





# **Furtwängler's Grave**

**A Novella**

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DEDICATED TO THOSE,  
WHOSE WORK  
ARGUES  
FOR LIFE:

*Pastor*  
**Marsha Acord**

AND

*Maestro*  
**John Adams**



What, art mad? A man may see how  
this world goes with no eyes. Look  
with thine ears: see how yond justice  
rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in  
thine ear: change places; and, handy-  
dandy, which is the justice, which is  
the thief?

**King Lear (iv:6)**



**i**

Alf Bergson knew satisfaction. He'd felt it eight weeks earlier over breakfast under sheer cliffs leading to Heidelberg castle's ruined walls. His Army pal, Jimmy Wilson – with elbows on the sidewalk cafe's table, pinching temples between thumbs – shielded bleary, gray, hung-over eyes from morning glare; but Alf's face turned skyward, content.

"What in God's name is that idiot grin for?" Jimmy muttered.

"If you don't know by now," Alf responded, "you've been sleeping this whole past month."

Brilliant white cloudlets, ascud between cliff top and cityscape, shimmered against implausibly blue sky. Alf remembered wandering sun-dappled pastures and forested byways in the highlands behind that precipice just the week before. With bustling city streets – two hundred meters below – muffled, his mind's ear heard only comfortable Beethovenian rapture, the Opus 74 Quartet's *Allegro*, in that landscape.

History, Alf figured, was a Rorschach test on a mirror.

Memories of Heidelberg fled: furious electronic buzz with obnoxious clang filled his outer ear; barred windows to leftward showed drizzly dark overcast, not blue beyond delicate whites. The glowering cave just ahead suggested music more likely *Godunov's* death scene or *Rheingold's* invisible Alberich driving haplessly enslaved, screaming dwarves through *Nibelheim's* fastness: iron-barred gate crashed against dying echoes of a shout within. Sergeant Alf Peter Bergson, US Army-Military Police Corps, ambled the Admin corridor toward the Central Control Point at the Mannheim Stockade.

"On the gate," Alf sang out, as he stepped up to blue-painted bars. A fatigue-clad soldier beyond those bars behind bulletproof glass craned his neck to survey the hallway behind Alf before pushing a console button on one side. Buzz, clang and creak, as the gate swung open: click-clang following, Alf entered the holding pen between Admin area and prison proper, pulling the gate shut behind himself.

Alf's recent, month-long training at Heidelberg's 130th Station Hospital qualified him (the Army believed) as a Social Work/Psychology Specialist at the stockade. Before that, however, the 22-year-old Iowan had been second-in-command of the Third Guard Platoon – the same unit currently on custodial duty this Friday morning in November, 1973. That's why he wasn't surprised his approach to the holding pen's inner gate brought no immediate response from the Control Room.

Private First Class George Morrell – a Dallas-born blond, of pale greenish eye and lynx-like nose – sat within, grinning wickedly, one hand poised over the control console. He and Alf matched

schnapps-shots and beer chasers at the local village *Gasthaus* frequently, pretending to argue relative values of Texas and Iowa beef herds, sagebrush and corn, or Cowboys and Vikings. "Say 'pretty please,' Sarge," George mouthed through the window.

"Please, Brer Private," Alf quavered, "don't throw me in that briar patch!"

"As you wish, then," Morrell chuckled – he knew his Uncle Remus to a fault, apparently – and Alf gained access to the CCP. Taking one last glance back southward, down the three hundred feet of Admin hallway, he closed the gate behind himself. A lone guard slouched awkwardly on a chair about halfway down the corridor at the open gate of Post 13, waiting to challenge the credentials of any possibly wandering detainees; beyond him, somewhere near the Commander's office, a perpetually trustee-driven buffer whirred and bounced lazily from wall to wall, polishing waxed linoleum floors to improbable brilliance.

The similarly quiet mid-morning CCP offered little to distract Alf as he turned to stride across it toward the stairs to the stockade's upper level. The medium-security Cellblock-A on his left, to the west, sat largely empty; prisoners housed there were either in classes upstairs, in the Industries section across the yard to the north outside, or at maintenance-specific workstations elsewhere in the facility. The doctor's offices, library, and gymnasium complex in the east wing marked the slack hour patiently, to his right. The barber shop – used once a week by a German-national contractor, whose atonal whistling and incomprehensible, broken-English jokes were partial price for keeping the

inmates cropped – slept in profound, locked-down darkness, ahead on the left.

Alf bore to the right, bounding counter-clockwise up three flights of steps and two landings, occasionally brushing his fingertips along heavy wire-mesh screens guarding the interior stairwell from unauthorized levitations. Nearly identical, contrapuntally droning instructors' voices escaped two classrooms behind him as he turned a hard right at the stairs' top, heading toward the upper maximum security Cellblock-C. A tiny one-man latrine set in the east wall just before the steel cellblock door attracted him and he entered it, setting an errant mop handle to right in its bucket and closing the curiously ajar broom closet door in the latrine's entryway wall.

Alf took pains not to splatter his trousers or spit shined jump boots after relieving himself and – real, breakable mirrors being obviously unacceptable security risks under the circumstances – satisfied himself by straightening his Dress Greens' necktie in an imaginary mirror before leaving the latrine. He took his job seriously and great pride in the proper appearance of his uniform. Whatever air of pacifism the Nobel Peace Prize and recent socialist practices lent his Norwegian heritage, Alf descended from a long line of US Army men.

His great-grandfather, Haake, had been only two years off the boat from Europe and struggling to establish himself in Illinois when the War Between the States erupted. Passionately anti-slavery by nature, he followed *Unconditional Surrender* Grant into the Mississippi Valley, lost an eye and an arm at Vicksburg and went on to found a prosperous pump and tire business in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

He even ran for mayor twice around the turn of the century, though unsuccessfully.

Two years after the old man died, his youngest son, Anders – Alf's grandfather, a freshly graduated veterinarian with pretty young wife and baby boy still at breast – followed *Blackjack* Pershing back to Europe to liberate France and Belgium from the Boche and never came home. He took a direct artillery hit near the Marne one night while trying to save some horses from the fire an earlier barrage ignited. The burial detail couldn't be certain the remains in his coffin were 100% his own; family lore acknowledged mixing his blood with that of the animals he loved a fit conclusion to his tragically abbreviated life.

Alf's own father, Edmond, was also just two years out of college when he answered the call to liberate Norway – and all of Europe – from Nazism. But *Old Blood and Guts* Patton's circuitous route to Oslo wound curiously through Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Sicily first. Edmond never got to visit his father's grave in France; friendly fire brought a troop transport down on his unit near the Gela beachhead and crash ejecta sent him home prematurely – with a metal plate in his head.

Alf determined to break these well-established family traditions. The only son of this gravely wounded veteran and the girl he'd left behind (who married him proudly anyway, crippling disfigurements and all), Alf came up a model student and Eagle Scout: advancing to Senior Patrol Leader before dropping Scouts to concentrate on varsity sports. He intercepted 14 passes during his senior year in high school and saw football scholarships to two different Big Ten universities; other-

wise he stuck his nose in dry, old books and listened to Beethoven quartets, Wagner, Bruckner, or Bach; he argued passionately, at every turn, against Washington's wrongheaded Indochina policies. Then – rather than wait two years after some major life milestone, like his forebears – he presented himself to the local Army recruiter the day after graduating from high school and asked if there were any two-way tickets for Vietnam available.

Fierce opposition to an ill-conceived war was one thing; duty, honor, and country were something entirely other.

But the Army fooled him. It sent him to Vietnam, all right, but trained him as a Military Policeman first, assigning him to guard US military prisoners at the in-country stockade there: affectionately known as LBJ, the Long Binh Jail. On tower rotations his M-16 pointed not outward toward the Viet Cong, but inward toward his own fellow soldiers.

So Alf became the first in his family to return from war unscathed. When his tour expired, the Army offered him a hefty cash bonus, a promotion, and his choice of next duty station to re-enlist. He took the offer and chose the Mannheim Stockade to test his years of high school German against the real world.

But the exasperated-looking, milk-chocolate-brown face appearing in the tiny, square C-Block door window after Alf rang the access buzzer suggested no conversation in German immediately ahead. "You runnin' late, today?" PFC Benjamin Jones asked as Alf crossed the cellblock antechamber's threshold. Jones, a stocky Floridian, closed

the massive steel outer door with slightly more than necessary force and the resultant, highly satisfying boomlet echoed back from both the cellblock ahead and the adjacent staircase leading to the sister maximum security section D-Block below.

"Yeah, we had some intakes from overnight to process," Alf said. He stood to one side diplomatically, waiting for Jones to enter the block office first. "You having problems back here?" he asked the guard's backside as they entered the cubicle. A massive, wire-reinforced window looked out past the desk onto an empty, tile-lined search area and an open gate leading to one wing of the cellblock proper.

"That fuckin' Leroy," Jones complained while plopping down in the swivel chair at the desk, "has ran his mouth the whole damn morning." He meant Leroy Beems, an accused murderer held in pretrial detention at the pleasure of German authorities. Schizophrenia, whatever that supposedly signified – a word scratched into appropriate boxes on various forms – summarized his condition.

"Yeah, well, he's already well over max recommended dosage on his Thorazine," Alf remarked as he settled into a deskside chair, shaking his head slowly and pursing his lips in sympathy with Jones' discomfort.

"It don't make no difference at all as I can tell. He fucks up the whole block with all that loudmouth shit."

Alf kept shaking his head slowly and tried heroically – if unsuccessfully – to refrain from mentioning things seemed pretty quiet at the moment.

"Just you hang around and wait," Jones snorted.

"Yeah, I'm sure I'll catch it when I get back there. I'll talk to him, but I might as well be talking to Nixon's grandmother."

Jones chuckled, "You got that right."

"How about the other men?" Alf asked, looking up from his clipboard to a yard-wide, grease penciled plastic cell roster on the wall behind the desk. "Anything else I should know happen on your shift?"

"Nah, just screamin' back at Beems is all."

Alf glanced across the desktop, taking in jumbled manila folders, half a mug of coffee, the ring of enormous metal keys controlling the block, and an ashtray well past the stage where it could have been profitably dumped. With obviously false optimism, he asked: "So, how's the coffee today?" The ancient urn at the far end of the desk had never – to Alf's knowledge – been cleaned by anyone.

"Very funny, Sarge." Jones scrunched up his face in a – not unappealing – caricature of poisoned surprise.

"Yeah, well, uh," Alf stood abruptly, with a little grunt, "guess I better get to it, then." Jones said nothing more, but stood again as well, grabbing the key ring and leading the way out of the office to the interior main cellblock gate. He let Alf through the gate and locked it again before stalking back to his desk and chair in the office.

Alf bore right, passing the empty search area, and stopped at the open gate leading to the east wing of the block's eighteen one-man cells. The temperature outside must have been well under 50°, but several translucent, chicken-wire-reinforced windows hung wide open beyond their barred inner frames on the outer corridor wall. Alf watched steady drizzle through the nearest one a moment, listening to seemingly random hammer strikes in the tin-roofed, open-air Industries section across the yard below.

Sometimes he felt he'd lived a charmed life: not only surviving a tour in Vietnam without coming anywhere near combat, for example, but arriving at the Long Binh Stockade there during construction of a brand-new, state-of-the-art facility. During earlier years medium- and minimum-security prisoners housed in tents inside the perimeter fences; maximum-security saw nothing but rows of steel CONEX shipping crates with occasional slats removed to provide ventilation. Up to nearly 800 men – an alarmingly high percentage of them black – were confined under such conditions at any one time, so it should have been no surprise when a massive race riot unfolded in 1968.

The riot's aftermath brought long overdue efforts to upgrade the facility, improve the quality of the guard force, and reduce the numbers of prisoners confined in-country: all redounding to Alf's obvious subsequent benefit. Even so, it rankled him to see how many prisoners were not real killers or hardened criminals, but simply battle-crazed soldiers with impaired common sense, men whose personalities clashed with their commanders' in the field, or harmless druggies with astonishingly bad luck. Something about the way the Army waited so

so many years to build an appropriate facility, only to turn it over to the South Vietnamese – less than two years after completion – left a sour taste in his mouth, as well.

The physical plant at Mannheim was only ten-years-old, but the interminable stand-off with the Russians showed no signs of abating, so Alf figured the Army would get its money's worth out of this row of cells, anyway.

The first of nine one-man cubicles on his left stood empty, its barred steel door rolled open on runners to one side of the doorway. Alf walked up to the outer wall opposite the second cell and transferred the DD Form 509, Inspection Record of Prisoner in Segregation, from its sleeve there to his clipboard. Apart from identifying header information, the whole page showed nothing but notes Alf had written there himself on earlier days – each followed several hours later by Lieutenant Colonel Grantham's terse "RLG." The Stockade Commander and Alf were practically the only two souls on earth who ever came specifically on purpose just to visit these men in their humble homes.

"Mr. Jackson, good morning," Alf said brightly. "You feel like talking to me today?" The young black man in the cell, lying on his left side on the bunk with an arm cocked over his face, lifted the arm a few inches and peered, bleary-eyed, through the bars at Alf. He cleared his throat and let his head fall back on the pillow.

"Not really, Sarge. I really just need some sleep after partying all night with Beems."

"OK," Alf replied, "sorry about that. Get some rest if you can." He moved back toward the outer wall, writing "Sleep-deprived from overnight block disturbances, otherwise alert and cheerful" after the date and hour on the man's 509 and initialing it before slipping the form back into its jacket on the wall.

The next men on the line were more talkative, but the outcomes were generally the same. No one could sleep at night with the madman raving at the top of his lungs. Alf listened to each politely and apologized sincerely, but everyone involved knew nothing could be done about the problem.

Leroy Beems had been at the stockade for nearly two years: almost as long as any of the current guard force and certainly longer than any other prisoner ever kept there. Prisoners stayed at Mannheim only in pre-trial status or when serving very short sentences up to six months. Those sentenced to longer periods normally shipped state-side to serve their time at Leavenworth.

But Leroy Beems was a special case. His German girlfriend's landlord caught him literally red-handed: dismembering the girl on the kitchen floor after murdering her with a knife. Within twelve hours of confinement at the stockade, he'd been in three different altercations with fellow prisoners and was segregated; by his thirty-sixth hour in maximum security, everyone realized his mental condition wasn't right somehow. He destroyed all the meager portable contents of his cell, ripped up his clothes and tried eating them. He carried on extended shouting contests with Jesus Christ, writing blunt messages to Him on the cell walls with his own feces.

The full-bird colonel commanding all Army psychiatric services in Europe came down from Heidelberg and, following brief examination, pronounced Beems schizophrenic, recommending immediate removal to secure psychiatric facilities stateside. But the German government held the deciding vote in Leroy's fate; the Status of Forces Agreement obliged the United States to detain alleged transgressors against German nationals for local trial. A court-appointed German psychiatrist duly arrived at the stockade, examined the prisoner even more briefly than the colonel from Heidelberg had, and declared him malingering to avoid prosecution.

Once every month for the past twenty-two, an American Army psychiatrist declared Beems insane, recommending his removal to psychiatric facilities stateside; and a German psychiatrist called him a bad actor, demanding he continue being held locally until fit to stand trial for murder. Meanwhile a dozen or more other young men held on C-Block – most of them also not yet convicted of any crime beyond possibly petty infractions of stockade discipline – were subjected to his incoherent rants and bloodcurdling screams twenty-four hours a day.

The names and faces sometimes changed from week to week, but the profiles and crimes of the men Alf inspected every weekday morning remained wonderfully uniform. They were eighteen to twenty-one years old; white, black, brown, yellow or red; and nearly to a man either direct drug offenders or otherwise petty criminals driven by drug or alcohol abuse. The Army being a fairly efficient machine for weeding its own ranks of hardened criminals, particularly before assigning to non-combat zones abroad, the epitome of military crime

in Germany generally involved quantities of hashish or crystal methedrine in a footlocker somewhere.

A 20-year-old, brown-eyed southern Californian whose neatly trimmed black moustache and angular jaw currently showed between bars of the wing's last cell, Steven Lynch allegedly misappropriated a 2½-ton truck from his unit's motor pool for a drug-trafficking scheme. He had written "Sailor" under the heading "Civilian Occupation" on a self-history, regaling Alf during his intake interview with superfluous tales of one-man sailing expeditions to Catalina Island in his "younger days." Alf considered him a classic "charming sociopath," possibly incapable of ever acknowledging responsibility for any wrong actions.

