

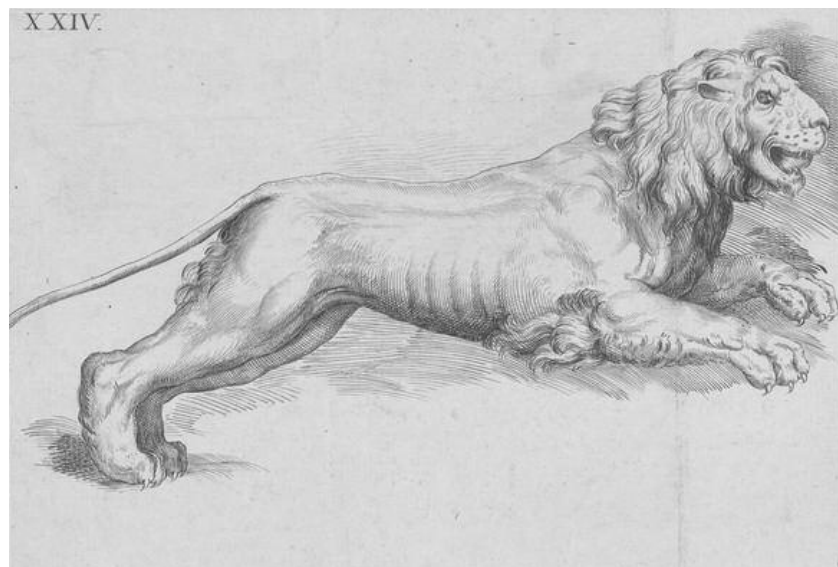
Corner Bar Magazine

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Page 1 – A NIGHT AT MARVIN’S by Tom Koperwas. Mr. Koperwas is a retired teacher living in Windsor, Ontario, Canada who aspires to write short stories of horror, fantasy, and science fiction. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming in: Jakob’s Horror Box; Literally Stories; The Literary Hatchet; Literary Veganism; Blood Moon Rising

Page 4 – TIME SHIFT IN BLACK AND WHITE by David A. Cohen. I am a retired librarian living in a suburb of Philadelphia. Recently, I had my first short story - The Junk Peddler - published in The Avalon Literary Review (Winter, 2020).

Page 11 –THE THIRD DAY by A. J. Padilla. Mr. Padilla writes, “I am a college librarian who lives and works in New York Hudson Valley. Over the years, I have been employed as, among other things, a day laborer, a bookkeeper, and a feckless salesman of encyclopedias. I’ve had a novella published in The Scarlet Leaf Review and another of my stories is scheduled to appear in the April 2021 issue of Aphelion Magazine. Although I have a master’s degree in English, I try not to let that get in the way writing readable tales.”



“A NIGHT AT MARVIN’S”

by TOM KOPERWAS

The sun was setting when Hopkins steered his golden hovercar out of the sandy desert wastes of Mirv Alley into the remains of Indianapolis, a square-mile suburban oasis of ranch houses and labs. Driving the car slowly down the leafy streets, he came to a small brick building with a bright neon sign on its roof that read *Marvin’s*. After parking the car, he sauntered down the sidewalk and entered the building through the faded wooden front door.

Hopkins stood in the entrance and flashed a smile at the barkeep wiping the sparkling marble counter with a chamois rag. The barkeep, a big, elderly man with double chins and a long, ungainly mustache that made him look like a benevolent walrus in a natty, faded suit, nodded and said, “Good evening, sir.”

“You don’t remember me, do you, Al?” Hopkins asked mildly as he approached the bar.

“I can’t say I do, sir,” said the barkeep. “Wait... why, of course! It’s been years, Mr. H.,” he exclaimed, leaning over the counter and shaking Hopkin’s hand.

The barkeep stood back and let his rheumy eyes rove over the middle-aged Hopkins; over the time-worn, intelligent and dignified face, the dark suit with its exquisite cut and sheen, the perfect hair,

and lastly, the shimmering ruby on his manicured pinky. “You look as though you found a pot of gold, Mr. H.,” he said.

“I did, Al. Right here in Marvin’s,” chuckled Hopkins.

“Really, Mr. H?” asked the bartender, his eyes widening briefly in astonishment before resuming their perpetually weary, heavy-lidded look.

“Or should I say, it found me?” Hopkins whispered to himself, sitting down at the table next to the large plate-glass window overlooking Mirv Alley.

“Somehow I knew you’d pick your old spot, Mr. H.,” said the barkeep through a toothy grin. “Now how’s about a drink on the house for old time’s sake?”

“No thanks, Al. I’ve quit. Just a coffee, please.” He sat thoughtfully for a moment as Al busied himself with the coffee machine, then said, “I’ll never forget how it was after the Big Blowup. How the bombs flattened the city and the Midwest.”

“Those were difficult times indeed,” replied the barkeep, placing a steaming cup of coffee on the table.

“I went mad with sorrow,” Hopkins continued. “And what did I do to combat the empty days and the nightmare-wracked nights? I went on an endless round of drinking. As usual, I was in Marvin’s, chas-

ing the tail-end of a long tear, downing double whiskey sours for pick-me-ups—a helpless zombie tormented by depression and exhaustion. Suddenly, the lights went out.”

“Must have been one of those power outages,” piped up the barkeep.

“Yep. And as I sat there in the dark I heard a little toot, like a child’s party horn, and the patter of tiny feet. Looking down at

the floor, I saw a glowing aardvark in a polka-dot dress, no bigger than a dachshund, dancing with a miniature anteater sporting a handsome cutaway. Behind them came a tapir no higher than my knee, blowing a tiny horn,”

“Marvin’s has never had a live act,” declared the barkeep solemnly.

Hopkins grinned. “Of course, they



weren't real. I knew they were just figments of my addled brain. But those little animals were so damn charming, engaging, and comforting that I wanted to reach out and hug them. That's when the idea popped into my head: the answer to my problems, a means to escape the cycle of self-destruction I was on."

"Two beers, Al," cried a reedy voice from across the room.

"A moment, sir." The barkeep strolled behind the counter and poured two drinks. Returning a minute later, he eagerly asked, "What happened next, Mr. H.?"

"I left Indy and headed to the scientific commune at Zabriskie Point. There, in the company of likeminded friends, I developed a genetic patent for designer pets, miniature ones."

Al's mouth fell open slightly as he watched Hopkins draw his hands close together till they were mere inches apart.

"Each with lovable characteristics: tiny giraffes adept at handstands, affectionate pocket-sized Kodiak bears, cheery little whales to cavort with in the bathtub. Sales were so brisk I opened my own company, Pet Design, Inc."

"Whoa, that's you?" the barkeep exclaimed.

"Yes sir. When space travel returned, demand went straight through the roof. You see, Al, people in the post-Blowup era have a near-neurotic need for comfort animals, especially when traveling in space. The spacelines know it and promote it. Space travelers think of the little darlings on their laps, in their carry-ons and purses,

as fellow travelers, intimate members of their family; and that makes them calm, makes them better passengers for the long haul."

"And you said you owe it all to Marvin's?" asked the goggle-eyed barkeep.

"You bet, Al. And to show you my appreciation, I've brought you a special gift," said Hopkins, clapping his hands three times.

The front door banged open, and in ran a two-foot tall blue elephant with bright pink spots, trumpeting wildly with excitement.

"Meet Snafu," announced Hopkins. "Note the special carrying tray strapped to his back. He's been fully trained to carry drinks to the customers, empties to the bar. He can even draw beer from a tap."

A roar of applause erupted throughout the bar, from the casual customers seated at the tables to the besotted barflies tottering on their tall barstools as they eagerly placed their empties on the little elephant's tray.

Hopkins put his empty coffee cup down and stood up to leave. Before he could get out the door, the aged barkeep rushed over and embraced him. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he cried, "Snafu's a barman's comfort and aid. Bless you, Mr. H!"



“TIME SHIFT IN BLACK AND WHITE”

by DAVID A. COHEN

I know something is wrong as I awaken in a body that does not belong to me. Fourteen-years-old, I guess. Still a male. At least I think so.

“Henry.”

There is this beautiful young woman standing before me. Wish she was my age. That is the age I used to be. What a wonderful dream I am having.

“Henry.”

“Yes.”

“Henry, really, are you paying attention?”

“I am.”

“Then, what did I just say to the class?”

“Oh, so that’s where I am.”

Laughter from all around me.

“Very funny, Henry. Pay attention!”

“Yes, Miss.”

“Now then, where was I? We are going to go down to the auditorium where we are going to hear our guest speaker, the Senator from the State of NY, Kenneth Keating.”

Kenneth Keating? He’s been dead for years.

“He’s going to be discussing something important with us.”

We march down to the auditorium by height; I am uncharacteristically the tallest. We file into a new yet old-fashioned auditorium and sit in the third or fourth row

which, I assume, means I am in one of the smarter classes. Or maybe the dumber. I’m not sure.

Out comes the Senator. He is just like I remembered he was from the pictures. He stands erect, with his gray hair mildly askew, and speaks in this distinctive voice. He coughs, messes with his notes and then drones on about the Soviet threat. I’m not paying attention.

The problem for me is where I should go after school.

“Henry, you are staying with me tonight. Your parents are out of town for the night and they asked that I look after you.” Teacher is apparently reading my mind.

“Yes Miss...”

“You know my name perfectly well, Henry. Miss Pennington.”

“Yes, Miss Pennington.” I answer with great affection.

“Miss Pennington, what date is this?”

“May 1, Henry.”

“Umm, I mean the year. I forgot the year.”

“Oh, Henry,” she says with not a shred of a sense of humor. “1964, as you well know.”

“Oh yeah, I just forgot.” She rolls her eyes.

#

Miss Pennington lives in an apartment near the school on Pelham Parkway in The Bronx, which is a pretty area for, say, The Bronx.

The apartment is small but nice and clean and she decides to leave as soon as we get to her place.

“Just make yourself at home Henry. There is some beef stew in the refrigerator. Just heat it up and make yourself dinner. I will be home late and will have eaten already.”

I lounge around; turn on the old television set with the rabbit ears, and eat dinner watching Walter Cronkite. Just like the old days.

It's morning. I must have fallen asleep on the couch. Teacher is already dressed. She has clothes laid out for me. I dress and we eat breakfast with some small talk. I'm afraid to ask where we are going. I figure I will let it be a surprise.

She explains that it being Saturday, we are going to a party. That's nice I thought. We walk towards White Plains Road and take the subway. Cost only fifteen cents a ride. These are the good old days. We are headed for Washington Square.

