. The top sheet, soaked in sweat, tore away from the mattress and rolled tight around his legs until it almost embalmed him. His thoughts became frozen and inarticulate as once again he knocked on the dream's dark door. He thought he saw Dr. Simonescu there watching him, smiling a knowing smile. Treppenwitz was vaguely afraid and wanted to ask him... ask him... ask...

"Let me in," Treppenwitz said, as the same terrible scene he had come to expect these past nights reappeared. He felt a tightening in his chest. A cold wet wind carried an enchanting sound, almost music, but unencumbered by syncopation, or even by a recogniz-

able melody. It pulled him. It was exactly as it had been each time before, always the same compulsion to enter and the same feeling of being swallowed.

Once again the door opened... the darkness slowly revealing itself seemed to leap out to devour him like some kind of vaporous serpent. An unintelligible voice beckoned to him from the misty depths. He leaned forward into the blackness, straining to hear. Frightening forms, unrecognizable, leaped from flickering shadows along the walls. He stepped slowly forward, the rusty hinges of a gate creaking somewhere behind him sounded heavy and old, and he felt as though he were freely walking into hell. His heart pounded heavily. Something within him wanted to shut away the need to face the reality of what might lay on the road ahead, a road into the unknown. But... he also, strangely, wanted to go on.

"You know you cannot hide from me," the voice boomed by him and echoed away, spiraling through the tunnel.

Treppenwitz asked hesitantly, "who are you?" thinking he could see something, a shape emerging, taking form from the fog just beyond his grasp.

"Come to me," said the voice. "I am God!"

Treppenwitz took another step and felt his foot sink into a pool, which was rising around his ankles. He didn't dare look down but he knew... it was blood. He felt the life force of it reaching rhythmically to his knees as it rolled in slow waves past him. "What do you want from me?" he pleaded.

"Follow me. I will show you the way."

"I don't trust you," Treppenwitz answered already almost afloat in the crimson flood.

"Of course, how could you when you do not even trust yourself?"

"I do trust myself," Treppenwitz argued.

"Then decide for yourself. You know you are drowning!"

"What should I do?" Treppenwitz pleaded.

"I cannot decide for you," the voice replied.

"I will decide for myself," Treppenwitz responded, "I know what's right."

"Good!" the voice mocked.

"I have free will and a mind of my own," Treppenwitz responded. "I can trust my reason."

The voice laughed long and hard. "Reason only replays the past... reason indeed. What does your heart say?"

Suddenly Treppenwitz was afraid and he strained every muscle to escape, but the blood rose with each attempted step until he was propped up helpless on his toes, in suspended animation, unable by all of his efforts to move forward or backward. He was trapped, half standing, half floating, taunted by the awful laughing voice echoing louder in the crevices around him.

"No!" Treppenwitz screamed. "I do trust reason; it's the measure of my humanity."

"You do what you are told to do," the voice chided.

"I do what I judge to be right," Treppenwitz answered, his voice betraying a hint of false assurance.

"And you mean you use your reason... and your... mind of your own, to guide you?"

"Yes."

"Look inside yourself," the laughing voice said, "and remember these words: *Eritis sicut Deus, Scientes bonum et malum.*"

Treppenwitz repeated the words over and over... *Scientes bonum et malum.*

HIS RESTLESS ROLLING WOKE ELSA, who listened from her room on the floor below for what seemed like forever before finally coming to help him. She felt strangely obligated to this man, even though she hardly knew him. She too was caught up in the whirl-

wind of uncertainty which had recently invaded both of their lives. She wanted desperately to save him, but she had no idea what she would save him from. It seemed to be her last chance to undo the pain of her own past. She saw the ravaged bed, the open bottle of Seconal, and the thought of suicide flashed through her mind. She sat beside him and heard him mumble again and again: *Eritis sicut Deus, Scientes bonum et malum*.

Unaware of the passing of time, Treppenwitz gradually dropped down deeper into the drug induced stupor until he fell silent and every trace of the torment which raged within him had vented its fury. Elsa waited patiently while he slept. It seemed like hours passed and sadness, carried by childhood memories mixed with fatigue, overcame her without warning.

THROUGH THE HALL WINDOW, in the black of night, she could see the stars. The stillness made her think of home. She wondered if she would ever again see her parent's house, smell the spring flowers or feel the warmth of the old coal oven, whose cast iron relief she remembered so well. Would she ever again experience the peace she had once known? She closed her eyes and heard her papa's voice whisper good night, and felt his strong hands firming the soft down comforter around her shoulders. Tears slipped between her eyelids as she felt the depth of her distance from home; her childhood happiness was so complete then and in such clear contrast with nearly her entire adult life. The years had passed so quickly, the seasons sped by in what seemed now to have been only an instant. It was all gone now. The dream and the certainty of youth were gone forever.

Treppenwitz too was floating free, somewhere far from home. His whole life had been a drive to success measured by society's standards. He was a victim of authority. He was directed and driven by it until he hardly knew why he thought what he thought or did what he did; and now everything was falling down around him. His

whole life, at least in terms of the meanings he had made for it, was threatened. His time was running rapidly out.

At last he woke. Looking around him, half imagined, he thought he saw a strange face. Suddenly he sat up startled. It was at that moment that he sensed that he was not alone and he felt naked under the gaze of this unknown overseer, whose receding form was slowly swallowed by the distant darkness. Wait! He thought he heard himself say, reaching for a faint reflection from a pair of eyes, disappearing eyes, barely visible, peering into his seclusion. Elsa, quickly and quietly backing away into the hall, was careful to stay unseen.

"Simonescu... is that you?" he whispered. The bed was safe and secure, but this apparition drove him, groping, out of it and down the dark seemingly endless corridor.

"Do I have to go back into the tunnel?" he thought he said, not knowing why. Suddenly, he stopped and stared straight into the darkness beneath which Elsa silently hid. She held her breath, waited and watched from the shadows. Something alive was there, near him, he thought; although it made no sound, he knew it was there. Elsa heard her own heart beating. Finally he walked past her without knowing.

Treppenwitz's mind finally cleared in the bathroom while drinking warm water to wash down the hours of drug induced sleep. For reasons he did not fully comprehend, he could only think of Raphael Ortiz and the Dockside... the Dockside. He continued to look around furtively as though he still sensed that he was not alone.

"Elsa?" he called quietly, and then, "Elsa?" again, more loudly, but still without conviction; she, although standing so near him, said nothing.

Treppenwitz looked vacantly into his own mirrored eyes, then down to his watch. It was only one o'clock. There was still time that

night to find Ortiz. If it were all true, maybe then he could rest. If only he could explain it, verify Eichler's assertion that Robbie Simonescu was trash, diminish his worth, erase his humanity, and through this justify his own actions.

He glided like a ghost through the house dressing as he went. Elsa watched him. He looked lost and sad to her even though he was clearly driven by deliberate intent. It occurred to her how much people are regularly motivated by conclusions, which themselves give meaning and definition to the actions which inevitably follow them, and how hypnotic it can all be. The ends seem seductively to create the means for their achievement and in the process lay forth their own moral justifications. They are their own justifications.

How mechanical he appeared she thought, how busy with his automatic actions, hardly aware of even being awake. It was very dark and Elsa strained to see. Later she could almost have sworn that Dr. Treppenwitz had been walking in his sleep. She watched from the window when he left the house and saw him drive away into the night. She had no idea where he was going. How sad he seemed to her, but she made no judgments.

PERHAPS IT WAS DUMB LUCK which led him to the right house in the Dockside; perhaps it was persistence. He hardly noticed how many doors had opened or how many suspicious looks, and silent faces, with hesitant questions he passed. He also didn't see the police stakeout in an unmarked van backed into the alley opposite Ortiz's door. He only knew he was there.

"Are you Raphael Ortiz?" he asked probing into the darkened doorway.

"Would you look at this? No shit!" Ortiz leaned back looking Treppenwitz up and down, shaking his head like a puppet. "Who wants to know?"

"My name is Dr. Treppenwitz... I'm a friend of... well I mean,

I'm interested in getting some information about a boy named Robbie Simonescu... and I understand that a Mr. Raphael Ortiz might be able to help me."

Ortiz was always cautious and for a few seconds said nothing. This Treppenwitz must be the one who bought out old Simonescu, he thought. Something was shaking; he smiled to himself; Treppenwitz looked like an easy mark. His encounter with Sullivan had stimulated his sense of imminent opportunity; he could smell it; and he also knew well how to play the jackal.

"Are you Raphael Ortiz?" Treppenwitz asked struggling forward and trying not to look worried or be surprised by anything.

"You say you want some information?" Ortiz looked up, shook his head again and exhaled slowly through puffed out lips. "I don't believe this shit man!"

"Are you Ortiz?" Treppenwitz repeated.

"Yea, man, I'm Ortiz. What is this shit with Robbie man? Cops were all over me today with that same shit."

"I'm looking for information to help me find him. His mother is worried about him... and thinks he may be mixed up in something illegal. I'm just trying to get the story straight on him, that's all."

Ortiz paused a few seconds and then said, "who are you man?"

"I told you; I'm a doctor. My name is Treppenwitz. I took over Robbie's father's medical practice."

"Why are you so interested in the kid?" Ortiz knew that if he stayed on the offensive he could control Treppenwitz and maneuver his way into something. He really wasn't sure what, but he did know that doctors mean drugs, sometimes easy drugs, and safe drugs.

"Well, everyone's worried about him." Treppenwitz's voice was shaky and unsure. Ortiz sensed his vulnerability. "And I'm just trying to help."

The lie seemed ludicrous, considering the hour and Treppenwitz's disheveled appearance, but Ortiz was in the grip of his own greed and didn't let himself care. "It's gonna cost you man," he said in a tone intended to reassure Treppenwitz that anything was possible.

"Well, I don't have much money on me, but..."

"Better than mon...ey." Ortiz slowed and extended the sound of the word nodding his head up and down with a knowing look, "and I know you got plen...ty."

"You mean drugs, don't you?" Treppenwitz said, only slightly surprised.

"That's right man," Ortiz answered looking down. "You take care of me and I take care of you."

"What exactly do you want?" Treppenwitz asked.

"I want morphine, man, clean needles and morphine. I know you got it, so don't jive me." Ortiz was shaking more from the excitement of the scam than from any immediate need for a fix, and struggled to hold together long enough to set up the score.

"But I can't do that. morphine's a narcotic. It's counted. How will I explain it?"

"Shit man, to hell with you then man. I ain't givin you shit man."

Treppenwitz panicked thinking that he might be losing his chance and caved in. "Come to my office Saturday afternoon... late... after five; go to the back door and I'll give you what you want. But only once, do you understand?" Treppenwitz tried not to completely lose control. "That's all, just one time. And then you tell me all you know about Robbie Simonescu."

"Tonight man, why not tonight?" Ortiz said trying desperately not to look weak.

Treppenwitz believed he had won. "No!" he said strongly. "Saturday... and then I'll take care of you."

“Saturday, man,” Ortiz repeated with a dropping tone and then, as though deliberately trying to regain the dominant position before Treppenwitz could turn to leave, he added, half in boldness, half in jest, “give me twenty bucks, man.”

“What?” Treppenwitz said surprised.

“Twenty bucks, man!” Ortiz screamed. “Or the deal’s off.”

Treppenwitz gave Ortiz the money without speaking; and so, as the two men parted, each felt a sense of failure and submission. Ortiz slept soundly, but Treppenwitz drove his car in endless circles until well after dawn. The world was awake and working before he would sleep.

ELSA HATED TO HAVE TO SIT IN THE SMOKING CAR, but for some reason the early morning mail train to New York City was only running two passenger cars that day and was very crowded. She felt fortunate to have found a window seat, and as she looked out at the drab grey cement of the train station, whose form was barely beginning to emerge in the early morning light, she thought that it was as if the world were being born anew. If only everything could start over, all possibilities, all potentialities, without prejudice or preconception. But, of course, she knew that this could never be.

Elsa had made this pilgrimage, almost a ritual now, every Saturday morning, with the mail, herself a messenger with her own secret mission. Although only once in four was it really necessary; the other three were for camouflage, or habit; she couldn't remember anymore.

She always marveled at how quietly and smoothly, almost effortlessly, the train began its journey, for a monster so powerful and heavy, something so unobtrusive and soundless which would grow into a raging mass of metal. She felt nothing, hardly noticing the concrete station pillars gliding past her like so many ghosts. For the first few minutes she gazed out at the passing countryside, unaware of how rough and noisy the ride was quickly becoming or how fast the day came on. The sorrowful sound of the engine whistle, far in front, warned a small suburban station. Somehow it comforted her to know that someone else knew they were there and she settled back for the long ride.

There was no buffet car, but the conductor offered her a cup of coffee from a portable urn set up on one of the few empty seats. She usually tried to sleep on the run into the city, but today she planned to finish translating Rolf's stories, as she had promised to do, and she welcomed the coffee. She nodded, smiling, and although she knew there would be no charge reached instinctively for her purse.

"Compliments of Amtrak, ma'am," the conductor said, softly raising his hand to prevent her.

Elsa thought of how careful and considerate the railroad employees were, how the ticket agent always double checked the schedule with her and wrote down the departure times from Penn Station on her return ticket envelope. He really seemed concerned that she returns safely. These Saturdays were always strangely welcome, maybe because they were so far removed from her other life. She knew, however, that one day she wouldn't come back. One day soon it would be over and there would be no more need.

The train rumbled on and on; her coffee cup stayed remarkably steady on the little pull down tray. By the time it was empty there was enough light to begin. She knew she could have worked under the little overhead lamp, but it wouldn't have seemed appropriate. She felt better translating the stories in daylight.

"The Caveman," she began. The story was short and the translation was straight forward and uncomplicated.

The street went along the river, through the town and directly to his secret cave. It was a rough and narrow, hand-carved, hole in the earth, which he had dug directly below his living room, and which, these past years, consumed all of his waking hours. The tunnel was so smooth and slippery, and descended at such a steep angle, that he could only crawl down into it with the help of his handmade cat-like claws.

Early every morning he went painstakingly to his work deep beneath the earth and deep beneath the consciousness of those above

on the streets and sidewalks that wandered aimlessly and chattered their meaningless chatter. He lived alone, walled in by ancient curtains, which covered his cunning as well as the windows.

One morning he awoke late. The sun already streamed through the narrow slit in the curtain's rotting fabric and fell shimmering on his face, lighting the eerie, dusty one room apartment. He saw, astounded, through the slit, on the street... seine mit Sack und Pack belastete Mutter... loaded down with bag and baggage, his mother... coming rapidly toward him. It was only a split second, but in it he could clearly see her. Fear gripped him. Almost automatically he reached for his fishing pole and its already baited hook, letting the line sink quickly into the open hole.

"What are you doing there?" the old woman asked angrily.

"Fishing!"

Elsa looked up briefly not wanting to give the story any thought and saw that water was passing on the right; instinctively she looked across and saw water on the left. The routine had been repeated many times and she paused for a few seconds to look out at the familiar scene of boats in the harbor. They were beautiful boats moored safely in still water. Many minutes passed before she began again with the next story. "Popcorn" it was called and she began slowly.

Es lebte einen starrkopfigen Mann... once there was a stubborn man who believed that he possessed some secret formulas to the truth. Every night this man sat in his favorite chair before the television and ate popcorn. One night, as he gazed absently at the blinking screen, he thought angrily about all of the injustices in his life. Only God knows how many other people nightly sit in the same seat, with the same security and the same certainty that they know it all. There are oftentimes people who consume their entire lives with such thoughts, and as he deepened the certainty of his

own convictions, so also deepened the hunger in his belly, a hunger which, strangely, only popcorn could satisfy.

With each tirade he let the popcorn pan pop. And so it was that on this most significant night, as once again he heated the pan and sprinkled the kernels into the hissing oil, something entirely unexpected and incredible happened. The pot shook and vibrated. The oil crackled. The stubborn man ranted up and down in the narrow space in front of the stove, his confused thoughts driving ever faster the pace of his march. The tension rose like the pressure in the pot; the sizzle went to a scream and suddenly, like a bomb, each corn burst as one. The entire building shook. Everything for a second froze. Momentarily he was dumfounded and was driven to his senses only by the clattering crash of the pan's cover.

What did this mean he wondered? Every corn popped together. It had to mean something. Every one in precisely the same split second! What could possibly be the odds of that happening! Millions! Billions! Trillions! A chill ran down his spine.

THERE WAS A SHORT STRETCH OF TRACK, which took the train parallel to the highway and Elsa watched the cars struggling fitfully forward, making a little progress only to reach another obstacle and have to start all over. She thought about each driver steering his way through the traffic, the snags and barriers, consciously controlling his own destiny, yet making so little progress, while she sped unconsciously and effortlessly by them. She sat staring and lost a sense of time. Nearly an hour passed before the conductor prodded, "Penn Station, ma'am."

The walk through the crowd was almost a conditioned reflex, the flight down to the subway almost unnoticed. She slid the dollar bills under the window without speaking and picked up the three tokens.

Elsa always took the uptown train first and went directly to

the giant unfinished Gothic cathedral in Morningside Heights whose huge façade dominated even New York City streets. It was a monthly pilgrimage which took her across both space and time. It reminded her of her childhood home and the great Dom, which dominated that skyline.

Then, as now, she went not so much to pray as to meditate. Walking into the vastness of the cathedral was always awe inspiring for her even though she made no regular religious practice. The towering height of the nave and its massive pillars exceeded even her memory of home, and so dwarfed her feeble and meaningless form that it freed her from pride and let her listen quietly to her soul. She sat alone and tried not to think, but only to be.

An hour passed in this way before she decided to translate the next to last story. Sitting in the dark nave, illuminated by the light of stained glass windows towering above her, she began, "The Confessor."

It had become his habit in recent years to rehearse his Sunday sermon on Saturday afternoon. This was the six hundredth Saturday that he climbed into the pulpit to practice. As he began, he had no notion of what was about to happen. Always be kind to your neighbors, he started, and then suddenly he felt himself being lifted into the air. His swirling thoughts mixed with the words of his sermon. Against your neighbors... What kind of magnetism is this? Be patient and fair... Some kind of power is driving me backward... Don't hate anyone... His feet then lifted lightly from the stage and he floated helplessly upward, his gown ballooning out as he fluttered like a leaf in the wind.

The ceiling of the old church was constructed with wooden beams in the manner of a ship's hull and he finally came to rest beside a huge rafter. Er war so überrascht... So shocked and surprised was he with this development, that he became completely

still and for a quarter of an hour at least didn't dare move or even look around.

She had never read these words before and she could not help feeling that she was somehow part of them. It bothered her to be sitting in a church although she knew it was absurd. It was almost as if the words were real. She tried to drown her intuitive fear in the work. It doesn't actually say dare move, she warned herself as though practicing her remarks for Dr. Treppenwitz, it says: *bevor er sich umdrehen konnte*, before he... could... turn around, but I'm sure he meant that fear prevented it.

He finally moved. It took all of his strength to turn his body over and when he looked down he saw himself on the pulpit speaking, then walking down from the stage and into the confessional. It was as though he were struck by lightening and he began once again to mumble. *Er war ich ... He was I... I am he... what's going on? Ich bin hier... I am here... he... I am down there.*

He didn't wonder any longer about the significance of it all and hid his fears behind more senseless words. I really must make a good impression on my parishioners. No one has yet come for confession. Maybe I still have time. I've got to hurry. How foolish it was to think of confessions at a time like this. But he was possessed and drove himself hand over hand along the beam... *sich hinab zu schleppen... dragging himself downward. Meine Pfarrkinder kommen... my parishioners are coming... my parishioners are coming... he babbled*, and in this way he finally came to the confessional door. He pulled himself painfully in, feet first, and happily waited... *auf den Kopf gestellt... upside down behind the screen until the first sinner arrived.*

She felt an unquenchable urge to flee. As she turned her head, her eyes focused on the enormous stained glass rose window above the main portal, which dominated the entire front wall. Its incredible color and mathematical symmetry made it seem to be a perfect

symbol for the beauty of truth. She never looked back and walked quickly across Amsterdam Avenue folding and tying her portfolio as she hurried along. She sensed the traffic and could hear the puff and rattle of a pneumatic hammer working somewhere near her, but walked undistracted directly back to the subway station.