Having been segregated the week before after a fight in the mess hall another prisoner probably instigated, Lynch looked positively forlorn now, however. Like all maximum security prisoners, his rumpled, insignia-less fatigues carried no belt and his scuffed combat boots no laces. The 384-cubic-foot of his 6' x 8' x 8' concrete-box home obviously offered few charms for a man whose fondest memories involved freedom on the open sea.

"Mr. Lynch," Alf smiled grimly, "good morning."

"Good as it gets, oh, yeah," Lynch responded ironically.

"You feel like talking to me today?" Alf inquired.

"Sure," the prisoner answered, "but to tell the truth, I'm kinda parched just now." Corroded

sinks the inmates couldn't turn on or off – and seatless, lidless toilets they couldn't flush – were additional delights segregated accommodation offered.

“I'll get you some water, then,” Alf said. He turned the corner into a connecting hallway between cell-block wings and entered the dank service corridor between the rows of cells. At the controls behind Lynch's domicile he opened the cold-water cock.

An horrific scream, seemingly of abject terror, issued through the wall directly behind him. Even having been forewarned of the possibility, the event caught Alf unawares and he barked his head against the water pipes in front of him, recoiling from the shock. Surreal echoes of the anguished cry rebounded from both ends of the service corridor, their overtones wrestling together crudely.

“No, Jesus! No! No, no!” Leroy Beems cried.

“Put a sock in it, Beems!” one of the men – back down the line Alf had already interviewed – shouted.

“Shut the fuck up,” another voiced sounded from the far wing, “you fuckin' cocksucker!”

“Leroy, Leroy!” another howled. Alf's poor ears rumbled with muffled dissonance as the shouts decayed in the narrow corridor's bizarre acoustics.

“Listen to me, Jesus!” Beems cried. And then he screamed again, precisely as before, at the top of his lungs.

"O.K., thanks, Sarge!" the nearly forgotten Steve Lynch shouted through the wall. Alf turned off the water and started back toward the Californian's front door.

"You listenin', Jesus?!" Beems wanted to know.

Lynch took one look at the red mark on Alf's forehead and laughed: "I thought I heard something bang on that pipe back there when Leroy started." He broke into what must have been a painfully broad smile, while water dripped from his moustache and cheeks.

"Listen to me!" Beems implored.

"Yeah," Alf admitted, rubbing the spot with his palm, "he gave me quite a jolt."

"Listen, Jesus!" Beems commanded.

"Stuff it, Beems!" another voice from the far side of the block chimed in. A cell door in the same area rattled and clanked against its runners briefly.

"Well," Lynch said, "if you want to let me out of here a couple minutes, I'd be glad to strangle that little motherfucker for you." But he smiled pleasantly again after saying it and his eyes danced with resigned amusement.

"Don't give me any ideas, now." Alf chuckled.

"But seriously," Lynch continued, "why don't you just forget about me for today and go see if you can do something about calming him down? That

would be the best thing for everybody back here, I'll bet."

"I hear you," Alf answered. "I'll try, but I'm only human, you know." He wrote: "Alert, appropriately humorous; concerned about effect of recent disturbances on entire cell block" on the man's 509. Then he returned to the connecting corridor and started toward the west wing of cells.

As he approached the far wall through an oasis of temporarily blessed silence, the increasingly familiar odor of ripe Leroy Beems confronted him. Saturday morning, tomorrow, a three-guard detail would watch the C-Block trustee drag Beems past eight other cells on a drop cloth down the corridor to the open shower stall for his weekly hosing. The trustee would soap, scrub and rinse the man there, before dragging him back to his cell still dripping wet. Beems could be quite violent and unpredictable – scratching and biting people who approached him – when locked in his cell, but invariably became catatonic whenever the cell door opened and relocation loomed.

PFC Luis Martinez, a Mexican-American whose ancestors were already living in California when Fremont arrived – when Alf's great-grandfather was still a farmboy in Norway – lounged impassively outside Leroy's cell in a school-style wooden chair with an open logbook on the writing arm before him, smoking a cigarette. Beems' 24-hour suicide watch – meticulously documented in this book (and several earlier editions) every quarter hour – dated almost to the beginning of his confinement, though he never had really tried to hurt himself beyond banging his head ineffectually against the bars or walls from time to

time. Even the guards sometimes did things like that to themselves when the hours dragged.

"Wow," Alf murmured, "he's really ripe today, isn't he?"

"Keeps me smoking, man," Martinez deadpanned. His vacant brown eyes and drooping shoulders spoke pathetically to the crushing boredom hours of watching Beems inspired. He belonged to the younger generation of guards chosen – during the Corps-wide reforms following the Long Binh disturbance – specifically for intelligence, rather than mere physical strength.

Alf turned and peered dubiously into Beems' domicile. Leroy stood quite silently now with his back turned, apparently staring up into the cell's far corner ceiling. One foot rested atop the standard-issue mattress – like him, devoid of all covering – on the floor beside him. A week's filth and concrete dust caked on his back and limbs brought to Alf's mind images of fierce Xhosa warriors on the verge of battle.

This moment, like none other in his daily routine, always reminded Alf just how inadequately trained he felt in the face of genuine madness. What possible course of action or combination of words could affect this man's condition positively? Consolation lay only in strong suspicion fully-trained psychiatrists were probably just as clueless as he, under similar circumstances.

"Mr. Beems," Alf said - rather too cheerfully, perhaps - "good morning. Feel like talking to me today?"

No response.

"Sarge, be quiet," Martinez commanded softly after a decent interval, his eyes shining ironic amusement. "He's listening to Jesus now."

Alf shot the guard an impish grin back over his shoulder. "Oh, I see," said he. "My apologies to both, then. I'll wait." He turned away from the cell and stepped to an open window opposite.

He found it curiously appropriate Martinez drew suicide watch on one of Beems' more vehemently "prayerful" days. Luis, a convinced and militant atheist, seemingly took more pleasure from ridiculing the dogmas and hierarchies of the Roman Catholic faith than from any other activity. Alf played the Devil's Advocate in off-duty discussions, warmly defending the possible existence of God and utility of organized religions.

Not that Alf was any great believer: a childhood of Sunday mornings spent enduring interminable Lutheran services predisposed him to doubt; but he studied all cultures' Scriptures with an open mind. The Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist legacies – insisting the sensible reality of everyday experience is mere illusion draped across a unitary Spiritual Void – seemed prescient anticipation of modern particle physics to him. But the Judaeo-Christian and Muslim books, he concluded sadly, contained only about 90% self-serving bunk and 9% bald-faced lies.

The remaining 1%, however – all imperishably necessary truths – a man could live by and die for. Why organized religions inevitably glut themselves on doctrinal chaff while real spiritual wheat

rotted from willful neglect, he could not imagine. "So many people spend so much time shouting about what somebody claimed '*God said*' 3500 years ago," Alf had insisted more than once, "they can't hear what God is saying right now, right this instant. They need to just shut up and listen, for once."

He stared out past the two-story, medium-security wings on his left through double rows of concertina-wire-tipped chain-link fence beyond them into rain and flat, brown Rhine valley farmland in the distance. "Jesus, you don't know," Beems agonized, "I'm telling you! You don't know!" Then something like "You doe glop freezhen" ended with a truly heart-rending, sobbing, and growlingly guttural sigh. Alf moved back to the barred cell doorway and spoke in the calmest, most matter-of-fact, gentle, caring and quiet voice he could find.

"Leroy. Over here, Leroy."

The prisoner's head turned; the rest of his clumsy, over-medicated body followed at length; he faced the cell doorway. His eyes managed to look both empty and anguished somehow. A sort of a shallowly stertorous gasping passed for his breath.

"Leroy, Jesus has very good ears. You don't have to shout when you talk to Him."

"He ... hates ... me," Leroy declared haltingly: seemingly more to the wall than to Alf.

"He hates no one who turns his whole heart to Him, Leroy."

"He ... hates ..." the prisoner repeated; then turning suddenly aside, as though hearing another voice from a different direction, he clutched compulsively at his skull with both hands and collapsed facedown on the mattress with an animal groan. Alf watched the man's breathing gradually relax into deeper patterns, finally concluding he'd fallen asleep or passed into some sort of a trance. He sincerely hoped this Jesus Beems spoke with constantly wasn't just some cunningly-named demon.

"You should've been a preacher, Sarge," Martinez observed wryly.

"I should have joined the Navy," Alf responded.

## ii

"The fleet's been ordered to stand down tomorrow," Specialist Larkin, the Correctional Office clerk from Delaware, confided between massive bites of mashed potatoes, "I got it on the horn from the Brigade HQ clerk this morning." Larkin could have stood to lose about twenty pounds, but mashed potatoes – not the kind from flakes, but real honest-to-goodness made-from-scratch ones – were insuperable obstacles to realizing the laudable goal. "I guess we aren't goin' to Israel after all."

"We never *were* goin' to Israel, Larkin," Morrell smirked. "They were just smokin' the Russians up." Nonetheless, during the whole last week in October every man jack in the guard detachment – along with thousands of other personnel spread through every corner of southern Germany – stood field gear inspection once every eight hours to comply with the Defcon 3 order issued during the Yom Kippur war. The Sixth Fleet had remained on heightened alert several weeks more. "Besides," Morrell brightened, "would they pack us off to the desert and leave all these desperate prisoners in the hands of some rank greenhorns?"

This time a huge chunk of rib eye steak interfered with the conversation, but Larkin couldn't wait too long to begin his retort. "I saw the plans, I'm telling you!" Technically clerk to the facility Provost Sergeant, Deputy Commander and Commander, he was only "the Colonel's man" in his own mind: deserving all the respect the position implied. "The prisoners were all going out stateside on one plane with a guard detachment detailed from CONUS and we were going to Israel."

"Well, shit," Morrell conceded. "I reckon I could've used some sand and sun right about now, anyhow. What d'you think, Sarge? Were we going to Is-rye-el?"

"Hey, leave me out of it, you guys," Alf protested. "I voted for McGovern, after all."

"Ha!" Morrell exploded, "Ha-ha! I'll bet you did, too! Ha ha-ha-ha!"

The three sat at one of a half dozen four-tops in the basement staff mess hall. Alf had come down straight from Maximum and was idling away a few minutes after lunch over coffee. Just outside the staff area's flimsy walls half the facility's medium-security population – ninety-some men from B-Block upstairs – could be felt, as much as heard, feeding: a dull rumble vibrated through everything.

PFC Tim Higgins, another Third Platoon guard, former offensive tackle at a Colorado high school, sidled up with a tray of steak and sides. His appraising, blue-eyed glances around the table clearly debated: either sit with Morrell and Alf or *not* sit with Larkin. He laid a meaty palm on the table after choosing the former option and sitting

down, saying: "Hey, Morrell, didja see that so-called fish gumbo they're feeding the prisoners today?"

"Can't say as how I did," Morrell answered, eyes fixed on the task at hand: cleaning up a generous portion of chocolate pudding. He always enjoyed hearing how poorly inmates fed. "What did it look like?"

"Like bloody shits," Higgins declared, "and that's not just my English accent you're hearing."

Larkin blanched at the crudity, but only a slight interruption in his meal's rhythm resulted. His freckled cheeks gained some contrast for a second; then his shockingly red hair's mastication-spawned vibrations resumed. Higgins and Morrell passed impish grins back and forth.

"Hey," Morrell rhapsodized, "that reminds me of a great story I'm sure you guys never heard before. You aren't gonna believe this! When I was training at Fort Gordon my girlfriend came out from Dallas once to spend the weekend with me at a motel in Augusta."

"Sweet," Higgins chirped.

"That it was," Morrell agreed. "We spent the whole weekend in bed. Called all our food in. Sheer delight. Anyways, long about sundown Saturday I felt a bit tuckered from all the old in-out, so I slithered on down south and commenced to lickin' and slurpin' on that slick little gash."

Larkin went from pale to quite noticeably pink and started squirming almost imperceptibly in his seat. "Damned if it wasn't the sweetest twat I

ever tasted," Morrell continued mercilessly. "Munched it for hours."

Larkin's lower jaw hung slack and a wad of half-chewed steak – ultimate destination unknown – quivered between teeth and tongue to one side. With a visible effort, he straightened up some and continued chewing. "After a bit," Morrell reported with infectiously breezy confidence, "I realized I needed to pee, so I left off lickin' and pulled away."

"Please, Morrell," Larkin flustered, "people are trying to *eat* here."

"Well, so was *I*, my man," Morrell smiled back broadly, "so was I. I stumbled into the can and switched on the light and looked at myself in the mirror. There I stood, just drenched in blood from nose to knob and back again: red as a ripe strawberry and twice as much fun. She'd come on the rag while I was eating her!"

"Aw, fer Chrissake!" Larkin hissed. He seemed on the verge of spewing his lunch back on the table in front of everyone; but the clerk composed himself at last, managed to stand with some show of dignity, and stalked deliberately out of the room toward the stairs to the upper levels.

Higgins and Morrell giggled like schoolboys, turning as red in the face as Larkin had at his height of distress. Higgins hugged himself with delight. "Well," Alf deadpanned after a few moments, "I must say that was an epic event."

"Whassis?" Morrell wheezed through hee-hees, "my weekend in Augusta?"

"No," Alf responded dryly, "Larkin just left some food on his plate for the first time ever."

Fresh gales of laughter issued from the two guards and Alf joined in. Larkin really seemed just a bit too prissy for prison work, he had to admit. "I'm not kiddin', though," Morrell resumed once the gales subsided, "that was the sweetest damn twat I ever tasted."

"Oh, I believe you," Alf countered.

"But did you go right back to eating it?" Higgins wanted to know.

"Well," Morrell chuckled, glancing up at the ceiling for inspiration a moment, "no." And they all laughed some more. "But I sure didn't stop screwing her - you can take that to the bank." He glanced at his watch and said: "Shit, I gotta go let somebody else chow down now or they'll put *me* on the rag."

"Yeah, me too," Alf said. They both pushed away from the table, leaving their trays for an inmate busboy to clear away.

Out in the little hallway leading to the staircase a steady stream of B-Block prisoners, under the watchful eyes of a single stone-faced guard, filed out from the inmate mess hall. Morrell waded impatiently into the thick of it, but Alf stood to one side quietly, letting the inmates up the stairs ahead of him. He sensed a presence at his side.

"Sergeant Bergson," a very small voice sounded tentatively, "can I talk to you?"

Alf turned his head and looked down to see Ricky Niemeyer, a pretrial detainee awaiting court-martial on theft charges related – of course – to a serious drug habit. A nineteen-year-old Virginian, he looked more like a precocious fourteen-year-old: short, slight, beardless and ill at ease in his body. The very large, very dark, plastic sunglasses he perpetually wore struck a sinister note in the windowless basement hallway.

"Mr. Niemeyer," Alf said, "of course, anytime. What's on your mind?"

"I mean, not here," Niemeyer explained. "Can we talk in your office?"

"Sure," Alf responded pleasantly, "that, too. What happened to your eye?" Even huge sunglasses couldn't completely mask an obviously fresh shiner spreading across the boy's left cheek.

"That's what I need to talk to you about," Niemeyer said.

"Right," Alf nodded. "O.K., you stick with me and we'll get there one of these days." Alf let the last few prisoners leaving the mess hall disappear up the stairs and then followed at an easy distance. He and Niemeyer wound and twisted their way through six flights and five landings, including the CCP, before coming in at the open B-Block gate on the second floor just behind the last knot of returning inmates. Alf signaled with his hand for Niemeyer to stand aside near the gate and walked into the B-Block office. A single black guard, Spec4 Eli Morton from New Jersey, stood leaning with his hands on the desk, intently watching through a massive window as prisoners returned to bay B-1.

"What do you need, Sergeant?" Morton asked, never taking his eyes off a dozen or so men milling about in the domicile beyond the glass.

"I've got Niemeyer, R., here, out of B-4," Alf reported. "Need to take him up front for a while."

Morton grabbed grease pencil and rag off the desk and started searching the plastic roster board on the wall above the window. "Niemeyer, Niemeyer," he muttered distractedly. "O.K., there." He wiped clean the inscription "Educ." next to the boy's name, writing "Soc Wk 1210 hrs" in its place. "He's all yours, Sergeant. Have fun."

"Thanks," Alf grinned, "I'm sure we will." He took Niemeyer back through the upper hallway and down the steps again: into the CCP. A-Block prisoners filed down the lower staircase to their turns at mess; Alf parted the line a moment to pull his charge through, presenting himself at the Control Room window with boy in tow.