I am aware that not many people on the Subway are sitting close to me. One guy is gripping a lunch pail and on my left. He sniffs, “You smell like chocolate to me.” He moves away by several seats. Do I have bad breath? New York is full of nuts. An older black woman sits next to me, says hello and smiles.

We saunter through Washington

Square and into a residential tower near the University. There we walk into the most peculiar party I have ever seen; people not only of different genders and races but also of different ages. Really different. From young kids of maybe seven to old people of maybe ninety and lots of them mingling.

There are waiters walking around with trays in their hands carrying a variety of drinks. One stops by me and asks if I would like a Coke? How about a Whisky Sour I suggest with what I assume is a cute grin? He hands it to me!

Miss P and a young man are just kind of staggering around. I start to mingle and listen in on conversations to find out just what the hell is going on here.

This pretty black girl, about my age, walks up to me smiling and I smile right back. She has braids and is wearing a low neckline dress with a pretty string of, what I assume, are faux pearls around her neck. I like her

“Hi. I'm Henry.”

“Hi,” the girl says, “I'm Allison.”

“So,” I say in my most debonair fourteen-year-old voice, “what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?”

She winces. “I was going to ask you the same thing.”

“So, what brings you here?”

“You don't know?” She smiles.

“Obviously.”

“Obviously.”

“It couldn't be about Kenneth Keating, right?”

“What?” she laughs.

“Never mind, I didn't think so. Clue

me in.”

She looks around and asks me what I see.

I tell her about the amazing diversity I find here, especially in age.

She smiles again.

“What about you? Your age?”

“I don’t know what you mean.” I am lying.

“Is there anything odd about your age that you feel?”

Wait a minute. Could she know? How?

“Umm, just what are you driving at?”

“How old do you think I am?”

Well I figure I don’t have to be polite by saying something younger.

“Fourteen?”

“Forty-five.” She has gorgeous teeth with braces on them.

Is she like me?

“How old are you really Henry?”

“Forty-six.” Close enough.

“You know why this party is so diverse in age, Henry? Because everyone here is like you. We all are, you should pardon the expression, fellow travelers; fellow time travelers that is.”

“Like Kurt Vonnegut’s coming unstuck in time?” I show off my literary knowledge to impress her.

“Not exactly like that, but something along those lines.”

“What about Miss P, my teacher? Surely she doesn’t know.”

“Oh, she comes here all the time. She is one of us.”

Damn!

“But is there a real Henry whose body I

am occupying? If not, how did I just show up in class?”

“Talk to Miss Pennington. She will tell you if you ask her.”

“Let’s go over together.”

“I don’t know Henry. That’s probably not a good idea.”

“It’s a great idea. Come, please!”

She smiles, takes my hand, and leads me to Miss P.

“So, Henry, I see you have found a friend. Hi, Allison.”

“Hi Joan. I told Henry about us. He wants to know how he got here and how he ended up in your seventh-grade class.”

Miss P. looks at me, holds up her rum and coke, and takes a long swallow.

“Are the other kids here like us?”

“Isn’t this lovely?”

“Lovely, yeah, but what, how, and why?”

Miss P. puts down her now-empty glass.

“You see, Henry, we all travelled through time into another body. We don’t know the how or the why. We just did. And we live in our new lives as if we always belonged here. We adapt.”

“But did I take over someone else’s body? Did I just show up in class? Didn’t anybody notice?”

“As far as we know, we don’t take anyone else’s body. We just show up near someone who is like us and they cover. You showed up outside my class door; just popped up. I knew right away. I introduced you to the class as a new student. You didn’t become aware of your surroundings until you were in your seat. I knew you wouldn’t know what happened to you, so I

waited for you to ask questions. You were remarkably restrained. An amazing lack of curiosity.”

“I pride myself on rolling with the punches. Besides, I thought I was having an interesting dream.”

A waiter walks by and teacher places her glass on it and grabs another rum and coke.

“I introduced you with the name Henry. That is my husband’s name. Back where I come from.”

“Do we ever switch again?”

“Not that we know of, Henry.” This is Allison speaking now.

“So, I am stuck in 1964 and have to go through all those awful years yet again?”

“Yes,” says Miss P. “Though there is, we discovered, one way of escaping if you would like to do so.”

“Yes, tell me. I can’t stand the idea of going through adolescence in the sixties again. And no, I am not going to try to change history. I just want to go home.”

“Where is home, Henry?” asks Allison.

“New Jersey. I’m a Librarian back in Southern New Jersey at a College there. I also have a Master’s in Poly Sci,” I brag. No offense to the Junior Senator from New York but who else is going to remember him?

“Are you married? With kids?”

“Kids yes, married no. It’s the year 2000. Things happen.”

“Anyway,” says Miss P., “the only way to get back to your previous life and body is to locate your real self in this time and convince your real self of your situation. If he

or she truly believes you it will be like clicking your red shoes three times and saying ‘there’s no place like home.’”

“I don’t have to do and say that for real, though. Do I?”

“No, Henry.”

“Good. Then I’m off to look myself up in 1964.”

“Can I come along for the ride?”

Allison is grinning broadly. Not certain what is so funny.

“I think that’s a great idea. Umm, by the way, do you have any cash on you?”

“Enough.”

“That clinches it. We’re off to see...I guess, me.”

“Good luck Henry.” Miss P. clears out another rum and coke.

“Bye Miss P. Thanks for everything.”

“By the way Henry, you know that if it doesn’t work out you know where to find me.”

“Thanks again. But I know it is going to work out.”

Allison and I hit the street and I want to hail a cab. I tell Allison where I am living in 1964. Allison laughs.

“A 14-year-old Black kid going to a housing project in New York and you think a cab is going to stop for you? Hilarious.”

“I’m Black?”

“You haven’t looked in a mirror?”

“No. I fell asleep on the couch last night. This morning I just threw some clothes on in the Bronx and rushed down here.”

The fact I’m Black is a lot to absorb. I’m very liberal on paper but I’m not on

paper now. This begins to explain other people's reactions to me.

We walk to 14th street and take a bus to Avenue D and the Jacob Riis Housing Project. We get off just after the bus makes the turn onto the Avenue and we stop right near my old elementary school.

There before us stands the housing project and right behind it is this huge Con Ed coal plant powering New York with electricity, defiling the air for every living thing in the Project and its environs. A few trees were planted along the street, but no one notices them. They are there to remind us of what a tree looks like and little more than that. We cross the Avenue and enter the grounds of the Project. Walking past a concrete airplane structure that the kids play on we pass several buildings until we find mine. We enter the front door of the six-story former home of mine, its rear facing the noisy and dirty Con Ed plant and its side windows facing the East River.

Arriving at the third floor we walk over to the - my - apartment. I knock. My body is shaking, and Allison puts her hand on my shoulder. We wait. I hear hurried movements inside followed by a peephole opening. A woman's voice shouts:

"Negroes?" I recognized my mother's voice.

Scrambling inside. The door opened slightly and there is a portion of my mom's face sticking out. So young.

"What do you want?"

I hesitate. Allison speaks up. "We came to see —your son."

I realize Allison doesn't know my real

name.

"Bob," I cough out.

"You know him?" My mom is suspicious.

"Yeah, from school."

A shrill scream from my mother.

"BOB! THERE ARE A COUPLE OF COLORED KIDS FROM SCHOOL TO SEE YOU."

That's when a miracle occurs. I see myself as a fourteen-year-old that I actually was in 1964, standing before me.

"Yes," I say; that is Bob says.

I can't speak. Allison saves me once more.

"We've seen you at school. Can we talk for a minute?"

"About what?"

"Hard to talk in the hall. Can we come in? It'll only be a minute."

Allison is quick on her feet. I'm standing there gawking.

"Maybe. Let me just ask my mom."

"Sure," says Allison.

A couple of minutes of hushed voices follow and finally the door opens.

"Okay, come on in," Bob says, not certain he is doing the right thing.

I look at myself standing there and think, hey, I didn't look as bad as I always thought.

We stride into the apartment; one I haven't seen in several decades. The living-room with the door open and the tiny television blaring is opposite the entrance and the long hallway is to the left of where we had entered. We follow myself down that long, bare hallway, past the kitchen with its

wonderful smells, the small bedroom painted a dismal yellow, and then, with my parent's bedroom hovering in front of us, we enter the larger bedroom on our right. This was – is – my room. The sight of the fading yellow paint brings back all sorts of memories.

I hesitate. I ask first if I can use the bathroom. I go in and stare at myself in the mirror. There I am, clearly black skinned. I turn on the cold water and splash my face several times and take three deep, long breaths.

When I return to my – that is Bob's – room, I see Allison charming Bob with small talk. She is perfectly at ease and knows exactly how to make someone feel the same, no small feat considering how shy and nervous I was as a kid. Didn't help that she was Black and it's 1964.

Bob looks at me and I realize I have to speak. I haven't exactly thought this part through.

"Look Bob, what I am about to tell you, is going to sound crazy and fantastic but you have to believe me. Our future depends on it."

Bob looks skeptical and confused.

"I – Allison and I – are from the future."

I pause. Bob gives a weird smile. Like, oh, this is some kind of prank. I knew this was going to be hard because I was many things as a kid, but dumb wasn't one of them.

"You see, Bob, I am not only from the future, I am from your future. My name is," and I pause for dramatic effect, "Bob."

"So, what exactly are you saying?"

"I am saying that I am you from the future."

Bob laughs so long and hard I think we will both die right there. He falls to the ground laughing, hugging himself as though trying to hold it together.

"A colored kid is me from my future? How dumb do you think I am?"

Allison speaks.

"Bob, this is no joke. We came from the future and arrived in different bodies. We can tell you all about yourself, things no one else knows."

"Okay," Bob challenges. "He's not believing a word of it. Go ahead."

Allison looks at me. I stare at her. Then I ask her to leave us alone for a few minutes.

"Sure." She walks out of the room and into the bathroom where my mom is scrubbing the toilet seat. Took a while but I realize I had been the cause of the toilet cleaning. I feel ashamed, wounded, and angry. Bob doesn't seem to mind. I close the door to the bedroom. Ten, maybe fifteen minutes go by with my saying things that no one – absolutely – no one could possibly know but me. Bob's jaw drops, he blushes, hides his face, and sits down.

"How could you possibly know all that?"

"I told you. And if you believe me, I will disappear and return to my – our – proper time."

"All I have to do is believe you?"

"Yes, but it has to be for real."

"But you're colored."

“Yeah, I know. Someday that will mean something to you.”