HER SECOND TOKEN TOOK HER down town to the village. The destination varied every month and she was careful never to repeat it, or to create any patterns which might be traced. New York was a perfect choice. Its almost endless number of banks and bank branch offices, as well as its fast and inexpensive public transportation network, made it perfect for her purposes. Sometimes she would continue uptown and into the Bronx; sometimes she would go all the way down to Brooklyn; there seemed to be no end to the possibilities; but today, she went to the Village.

“Could you tell me the exchange rate for dollars into West German Marks please?”

“Yes... it's 1 Mark 70 to the dollar.”

She new she could get a better rate, and that there may have been other ways, but this had been her system for all these years and it had never failed her. “I would like to wire 1000 Marks to a savings account in Cologne, West Germany.”

“Certainly... the D Marks will cost you... \$589.04... Will you fill this out please?”

Rheinische Sparkasse Köln... Elsa wrote the names and the numbers on the proper lines as she had done hundreds of times before; and once again, in a matter of minutes, for another month at least, it was done.

THE SINGLE DAY ROUND TRIP TO THE CITY was always exhausting and Elsa ordinarily tried to avoid the late afternoon commuter rush through Penn Station. She usually waited for the

evening train and the opportunity it gave her to sleep. It was already dark when she boarded.

There was one more short story to be translated. Its title disturbed her greatly and she sensed the depth of its sadness. "Das Sterbebett," she whispered to herself. The Deathbed, she wrote with a shaking script, but she was too tired to continue. This last and, in many ways, most significant of the stories would have to wait for another time.

IT WAS FINALLY SATURDAY and the day seemed interminably long. Although Dr. Treppenwitz tried in vain to busy himself with the pretense of preparing for his first patient visits, his mind continued to circle around and around the approaching arrival of Raphael Ortiz. He had gone over it, in his mind, a hundred times. He also knew exactly how he wanted it to work and what he wanted to say. He knew, of course, that his intention was illegal and dangerous, that he could lose his license to practice medicine, or worse, that it could unravel the murder. But what did that really matter now? His heartbeat quickened. He had to uncover the truth and Raphael Ortiz was his only opening. Everything was ready. The slender morphine vials lined up in open sight, obviously meant to be seen, to seem within grasp, yet be beyond reach, would urge Ortiz on.

Treppenwitz sat behind the waiting syringe and again, without warning, he contemplated suicide. There so often seemed to be no purpose to life. Wouldn't it be simpler, safer, even better to die, quietly, silently, painlessly? He had promised himself that he would be prepared for death and that he would take the easy way out if pain and suffering came. It was a subject that perhaps all doctors had considered, constantly faced as they were with the reality of suffering and death. He had no problem with the idea of medically assisted euthanasia or even of suicide when it would save human beings from the inevitable agony of a slow and painful end. This was the one thing he couldn't understand about people whose sense of absolute morality prevented them from according to others that which they would certainly claim for themselves.

Wasn't this pain? Wasn't this suffering? Wasn't the morphine really meant for him? His mind, as always, worked rationally. He would choose the time, if not now, then certainly sometime soon. He would have to face it eventually. Why not now? He had little family left and his few friends, like his fading future, seemed very far away.

Treppenwitz wondered if people would believe that his death had been a suicide, or if they would see it as the accidental overdose of an addicted doctor. He knew what most people would prefer to think. In his mind he projected the hypothetical extrapolation of cause and effect on into a world yet to come, a world which his own avowed intentions would consciously have destroyed. He never saw this inconsistency, nor did he understand its implications for the puzzle of his own life's purpose, which was understandably so difficult for him to comprehend.

The doorbell echoed across the house and, even though keenly anticipated, it shocked Treppenwitz. "I told him to come to the back," he said angrily to himself in a voice which was a little too loud and which also betrayed more than a small hint of apprehension. The sun was still setting and it was far too early. Why did he come to the front? It wouldn't be safe to go through with it now, he thought, half running across the living room to the foyer. But of course he had to go through with it. What other choice did he have? Treppenwitz was so mentally prepared for Ortiz that he was momentarily paralyzed by the sight of Lotte Simonescu.

"Good afternoon Dr. Treppenwitz... Dr. Treppenwitz, are you alright?"

Treppenwitz struggled to overcome the paralysis. "Ah... yes... of course. I'm sorry Mrs. Simonescu. Please forgive me. I was... just taking a nap and I must have been still a bit groggy. Please come in."

Lotte Simonescu was a tall, attractive, educated woman in her

early forties, whose elegance sprang as much from her manner of movement and tasteful dress as from any combination of physical characteristics. Her face, in fact, was rather plain, but although she wore little makeup, she had the unmistakable mark of beauty seen only in mature women and in mothers.

"I had hoped to find Elsa home," she began obviously bothered. "I should have realized it was Saturday."

She seemed bitterly disappointed, as though her entire existence hinged on him. Treppenwitz reacted predictably. "Perhaps I can help you with something?"

"Well... it's about my son, Robbie..."

Treppenwitz nodded, ironically hoping to help.

"I thought that Elsa might know something," she added, lifting her head and looking directly into Treppenwitz's troubled eyes. He felt the pressure, which this moment of terrible confrontation had caused. This was a mother searching for her lost child. The child whose life he believed he had taken. He wanted desperately to tell her, and to let this somehow atone for his sin. But how could that be?

Lotte Simonescu seemed to read his silence. "I think I should go. I didn't intend to disturb you Dr. Treppenwitz."

Treppenwitz forced himself to respond. "No... please. Perhaps I can help. Please come in."

The woman needed to talk, to tell someone, anyone, even a stranger, about her fears and about what she believed to have been her failures. Talking, even saying the same words over and over again, seemed to help. "I've been trying to find him. I've looked everywhere." Her voice was cracking and she started to cry. Her words came in rapid bunches, between sobbing gasps. "I'm afraid to stop... I'm afraid... no one cares... and that if I give up... he'll never be found."

Treppenwitz felt, at once, both an urge to console her and a

need to confess his crime. "If there's anything I can do," he said automatically in a way that he knew sounded shallow and empty.

She didn't look up as she fumbled self-consciously for something in her purse. "You must forgive me my emotions Dr. Treppenwitz, but I can't help thinking that there's some connection between Robbie's disappearance and this house. I know it's silly, but I had the feeling that Robbie might have come here and that something awful happened here."

"Why do you think that?" Treppenwitz asked calmly, having been suddenly made more alert to danger by the depth and precision of her unexpected probe. She noticed the change in his tone, but it made no significant impression.

"I don't know why, except that something was happening between Robbie and his father in those last weeks." She paused briefly as if reconsidering some thoughts and then continued. "I'm sorry to have to bother you with all of this."

"No, please. I want to help." Treppenwitz quickly responded but tried to remain careful not to appear too eager. "Tell me more," he said, feeling a strange attraction to this woman, pulled as he was by the feeling of responsibility for her sorrow.

She smiled. "You're very kind... But I really must go," she said, standing and turning slowly toward the door. "There is one thing though," she added, again looking directly into him. "Please try to understand. I must find my son."

"I do understand, Mrs. Simonescu. I only wish I could help somehow."

Treppenwitz's remark was strangely sincere and it had a deep impact on the tormented woman. "Please call me Lotte," she added, her soft smile surfacing his deepest protective instinct. How could he let her go off again, to never know the truth? Somehow he had to tell her that there was no hope, that her child was gone, that he was dead and dismembered, stuffed in a body bag and buried. Beads

of sweat began to rise on his brow and he fought to stay sane as the horror hit him.

"Have you considered... the possibility," he stumbled and paused.

"That he's dead," she quickly finished for him.

He nodded, trying not to have to look at her and said nothing.

"Yes," she went on in a rapidly rising tone, which ran uncontrollably into tears. "I have."

Treppenwitz moved toward her and instinctively touched her hand. The tears streamed across her cheeks. He put his hand on her shoulder. It was very awkward. He wanted to hold her in his arms, but didn't dare. He felt helpless and could only stare outward over her shoulder. Minutes passed before her sorrow settled into a soft sobbing. Treppenwitz, all the while, said nothing, using all of his concentration to repress the memory of the blood and of the embalming table.

Lotte finally broke the tension. "I'm alright now. Sometimes I just can't control it."

Treppenwitz was incredibly ill at ease, and had no words to say, when suddenly he was startled by the harsh rap of knuckles on the back service door.

The woman seemed relieved and took immediate advantage of the opportunity to escape. "You have a visitor, don't let me keep you any longer," she said quickly, her voice fading from the entryway. "I'll let myself out."

TREPPENWITZ DIDN'T ANSWER, dominated by his own concern to get Ortiz inside the house before she could turn the corner into the driveway and see him. As soon as the front latch clicked, Treppenwitz ran to the back door and pulled Ortiz in.

“What’s with you man?” Ortiz said, pushing Treppenwitz away. “You said the back door.”

Treppenwitz paid no attention and turned quickly away to the window as the boy’s mother walked past. The stark contrast Ortiz created by his appearance seemed to symbolize, as well as anything could, the reality of choice, and here again was a chance to change direction. He wanted to call her back and confess everything, but he couldn’t. Fear prevented it. Ortiz waited, while Treppenwitz pulled the blinds on Lotte Simonescu and once again on himself.

Ortiz had already seen the vials of morphine and he knew that there was a reason, a very good reason, why he was there that day, why this respectable doctor wanted to talk to him. He knew that there was little likelihood that anyone would risk so much unless he otherwise had much more at stake. Ortiz knew that the boy was missing and he had heard the word on the street that the boy had been murdered; he now believed that the doctor was deeply involved. What other explanation could there have been?

Both men thought they were in control. Treppenwitz picked up the morphine and brought it back to his position of authority behind the desk. Without looking up, he said, “please sit down Mr. Ortiz.” Then he turned one of the tiny vials between his thumb and forefinger. It was all thought out and carefully staged. Ortiz could see the amber fluid sliding along the inside glass surface. Treppenwitz watched Ortiz’s hungry eyes and hoped that this would loosen his tongue. “Do you remember our agreement?” Treppenwitz asked, arranging the vials in a straight line like an arrow pointing right at his target.

But Ortiz was following his own agenda. “This ain’t gonna be no bullshit lawyer session,” he exploded. “You know what I want and I know why you’re gonna give it up.”

Treppenwitz was seriously shaken by Ortiz’s outburst and the unexpected complication it created in his carefully orchestrated

scheme. His natural reaction, almost automatic, was to rely on the drugs. He took the tiny file from the desk top and scored a mark along the narrow part of the vial's neck. Ortiz held his breath, his eyes fixed on Treppenwitz's fingers. The sudden snap of breaking glass further riveted Ortiz's attention. His lips parted. The doctor carefully placed the open vial on the desktop and peeled back the wrapper from a 2cc disposable syringe. Without speaking he slid them across the desk top toward Ortiz.

Treppenwitz watched while the little junkie drew the fluid into the syringe, flicked out the air bubbles and pushed the needle expertly into a bulging vein. He closed his eyes and breathed through his mouth, closing his lips before each exhale creating a rhythmic, half hissing, push behind each phrase. "Man... that's fast... smooth man... fast..." Ortiz smiled and leaned back in his chair.

"There are five more hits here," Treppenwitz said, gathering the vials together in the palm of his hand to emphasize that he was back in control. "Tell me what you know about Robbie Simonescu."

But Ortiz, boosted now by the morphine, took his shot. "He's dead man."

Treppenwitz's heart pounded and his face showed fear. Ortiz saw it.

"He's dead!" Treppenwitz asked trying to feign surprise.

"Murdered, man," Ortiz added, looking coldly at his victim.

"Murdered, what do you know about that?" Ortiz heard it. What do you know about... that... about, that... and he knew.

"He got in somebody's way and got snuffed," Ortiz hissed menacingly, slowing down deliberately and emphasizing the somebody. "He got in... somebody's way." The words went right through Treppenwitz.

"How? Who killed him?" Treppenwitz asked, careful to stay concealed.

Ortiz motioned toward the morphine and Treppenwitz slid one of the vials toward his outstretched hand.

“All of them,” he said coldly reaching across the desk. “And this is only the beginning. We both know the truth so let’s stop bullshit-ing.” For Ortiz, this was his biggest long shot gamble. What were the odds of hitting something so sweet? Yet there it was. How fast the tables turned. Treppenwitz was trembling, felt helpless and said nothing.

Ortiz was careful not to let it slip away. “We’ll stay in touch,” he said prying the drugs from Treppenwitz’s frozen fingers.

“**Z**U EINEM HEILIGEN TRAT EIN MANN... This seems to have been cut from a book and pasted here on the first page of the diary,” Elsa began, looking up at Treppenwitz, who appeared older to her and smaller, overpowered as he was by the massive fireplace that dominated the otherwise almost empty room. She began the translation of Simonescu’s diary without waiting for a reply, knowing that her thoughts and his could never coalesce, at least not yet. “Carrying a new born baby in his hands a man approached a holy man. Was soll ich mit dem Kind machen? ...what shall I do with the child he asked, it is in misery, is malformed and doesn’t even have enough strength to die. Tote es... kill it said the holy man; kill it and then carry it for three days and nights in your arms to remind you not to beget a child when it is not your place to beget.”

Images ran wild in Treppenwitz’s memory. “Kill it... Kill it.” The words raked back the bloodied bits of Robbie Simonescu.

Elsa continued. “When the man heard this he went away confused and many people scolded the holy man for suggesting such cruelty. But isn’t it more horrible... es leben zu lassen... to let it live, he said?”

Elsa was interrupted by Treppenwitz’s erratic breathing and she looked up at him again. “This is from somewhere...” She was trying to reword her remarks, making them more matter of fact and less emotional. “It’s from Nietzsche, I think. I’ve heard it before, but I’m not sure. I think it refers to racial hygiene.”

“Nietzsche!” Treppenwitz remembered the book, which had

hidden the diary and the word was almost breathed. Elsa knew he wanted to escape into analysis and she allowed him to ease away from the pressure by saying nothing.

Treppenwitz's motionless, almost catatonic demeanor made her uneasy, she shook her head, maybe it was fatigue, she thought, from the long day and the long train ride. She looked down again at the diary. She had never read it before and the short and often staccato tone fascinated her.

"Racial hygiene?" Treppenwitz asked probing for shelter.

Elsa, caught in her own memories of the past, tightened her lips and answered. "The idea of protecting the nation's so-called racial hygiene dates back well into the last century when shortly after Darwin, and especially after Mendel, some scientists were saying that epidemic diseases, like tuberculosis, were actually good for mankind because they culled the weak from society. Some even said that the slums of the great cities where hunger, homelessness and pestilence reigned were in reality great monuments to national health, or even that the weak should not get as much to eat as the strong and so thereby be driven on toward a speedier death." Elsa paused to inhale. "At least this seems to be the sense of this first hand-written entry. It is dated January, 1940." She read the German very rapidly and only half aloud, but completely, in order to get a feeling for its meaning. "These entries are different from the letters, or even the stories," she said. "They all hold hidden meanings. I can feel it. There is more here than just words!"

"Diese Idioteninstitute..." She paused and concentrated on the half hushed words... "Institutions for the retarded and even health insurance interfere with natural selection and the improvement of the race. Das Turberkulosebazzillus als Freund der Menschheit..." She smiled, shaking her head... "The tubercular bacillus as a friend of humanity."

The words found an uncomfortable and unwelcome place in

Treppenwitz's mind, but he couldn't drive them away. Human beings are the only creatures which nurture disease and sickness he thought, keeping it alive, smoldering in institutions where it threatens to overwhelm the healthy. Could disease become so widespread as to actually smother society in sickness?

Elsa knew something troubled and plagued him. She waited briefly before beginning again. "The next entry reads, why do inferior peoples reproduce faster than more worthy groups? Where do they come from? Is it really a result of sexual sins?"

Treppenwitz wanted to wonder about what Simonescu had meant by sexual sins, he wanted time to sort it all out, but Elsa pushed him vigorously past it and almost militantly said, "the death of the sick was believed to be necessary for social and racial hygiene and the judgment that retarded, uneducated and unemployed people procreate more rapidly than do healthy educated people probably helped increase the sentiment, first for sterilization, and later, for euthanasia. Hitler said himself, in *Mein Kampf* I think, that the strong should hunt down the weak and kill them."

Treppenwitz was nervous and he couldn't make it go away. Do poor, uneducated people have more children than... If only he could concentrate hard enough, think fast enough...

Elsa's voice finally broke his spell. "Don't forget, the Nazis put a very high premium on the usefulness of citizens to the state and valued them accordingly, so that for them it made no sense to nurture the weak at the expense of the strong." She drove her words, like daggers, right through Treppenwitz, smashing his attempt to speak as though she knew, and then added in an uncharacteristically nasty tone, "don't try to figure it out; you can't." She sensed that he was justifying in his mind and she didn't want to let him do it. "Shall I go on?" she asked.

Treppenwitz's nod was silent and hesitant.

"The next entry reads..." He could see her eyes running rap-

idly over the words again and again and could feel her obvious bewilderment.

"I'm not really sure about this, but it seems to me that the idea is that the state makes its own morality. That is... that there is no justice, only reality... or actual cases, and that right is... synonymous with real."

"Might makes right," Treppenwitz offered, trying to help her and immediately sensing his inadequacy.

"Yes, I suppose you could call it that," Elsa replied and then added, "now here's what looks like part of a school mathematics book pasted on the next page. It reads, the building of a mental hospital costs 6 million Reich Marks. How many family homes for 1500 Reich Marks each could one have built?"

"Is that from an actual school book page?" Treppenwitz asked again feigning scholarly interest. "May I see it?"

"Certainly," Elsa answered passing the diary to Treppenwitz, who was only now beginning to understand how pervasive it all had been and how relevant it was even today, and for him.

Elsa's voice was soft and sure, betraying a depth of understanding that could only have come from actual experience tempered by time, contemplation, and wisdom. "This attitude applied to every aspect of society. It was wiser to pay your penny for the education of a healthy child than to waste it on a crippled or retarded one."

"Let me read you the next entry. Sterilization for the hereditary ill and mentally deficient... aber was ist Schwachsinn?... but what is mental deficiency? Unemployed, lazy, nonconformist? Und was ist Erbkrank... and what is hereditary illness, epilepsy, blindness, deafness, even clubfeet? Kapitalismus trennt die Samenleiter durch ... Capitalism cut the semen tube."

"Capitalism?"

"There's more," Elsa went on. "It's so easy to see them as only income producing goods... and to treat them only as lines in the

accounting book, to weigh their value only as so much saved..." Elsa turned the tiny page without commenting and her eye came to rest on another date: 1.6.1940 and the words, "Die judische Erfindung!" She shook her head. "The Jewish invention," she translated. "Have they also invented Christianity?"

"What does that mean?" Treppenwitz asked, but he wouldn't really listen to her response about caring for the weak and downtrodden, immersed as he was, drowning almost, in his own dilemma.

"The Jewish invention was the Fifth Commandment," Elsa answered almost automatically. She didn't know how that thought surfaced but keenly felt the mixture of pain and joy which always clouded her recollections.

"What?" Treppenwitz asked only half hearing.

"Nothing... just an old memory," she said and then regained her concentration. "Thou shalt not kill."

"Thou shalt not kill?"

"The Fifth Commandment," she repeated helping him to reorient his thoughts.

"The Nazis rejected this as a commandment of God since they said it is contrary to the laws of nature. Death alone they believed kept the group healthy. They expanded on this to condemn Christianity with its concern for the weak and suffering as another scheme in the serpentine Jewish plot to undermine civilization. Christianity was itself a Jewish plot."

"Unbelievable!" Treppenwitz said with conviction, while in the quiet tangle of his mind it didn't seem so simple. He thought he was a Christian and therefore could not say in good conscience that any life was unworthy of life. Yet was it not more humanitarian, and hence more Christian, to allow a painless death to a hopelessly suffering body? He tried to escape from the logic trap but couldn't. "Please go on Elsa," he almost pleaded.