Morrell, back at his control post, looked surprised to see Alf with a prisoner. "What, you workin' again already, Sarge?" he asked.

"No rest for the wicked, that's right," Alf announced. "This young man needs to go up front with me for a while."

"Okey dokey," Morrell smiled. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, now."

"Fat chance of that," Alf chuckled. He and Niemeyer buzzed through the double row of gates and soon arrived at the Social Work office. Spec6 Jeff Ferguson, Alf's immediate boss – a gaunt Illi-

noisan with a Social Work Masters – sat at his desk next to the far window, scratching pen across paper. Ferguson, faced with a shortage of rotatable 91G's to staff his office last summer, had convinced LTC Grantham Bergson would make a perfect Social Worker – with a little training. His green eyes looked up through horn-rimmed glasses; he put down his pen with a sigh.

"Ah, there you are," Ferguson said. "I thought Beems must have eaten you today."

"He told me he meant to do that, Jeff, but I guess I was just too quick for him. I had my lunch already, anyway: if you're ready to go."

"Good, that's what I was hoping." Ferguson shot up from the chair and squirmed into his dress coat for the trip to the mess hall. "What's up, by the way?" he asked almost as afterthought, briefly indicating the prisoner with his eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Niemeyer here has some confidences he wants to share with me," Alf declared.

"Well, good, good," Ferguson nodded, "that's what we're here for. I'll just get out of your way, then." And out the door he marched, pulling it to behind himself.

West side Admin windows all looked out on the prisoner's exercise yard and Tower One. One here was cracked open, so Alf heard – as well as saw – drizzle had strengthened to steady light rain. The sky darkened appreciably since his last view from the Max-blocks; the prisoner's sunglasses seemed increasingly ridiculous under the circumstances –

though Alf understood their significance. He turned to face the boy, reaching out a hand.

"Do me a favor and give me those glasses a minute so I can look at your eye." Niemeyer complied, offering his cheek to Alf's inspection. The bruise wasn't that bad looking, but Alf noticed several jagged, freshly scabbed, little cuts on the boy's neck now, as well. With anyone else, he might have assumed it a shaving accident: but not on that neck.

"Well, you'll live," Alf said. "Let's sit down and hear the whole story." He settled in at his desk, placing the sunglasses on it just out of Niemeyer's easy reach. The boy took the interview chair adjacent, joining hands together on his lap.

"I was coming back to my bay last night on a pass from the library."

"When was that, exactly?"

"Sometime after twenty hundred, for sure. Maybe ten after, I guess."

"O.K."

"That scuzzy Spanish guy, Cortez, came up behind me on the stairs and grabbed my arm" – Niemeyer grasped his own left triceps at this point to illustrate – "and forced me into that latrine upstairs outside C-Block."

"Coming back from his job in the mess hall," Alf said: more to himself, than to Niemeyer.

"I guess," the boy said. "He was all greasy and stank enough, for sure."

"No," Alf mumbled, "I didn't mean to interrupt, I'm sorry. Then what?"

"Then he hit me upside the head and knocked off my glasses and pushed me down on my knees in the closet there. He pulled a shank and put it up against my neck and said he'd sooner kill me, than look at me any more." A fat tear rolled down the boy's cheek across the bruise, plunged, and splashed off a lap-bound hand below.

"It's all right, Ricky," Alf reassured him. He felt a misty welling up in his own eyes and fought the impulse. "Get it out."

Niemeyer sat up straighter with a sudden jerk, snuffling back liquids in his nose. "I'm all right," he said, fixing Alf's eye with a defiant, angry glare rimmed with moisture. "He made me suck his dick and when he was through said he'd let me live this time, if I kept my mouth shut."

"O.K.," Alf nodded. "You just did the right thing here and you sure as hell didn't do anything wrong out there; you know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"We're gonna take care of this right now and he's not gonna get close enough to even look at you for the rest of your stay here, all right?"

"That would be nice."

"Just tell me a little more and then I'll get things straightened out with the rest of the staff."

"What?"

"Did you have any other contact with Cortez before last night?" Alf didn't ask if he'd had contacts with anyone else, as the sunglasses – coupled with the boy's slight build and adolescent bearing – were dead giveaways. Everyone in the facility surely knew Niemeyer was a whore, but even a whore deserved protection from rape and bloodshed.

"He doesn't even live on the same block as me, Sarge. I never said two words to him before."

"As far as you know, did anybody else witness any part of this incident?"

"I didn't see anybody. I was too scared to make any noise, either."

Alf didn't ask why he didn't report the assault to B-Block guards right after it happened. Even Alf wasn't so sure they wouldn't have just laughed in his face and made some insulting, crude remarks. "Tell me about the shank. Did you see where he keeps it?"

"In his boot, on the right. It's on an old toothbrush handle."

Alf had Niemeyer lower the shirt off his shoulders and inspected the bruises on his upper arm. Then the boy buttoned up again and they went out together into the hallway, turning right, toward the higher command offices and main facility entrance. Alf stopped at Post 13, asking the guard

there if he knew where Sergeant First Class Morgan, the Third Platoon Commander, might be. Hearing Morgan was up in the Control Room by the main entrance, Alf instructed Niemeyer to wait on the wall right there and told the guard he'd be back for the prisoner, in just a few minutes.

Alf strode up the corridor: past Funds and Property, three interview rooms, Reception and Release, the Visitors' Room, Correctional Office and Commander; past the last great interior courtyard gate leading to the sally port and outside world. He thought about Herman Cortez: a former supply staff sergeant, another Mexican-American Californian, 28-years-old and accused mastermind of a vast theft, extortion and drug-smuggling ring at the Frankfurt Air Force base. He was implicated in two murders in the affair as well, but proof eluded investigators on those charges as yet.

Something else struck Alf suddenly: Niemeyer, the notorious cellblock fag, shaking off tears after only a single drop: so much for stereotypes. In over three years working stockades, Alf had seen only one prisoner ever actually break down into helpless blubbering: ironically also the only commissioned officer ever confined at Mannheim on his watch. A Nam-veteran, Airborne Ranger captain mixed in with unsavory German nationals misappropriated some M-16s from the unit armory, using them to pull daylight stickups at German banks, though never actually shooting anyone. The M-16 slugs gave police the clue needed to roll up the gang and the American spent a couple days at Mannheim before shipping stateside; the Germans gladly and quickly waived Status of Forces rights in his case for some reason.

Naturally, every guard in the place suddenly took to walking around singing the old basic training cadence call, "I want to be an Airborne Ranger, I want to live a life of danger," so this incarcerated captain stayed in super-isolated segregation during his brief stint at Mannheim. Alf, as Third Platoon second-in-command, figured among a very select few allowed any contact with him; he delivered and retrieved the man's meal trays to and from his cell during both day shifts. On the second day, the prisoner asked him something about seeing a lawyer and Alf said he probably shouldn't expect much help from anyone before getting situated stateside; it seemed reasonable advice. But then the man suddenly blurted out: "Oh, God, what is my *father* going to think about me, now," plopped down on his bunk with head in hands and sobbed like a bitterly disappointed child.

Alf rapped on the Control Room access door window; a clerk admitted him. SFC Eric Morgan, a bear of a 22-year veteran from Akron – who'd fought in Korea, been at Long Binh long before Alf, and done tours at Okinawa, Leavenworth and elsewhere – looked up from some files on the desk before him, fixing his eyes questioningly on Alf. His thinning, sandy-blond hair – seemingly flouting regulation length requirements, particularly on top – remained in place under rigorous applications of '50s-style goop. "Sergeant Bergson," said he, grimacing expectantly, "what's up?"

"I just heard a credible complaint," Alf started at good speed, "from Ricky Niemeyer that Herman Cortez sexually assaulted him in the upper tier public latrine last night. He has consistent multiple bruises and wounds; and I noticed some

disorder in the closet there earlier today – purely by chance – that fits the account."

"Well, hallelujah, Alf," Morgan grinned. "I've been wanting to get that son-of-a-bitch off the medium bays for weeks now, but he's just been too fucking sly for me. You'll write up a D.R. on this?"

"Before I leave tonight, for sure."

"Great," Morgan said. He closed the file he'd been poring over, shoved the whole stack to one side, pushed his chair back and stood, hitching his fatigue pants up with both hands. "We can grab up Cortez from the mess hall right now and give the whole bay a good shakedown at the same time."

"Uh, Niemeyer," Alf interjected, "needs to go into Protective Custody right away, too – yes?"

"Hell, yes," Morgan shot back. "Where is he?"

"Parked at Post 13."

"Why don't you grab up his things and take him back to C-Block yourself right now? No, no, wait – let's put Cortez on C-Block. The cell next to Beems is vacant, isn't it?"

Momentarily surprised, Alf heard a distinctly evil chuckle: apparently in his own throat. "That's right, Sarge," he nodded. "And a first-rate idea, too, if I may say so."

"You may," Morgan agreed magnanimously. He came around from behind the table, striding purposefully over to a console under the windows

showing out onto the main entrance lobby. Flipping a switch there, he barked out: "D-Block!"

After a few seconds, the console speaker crackled and a voice came back: "D-Block. Specialist Lindale."

"This is Sergeant Morgan, Lindale. You got a bed back there for a Protective Custody intake?"

"Affirmative, Sergeant."

"Good. Sergeant Bergson will be bringing you one in a few minutes."

"We'll be ready, Sergeant."

Morgan turned to Alf and said: "O.K., there you go. I'll take Nash from B-Block and, uh, Higgins from A-Block and we'll go pay Cortez a little visit down in the mess hall. God, I hope he grabs a knife on us!"

"Yeah," Alf suddenly remembered, "have a lookout for a shank in his boot, too. We'll want that as evidence at the rape hearing."

"Good, I hope he pulls it on us. We'll pound him back to baby-talk and that'll keep his dick in his shorts for a while."

"Well, good luck," Alf offered.

"No luck about it," Morgan said. Pushing another switch on the console, he barked: "C-Block!"

Alf turned and walked toward the door to let himself back into the Admin corridor.

"C-Block. Private Jones."

"This is Sergeant Morgan, Jones. You have an open cell next to Beems, right?"

The door clicked shut; Alf sauntered down the hallway with an open grin. Passing the corridor door to the Commander's Office, he saw LTC Grantham sitting behind his desk, on the phone, with the back of a fatigue-clad figure in the interview chair next to the desk. Though difficult to tell at a glance from the rear, since prisoners and guards both wore fatigues, Alf sensed it was an inmate.

"Sergeant Bergson!" a stout voice – seemingly piped in through ceiling speakers – boomed through the corridor two seconds later. Colonel Grantham wasn't shouting, just using his normally robust command voice. Alf turned abruptly into the Correctional Office, stopping by the interior door to the Commander's Office and peering in.

"Sir?"

Grantham held the phone receiver next to his cheek, one huge hand covering the microphone end, and shot Alf a questioning look. "Can you wait a minute and then give me a few seconds?" the Colonel asked. The interviewee indeed a prisoner: Alf figured Grantham to be calling somewhere in the man's chain of command about some procedural detail in his custody status.

"Yes, sir," Alf responded, nodding his head vigorously. He turned away from the Colonel's door, taking in the Correctional Office at a glance. Major Legrand's desk in the interior corner, facing the center of the room at a 45-degree angle, sat

uncharacteristically clear of paperwork while the Deputy Commander handled some Brigade business in Kaiserslautern. Sergeant Major Ocasio, the facility Provost – a tall, wiry Puerto Rican, counting the months to 30th year retirement plans on his fingers – sat hunched over a stack of files on his desk with his back to the exercise-yard windows. A filing cabinet's upper drawer next to the wall hung precariously open near his head.

A nervous-looking Huey helicopter behind him – swinging its tail rotors back and forth along the north-south axis – hovered low over another section of the base about 3000 yards off.

Spec4 Larkin's station sat in the other corner next to the windows, parallel to the Sergeant Major's desk. His chair faced a typewriter stand against the wall, but the Specialist's upper torso twisted across the desktop now as he leaned on a forearm, avidly following the progress of Second Lieutenant Pogue's right index finger across some document on the desk. The Rhode Islander, Artemus Pogue – with his wire-rimmed glasses, baby face, and perpetually flummoxed demeanor – nominally commanded the Stockade Records section; but everyone knew a black warrant officer 15 years his senior actually ran the unit and made all the decisions.

Pogue figured centrally in one of the stockade's more slipshod recent events. Detailed off post on some financial business, the lieutenant carried a sidearm to protect the assets and documents involved. On his return to the stockade – as per protocol – the Sally Port guard inspected the officer's briefcase and sidearm before admitting him to the facility grounds. Buzzed into the main reception

lobby, Pogue – also per protocol – surrendered his weapon to the main Control Room clerk on duty before signing in. The clerk pulled back the slide on the .45 caliber pistol, verified an empty firing chamber, let the slide return home, and – all supposedly per protocol – calmly fired off a round into the trash can and floor at his feet.

None of the three, of course, had bothered insuring the gun's magazine chamber was empty; that should have been one of the first steps in the process for each. By releasing the slide mechanism, the Control Room clerk loaded a round from the full magazine: neatly overruling his visual inspection of the empty firing chamber when the slide was open. This was not the Military Police Corps' finest moment in history.

Worse still, the negligent parties' subsequent administrative punishments – handed down through the guard unit, not the stockade command – only further tarnished the Corps. The overawed Sally Port guard lost a pay grade and paid a stiff fine out of his salary for three months; the delinquent Control Room clerk lost a pay grade and paid an even stiffer fine every month for the next six. Lieutenant Pogue – the man originally responsible for the weapon and far outranking the lowly PFCs at the control points – had a stern letter of reprimand placed in his permanent record: for six months, after which time it disappeared forever.

The lieutenant, having finished his explanations to Specialist Larkin, slunk out of the Correctional Office into the main Admin corridor, keeping his eyes firmly fixed on what he apparently considered uncommonly treacherous footing on the floor ahead. Almost immediately the prisoner in

the Commander's Office also appeared: brushing past Alf as he, too, exited into the corridor and returned to duty. Directly behind him, LTC Grantham materialized in the office doorway, bowing his head slightly to avoid contacting the lintel; he was a big man in most every sense of the word.

Robert Grantham figured prominently in Alf's sense of living a charmed life. A fellow Iowan, hailing from a small farming community near the Minnesota border, Grantham graduated from the State University before joining the Army during the mid-'50s. Transferred to the MP Corps after several years as an infantryman, he earned a Masters in criminology and went from success to success as a police administrator.

When Alf arrived at the Long Binh Stockade as a raw, freshly-trained recruit, construction of the new facility neared completion, but inmate disturbances and racial disharmony among the CONEX boxes continued. Assaults, mysterious fires, frequent little rebellions and demonstrations plagued the camp; barely a week passed for many months when the assembled guard platoons weren't required to dress out in full riot gear and restore some semblance of order to one or another section of the camp by show of force.

Endless processions of twelve-hour shifts, relentless animosities, racial tension and constant resort to necessary force threatened to turn Alf into just another heartless, cynical screw; then Bob Grantham arrived and assumed command. From almost the first day, when he astounded the prisoners and alarmed the guards by wading unarmed and nearly alone – with only the trembling Chaplain by his side – into the thick of an angry domicile, re-

storing order by mere force of reason: the tide turned at the Long Binh Stockade. Month by month and week by week the incidence of violence and revolt gradually declined to insignificance.

Grantham's success lay in counterintuitive – frankly Zen Buddhist – use of his natural strengths. His imposing 6'6" frame, hypnotically commanding voice, piercing blue eyes and patrician features remained almost exclusively on background; he never blustered or demanded obedience and respect, as many would. He made himself a living presence among both guards and prisoners: always ready to humbly listen – really *listen* – to any man's complaint or opinion; and when command decisions finally sounded, everyone knew the most efficient compromise, the fairest solution, the most humane and reasonable course had been determined.

Far from mollicoddling or kowtowing to prisoners, he encouraged often long-dormant senses of self-respect and dignity within them, sparking self-disciplined ambition. His effect on the guard force was similar. When Alf (having rotated out of Asia, re-upped, transferred to Europe, and settled in as a guard platoon's second-in-command) first heard Bob Grantham was also rotating – into the warden's job at Mannheim – he knew his life truly had been charmed.

Having successfully negotiated the doorway, Grantham leaned back comfortably against its frame, like a big cat massaging himself on the walls of his den. Even at 6'2" and 185 pounds, Alf sometimes felt like a dwarf in his presence. "What's your take on Steve Lynch back on C-Block?" the Colonel asked.