Bob thinks for a few more minutes and then stares at me. It happens. I close my eyes and when I open them, I am in my townhouse in New Jersey and I am a white, middle-aged Jewish man once again. I feel a pang of regret. I will never see Allison again and I hadn't had a chance to say goodbye or even find out her real name or where she lived so I could look her up in this time. I sit on my couch and ponder my experience. I fall asleep and awaken the next morning.
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I hear a bell chime. My eyes are half open when I open the door. There is this gorgeous woman standing before me. “Hi, Bob.”

I stare. “I'm sorry, do I know you?”

“Oh, yes. I'm Joyce.”

“Umm, I'm sorry but I don't know any Joyce.”

“Sure you do. Can I come in?”

“Yeah,” I sputter out.

She says she is a lawyer. I'm thinking, oh, oh, am I in trouble? My thought leads to an awkward facial expression.

She laughs. “You aren't in any trouble.”

“Then who are you?”

“I told you. I am Joyce.”

“But I don't know any Joyce. At least any Black woman named Joyce.”

“Sure you do. Oh, wait - you knew me as Allison.”

Of course. “How is that possible?”

“When I was speaking to your mom while you were with yourself, if you know what I mean, I asked your mom all about

you. You had already said you were a librarian at a College in NJ in the year 2000. Didn't take me long to track you down.”

“But why didn't you track me down much sooner?”

“Oh, you don't know. Somehow, when you disappeared, I did too and went home to my current age. I did some quick research and drove down here from the City.”

Allison, or Joyce, gives a big yawn.

“Didn't get much sleep last night.”

“Great. You still have a beautiful smile. No braces.”

“They disappeared when I disappeared.”

“How about we get something to eat? I love to cook. We have a lot of catching up to do.”

Joyce leans over and gives me a gentle kiss on my cheek. “You cook too?”

“Maybe we could disappear and pop up in the future to see what that is like? Would you like that?”

“Sure,” Joyce says. “How about 2017? I wonder who our President will be then?”

“Maybe a Jew?”

“Or an African American? Or a woman? Or an African American woman.”

“Yeah,” I muse. “The future. Where anything is possible.” ❖

“THE THIRD DAY”

by A. J. PADILLA

Dieter
March 1945

The black Mercedes 770 drove into view, bouncing over the ruts and hillocks of frozen earth before it rolled to a stop at the edge of the pine forest. Dieter watched as four men in black *Schutzstaffel* uniforms got out of the car. One of them, a tall blond officer, held the rear door open for a man in a long white overcoat and military-style cap. The man's left hand shook badly, as if from a palsy.

The passenger turned to Dieter.

“Be sure to have the aircraft refueled and ready to leave when I return.”

“Yes, *Herr Doktor*.”

The passenger jogged over to the Mercedes. He spoke to one of the SS officers before turning to the man in the white overcoat and extending his right arm in a stiff-armed Party salute. He led the way as all six walked away from the car and into the trees.

Dieter refueled the aircraft and went through a slow, careful check of its exterior. Their next refueling stop was four hundred kilometers away, and they must take off soon if they were going to have any chance of making it there before dark. He lit a cigarette and waited.

Dieter had no idea what the six men might be up to, nor did he waste time speculating about something that did not concern him. His orders were clear enough; fly the passenger anywhere he wants to go, at any time of the day or night. The Reich official who took him from his Luftwaffe squadron eighteen months ago also made it clear that under no circumstances was he to allow his passenger to be taken alive by the enemy. He tried not to think about that part of his orders

The High Command kept him supplied with maps of a very special kind. Each showed the locations of safe landing zones and caches of petrol in areas still controlled by the Reich. The maps had been updated every few months until the Normandy invasion nine months ago. Now, despite the growing chaos infecting the Reich like a plague, new maps reached him every week.

His Fieseler Storch had been stripped of all its military markings and outfitted with an auxiliary fuel tank. Dieter knew that making the plane resemble a civilian aircraft would offer little protection against a British or American pilot intent on forcing him down or shooting him out of the sky. But luck had been his companion so far, and he hoped it would not abandon him on this last flight into Franco's Spain.

Dieter reached into the plane's cockpit for the maps delivered by messenger only yesterday. He studied them carefully, calculating distances and fuel consumption to the various alternative landing sites. When he was done, he put the maps away and lit another cigarette. He checked his chronograph. Another thirty minutes had gone by and there was still no sign of his passenger.

He ran over to the Mercedes and saw that two of its windows were beginning to frost over. Dieter smoked another cigarette and paced back and forth by the motorcar. Any chance of reaching the next refueling stop before nightfall would soon vanish. He walked to the place along the tree line where he had seen the six men disappear and, after a nervous backward glance at the Storch, walked into the forest.

Dieter was immediately enveloped by a misty, green twilight alive with the scent of pine. A soft carpet of brown needles cushioned every footfall, so that his movement through the trees was nearly without sound. The forest felt utterly peaceful, almost dreamlike. It made the endless violence of the war seem suddenly very far away, a part of some other world. For a moment it was possible to imagine that the nightmare of the last six years had never happened. The notion made Dieter smile, but the illusion of peace faded quickly and his handsome young face once again became a rigid, anxious mask.

He was no traitor or defeatist; he had fought bravely for the Reich over the skies of Poland, France, and the English Channel. And yet this quiet place made

him think of other paths open to him. The war could end for him tomorrow. All he would have to do is walk away. Spain was a big, beautiful country that had its own *führer* in General Franco, a man to be respected and admired. It would be so easy to disappear, to lose himself in a new land far from a dying thousand-year Reich.

The heavy scent of pine also brought with it thoughts of the holidays. Back in December, Dieter had pleaded with the passenger for a day's leave to visit his family in Dresden. He had offered to find a reliable pilot to take over his duties, but the request had been instantly denied. The passenger insisted that Dieter and no one else must remain at his disposal. There would be no exceptions, even for a son's understandable wish to be with his family at *Weinachten*. Nothing outside of his secretive mission seemed to mean anything to the man. Now Dieter's mother and father were dead, victims of the enemy's latest criminal fire-bombing of civilians.

As for his older brother, Werner, God only knew what had become of him. Dieter had heard nothing from him since the Sixth Army's surrender at Stalingrad two years before. He was probably dead or taken prisoner by the bestial Russians, which amounted to the same thing. If he did decide to begin a new life in Spain, he would not be leaving anything or anyone behind.

Dieter had gone nearly two kilometers when he came upon a clearing where the pine needle floor ended, replaced not by bare earth but by a green concrete slab. A

structure the size of a small tool shed, sheathed in dull gray metal and draped with camouflage netting, stood at its center. Part of the netting had been pushed aside to reveal a door. Dieter approached it warily and saw that the door was slightly ajar. He was only a few meters from the shed when the ground shuddered and he nearly lost his footing. The sudden quake was followed by a low rumbling sound. The pungent smell of burning rubber stung his nostrils and a fine yellow mist rose from the earth around him like a fog. The trees around him seemed to undulate, as if he were seeing them through the rippling heat haze of a desert noon. Dieter became light-headed and backed away, off the concrete slab and into the woods. He reached out to steady himself against the trunk of an old pine. Its rough brown bark was hot to the touch and he jerked his hand away as a cold surge of panic gripped him. What was happening? Before he could begin to imagine any sort of answer, it was over. The yellow mist slowly dissipated and the forest was again quiet except for the sound of distant birds and sighing wind.

Dieter turned and ran.

He was breathing hard, shaken and sweating, when he emerged from the tree line. He ran to the Storch and stood alongside the aircraft smoking cigarette after cigarette, trying to calm himself. The passenger returned twenty minutes later, without the SS officers or the man in the white overcoat.

“Is everything in readiness, Dieter?”

“Yes, *Herr Doktor*. What about the

motorcar?” He pointed to the gleaming black Mercedes.

“My companions no longer need it. Let us get on with our journey, Dieter. I would like to reach Spain as soon as possible. There is so much work yet to be done.”

“Very well.”

Dieter quickly re-checked his newest maps, his hands still trembling from the bizarre occurrence in the forest.

“Are you alright, Dieter? You seem agitated.”

“I’m fine, *Herr Doktor*.”

He flew most of the way to their next stop at treetop level, even though he believed there was little chance of encountering enemy aircraft. The war was nearing its end. Very few dared say it aloud, but Germany was probably only weeks away from surrender. The promised miracle weapons that were supposed to stave off defeat had done nothing to prevent enemy armies from closing in on the Fatherland. The once invincible Luftwaffe now barely existed as a fighting force, and Wehrmacht divisions, or what remained of them, were falling back in disarray on all fronts. The Führer’s Reich was vanishing before his eyes, like some magician’s hideous sleight of hand.

He needed more time to compose himself and was relieved when the passenger fell asleep. He could not begin to understand what had happened back in the clearing, but was certain that his passenger was involved. He was sure of something else: he had not been meant to see any of it.

Dieter landed at the next refueling stop,

a pasture thirty kilometers from the nearest town, just before nightfall. He quickly located the drums of petrol and went about refueling the Storch, being sure to fill the auxiliary tank to full capacity. The extra fuel would provide the additional range needed to complete the final leg of their journey over the Pyrenees and into Spain. But the tank also added weight and took away from the small plane's maneuverability. His fellow Luftwaffe pilots used to joke that Dieter could make an ME 109 do magical things. He prayed that he would not have need of such skill before their journey was at an end.

He rolled the empty petrol drums back under the camouflage netting. The passenger woke just as they were getting underway.

"We should be crossing into Spain at dawn, *Herr Doktor*."

"Have you seen any enemy aircraft?"

"No, sir."

"Good, good."

The passenger was restless. He shifted in his seat and started to light one of the American cigarettes he always managed to have with him. Dieter gently reminded him that smoking was forbidden inside the aircraft, especially now that the auxiliary tank was full to capacity.

"My apologies," he said, and put out the cigarette.

They last flew into Spain late in 1944, around the time of Von Rundstedt's December offensive. The weather was terrible and as a result enemy air activity had been minimal to non-existent. Once in Spain, Dieter landed in the usual place, a

large field near the abandoned barn where his passenger kept an old Maybach. He had watched him drive off toward the northwest. To pass the time until the older man's return, he read copies of the *Volkischer Beobachter* and drank bitter coffee he brewed on a camp stove.

The passenger had never been gone more than half a day on their previous flights, but that time he did not return until well after sundown. He drove directly into the barn and said nothing as he stepped out of the car, put on a pair of heavy rubberized black gloves, and removed a metal box from the Maybach's boot. He carried the box as if it contained something fragile and very precious, gingerly placing it at the rear of the plane's cockpit floor.