"Ist es notwendig... is it necessary for every citizen to be use-

ful. Must one be capable of productive work to have the right to have children? Furthering careers, viele sind so Karrierebewusst... so many are so career-conscious."

Elsa looked up and added, "this created a whole new industry, you might cynically say, with wonderful prospects for research and recognition. Many jumped at the chance to advance in their jobs, fame and fortune you know. And... just imagine the potential the concentration camps offered!"

"Where was he when all of this was written?" Treppenwitz asked.

"I believe he was still at Brandenburg an der Havel near Berlin. He doesn't mention where, and rarely writes a date," Elsa said thumbing quickly through the pages. "Although it seems that this entry was written during the first year of the war. I believe that this one here gives a clue. Gehen, mit den Polen, die Asoziale unter... and so on. It's even sadly poetic. Without a law the nonconformists went down with the Poles and with a single sentence the mentally ill went under too."

"With a single... sentence... did you say?"

"Yes, it refers, most likely, to an edict issued by Hitler on the day the Germans invaded Poland. In it he ordered that the doctors begin to evaluate the condition of all incurably ill people in state institutions and begin at once the... mercy killing... of all those whose cases were deemed hopeless. It is interesting to note that this order was written by Hitler on his private stationary, was unofficial, and had no force of law." Her voice dropped and slowed. "But everyone understood. Out of consideration for the delicate international propaganda balance Hitler objected to any official euthanasia program. Everyone knew well enough however exactly what was expected... and what to do."

"So Simonescu was at a place called Brandenberg an der

Havel," Treppenwitz summed up trying to hold to the empirical plane, "which was used for mercy killing."

"Yes," Elsa answered.

"Then he must have seen it all from the beginning?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure he did... from the very beginning." Once again Elsa's eyes sank slowly down to the diary and she read on, "...braucht man nur ein kleines Zwei! In order to camouflage carbon monoxide in the hospital as oxygen one only needs add a tiny two."

Treppenwitz's puzzled look encouraged Elsa to elaborate. "One of the most nagging problems with the early euthanasia program seems to have been finding a method for quick, painless, efficient and inexpensive killing. The science of pharmacology really didn't have any answers. Here he says: Probetotung, Injectionsversuch... Langsam und traurig... Death experiments, injection experiments over and over with high doses of morphine-scopolamine. Slow and sad."

Elsa elaborated again reading Treppenwitz's silence as a question. "Massive injections of morphine, scopolamine, or luminal would kill, but often very slowly. Sometimes days passed before the victim died. The Kriminaltechnische Institute was given the task of coming up with a better answer. Carbon monoxide was then brought into the hospital wards in canisters camouflaged as oxygen and tested on the mentally ill."

"So it all began there, at Brandenburg?" Treppenwitz asked.

"It would seem so, at least for him," Elsa answered. "And he seems to have been struggling with his conscience. He says here... is there really a relationship between crime and mental deficiency? Must the children... ewig das Leid der Ahnen tragen... bear the burden of their ancestors forever?" The last words lingered on Elsa's lips and she repeated them silently to herself, must the children bear the burden of their ancestors forever.

She tried to escape from the moral pressure by returning to the task, but it was difficult because the diary seemed to show that the war was already underway before he began to struggle with his conscience and she wanted to remember it differently. Work always has the capacity to absorb the need to judge. “Portable crematory ovens were sent to Brandenburg, which was the site for the research to find the best killing method. They were necessary to dispose of what would weekly become hundreds of bodies. Many Nazis began to favor carbon monoxide because it was virtually painless and untraceable. But then he writes, symbolically many doctors preferred the needle... to regulate the gas valve... kommt ihr ärztlich nicht vor... was medically unseemly.”

“Even though it was difficult to avoid the fact that gas was more efficient this somehow shocked the sensibilities of many of the doctors, who evidently felt that, for physicians, the syringe was more appropriate... as a murder weapon. The next line reads, die Spritze gehört in die Hände des Arztes. The needle belongs in the hand of the physician... How often must we listen to this crap when everyone knows that the needle is now really a nozzle in the shower room wall?”

Elsa felt the weight of her words pressing down on Treppenwitz, but went on deliberately and perhaps even a little cruelly. “Die rote Teufel macht mit Gas die Totung tuchtig... This was evidently when someone, who was known as the red devil, he doesn’t mention his name, and who was some sort of expert from Berlin demonstrated the efficiency of gas. Special shower rooms were set up with pipes for the carbon monoxide. Many prominent people, doctors who would later lead the killing stations at places like Grafeneck and Hadamar, were present to watch and learn. This must have been the meaning behind the words, Entsetzliches Tourismus... horrible tourism.”

“He then says, die Reihe von Besuchern geht immer fort... the

flow of visitors goes on and on... supporting, spreading and driving the need for euthanasia.”

“Once gas was accepted,” Elsa added, “as the preferred method, the search for an administrative system began. It was decided, of course, that only doctors could control the killing, including the determination of who was to die. This was done by reading reports on individual patients sent from institutions all over Germany and forwarded to Berlin.”

“The next entry will give you a sense of this, it is headed, *Columbushaus*, but has no date.” Treppenwitz raised his eyebrows but said nothing. “I’m not sure what that means,” Elsa continued, “but it evidently had to do with reviewing the reports because the entry reads, *das rote Plus und die blaue Minus*... the red plus and blue minus, thank god there’s only one more day. Questionnaires were reviewed, possibly at this *Columbushaus*, and marked with a red plus for death or a blue minus for life.”

“How did they decide, I mean, what criteria were used... to determine who was to die?” Treppenwitz asked.

“There really weren’t any... medical criteria as you put it, or at least nothing was ever written down. The most important question was could the patient work, and at what. To be labeled a *nützloser Esser* was a sure death sentence.” Elsa looked up at Treppenwitz, “useless eater” she added dryly.

“There are also entries here which seem to refer to the reports themselves and to the actual questions on them. For example, this one... the most critical question, over and over... *wie weit entfernt der Bahnhof liegt*, is how far away is the railroad station. Or this one, *wie oft der Patient Besuch erhalten hat*... how often does the patient have visitors.”

The significance of the questions was not lost on Treppenwitz whose expression and silence told Elsa to add nothing. “The salary for this work is listed here, and evidently Dr. Simonescu acted on

about 500 questionnaires a month, for which he was paid 100 Reich Marks.”

“May I see that?” Treppenwitz asked moving to Elsa’s side and looking over her shoulder at the pay schedule printed neatly on the little diary page.

“How many questionnaires were there... and how careful could they have been?”

“One doctor passed judgment on over 15,000 people in less than nine months.” Elsa’s tone was icy cold.

“Incredible and they were paid like piece-work.”

“Yes... exactly.”

Treppenwitz could not think of anything to say and after a few seconds Elsa continued. “Brieflich geht die nützloser Essern zur Beseitigung... The useless eaters are mailed to their death... und postwendend geht die Kleider zuruck... and the clothes go back by return mail.

She paused again and then explained. “The massive transfer of patients presented additional problems and the busses belonging to the German post office were pressed into service. This must have been what he meant by mailing the victims to their death.”

“This program must have gone very quickly into full swing then,” Treppenwitz added. “How were they accounting for all of the transfers and deaths?”

“It’s interesting,” Elsa answered, her eyes intently tracing the diary’s tortured words. “That question is almost prophetic, he says here, how many train wrecks can there be!”

“You’re not serious!” Treppenwitz said with a sad laugh.

Elsa only smiled and read on, “mit einem Kreuz am Rucken gezeichnet...” She paused again, briefly, before summarizing the significance of the words. “No matter what time the busses arrived, the procedure was always the same, and was immediately carried out. The victims were stripped; examined; photographed and gassed,

except for those with gold teeth... they were first marked on the back with an X. Later, their bodies could be identified and the gold pulled out and preserved."

"Do you think Simonescu did this kind of work?"

"No," Elsa answered. "He was in Berlin by then. He reviewed the documents and made the decisions, but didn't do the dirty work." Her voice was suddenly hard and accusatory. "He didn't have to pry open the mouths and break out the teeth." The image of it was almost too horrible to comprehend, the dead and cold body still clinging tenaciously to its pitiable treasure, while other victims, victims not allowed to die, with vile probes tried to snatch it away. "Some people were forced to do some very horrible things in order to survive. Unbelievably perverse jobs were created by this insanity, which must have done severe damage to the minds of the poor people who had to do them. They suffered too you know, terrible psychological scars." Even though it was painful for her, she always included him among them.

"You seem to be implying that the killers suffered as much as the killed!" Treppenwitz reacted with a hint of anger, which, however, was quickly dissolved into self-pity by her answer.

"Yes, I suppose I am, as absurd as it may sound. Death comes for us all. It's only the living who suffer. Think about the Leichen-träger who day after day emptied the gas chambers, where bodies, smeared with blood, urine and feces, and twisted together by the agony of asphyxiation, had to be pulled apart."

"And for example," Elsa said, her tone rising, the pace quickening, as she pointed to some words on the tiny page, "je fatter je besser refers to the fact that fatter bodies burned faster in the ovens than skinny ones. And here... he mentions a prisoner... whose job was to collect run off fat from the fires... in a can... and then pour it over the new bodies about to be burned... all day... every day. And another, here... who ground human bones and... stirred them

together with collected ashes measuring exactly so much of the mix to be sent... in an urn, to the families of the victims.”

Treppenwitz was visibly shaken. “But I thought you said that people in Germany found out about this and that the protests led to the end of euthanasia?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Elsa said. “On August 24th 1941 Hitler ordered the so-called Euthanasie-Stopp.

“But it didn’t stop?”

“The very next entry says, *Haftlings Euthanasie*, the euthanasia of prisoners... *die Konzentrationslager von Ballastexistenzen zu befreien...* to free the concentration camps of ballast existences.”

Treppenwitz sat staring and silent.

Elsa ended with the first words in what seemed to be a new part of the diary, “*Dachau, im Wald versteckt... Dachau...* hidden in the forest and surrounded by an SS encampment... *Es liegt auf der Hand, dass es mehr als ein Gefangnis ist!* It’s obvious that this is more than just a prison!”

TREPPENWITZ HELD THE TELEPHONE TIGHTLY, forcing it against the desk top to control his trembling hand and watched dutifully as his forefinger found each hole on the old fashioned rotary dial. His pulse was racing and he could hear his heart echoing in his chest. It was very late and he expected Eichler to be asleep; there would have been no point in delay; it would only have increased the chance that someone else would notice. Treppenwitz wedged the receiver between his chin and shoulder as he instinctively fumbled to find his own pulse. It only took three or four beats for him to make an accurate estimate. Over 120, he thought, his racing heart blending with the bell far away, ringing in his ear.

“Hello.”

Eichler’s voice sounded strange and too alert to have risen from a sound sleep. “Hello... Mr. Eichler? This is Frank Treppenwitz. I’ve got to talk to you right away.” Treppenwitz was expecting the usual questions, and objections about the lateness of the hour, and was surprised when Eichler, in a low undertone, asked hoarsely, “is Elsa asleep?”

“Yes... I think so,” Treppenwitz answered, but he really wasn’t sure since he had left her less than a quarter of an hour before. “Why?”

“I want you to come over here right now and I don’t want her to see you,” Eichler said strangely.

There was a shrill, almost a squealing edge in Eichler’s voice and Treppenwitz knew now that something was wrong, dead wrong,

and he momentarily forgot the encounter he had had that afternoon with Raphael Ortiz.

“Wait until you are sure she is sleeping and then go down the fire escape at the end of the second floor corridor. Go across the back yards to the service door under the car port. The key is hidden under a shingle right next to the door, just even with the bottom hinge. There’s no alarm. I’ll put the outside spot lights out. Don’t rush it. I’ll be waiting.”

Treppenwitz heard the click at the other end and silently set his receiver back into the cradle. Once again he found himself willing to follow, thinking he was protecting himself from danger by accepting the dictates of the assertive voice. It relieved him of the personal need to decide. He only had to do what he was told and everything would automatically be alright.

He wondered if Elsa were asleep and tried to listen for sounds from below but only heard the beating of his own relentless heart. Finally he tip-toed slowly to the stairs and eased himself down on his hands along the railing until he could see the second floor hallway and the door to her room. It was closed but a thin line of light was clearly visible along the threshold. He stayed that way, face down on the stairs, and quietly watched and waited.

ELSA WAS WEARY AND WANTED TO SLEEP, but something about the diary bothered her. It was the date of one entry. It was all so uncannily familiar to her, as though it were fixed somewhere in her memory. She had to know the answer that night.

Digging to the bottom of an old trunk, where remnants of her own history were hidden, she found some big brown manila envelopes stuffed to overflowing with old papers, there were bills and receipts from another life and finally... some letters. They were Sandra letters, just like the others, neatly bound by a blue hair rib-

bon. The paper was yellowed with age and the edges of the envelopes were worn.

The diary date, 6 January, 1940, recoiled in her memory and dragged after it images of the crematoria at Brandenburg and his hideous description of the distorted agonies of death. Suddenly she saw it; it was a letter dated 6 January, 1940. The letter had been written the same day, the same exact day, that he had touched the twisted bodies.

Liebe Sandra ! Es ist sehr spät... It's very late but I don't feel tired so I thought I'd write so you wouldn't worry because I had to miss New Year's Eve. We had some work which couldn't wait, but tonight we had a wonderful, if belated, New Year's Eve party. We were all invited by Dr. Conti to his house in Berlin. The food was fabulous. We danced and drank all night. We even had those little cakes like Hilda used to make. It was wonderful.

It was wonderful, Elsa repeated to herself only now beginning to understand how it had all happened, so slowly and steadily, almost unnoticed and unseen and how it was possible to know and not to know... or to do and not to do... at the same time. It's almost as though he were two people, she thought.

TREPPENWITZ WAITED FOR SEVERAL MINUTES after Elsa's light went out. The window to the fire escape was always left unlocked and it opened almost silently. Only the rusty steel rods of the old ladder threatened to reveal his presence. Stealthily, sliding one foot in front of the other, Treppenwitz methodically made his slow but steady descent. He moved silently, half crouching, across the lawn and between the row of half-grown hemlocks to the street opposite Eichler's side lawn. He chose to cross at the point furthest from the corner and where the dying street light was least likely to expose him. He thought, oddly, that he should have worn black, not noticing to what tasks the mind can quickly turn.

The grass in Eichler's lawn had not been cut since late in the summer; it was long and wet. Treppenwitz could feel it sliding against his bare ankles as he tried to shuffle forward with only the slightest level of sound. As his bent form slipped into the deep shadow falling from the big tool shed along the edge of Eichler's abandoned vegetable garden, his eyes and thoughts were fixed on the approaching house. He didn't hear anything... until suddenly a massive hand across his mouth wrenched him backward through the open shed door.

"Don't make a sound," Eichler growled in a grating, almost feminine, falsetto half-whisper. "I thought this would be safer than shutting the spots off on the house."

Treppenwitz pulled himself free from Eichler's grasp and tried to speak softly. His emotions made his voice crack and squeak. "You... scared me... damn near to death. Did you have to do that?"

"Yea... I guess I did," Eichler retorted, "and keep your voice down before you get every dog in town howling."

The two men were face to face, not four inches apart, yet they couldn't see each other through the almost liquid darkness. Eichler could make out only the hint of Treppenwitz's head and sense, more than see, it bobbing and rocking with each animated word.

"I had to call you... something happened... I don't know how to handle it..."

"Calm down and start from the beginning," Eichler commanded. "What happened?"

"Ortiz knows! He knows about the murder! He's trying to blackmail me!"

"What!" Eichler grunted grasping Treppenwitz's throat and clawing him backwards, violently rattling the shovels and rakes bunched along the wall. "If you told him about me, you stupid bastard, I'll kill you right now..."

"No!" Treppenwitz's whisper reached as close to a scream as

was humanly possible. "I didn't... I don't think he knows anything about you."

"He knows!" Eichler hissed. "He called me on the phone... He knows."

"What!" Treppenwitz reacted spontaneously, but quickly regained control and didn't dare go on.

Eichler suddenly became very serious, almost reserved and slowed, his voice emphasizing each individual word. "Tell me, exactly, what happened, and don't, leave, anything, out."

Treppenwitz didn't want Eichler to know about his feeble attempts to uncover Simonescu's past and chose to begin the story near the end. "Ortiz came to my house... yesterday afternoon... and demanded that I give him drugs... morphine, he wanted morphine. At first I refused, but he said I'd better come across because he knew what had happened and... he's coming back."

"When?" Eichler demanded.

"I told him next Saturday, while Elsa is away... He wants more morphine... and money too I guess. But I didn't say anything about you."

Eichler slowly smiled an unseen but sinister smile and said, "well, that bastard telephoned me tonight... The voice was muffled and he didn't tell me his name but it was him all right, it must have been, and he knows how we did it. I couldn't figure it until now, but now it makes sense."

"What else did he say?"

"Nothing, only that I would hear from him soon. He wants to scare me, let me stew for a while. But he doesn't know that I know who he is." Eichler's voice betrayed a hint of laughter and Treppenwitz could feel and almost smell the grinning lips he could not see.

"How could he have known?" Treppenwitz whined already sensing what was coming next.

"He must have seen us... been there even, maybe he was with

the kid right in the house all of the time.” Eichler knew what had to be done and was irritated by pointless talk. What was important now was what to do about it and how to do it without getting caught. “We have to kill him!” he said straight out.

“Oh... for God’s sake Eichler,” Treppenwitz objected almost obligatorily, but he knew that there really wasn’t any other way.

“It’ll be easy,” Eichler began, already settling into a purposeful tone. “It’ll be easy... real easy; you’ll just O.D. him on the morphine when he comes Saturday to collect.” Eichler laughed. “He’ll collect alright! Triple the concentration, that’s all. He’ll never know what hit him.”

They both knew that it wouldn’t be that simple and that Ortiz could take hours to die. “I’ll be there to help you.”

“What if he told someone... has an accomplice or something?”

“We’re going to have to take that chance, besides he’s scum, nobody will care what happened.”

“There are a lot of problems with this plan,” Treppenwitz said already accepting the inevitable end and concerned now only with the means. “What if someone sees him come to the house?”

Eichler, his eyes bulging, angrily barked. “Nobody gives a shit about him, don’t you understand... The cops won’t even look for us; he’s shit Treppenwitz, society is better off without him.” Eichler laughed again, mockingly. “We’ll murder him for the betterment of mankind...” Eichler laughed again. “You’re a doctor, consider it a sanitation measure; it’s your duty Treppenwitz; you’re ridding the world of a disease that’s all.”

“I don’t know if I can.” Treppenwitz began to face the reality of what was about to happen and his growing inability to cope with the pressure of it resurfaced. “No, I don’t think I can,” he said with a hint of panic. He felt the sweat flood his palms and the fear rise in the pit of his stomach. The almost uncontrollable urge to run welled

up in him. Run! A voice told him, run! He tightened his fists and his eyes. Blood pounded through his veins.

"You'll do it alright. This is survival of the fittest Treppenwitz, laws of the jungle... Do you want to rot in prison just to save that low-life junkie blackmailer's ass? He's out to screw you... Get smart, nobody's ever going to know." Eichler couldn't see Treppenwitz in the darkness, but sensed that he was close and drove ahead. "I'll help you every step of the way... but he can't know I'm there; I don't want him to see me; it might scare him off. You've got to do it." Again there was no response from Treppenwitz and Eichler quickly continued. "He'll want a fix right away. It's perfect. He'll do it himself. All you have to do is mix the morphine strong enough to put him into a stupor. Once he's out of it we'll pump more morphine into him until we snuff him."

Treppenwitz said nothing and tried not to think about it... maybe because he knew that he would do it.

"Alright? It's settled then?" Eichler asked... and again a few seconds later and more loudly, "alright?"

"Alright," Treppenwitz answered flatly, "but..."