“He’s capable of toeing the line,” Alf responded. “And I think he really was just defending himself against Murcheson in that mess hall business.” Murcheson would knife his own grandmother for the last piece of pie, Alf frankly believed: but did not say.

“I’m thinking about ordering him back to A-Block after the weekend.”

“Sounds like a good idea to me,” Alf nodded. “He seems to have been doing mostly the right kind of thinking back there in the box.”

SFC Mason appeared in the doorway behind Alf suddenly; both speakers turned their heads to look at him expectantly. The guard commander looked from one to the other just as expectantly, then addressed the Colonel: “Sergeant Bergson’s told you what’s going on, Sir?”

“I don’t think so, no,” Colonel Grantham responded, turning his face back to Alf with upturned eyebrows.

“We were just discussing something else,” Alf told Mason. “I haven’t said anything about Niemeyer or Cortez yet.”

“What about Cortez?” Grantham interjected; apparently he’d had an eye on that one already, too.

“Seems he assaulted and raped Niemeyer in the upper corridors on his way back from mess hall duty last night,” Mason declared.

“Niemeyer just reported it to me a few minutes ago,” Alf added. “He’s got all the right bruises and there was some circumstantial evidence at the scene of the crime I noticed earlier today, even before he came forward.”

“Evidence?” Colonel Grantham asked, pulling a wry face. “I’m afraid to ask.”

Mason and Alf both snorted as though on cue. “There was a mop bucket out of place exactly where Niemeyer said the rape occurred,” Alf smiled. “That’s all I noticed this morning, anyway; I didn’t realize there might have been something else worth looking for.”

Mason and Grantham both shook their heads slowly after this confession, lips tightly shut against further commentary. “There should be two men waiting for me at the CCP right now,” Mason told Grantham after a beat. “I figured to take Cortez out of the kitchen straight back to C-Block before the shift change.”

“No time like the present,” Grantham agreed. “I may just tag along and see how things go.” Turning his face toward Alf, he continued: “Are you going down, too?”

“Actually, sir,” Alf responded, “I’ve got Niemeyer standing on Post 13 and probably ought to run ahead and get him into Protective Custody on D-Block.”

“O.K.,” Grantham nodded, “go ahead and we’ll give you a minute to clear the CCP with him.”

Niemeyer and the guard at Post 13 – apparently already watching the hallway in anticipation – both eyed Alf curiously as he emerged from the office. Alf approached with deceptive leisure, whistling fragments from the opening *Allegro* of Mozart's G-minor Piano Quartet. The same had been his constant, consoling mental companion during long, full-field-gear, double-time formations back in Basic Training.

"Thanks for the baby-sit, Stepanovich," Alf said to the guard as he approached the post.

"Any time, Sarge," the guard replied.

"OK, Mr. Niemeyer," Alf said without missing a step, "let's go." The prisoner had to jump and quick-step to catch up. They returned to single file again for a moment as they passed the trustee prisoner in stocking feet methodically buffing waxed linoleum floor to improbable brilliance.

### § § §

Alf figured Niemeyer first realized something wasn't right when the Social Worker disappeared into the B-Block office and talked with the guard there at length, leaving the prisoner cooling his heels just inside the main block gate. When all three walked together down the long corridor to bay B-4, passing mostly empty afternoon domicile-cages and dark service corridors between rows of open toilets and showers, doubt would have no longer been possible. No Admin staffer would walk a prisoner all the way back to his bunk; that was the turnkey's job.

"OK, Mr. Niemeyer," Alf said quietly once the key opening the barred bay door turned, "get your stuff together and bring your footlocker with you."

"You're taking me to the hole," Niemeyer declared. It wasn't a question.

"It's for your own safety," Alf explained.

"You said I didn't do anything wrong," Niemeyer pleaded.

"You didn't," Alf said firmly. "You're going into protective custody; it's not a punishment."

"I don't want to go back there."

"I don't blame you," Alf said matter-of-factly. "But we don't have a choice. The regs are clear about it." Three months earlier Alf never would have reasoned with a prisoner about a custody grade change on an open bay like this. He sensed the turnkey behind him fidgeting with discomfort and knew how he felt.

"Now I won't get my GED," Niemeyer complained. Again, it wasn't a question.

"You'll get your GED, don't worry. You're not being punished, I tell you. But you will be, if you don't get cracking on that footlocker right now."

"All right," the boy said, shoulders drooping. "All my stuff's already in there, I'm sure." He pulled open the lid and poked around in it a few times, just to be sure. Then he hoisted it up on his back and started the long march to segregation.

When they were halfway down the corridor, a voice from one of the far bays – doubtless a prisoner restricted to quarters with some kind of medical profile – called out: "See ya later, pretty boy! Gonna miss ya!"

## § § §

Alf had no heart to watch Niemeyer strip searched and humiliated by D-Block guards, so he took his leave in the anteroom there after brief explanations to staff and a promise that the boy would see him again every day from now on and that things would work out for him. Back in the office, the daily workload piled up ahead and even more time evaporated as the ever-curious Ferguson chewed over every second-hand detail of Alf's afternoon. By dinnertime, with the Fourth Platoon already two hours into its swing shift and Ferguson eager to get back to his wife and kids off base for the weekend, Alf still hadn't written the promised Disciplinary Report. He took a corner table, away from current shift guards in the mess hall, scratching sentences between bites.

After delivering the completed form to the new Guard Commander on duty and being coaxed to recite yet again every saliently prurient detail of the Niemeyer-Cortez affair, he set his steps toward maximum security. Every knot in the path led past yet another incredulous swing shift guard asking: "Don't you know it's Friday night already, Sarge?"

"Don't I ever!" he responded in the C-Block anteroom. "I just want to check on a couple details back there and then I'll get out of your hair."

"Hey, knock yourself out, Sarge. I got no where else to be."

Rather than going directly, he circled around through the east wing again: to come at Cortez by way of Leroy Beems first. At wing's end he found Lynch leaning against his cell door bars, smoking a cigarette.

"Don't you know it's Friday night already, Sarge?" the prisoner smiled.

"Don't I ever!" Alf laughed. "I've just got a couple more loose ends to gather together back here and then I'm gone."

"Well, I was gonna thank you Monday, but guess I can just as well do it right now."

"Thank me?"

"Yeah. I don't know what you did to Beems this morning, but he never made another peep again all day long after you came through."

Alf got a good laugh out of that one. "O.K.," he chuckled afterward, "I'll take credit for that, but I'm sure it was just a coincidence. He was already plain tuckered out by the time I got to him. He's probably just waiting for me to check on him right now before he starts screaming again."

"Yeah, well, that and the Colonel talked to me for quite a bit this afternoon after reading your note about me on the 509. He said he thinks I can probably go back to the bays on Monday, if I can keep my nose clean out there."

"Oh good, great," Alf said. He wondered idly whether that was before – or after – the conversation about Lynch in the Correctional Office. "Hell, I'm just glad somebody actually reads those things."

"He reads them every day, Sarge."

"I know you can make it out there. Let the smart-mouth assholes run their mouths and don't take it to heart. Just because some other guy has to prove how stupid he is, is no reason why you should have to end up back here again."

"I get it, believe me."

"Well, I hope you guys have a quiet weekend and I'll probably see you Monday."

"Thanks, Sarge. I'll see ya, then."

Even Beems' stench seemed dissipated somewhat since the morning. The suicide watch logbook showed a steady monotony of entries every 15 minutes, all afternoon: "Sleeping. Sleeping. Sleeping. Snoring. Sleeping...." Peering into the cell, Alf noticed quiet, regular breathing and smiled briefly at the dusty naked black butt: stuck up in the air, just like a baby's...

"All hail the conquering hero!" a grim, sarcastic voice hissed from the neighboring cell.

"Mr. Cortez," Alf said quietly, "good evening." He took the few steps necessary to plant himself squarely in the miscreant's face and stared him coolly in the eye. But for the black-rimmed, vocational-education-teacher-style glasses on his oily face, the man's swarthy, thick, pockmarked

complexion reminded him of nothing more than contemporary descriptions of ... Ludwig van Beethoven. Disgusting.

"Come back to gloat over your victory, then?" Intense hatred glowed in the man's dark eyes.

"Just because you've suffered a defeat, Cortez, doesn't necessarily mean I've won a victory."

"Right, right, right. Listen, what is that odor, anyway? Smells like something died in here."

Nearly five hours on C-Block and Cortez still didn't know squat about Leroy Beems: actually not so strange, since Max-block guards – not wanting to prejudice upcoming administrative hearings with inadvertent remarks – often gave fresh disciplinary intakes the silent treatment. Besides, it made a nifty sort of a reverse welcome mat for self-styled bad-asses who needed to learn negative attitude gets one nowhere in a helpless, one-man cell.

"Oh, that's just your next door neighbor," Alf revealed. "I hope you'll be kind to him; he's a very sick man."

"Sick? What do you mean, sick?"

"Sick in the head, Mr. Cortez. Paranoid. Delusional. Schizophrenic. He should be an object lesson for you about what can happen to people who nurse hostilities and plot revenge against imaginary enemies."

"Can the psycho mumbo-jumbo, Bergson. I know what this is all about."

"Do you?"

"It's all about that pretty fagboy *hoto*. You know I never raped him. He wanted it. He begged for it. You're just jealous because he wanted *me* and you can't have him."

"You're only hurting yourself, Cortez, believe me."

"Admit you want him."

"Look, even if I did, that wouldn't be the point. Even if I did, I wouldn't punch him around and hold a blade to his throat to show my affection." Maybe half a second of confusion – not to say, shame – flashed across the prisoner's eyes before they hardened again. "Don't keep shooting yourself in the foot for the rest of your life," Alf concluded.

"All you slick Anglo *hoto* fags make me sick."

"Face the truth, Cortez. You aren't the one in control of your life anymore. Maybe you never were, I don't know. You're gonna need all the help you can get from here on in."

"Nobody helps me. I help myself. Nobody crawls in my head and moves things around, either."

"So be it," Alf concluded. "I'll see you Monday at your hearing." He turned and strode purposefully down the corridor toward the exit: trees, fresh air and a weekend of absolute freedom.

"You can all go to hell," Cortez shouted after him: "all you slick Anglo fag cocksuckers can suck cocks in hell!"

"Jesus in hell!" Leroy Beems screamed, rattling his barred door violently in its runner for a few seconds after. "Jesus rules in hell! Aaaagggghhhh!"

A tight, little smile danced across Alf's otherwise thoroughly exasperated features: a charmed life, indeed – and a fine one. Echoes of Beems' feral shout warped and decayed in the mazes of narrow corridors surrounding. The re-education of Herman Cortez had begun.

### iii

The rain passed and only windswept, fresh, starry night greeted Alf as he left the stockade grounds. After a quick shower at the barracks, he changed into what passed for civvies in his wardrobe: khaki pants from the summer dress uniform, blue civilian dress shirt, burgundy sweater, and gray wool German-cut sport coat from a local shop. Well-worn standard-issue combat boots from Basic Training days – not spit shined, like the jump boots he wore to work every day, but still highly polished – protected his feet.

On the way out, Alf passed through the Third Platoon barracks section and heard some commotion issuing from the room George Morrell shared with several others. *Obladi* was *oblada*-ing and *life was going on* and a gust of muffled laughter escaped through the closed door, so he stopped and knocked. Tim Higgins opened the door a crack and peered out suspiciously.

"Sergeant Bergson," he said at last, "good timing! Get your butt in here." He actually reached out a massive hand and pulled Alf into the room by an arm, quickly shutting the door behind them and locking it. Luis Martinez and another longtime

Third Platoon guard, Alex Sinclair, still in fatigue uniforms from work, lounged against the far wall at opposite ends of Morrell's bunk; Sinclair – a slender blond from upstate New York somewhere – held a half-empty Jim Beam bottle by the neck on his thigh. Morrell, wearing nothing but t-shirt, boxers and dog tags, sat between them with the Beatles' White Album cover on his knees: just finishing up the elaborate ritual of crumbling opiated black hashish into a pile of cigarette tobacco and loading the whole into an old Doctor Grabow pipe.

"Just in time to do the honors, Sarge," Morrell smiled, holding the final product out toward Alf with pipe stem pointing straight at him.

"Better take a pull off that bottle first, just to get my courage up," Alf countered.

"So," Sinclair drawled, holding the whiskey out for Alf to take, "you want to pass out, *before* you fall down."

"That's right," Alf responded, "less chance of hurting myself that way."

Several pipe rounds through the quintet – with frequent coughing fits – later, Sinclair and Martinez lounged even more comfortably against the wall somehow; and Higgins – plopped down on the floor at Sinclair's feet with his back against Morrell's wardrobe locker – stared fixedly, fascinated by something about the wall molding under the Texan's bed. For several moments only the album on the stereo – and the jangling of Morrell's dog tags as his shoulders squirmed along to the music – could be heard. Some person named Bill, who apparently lived in small, one-story house

somewhere was undergoing strenuous interrogations about his hunting practices.

"So they put Cortez in the cell next to Beems," Morrell ventured.

"That they did," Alf remembered, "and he seemed none too happy about it."

"I always knew there was somethin' hinky about that fucker," Morrell continued: "I mean, more than your usual prisoner hinkyness quotient."

"Yeah, he's about as shifty-eyed as Nixon," Alf concluded.

"All right," Martinez interjected, "that'll be enough bad-mouthing your Commander-in-Chief here in this elegantly appointed accommodation he personally selected for your comfort and safety."

"I'm sorry, Luis," Alf returned, "you're right. I should have said he's about as shifty-eyed as Agnew."

"That's much better," Martinez grinned.

"So," Morrell began, looking Alf up and down, his lips pursed, "you're, what, goin' over to the Club, tonight?" He meant the *Sportklub Blumenau*, a backroom annex of the *Gasthaus* just outside the main post fence line next to the stockade. Designed for local soccer teams' victory celebrations from the field nearby, it was about as far into German culture as many stockade guards ever ventured.

"Actually, I thought I'd go downtown and try my luck at the disco," Alf replied. "Want to come along?"

"Nah, we've got one more day shift to pull; I'd better just stick around here and drink myself into a stupor tonight. I'd go tomorrow, though."

"I may go to Heidelberg tomorrow," Alf said, "but I'll definitely look you up, if I don't – or if I come back early enough."

"O.K."

"Thanks for the smoke though, man. I owe you one."

"Anytime," Morrell said. "Oh, here they go!" He leapt up and started dancing and singing along to the Beatles: something about a convent's Abbess and a firearm – Alf couldn't be quite sure what. Martinez and Sinclair joined in singing when they got to the part about the weapon's warmth being a source of such transcendent joy.

§ § §

Under clear, but moonless skies, the Mannheim Stockade glowed in harsh perimeter-light islands like a game neither athletes nor spectators remembered to attend. After crossing abandoned railway tracks near the barracks and negotiating a pitch black valley, where the stockade's only access road wound past a rarely used firing range, Alf ambled through the facility parking lot, marveling at the glare. The guard in Tower One nodded and waved at him, but the man in the Sally Port guard-

house seemed avidly reading something, oblivious to any approach.

Just as well, since Alf turned sharply right near the Sally Port, crossed a narrow grass strip, and ducked through a conveniently man-sized hole in the post fence line onto the Germans' neighborhood soccer field. This breach in the fence – directly under the stockade front gate control point's gaze – base engineers repaired once every six months like clockwork; just as inevitably it reappeared again the very next day. The likelihood German nationals or Russian spies might sneak onto the base in the prison's teeth seemed comfortably remote; but off-duty guards' pressing need to visit the neighborhood watering hole without going a mile out of their way through the main post entrance would not be denied.

The brisk night; redolent, damp soccer field grass; and nearby humming glow of stockade perimeter lights: all combined to suggest something memorable. Casting a glance along his own grass-edged shadow to the distant sideline, then turning 180° to face the glaring lights, he finally remembered his Senior-year game against Jefferson: played on exactly similar, rain-soaked turf. The J-Hawks, down by four late in the fourth quarter, were driving hard and had put Alf's team back on its heels. He'd slipped on wet grass early in the play, botched his assignment, and was running desperately to catch the man near the sideline, when the J-Hawks' quarterback launched a bomb from the opposite side of the field. Running full out with his head turned back, he'd lost the ball in the stadium lights; in an awful flash, he knew the winning touchdown was about to be scored – on his own mistake.