That night they sat in the barn eating bread, cheese, and fruit, and washing it all down with some good Spanish wine. The passenger sat on a crude wooden stool by a kerosene lamp, intently using his slide rule and scribbling in the small black notebook he always carried with him.

Dieter never asked him about the contents of the box. He had learned that it was not a good idea to ask too many questions about anything. If you did, sooner or later someone might start asking *you* a question or two, and in these hellish, frenzied last days of the Reich there were people in power who saw traitors behind every bush. Even the most innocent question could be twisted around and made to sound sinister. He had heard far too many stories of summary executions based on groundless accusations to permit himself the luxury of ordi-

nary curiosity.

His usually quiet passenger suddenly became talkative.

“I have performed a miracle today, Dieter,” he yelled over the sound of the propeller. “A miracle!”

Dieter had no idea what he was talking about or what he should say in response, so he said nothing and pretended to check the plane’s instruments.

“It is criminal to have to keep such a thing secret, Dieter! Criminal! The world worships Einstein and will never know how I have accomplished what that Jew can only dream of.”

“Yes, *Herr Doktor*.”

He carried on about his miracle without ever saying what it was and continued to imagine what the scientific community would say, how it would lionize him, if they were only permitted to know of his accomplishment. Dieter was grateful when he finally stopped talking and again fell asleep.

They reached Spain just as the sun’s first rays brightened the rim of the eastern sky. He expected the passenger to drive off in his Maybach as soon as it was fueled, but the excitement he had shown aboard the Storch was upon him again like a fever. He paced around the drafty old barn, gesturing and talking.

“I don’t expect you to understand what I have done. There are brilliant physicists all over the world who, even if they knew, could not understand. I have turned one of man’s eternal dreams into a reality.”

He stopped pacing and looked around the empty barn with a sly, conspiratorial

smile on his face.

“Now here’s a bit of news for you, Dieter. In the coming weeks the world will be shocked by the death of our Führer. His body will be cremated, which will, of course, make identification of the remains difficult, if not impossible. The war will end and the enemy will occupy our sacred land. But Germany will go on, Dieter, and our Führer will be every bit as alive as we are at this moment. He will be safe and restored to perfect health where our enemies cannot find him, even if they were to search every square centimeter of the planet.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, *Herr Doktor*.”

What he was saying sounded like nonsense – the Führer dead, but somehow also alive?

“Of course not. How could you? How can anyone? That is why he is so utterly beyond the reach of our enemies. And yet it is true, Dieter, I assure you.”

Dieter was certain now that the passenger was mad. Perhaps whatever it was that happened in the forest had disordered the scientist’s senses, destroying his ability to reason. He concluded that it would be best to listen quietly, humor him until he was done with his lunatic rant and quietly drove away.

“Of course, as is the case with nearly all human endeavors, our plan has not been without its flaws. The Austrian actor who so successfully doubled for our Führer since the spring of nineteen forty-three became, how shall I say it, too involved in his portrayal? The fool started believing he could

do a better job than the Führer himself. And to make matters even more ridiculous, the Führer's mistress, the pretty but empty-headed Miss Braun, appears to have fallen in love with the man! Imagine that, Dieter, that idiot woman preferring a trifling actor to the greatest man in human history! Well, she will be gone, too, in the not-too-distant future, a loyal wench preferring death to a life without her Führer. A love story for the ages, eh, Dieter?"

"Of course, *Herr Doktor*." Dieter smiled uneasily, finished fueling the Maybach, and began wiping the big auto's dusty windshield.

"When the time is right, the Führer will restore the Reich and make us masters of the world. That has always been the inescapable destiny of our people. It will happen, Dieter, I promise you. In the meantime, he will wait patiently in his new world. Oh, how I envy him the wonders he is even now experiencing!"

"Yes, *Herr Doktor*. I think that's fine."

The passenger stared at Dieter.

"You think I'm insane, don't you? I can see it in your young face. Well, that is good. Let them all think I'm insane and that what I have accomplished is impossible. In this case the notion of impossibility is a splendid ally and protector. What a man cannot imagine, he can never suspect."

"Certainly, *Herr Doktor*."

"I must be on my way now. I have a long drive ahead of me and an even longer flight after that. The Third Day is just getting started and requires much work."

"The Third Day, *Herr Doktor*?" Dieter

asked with feigned curiosity.

"Yes. The Führer himself chose the name for the project. It is a small joke on his part. Think of the Easter story, Dieter, and you will understand. From this point onward The Third Day will consume my life and the lives of all the others devoted to its success. These past six years have been a prelude and nothing more. Let our enemies celebrate their victory when it comes. It will be nothing more than an illusion. But I have already said too much, too much. You must understand that I am on fire inside, Dieter."

He looked at Dieter for a long time without saying a word, then shook his head and said, with sorrow in his voice, "You should never have done it, you know. You had strict orders to remain by your aircraft until my return."

"Sir?"

"Klaus, one of my officers, briefly left the underground chamber for a cigarette and saw you approach through the trees. He ran down and told me. He did a most admirable job of describing you, Dieter, so there can be no doubt who it was he saw. I suppose it is partially my fault. The area should have long ago been fenced off and put under guard, but there has been so little time, really no time at all."

"You are an excellent pilot, Dieter, and I was fortunate to have had you assigned to me. In a just world, we would be winning this wretched war and you would have been assured a brilliant future in the new Germany. But in the ugly and unjust world we are forced to inhabit, loyal servants of

the Reich have been left with only the taste of ashes as a reward for their heroic efforts. Yesterday, I assured us all of a Fourth Reich. Today there is, sadly, an unfortunate present that must be dealt with.”

He pulled a Luger from his overcoat pocket. Dieter stared at it, too surprised and frightened to speak.

“I detest having to do this, Dieter, believe me, but I’m afraid you saw too much during your little forest excursion. I cannot take the chance that you might one day share what you saw with someone else. Look at it this way, my boy, we are all soldiers of the Fatherland and soldiers die in battle every day.”

“You are not yourself, *Herr Doktor*. Please put the pistol away.”

The passenger seemed not to have heard him.

“So many have had to die already,” he sighed. “The thousands of laborers who built my underground chamber during the early years of the war, the *Wehrmacht* guards who oversaw them, and only last summer the scores of engineers who assembled the device also had to be sacrificed. I understand completely the necessity for their elimination, yet I cannot help regretting it. But I assure you that I will regret no death as deeply as yours, Dieter.”

“I don’t understand anything you are saying, *Herr Doktor*.”

There could no longer be any doubt of his passenger’s insanity. Unless he found words to dissuade the madman, he would soon die a senseless death out in the middle of nowhere. Dieter suddenly longed as

never before for the sight of his ruined homeland.

“I know, I know,” his passenger said, and pulled the Luger’s trigger.

Lieutenant Carl Noble

November 2083

Two uniforms and a crime scene tech were already on the scene when we walked into the place. The living room looked like it had been redecorated by a tornado. The stiff was on the living room floor, his sightless blue eyes open and a pool of blood spreading out beneath him in the shape of a lopsided heart.

“What can you tell me?”

The tech was kneeling by the body. She looked up at me.

“Looks like the student who lives here, a kid named Stryker, walked in on a burglary in progress. The guy pulled a gun, got off a shot that made mincemeat out of a sconce lamp over by the front door. There was a tussle, and the gun went off again, this time at point blank range right through the burglar’s pump.”

The stiff was still holding the gun in the clenched fingers of his right hand.

“Mind if I take a look?”

“Help yourself. I’m done here.”

I called my partner over.

“Hey, Ritt, take a look at this. Pretty well dressed for your average burglar, wouldn’t you say?”

“Maybe he wasn’t an average burglar.”

The tech held up a plastic evidence bag.

“Here’s a little something you might find interesting. It probably fell out of his pocket during the struggle.”

The bag contained a wafer-thin silver object about the size of a business card. I’d seen others like it before. It was every burglar’s dream come true, a contraption that scans and opens just about any electronic lock on the market, even those activated by palm or fingerprints. The nasty little things are illegal and cost about as much as a sixty-foot cabin cruiser.

I went through the stiff’s pockets and came up with a leather billfold containing several thousand dollars in cash, a rare thing these days when nearly everything is paid for with the scan of a handheld device. He had an international identification card that told me he was Anton Duvalier and that he lived on the Rue Saint-Paul in Paris. His expensive-looking jacket had a label from a tailor’s shop in that city. The slacks and shirt looked as if they, too, were custom-made. His outfit probably cost more than I earn in a month.

“What do you think, Ritt?”

“Not sure yet, but this doesn’t feel right.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean.”

Stryker was sitting at the kitchen table across from Officer Timothy McGivern, a good cop and a friend from way back. The kid looked up at me with dazed brown eyes. He was probably hoping this was all a bad dream and that any second now he’d wake up next to his girlfriend.

“Looks like you had quite a dance with

our friend over there.”

“Dance?”

I’d have to go easy with him. The kid was still deep in shock.

“Sorry. I mean, there must have been quite a struggle.”

“I ... I walked in on him. He took a shot at me and we wrestled, knocked over a lot of things. I had him pinned, trying to get the gun away from him ... and ... and it went off.”

“Ever see him before?”

“No, never.”

“I’m Lieutenant Carl Noble. This is my partner, Lieutenant Walter Ritter. Why don’t we go over what happened here, step by step? Take your time.”

McGivern and his partner stood up.

“We’re going to take off now, Carl.”

“Thanks guys. We’ll take it from here.”

I sat across from the kid.

“Go ahead, Mr. Stryker.”

An hour later Ritt and I were on our way back to the station house. He hadn’t said a thing for a whole ten minutes, a record for him.

“Okay, spill it. What’s wrong, Ritt?”

“Nothing.”

“You haven’t tossed two words in my direction since we left Stryker’s apartment.”

“I’m thinking.”

“That’s what worries me.”

“Why don’t we stop for a bite before we go back? That new seafood place over on Arlington looks like it might be worth a try.”

“We’ll go anywhere you want, but first

tell me what's on your mind."

"Well, for starters, we've got a burglar who dresses better than the police commissioner. He's got enough cash on him to start his own bank and is walking around with an illegal device that costs as much as my house. Did you by any chance take a look at his hands?"

"Yeah, I saw. The stiff liked jewelry and manicures. So what?"

"So that was no ordinary burglar lying there with a hole in his chest. So maybe this wasn't a burglary at all. Could be the two guys knew each other, argued over something - money, a woman maybe, whatever. So maybe what we're looking at here isn't self-defense but murder."