"But your ass," Eichler growled pulling, Treppenwitz so close that he could feel the damp warm words wash over his face. "No buts!"

THE TINY OFFICE AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR still served as a closet for the darkroom and a slight odor from corroded chemical bottles hung in the air, although neither Sullivan nor Mota could smell it any more. The room was full of filing cabinets and cardboard boxes, open and over stuffed drawers revealed a need to do, but a real hatred for, the paperwork.

The bulletin boards, which oddly covered all four walls, were already layered so thick with paper that the thumb tacks could barely reach through, and most visitors, repulsed by the clutter, stopped at the door and talked into the room. Anyone who had ever actually entered knew that once inside it was nearly impossible to move or even to close the door without squeezing against the wall or standing on something. It could cause nearly anyone to become instantly uncomfortable.

Detective Sullivan held and dialed the phone with one hand and fumbled with the other through the confusing array of paper that cluttered his desk.

"You got that blood work yet?" he barked, his voice betraying the early morning effect of too many cigarettes. "Well send it up here will ya."

The all night stakeout in the Dockside had reported Treppenwitz's visit there. The detective's suspicious mind was working feverishly, although toward what goal even he himself did not know. What did he want with Ortiz, Sullivan wondered; and who this Treppenwitz was anyway.

"Manny, come here. Listen to this. Treppenwitz went down

to Dockside Avenue Friday night... He went to see our friend Raphael."

"Really," Mota offered.

"Really," Sullivan mocked not hiding his annoyance.

"Something's going down," Mota offered again.

"No shit," Sullivan retorted.

Mota was more than mildly interested but couldn't quite fathom Sullivan's intense excitement. "What do you think it means Jim?"

"What do I think it means?"

Mota hated to be trapped in these word games. He could never tell if Sullivan were serious and so this time he chose to remain silent.

"It means there's some connection now doesn't it? And what's the common denominator?" Sullivan raised his eyebrows and punctuated each word with a short nod, "drugs and death!"

Mota stayed silent.

"Where the hell is that damn lab report?"

"This what you're looking for?" Mota sheepishly offered Sullivan the onion skin typewriter carbon. "One of the white coats sent it up along with a few choice comments."

"Give me that, and find young Simonescu's file. It's here somewhere."

Mota was not new to the task of digging through the waste dump of paper work in search of something, supposedly critical, which had earlier been carelessly cast aside. Sullivan had spent considerable time calling and cajoling his contacts and had learned that Treppenwitz had type O-Positive blood. Robbie Simonescu's high school medical record was also easy to obtain.

"A-Negative, pretty rare," Sullivan said, half aloud.

"Here it is."

"Bingo... A-Negative."

"What does that prove?" Mota asked.

"It proves that the blood on Treppenwitz's handkerchief wasn't his. And it also proves that it... could have been Robbie Simonescu's."

"Are you saying this could be a murder case?"

"Could be Manny my man, could be."

Mota noticed the strange look on Sullivan's face and said, "hell, I think he's involved in something too." Mota was concerned that Sullivan was becoming increasingly consumed by speculation into the disappearance of Robbie Simonescu. It didn't seem normal. "But you don't have any hard evidence... in fact you don't have any evidence at all."

"What about the handkerchief?" Sullivan retorted, although he knew that it was hardly substantial enough to prompt a full investigation, including search warrants and electronic surveillance. "There's blood all over the bastard and it ain't his own... if I could get a wiretap..."

Mota looked at Sullivan and tried to tell from his expression if he were serious or only setting up another sting. "Give it up, with what you've got there's no way in hell you'll get a wiretap."

"Damn it, Manny, I know it's him." Sullivan was obsessed. Mota noticed his quick abrupt turns almost like the movements a wild animal makes when it first finds itself confined in a small cage. "The blood type on the handkerchief was the kid's." Sullivan's voice rose almost to a pleading. "That's evidence isn't it? Who the hell else's blood was it?"

"It's not evidence," Mota returned.

"Well what the hell is it then?"

"It's a handkerchief... a handkerchief that was... illegally... taken from the suspect," Mota answered still not knowing if he were playing some sort of elaborate mind game. He couldn't help thinking that the joke was somehow on him and that the trap was about

to be sprung. Maybe he's setting me up to bring this scatter brained wiretap scheme to the captain for me to make an ass of myself, he thought.

"Don't give me that fruits of the poisonous tree shit Manny. I want this guy's ass," Sullivan railed.

"Give up the wiretap," Mota said shaking his head and exhaling an almost silent sigh. He wasn't going to be pulled into this, not this time.

"Well what if we don't use the handkerchief?"

"What else have you got?"

"Ortiz."

"Ortiz! His word isn't worth shit and you know it."

"But this bastard Treppenwitz is involved in drug trafficking up to his eyes. I can taste it; and I'm going to get him. Do you think it was just a coincidence that he came down here and bought old Simonescu's practice?" Sullivan didn't pause for an answer. "Bull shit it was," he blasted. "He knew what was going on and he bought in. Those two were probably mixed up together all along and when the old man got snuffed this Treppenwitz just shows up to take his place and everything goes on as usual. Bull shit. This is a conspiracy; these guys are all mixed up together. I know a wiretap will open this all up. It goes deeper than you think. There's something big behind this."

Mota began to realize that his partner was far from joking. He was accustomed to a little apparent, or artfully feigned, insanity when it came to Sullivan, he didn't know or much care which, and maybe it didn't matter, but this was the first sign Mota had of how much Sullivan's personal psychological involvement with the case was beginning to dominate his thinking and he decided that it might not be a bad idea to try to slide the problem up the line. "Maybe if you can convince the captain that some kind of conspiracy exists he'll buy the wire. You've got to show some type of organization to

get a wire tap, some reason why the use of the telephone was central to the commission of the alleged crime.”

Sullivan was annoyed at being lectured to by his rookie partner and snapped back spinning around in his chair. “Let me show you something asshole,” he snarled violently pulling open the top drawer of a filing cabinet which had been pushed flush against the wall. It scrapped like a razor against the bulletin board slicing and scattering the clippings and memos in its path. Amid the rustle of falling paper, Sullivan reached into the drawer and pulled a report from between piles of dog-eared folders. “This is an affidavit for a wiretap!” He threw the hundred plus page spiral bound book from such close range that Mota barely had time to protect his face. “That bastard would just tell me to write another report. We don’t even cover housebreaks any more. All we do is write these rotten reports. And do you know something? We didn’t even get that affidavit past some snot nosed assistant DA. Two months of work and it didn’t even get to the judge. Now do you think he’s going to the DA with an unusable bloody handkerchief and the word of a junkie snitch?”

Mota had never seen Sullivan this agitated and decided to let him talk it out in the hope that it would go away. He could see that there was potential for a great fall in this and didn’t want to be dragged down with it. “Tell me what you’ve got,” he asked.

“I don’t have shit, Manny, you know that.”

Mota knew he would have to tread lightly. “Well, I mean... what do you think?”

“I think that old Simonescu was pushing drugs and that this Treppenwitz is following in his footsteps. I don’t know what Lotte saw in that old fart. I’d love to get into those files. He had to keep records. If he was writing bogus prescriptions or something we’d find it fast enough.”

Mota felt the importance to Sullivan of his lost love for Lotte

Simonescu and carefully unfolded it. "Why do you think she married him?"

"Damned if I know. She was so pretty and smart. She could have had anybody she wanted. Why she wasted it all on him I'll never understand." Sullivan refilled the stained Styrofoam coffee cup and started the story he had for so long wanted to tell someone. "As soon as he showed up she changed. It was almost as if he hypnotized her or something." Sullivan looked over Mota's head as though deliberately avoiding eye contact. "She was my girl you know, senior year. But after that she went away to college, far away, and I got drafted." Sullivan laughed, "Great, huh? I always thought her old man had something to do with that... rich bastard. He worked his ass off to break us up. I know that's why she never wrote back. She always loved me, I knew that alright and when I got my associate's and made something of myself on the force I thought it would all change." Sullivan inhaled deeply, exhaled and swallowed the last of the cold coffee. "Stupid, huh? I tried to date her a couple of times... years later, but she would never go. I know her father was still stabbing me in the back. He never missed a chance. Simonescu was his friend. I know he wanted her to marry him. He was... a doctor."

Mota was overwhelmed by the pent up feeling flowing from Sullivan and sat silently listening. "I prayed for the old bastard to die. I knew if he was gone she would come back to me. Then practically from his grave the prick screwed me again. He must have begged her from his deathbed. It's the only thing that makes any sense." Sullivan was talking softly as though the words had to be kept secret. Mota saw that he needed to blame someone for his shattered dream. "Why else would she have married him? He was more than thirty years older than her for God's sake. I never thought it would last. But then the boy was born; what else could she do?"

Mota had no idea how to respond to Sullivan's outpouring, but could easily read the roots of his irrationality. He continued to try to

work his way carefully through it. "Do you think she was involved in any of this drug business?"

"No," Sullivan answered curtly and Mota began to wonder if this whole thing wasn't all contrived to fill a need for neat answers, answers intended to mask his pain and place the right blame; but there was no real way to tell. In any event he wanted to escape from the corner into which Sullivan's painful rambling had pushed him.

"What about hitting the drug stores?" Mota offered, changing the subject back again. "Maybe we could check a few out and see if there was any unusual activity or a pattern."

"We'll need an... ad-min-is-trative search warrant," Sullivan hissed in his most mocking tone, "and another bullshit affidavit for the bullshit DA... No way... We'll never get it," he sneered, slamming shut the often abused filing cabinet drawer. "Besides we can't check out all the drug stores. It could take a year and we still might not find anything. We're better off breaking into the bastard's files. Everything will be there. He had to be ready at any time to produce his records for the DEA. He's got to have them."

Mota was caught between his friendship and loyalty to Sullivan and the reality of his partner's state of mind and the danger in what he was proposing to do. Mota knew he would never turn his partner in, but he also knew that he didn't want to be involved any further. "We all take short cuts," Mota said trying not to sound condescending. "Any good cop investigating something he thinks is serious takes short cuts, but not this. Do you know what you're looking at if you get caught?" Mota was also careful not to say we.

"I'm going to get into those files," Sullivan answered deliberately and without any sign that he had heard, or even cared to hear, Mota's warning, "and I'm going to put a clip on the bastard's telephone wire or a bug in his bedroom or something... and I'm going to do it tonight."

"B and E in the nighttime," Mota said, "nice, that's a felony,

with intent to commit larceny, state pen for up to twenty years, not to mention your pen...sion." Mota's words were too matter of fact to be funny almost too absurd to be real. But sadly they both knew better.

I know about this, Mota thought... I could be an accessory before the fact. He could feel his career and his future slipping into jeopardy. "Don't tell me any more," he said firmly. "I didn't hear a thing... do you understand?"

"Relax," Sullivan said with a chuckle which immediately caught Mota's attention. "It's already done you chicken-shit bastard and you didn't know anything about it."

Sullivan held up a tiny audio cassette. "I clipped his wire just like in the movies."

"How did you manage that?" Mota asked almost instinctively.

"You don't want to know, remember. Besides what difference does it make? I've got it in and we'll see right now if it worked."

Mota was more than a little curious and fumbled around for the cassette player. "Are you sure you want to stay for this?" Sullivan taunted.

THERE WERE SIX CALLS IN ALL ON THE TAPE for the previous day, but only one was worth repeating. "Play it again from the beginning," Sullivan said sliding his chair a few inches closer to the desk top and bending forward to be sure to catch not only every word, but every inflection of tone and nuance of meaning.

"Hello... Dr. Treppenwitz?"

"Yes..."

"This is Lotte Simonescu."

"Hello... how are you?"

"Fine. I wanted to apologize for being so rude... the way I left so abruptly last Saturday. I'm sorry. I hope you'll forgive me."

"There's no need to apologize for that. I was as much at fault

for not being more hospitable. There was so much more I wanted to say and to ask you. I'm so glad you called."

"I wanted to talk about it too. It's been so hard coping with this alone."

"Shall... we meet?"

"Yes... I'd like that."

"For lunch tomorrow?"

"Yes."

“THIS WHOLE SECTION OF THE DIARY seems to be devoted to Dachau,” Elsa began. “There are long, hand printed, passages accompanied by marginal comments and notes.” Elsa adjusted her glasses and strained to make out the minute entries.

“The first date is May, 1942 and he says, I have been transferred to the Bodenständige Prüfstelle für die Hohenforschung... some sort of air force research laboratory in Munich. Dr. Rascher insists that it is no longer possible... an Affen durchführen... to continue the research with monkeys, and that human subjects must be found.”

“Dachau was very near to Munich?” Treppenwitz asked.

“Yes, only a few kilometers north of the city. That’s where most of the experiments were done.”

Treppenwitz asked with his eyes and Elsa answered. “Himmler was behind all of this. It was his dream to lead an SS based science, which would be free to pursue many pressing questions. He founded an inner circle of supporters that included several prominent industrialists who gave him the funds to conduct thousands of clandestine experiments.”

“The Germans were closing in on some really significant scientific breakthroughs,” Treppenwitz offered in a way which hinted too much at admiration and it annoyed Elsa.

“Yes... I guess so,” she said curtly while condemning him for seeking justifications and read on. “There’s something extremely important about high altitude flight. There are so many rumors about

rocket planes and new jet engines, which could mean a quick end to the war. It has to be more than just saving a few downed pilots. The English and the Americans are working on it too. There's a real urgency to all of this."

Everything seems to be running headlong out of control, Treppenwitz thought to himself, missing a few of Elsa's words; there is a kind of limit which events, when they begin to roll, give to future choices. The path narrows at every turn.

"He evidently received permission from Reichsführer Himmler on this because we are going to proceed with some experiments. The low-pressure chamber was delivered today from Berlin. We asked what the risk was for the subjects and he said that some would no doubt die, but that it was absolutely essential for the war effort."

It was absolutely essential, Treppenwitz thought, there was no chance to turn back... absolutely essential. The trap of reason had snapped shut. Treppenwitz's mind was blurred and began to swing back and forth between thoughts about his own crisis and Simonescu's story, which seemed to go on relentlessly.

"Es besteht die Behauptung... he determined today that a parachute decent from 12 or 13 Km. without any protection, or oxygen, would not kill the subject, although severe high altitude sickness occurred in every case, as did a loss of consciousness. Although the electrocardiogram showed... gewisse Unregelmässigkeiten... certain irregularities, during the decent, the curve returned to normal and the subjects seem to show no lasting ill effects."

Elsa paused, staring at the words. The interruption caught Treppenwitz's attention and for a few seconds their eyes met; he wanted to say something but she began again before he could.

"Evidently it is now necessary to determine how long a subject can live at high altitudes without oxygen or a pressure suit." Elsa paused again, shaking her head, before continuing. "I pointed out to him that since the purpose of these experiments seems to be to

determine how people die... in low temperature and low pressure conditions, it would appear that... to kill the subject would be a basic requisite of the experiments, but he didn't answer."

"He seems to have had some serious ethical reservations about this," Treppenwitz offered not noticing Elsa's emotional involvement.

"Yes," she answered, "but they never mattered in the end." Elsa spoke without lifting her eyes from the diary, and without waiting for a response, as though driven by some hidden force. "As far as these experiments are concerned, I believe they must have an overwhelmingly important purpose," she paused again before continuing, "which could not be achieved by experiments on animals, and also that the subjects participate by their own free will. As long as the free choice of the subject is respected then isn't science morally free, or even morally obligated, to push forward?"

Treppenwitz suddenly interrupted and found himself asking without knowing why. "Have you ever heard the words, *Eritis sicut Deus, Scientes bonum et malum?*"

"Yes," Elsa answered. "... It's from the Bible."

"Do you know what it means?"

"It means, and you shall be as God, knowing the difference between good and evil."

"But how can anyone ever be sure of what is right?" Treppenwitz asked with a hint of pleading in his voice.

Elsa answered almost distantly. "No one can. Only God can know the difference between good and evil."

"But what do you think?"

"In Faust the devil answers," Elsa said.

"Well what does he say?" Treppenwitz urged.

Elsa smiled for a few seconds, thinking, and then decided not to tell him. "I really don't remember," she said looking away.

Her words momentarily pushed Treppenwitz back to memo-

ries of his dream and for a few seconds he lost his grip on the present. "Does it matter that I didn't mean to do it?" he mumbled, confused and unaware of what he was saying. "Doesn't evil assume a free choice to do wrong? I didn't mean to do it..."

Elsa could see clearly that Treppenwitz needed help and she suffered for his lack of understanding. He could not yet see that the whole encompasses both the good and the evil. "You must find that answer within yourself," she said. "Look into your heart."

The words sounded strong and frighteningly familiar to Treppenwitz, but before he could respond Elsa resumed her translation. "The next section is neatly hand printed and seems to be a copy of someone else's notes, or a report of some kind about the experiments. "Die Atmung hielt bis 30 Minuten an"... Elsa's eye ran across the page for several seconds before she continued. "The subject breathed for thirty minutes. At four minutes the subject began to sweat and to shake his head. At five minutes... traten Krämpfe an, cramps came on and between six and ten minutes the breathing became faster until the subject fell unconscious. Between eleven and thirty minutes the respirations gradually slowed until they reached three breaths per minute and then stopped completely. Zwischen durch trat stärkste Cyanose auf... the subject became extremely cyanotic and foamed at the mouth. EKG's were done at five minute intervals and continued, bis zum volligen aussetzen der Herzaktion... to the complete cessation of all heart function."

"One half hour later we began the autopsy. As soon as the thoracic cavity was opened, beginnt der rechte Vorhof..." Horror filled Elsa's face and her words came faster and with greater emphasis. "The right auricle of the heart began to beat powerfully about sixty times per minute. This frightened all of us, except Rascher who laughed and stabbed the heart with his scalpel. It began to spurt blood in a thin stream for at least fifteen minutes before finally stopping. Dr. Rascher became very excited about the implications of

restarting a heart and what it might mean for reviving fighter pilots who may have been prematurely pronounced dead.”

“The heart was still beating when Rascher removed the brain by completely severing it from the spinal cord. He no sooner had it in his hand when the heart began to beat faster, spitting blood while Rascher looked for free air in the cerebral arteries. We all knew immediately that this would mean many repetitions of the experiment to try to learn how to bring a body back from the dead.”

“Do you actually mean that they were going to deliberately kill people in order to see if they could bring them back to life?”

“Yes,” Elsa answered, “that’s exactly what I mean.” She went on without waiting for a response. “Himmler was evidently very excited about this because Dr. Rascher was waving a letter giving him encouragement and authorization to continue the experiments. He said that naturally only prisoners condemned to death would be used and that if anyone was brought back from death then his sentence would be commuted to life in prison.”

“Unbelievable,” Treppenwitz said, feeling the need to record at least a verbal objection, and Elsa sensed how easily life is destroyed in misdirected attempts by science. Could this be the curse she thought, looking at the bewilderment in Treppenwitz’s eyes. She wondered why he was so fascinated by this horror and it rekindled her concern about what was really troubling him.

“We repeated these experiments hundreds of times and seventy or eighty prisoners died. Rascher was very proud of his final report. We all believe that these experiments are of the greatest importance; God help us.”

Elsa closed her eyes to regain her composure. The strain of so powerful a memory was taking an awful toll on her. She had known, of course, about the experiments, even some of the details; they had been well documented at the Nuremberg trials. But she had not known that he had been there, and that he had participated.

She was caught in the grip of this new revelation and began to read rapidly, half aloud, to herself, forgetting completely that Treppenwitz was present. Nearly a minute passed before she caught herself. "...Oh... I'm sorry Dr. Treppenwitz... this next section tells about another series of experiments, this time done to determine the effects of extreme cold on the human body."

"Please," Treppenwitz responded softly, "go on."

"The subject was put in ice water at between 2 and 12 degrees Celsius, in full pilot's uniform, and kept afloat with a life jacket. In some cases the neck and the base of the brain were held out of the water and in others they were submerged. Body temperature was monitored electrically and it was determined that when the body temperature fell to 28 degrees, death was a certainty no matter how much effort was expended to save the subject."