In the next flash, the ball was right *there* – coming just within reach; the Jefferson player was down on his ass sliding, having shifted gears too fast trying to get back to the underthrown pass; Alf tipped the ball up, managed to get underneath it, and hugged it to his numbers when it finally came down. He even ran about twenty-five yards back toward midfield before two guys smacked him from opposite directions – and high and low – and down he went, like a light pole in a tornado.

The home field stands exploded and the whole bench mobbed him as he left the field; but Coach just looked, shook his head, and said: “You are about the *luckiest* S.O.B. I’ve ever known, Bergson.”

Alf agreed. That was the same night Cindy Wetmore (always the outside girl on the left side, second row of the cheerleaders’ pyramid – whose hair smelled like apples) had been waiting for him out on the parking lot after the game. They’d driven to Coralville Lake and she’d given herself to him there, right by the water under some trees; he’d had no clue she even liked him, before that night.

Whatever happened to Cindy Wetmore, he wondered. Probably went on to lead cheers down at Iowa City, he figured; then laughed, remembering the Hawkeyes had gone 12-28-2 during the years he would have been there. Thank God he’d joined the Army, then! he laughed again, turning his gaze one last time to the harshly lit concrete stockade walls behind systems of fence lines, the four towers, and the pitch-black outline suggestion of a tree line beyond – out Lampertheim way.

He might have been playing his rookie year in the NFL right now: if he'd gone on to school; if he'd played well there and not been hurt; if he'd been picked up by the draft; if his life really had been charmed. But those were the Stars and Stripes flying there: wrongheaded policies or no, no Bergson would ever turn his back on that flag. No Bergson from Iowa could have just played football, knowing other men were bleeding and dying for him in the jungles of Indochina – or anywhere else.

He picked his way past convivial sounds of *Sportklub* nightlife, planting himself at a quiet bus stop near the *Gasthaus'* street side. Ten minutes on a bus from this sleepy northern suburb would take him to the slightly less sleepy suburban streetcar stop at Sandhofen; an additional fifteen minutes on a train would place him on the Paradeplatz in downtown Mannheim. There the humming buzz of perimeter lights and echoed clangs of operational security gates could all be forgotten.

Alf found his high school German – learned under the exacting ear of a native *Rheinländerin*, transported shortly after the war with her new GI husband – quite serviceable in this ancient *württembergischer* city. Even at the stockade, he regularly found himself paged to take the Correctional Office phone from Spec4 Larkin's useless hand for translation; he invariably commanded details transferring newly adjudicated prisoners to German prisons; he even served once as ad hoc interrogator, when some Turkish *Gastarbeiter* tried stealing a spoon and coffee cup from the facility mess hall in his satchel. The ironies of Army appreciation for his talents knew no limits.

His mother's father taught art at Coe College in Cedar Rapids; as a teenager she knew Grant Wood, Conger Metcalf, Marvin Cone and other 30's-era painters of the celebrated Stone City Art Colony. She never tired of relating how during the First World War the enlisted Cone – once the Army discovered his already considerable brush skills – was set to work painting patchwork camouflage patterns on tanks in France. Alf thought he could do this story one better: during orientation week at boot camp he spent an entire day – four hours reading in the morning, and four hours listening in the afternoon – demonstrating German skills, earning Level 3 translator status. But when the final assignments for his last training company's graduates came down from the Pentagon months later, those whose names began with the letters A-M saw orders for Vietnam and all the rest went ... to Germany. The tour in Vietnam wasn't the issue, of course; Alf supposed and intended to be sent into combat from the start. But the Army's apparently routine waste of talents, effort and intelligence unsettled him.

At first blush Mannheim seemed rather monotonously constructed entirely of 5-story, 50's-style buildings. Allied bombers systematically flattened the city during the War; a single night's attack in September 1943 left more than a quarter of its inhabitants homeless. But a strategic location – repeatedly destroyed and reoccupied during the Thirty Years War, the first written record of whose name dates to 766 A.D. – endures.

A principal charm of the place for Alf flowed from the 18th-century Mannheim School, serious competitor with Vienna for honor as the birthplace of Classicism in music. The father and son, Johann and Karl Stamitz – together with another famous

child of fame, C.P.E. Bach – made innovations in form and dynamic practice clearly influencing posterity: including Beethoven, *the Master*. Mozart, Goethe, Klopstock, Lessing, Wieland, Berlioz and Wagner all visited Mannheim; and Schiller found refuge there after authorities in Stuttgart sought his arrest for writing *Die Räuber*.

The discotheque "CountDown" occupied the entire second floor of a commercial building not far from the *Paradeplatz*, somewhere in the reconstructed 17th-century quadratic rabbits' warren of downtown Mannheim. Alf wormed his way through a babbling crowd of young people on the sidewalk outside, weaving several times on the staircase up to avoid similarly weaving youths coming down, and finally stood on the dance floor's edge, where swirling lights bisected tobacco smoke clouds over the crowd's bobbing heads. The current piece's steady drumbeat and inchoate lyrics were not strictly speaking of the Mannheim School; but the children of Mannheim seemed content.

Alf surveyed the rectangular bar running nearly the full length of the establishment's back wall and discovered only one vacant seat: close to the rear corner nearest him, with a view of the dance floor through the bar's well and patrons seated opposite. He slithered onto the high chair and ordered bourbon on the rocks, keeping his alcohol consumption for the night on the same gauge track. Not long after, an event Alf anticipated with misgiving the moment he claimed the seat took place: the woozy, mid-fifties-looking, overweight character in the seat to his left broke the "silence" between them.

"You are an American soldier," the man said in passable, though accented English.

"Yes, that's true," Alf replied in his most careful German, turning to confront his accuser's slicked-back, thinning blond hair and aquiline nose. "A military policeman, to be more exact." He used the relatively obscure military term, *Feldjäger*, at risk of pedantry – but with electric effect on his listener.

"Are you, really?" the man shot back in German, suddenly sitting up more erectly and ineffectually straightening brown-checked sport jacket against ample gut. "I was a *Feldjäger* myself, once. Years ago, in the Russian war." Almost as a dreamy afterthought, he continued: "At Kharkov."

This piqued Alf's curiosity and – despite sustained public din forcing the strangers to nearly lock faces and shout to be heard – conversation took off. "Kharkov," Alf marveled, "good God! Kharkov in '42 or in '43?"

"Ah," the man's eyes widened with surprise, "you know your history too well. Are you sure you're American?"

"Quite certain," Alf grinned, appreciating the backhanded compliment. "You don't have to be a professor to know the Russian front – all by itself – was the largest, most costly and terrible campaign of any war ever."

"Yes, it's true: you do know your history all too well. I was there when we took Kharkov in '42 and I was also there in '43, when the Soviets took it back from us. I still dream about that accursed win-

ter sometimes and wake up shivering to the bone. Sometimes I think I died there and was just too damned cold to realize it."

A sudden burst of silence between songs brought dozens of surrounding conversations into jarring focus and caught Alf aback. He remembered many books read; he flipped in a mind's-eye instant through hundreds of photographs seen: showing bodies frozen solid and stacked by hundreds like so much cordwood; men crushed to pancakes in armor tracks on dirt roads; firing squads executing dozens at a time on the lips of hastily dug mass graves; shawled women screaming grief to the sky over lifeless children. Here, then, was a man who had been there. A military cop like himself.

The older man seemed to be reading Alf's mind. "By the way," he confided, after a fresh song started booming through the loudspeakers, "I was never a Nazi, if that's what you're thinking. I hated those arrogant pigshits. But I was always a German patriot and always will be one."

"I can understand that," Alf said. "I hated what my country was doing in Vietnam; but I went there, anyway, and did my duty."

"Exactly," the man nodded earnestly. "We are truly comrades, then. We both fought the Communists to serve our homelands."

Alf wasn't so sure he liked this idea, but could think of no apt or ready contradiction to offer. It wouldn't have been exactly politic to announce great joy at the Russians having kicked the Germans' butts back home; and he certainly wasn't about to say he frankly didn't see what was so awful

about the communist ideal – in theory, anyway. "Actually, the only fighting I ever did in Vietnam was with criminals in my own army," he finally laughed.

But his companion saw no humor in this observation. "The military policeman in wartime often doesn't know how many real enemies he has," he responded flatly. From here the conversation degenerated into a series of increasingly revealing monologues; Alf's participation gradually devolved into noncommittal nods and meaningless facial gestures.

The man wasn't a Nazi, but had to admit the Nazis were right about the Communists. Communism and socialism were vile, godless, soulless perversions of slavery that killed the human spirit. The Germans, Scandinavians, English and Americans were natural historical allies against Communism. No sooner had the war concluded, than the Americans were forced to pick up the defeated Germans' struggle against this unholy system.

Almost imperceptibly, as the rants continued, Alf's bar mate began equating Communists with Russians in general; then, Russians with Slavs; Slavs with Mongols; Mongols with Asians; Asians with all the dark races; and the circle came full. He never mentioned Jews, but implication that Jews were naturally Asiatic and dark would have been little more than a passing footnote in this mass of racist claptrap. Just when Alf had heard about all he could take and was ready to start offering counter-arguments, the old soldier suddenly changed tacks: "You are a bachelor?"

"No wife yet, that's right," Alf said cautiously.

"Well, you are smart, good-looking and honorable," the man pronounced. He reached out his right hand and placed it on Alf's left thigh near the knee: "You should come and meet my daughter, sometime. You might like her."

Alf went back to noncommittal gesturing after that and the conversation essentially died. Looking around the bar and dance floor repeatedly for some salvation, he finally noticed someone he knew from earlier visits here come to the head of the stairs from the street below. "Ah, there's a friend of mine," he said brightly to the now morose-looking, middle-aged fat man beside him. "There's something I need to tell him." He drained the last of his bourbon and started working around the bar to the other side.

The crush of people coming in or leaving; going to or returning from the toilets; migrating toward the bar to freshen their drinks or gingerly seeking to get back without spilling anything newly freshened; stalking friends or a stranger: all this combined with the dancers' ongoing whirling, stomping, and head-bobbing against incessant drumbeats to confuse almost any purpose imaginable. Alf excused his way through all patiently until finally standing within hailing distance of an amazingly black-haired, dark young man wearing very tight and very pale blue trousers, a blue flowered shirt, and camel-colored sweater every bit as form-fitting as his pants. The youth stood facing the bar, just receiving some sort of drinks from the attendant there.

"Behar," Alf shouted at the boy's back, "Behar!"

Behar Kovachi, a 17-year-old Gypsy – or *Sinto*, as he untiringly insisted to everyone he met – presented a jarring contradiction to every possible popular misconception about the *Sinti*. Far from wearing colorfully ethnic and idiosyncratic costume, he was easily the sharpest and most stylishly dressed male in the whole discotheque. Having never lived in a horse-drawn wagon, migrating from place to place, he had been born in Mannheim and lived his whole life in the same house there. Never once imagining to support himself by petty crime or shyster confidence games, he was already – just as his father had been, at his age – an accomplished auto mechanic capable of repairing almost any kind of vehicle in short order, often with cunningly improvised tools and parts.

Alf met him here several months before and sometimes went on to quieter locales for nightcaps with Behar and his friends when dancing lost its allure. Behar – whose German seemed more carefully exact than that of many ethnic Germans – wanted to know everything about America; and Alf obliged him with what little he thought he knew about his own homeland. Hearing his name shouted now in the discotheque's madness, the young *Sinto* turned and flashed a winning smile at the young American. "Alf," he said, "how goes it?"

"Behar," Alf said yet again, "do me a big favor: act like you're really glad to see me."

"But haven't I done that already?" Behar asked with amused perplexity.

"Yes," Alf admitted, "but there's some old shithead sitting over there behind you who wants me to marry his daughter."

The *Sinto* turned his head with studied casualness, quickly taking in the row of drinkers opposite. Then his face returned into Alf's view, its expression decidedly grim. "You mean that old Nazi pig-dog?"

"That's the one, yes."

"More likely he wants you in the house so he can have you all to himself," Behar growled. No hint of a joke – in either expression or tone of voice – softened the observation. "Don't worry; we'll keep him away from you."

"You know him, then?"

"I know him," Behar declared ominously, "and he knows me." Then he turned again quite deliberately to stare at the object of conversation. The old soldier stood now, leaning against the bar with his right hand, while quite realistically pretending to hang himself in his necktie with the left. His head hung to one side, his tongue lolling obscenely from the twisted gash of his mouth.

"We should be so lucky," Behar laughed. "Come, here, take two of these," he continued, handing Alf two drinks. "The girls have a place over against the wall." He led Alf through the weaving crowds and they arrived not at a table, but at a sort of a shelf built against the far wall. Not one or two, but actually three young German women waited there patiently for the handsome young *Zigeuner's* arrival.

The situation nonplussed Alf somewhat; but none of the girls seemed disappointed to see him, so he brightened quickly. Alf knew Behar was al-

ready betrothed – actually decidedly behind schedule at his age by *Sinti* custom – to a suitably chaste, and very young *Sinto* girl, who would never be allowed to roam the streets at night without considerable escort of male relations. But Anna, Gretchen and Lisle – the three *Rhine Maidens*, as he immediately dubbed them in his imagination – were apparently interested only in dancing; and that, as soon as possible. They took turns using Alf and Behar on the floor until another young man came up to claim the odd girl out for a spell and the world – old German soldiers, prisoners, madmen and other outcasts excepted, of course – returned to its intended perfect balance for a time.

Alf felt vaguely sorry for his parents' generation, as the rituals of dance in those prehistoric times seemed almost uniformly stylized and absurd to the children of rock and roll. Some people insisted there were still particular steps and motions involved in proper dancing nowadays – even inventing names to describe them – but Alf never saw the masses paying the least bit of attention to these officious, cultural busybodies. Some people danced with their heads; some with their feet; some with their arms or hips or hands; some seemed merely afflicted with terminal stages of *locomotor ataxia*.

Behar's dance might have been called “the Trance”: he stood perfectly erect, head held high, his features displaying unbelievably composed disinterest, with one immobile hand resting on his own hip and the other held out palm up at about shoulder level as a prop for his partner to dance around, while some vague motions of his feet and knees completed the exertion. By the time Gretchen began rounding up the other *Rhine Maidens* with breathless warnings that her father would

certainly kill her if she didn't go home that very instant, Alf was quite winded and a bit wet from all the flailing and dipping. But Behar stood quite impassively unruffled, every hair still in place, looking ready to dance all night.

§§§

"You want to go down to the river and smoke?" the *Sinto* asked Alf after they'd seen the girls off at their streetcar stop.

"Outstanding idea," Alf smiled. They turned away from busier areas and chose one of the narrower, less traveled southwesterly downtown streets leading to the *Bismarckstraße*, former Imperial Elector's palace, and riverside park. Alf noticed almost immediately that Behar had turned if possible even more sober-looking than usual.

They walked about a block and a half on this new street in silence, when Behar suddenly stopped dead in front of a watchmaker's shop. Alf kept on walking a few seconds and then halted as well, turning around to see what the matter was. Behar shifted his back to the young American, then turned a quick 180° on his right foot, bringing his left one up level with his hips and driving it backward directly into the glass front door of the shop.

Glass shuddered an instant, then shattered to masses of shards and collapsed into the business' entryway. An alarm within set to clanging and Alf saw the entire future course of his Military Police career suddenly shimmer past his mind's eye as though in reproachful farewell. But Behar was not, as Alf feared, bent on larceny.

The *Sinto* stood erect again, shrugged his shoulders and began walking in Alf's direction quite casually, as though nothing in particular had just occurred. Alf, with heart in throat, said nothing until the two took a few steps together in their original direction and the sharp invasive alarm bell receded somewhat into background. Every new second absent sound of distant sirens brought fresh encouragement.

"So what was that all about?" Alf finally asked.

"Nazis," Behar responded simply.

"That shop's owners are Nazis?" Alf insisted.

"They are all Nazis," Behar replied, warming to his subject. "All the old accursed German *gadjé* pig-fuckers lined up every morning just to lick Hitler's ass. And they still worship him."

Alf did not protest that many Germans suffered horribly under the Nazis; that many fought with the Allies or underground – some right here in Mannheim – and paid with their lives; or that ordinary men, women and children everywhere are, in any event, largely helpless against inexorable history and its consequences.

"Do you have any idea what they did to my family?" Behar asked rhetorically.

"No, of course not," Alf murmured. "But I know Gypsies were as much a target to them as Jews, Communists, Slavs, homosexuals, the sick or mentally defective."