"The kid's clean, Ritt. If he was lying, I'd have known it."

"Why don't we make sure?"

"What are you getting at?"

Ritt reached in his pocket and brought out an evidence bag with a few strands of hair in it.

"These came from the kid's hairbrush. I looked around the place while you were talking to him. I'll have the lab run a DNA tracer and see what they come up with. In a few hours we should know everything the kid's done since he came out of his mama's belly."

"Are you aware of the laws against that type of thing?"

"We can always get a search warrant later if it turns out he's dirty. Who's to say when, or how, we got a couple of strands of the kid's hair?"

"Sometimes you worry me, Ritt."

"Let's get some lunch. Playing Sherlock Holmes makes me hungry."

I wrote my report when we got back to the squad room. The DA's office would take a statement from him tomorrow and then it would be up to them to decide if Stryker was guilty of anything other than defending himself against an armed intruder. I was willing to bet my pension that they wouldn't.

Ritter got his report an hour before the end of our shift.

"So, were you right about the kid, Sherlock?"

"Doesn't look like it. Stryker's a boy scout. The tracer doesn't even show a parking ticket. His father's a banker, fairly well-to-do, and his mother teaches at a fancy private school. He was an honor student in high school, where he was also captain of the wrestling team and valedictorian of his graduating class. The kid went to college on a scholarship and wrestled there, too, until a back injury put him out of commission during his junior year. He graduated Magna Cum Laude and now he's working on a PhD in Theoretical Physics, whatever the hell that is, over at the university. The kid's also some kind of author, written some stuff for tablet magazines and dailies. Take a look at this."

He dropped a hard copy of a tab magazine article on my desk: "The Time Machine That Might Have Been."

"Have you read it?"

"I tried. It's about some crackpot who dreamed up a time machine."

“People can’t seem to get enough time travel garbage since that awful movie came out last year.”

“Yeah, I know. Only this article is a little different, Carl. It’s not made-up stuff like the movie. The guy he writes about actually lived more than a hundred and fifty years ago.”

“Still sounds like a load of crap to me, just like the movie.”

I tossed the article into my desk drawer.

“Anything else, Ritt?”

“Not about the kid. We did get something on the stiff’s gun. It was reported stolen six months ago by a commercial dealer in antique firearms. How about you? Hear anything from Larry about Duvalier?”

Larry Sobel is the city coroner and chief medical examiner.

“Not yet. We should have something soon.”

A call came in just then: a citizen named Rehnquist reporting a body out in the waterfront district, a possible homicide. A Med Unit was on its way and would meet us there.

The “body” turned out to be a vagrant who had passed out after taking a hit of Oblivion, the latest drug making the rounds of our fair city. It’s supposed to knock you out for half an hour or so and while you’re in never-never land you experience visions that change your life in all kinds of wonderful ways. The dirt bags who sell the poison promise users that they will be born again. It’s been a real problem over at the university, where students sometimes overdose and wind up with screaming nightmares they

have a hell of a time waking up from. Then there are the poor kids who take it one time and never wake up at all.

The med techs managed to bring the vagrant out of it. If the poor slob felt born again when he woke up, he certainly didn’t show it. He vomited for ten minutes and had trouble remembering who and where he was. They finally carted him away to a local detox unit.

Ritter shook his head as we walked back to the car.

“The fun and games never end for us humble servants of the law.”

A message from Larry Sobel was waiting for me when I got back to the squad room. I took it at my desk display unit.

“Got a wild one for you, Carl.”

“Meaning what, Larry?”

“I’m talking about your well-dressed decedent. First of all, his wound is entirely consistent with Mr. Stryker’s account of what transpired. Things get a little peculiar after that. Duvalier’s identification card is a forgery, the best my office has ever seen. The real Anton Duvalier was a jeweler who went missing a few years ago while on vacation in Germany. The Paris address on the card turns out to be an antique shop owned by an elderly Latvian couple. We ran the guy’s prints through every database known to man and cop and came up empty, so I ran facial and iris scans on the body and came up blank again. How old would you say he was?”

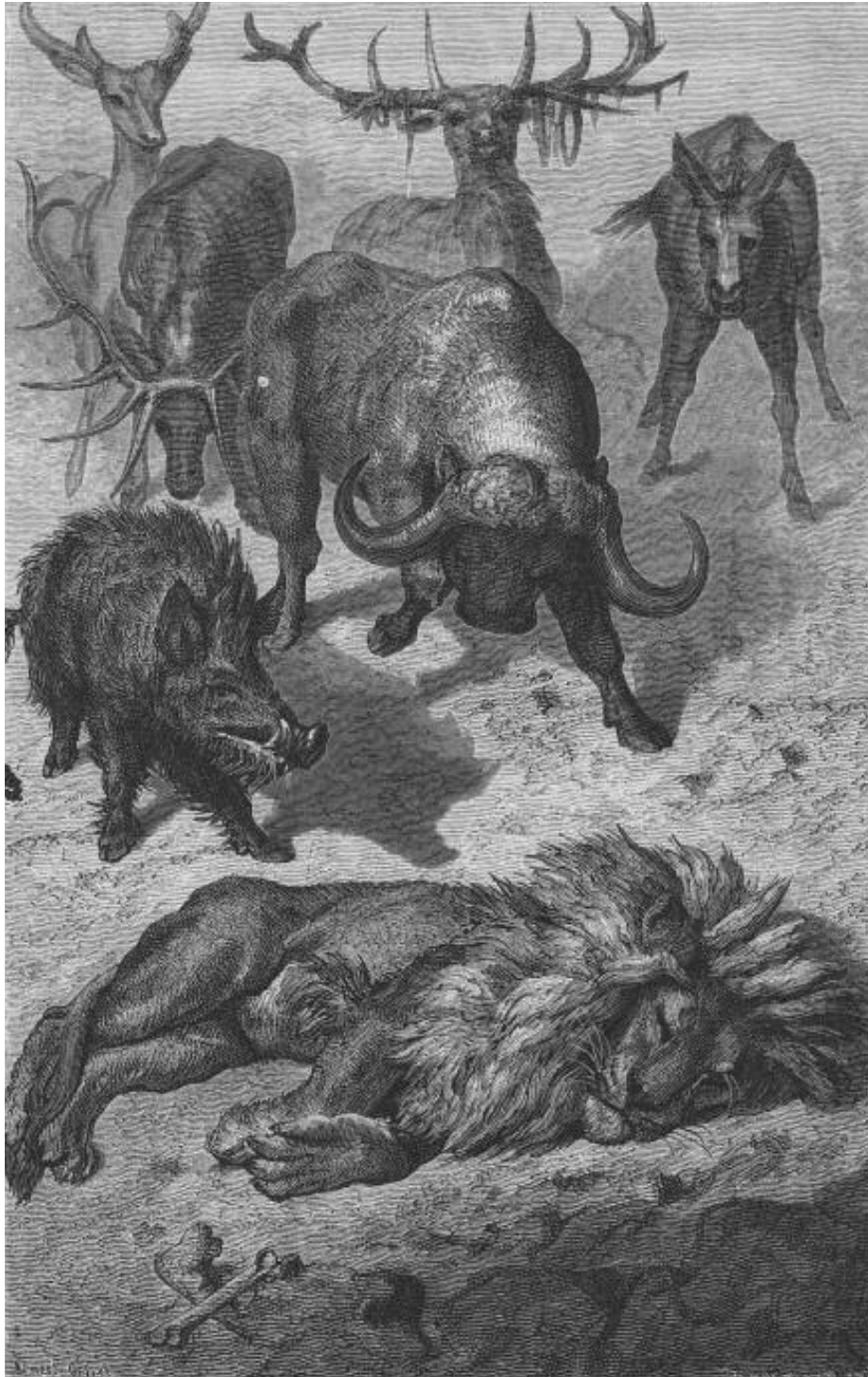
“Thirty maybe, give or take a year or two.”

“That’s just about where I’d peg him,

Carl. That means he should have an embedded chip, just like everybody else born in the last forty years, only this guy

doesn't and there's no scar to show that it's been removed."

"He's a foreigner, Larry."



"Makes no difference. We were late getting into the chip game, remember? The rest of the world was tagging babies years before us."

"How about Interpol?"

"Same story. Nothing. There's one other really curious thing about the deceased. His teeth. They were in good shape except for a couple of fillings. It looks like some butcher used a drill on the guy. My God, can you imagine that - a drill? And you wouldn't believe what they used to fill the cavities. The stuff's been banned for at least sixty years. Unbelievable."

"What are you trying to tell me, Larry?"

"I'm telling you that your burglar doesn't exist, at least not officially. He's a John Doe and that's what he's going to remain unless someone comes out of the woodwork and claims the body. We vaporize the remains in two months. That gives you sixty days to try and find out who he was, if you're so inclined."

"When will I get your report?"

"It's already there. Look under the case number."

"Thanks, Larry."

Larry's face faded from the display.

"So, what's the story on the stiff?"

Ritter had been out getting what was probably the day's tenth cup of coffee. He hadn't heard any of my conversation with Larry.

"There is no story, Ritt. The guy's a blank."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just what I said. He's a total blank. I.D.'s a phony. No chip. No match on the prints or anything else. The only thing

Larry knows for sure is that he had a butcher for a dentist."

"Dentist?"

"Don't ask."

"Guess that's that."

"No, it isn't. Not for me."

"Why should you give a damn who he was? He's dead. Over and done with."

"I don't, not really. I just hate loose ends."

"Is that what this Duvalier character is, a loose end?"

"You know what I mean."

"I'm afraid I do, Carl. You know what Chief Carpenter says about you?"

"Sure. He says I obsess over cases."

"I'm beginning to think he might have a point."

"He does. It's on top of his head."

"Listen to me, Carl, if you're so hell bent on wasting the department's time finding out who this creep was, why not try getting in touch with Paul Boyer? We know the stiff's duds were all made in Paris, right? And he was carrying an I.D. with a phony French address. Maybe Paul can come up with something that'll tie all your loose ends together."

"You think I should bring him into this? Chief Carpenter would just love that."

"I'm not suggesting an official request. Make it a personal thing, a favor for a friend. Strictly unofficial."

Paul Boyer is an inspector with the French police. Two years ago, he was on the trail of a banker, a guy named Jean Chevalier who, after embezzling a fortune from his employer, had poisoned his wife

and her lover. It was a week before the bodies were discovered and by then Chevalier had bought a one-way ticket to the USA, where he proceeded to lose himself among our four hundred and fifty million overcrowded citizens. The French cops were under a ton of pressure to find him. It seems Chevalier had family connections to some very prominent people in the government and they were mad as hell about his still being on the loose. They wanted him caught, and fast.