"Important findings born out by all of these experiments show a large increase in blood viscosity, a rapid increase in hemoglobin, in leucocytes and in blood sugar. The onset of auricular irregularity first occurs at 30 degrees..."

"...revival of the subject is directly related to the rapid warming of the body and it is important to note that the temperature continues to fall even after the subject has been removed from the cold water. Further experiments will be necessary to determine the best method for warming the frozen body. Further improvements in foam rubber suits, and..."

Treppenwitz's perception of her words faded in and out as it mixed and blended with his own thoughts, although he never understood their significance.

"...the curve of rectal temperature shows a steady gradual decline down to 35 degrees which is followed by a more rapid drop down to 30 degrees. Death occurs when..."

Science seems so cold and calculated, almost immune to question, Elsa thought as she began to see the gradual evolution of the

sterilization program, with all of its noble intentions, into a malignant euthanasia, which finally degenerated into the mass extermination of millions.

“...death results from a total irregularity of the heart which sets in at thirty degrees and finally overwhelms the muscle which has been weakened by the accompanying general increase in the viscosity of the blood as well as by the blockage of peripheral...”

“...if the neck and head are exposed, the drop in body temperature is accelerated and there is also a greater risk of edema to the ...”

Fear is a motive force, she thought to herself. Fear paralyzes a person's will to decide for himself and makes it easy to accept authority.

“...blood sugar rises rapidly with the drop in temperature and respiration is seriously impaired by a paralysis which immobilizes the ...”

It's so easy not to trust your own judgment in matters which seem of the utmost importance and are so hurried. People are more and more prone to seek authority and to follow it she concluded.

“Struggling stops after about five minutes and is followed by the onset of rigor, which seems to have a particular effect on the arm muscles that become severely folded and pressed against the body. The rigor spreads steadily and is interrupted by intermittent colic and...”

What happens when the circle insidiously closes, she thought, when the same voice of authority looses the very fear which it promises to soothe and allay?

“...of particular interest is the speed with which the stiffening comes on, and on the breathing, which becomes very hesitant. Mucus secretions increase greatly. At temperatures of 31 degrees the subject begins to lose consciousness and at 30 degrees a deep cold induced narcotic effect occurs. When the temperature reaches 28

degrees arrhythmia and sudden heart failure is inevitable and any further drop in temperature leads immediately to death.”

“The issue here is the nature of authority and its hypnotic hold on the human mind,” Elsa said suddenly aloud, interrupting Treppenwitz’s concentration. “People have to face the task of dealing with their own responsibilities,” she added, looking directly at him. “Free will of choice is the most challenging aspect of life.” Her piercing eyes made Treppenwitz uncomfortable and he struggled to escape the need to think about her words.

“I guess the Germans are conditioned to accept authority,” he offered not realizing that her remarks were meant for him.

“I don’t believe that’s an adequate explanation for these atrocities,” Elsa retorted. “I can’t believe it... not for a minute that educated Germans would follow the authority of a government whose dictates could not have been made compatible with their own rational conclusions.”

“They must have been compatible then,” Treppenwitz added, “or they made their rational conclusions compatible with the dictates.”

“Yes...” Elsa said reflectively, beginning to unravel the enigma of how thinking people can accept themselves as murderers. “How can they avoid knowing that they are murderers?” Her words drove deep into Treppenwitz’s soul. Or maybe it’s because they think too much, she added to herself.

“WHY DON’T WE HAVE A COCKTAIL before we order?” Treppenwitz said, looking for an opening which would lessen the tension.

“I don’t think I should.” Lotte answered slowly shaking her head in a way which put Treppenwitz a little more at ease. “They’re so strong for so early in the day.” There was something about her he instantly liked, something genuine and he felt as though he had known her for a long time. “But white wine would be alright.”

Treppenwitz, feeling very self conscious, fumbled with the menu. “I’m not sure what we’ll get here,” he said. “Do you want to order now?”

Lotte wasn’t listening, absorbed as she was in structuring her own thoughts and only the last few words jogged her to attention. “Oh... I’m sorry,” she said sinking her face into the palms of her hands, exhaling through her nose and then looking up with a self-conscious smile.

“The house Chablis?” he helped.

“Yes... please,” she answered, as an introductory remark, already pushing ahead toward her own agenda. She reached out almost automatically and touched his hand as she spoke, sending a chill through his body. “Dr. Treppenwitz, I appreciate what you are trying to do.”

Treppenwitz’s response was strangely defensive. “Please... call me Frank.”

“Yes... Frank.” She smiled, sliding her hand back across the tiny candle-lit table.

Treppenwitz watched the flickering shadows run along her arm. "Something... like," he stumbled, "well... you know what they say about two heads... besides, I feel involved, a little anyway, having bought the house and all. So I really want to help... if I can that is." Treppenwitz was relieved when the waiter reappeared.

"A carafe of Chablis?" he asked hesitantly, looking in Lotte's direction, although carefully avoiding eye contact.

"A glass will be enough for me," she answered smiling and looking up at the waiter.

"Two glasses of Chablis... We'll order later," Treppenwitz said in a distinctly more assertive voice.

THE WAITER NODDED AND DISAPPEARED without speaking; silence fell across the table. Lotte Simonescu began to read the big leather bound menu, which she propped like a book on the table. Treppenwitz looked furtively at her face, which was veiled below the eyes by the menu. His darting glances gradually slowed and finally lingered. She's very beautiful, he thought. The flickering candle flame made a bewitching, almost medieval, light which cast her, in his imagination, as his own mysterious and dreamlike Scheherazade. Her face was so soft in that light, and so feminine, that for an instant at least she really was Scheherazade and he wondered what magic tales she could tell; the air seemed alive with energy. If only it could have been another time and another place, he thought. But this... this could never be. Even this fleeting and clandestine thought was taboo and threatened to raise ghosts kept carefully hidden. She's his mother! He screamed to himself... his mother for god's sake! He fought back the attraction she had for him and spoke. "I think there's a relationship between your husband's death and your son's disappearance."

"I know there was," she answered with quiet conviction.

Treppenwitz was happy to follow this new track, which prom-

ised to lead him safely away from these unwelcome urges and so he continued. "What was it, do you suppose?"

"I really don't know for sure," she answered. "I didn't know all there was about his deep past. There was something wrong there and it was something he didn't like to talk about."

Treppenwitz carefully tip-toed ahead. "You did know about... the Nazis... the concentration camps?"

"Yes... as I said, there was something in his past which pained him very much." She paused, interrupting her thought while the waiter placed the two glasses on the table and for the few seconds it took to make a toast to the future and to sip the wine. "The answer was in the house somewhere. I know it was," she finished.

"Was it a diary?"

"There was a diary. Robbie told me about it, that it held accounts of his father's life. I'm sure Robbie wanted to find it and it could have been the reason he may have gone to the house that night, but I don't think that was all."

"Did you ever read the diary?" Treppenwitz asked.

"No," she answered shaking her head somewhat self-consciously, embarrassed at the apparent lack of intimacy which had existed between her and her husband. "He didn't share those kinds of things with me," she half apologized, although there was no need on his account.

"What do you think was in the diary?" Treppenwitz probed.

"Details... perhaps some clues to help explain his death. Robbie was sure it was a murder. He had a romantic notion that his father knew something, or could identify some important former Nazi war criminal or something, and was killed because of what he knew. In any event we both sensed that something was very wrong."

"Why?" Treppenwitz asked turning his head inquisitively.

"My husband had premonitions of his own death. He became something of a recluse in the last few months. He meditated a lot."

"Did he discuss that with you?"

"Do you mean the meditation?"

"Yes."

"No... I did know that he would immerse himself in water, sometimes in the bath tub and sometimes in the sea. He said it helped him. But how it helped him, I don't know."

"Did he ever mention any names that you could connect to this?"

"No."

"What about your neighbor, Mr. Eichler... the mortician... did he ever talk about him?"

"No... In fact he never even spoke to Eichler. I thought that was strange since he lived next door to us. Even when they passed on the street neither nodded."

"Why do you suppose that was so?"

"I really don't know. I remember that my husband was upset when Eichler opened a funeral parlor across from his office. He thought that it might affect his practice."

Treppenwitz frowned and Lotte nodded. "It was silly, I know, but that's what he said. Anyway he never liked Eichler."

"How long ago did Eichler arrive?"

"Oh... only a couple of years ago, shortly before the doctor's death."

Treppenwitz thought it was odd that she referred to her husband so formally as the doctor or as Dr. Simonescu but never by his first name. "You said that you thought that the diary wasn't the only thing Robbie was searching for."

"There was a film... a film made during the war, especially for Hitler or Himmler or someone important like that. It was shot at Dachau, I think... of some of his secret work there. It was sensitive. I know it showed something."

Treppenwitz was suddenly intensely interested and pursued

it aggressively. "What kind of a film was it?" he asked quickly, "16mm...35mm...How long was it?"

"I don't know...16mm I think...about thirty minutes long, no less than that. Have you seen it? I think it's hidden somewhere in the house."

"No... but that much film would fill a can at least the size of this dinner plate and would be pretty hard to hide."

"I can't help thinking that that film holds the secret, and if we can find it we'll find Robbie."

"Well I'll certainly look for it... Perhaps Elsa can help," Treppenwitz offered already more than mildly intrigued. For the next few seconds his mind was absorbed with thoughts of the film and he was somewhat startled by the waiter's reappearance. "Shall we order now?" he asked trying to fill the awkward void he sensed he had allowed to emerge. He didn't notice Lotte's absent look.

"Yes... I think the chef's salad will be enough for me," she answered closing the menu and laying it neatly at the edge of the table.

THERE WAS MORE ON HER MIND, much more, and it was deadening her appetite. She couldn't explain why she was about to turn to Treppenwitz for help, although she had asked herself how she could be so open with a man she hardly knew. Perhaps it was because he was a doctor that she thought she could trust him. She was sure at least that she had correctly sensed that his concern was real and she was, for some reason, convinced that he would not let her down.

"There is something else which is very pressing," she said trying to hold to the most dignified plane, although the tears welling in her eyes were already visible, "that... I need your help with."

"Two chef's salads," Treppenwitz said hurriedly ushering the waiter away before turning quickly back toward Lotte whose blur-

ring eyes could no longer focus. "What is it?" he asked, leaning forward. "Are you all right?"

"I really don't know if I should be telling you this... but I feel as though I must do something," Lotte began, carefully trying to ease it out under control. Treppenwitz could feel the rising tension. He sat silently and listened.

Lotte slowly looked up as if about to reconsider and then continued. "Sarah... she's a wonderful girl... she's Robbie's girl. Well, it seems that... Oh God... she's pregnant... and she wants an abortion."

Treppenwitz said nothing, drawing Lotte on. "I know that doesn't seem so important to you... at least not yet, but please try to understand how important it is to me." The words came quickly and were charged with an emotion which was immensely magnified by the belief, which she couldn't shake, that her son was dead and that she would never see him again. "It's Robbie's child. She doesn't want it. She wants an abortion... Oh God she wants an abortion..." Lotte paused briefly and looked up at Treppenwitz. Her eyes were filled with tears. "She's already been to one of those clinics, the free one on South Street I think. I know she'll go through with it. It's Robbie's baby... it's my grandchild. It may be all I have left of him. I can't let her do it!"

"How old is she?" Treppenwitz asked mustering his best professional matter of fact tone, although he too was deeply affected.

"Sixteen," she answered, Treppenwitz's manufactured attitude calming her considerably.

"How far along is she?"

"Only a few weeks." Again Lotte began to visibly lose control. "She'll go to an abortion mill... she'll go through with it; I know she will unless I can stop her..."

"Take it easy," Treppenwitz said, this time thankful for the waiter's return and the few seconds of silence it allowed him to sort

this out. The thought of an abortion, this particular abortion, was beginning to dig its awful significance into his mind as well. "Have you considered talking to her parents?" he offered weakly.

Lotte exhaled audibly through her nose and spoke in short choppy sentences that were close to out of control. "They agree with her... they're encouraging it... Oh God, will you talk to her? You're a doctor; she'll listen to you... You can convince her."

Treppenwitz too felt an unexplainable fear and an unquenchable need to save this unborn child and with it at least a part of its slain father. It was the first time he had ever thought of it that way... as an unborn human being. It was so much easier, cleaner and more clinical, to think about an embryo or a fetus, but he couldn't, not this time, perhaps not ever again. He could feel the unmistakable link that this child had to its murdered father; it was an irrevocable link to the past, to the future, and to all mankind.

"But I don't know what I can do... How can I help?"

"Dr Simonescu volunteered one day a month at the South Street Clinic, and I thought... well, I know you agreed to continue that..."

Treppenwitz listened quietly, already way ahead of her and for reasons not entirely clear, even to him, was prepared to pursue her plan. "... and you want me to see her at South Street?"

"Yes... I'll bring her Wednesday morning while you're covering the clinic... you'll be the only doctor on duty and I'll bring her then."

Treppenwitz smiled thinking of how much she knew about him, his schedule and even his state of mind. There was an intimacy to it which brought her closer to him and he liked that.

"If I seem bold it's because I have no where else to turn," she said sincerely.

"Bring her Wednesday... and I'll try," Treppenwitz answered.

COLD LURKED MENACINGLY ALONG THE EDGES of the big drafty sitting room and it drove Dr. Treppenwitz to light the fireplace for the first time since he had lived in the house. He welcomed the warmth it gave and sat silently in its scarlet glow waiting for Elsa to return from the city. The flickering light from the hearth pranced in the shadows across the walls and curtains, holding at bay the cold and dark of the onrushing night. Treppenwitz stared into the dancing flames. Their hypnotic hold on his mind helped to soothe the painful memory of Ortiz and of what he had just done. It sent its shimmering reflection against the glass syringe, once filled and waiting, now bent and discarded. In his mind, he saw Eichler waiting too and watching through a narrow crack in the closet door. It was strange, he thought, how clearly he could remember the past when he had no hint of the future, and the opportunity to know the now was buried by so much remembering and anticipating.

Everything went exactly as Eichler had said it would. Ortiz couldn't resist the sight of the bulging syringe. He couldn't take his eyes away from it as he scrambled to pull off his belt and wrap it around his arm to puff up the broken veins. The strong concentration of morphine hit him like a hammer; he was unconscious before he dropped; but... he was far from dead.

The violent incandescence of the fire slowly consumed the sacrificial slabs of wood, which fell away from their charred black bodies in flakes of white ash, then gathering below the grate like so many fallen leaves. Here and there the pulsing red of a still living ember erupted in a flash of brilliance, releasing a wisp of smoke

that swirled upward and disappeared through the chimney. He sat remembering, motionless and silent.

"Get a needle into a vein," Eichler commanded, the thought sending a wave of fear through Treppenwitz's body as in his mind he saw Eichler's face and heard the file scratch into another vial of morphine. He remembered himself shaking then, so violently that all of his conscious effort could not direct the tip of the needle toward its target. He saw Eichler look up and snarl. "You're worth shit, you know that? Get me a pillow and I'll smother the bastard."

Treppenwitz pressed his cold sweaty hands against his forehead, which was hot and flush from the fire, in stark contrast to the cold creeping toward him from the room's dark corners. He could feel its icy fingers wrap around the back of his head and begin to inch toward his eyes with each dying spark. He knew that when the fire faded, and finally ceased, the cold would close over him.

His life seemed so much like the fire, consuming itself in an insatiable dash toward its own destruction. The promise of life lives only in the uncertainty and chaos of the flames; but that same blaze inevitably burns down to the icy stillness of death. He fought to find an island of sanity and ordered safety in the otherwise unordered and insane, but the destructive end of the effort alone exceeded and overwhelmed any positive outcome it might have created. "Everything I attempt inevitably does more harm than good," he said softly to himself, finding it increasingly difficult to separate the now from the then, the present from the past. Does anything overcome the flames?

"No!" Treppenwitz's memory attacked again, "they'll know... they'll do an autopsy for sure and they'll know!"

"Then get that morphine into him," Eichler retorted.

Treppenwitz saw himself slip the shaking needle through the thin skin on the back of Ortiz's boney hand. "I did it... I... it's in!" he blurted again aloud. Then he remembered that it was Eichler

who took the dripping syringe and plunged Ortiz into a deep coma; but he still refused to die.

Eichler became increasingly nervous as the minutes passed. He paced up and down as Treppenwitz monitored the shallow respirations. "Give the bastard another jolt," he growled.

"We can't," Treppenwitz remembered pleading. "It'll show up in his system. They'll know that no one could have possibly given himself that much morphine. He's had enough to kill a horse."

"Well why isn't he dead then?" Eichler demanded as though Treppenwitz were responsible for the little junkie's tenacious hold on life.

"I don't know," Treppenwitz responded.

"Well we sure as hell can't wait forever. We'll take him down to the Dockside and dump him in the river. That way he'll drown. That'll wash."

"What if somebody pulls him out before he does, or he floats or something and doesn't die?"

"Alright for God's sake," Eichler said, annoyed and impatient to have it over. "I'll drown him right here... in a pail of water. Then we'll dump him in the river."

It was at that moment that Ortiz exploded into a violent seizure, his body arching upward and then falling limp. "One down and one to go!" Eichler snickered looking at Treppenwitz whose reaction was immediate.

"One to go?"

"You were right... when you said it was more than just him. I should have known that that puss bag couldn't pull something like this off alone."

Treppenwitz was fast losing control. Would it ever be over? Didn't one thing lead inevitably to another in an endless chain descending into destruction? Was there any way out of this? What could he do when everything he tried only made things worse?

"Russo!" Eichler howled, his eyes gleaming with the glow of the fire which mixed in Treppenwitz's memory. "That bastard Russo is behind this. Ortiz is nothing; it's Russo... We've got to snuff him too!" The rasping tone in Eichler's voice hacked into the frightened doctor like a dull axe.

"No!" Treppenwitz screamed. His words were so strung out with panic that the memory of it alone left him, the enigma he was, shivering like a frozen rabbit, while drenched in sweat from the heat of the fire. "That's it... no more... I'm through... no more. I won't... oh God, no more." His voice was suddenly frail and tired.

The sense of surrender in Treppenwitz's voice and the weakness it betrayed alarmed Eichler, who for the first time began to believe that it could all unravel. "Are you crazy?" he growled. "Get a hold of yourself."

Treppenwitz was rendered so nearly helpless by the horrible recollection that he hardly moved an inch in almost an hour. He could feel the numbness stretching out from his elbows begin to engulf his arms and hands. He felt paralyzed. All of his effort couldn't erase the image of Eichler's face shimmering in the hungry flames. He heard himself say, "I won't do any more... It's murder... We're murderers... I want to give myself up." Eichler looked at him quietly smiling with the sly and patient smile of the spider and said sweetly, "don't worry... I'll take care of everything. You just relax."

THE CRACKLE OF SHRINKING FIBERS mixed with the faint whistle of steaming moisture escaping from deep within the burning wood, the seductive sound of it easing Treppenwitz back from the past. Like a spider he thought to himself, when suddenly he remembered the first of Simonescu's eerie stories. The image of it had buried itself deep within his psyche, an exact imprint, hidden for a time, only to reappear so vividly that it was as though he were living it all over again. "The spider-shark smiled!" he said under

his breath to himself as his mind dredged forth the drowning man in Simonescu's story, overwhelmed by an angry sea, struggling to swim, to survive, to reach the safety of the shore... and he saw the spider-shark there... watching, waiting, smiling. The words poured out of him, just as Simonescu had written them, and Elsa had translated them.

Treppenwitz was so completely occupied with self-pity and the story's awful significance that he didn't hear Elsa enter. She walked slowly toward him. He sat so still and erect in the soft easy chair that he looked almost absurd. His hands, palms down, rigidly on his knees, and his eyes, glazed by the smoke escaping into the room, reminded her of the statues of ancient pharaohs who seemed more asleep than the stone out of which they were carved. She thought it prudent to stop and speak from a distance fearing that her sudden appearance might startle him. "Dr. Treppenwitz... I'm home. I'm going to make some coffee... Would you like some?"