"We were all defective in their eyes, God, yes," An uncomfortable silence followed this pronouncement, as Behar struggled to compose his thoughts. "Of my father's side, there is no one left. There were fourteen people I never met. My great-grandparents were gassed at Auschwitz in 1944; there were so many *Sinti* killed that night they still call it *die Zigeunernacht*. My grandparents were pulled from their car by the side of a country road in Austria in broad daylight and shot in the ditch like dogs.

"My Uncle Chavula and Aunt Marilis were marched with dozens of other families hundreds of kilometers on foot through Hungary and died from typhus in a filthy camp after being already half starved to death. My Uncle Lensar died in the camp at Lodz; no one knows how. My Uncle Danior simply disappeared one day, searching for firewood, and was never seen again.

"My Father only survived because he escaped to Switzerland and joined a band in the mountains, living like a fugitive or a hunted animal – even among the ever-so-tolerant Swiss."

"Behar," Alf stammered, "it's terrible, unimaginable, unspeakable."

"Yes, and to this day my Mother does not speak of what happened to her and her blood in those years. I have met only one old woman she says is her aunt. Toothless and barely able to speak, this poor woman, so addled with grief from the unknown horrors she saw."

Struck dumb, in the face of this heartrending narrative, Alf stopped dead in the street him-

self now, glaring sullenly at the buildings surrounding. Behar stopped, too, and returned to Alf's side. Both their mouths were grim lines.

"I am sorry, my friend, to be so unpleasant. You are *gadjé*, but your heart is good. You have a right to know what kind of things your new friend at the bar has done in the war."

"He's no friend of mine," Alf growled.

"You have said your father fought and was nearly killed, trying to end their madness. I am sure he was not fighting for the *Sinti's* sake, but his sacrifice is remembered and honored."

"He has suffered all his life ever since from that wound, yes."

"He did not fight in vain, my friend."

"Nothing like this must ever happen again, Behar."

"Bah, it was not the first time, and will not be the last. The *gadjikano* have hunted and persecuted us for 700 years here in Europe. "Gypsy Hunts" are an ancient and time-honored tradition all across the continent."

"But, why?"

"Why? Because we have dark eyes and dark skin. Because we stick together and honor the memories and customs of our ancestors, rather than bend our ways to fit their prejudices."

The pair continued in silence then, soon arriving at a relatively quiet *Bismarckstraße*. The massive and repeatedly restored edifice of the 18th-century Baroque riverside palace there, now the scene of various government functions by day, lay in stoic midnight silence before them. Detouring around this historic monument and strolling through a long pedestrian tunnel under railroad tracks brought them to the head of a kilometer-long stretch of Rhine-front parkland lying in silent isolation.

Behar led the way across shadowy upland lawn to a particularly dark spot near a tree line, fairly distant from any pavement. The prospect of encountering any other souls at this late and chilly hour seemed remote, but Alf appreciated the caution. Behar crouched down on his haunches, deftly producing a tiny metal pipe, pocketknife and foil cube; in short order he shaved several hefty flakes from a more common local brownish-green-yellowish hashish-chunk into the bowl, screwing a wind-defeating lid over same. A tiny hole in the lid allowed flame to be sucked into the bowl, containing resultant smoke so all could be channeled through the pipe stem into the users' lungs.

"OK, my friend," Behar began ceremoniously, "now we will forget the trials of the past for a while and look ahead only to the promise of the future. A week from tomorrow, I eat bloodstained bread."

"Excuse me?" Alf hastened to ask. Remembering Morrell's obscene mess hall monologue didn't fit well with anticipating imminent high somehow.

"I will marry, I mean. It is an old *Sinti* custom. The man and his bride each drip their blood onto chunks of bread, exchange them and eat."

"Ah, I see," Alf returned, with relief. "I offer you both my sincere congratulations, then. A long life, joy, and just the right number of children to ease your trials in retirement!"

"Thank you, my friend," Behar nodded, extending pipe and matches toward Alf, inviting him to begin the ritual. This Alf did gladly, exulting in the taste and aroma of unadulterated hashish and feeling its relaxing charms in his brain and limbs immediately. Once the pipe exhausted, the two young men remained crouching for some time, each staring out onto the distant water and thinking private thoughts.

Associations of blood and sex overwhelmed Alf's mind disturbingly. Behar's Gypsy wedding ritual and the near-extirmination of his bloodline during the war; Morrell's distasteful mealtime reminiscence and the rape-induced wounds on Niemeyer's childlike neck; added to a recent memory of his own, melding regret and revulsion with unimaginably potent satisfaction: unnerved him. Life in the real world seemed a precarious, filthy, dangerous, painful, bloody – and incredibly precious – thing.

"I had better go home, then," Behar said presently, rising to his feet with a little groan, on unsteady legs. Alf unintentionally imitated the gestures perfectly as he also rose. "I will see you again, soon," the *Sinto* continued. "I may be marrying, but I am not moving to the moon."

"I should hope not," Alf laughed. "Thanks for the smoke, and a wonderful wedding to you, if I don't see you again before."

"Thank you, my friend," Behar said quietly. He turned and was gone. Still stiff from long crouching, Alf hobbled down a gentle slope toward the river and eventually came to rest, leaning against an iron railing at the very water's edge. The swift current's hypnotic, sloshing gurgle worked wonderfully on vast open spaces hashish cleared in his skull. The distinct sound of a marine motor came across the water, though no lights or other signs of traffic were visible on the swirling surface. Downtown Lufwigshafen glowed about 500 yards upstream; the whistling, metallic whir of cars and trucks on the massive bridge connecting the two cities there came as though dropped from the sky into Alf's absorbent ear.

Every previous time Alf came near this spot his mind's ear heard proud and quickening tones of *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* from *Götterdämmerung*. But the stultifying weight of Nazi atrocities remembered during the evening behind him pressed down on his conscience now: making Wagner seem crass and indelicate for the moment. He searched ardently through brain caverns a while, hoping to locate and consciously choose some more appropriate theme to delight his senses on the waterfront.

But the brain is a trickster and Wagner would not be denied. Images of Anna, Gretchen and Lisle dancing in the discotheque sprang unbidden to Alf's mind; these led inevitably to *Rheingold's* first act and the *Rhine Maidens'* scornful hahahaha-hahas as they tormented unhappy Alberich, mocking his hopeless love. The misshapen dwarf

solemnly forswore love forever then: stealing thereby the maidens' enchanted gold; he fashioned and cursed a ring of enormous power from same, thus setting in motion chains of events that eventually brought down the very gods themselves in *Wal-hall's* fiery ruins.

The association with Hitler was obvious; association with Herman Cortez in Alf's searching imagination was also immediately inescapable. Cortez was a cursing and noxious misbirth, if ever unwary Nature allowed one. He ruined his own life with unseemly choices and still ruined others' in the very antechambers of hell while awaiting punishment.

And what had poor Ricky Niemeyer done to deserve his lonely fate tonight? He was a potential disease vector, of course: a potential source of violent disruption on the open bays as he plied his illicit trade for cigarettes, drugs or smuggled alcohol – or perhaps simply for love as he knew it. The regulations were doubtless correct to demand the boy be segregated for the good of all; but where was the good for Niemeyer in it?

The river – roiling past, gurgling, groaning, pulling at him with immense, untamed, mindless, transcendent power – made him feel a bit like Alberich himself. Not the ugly, slimy, sadistic part, of course: but the love-forswearing part he knew quite well. To give the Beatles their due, he was thoroughly sick of *hiding his love away*; the simple *agape* he struggled to show every sentient being in his path – every hour, every day – wasn't enough.

Cindy Wetmore hadn't been his only sexual adventure in high school, by any means. He was a

football star, after all; he wasn't bad looking; people found him attractive. But he'd never had the guts the whole time to approach that one person: the only one he dreamt about at night: the only one he ever really loved.

Alf almost envied Behar Kovachi his virgin bride and arranged marriage at seventeen; he sincerely wished them happiness, peace, safety, good fortune, and love throughout long lives. He prayed God help him overcome the dark fears within that invariably turned his own life to useless ciphering in every human heart. He prayed God send the *forgiving* Jesus to Leroy Beems' naked cell: restore the man's reason and spirit, for the good of all.

## iv

The stockade's vast concrete south facade, awash in pink-glimmering after-dawn, shone against cloudless sky. Escaping by the ruined post fence line into Blumenau again, Alf negotiated a few short blocks of squat, quiet, white-walled, empty-porched German houses in the morning chill. Crossing parallel railroad tracks at village-edge gave onto a broad, grassy path through immaculately managed woodland.

Forest stretched on both sides to eyesight's end: row upon neat row of identically mature Norway spruce over uniform needle beds with no underbrush. Only the variable wind showed any hint of difference among the trees as they bent and recoiled, their upper branches gently shivering. A rabbit shot across the path ahead, its white tail flashing among the woodland architecture's greens and browns.

Forest gave way abruptly to gently rolling or flat, fallow farmland; Alf set his path toward a low ridgeline of wine-productive mountains about ten miles to the east. Apart from a farmwoman, walking west on distant parallel track – her long blue skirt occasionally whipping before her on intermittent

breezes – he saw no other human form in any direction. Despite yesterday's rain, little dust cyclones scoured the empty fields when the wind searched the land.

Rhythmically intense echoes of Stravinsky's *Symphony in C* lurched about as Alf trod resolutely toward the distant purple ridgeline. All about him, broad historical landscapes harmonized: half-million-year-old *homo erectus* shards underground; ruined Roman forts on the uplands ahead; medieval knight errantry's lore by the storied Rhine to the rear. Worms Cathedral, squat to the easy northwest behind him, put even Martin Luther at his elbow.

Oh, but the acrid pall of Nazism's dark legacy! However many great humanists, scientists, poets, musicians, or scholars of God worked lasting influence over this blessed valley, the world heard only *Kristallnacht* window glass shattering and groans of oppression: saw only burning synagogues and cattle cars packed with human cargo: smelled only Zyklon-B and corpses en masse. Even the poor swastika – globe-straddling, five-thousand-year-old symbol of transcendent good fortune – shrank in the popular mind to mere rictus of genocide.

Remembering the pathetic former *Wehrmachtsmann* by garish discotheque lights, Alf shrank from balancing justice's scales on that grotesque head. What portion of national guilt involved common soldiers, serving hearth and homeland; humble farmers, feeding armies; or musicians, crafting tunes to beguile the all-spirits? What single human hand could avert history's uncaring juggernauts?

Certainly his own family had snared on those impersonal gears often enough. His father – orphaned by Wilson's war, crippled by Roosevelt's – seemed a living index to the majestically nonchalant, deadly consequences of battle. The enormous, misshapen crater on his skull's one side; the slurred, erratic speech; the spastic arm movements and lumbering, bowlegged gait strangers shrank from instinctively on the street: all this was his daily cross.

But the conscious brain under that damaged skull remained substantially intact. Edmond Bergson quoted Shakespeare at length, rhapsodized on nature's glories and passed his love of Brahms' chamber music on to his son by ecstatic example. He made a decent living selling life and medical insurance: subtly thrusting his own humble person forward during sales pitches as a highly effective suggestion of fate's raw cupidity.

Alf was enormously proud of his father's courage and strength of purpose. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than memories of the old man's obvious pride in him at his Eagle ceremony or his squeaking, off-key shouts of encouragement from the sidelines during football games. Would the incentives be any less sharp, were he a soccer-playing German boy, whose father came home mangled from Stalingrad?

Alf's pride in his father extended naturally to the whole generation of men and women who suffered and struggled – many traveling halfway around the world, only to die in pounding surf, crouched in some muddy foxhole or dangling helplessly at the end of twisted parachute lines – to thwart the plans of Tojo and Hitler. But he could-

n't help wondering how clear-cut the war's truths – which seemed so obvious years later to official historians – struck participants on all sides at the time. Even Churchill's shining truth had its "body-guard of lies."

Even General Patton – his father's old commander, whose fatal postwar auto accident occurred just south of here in Seckenheim – sharply criticized overly zealous denazification measures, suggesting most Germans became Nazis much like Americans became Republicans and Democrats. General Eisenhower relieved him of his Third Army command then: strictly ordering him to keep his mouth shut for the future. Something about wartime propaganda – whether of hot wars or Cold ones – Alf found deeply unsettling.

But what did he know about war?

### § § §

Once Alf crossed the main north-south Autobahn, tramped the narrow medieval alleyways of Weinheim *auf der Bergstraße* and set his aim onto nearby heights beyond the town, he realized: the tramping, itself – the hiking, with its memories of Boy Scout days – stirred the discomfort in his spirit. It wasn't the climbing: he'd climbed higher mountains than these in Wisconsin with a fifty-pound pack on his back. He'd also stood in probably a hundred flag ceremonies or Courts of Honor and pledged – or solemnly sworn.

Something about Vietnam, stuck on the oft-repeated Scout Oath's "duty to God and my country," wouldn't go down. It wasn't his own tour there; he'd done nothing shameful in Vietnam:

treated every man with ample respect and never hurt anyone, who hadn't just clearly resisted lawful orders or hurt someone else. He'd never been on anything even remotely resembling a combat mission – much less participated in any atrocities.

But the President, rattling solemnly on about "peace with honor" on TV – after the North Vietnamese finally "agreed" to allow American withdrawal from the country earlier this year – shamed him profoundly. Maybe five million souls lay dead in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos after a generation of pure hell sponsored, abetted, and ultimately waged by the United States. Even Eisenhower admitted Ho Chi Minh would have won the Geneva-mandated '54 election by a landslide, but the US-sponsored puppet in the South refused to submit to a popular vote.

Where was the honor in that?

Even as a boy of nine, Alf had known something wasn't right about Richard Nixon: "five o'clock shadow" spotted during televised debates with Kennedy only tipped the iceberg of the jerking, shifty-eyed nervousness the man's hidden persona betrayed. Now Nixon's whole Presidency teetered in the balance while he shamefacedly denied involvement in some failed, third-rate burglary attempt; Vice President Agnew had just resigned in disgrace after refusing to admit – or deny – being a common extortionist. Alf wondered how many inmates at Long Binh or Mannheim could have avoided prison with a *nolo contendere*.

Doctor Kissinger, supposed universal genius of *Realpolitik*, Alf considered simply a reactionary toad and war criminal. Kissinger's apparent engi-

neering of the recent overthrow and murder of Salvador Allende – Chile's constitutionally-elected President, whose unspeakable crime had been decreeing half a liter of milk daily for every school-child – seemed to lead directly to his appointment as Secretary of State. The years of devastating and secret carpet-bombings of ostensibly neutral Cambodia – ended only last August – perfectly complimented his newly-awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

“A politician,” as the *Hamlet*-quoting Edmond Bergson loved to say: “...one that would circumvent God.” This serpentine trail in west central Germany, climbing densely wooded hillside to an unseen promontory, fairly throbbled with memory of failed circumventions. Germany may have smashed up against a hard place in her journey through time, but the United States apparently just kept slithering on through.

The path ended abruptly, leaving Alf standing on the summit: dwarfed by massive, tumble-down remains of *Schloß Windeck*, a formerly fairytale-turreted 12th-century castle. Having fared rather poorly during the Thirty Years War, its remaining sections of four-story-high stone walls – centuries-old trees inhabiting the ruined keep behind them – had glowered philosophically across the broad Rhine valley below nearly three hundred years. Its single stone tower – even with top blasted away easily three times taller than the largest surviving wall – pointed forlornly above: like a cannon spiked after unsuccessful battle with angels.

As much as he loved his own country's advances in political theory, Alf deplored the willfully ignorant arrogance she often spat in the face of history. Germany had been a helpless plaything of

armies from many nations long before the United States drew breath; even a people so famously peace-loving and neutral as the Swedes had helped devastate her in centuries past. Yet many Americans – seemingly oblivious to the napalming of innocent neutrals in far-off lands – felt fully qualified to lecture the German nation on the uses and methods of war.

Alf knew American soldiers in Vietnam – My Lai and rumors about a so-called "Tiger Force" cleansing Central Highland villages aside – had never been genocidal death squads. But neither had the vast majority of German troops under Hitler been monsters. Most on all sides in all wars were simple patriots doing what the nations' leaders required.

A generation after the end of Hitler, Germany still lay – divided and prostrate – under forward positions of now mutually hostile former enemies. Russia and America tested ever more powerful nuclear weapons and raced one another into space, hurling foul imprecations at each others' heads. Meanwhile, many hundreds of thousands were starving in central Africa under drought conditions; many millions routinely starved worldwide every year under mere business as usual.