The French police thought he might be living in or near our city in order to be close to a married woman he'd been having an on-again, off-again affair with for nearly ten years. They'd met while she was teaching at the Sorbonne and the affair continued until she left France and came to work at our university. The French authorities requested assistance in apprehending him and placed Paul on temporary assignment with our department. We kept an eye on the girlfriend, hoping Chevalier would eventually feel safe enough to come out of hiding and contact her. After all, boys will be boys, and having seen his lady professor I can't say I would have blamed him much for wanting to get close to her again.

It took a couple of months, but Chevalier's hormones eventually got the better of him and he showed up at the woman's door, looking arrogant and self-satisfied. We were there waiting for him when he left her place. I suppose we all assumed that a slightly overweight, middle-aged banker wasn't likely to give us much trouble. How wrong we were. He saw us closing

in and pulled a Ruger automatic from his overcoat, firing as he ran for the sporty red roadster he'd left parked up the street. He never made it.

Paul and I got to be friends during the two months it took to nail Chevalier and we've kept in touch ever since.

"I just may do that, Ritt. He owes me a couple of favors and this might be a good time to collect one of them."

I reached Paul at his home in Montreuil late that evening. We chatted for a while before I got around to asking him for help. He didn't sound very enthusiastic, but agreed to do what he could. I sent him all we had on the case and waited.

I heard back from him four days later.

"What have you got for me, Paul?"

"And *bon jour* to you, too, Carl."

"Sorry. How are you?"

"Old, exhausted, and in debt, but otherwise *magnifique*. And you?"

"About the same."

"Well, this was a curious little puzzle you dropped in my lap."

"You came up empty, too?"

"I did not say that. I came up, as you say, 'empty,' but only at first. Then I took the photograph you sent me to the tailor's shop where your well-dressed corpse had his clothes made. A very expensive place, I might add. The clerks remembered him quite well. He had been a very good customer of theirs for the past two years. All his purchases were delivered to the same address in an exclusive part of our city. The fellow called himself Günter Hess. That's all the clerks were able to tell me. He had a

flat in a luxury building managed by a local real estate agency for its foreign owners. The woman I spoke to at the agency said that Hess bought the flat for sixty million in cash.”

“Then Hess was the guy’s name?”

“No. Oh, he did produce a passport and a European identification card when he bought the flat. Both had the name Günter Hess on them. I’m sure the agent wasn’t interested in checking any further. Why should he? When a man pays that much for a flat, he’s allowed to call himself Mickey Mouse if he wishes. I also had a chat with the building’s concierge. He told me that Hess was quite the ladies’ man. Excellent taste, too, he said, but quite fickle, never seen with the same woman for long. And ladies were not his only passion. He had two new Maserati convertibles parked in the building’s garage, one red, one black. We traced those and found that they, too, were paid for in cash and registered to Günter Hess. Your burglar was also something of a gourmet who ate at only the best and most expensive restaurants our city has to offer. Hess managed to live in this most enviable fashion while having no income, at least none that I have been able to discover. The real Günter Hess, by the way, was a schoolteacher who disappeared several years ago while on holiday in Munich. Now let me ask you a question, Carl.”

“Shoot.”

“Have you disposed of the remains?”

“No. If a relative doesn’t show up within fifty-three days, the body will go into the

chamber and disappear in a cloud of blue smoke.”

“You must not allow that to happen.”

“Why not?”

“That is the strangest part of this puzzle, Carl. You see, when I was unable to identify your burglar through conventional means, one of my assistants, an ambitious young fool who has not been with us very long, took it upon himself to run the prints you sent us through an old database, an idiotic thing to do, since that particular database is a collection of millions of very old records of deceased individuals from all over Europe. It contains everything from nuns, entertainers, and generals to thieves, politicians, housewives, serial killers, university students, and infants. It is used strictly for training purposes. Incredibly, this burglar of yours was in that database. His name, it seems, was not Duvalier or Hess but Klaus Auguste von Tauber, born on the fifteenth day of April in the year 1915, which made him approximately one hundred and sixty-eight years of age on the day of his death. So, my friend, if you have not yet rid yourselves of the remains then you may wish to take them to a facility for advanced medical research. This fellow could very well help science discover the secret to eternal youth.”

“It’s a mistake, Paul. Some sort of computer mix-up. You know that.”

“Of course, it is a mistake, Carl. There can be no other explanation. Still, it presents us with a fascinating mystery, does it not? How is one to explain the fact that Duvalier’s fingerprints are a match for Von

Tauber's, or that the photograph on the old *kennkarte* my determined young assistant came up with appears to be the same person, a little younger perhaps but without question the same individual or his identical twin? Now here's another curious fact, Carl: while Herr von Tauber was born in Germany, his last known residence was a place right here in Paris, not the flat where he lived the past two years, but 84 Avenue Foch, which happens to have been the headquarters of an SS counter-intelligence unit during the unfortunate twentieth century occupation of my country. The German authorities were kind enough to track him down in their archives and sent my assistant a copy of an old dossier on von Tauber. I'll forward a copy of the dossier and identity card to you. Does anyone in your department read German?"

"No, but if I need a translation, I can always find someone at the university to do it for us."

"No need. I'll have my assistant translate the documents before sending them along. His maternal grandmother was German, and among his many talents is a fluency in that language. My assistant tells me that this von Tauber fellow was from a family of wealthy Prussian aristocrats, a university graduate who studied in both England and France. He also seems to have been a good little Nazi, very devoted to the cause. The dossier chronicles his activities through early 1944, when he was assigned to the staff of a civilian scientist named Frömke, Otto Frömke. There is nothing after that. I'm having Le Clercq -- he's the

fellow who discovered everything I have just told you -- look into this Frömke person. I doubt that anything useful will come of it, but if nothing else the search will help to keep my ambitious assistant out of mischief for a while."

"Nothing about this business makes any sense, Paul. What motive could this guy, whatever his name really was, have had in the first place? According to you, he had been living like a king in Paris for the past two years. We're supposed to believe that one morning he wakes up and decides to fly thousands of miles for the sole purpose of breaking into a place rented by a student he doesn't know, a kid whose total net worth maybe adds up to what he paid for a couple of his tailor-made suits? That makes about as much sense as his being one hundred and sixty-eight years old."

"Let me ask you something, Carl. Does your burglar have a scar on his right shoulder? Is there a small kidney-shaped birthmark on his lower back? Von Tauber had both. If your corpse also has them, then I think we are left with a most curious situation: a man who has been dead for a very long time appears to have been the person killed in your city a week ago."

"You saw the coroner's report, Paul. The scar and birthmark are both there."

"Well, that is it then, isn't it? You handed me a mystery and I have given back a conundrum. Incredible as it may seem, the facts seem to tell us that von Tauber and the deceased are one and the same person. The probability of an error in this case is statistically so small as to be virtually non-

existent, or so young Le Clercq assures me. Now, if you'll excuse me, I am going to my favorite bar and have a large absinthe, possibly two, while I try to forget all about your well-dressed Methuselah."

"Thanks, Paul. I owe you one."

"Allow me to offer you a little brotherly advice, Carl. Don't bother reading the dossier Le Clercq is sending you. What does it matter who your burglar was or might have been? He's dead. Forget him and get on with your other cases."

"I can't do that."

"Can't? Or won't? There is a world of difference between those two."

"Give me enough time and I'll find out who this guy really was."

"I wish you luck, Carl. In the meantime, should anything else turn up I will have young Le Clercq get in touch with you. *Au revoir*, my friend."

"Aren't you going home today, Carl?"

"You go ahead, Ritt. I've got some work to catch up on."

Ritter looked at the pile of paper on my desk and shot me a long, skeptical look.

"Jeez, are you back on *that* again?"

"Go home, Ritt."

He shook his head as he walked out of the squad room.

My desk was covered with everything I had on Duvalier. The similar birthmarks and scars could be chalked up to coincidence. Many people have scars, many have birthmarks. Explaining a seemingly exact match between the photograph and fingerprints on old German identity card and

what we had on Duvalier was a hell of a lot harder, and yet to accept what they suggested was crazy. Thirty years of experience told me that hidden somewhere in the pile of information in front of me was a telltale fact that would destroy the ridiculous notion that Klaus Auguste von Tauber and the burglar killed in Stryker's apartment were one and the same person.

For the next two hours I sat at my desk poring over files, while outside the dusty squad room windows the sun went through its daily disappearing act. I read through everything twice and found nothing, but that didn't discourage me. What I needed was in those pages, and sooner or later I'd spot it. I opened my desk drawer to put the files away and that's when I saw Stryker's article. It had been there, buried under a clutter of notes and old paperwork, since Ritter first handed it to me. I'd never bothered to read it.

I was at the ragged end of a very long day and badly in need of some Chinese takeout, a couple of cold beers, a hot shower, and ten solid hours of sleep, in exactly that order. That's how the evening should have played out for me, but I made a mistake, a big one. I picked up Stryker's article and scanned the first few paragraphs on my way out of the squad room. The name "Frömke" jumped off the page at me and I froze where I stood.

Like most other cops, I'm used to dealing with facts, sometimes cruel and pitiless facts but always facts, never fantasy, never impossible coincidences. Standing there looking down at that name I felt suddenly

adrift in a strange new place where facts meant nothing and truth had a thousand faces. The twenty or so steps back to my desk seemed to take forever.

I read Stryker's article all the way through, unable to make much out of his equations and all the stuff about space-time and relativity, but I still managed to get to the heart of what he was saying: almost a century and a half in the past, a German physicist named Otto Frömke had published a couple of papers in something called *Annalen der Physik* that described a contraption he said was capable of moving through time. He was dismissed as a dreamer, a lunatic, but Stryker wasn't so sure he was either. His article was full of drawings of what he claimed the machine might have looked like. I examined each one, but all I could see was a gadget that looked like a giant black bell with wires all around it.

I put the article down and closed my eyes. Random facts were slowly coming together to form a pattern, only the pattern they formed made no sense. For the first time since I was a rookie I needed answers and had no idea how or where to find them. I felt a migraine building, still some distance away but headed straight for me like a locomotive.

My tablet signaled an incoming call. I was going to ignore it until I saw the French identity prefix. I hoped it was Paul calling back to explain how his assistant got it all wrong: electronic records had somehow been mixed up, with absurd results. I switched the call from my tablet to the large desk display. The face I saw was not Paul's

but that of a man with dark eyes and a head of unruly brown curls. He looked to be somewhere in his early twenties and had an expression lit up by an idealistic young cop's enthusiasm for his work. We had the same type on our own force. They didn't remain idealistic for long, and the enthusiasm usually died a whimpering death after a few years on a job where you're forced to confront all the ugliness people are capable of.