"Do you believe in God?" Treppenwitz droned without looking up from the fire and catching Elsa by complete surprise, although she was coming to expect the unexpected from him and knew that something was very wrong.

"In God ... I suppose I do," she said trying to catch a clue to the real meaning behind the question. "But... why are you concerned?"

"I can't help it," he said a little too quickly. "How else can you measure right from wrong and know that you are not doing evil?"

"There's so much smoke in here," she said playing for a little time by opening the mesh screen and pushing some pieces of smoldering wood to the back of the firebox. Finally she stepped slowly around the chair and looked directly at him. She saw his reddened and watery eyes and answered in a quiet tone. "Surely those are not God's questions."

"Well what are God's questions then?" Treppenwitz shot back. "Don't you see evil existing in the world... even rampant?"

"Do you mean a force of evil?" Elsa asked, struggling to comprehend the strange conversation, "... like a devil... actively doing evil?" she added, wrinkling her brow.

"Yes," Treppenwitz said.

"No..." she answered with conviction. "I don't see that. I see only an illusion of evil in the human mind... and the determination to use it."

"Do you think God allows evil to exist?" Treppenwitz said somewhat angrily. Elsa noticed it but had no way of knowing what was really on his mind.

"God plays no part in this," she insisted.

"But God is God... God is all powerful... God must play a part," Treppenwitz insisted.

"God is infinite and contains all possibilities," Elsa answered, "...both the good and the bad. Man cannot diminish what God can be. God cannot be only good... and so words like good and evil have no meaning."

"But they do have meaning... They have meaning for me."

"Yes... perhaps they do."

"And I see evil in the world Elsa and I'm afraid... I'm afraid that I am evil."

"When you say that, you imply that you can know what is good and what is evil. But you cannot know that because there is no good and there is no evil. It's only you struggling to know."

"But I don't understand any of that," Treppenwitz complained with true perplexity in his voice.

"No," Elsa answered, "because you look... out at the universe. You measure it and see it as something apart from yourself, just the way you see God. The truth cannot be... figured out like that. It is inside of you. You must learn to feel it. It is a quality of the heart."

Elsa tried to speak sincerely, even though the concepts were not clear, even to her, and she sensed that he could not comprehend her. There was something almost absurd about trying.

“Surely there is right and wrong,” Treppenwitz began again.

Elsa answered. “When you find what you think is right you will find, with it, its opposite to condemn.” She paused briefly as though reaching exhaustion, then added, “the more good you find, the more evil there will be to slay. Unless,” she finished, “you could detach yourself from the world you are in.” Sadly, the riddle of her words only confused him further.

THE CONFRONTATION RAGED on the sidewalk in front of the South Street Community Health Center. Anti-abortion activists, almost daily, tried to interrupt the work of the small family planning service, which was available there for poor women, and they were regularly confronted by militants from the other side. Dr. Treppenwitz sat in the examining room and listened to the angry, faceless, voices that penetrated the thin partition. He too was driven to settle this issue of abortion, which was so muddled in his mind that it caused his impending visit with Lotte and the young pregnant friend of Robbie Simonescu to frighten him. He had tried to prepare for it, but still had no notion of what he would say or indeed even what he actually believed. It should have seemed insignificant, considering all that had recently happened to plague his life. But beneath it he knew that it was somehow all interwoven like a rich and tragic fabric and that he was engulfed by it and could probably never escape it.

He listened to the penetrating high pitched woman's voice. "You," she paused pointing her finger, "have no right to tell me what to do with my body. You want to push women's rights back into the middle ages."

"But you don't mind deciding what to do with your baby's body do you?" another, deeper, slower voice returned. "You're going to be a murderer."

"You dare to mention murder? If you outlaw abortion women will be the murdered ones, butchered in back rooms by illegal abortions," the wail went on. "We'll never go back to that."

“Murderer...” the same voice said again and another added, “you’re nothing but baby killers.”

“A fetus is not a human being until it can sustain life on its own. As long as it is part of the mother’s body... it isn’t a human being.” A rising impatience became evident in the voice. “Oh, why am I bothering... just get the police and get them out of here.”

“Why did you call her a mother then?” the deeper voice asked relentlessly and then without waiting howled its own reply, “because you know damn well that it is a baby right from the point of conception... All you selfish bitches think about is yourselves. You talk about woman’s rights but it’s really only a matter of your own convenience. Try thinking about that infant that you want to kill. Why don’t you people ever think of that?”

The other voice broke through forcefully. “You’re the ones who don’t care about the children. I care about the children... I don’t want to subject them to a tragic life of suffering.” The voice rose even higher to overcome any further interruption. “I am so sick of you self-righteous ass-holes telling me what I should believe or trying to make me believe what you believe.” The words began coming in almost military cadence. “I don’t, give a shit, what you do. You don’t have to have an abortion if you don’t want one. This is an issue of women’s rights and freedom of choice.”

“That’s bullshit! What about the baby’s rights?” another voice asked.

“There is no baby. Don’t you understand? There is only a fetus attached to the women’s body. It can’t sustain its own life. It’s totally dependant on the woman. It’s part of the woman. You can’t murder something which isn’t capable of living.”

Treppenwitz, who was himself desperately confused and whose mind was continuously harassed by horrible memories, suddenly appeared at the waiting room door. “Please Doctor,” a nurse cau-

tioned. "I've already called the police. These people show up every few days to cause trouble. If you'll just wait in your office..."

"But I want to talk to that woman," he protested.

"But what ever for? It'll only encourage them."

"To both of them... the ones whose voices I've heard... Ask them to come in," he said turning back into the examining room.

"It's not a good idea," the nurse insisted.

"Please," Treppenwitz said in a forceful, supervisory tone.

The nurse tightened her lips, but turned dutifully toward the demonstrator who had heard the request and had already stepped aggressively forward. "Would you mind answering a few questions for the doctor?" she asked obviously displeased.

The woman smiled and walked with a firm and confident stride past the nurse into the examining room, followed closely by the other younger woman.

Dr. Treppenwitz, whose reliance on reason usually yielded what he always took to be simple satisfying conclusions to complex problems thought he had found a way to overcome his own indecision. Questioning these women would give him the opportunity to test his logic and to prepare his remarks before Lotte arrived with the girl.

"Does age have a bearing on the sanctity of life?" he began professorially.

"What do you mean?" the older woman asked.

"Can you say that a one year-old child's life is more valuable than that of a ten year-old?"

"No," she answered, and the younger woman nodded agreement.

"And what about a ninety year-old's life, is it less valuable than the child's?"

"It doesn't matter," said one. "No, it can't matter," said the other. "It's life itself which is important." They both agreed.

"Then our ethical standards ought to apply to all ages of life?"

"Yes... of course," the older woman answered.

"... and they should be consistent for people of all ages?"

"Yes."

"Then, morally speaking, the events which occur as life begins and those that occur as life ends should also be consistent?" Treppenwitz loved complex rational argument. He almost reveled in it, especially when it began to take on a life of its own; he could hypnotize himself with it. "In other words, if we can agree on when life ends then the same principles must apply to the determination of when life begins. Would you agree?" he asked the women, whose perceptions were different, but no less profound than his. They both nodded hesitantly and in a way intended more to show comprehension than to indicate any conscious agreement with his conclusions.

"Does death occur when a person can no longer sustain life independently and needs an artificial life support system?" he asked academically and without eye contact. "Consider a person who needs a machine to breathe with. If we shut off the machine and he suffocates would you call that murder?"

"Yes, of course," the younger woman said, but Treppenwitz hardly heard her, absorbed as he was in the emerging syllogisms.

"Then a fetus in the woman's womb, which relies on its mother to sustain its life, is it not equally as alive, with no less of a right to live, simply because its life is supported?"

The older woman smiled seeing the conclusion to be consistent with her own emotional convictions. "Well then how can you be part of this?" she asked pointedly. "You've just admitted that abortion is wrong."

"Yes... if we accept that a human life cannot be arbitrarily ended simply because it cannot sustain itself. It would seem that the

argument that because a woman sustains the life of a fetus it is for that reason alone not a human life is spurious.”

“Well in that case life begins at conception when we have living tissue and there can be no abortion,” the older woman added firmly.

“I’m not so sure,” Treppenwitz said wrinkling his brow. “Do we consider a person to be alive until all living body tissue has perished?”

“Obviously not,” the younger woman answered assertively.

Treppenwitz went on entirely without hearing, caught again in his web of logic. “There is a point after a person is legally, and morally, declared to be dead when tissues, even whole organs, are very much alive.” He looked up at the woman widening his eyes and lifting his brows. “Would you stop all organ transplants, for example, because you would have human life go on until all tissue is dead?”

“No!” the younger woman said with a hint of excitement, sensing a shift in the argument, “of course not.”

“Then there is a point at the end of human life when the body is in its parts alive, but is not, morally speaking, a living human being?”

“Yes... yes, of course there is,” the same woman added, while the other, her anger growing, sat in almost disbelief.

Treppenwitz rambled on, calmed by the seeming certainty of reason. “Then this same principle should also apply at the beginning of life as well. Conception cannot be the start of human life any more than a living heart alone is a whole human being. Human life, for which moral principles apply, begins after conception, but before the baby develops the ability to sustain its own life. Just as moral life doesn’t end until well after the point where unaided survival has been passed, but certainly ends before the death of all tissue.”

“Then you would force a woman to carry to term a child she

didn't want, against her will?" the younger woman said almost incensed.

"Yes, at some point I guess I would," Treppenwitz said a bit hesitantly, but yet seeming satisfied with his logic as well as with his conclusion. "As I see it... there is a transition taking place as the woman's tissue is gradually transformed into an independent human being. Until this transition is complete the woman is free to abort the tissue because, morally it is part of her own body. But gradually a human being is created and once this occurs the woman is, at that point, a mother, and is ethically, and should also be legally, bound to bear that child."

"Even against her will?" the younger woman asked in a resentful tone, "even when it threatens her life and her happiness?"

"Yes, don't you see, it is no longer her choice to make. It is a separate human being to whom she is morally obligated."

Both women were disappointed and visibly angered, and one of them asked what both were thinking. "Exactly when is that magical point reached... the one where the woman's tissue becomes a baby?"

"I don't know, but it's a question which must be answered," Treppenwitz said without noticing the utter failure of his argument to make even the smallest imprint on either woman.

"And who makes up these ethical rules that women must live... and die... by?" the younger woman sneered.

"People do."

"You mean, men do." The emphasis was hard and accusatory. "What gives you the right?"

"No... you do and I do; society does." Treppenwitz stumbled.

"Then you and I and society as you put it are obligated to nurture and to protect that child, which you say the woman must bring unwanted and unloved into the world and to protect the woman whose life you might destroy."

Treppenwitz turned toward her and tried to smile but the older woman reacted before seeing him and said mechanically, “obviously we are lacking enough social services to deal with the problems that can be created by these births, the population increases and so on, but that’s a different...”

“No it’s not,” the younger woman shot back past Treppenwitz to her adversary. “You people are so damn moral when it suits you, when it’s convenient. It’s not right to tell the mother she must have the baby and then allow it to die from malnutrition or to grow up to be a drug addict or a criminal. Society has a right to protect itself from these kinds of tragedies and women have the right to avoid being the victims.”

“But that’s a whole different question,” Treppenwitz protested, his sense of polemic purity violated; but no one heard him.

The older woman stood up indignantly. “You’re no better than fascist pigs,” she said with growing rage, her finger pointing menacingly across the desk, “when you would kill babies to improve the quality of your own life. That’s what the Nazis did; they killed babies, for all the right reasons. Just like you. This is no different from the Holocaust and you’re no better than a Nazi pig.”

Treppenwitz had heard the Holocaust analogy before, but he had never before paid much attention to it. This time it seemed more real. There was something unmistakably missing in his sterile logic. He had failed to convince the women and in the final analysis he had even failed to convince himself.

THE ANGRY VOICES ROSE AGAIN, as loud and as violent as before and they blended into an incomprehensible din when he covered his ears and closed his eyes. He hardly noticed the arrival of the police or the presence among them of Detective Sullivan, who had heard the radio call and was now taking every opportunity to watch Treppenwitz. Silly as it may have been, Sullivan was convinced that

Treppenwitz and Lotte Simonescu were lovers and he was obsessed by the need to stop it; he couldn't help himself. He was driven on by jealousy and the fear that he was losing her once again, and once again, just as before, he was losing her to a silver-spooned son of privilege. It was insane but that didn't matter. He was determined that this time it wouldn't happen.

The police had become conditioned to the anti-abortion confrontations and proceeded machine-like with the almost routine removal of the limp and passive protesters. Some had already chained and padlocked themselves to doorknobs and desk legs and even the rasping screech of hacksaw blades didn't penetrate Treppenwitz's stupor. Something had kindled in his mind the image of Eichler's face and he thought he was finally beginning to see some of the pieces of the puzzle.

He fumbled nervously with the telephone. The number came from nowhere, as if by magic, and she answered almost before it had time to ring. Sullivan, still unseen, slipped closer and listened.

"Lotte," he said in a quick agitated tone, and Sullivan's eyes widened, "this is Frank Treppenwitz... I'm glad I caught you. There's trouble... demonstrations here at the clinic. It's not a good time to bring her."

"Maybe this afternoon then?"

"No... not here, not yet... I... don't feel ready to do it yet."

After a few seconds of silence Treppenwitz added, "can you meet me... alone... right now? I need to talk to you."

"Of course... shall I come down there?" Lotte asked.

"No... Meet me at the Public Library."

"The library?"

"Yes... I'll explain later."

When Treppenwitz looked up, Sullivan was already gone.

WHEN LOTTE ARRIVED at the second floor reading room, she found Dr. Treppenwitz already surrounded by books and papers. Sullivan, concealed behind a carrel in the stacks, was quietly watching from between the books. Several journals of obstetrics and gynecology were piled near Treppenwitz, with folded scrap paper flags tucked between relevant pages, and Lotte could read the title, Human Embryology, on the binding of a big opened text set face down to hold its special place.

She stood quietly for a few seconds before he saw her and she watched him feverishly taking notes and then checking indexes and bibliographies. His glasses made him look older and more distinguished, and he reminded her a little of her late husband. She could tell that he was very good at study. Years of academic training and conditioning had prepared him to travel this route to the resolution of all problems. He was convinced that these scholarly monographs and articles contained the answers he sought, and that careful research would lead unerringly to the truth.

“What are you doing?” she asked finally, although she was sorry to have had to disturb him.

He looked up, smiled and said, “hello,” simultaneously standing and politely reaching for her hand.

There was something about the way he touched her, the way she leaned toward him, looked up at him, which burned through Sullivan’s psyche. He sat imagining the words he couldn’t hear, interpreting the gestures he could only half see and nurturing his growing hatred for this new rival.

"Hello," she answered, warmly returning his smile.

"Please... sit down; I think you can help me."

"I seriously doubt that," she said obviously looking toward the pile of scientific journals.

"Oh... don't worry about those," he said motioning for her to sit, then added with only a quick glance upward, "for this you have special qualifications." She said nothing and he went on. "There has to be a point at which a fetus can be considered to be a human being. I'm trying to decide where that point is."

"But why?" she asked, watching his eyes run rapidly across the page and sensing immediately from his attitude how important this question was to him.

"Because it's critical," he said pushing his glasses back on his forehead and finally stopping long enough to look back at her. "It's the point at which abortion becomes murder!"

"What do you mean, becomes, murder. Abortion is murder," she answered.

"But all abortions aren't murder, Lotte," Treppenwitz returned. "It's legal. A woman has a right to have an abortion." Somehow these words echoed over and over in his mind as though they had a life of their own. It's not murder... It's legal. He closed his eyes. It repeated again in his mind. It's not murder... It's legal. He remembered Simonescu's letter, written on the eve of the massive euthanasia in Nazi Germany. The judges in Berlin have all agreed he remembered Simonescu saying from somewhere. You couldn't murder a life which was not a life, which was unworthy of life.

"Oh, for god's sake how can it be legal?" He heard Lotte's voice far away and it helped him escape from this unwelcome train of thought which threatened to twist him ever tighter to the past of Radu Simonescu.

"It's a woman's constitutional right to privacy," he said al-

most automatically. "She is free to terminate her pregnancy at any point."

"At any point... even a second before a full term delivery!" Lotte remarked without the slightest indication that it was actually intended to be a question.

But Treppenwitz answered anyway, "yes."

"Doesn't the unborn child have rights?" Again the words were cold and clearly rhetorical.

But the doctor answered again. "No, a fetus is not recognized as a person having rights under the law."

This time the patronizing tone of his answer drove her to react. "Not a person... for God's sake," she began, but Treppenwitz whose mind was elsewhere went on, "I've been reading some recent research on this." His voice had the sound of academic detachment, which added to her anger. "Do you know that by thirty days the fetal heart is beating and circulating blood throughout its body, brain waves have been recorded at forty-three days, it moves, it swallows, it wrinkles its brow, all long before the end of even the first trimester. Heart beat and brain waves, those are the boundaries between life and death... and they appear very early."

"According to the law it is not a human life and therefore has no rights," Lotte mocked; but Treppenwitz didn't notice.

"But there has to be a point. We have to be able to find a point at which the fetus becomes a baby," Treppenwitz added thumbing through another journal in search of the illusive answer.

Lotte read the title, "Studies of Fetal Activity," and couldn't contain herself any longer. With both hands she tore the journal from his grasp, jarring him to attention and said loudly, "it's a human being, a particular person, it has a unique genetic code from the moment of conception. It's somebody damn it..." she almost screamed. "It's not a fetus... It's not a goddamn fetus. Stop calling it that."

Sullivan was too far away to make out the words, but he saw the obvious emotion. Strange faces with disapproving expressions turned toward them from everywhere in the room. Treppenwitz was shaken and confused. "Please, I'm sorry," he whispered putting his hands on her shoulders and trying to calm her, "but I've got to be sure of what I believe; I don't know what to say to her."

"That bastard," Sullivan, still watching intently, said in an audible but stifled tone.

Lotte Simonescu was very agitated. In her mind she couldn't separate the terrible fear that she had lost her son from thoughts of the impending destruction of his unborn child. In a way it was a valve through which she could unload her pent up emotions. "Tell her how the baby is ripped apart, then scraped loose, and sucked out with a vacuum pump... Show her pictures... Stop her, you're a doctor; she'll listen to you."

"Please keep your voices down," a hissing half-whisper came from somewhere in the room and Treppenwitz stood up, almost instinctively, smiled and nodded acquiescence in no particular direction. "Please, Lotte... I didn't mean to sound so uncaring..." Lotte, who was too drained of emotion to resist, came very near to tears and Treppenwitz held her loosely in his arms. After a few seconds she lifted her head from his shoulder and they looked at each other but didn't speak. Sullivan, seething, stared and held his breath until she finally sat, separated from Treppenwitz by the stack of learned treatises. "Bastard," he said again.

"I'm sorry I acted that way," Lotte apologized sincerely. "I should be grateful to you and instead I..."

"Stop it," he scolded gently. "You don't have to apologize..." He was groping for something and didn't know what to say. "How far along did you say she was?"

"She's past three months," Lotte answered flatly.

"There's research here to indicate that it can feel pain... even

by... four months..." His voice hesitated as he realized that it was clearly a mistake. He was instantly sorry he had said it. "Alright," he said quietly. "I'll talk to her tomorrow..."

"Oh... good," Lotte muttered obviously relieved and not recognizing how illogical her deep emotional entanglement in this had become. "I know it will help. If I can get her to come; she's so stubborn."

"Only, bring her to the house... I'm... not going to continue any longer at the clinic."

Lotte said nothing but asked with her expression.

"They had to close today because of the trouble. I was very uncomfortable there today," he added shaking his head.

"I understand. It bothered my husband as well," Lotte offered sorting memories and trying to rebuild the relationship that nearly shattered. "But he wanted to do something to help poor suffering people. He couldn't stand to see broken lives, drug addicts or prostitutes. It was almost as if he felt personally responsible for them. All of those hours he put in at the free clinic were like penance for him."