From ruined *Schloß Windeck*, looking west across Rhine valley flatland to distant mountains of the Pfalz, Alf fancied he could feel the planet lumbering eastward beneath his feet. At something like 650 miles per hour in this latitude, earth's axial rotation blurred into other billions-of-years-old momentums through space: 19 miles per second around the sun; 137 miles per second around the galactic center, once every 230 billion years. What

speed and course the galaxy itself followed through the larger universe remained a great mystery.

Alf remembered sitting next to Denny Hutchinson in a study hall one lazy afternoon during his senior year in high school. With thick, Shostakovich-style, round eyeglasses and self-contained air, Hutchinson was the school's most prominent egghead, already destined – rumor suggested – for a career in Foreign Service after taking an inevitable degree or two from Harvard. Noticing the boy alternately shaking and nodding his head over some passage, Alf asked about the rather large book open before him.

"It's Volume 21 of the *Collected Works* of V.I. Lenin, actually," Hutchinson explained brightly, seemingly relieved to have been interrupted. "You've heard of him, no doubt."

"Sure, that old Russian guy who looks like the Devil, right?" Alf answered, tongue in cheek.

"Father of the Russian Revolution, yes," Hutchinson responded soberly – apparently not guessing the lesser creature's joke, as genii frequently don't. "Do you suppose the Devil really looks like that, though? Or maybe just every picture of Satan you've ever seen was deliberately drawn to resemble Lenin?"

Alf laughed: "Good question." The thought actually had never occurred to him. "So you're turning Commie on us now?"

"Oh, I doubt it. It's mostly just 'Know thy enemy' and all that, I suppose. But I think I just found out one of the reasons why Joe McCarthy was

so dead set on keeping these ideas out of American minds." Passing the book over to Alf and indicating a spot on one of the open pages, he said: "Take a look at just this one sentence he wrote in 1915."

*A United States of the World (not of Europe alone) is the state form of the unification and freedom of nations which we associate with socialism – until the time when the complete victory of communism brings about the total disappearance of the state, including the democratic.\**

What "the total disappearance of the state" supposedly meant, Alf could not imagine. But the rest was rather painfully obvious.

"A United States of the World, eh?" he ventured, alternately shaking and nodding his own head now in consternation.

"Precisely," Hutchinson shot back, supremely amused irony animating his face. "What a stroke of propaganda genius: the master plan for a world-conquering slave dictatorship straight from the horse's mouth!" And he laughed: a sort of a hollow, dry chortle, that gradually died away into something like a moan.

From windswept, ruined medieval battlements Alf descended into ancient Weinheim, caught a southbound express train almost immediately and stood – fifteen minutes after that – on the *Hauptbahnhof Heidelberg* platform.

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\* "On the Slogan for a United States of Europe," *Lenin's Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Second Printing, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, Volume 21, pages 339-343.

## V

Suddenly ravenous, he picked his way through surprisingly dense train station crowd toward a large snack bar near the main entrance. A baffle of languages – German, Italian, Turkish, English and Dutch, at least – confronted him in the voices surrounding. The whole came back in densely muffled, distorted echoes off the high ceilings and walls.

A boy of perhaps fifteen – wearing somebody's old German army field jacket and very dark, plastic sunglasses – leaned diffidently against the wall outside the snack bar entrance between public restroom doors. Something about the pink cheeked blond struck Alf oddly until he realized sunglasses, build and posture all suggested Ricky Niemeyer, who right about then was doubtless just starting to go properly stir crazy in his newly restricted living space on D-Block. The boy gave Alf an obviously searching and following look over the sunglasses' frames as the soldier passed.

Alf bought a wurst and roll, joining numerous other patrons standing at early afternoon meals around the snack bar countertop. He noticed the wall-bound boy kept him on a fairly short list of ob-

jects to surveil. Though Alf would certainly never approach him or respond favorably if approached, something undeniably sweet about another human being's open admiration warmed him.

Alf suddenly felt as it were talons of a remarkably large bird clasp his left forearm. Looking there with studied calm, he confronted a smallish oriental gentleman of perhaps 60 or 70 years wearing a big, blue padded jacket and something like a black Greek fisherman's cap on his gray-haired head. Alf thought at first a Japanese diplomat might have been stranded in Germany after the Axis powers' defeat; but that seemed ridiculous.

"You are very handsome," the old man pronounced in excellent, if squeaky German. He maintained his grip on Alf's forearm as though unable to stand otherwise and apparently smiled at Alf's face – though the point was debatable. "Are you a student?"

Being openly admired was one thing, but this bordered on lunacy. "No," Alf responded with barely concealed irritation. "I am a soldier – a policeman, to be more exact." This time he used the universally recognizable noun *Polizist*, not the more specialized military term *Feldjäger*. By pure happy coincidence he spied out of an eye's corner at that very instant a German police officer coming in at the snack bar entrance. Pointing toward this patrolling officer, he said with a hint of triumph: "And here comes one of my colleagues now."

Alf turned his head back to see the old man's reaction, but the wizened gnome was quite gone: disappeared into the crowd somehow, as though never having existed. Alf laughed grimly and then

noticed the boy by the toilets had also just vanished sometime during the last few seconds. He finished eating and, still shaking his head at the absurdity and pathos of it all, left snack bar and train station to continue the trip to the 130th Station Hospital.

Once comfortably ensconced on a southbound streetcar running along *Rohrbacherstraße*, Alf turned his attention to the *Gaisberg* heights immediately on his left. Though spare and brown in mid-November chill, the heavily wooded mountainside still glowed invitingly under blue sky and early afternoon sun. The sight of it reminded him of the last time he saw Jimmy Wilson – and the unfortunate circumstances of their parting.

They'd met and hit it off immediately: in the hospital mess hall at lunch the very first day of Alf's temporary duty on the Psych Ward. A 19-year-old general wards orderly PFC and Nashville native, Jimmy Wilson apparently either saw Altman's film *M\*A\*S\*H* or actually served as an original model for the wisecracking doctors used in the script. He shaved intermittently, always managing to look rumpled and unkempt somehow, no matter how clean his uniform or carefully brushed his wiry brown hair.

Alf spent mornings at Heidelberg sequestered in an empty office, his nose tediously buried in Psych textbooks and Army Training Manuals. Afternoons he shadowed Social Work/Psychology specialists on the wards and did rounds behind the bird colonel head shrink. Many days the only patients seen were clinically depressed field grade officers' wives. The second time an uncontrollably sobbing, palsied middle-aged woman wheeled into the ward in restraints on a stretcher, Alf decided a

shank in the back at the stockade might not be so bad.

Jimmy Wilson served as proper antidote to oppressive psych ward culture. His mess hall monologues mocked the hospital administration, USAREUR command, the Pentagon, Joint Chiefs and President in no uncertain terms. Jimmy never met a Republican he didn't despise and the only thing he liked about Democrats was the fact they weren't Republicans.

Alf took to visiting Jimmy in his quarters evenings and they played chess together or commiserated about the sad state of affairs in the Army, nation and world. What Jimmy didn't know about history he made up for in often surprising awareness of current events. He knew far more about the Allende government in Chile than Alf, for example: actually predicting the army coup there at least two weeks before the event.

Alf dragged the Tennessean – who knew little or nothing about classical music – over to the USO one Saturday afternoon and made him listen to Beethoven's first *Rasumovsky* quartet and Mahler's 6th Symphony through the headphones. He figured the orderly would like Mahler and wasn't disappointed in that expectation. But when Jimmy came out into sunshine afterward whistling the Beethoven *Allegretto's* bouncingly peripatetic principal theme – with an hour of bombastic Mahler between his inner ear and first hearing of the Beethoven – Alf decided he'd made a friend worth keeping.

The only thing Alf couldn't get Jimmy to do was go out on the town. He'd smoke hash or get shit-faced on beer at the NCO club, but wouldn't

venture off base for anything: claiming he'd already seen everything Germans and their oompah-pah tourist traps had to offer. Convinced this was purely a language gap problem, Alf kept insisting he could show the orderly a good time in the *Altstadt*, if only given the chance. Jimmy's resistance finally broke down; he agreed to make the experiment the Friday night following Alf's last duty day at the hospital.

Things didn't go quite so smoothly as Alf hoped. They wandered around the Old City, hitting about half a dozen university student drinking and dancing spots along the *Untere Straße*, but Jimmy was clearly brooding about something and wouldn't discuss it. Eventually he started acting the thoroughly obnoxious drunk, even asking a cocktail waitress to quit her job immediately, take him home with her, and fuck him silly all night long.

Scant seconds later – language gap problems or no – management and employees together unceremoniously showed Alf and Jimmy the establishment's door. Jimmy staggered along the cobblestones behind his embarrassed guide and they eventually came upon an old hotel, *Der Rote Hahn*, on one of the southernmost Old City streets. That name, The Red Cock, had an air about it, so Alf took a room with double twins and led Jimmy up the stairs to bed.

Already stripped to his shorts, Alf had about finished helping Jimmy out of his own clothes when it happened. Something like it always a part of the bargain, Alf had frankly expected nothing more than giving the younger man a quick blow job and then to sleep in separate beds. But suddenly Jimmy was all over him: kissing him passionately, biting

his neck, running hands all up and down Alf's body and pushing him back on the bed.

He hadn't expected it: but certainly welcomed it, responding in kind. He'd gone so long – so many lonely, frustrating years in the Army – with no response: no hope of any answering call. In short order they were both naked and Alf supine with his knees against his own shoulders and Jimmy's engorged member planted firmly below.

Anal intercourse could be messy and malodorous: almost always uncomfortable, if not downright painful. Alf much preferred the gentler, more controllable options of mutual petting and prolonged serial fellatio. But the rush of passion opening his love for Jimmy made this exactly the way it needed to be: the only way it could have been.

Jimmy Wilson's body wasn't the type Alf generally found inspiring, either. His life's great, unsung passion: a short, 135-lb wrestler at high school who fasted himself down to 124 for weight class advantage every winter: a half-Cherokee whose tight musculature inhabited a practically hairless body. The only muscles Jimmy boasted Basic Training left behind; masses of feathery, half-inch hair covered his lower torso and legs; but Alf found himself pinching great hanks with delight now: combing it through his fingers as he guided – or followed – complex pelvic arcs in the air above him.

They continued wordlessly what seemed an eternity: mouths locked in exploring, deep kisses; biting each other's ears, necks, shoulders; hands everywhere within easy reach, alternating iron grips with ineffably subtle caresses; hips dancing in perfect synch as penetrations advanced and ebbed.

How could anyone be so gentle and yet so furious at the same time? Alf could not say.

Breaking off with a groan, Jimmy surprised him then yet again: not because he'd come – as Alf feared momentarily – but to work his mouth back and forth, across and down Alf's chest and abdomen to the root. With suddenly deliberate, slow concentration he busied himself there: utterly reversing the roles Alf expected from this night. After an indecent interval he jumped up, placing himself on all fours parallel to Alf's reclining form.

"It's your turn," he rasped, with jagged breath. Assuming that meant his turn to taste and tease, Alf stuck his head under Jimmy's belly, straining his face toward lower parts; but the other grabbed his shoulder, rolling him back out from under. "No, fuck me, I mean" Jimmy insisted: "please, fuck me, now."

So Alf propped himself up on one knee and complied, giving back as good as gotten doggy-style: sometimes holding his body erect and riding Jimmy's engagingly thin hips delicately with his hands; sometimes collapsing forward against the other's back, hands and arms embracing, caressing from chest to crotch and back again below; sometimes grasping Jimmy's shoulders through his armpits underneath and thrusting against solid purchase. Gasps and moaning yelps of delight vibrating through Jimmy's back into Alf's stomach then told him all was right.

Some two hours or more the young men used each other like this: regularly shifting positions, trading roles; moving from bed, to floor, to window well and back again; standing, sitting, kneeling, ly-

ing side by side or one mounting the other; facing to and away or splayed at seemingly ridiculous angles in acrobatic stunts. All the while they kept coming back to maximum possible penetration combined with maximum possible contact between bodies. They struggled against one another to invent the most innovative and sense-tickling combinations; they struggled together to create a single dynamic, breath- and sweat-soaked purpose that was affection and love.

"You are so beautiful," Jimmy Wilson whispered during a regular ebb tide in the fury when – *poco a poco meno mosso, ma sempre intenso* – passion subsided toward quietly marking time some few moments. They had been side by side facing one another while Jimmy alternately lapped and gently chewed at Alf's lateral pectoral root, his palm tracing curvatures of the Iowan's spine with insistent, slow pressures. Alf's face lunged toward the orderly's mouth then; pushing Jimmy on his back again, he climbed atop while the kiss continued; and fury returned: *a tempo, subito*.

When all was over Jimmy said simply, "Oh, wow," collapsed on his stomach next to the wall and dove into sleep as though anesthetized. Alf watched him a few moments in dazed satisfaction, then hobbled into the bathroom and turned on the light. His sudden image in the mirror reminded him immediately of childhood chicken pox: matted in his sweat-drenched hair, covering his entire body from face to toes: several hundredfold tiny flecks of blood and feces.

This inspired hearty sardonic laughter and a long, hot shower with plenty of soap. Drained and exhausted afterward, but curiously content and

aglow, Alf returned to the bedroom, turning down virgin sheets on the empty east wall bed. He crawled in and slept.

By morning light Alf considered the muffled heap of snoring covers that was Jimmy Wilson and took stock. The warmly satiating trance born the night before was if anything even stronger: like nothing he'd ever felt before. No impassioned lakeside night with an adoring cheerleader; no acrobatic back seat adventure with a National Merit Scholar, Mistress Vice-President of the Senior Class; no after school romp in an empty house with the worshipful fagboy down the street left him feeling this depth of contentment and joy.

Even the long-imagined paradise of his little wrestler's loving arms – what he never had guts enough to ask for, haunting his imagination to this very day – seemed somehow second-rate in the face of these profoundly realized emotions. He'd never deluded himself Jimmy would respond to his overtures with a lover's touch. He'd never thought Jimmy anything but perfectly straight and understandably frustrated in the all-male Army environment and a foreign land.

Now it seemed suddenly he was bursting with love for this unpredictable young man; and that love was answered.

Jimmy awoke with an unpleasantly moaning cough, poking his disheveled, blinking face out into pitiless morning light. Once out of bed – finally fully recognizing the foul disorder of dried blood and excrement covering him – he muttered simply "Oh, Jesus Christ!" and disappeared into the

bathroom. Alf tried not to imagine what uncomfortable gyrations Jimmy's cleansing might entail.

He busied himself stripping sheets off the beds while the shower ran in the next room. The most soiled ones he bundled into the less disgusting, finally tying all off within the practically unused sheets from his own bed. He scrawled "please forgive us" in German on a sheet of hotel stationery, folding a twenty-mark bill into the result and tucking it under the knot of the bundled sheets on his now naked bed.

Alf and Jimmy emerged into brilliant morning sunshine and soon thereafter sat under a sidewalk cafe table's umbrella, picking over continental breakfast and coffee. Remarkably taciturn and obviously hung-over, Jimmy kept squeezing his temples between his thumbs, shielding his eyes from the glare: even in the umbrella's shadow flush against the sheer precipice under the *Königstuhl* and *Gaisberg*. Alf gazed up into the sky beyond that cliff, remembering the night before and the ecstatic Beethoven solitary walks through those highlands suggested.

"What in God's name is that idiot grin for?" Jimmy muttered. Alf looked at him indulgently, feeling no pique whatsoever.

"If you don't know by now, you've been sleeping this whole past month."

"Damn it," Jimmy moaned softly, "I wish I were still sleeping now."

"I'm sure you can catch some Z's back at the barracks later today," Alf pointed out. "I've got to

pack my shit and get back to Mannheim, anyhow. I can hear anxious prisoners chirping my name on the wind already."

"Do me a big favor, will you, Alf?" Jimmy said softly – not snappishly like before, but quietly in earnest.

"I would do anything for you, Jimmy Wilson," Alf answered directly, "*anything*."

"That's what scares me," Jimmy replied. In a perfect world he would have laughed after saying that; but in the real world he didn't. "Listen, I'm not sorry about what happened last night; I'm glad we did it. But in the future if we ever run into one another again, I'd appreciate it if you just wouldn't mention it."

With remarkably false bravado, his heart breaking, Alf shot back calmly: "No problem, Jimmy. You'll not hear another peep from me about it. Just let me sincerely thank you once before I shut up: I'll never forget it – I'll never forget ... *you* – as long as I live."

"Yeah, me neither," Jimmy admitted inscrutably; "that's what scares me, too."

And that was the end of it.