"Good evening, Lieutenant Carl. I am Georges Le Clercq. I work with ..."

"I know who you are, Inspector Le Clercq."

"I was asked to call you about a matter you and Inspector Boyer discussed some days ago."

"What have you got for me?"

"I thought you might be interested in a document I happened on while looking into a man named Otto Frömke. As you may already know, a Major von Tauber was assigned to his staff in 1944."

Le Clercq was wrong. At that moment, I wasn't the least bit interested in his document. Supper and a night's sleep were the only things on my mind, but I didn't cut him off, mostly for Paul's sake.

"It is a statement given by Ladislau Rutkowski, a Polish national who was part of a group of engineers forced to work for the Germans during the Second World War. His deposition was given in connection with the prosecution of the commandant of a concentration camp where he was briefly interned. The commandant's trial was scheduled to take place in nineteen

forty-eight, but by that time Mr. Rutkowski had fallen ill and was far too weak to appear at trial, so the American occupation authorities allowed him to submit a deposition in lieu of testimony in open court. His deposition was never used because the accused committed suicide before a trial could take place. Rutkowski's statement was later archived with other materials documenting the Nazi war crimes trials.

"Rutkowski was one of fifty engineers forced to work on a project located in a remote and heavily forested part of eastern Bavaria. The engineers were divided into groups and kept isolated from each other at all times. Each group worked on one section of the project and was taken away as soon as its work was completed. No group was told exactly what it was they were building or what it might eventually be used for. Rutkowski writes of witnessing the near-fatal beating of an engineer whose only offense appears to have been curiosity. He had been foolish enough to ask a guard what it was they were constructing."

"What does any of this have to do with Duvalier?"

"Well, the connection is slight, to be sure, but it is very definitely there. You see, Rutkowski claims to have seen Otto Frömke at the site on numerous occasions."

"How did he know it was this Frömke character?"

"He didn't, not at first, but then he overheard the name spoken by guards whenever the man was present. Rutkowski spoke German, you see, among several other languages, an ability he was careful to

keep hidden from his captors. The guards often joked among themselves about what was going on. They called the project 'Herr Frömke's hole in the ground.' They were apparently kept as much in the dark as the engineers who were forced to work there. Mr. Rutkowski somehow managed to escape after a few weeks. He traveled at night, hid during the day, subsisted on what he could forage, and in this way eventually reached the Czech border. Unfortunately, he was recaptured by the Germans and sent to a concentration camp in Poland."

"Do you have any idea what the Germans might have been up to?"

"No, Lieutenant, but Rutkowski does mention a phrase he heard Frömke use on several occasions: *der ditte Tag*. I've searched all the records provided to me by the German authorities and found no other mention of this phrase or what it might signify."

"What does it mean, Officer Le Clercq?"

"It means 'The Third Day.'"

"Is that all this Rutkowski had to say?"

"Well, there is one other thing. He blamed some of the materials brought into the work site for the particularly aggressive form of cancer that eventually took his life. That suggests to me that a radioactive substance may have been used. The Germans were known to have had an ambitious program in place for the development of an atomic weapon. It may be that the project was in some way connected to that. Rutkowski described the area around the construction site in great detail. He even

named a small town, a village really, some sixty kilometers due east of the work site. He was very precise in his description, so it was easy for me to identify the location. You see, Lieutenant Carl, I am only half French. My mother is German. In fact, her family was originally from Bavaria and as a child I spent many summers there at the home of my grandparents, much of the time bicycling and hiking through the countryside. I know the place Rutkowski wrote about, Lieutenant, know it quite well indeed. Now here is where I encountered something odd, something that relates more directly to your case. If you'll recall, the flat von Tauber was —

“Hold on a moment.”

“Yes?”

“All we know for sure is that the guy used a couple of aliases. We still don't know who he really was, and I'm not buying this von Tauber business.”

“Yes, of course. My apologies. The building in Paris where the deceased individual had a flat is owned by the Oststern Group, a large multinational corporation with headquarters in Munich. And as I learned only recently the site where Rutkowski and others were forced to work is today owned by that same company. It has been turned into a large research compound that is guarded around the clock by a cadre of armed private security guards. Interesting, no?”

“Maybe. Big companies usually own all sorts of things, don't they?”

“Certainly. I merely thought it an interesting link between a very old document

and your recent investigation. I will have a translation of Rutkowski's deposition forwarded to you in the morning.”

I thanked him, even though I had no use for it.

“You are most welcome, Lieutenant Noble. Inspector Boyer gave you my personal number, did he not?”

“Yes.”

“Please do not hesitate to call me if you need more help with this curious business.”

“Thanks. Listen, Inspector Le Clercq, I'm grateful for this call and your offer of help, I truly am, but at the moment I'm very tired and have just about had it with Duvalier or Hess or whatever the hell the guy's name was.”

“I understand completely, Lieutenant Noble. Have a good night.”

I tossed Stryker's article in the trash on my way out of the squad room. Paul had probably been right when he suggested it would be best to drop the matter and get on with things. After all, who would care what a dead burglar called himself after he went into the coroner's disposal chamber and disappeared in a cloud of blue smoke? Of course, I knew the answer to that all too well — I would.

My fifteen-year-old jalopy, an ancient hybrid nobody drives anymore, was waiting for me in the station's basement garage. I took a long look at it and decided that the car and its owner were very much alike: both have seen better days, both aren't as fast as they used to be, and both have a built-in refusal to quit. I got in. The mixed odors of leather, tobacco, and Jim Beam

hung in the air like memories.

A car drove by as I sat there. Tim McGivern was at the wheel, on the way home to his wife, Marlene, and their two kids. I shut my tired eyes and was instantly drawn back to the scene in Stryker's apartment, with the stiff lying on the floor with a startled look in his wide-open blue eyes, the cheap rug under him damp with blood, and Stryker sitting in the kitchen with a dazed look on his youthful face. Yeah, there was about as much chance of my letting go of a search for Duvalier's identity as there was of my old wreck magically turning itself into a sleek new sports car. Unanswered questions have always had a way of eating away at me; of waking me up in the middle of the night and starting me on the ugly business of losing sleep.

I should have started my car then and, like McGivern, headed straight for home, or the two-room walkup I've called home since my divorce. But I didn't. Instead, I continued to sit with my eyes shut, massaging my temples in an attempt to get rid of a growing headache, while at the same time trying to make sense of all I'd learned about the man killed in Stryker's place. Each attempt led to the same impossible conclusion. Then, with the suddenness of a lightning strike, a solution came to me. I bolted from my car and ran up the three flights to the squad room.

I pulled the copy of von Tauber's dossier from the desk drawer and went through it until I found what I was looking for, a single detail that only an hour ago had been a meaningless fact in a sea of

other meaningless facts. The coroner's report was next. Page three of that document told me what I needed to know. My path to the truth was now clear.

A call to Georges Le Clercq was the next, crucial step. It would be past one in morning in Paris, late for a call from a near-stranger asking for a favor. On the other hand, the determined young cop had contacted me not all that long ago. I took a chance and tried reaching him at his private number. He answered immediately. I hurriedly explained what I had in mind.

"I will be happy to assist you, Lieutenant Noble. However, what you ask may take some time and will involve the cooperation of others. That cooperation, of course, I cannot guaranty, but I will do what I can. You have happened on a fine solution to your problem, Lieutenant. I only wish I had thought of it myself."

There was nothing left to do then but wait. So, after having been on duty nearly sixteen hours, I went home. The last thing I thought of before drifting off into an exhausted, dreamless sleep was how good, how beautifully rational, the world would look after the crazy notion of a one-hundred-and-sixty-year-eight-old burglar was laid to rest forever.

Two weeks went by before I heard back from Le Clercq. I was sitting at home on a Friday evening trying to decide whether to have Thai or Indian for supper. My tablet came to life just as I made up my mind to go with Indian.

Le Clercq's face filled the small display.

“How are you, Lieutenant Noble?”

“Surviving. How about you?”

“I am fine, Lieutenant.”

“Good. Got any answers for me?”

“I do.”

“Wonderful. Let’s have them.”

“Karl von Tauber was married in August of 1939, several weeks before the outbreak of war. He and his wife had one child, a son named Eric who was born in 1941. This much you knew from having read von Tauber’s dossier. Eric von Tauber survived the war and lived to the age of sixty-three. His son, Heinrich von Tauber, is ninety years old and very much alive. He is, as far as I have been able to determine, Klaus von Tauber’s only living blood relation. Heinrich has been hospitalized in Belgium for the past two weeks, which made obtaining the necessary blood sample far easier than it might otherwise have been. Our laboratory in Alsace has confirmed a DNA match. He is without question a descendant of the man you know as Anton Duvalier. I had a laboratory in Zurich check the results and they corroborate our findings.”

“Are you telling me that the guy in our morgue and von Tauber are definitely the same person?”

“It would certainly appear so. The methods employed in making such a determination are not new. They have been used for many decades and are considered as close to infallible as science can make them. Let me assure you, Lieutenant, that this result is as troubling to me as it is to you.”

“Well, I suppose that’s it then. Thank

you, Inspector Le Clercq. If there’s ever anything you need from me, anything at all, don’t think twice about calling. And please give my best to Paul when you see him.”

“I will.”

Le Clercq’s image faded from the display and for a long time afterwards I sat staring at the blank screen.

There was my answer, looking me in the face and daring me to deny its existence. I had sought Le Clercq’s help in destroying an absurd notion and he had instead confirmed it in a way that seemed irrefutable.

What was next? A call to Larry Sobel asking him to fill out a death certificate in the name of Klaus Auguste von Tauber, age one hundred and sixty-eight? Common sense and logic had been the tools of my trade for a long time. Was I now supposed to toss them out of the nearest window? I felt lost. Von Tauber, Duvalier, Hess, Frömke, Rutkowski, time machines, The Third Day: was there any way of putting them all together that did not defy reason? I couldn’t, but I knew one person who might be able to do exactly that. He was my last hope.

I opened my small black notebook, the kind every cop on the planet stopped using decades ago, and found Stryker’s tablet identification number written in my penciled scrawl. It didn’t take him long to link up at the other end.

“Lieutenant Noble?”

“Are you busy, Stryker?”