Her words reactivated in Treppenwitz a lingering suspicion that Eichler had killed Simonescu, that there was something in the past of both men, something dating back to the dark days in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, a hatred so dirty and sunk so deep and festering for so long that it could explain everything. His real motive in asking Lotte to meet him was to explore this suspicion, but he wanted to do it discreetly and without arousing in her any doubts about why he was so interested. "It sounds like you are implying that he felt guilty about something," he said.

"Yes. I believe he was."

"Something from his past, from the camps?" he ventured, prepared to retreat if she showed the slightest resistance.

"Yes, I'm sure there was something there he couldn't outlive. Although I never knew exactly what it was."

"Do you think it could have been what killed him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Someone from his past perhaps?"

"You mean murdered him?"

"You said Robbie suspected..."

"Yes, but Robbie was young and immature. I never thought there was anything to that. Or at least I never knew anything to make me think that."

TREPPENWITZ HAD A PLAN, a scheme to test his hypothesis and Lotte did know one precise fact that was critical to his next step. "What was the exact date of your husband's disappearance?" he asked indifferently, cunningly concealing his intense eagerness to immediately begin the pursuit of his plan.

"It will be three years next July 19th," she answered automatically, but her mind was also on other things. "May I bring Sarah tomorrow then, to your office at the house?"

"Yes," he said absently as he stood to courteously see her out, although he was beginning to realize that he couldn't go through with it. "But bring her early... about eight."

"I'll see you tomorrow then," she repeated hoping to have accomplished her goal, but unsure of how to read his expression, "about eight." Treppenwitz nodded vaguely, but was so engaged by his own scheme that she disappeared from his consciousness even before she had left his sight.

Back issues of the newspaper would tell him if there had been any unusual deaths during the days immediately surrounding Simonescu's disappearance, any accidents or burnings or mutilations which would require that the body be buried in a bag. It was all he

could think of as he gathered and returned the medical journals and texts and rushed to the periodicals room.

He worked quickly and efficiently but didn't limit himself to the obituaries. He scanned every page of the city daily carefully, constantly adjusting the focus on the microfiche machine so as not to miss anything. He read every word of the story about the doctor's disappearance and presumed drowning, but found nothing new. He did learn that Eichler had done two funerals in the days immediately after Simonescu's disappearance. Neither was unusual or provided any legitimate need for a body bag. He knew painfully well that Eichler kept one bag on hand and ordered a new one only when the one he had was needed. If he had murdered Simonescu, and if he had disposed of his body in the same way as he had disposed of Robbie's, he would have used the one bag and have immediately ordered another to replace it.

Did Eichler order a new body bag in the days following Simonescu's death? The question haunted Treppenwitz because the answer would tell if buried beneath the corpse in one of those two coffins were the rotting remains of Radu Simonescu.

ELSA HAD, ALMOST TOO READILY, AGREED to take Treppenwitz to the spot where Simonescu had disappeared. She was not prepared for the frightening feeling that the old man was there too, walking with them. There was something in the air, an ominous attraction, almost magnetic, pulling them to that fateful spot.

The tide was rapidly rising as they started along the ocean's edge toward Quick's Point and Elsa knew that the flooding tide would swell under the full moon and that they could be stranded there when the sea separated the point from the rest of the neck. She thought about this for a time as they walked in silence, but she said nothing. There was a doomful quiet. Only the clanking chain of a channel buoy, hauntingly holding to the pace of each third step, could be heard dimly in the distance.

"But you can't expect me to answer that," Elsa finally said, restarting a stalled conversation and looking up at Treppenwitz whose eyes were fixed somewhere on the watery horizon. She shuddered at how much, at that moment, he reminded her again of Rolf. So fixed had that thought become in her mind that she needed deliberate concentration to avoid giving herself away.

Then something, perhaps the sea, suddenly caused her to remember the old photograph, the single surviving evidence of her childhood. It was only a faded black and white memory of a tiny child and a time long past; how often over the years she had looked at it, touched its now tattered edges, before carefully returning it to its place. She was only a baby, sitting barefooted in the bow of Papa's

row boat. She remembered him sitting in the back of the boat with his old black box camera from America. She stared right at him, right into the lens of the camera as he turned and gazed out over the ocean. She never knew what made him look away. She often wondered what he saw, as she wondered now, what Treppenwitz saw.

"But why not?" he finally asked. "I'm sure you have an opinion."

"No... or I should say, you can do nothing... The girl must decide for herself."

"But I feel that I have a moral obligation to do something."

"Your moral obligation is to do nothing." Elsa's words were uttered slowly; she almost seemed exhausted, as though struggling to muster enough energy to speak.

Treppenwitz pressed on. "Aren't there moral requisites to life?" he asked.

"Yes, there is one."

"But you just said..."

"The only answer is to do nothing, to not interfere with the freedom of any person," Elsa said again and without further qualification.

"So a murderer should be allowed to murder... a rapist to rape?"

"I'm sorry," she said sadly, knowing that, as long as he needed to ask, there could be no answer to his question, and that he would go on searching in vain.

"Then you are in favor of unlimited abortion, abortion on demand?"

Elsa closed her eyes and quietly declared, "I abhor abortion!"

"But you would do nothing to stop it!"

"Yes... I would do nothing... to stop it."

"Even though you believe abortion to be wrong and immoral?"

His response came so rapidly and mindlessly that she knew he didn't understand her. "I would choose," she added, trying once more to make her meaning clear, "for myself... not to have an abortion." Elsa suddenly stopped and faced Treppenwitz to emphasize the importance of what she was about to say. "But that doesn't mean I would impose my beliefs on others, sometimes the more good you try to do, the more damage results."

"But doesn't society have a right to protect itself from evil doers?"

Elsa was saddened and didn't answer. They walked on for a time in silence before she finally spoke again. "Gandhi once said the only devils in the world are those running around in our own hearts. That is where the battle should be fought."

THEY WALKED ON WATCHING THEIR FOOTSTEPS find secure spots on the rocky breakwater that connected the sandy neck to Quick's Point, now isolated and awash in the rolling sea. Here and there, as they crossed a particularly large flat rock they came upon the smashed and emptied carcass of a small crab, the mutilated claws and broken bits of shell surrounded by the dried white fecal splashes... of the killer... Treppenwitz thought to himself when suddenly the bird's mocking laugh shattered his concentration.

It was shocking how white and incredibly clean the seagull was; its hypnotic red eye, riveted to Treppenwitz, measured their approach. It seemed that for a second or two everything went still. Then the bird looked away and stepped from the rock, spread its wings and glided ghostlike into the misty wind.

Quick's Point was only a tiny speck of sand along the edge of a watery abyss. Some thin sea grass clung precariously to life, and a flag to warn passing boats of treacherous shoals found a fragile footing there. Otherwise Quick's Point was a desolate, forsaken and foreboding place. "So this is where he came to think."

"Yes," Elsa answered. "He said the sea freed him from his sorrow."

"I guess you might say that this is his resting place, almost like a cemetery," Treppenwitz added searching for something appropriate to say.

"It's odd that you should say that," Elsa responded. "I often thought the same thing and that someone should set a grave marker here. I spoke about it only yesterday to Frank Russo, the caretaker at Stone Hill Cemetery, may his soul rest in peace. But I guess I'll have to start all over again now.

"Why... is there some problem?"

"Oh... it's not that. Haven't you heard? Mr. Russo passed away last night, very sudden, heart attack I believe. Jim Eichler told me this morning."

"Eichler! ...Russo had a heart attack?"

"Yes, he has the body. And in fact he asked me to be sure to tell you that."

"Tell me?"

"Yes, it seemed strange, but he said, tell Dr. Treppenwitz that Russo is dead... and that I have the body."

"Really!" Treppenwitz answered his voice weak and hesitant. "I wonder why he did that."

"I don't know. But he repeated it, and he said you would understand."

Treppenwitz knew at that moment that there would be no escape for him. He fought the fear that was rising and tried to mask it with other thoughts. He shook his head and said, "tell me more about Simonescu, Elsa... You promised you would. How did he get out of Germany? How did he get here?"

"His name wasn't Simonescu," she began, "the Americans gave him that. His real name was Rolf Schilling, Dr. of Medicine Rolf Schilling."

SUDDENLY HER MIND RETURNED to the last days of the war and to that poignant part of her life she decided not to share with him, and so while she spoke in a kind of mechanical disguise, she remembered that even before the terrible bombing on the night of March 2, 1945, most of the city had been destroyed. There had been no water, electricity or gas for months, and even the sewers on the west side had collapsed. That the cathedral still stood, alone amidst this desert of destruction, worked on her mind like a wonder, offering hope for her and the few others who still struggled to resist, printing their pamphlets and painting their seditious slogans on battered walls.

Very early on the morning of March 3rd she went out once more into that dangerous landscape of death. Flurries of snow were falling. There were no sounds of spring. A heavy cloud of smoke from the smoldering rubble shrouded the city, trapping the smell of death. As she turned into one of the few side streets wide enough to remain open, she suddenly confronted the hanging body of a young soldier, hardly more than a boy. A crude sign hung around his neck read: I am a coward and a deserter. He was not the first she had seen. She watched the dust covered corpse spin slowly in the wind and thought of Rolf. She walked on and tried to forget it but couldn't. Four years had come and gone, four long winters of war and suffering, four summers of sadness without ever even a single word from him. She remembered the endless hoping and praying that she would finally see him alive again, that he would come back to her, but a hope always tempered by a deep fear of finding out what he had become and what he really was or might have done and finally, if she could ever love him again.

The winding wail of an air raid siren cut into her consciousness. She knew she had to keep moving and stay under cover as much as she could. The bombers came night after night, pounding the city into submission, devastating the neighborhoods west of the

Rhine, softening the defenses for the impending assault by the advancing Americans. Hardly anyone bothered anymore to crawl out of their warm crevices to seek cover in the cold damp shelters. There had been too many alarms, too many bombs. She ducked briefly into a doorway to scan the sky. Daytime raids were very rare she thought, straining to see any signs of aircraft. Suddenly the scream of incoming artillery passed directly over her head, low and fast, then another, and another. Shells began bursting in hideous harmony, like the tympani of some satanic overture. She looked back toward the river. The bridge, she thought, they're trying to knock out the bridge. This was the first time the river had been reached by field guns and it meant that the Americans were getting close, very close. It was all the more urgent now, she thought, and disregarding danger, she ran down the center of the street toward the railroad yards. She slipped through the SS patrols under the whistling cover of the American artillery.

In the final weeks of the war, as the German army began to disintegrate, a vicious struggle raged behind the shrinking lines between the SS military police units sent to stop the desertions, and stiffen the retreat, and the remnants of the resistance trying to encourage a general collapse. The Wehrmacht was in a desperate last ditch struggle to hold the western suburbs. The city prison, where day and night the guillotine did its deadly deed, was packed with half starved skeletons condemned by special mobile military courts. Deserters, when caught, were quickly sentenced and summarily hanged.

Every day a thin stream of desperate men sifted through the city, hiding in the bombed out buildings of the old town along the river near the cathedral, and especially in the heavily targeted railroad yards which for weeks had been within artillery range and were too dangerous to be patrolled. Every day she went there to find

them and help them, hide them and pass them along the river south to where it was safe to cross.

She had done this so many times; it was so routine despite the danger that she had almost forgotten why she did it. There was no big purpose to it anymore, only people, people suffering, people in need. As she wove her way among the twisted bodies of thousands of wrecked railroad cars, calling randomly into open doors and ripped walls, she felt frightened eyes on her, suspicious eyes worn out by war and deceit, unable to trust. She stopped and almost like a divining rod turned toward the half opened door of an undamaged freight car. She stretched her head into the dark opening. She saw the clean hay and smelled a man hiding there. She had found so many that way, but she was not prepared for what she was about to find this time.

"Don't be afraid, I will help you," she said pulling herself up through the opening.

"Sandra?" His voice was weak, plaintive and hesitant. "Sandra?" again in a more interrogative tone. Silence, seconds passed; then he stepped forward from the shadows. She knew his voice. How could she not know it? And then she saw him. The light was dim and he was so different. Her whole body stiffened as if by instinct. She looked hard into his eyes with practiced determination not to be deceived by her own emotions and not to let some stranger, if that is what he had become, seduce her with lies. It wasn't enough anymore that he had returned to her. She needed to know that "he" had returned, unbroken and as he was before. But how could that be? How could that ever be?

He stood, not speaking, waiting for her reaction, not knowing what to expect, arms slack at his sides. Again she looked hard into his eyes trying desperately to fend off the feelings buried deep within her, feelings so strong they threatened, despite all her efforts, to well up and overwhelm her practiced defense. She wanted so much

to just throw her arms around him, to scream out his name, to tell him how much she missed him, how much she loved him. In a flash of unbridled ecstasy she saw herself holding him and kissing him, and kissing him and kissing him. She pressed her teeth together and pushed the vision down with sheer determination to be strong and to stay in control. She had planned for four years for this moment; she had questions to ask him; she would test him. But then she saw him, saw the tears in his tired eyes. "Rolf, my God, Rolf it's you!"

"Please Sandra," he said softly, "I need you, please help me, I'm so scared."

His face was so much older and so worn, his clothes torn and dirty like some homeless beggar's, so different from what he had been, yet so much like the countless refugees, their faces dazed, wandering the rutted roads, going, going. And she felt so much like the women, the many thousands and thousands of women who daily prayed for the ones who were gone. How could she deny him now? What kind of sick moral sense could make her deny him now? He was home. Nothing else mattered. What difference did it make what he might have done. That was then. That was gone. She loved him and he needed her, that's what mattered now. She loved him and he needed her.

"Oh God Rolf, you're home!"

"Sandra... I'm sorry," he said his tone dropping almost like a small child, sobbing, his voice cracking, tears flooding from his eyes. "I love you."

"I love you so much," she burst out in a mix of joy and relief to have it over. Throwing her arms around his neck, she pulled her face up into his, feeling the wet tears, rubbing her smooth soft skin into the rough stubble of a half grown beard on his cheeks and chin, kissing his eyes, his nose, his mouth. He felt so rough, so crude and yet so right. He was her man and he finally came home.

"Sandra, I'm so sorry, I was so wrong," he whispered again, but

she pressed her lips against his and stopped him. For the shortest moment time stopped. She felt his arms tighten around her and his lips soften as their mouths melted together.

"Oh Sandra, I love you so much," he blurted half crying and half laughing, finally feeling safe and secure in her arms. "I was so afraid I'd never find you, never get you back, that you were gone, that someone else... You do still love me then?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she answered, pulling her face back so he could see the truth in her eyes. "Yes."

"DID YOU SAY 'YES' ELSA?" Suddenly Treppenwitz's voice broke through the hypnotic hold her memory had on her.

"Did they know about him, the details I mean?"

"Oh yes," she repeated beginning to reorient herself... "they knew everything, even before the war ended. They knew all about him. Every detail could be documented. The Nazis kept such good records you know. It was ironic."

"So he was German then?" Treppenwitz asked almost rhetorically, and Elsa continued without answering directly. "Only weeks before the war ended he deserted and made his way back to Cologne where his family was. Where Sandra was; she saved him. It was by pure chance that she found him. She was so scared that he would be caught. But she found him in time."

"As soon as the fighting stopped the roads filled with refugees. Some were liberated prisoners from the camps and beside them on the road, here and there, were the Nazi butchers, in disguise, trying to escape. They all flowed together back and forth across the rubble of war. He knew that the Americans wanted to arrest all the doctors who had been at Dachau and to make them stand trial for war crimes. They had teams of Nazi hunters racing around everywhere in jeeps. They were waiting for him to reach Cologne, but he was already there."

Treppenwitz noticed the quickening pace of Elsa's words and decided not to interrupt her.

"He hid in the attic in the family house for months. He was very careful. The Americans came every few weeks. They watched the house. But he stayed hidden."

"Then a very strange thing happened. An American officer, an army intelligence officer, who spoke good German, came to the house and wanted to get a message to Rolf. It was as though he knew we," she said it deliberately hoping he would notice, "were hiding him. He said the Americans would protect him. That they would bring him to America if he agreed to tell them all he knew about the human experiments done at Dachau."

"We had heard that many scientists and medical doctors, some even SS had escaped prosecution and been flown directly to the United States, even given visas and promised American citizenship. Rolf was suspicious and thought it was all a trick. He said he didn't know anything important, that the experiments were not breakthroughs and he told the American this, but they didn't seem to believe it."

"As the months passed it became common knowledge, and was quite a scandal, that so many Nazis were getting away to America. It was at that time, about a year and a half after the war ended, that Franz Holderman came to the house. He looked very good, was well dressed and seemed in good spirits. He had been Rolf's superior at Brandenburg you know and was now working for the American intelligence service, the CIA. He told them that if they could contact Rolf they should because the Americans were very worried that the Russians were getting all of the best scientists. This was the time for Rolf to come out of hiding he said. It didn't matter if he really knew things, the Americans would believe anything... make something up he said. Say you have important knowledge about low temperature and high altitude. Those were the key words, low temperature

and high altitude. The Americans were very interested in this. It was time to make a deal. It seemed so unreal but everyone was so afraid of Communism. The Americans were determined to keep the Germans away from the Russians. That was more important than any real scientific gains which might be made, or even in punishing the war crimes.”

She paused briefly and then went on. “It was at this point that Rolf decided to take a chance. He was so tired of hiding. Through Holderman they arranged a meeting with the American CIA.”

“Are you sure Elsa, that it was the CIA? I didn’t think they even existed then!”

“I’m certain. We thought, at first, it was with the Army... but it was with the CIA. They told Rolf that there was a growing uproar in the United States against harboring Nazis and some were being sent back to Germany for trial. We heard that there were three or four hundred doctors and scientists waiting to come to America and that the Army didn’t want to lose them so a new plan was hatched. Rumors of Russian sweeps through Germany netting thousands of scientists pushed the Americans to extremes. It was at this point that the CIA got involved. Rolf was kept in hiding for more months and was finally given a false Rumanian identity.”

“That was when Rolf Schilling became Radu Simonescu,” Treppenwitz concluded and Elsa continued. “Papers, passport, even medical degrees and references were provided for him.”

“How did he enter the United States permanently?”

“The CIA got him a refugee visa.”

“A... refugee visa?”

“He entered the United States legally... under a false name and in the guise of having been, himself, persecuted by the Nazis,” she said raising her eyebrows.

“And what about the medical secrets he was supposed to give them... didn’t they find out he was lying to them?”

“He was never asked to tell them anything. I doubt if he knew any secrets. I swear the motive was just to keep him away from the Russians.”

TREPPENWITZ STOOD FACING THE RESTLESS SEA. A stiff wind rose with his emotions and roared in his ears. There could be no further evasion. He knew what must be done and that he would do it that night. “I want to go back Elsa. I have to go back now.”

“But the tide is peaking. Perhaps we should wait. We’ll get wet on the break water. The rocks will be slippery and it’s getting dark.”

“I don’t care. Wait if you want to, but I must leave here now,” Treppenwitz said, as he hurried toward the string of stones leading to the safety of the shore. There was something unbearably threatening about the thought of being stranded there. He didn’t try to explain it. He only responded to it instinctively.

The tide was unusually high that night and each rolling wave completely submerged the rocks before it slid back through the cracks into the sea, so that each wave forced them to stop knee deep in the swirling water and wait until they could see the stones again before taking another step. In this hesitant fashion, holding hands, a few steps then wait, then a few steps more, they made their way home.

THE SOUND SUDDENLY STOPPED AGAIN. Elsa, who could rarely curb her curiosity, rolled her head sideways to free an ear from the smothering overstuffed down pillow. The quiet, almost imperceptible, rustle of the bed sheet against her cheek roared in her ears. It seemed silly, but still she sensed that something strange and horrible was about to happen in the house.

She could hear his shoes shuffling slowly across the floor above. At first it seemed like the purposeful straight back and forth tracking of a caged cat, but after a time she could clearly perceive a more interrogative circular path and in her mind she saw a slow meandering revolution around and around the old attic library. At the same spot on each return she noticed that the steps slowed and the sound stopped, only to immediately start again in merciless repetition. Something about the footsteps threatened her; she tried to force it away, but couldn't.