Alf jumped off the streetcar like a man with somewhere to be, then came to a dead stop on the sidewalk before the hospital grounds; dreadful anticipatory butterflies – mixed with impossible hope, determination, and love – raged within. He *wasn't* going to mention it again; he *wasn't* going to tell Jimmy he'd lain awake every night these last eight

weeks remembering, reanalyzing, and pining; he *wasn't*. But he sure as hell *was* going to look him straight in the eye and tell him he'd missed him a lot: and damn the Israelis and Arabs to hell for their fucking war that kept him in Mannheim packing and unpacking ground cloths and atropine injectors in field gear when he should have been playing chess in Heidelberg with Jimmy Wilson.

Maybe some prick of conscience or need had stolen into Jimmy's heart and opened his eyes to the truth in the interim: just maybe.

Alf entered the old familiar barracks with bouncing stomach, hearing his own footsteps echo off corridor's end. He eventually peered in at the open door of Jimmy's room and quickly looked back down the hallway to be sure he'd chosen the right building. Nothing in this room belonged to Jimmy Wilson; no doubt about it: nothing in this stripped-down room belonged to anyone but the United States government.

He stole silently back down the hallway, looking in at every open door. Finally he saw someone he knew: PFC Partinelli, another general wards orderly, sitting on a bunk sewing a button on a shirt. "Hey, Party," Alf said brightly, "how's it goin'?"

"Hey, Sergeant Bergson," Partinelli answered after looking up from his repairs. "Long time, no see. Where ya been?"

"Workin' at the stockade in Mannheim as punishment for my sins," Alf confided. "Say, I was lookin' for Jimmy Wilson, but he seems to have moved out of his room."

"Oh," Partinelli said dully, "you haven't heard, then."

"Heard what?" Alf shot back.

"Wilson is, uh," the orderly hesitated, swallowing his words. He looked down at the floor a second and then back to Alf's face, clearly not knowing how to say something; then he sighed. "Jimmy Wilson is *dead*, Sarge."

"No," Alf replied, "oh, no! What on earth happened?"

"He O.D.'ed on heroin."

"Heroin?" Absurd. "He never did heroin that I knew anything about. A little hash maybe, like anybody else. But, *heroin*?"

"Yeah, that's what everybody else said, too. They think he must have just decided to try it and bought it with the first needle 'cause he didn't know what he was doing."

"They don't think he," – it was Alf's turn to stumble – "think he did it on *purpose*, do they?"

"No," Partinelli said soberly. "It was given out as an accident, anyway. Did he ever say anything to you about wanting to kill himself?"

"Oh, hell, no," Alf stressed, "God, no. Oh, what a waste! What a fucking waste!"

"No doubt."

"When did this happen, anyway?"

"Shit, weeks ago. It was the last week in September, I think." He looked up at the ceiling and apparently saw the answer painted – or floating – there. "Yeah, late in September: before the war started in Israel, I'm sure."

And the tears started flowing from Alf's eyes. "Man, I'm sorry," he muttered, his voice catching. "It's just such a waste."

"No doubt," Partinelli repeated. "It hit me hard, too, at first. He was an all right guy."

"Yes, he was," Alf agreed. "I gotta go, shit, this is awful."

"I'm sorry, Sarge."

"I'm sorry, too," Alf responded: walking off down the hallway, fighting his tears.

The sun still shone brilliantly outside: utterly astounding. He walked off post back onto *Karlsruherstraße* like a zombie. Where could this mess of Germans in all their little cars possibly be going; some south, some north: were they lost? An enormous commercial truck whizzed by, blasting thick, fummy wind past him.

Somehow he realized a light had to change, before he could cross to the street's west side. The little white man with the thick stick limbs on the green lens cover flashed at last and Alf stepped out into crosswalk. Two steps off the curb he suddenly stripped off his jacket and started running: sadness and grief instantly transformed into white-hot rage.

He cursed all the men in fancy suits who ever sat in capitols, writing stupid laws. Cigar-smoking, whiskey-and-soda-drinking, pill-popping hypocrites all: who condemned men to jail for a God-given weed and smirked while others died with needles in their arms because no one could know the true strength of a black-market street drug. Smirked and considered themselves righteous defenders of the very society their *idiot* laws decimated.

His boundless fury cursed all the legislators and self-righteous preachers in their shining, high pulpits. One man's love was a holy sacrament, the cornerstone of all civilization; the next man's was a criminal abomination, stinking in the very Imagined Nose of God. Forbidden to marry or even so much as show his true feelings in public, his consequently brief and shadowy relationships then hotly condemned as proofs of congenital dysfunction: routinely driven from public places en masse by the police, he was tempted to suicide from despair, loneliness and shame.

North, back toward the *Altstadt*: he ran full out along narrow sidewalks with tears of rage streaming down his face. He never looked at cross streets (all led only to the mountain, anyway), running past all the Saturday afternoon Germans in their Saturday afternoon clothes. One stopped, yelling something at him; "*Dir auch, Arschloch!*" Alf screamed over his shoulder at the man – then ran all the harder.

After about three miles – coming up on the train station and city center again, having veered back onto *Rohrbacherstraße* – he stopped running and blew great gobs of mucus out of his sinuses into a handkerchief. He coughed up something out

of his lungs, as well, and felt much better. He put the jacket back on and suddenly recognized the western edge of the old *Bergfriedhof* cemetery at his very feet. More than one route – via the *Steigerweg* or the *Oberer Gaisbergweg* – led from this cemetery out onto the highlands above; Alf thought he might just climb up and see if any Beethoven could be found there: even if only the *Funeral March* from the *Eroica*.

He set off at a moderate pace, puffing and periodically stopping to stretch his legs and back in cool-down routines. About the length of a football field ahead at the end of a gently rising, arrow-straight, tree-lined path a sort of a four-columned, pseudo-Greek temple – the facade of one of the oldest surviving 19th-century crematoriums in Germany – loomed. Recumbent women or angels on the building's cornice-frieze regarded each other sympathetically as he approached.

Alf stopped at the base of the crematorium, considering his options. The section to the near southeast contained the only active Jewish burial grounds in Heidelberg, the older plot *am Klingenteich* on the river having reached its capacity by 1876. During the Nazi decade frequent vandalism and other indignities erupted here: the ghouls not satisfied simply to have burned down the synagogues, stolen all the Jew's homes and businesses, and driven them off to death in the camps at *Gurs* and *Dachau*. Even bones of long-dead Jews, it seems, affronted Aryan racial purity and soil.

Alf figured he'd already meditated enough on the Holocaust during recent hours – the *Steigerweg* lay more to the northeast from here, anyway – so he turned and set off along an inviting path

leading north. Framed with moderately young trees and shrubs, the illusion of a simple walk in the park came easily: so long as the import of monuments and inscriptions along the path remained studiously ignored. Every so often elaborate statuary appeared, as well: pensive guardian angels draped languidly across stones, gazing barely concealed emotion onto silent graves below.

Bearing ever northward and eastward, Alf roamed a profusion of walkways, confident of eventually stumbling out onto the *Steigerweg*'s trail to the ridgeline above. Gradually paths eastward assumed steeper and steeper gradients, predominantly evergreen surroundings thinned into bleak mid-November deciduous nudity and monuments waxed increasingly more weather-beaten, moss-stained and discolored. Eventually, denial the locale was simply an old cemetery – not a sculptors' theme park – seemed absurd.

No denying Jimmy Wilson was dead, either.

Somewhere near the apparent crest of a rise, a piteously astonished squeak pierced the air just ahead; a startled squirrel dashed across the path into a sideway, stopping occasionally to flash its tail and cluck disapproving warnings back at the intruding human. Alf stopped a moment, chuckling grimly at the animal's paranoid distress, and noticed the elected pathway apparently led through another section of more recent stones. Brilliant mid-afternoon sunshine, seemingly alive with swirling motes of atmospheric detritus, cut through a break in surrounding evergreens, shining seductively on a section of gravestones about midway up the path.

Alf set off along this trail, unintentionally driving the unhappy squirrel before him by stages and occasionally reassuring same he meant no harm, but was just passing through. At the island of sunlight he stopped and regarded the principal monument illuminated – a simple gray slab like a coffin lid set perpendicular to the path, its head slightly elevated. Inscribed around the sides and bottom edge of the slab in Luther's powerfully unadorned German the words of *1st Corinthians 13:13*:

*And now these three remain: faith, hope  
and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

The name set at the slab's head: *Wilhelm Furtwängler*.

An electric charge of pure disbelief shot along Alf's spine, lifting the hair on his neck behind. He knew Robert Bunsen, tormentor of chemistry lab students everywhere, lay buried in this cemetery somewhere; he knew Friedrich Ebert, social democratic first President of the Weimar Republic, reclined under a massive dolomite block back to the south and east from here; he even knew 27 anti-fascist German activists executed by the Nazis were memorialized and interred in the *Bergfriedhof*. Why hadn't he known Wilhelm Furtwängler rested here, as well?

Already long-established as one of the world's five top conductors by the early 1930s, Furtwängler had been approaching 50 when the Nazis came to power. As director of the Berlin Opera, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Berlin Philharmonic, and Bayreuth Festival Orchestras, he had toured foreign capitals – and even America – repeatedly, to great acclaim. The resplendent feather his repu-

tation stuck in the German national cap Hitler and his cronies were keen to exploit.

But Wilhelm Furtwängler deplored the Nazis' ascent to power. He vigorously resisted efforts to exclude Jews from occupations in the German arts and when Goebbels banned performance of Paul Hindemith's rather too transparently anti-Nazi historical opera, *Mathis der Maler*, Furtwängler resigned his Berlin Opera directorship. But suggestions he join Hindemith and others in self-imposed exile went too far, he believed.

Furtwängler's bosses – by his own lights – were Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, and the future of German culture: not Hitler, Goering and Goebbels. He believed the honorable course continued serving German music and resisting barbarian claims to leadership in the cultural sphere. But Nazi control of the broadcast media made effective resistance nigh impossible and the war, of course, destroyed everything: not alone Wilhelm Furtwängler's reputation. Forever after, clouds of bitter controversy over his supposed complicity with the Nazis engulfed his work and person. Some believed his rapid decline and relatively early death in 1954 followed directly from this virulent uproar.

Some claimed ferocious intensity in Furtwängler's wartime recordings showed his – and his orchestras' – anguished defiance in the face of Nazi tyranny and violence. Even given the relatively poor quality of the recordings Alf knew, he had to agree some extraordinary spiritual force worked through them. A late-1944 production of Bruckner's unfinished 9th, in particular, took the concluding *Adagio's* even normally inevitable pathos to almost unbearably poignant heights.

But German music's most bone-chilling war-time event, to Alf's mind, wasn't actually directed by *Maestro* Furtwängler – though he occupied the podium as it transpired. Late in the Third Act of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* a chorus of townspeople roundly laughs a pretentious buffoon – freshly unmasked as an incompetent fraud – to well-deserved scorn. But a live 1943 Bayreuth performance's singers – suddenly released from the discipline of carefully defined notes under historically-set text – managed to choke out only pathetically false caricatures of laughter at this point in the score. Undercurrents of shock, grief and dread in their voices spoke more to the horrors of Stalingrad, massive aerial bombardments, and endless casualty reports than to jovial Wagnerian satire or the consolations of art.

Alf turned his back hotly on Furtwängler's gravestone, his heart transfixed of a sudden on inexorable despair. Horrified onlookers, victims, and victimizers lay promiscuously together in every direction around him: all went down into the same silent earth: all over the world. Nazis, Jews, Germans and Gypsies; Aryans and Slavs; Muong tribesmen and Airborne Rangers; gaunt African babies, fat American businessmen and fat Russian commissars; farmers, doctors, soldiers, politicians, insurance men, murderers, preachers, artists, wives, musicians; black, white, red, yellow, brown: all went down into the same cold, indifferent earth together.

As a soldier who'd never fired a shot against an enemy, burned down a hooch or driven anyone into a relocation camp; as a citizen who'd consistently voted against reckless leadership and argued against inhuman, failed policies; as a taxpayer

who'd nonetheless paid Caesar his due: how much less culpable was he than those who pulled the triggers or made the decisions? How much less responsible than scornful coffee-shop quarterbacks railing against "hippies and anti-war protestors stabbing the troops in the back?" How much less guilt for the average American – whose ancestors depopulated a continent, filling it with slaves from another – compared to the average German today?

That his own ancestors had done no such thing, actually sacrificing life and limb to help liberate slaves and others, offered scant consolation. Popular animus toward the German, Japanese, Russian, Chinese, North Korean and North Vietnamese peoples proved collective guilt inescapable. Surely the world at large would not remember My Lai, napalm, Agent Orange or Nagasaki kindly.

As a homosexual – a bisexual, or whatever he was – silently enduring cultural hatred and fear to keep his job and appearance of self-respect, what share of his own oppression did he create himself? He'd just helped lock Ricky Niemeyer in a box with his own hands, after all; he'd implicitly threatened a pathetic old man in a train station with the police. The police! he *was* the police.

He helped drive Jimmy Wilson to desperate recklessness – even to suicide, perhaps – with his love.

When Alf was eight years old on a family vacation at the Carolina coast, a wave knocked him down in the surf; undertow pulled him away from shore. The bitter taste of the ocean's inexorable pressure and his helpless panic then came back to him now; he was sitting on the ground, somehow:

sitting before Furtwängler's grave, face in hands. Tears in an angry flood coursed past his wrists into his jacket-sleeves and sweater down to his elbows.

What had he done; what had he done or not done; what had he done? What did they want from him? Tears flowed against all resistance until his head throbbed and his ears rang. Finally he even reproached himself for feeling mere selfish personal grief in the face of so much real tragedy worldwide. That was the final straw.

Alf staggered to his feet drunkenly, emptying his nose yet again into a handkerchief now thoroughly soaked with castoff moisture. Without even knowing to whom or what, he turned aching eyes above, groaning through clenched teeth: "I need to know..." Know what? What on earth? "I need to know ... what you *really* think about me."

Silence, of course, reigned: no booming extraterrestrial announcement followed; no deafening thunderclap or furious wind bent the trees to the ground; no choirs of angelic trumpets proclaimed. If anything the day's frequent gusting diminished to absolute stillness and the rocking evergreen treetops surrounding froze. He stood, maintaining a defiant, angry gaze above: into the crystal-blue, sunbathed, indifferent face of a silent Universe.

Then a supremely calm, matter-of-fact, gentle, caring and quiet voice spoke from the air directly above him, saying: "You need to follow your own advice for a change."

The voice was *not* in his head; that was beyond all doubt. The voices that were in his head gabbled "trick," "hallucination," "don't listen," and

even "on your knees, fool!" But Alf – suddenly paralyzed and breathless with astonished, foreboding terror – followed Native American wisdom: he remained standing in the presence of *Great Mystery*.

He fancied hints of ironic amusement shot through the Sky Voice as next it quietly repeated his own former words back to him:

"Just shut up and listen, for once."

Alf and all his internal monologues shut up and listened.

"I love you," the Voice concluded simply.

Alf lowered his gaze, remarking – in a glance – the mass of surrounding gravesites, the neat and affectionate care shown by the living for those now long dead, the profusely resplendent golden sunbeams dancing among evergreens, beeches and oaks. "Thank you," he murmured toward the trees; then recollecting himself, he turned his face skyward again, distinctly saying: "Thank you, so much." He knew in his heart nothing more need be asked, answered or expected in this moment.

Mixed choirs and a boys choir soar above massive joined orchestras in the *Veni, creator spiritus* of Mahler's ecstatic 8th Symphony, based on a 9th-century hymn:

*Accende lumen sensibus,  
Infunde amorem cordibus.*

*Inflame the senses with light,  
Fill hearts with love.*

Alf was crying again; but now grief blended with gratitude, hope, faith, determination and love.

There *was* some point to it all. There was a purpose to the sufferings of millions, the sacrifices of all those seemingly unrewarded and crushed, even the doubts and grieves of a timorous, ungrateful mouse like himself. Some process unfolding across fathomless dark eons of ages was building into Light: into Enlightenment and Peace.

Even if it *were* just a voice in – or out of or through – his head, it said what he needed to hear. Borne in filth and blood: every eye, ear and heart is charmed; light – and the lyric of Love – draw them on! Bidding respectful farewell to Furtwängler's grave, Alf Peter Bergson marched back down the hill – past martyrs, monsters, mere mortals, and their monuments – to the *Hauptbahnhof Heidelberg*, the Army, the Mannheim Stockade, the United States of America: and the World.

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