“A little. I’m trying to get set up in my new place and start work on a doctoral dis-

sertation at the same time. Right now, I'm not making much headway with either."

"I've got a question for you and I want you to think very carefully before you answer. Have you ever heard of something called The Third Day?"

"The Third Day? No, I don't believe so."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes."

"How about Klaus von Tauber? Ever come across that name?"

"Von Tauber? No, never."

I wanted to sit down with the Stryker, tell him everything I'd learned about the man who called himself Anton Duvalier, and have him explain why the craziness taking shape in my head had a perfectly reasonable explanation with deep roots in the real world.

"Have you had supper yet, Stryker?"

"No. I was just thinking of going out for something."

"How about Indian? I'm buying."

"Sounds okay."

"Why don't you meet me at the Delhi Palace in half an hour? It's on the corner of Arlington and Smith."

"I know the place."

"Good. See you then."

"Hold on a moment, Lieutenant. What is this all about? I've already given my statement to the district attorney's office. I'm afraid I have nothing new to add."

"Forget about that. Listen, I've got a godawful mystery on my hands and you're the only person I know of who might be able to solve it for me. Tell me, Stryker, do

you like a good story?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Do you like a good story?"

"As much as anyone else I suppose. Why?"

"Meet me at the Delhi Palace in thirty minutes. I'll buy you supper and tell you the damndest story you've ever heard in your life."

Klaus

November 20, 2083

There he is. It is not like young Stryker to be so late leaving for the university. His days are usually carbon copies of each other. Staying at the woman's flat last night has doubtless upset his usually rigid schedule. It was certainly a sacrifice worth making. The young woman he had dinner with, and later took to bed, was as beautiful a creature as I have ever seen. Under different circumstances, I would have spared neither time nor expense in making her acquaintance.

He will be gone until evening, giving me more than enough time to search his flat thoroughly. I have followed him for weeks and nothing he has said or done suggests that he knows about The Third Day's existence. If this morning's search fails to uncover anything new, I will be certain beyond any doubt that his troublesome article was the byproduct of coincidence and a lively imagination, nothing more. I will then be free to return to my flat in Paris. I have had more than my fill of this vulgar place. America is a land of so many won-

ders, and yet its people remain stubbornly uncivilized.

I touch the Sauer 38 inside my jacket. It has a cool and reassuring feel. One exactly like it saw me through the Polish and French campaigns. A single shot to the back of the head always does the job. Although I will not hesitate to act if such a thing becomes necessary, I truly hope it does not. The simple truth is that I have developed a certain admiration for the lad.

My chronograph shows that ten minutes have gone by since Stryker left. He has had time to pick up a coffee at the café where he goes every morning and be about halfway to the campus.

“Do not cross the street, Klaus.”

I reach for the Sauer as I turn to face the voice behind me.

“Don’t be alarmed, Klaus. It’s only Otto.”

I stare at Herr Frömke in astonishment.

“What are you doing here, *Herr Doktor?*”

“The Third Day has canceled the operation, my boy. You are free to return with me to Paris this very afternoon.”

“But why?”

“Oh, it’s none of your doing, Klaus, I assure you. The fact is that any further effort on your part would be wasted. We have determined beyond any doubt that the student knows nothing that can compromise the secrecy of our work.”

“How could you have concluded that before receiving my report?”

“By using other means, Klaus.”

“Other means?”

“I’ve always been a cautious fellow, perhaps even overcautious. It is a fault, I know. When I was first ordered to send you on this assignment, I took the precaution of providing our organization with a measure of insurance in the form of a zealous young Party member from the Rhine Valley. This loyal soldier of the Reich was, like you, tasked with learning how our young author came to write his disturbing article. The agent was able to do precisely that. Unfortunately, we learned of it too late to avert a dreadful turn of events. That is why I have traveled here today, to prevent a repetition of that regrettable outcome.”

“Repetition? I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“You were about to search the student’s flat, were you not?”

“Yes.”

“I can assure you, Klaus, that your search would have had a tragic end, one that involved local authorities and very nearly uncovered the existence of The Third Day. Of course, that is something we could not permit.”

“Herr Frömke, I have not moved from this spot.”

“No, you haven’t. But you most certainly would have. In fact, you did.”

I am familiar with Herr Frömke’s miraculous device, and was among the first chosen by our Führer to voyage upon a sea of future-time. I’ve always understood what it can and cannot do. And yet there are still times when the physicist’s words fill me with confusion, such as now, with his talk of the outcome of something I have not yet

done.

“I don’t understand, *Herr Doktor*. I never ...”

“Well, well, what have we here, Klaus? A fellow you know well, I believe, and he seems to be in quite some hurry.”

I followed his gaze across the street and saw Stryker running up the sidewalk, his face glistening with sweat. I watched as he ran into the building.

“A good thing you weren’t up there going through his flat, wouldn’t you say? Who knows what might have happened?”

A strange chill went through me as he spoke those words.

“Fortunately, what that fellow does is no longer any concern of ours. Now, why don’t we get on with our journey home? A motorcar is waiting for us a few streets from here.”

“Very well, *Herr Frömke*.”

I fell in step beside him. He doubtless saw the confusion still written on my face, because he smiled and shook his head after glancing over at me.

“Believe me, Klaus, I do know how you feel. Like any good soldier, you would have preferred to see your mission through to its conclusion. If it will make you feel any better, try thinking of our sudden departure as, what is the military term, a tactical retreat? You will return to Paris and I will go back to the Oststern compound. I’m afraid that, like me, the device has grown old and requires much care.”

We walked the rest of the way in silence.

“Ah, here we are!”

Herr Frömke turned into a tree-shaded side street and approached a white Mercedes parked at the curb. A woman got out of the driver’s side and held the rear door open for him. She was young, probably in her twenties, with bright red hair cascading down to her shoulders. Her green eyes flashed when she looked at me.

“Good day, Major von Tauber.”

Her voice rang with amusement. I found her every bit as beautiful in broad daylight as I had last night when I watched her dine with Stryker.

Herr Frömke smiled up at me from inside the Mercedes.

“Allow me to introduce Olga Arndorfer, Klaus. She is the young agent from the Rhine Valley I mentioned earlier.”

I stared at her in disbelief, unable to say anything.

“The Major and I have encountered each other once before. Haven’t we, Major von Tauber? I was dining with a mutual acquaintance and I believe the Major tipped the maitre di’ to seat him at the table next to ours. I’m afraid he eavesdropped shamelessly the whole evening. Oh, don’t look so surprised, Major. I was briefed before being sent here from Munich and knew who you were the instant you entered the restaurant. I watched you almost as closely as you were watching my companion.”

“Congratulations, *Fraulein Arndorfer*. You have apparently done a brilliant job of extracting the necessary information from young Stryker. Of course, you bring certain advantages to the endeavor, advantages I

will never possess.”

Frömke laughed.

“Good. We will stop at your hotel, Klaus, and collect your things. Olga will drive us to the airport. The bar there serves an excellent cognac.”

I sat next to Frömke in the rear seat. A faint scent of the rosewater he always uses on his hair filled the inside of the Mercedes. I watched with interest as Olga disabled the auto-drive function and elected to operate the big motorcar herself.

“Today is a special occasion, Klaus. It is Olga’s birthday.”

“Is it? My regards, Fraulein Arndorfer.”

“I was privileged to have been born the year our Führer published *Mein Kampf*.”

“Sadly, Olga will be leaving us in a week’s time. She has been assigned to the Führer’s staff as a guardian.”

I knew well what that meant. She would soon be transported by Frömke’s device into a future where the Führer waits to fulfill his destiny. She might be given any number of minor responsibilities, but in truth she would have only one: in the event of the Führer’s death, she will carry out a rescue mission of sorts by traveling to the town of Bamberg. She will arrive there on the morning of December 25th 1947 and go directly to a safe house where the Führer stayed twenty-four hours on that day. That place and time are his rescue points. She will then return with him to a time just after the death of his future self. The resurrected Adolph Hitler will undergo the same reconstructive surgery that now makes him unrecognizable to all but members of The

Third Day. He will then be free to resume his new identity and his sacred work on behalf of the Fatherland.

All twelve members of The Third Day’s governing council are similarly shielded from death. I suppose one could say that Herr Frömke’s machine has, in a way, made them all immortal.

“You are looking remarkably youthful for a woman of one hundred and fifty-eight, Fraulein Arndorfer.”

“Thank you, Major von Tauber.”

“Since Olga and I must remain in Paris for several days before returning to Munich, why don’t we all meet for dinner?”

“I will look forward to it, Herr Frömke.”

“Excellent. We will have a lovely dinner and everything will be explained to you then.”

“There is one thing I would like to know before we dismiss the Stryker matter, Herr Frömke.”

“And what might that be, Karl?”

“How Fraulein Arndorfer managed to extract the truth from the student.”

She looked at me in the rearview mirror. “Why ask when you can see for yourself, Major? Here you are.”

She tossed a tiny, bronze-colored cylinder into the back seat. I picked it up and examined it.

“What is this?”

“Don’t you know?”

“No.”

“You must forgive Klaus, my dear. He is something of a Luddite. He believes that this new world’s technology is too all-perva-

sive and threatens to make us ... what is the word you use, my boy?"

"Soulless, Herr Frömke."

"Ah, yes, soulless! I'm afraid Olga does not agree with you. Nor, for that matter, do I."

"You are being too hard on the Major, Herr Frömke. Remember that for all of us the world of the Third Reich was only a few short years ago. Give him time. He will adapt."

"I hope I never do, Fraulein."

"So, Major, to answer your question, that remarkable little device is last night, all of it, in exquisite detail. Every word, every action, every breath is there. All you need do is insert it into any viewing device."

I understood then and looked at the cylinder in my hand with disgust.

"Fraulein Arndorfer, I am not without my faults. Very few of us are. However, I do not include voyeurism among them."

I handed the cylinder back to her.

"I would much prefer a brief account of

how you got the information from young Stryker."

"Very well, Major. But there is really not much to tell. I merely expressed my admiration for his article after we made love and he spent the next half hour cheerfully telling me every detail of how it came about."

"That's that then, isn't it?" Herr Frömke said with a trace of annoyance. He had clearly tired of the subject.

"Let us forget the past and dedicate ourselves to a glorious future. When it becomes a reality, the Fourth Reich will write a new chapter of world history in letters of fire. Of course, its realization may take years, perhaps decades, but that need not concern any of us. Have I not made us all masters of time? We must have patience, my young friends. Remember that even now, as we sit in this motorcar, the Führer also waits, patiently waits, for his time to come round again." ❖

END TRANSMISSION