Her thoughts, half sleeping, mixed with memories of the first night she had spent in the house, almost as if none of the almost thirty years had passed. What should she have done? How could he have known that she would follow him, even after all those years? She knew he still loved her, and would always love her, but it was too late and could never again be; and then there was the boy. It was too awkward and complicated and far too much to ask, to expect, especially after all those years. It would be enough to be near him, to share their secrets, to steal a moment now and then.

Oddly, she even remembered that it had been a Tuesday. Wasn't that strange, she thought, to remember the day of the week like that.

Her little room had hardly changed in all that time. Some things appear to be so mutable she thought, while others hardly seem to change at all. She remembered too how the spring had come early that first year and how the blossoms of the ancient apple tree had pressed against her window pane. The tree was dead and gone now. How beautiful it had always been for the few short days when so many flowers hid its scars. It was miraculous how something so old and decayed could produce such a display of beauty. Why do I have these thoughts she wondered.

She hardly sensed her head sinking slowly and softly down. No one ever cared for that tree; no one ever pruned it or sprayed it. What a shame it was... what a shame... Her thoughts streamed... what a shame about the stories, the awful speculations, his disappearance, and now the boy's... What a shame... How cruel they could be sometimes... especially to Lotte... and now Robbie was giving her so much to worry about. He would come home, he had to. Lotte wouldn't be able to face it if he didn't.

Her breathing gradually became deeper and more deliberate as sleep began to subdue her restless mind. Why did I stay? I shouldn't have. I didn't want to. Why did I let him convince me? What a shame. As her neck and shoulders involuntarily relaxed, her head unwound slightly like the last belated lurch of an almost exhausted clock spring. I should have made at least one apple pie, she thought. How wonderful it would have been to have seen such a pie... A faint, almost smiling sigh slowly parted her lips.

She was almost asleep when she heard Treppenwitz tiptoe through the house and she settled in her chair by the window to wait for him to return, plagued by an undefined anxiety and knowing instinctively that this was a turning point in both of their lives. She wondered if he knew that she was Sandra. "Liebe Sandra," she said softly to herself remembering the start of each sad letter from her lover whose tragic history she had lately been forced to painfully

relieve. She wanted to tell him and hoped that her hints would give her away, that he would ask and she could answer. But he said nothing. Couldn't he see that she was Sandra? She wanted to shout it out at last, after all these years of hiding.

At that moment she knew that she would finally go home, back to Cologne, while her mother, over ninety now, still lived on the monthly money so artfully sent, its source carefully concealed to fool the Nazi hunters who were still waiting and watching, like hounds for the fateful contact that would yield a scent back to their quarry. "Liebe Sandra," she said again softly to herself as her eyes filled with tears.

TREPPENWITZ HAD WAITED UNTIL IT WAS VERY LATE. It was a somber, overcast night and a vaporous gloom coated the ground. Crouching below the height of the hedges, he slipped unseen across the back lawn into Eichler's driveway. A wave of fear rolled over him as he passed the garden shed where the undertaker had lurked that night. Was he hiding there again? The thought of it came unexpected and seemingly from nowhere; Treppenwitz pushed it aside. "Get yourself together... This will be easy," he reassured himself. "Don't panic; don't rush it." Still the sinister shed leaned ominously over him as he passed and he couldn't conceal the feeling that Eichler was in it waiting for him again. "Stop it!" he said softly but sharply to himself with as much conviction as he could command. "He's asleep... You saw his light go out hours ago; nothing will go wrong... Just stay calm."

Treppenwitz ran his hand along the wall of the house next to the embalming room service entrance. There's no alarm. He remembered Eichler telling him, the key is under the shingle... right next to... "Here it is!" he said almost too loudly as he fumbled nervously in the blackness, feeling with his fingertip for the keyhole and sliding the key along his finger to the target. The door, slightly swollen from

the recent rain, made a long aching groan as Treppenwitz, pushing hard with his shoulder, forced it slowly open. Suddenly the brute weight of his body stumbled mindlessly forward and he deliberately pulled back on the door knob to control its dumb momentum. He didn't think about his own life's encounters, like this one with the door to the dead house, which seemed to sweep him along barely responding to his pitiable attempts to guide and regulate them.

Treppenwitz, his mind fixed to its single purpose, stood silently in the dark just inside the door for a few seconds before lighting the flashlight. A lonely beam cut across the embalming room, once again raising repressed memories. He shut off the light and waited for the chill to pass, but the smell of formalin triggered the thought that there was a body somewhere, out of sight, under the sooty cover of darkness. An automatic mechanism in Treppenwitz worked again to mask the memory of his own horrible nightmare in that room and replaced it with the thought that it must be the embalmed body of the grave digger Russo that he could smell.

He moved lightly but deliberately on his toes, following the small circumscribed spot of light across the embalming room floor to the office door. It was unlocked and Treppenwitz was careful to close it quietly and completely after entering. The beam of his flashlight swept the room and quickly found the filing cabinets and the drawer marked: Purchase Invoices Paid. The files went back far enough and were accurately alphabetized by year. The rest was easy. The paid invoice for the bag which had replaced the one used for the body of Robbie Simonescu was properly filed and Treppenwitz's fingers flew over the file folders back to the date of the father's disappearance. "Here it is!" Treppenwitz paused to digest his discovery, even though he had been dead sure all along. "Eichler killed Dr. Simonescu," he said softly to himself. "I knew it."

Treppenwitz carefully, but quickly, closed the filing cabinet drawer and turned to go. A streak of light slid like a snake up and

down over the piles of paper on Eichler's desk. He didn't know himself why he suddenly threw the light back across the surface to a new purchase order, not yet mailed, a new purchase order for... "another body bag!" a body bag yet to be needed, a bag for a body yet to be murdered. "It couldn't be for Russo," Treppenwitz thought to himself, his heart pounding, and then he knew. "This bag is for me!"

INSTINCTIVELY HE SHUT OFF THE LIGHT and hid again in the darkness. He was shaking and incredibly frightened. He wanted to wait, but his emotion wouldn't let him and he ran, in the dark, nearly out of control back across the office toward the door. It was a mistake. He was moving too fast and his knees hit something solid and unseen. The pain was short but intense and as he reached out to catch his balance his hand grasped what felt like a wheel, which turned with his weight pulling him forward and down to the floor with a dull thud. For a few seconds he didn't dare move. He listened for any sign that he had disturbed Eichler and prayed that none would come.

Finally he flashed his light upward on the object which had blocked his escape. His eyes, blinded momentarily by the bright glare reflecting from something shiny and metallic, finally focused on, "the film!" Like a gun, loaded and aimed, the projector had been left there ready, as though meant to be found.

His encounter with Eichler's past was not over. "This is the film Lotte was talking about; the one Robbie was looking for that night." He knew it could tell why Eichler had murdered Simonescu. He felt the excitement rise in his stomach. He knew that the machine would make noise and that it could give him away but none of that mattered, perhaps the thrill of danger even drew him on a little; it was impossible to tell. One thing however was certain; he had to see it; and he had to see it now.

The room was dark, the door closed, he was separated by two

floors from the bedroom where Eichler slept. He had to chance it. Treppenwitz stood up and listened again deliberately waiting for a full minute to be sure he was safe. Then he started the projector, turning the switch very carefully as though the click would be more silent if the switch turned slowly. The rattle of the old and brittle film, slashing through broken sprocket holes, shattered the stillness of the night, as though sneering at Treppenwitz's caution.

He instinctively reached out to stop it and hide again under the cover of shadowy silence, but the words suddenly shining on the screen paralyzed his hand. *Massen-Sterilization durch Röntgenbestrahlung*. The similarities with the English were too obvious for Treppenwitz to miss, Mass-sterilization through... röntgen... "X-ray!" he said to himself. "This is a film record of experiments to use X-rays for the mass sterilization of men!" He said it almost too loudly; the thought of it disturbed him terribly.

The silent film rolled in the places where the sprocket holes were completely cut away and at times its focus failed, but its message was unmistakably achieved. Treppenwitz sat in the chair beside the projector, his hand still on the switch, and stared at the tiny moving image. Naked men, obviously prisoners, stood in a row with their testicles sandwiched between the metal plates of a cumbersome old X-ray apparatus, which seemed to have been especially adapted for this special purpose. The men looked around sheepishly and seemed bewildered. The camera moved slowly across the room seeing and remembering everything, passing again and again over the sad faces of the men forced into this horrible experiment. "Oh God it's...!" Treppenwitz said as the camera moved upward over the abdomen and chest to the face of one of the prisoners. It was the eyes, unmistakable, unforgettable, it was... It was Eichler!

15 minuten später shimmered on the screen followed by a close up view of a gloved hand presenting to the lens the groin and scrotum of a man who flinched and seemed to be in pain. The skin was

darkened and appeared to have been burned. "Oh God it couldn't be him," Treppenwitz said with hoped for conviction, but sadly he knew better.

7 tage danach and the picture changed to open ulcers, some running wet and obviously infected. Treppenwitz studied the scene carefully as a series of examples of some of the typical results of so massive an X-ray dose were documented. He tried to lose himself in an analysis of the causes of this and how it might have been avoided, but the reality of what had happened and of his own reaction overwhelmed it.

Then the word *Samen-probe* appeared and Treppenwitz, already absorbed in the experiment, understood full well the purpose of what he was watching, although he didn't understand the technique. First a piece of rubber tubing was stretched over a wooden rod. The rod was then inserted into the rectum of one of the men. "Oh God it's Eichler!" Then the rod was twisted and manipulated for what seemed like a very long time. The victim... it was Eichler; there was no doubt it was Eichler... needed to be restrained and was in obvious pain. Treppenwitz began to feel sick. Finally an ejaculation was achieved and the semen collected for laboratory study. "Probably for a sperm count," he thought to himself trying again to bury the horror of it all in the only way he knew; but it didn't work. Treppenwitz was sweating profusely and wanted to escape, but he was caught. He was conscious and fully aware, but no longer in control of himself. The film rolled relentlessly on.

Kastrations-versuch came across the screen followed by the sight of what looked like an assembly line of naked men, the same men, weakened by their ordeal, being castrated, one after another. Testicles cut, examined, even sliced and smelled, then packed in jars for shipment. Treppenwitz was incredibly uncomfortable watching it. He fidgeted uncontrollably, moving his feet and constantly readjusting his position.

Suddenly the film broke and an end spinning around with the take-up reel began slapping rhythmically against the body of the projector. Bright white light radiating from the screen pushed back the shadows of darkness along the corners and edges of the almost empty office and as Treppenwitz turned to stop the motor he saw that the door to the room was now open!

Nearly frozen by the surge of fear that instantly shocked him, he barely managed to turn the switch. Murky gloom and silence simultaneously flooded the space around him, deadening one sense while enhancing the other. He stood motionless and listened. At first there was nothing, but then, he heard breathing... deep, slow, but unmistakable breathing... it was behind him, but close... very close!

Treppenwitz could no longer contain the dread within and it exploded out of control. Run!!! The way to the open door was clear. Run!!! Get through the door, across the embalming room to the side entrance and out, out to freedom. No need to be cautious and quiet now, only to escape, to escape alive; keep running; reach the house; reach the safety of the house.

ELSA COULD SEE DR. TREPPENWITZ from her bedroom window as he crept across the garden into Eichler's driveway. Cloaked by the night and careful to remain unseen, yet so obvious from her lofty vantage point, he appeared to her to be an indication of the absurdity of all human effort to control the events of life. How critical this was to him, and how hard he struggled, only to spiral ever downward into the bottomless pit. The truth was clear to her, she could see it all from the window there high above him, but he, caught as he was in the particulars of his own pitiful condition, would never know it.

She watched him disappear through the side door into Eichler's house and sensed the depth of his desperation, although she could not articulate it. She knew none of the hideous details, but she rightly suspected the worst and knew intuitively that he was in grave danger. She would have helped him, if he had only trusted her enough to have told her how. She saw that he was drowning and wanted to rescue him, but he hadn't said anything, so she waited and watched. She never wondered why she was herself so intent on coming to his aid, when every aspect of her being scoffed and warned her that it would be futile. Perhaps this was the human ethical paradox, to constantly plunge ahead to perdition.

She sat and waited, watched by her own reflection in the window pane. She looked into her own tired eyes and her churning apprehension mixing with her mortal need to do something caused her to remember Simonescu's one remaining, and as yet untranslated, short story. She had promised Dr. Treppenwitz that she would

do all of them and she thought to herself that this, at least, would allow her to feel useful. So, gently lifting the leather folder from the bedside stand she began for the second time with: The Deathbed.

IT WAS A SAD WINTER NIGHT. Nearly all of the trees were leafless. Only the lonely oak in the garden near the window struggled to keep its leaves, which stood... wie Grabsteine... like gravestones in the snow covered branches. Oak trees, like some people, hold on stubbornly to their possessions and only when the new buds of spring are born can the old leaves rest.

The dusty stack of hometown newspapers, neatly piled in the corner, had not been disturbed since the burial of his beloved wife. Also there, on the bedside table, was her gold-framed portrait and he strained through the darkness to see her once again. He could no longer remember her face and sadly he yearned to see the photo.

Zwischen den rauchenden Schornsteine... between the smoking chimneys of the city's silhouette, the crescent moon rose, its sly look seeming to betray a delight in the secret tragedies everywhere hidden by the depth of the night.

Elsa paused briefly. She knew the German had been artistically rendered but tonight she felt the need to hurry as though she were running away from the tormenting words and their inevitable end.

The windows, locked tight, could not hold back the onrushing night, nor could they defend against... den schon innerhalb wartenden Feind... the words startled her... the enemy already within. The burning in his lungs was worse now and it was impossible to breathe without pain. Specks of coughed up blood stained the old goose down comforter, which was the only soft thing left in the rundown wood furnished room. He was very weak and he knew that he would never leave the bed alive.

"What does she look like?" he pleaded, and then again, almost inaudibly mixed with his death rattle, he repeated, "what does she

look like?" Through the window the stars, like candles, consecrated the scene, but their woeful light could not reveal her gentle face.

Elsa sat for a few minutes staring at the blank page below the last line. "Oh God, this can't be it," she said half aloud and searched the folder, fumbling for another, wanting a better, happier ending. But there was no more.

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, as if planned to prevent her from reflecting on the story and its sad symbolism, she heard Treppenwitz come crashing back through the house. He ran directly up the stairs past her door to the attic. Instinctively she shut off the little bedside lamp and, not knowing why, went to the window. The wind was gusting terribly, signaling the approach of an autumn squall. Dark clouds were running rapidly over the moon and the light changed dramatically every few seconds. She strained to see, to interpret the confusion of shadows, muddled in the swirl of wind driven leaves.

Then she saw it. It was too regular, too deliberate, too organized in its intent to be natural. It was moving, skulking, in short bursts... from bush to bush... moving closer, toward the house, moving toward the back of the building! She pressed her face against the window frame and squinted to stretch her angle of sight along the wall's edge. It was there below her, stooping low. And then it disappeared. Was it only her imagination, she wondered. Surely there was no one out there, she thought. Yet there was something awful and unnatural... something human... about the precision of the advancing shadows.

It was deathly quiet. She waited. The silence was her salvation; it confirmed her conclusion and whispered the ultimate cliché: everything will be alright... Don't worry; everything will be alright. The rhythm of the words soothed her.

But... then she heard it, barely audible but undeniable. She listened. It was nothing she told herself. It was windy. It must have

been a branch brushing against the shingles. But then she heard its creaking moan again, louder and more distinct, and then again, the sounds divided by an even pulse of time, too even, too logical, and too calculated. "The fire escape ladder!" she said softly to herself, her eyes bulging open; her skin, everywhere on her body, tingled. She saw, in her mind, shoes slowly ascending the rusty steps.

She crept quietly across the room to the door and pressing her ear against one of the thin panels she tenaciously studied every sound. She was sure she heard the window slowly open. Fear flooded outward from the pit of her stomach, radiating over her as for the first time she sensed that she too was in danger, in mortal danger. Her fingers found the key which waited, never used, in the lock. She stretched her senses to the limit in her struggle to hear. One step, then a second, then silence. Should she turn the key, should she turn it now? Could it stop him? The bolt would slide; it would make a sound, could it really protect her? She heard a third step... and a fourth... right outside her door, their faces only inches apart! She opened her mouth as widely as possible and drew short shallow almost silent breaths. And then, finally, mercifully, the footsteps faded into the distance.

She wanted to call the police, but doubt prevented her, it paralyzed her ability to act by mixing with her determination not to do anything which might make things worse. Then she remembered Detective Sullivan and his suspicions about the boy and about Dr. Simonescu. She also remembered the card he had given her, the card with his unlisted phone number and his words: call me anytime. He seemed so sincere... anytime day or night. Sullivan would come. Sullivan would save them. He wanted to help he said, to keep things quiet, for Lotte's sake, to get to the bottom of it without ever exposing the truth. She felt almost instantly relieved, but it was only the fraudulent hope of eternal optimism.

She waited until the footsteps creaked on the attic stairway

before daring to move, fearing that even her heart beats could be heard. The card was in the vanity mirror. The phone was on the night stand by the bed. She was dialing before she had even thought about what she would say, how she would sound.

"Hello." The voice was hoarse still obviously trapped in the stupor of sleep.

"Detective Sullivan?" Elsa said as loudly as she dared.

"Who is this?" Sullivan asked already annoyed and naturally suspicious.

"It's Elsa Tikhonin, Detective Sullivan," she said again, her muffled voice further dampened by her hand cupped around her mouth.

"Who?"

"It's Elsa, Elsa Tikhonin. Can't you hear me?" she pleaded, the words too feeble to be heard.

"Who are you?" Sullivan barked and at that moment she knew he would never hear her, that her whisper would never break through. "If this is some kind of goddamn..." the words abruptly stopped as Elsa quietly cut the connection.

THE STORM HAD PASSED, the warm autumn sun had risen, and no sound had been heard in the house for hours when Elsa finally dared to leave her room. "Dr. Treppenwitz," she called almost mutely at his bedroom door and then up toward the third floor library she called again, "Dr. Treppenwitz!" There was no answer. Then, although frightened by the thought of what she might find, she climbed the attic stairs. Gradually her steps, slow and unsure, lifted her into the dark and depressing space.

The heavy shades which covered the one window at the end allowed so little light to enter that the lamps were needed even during the day. But otherwise, everything seemed in order. The book bindings were all even on the shelves, the wastebasket empty, the

desktop, except for one piece of paper, was clear. She looked for signs of a struggle, or any indication of foul play, but there were none. In fact the room looked needlessly neat, almost scrubbed, and she noticed the faint odor of bleach.

Elsa lifted the single sheet, turning her back to the incandescent bulb allowing it to saturate the page with a warm orange glow. It was a letter. When she read the salutation she felt the most unmistakable sign that her worst fears were true. Tears, as much for herself as for him, blurred her eyes as she began.

Dear Sandra,

I have been tormented these past few weeks by the unavoidable belief that I am evil. I don't want to accept this, yet I believe I must. I have done horrible things yet I feel no remorse and seem always to be capable of justifying my actions. I am so mutable and I change so rapidly with circumstance that I no longer know who or what I am. I seem to excel only at escaping.

I cannot bear to tell you more. I am sure that in time you will learn the truth from some other and I pray that everyone will forgive me.

Treppenwitz

FOR SOME STRANGE AND UNEXPLAINED REASON all Elsa could think about at that moment was cooking breakfast. She struggled to read her watch in the dim light and then walked to the window to pull back the dusty drape. The sun streamed in. It was already after eight. Below her she saw the limousines lining the street and she remembered Russo's funeral. Eichler was standing there, smiling. Lotte Simonescu was there too, alone, and looking toward the house. Elsa watched the mourners file past and the flowers fill an

entire car, and finally she saw the six pallbearers strain to hoist the heavy casket into the waiting hearse.

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