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**I. Dieter Alt has a bad dream. Monday, 22 September 1986, afternoon**

Like many a regular about to view a show at the Manhattan Guggenheim, Alt is headed for the top floor; the museum's curator is suddenly with him as the elevator jolts to a halt, and they are released into the space still closed to the public. Staff have been asked to stay out of sight.

'Go ahead, Dieter,' says the curator bowing slightly; his gold-rims glint as Alt steps out on the spiral gallery. The light disconcerts him. Watery, strangely green it falls on his early paintings, which the curator has put together here. All at once he turns downhill rather than into the gallery's uppermost circle; like a vice he feels the grip, his chest tightens, he can't breathe, it's vertigo, surely, making him so sick, rising from the depth of the space he has invaded, amplified by a new wave of jet lag, to last a few days yet. Or is it the food he ate in the Sudan? He needed to taste what the relief agencies were dishing out to the starving mothers and dying children there. He lived on scraps for a week.

His feet miss a step, he stumbles, nearly falls: in slow motion Alt sees himself stagger on. An hour ago he showered and put on fresh clothes at the studio, cords and the denim shirt he likes to wear over them. In the battledress Alt wore in Africa, though, the *Doppelgänger* recovers his stride and walks away. It's a phantom, trick of

his disoriented mind, and yet Alt feels left behind; he knows this pain, deep in his heart: early in life he was orphaned twice.

Young Dieter now looks up at him across the void at the spiral gallery's core. Or is it Charlie, much alike him nowadays? Fourteen years ago Alt portrayed himself with his little daughter, both in pierrot suits, holding hands – the painting hangs right there, a circle and a half further down. The *Doppelgänger* has stopped to look at it, barefoot, the left hand akimbo, the right falling to the thigh: the Arcadian in Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation* stands like that, in a scarlet tunic, though, not naked like the figure here, which presently turns with that wide-eyed stare, also in Piero's work. With a shiver Alt remembers the witch his guides spotted near the Eritrean border. Squatting under a tree ravaged by mortar shells she stared at him, questioning not only his presence – his very existence suddenly hung in the balance, despite his compassion for the victims of endless feuds and local wars. She saw that he too had lost his way.

Alt holds his breath. How many images are there apart from the two he painted? What's real in this composite, showing aspects of the same person at different times, as a cubist might have tried to depict them? Let alone his split-off self, he never expected to find this painting here. Days after their divorce Jane Alt sent it to auction, and it

disappeared, despite his dealer's efforts to find out who had bought it.

'Who are you, what do you want?' Alt demands though he can't utter the words.

'Can't you see?' The *Doppelgänger* lifts his balls, which presently balloon and turn bright pink – Kid Casper's *loud* pink – as they float off into the central void and the curator appears behind them on the other side of the spiral. 'What's wrong, Dieter?' he cries in a voice that isn't his. 'We hung it as you said. It's a magnificent show, consistent, strong – why – you're so pale!'

The curator – Wagner Bielowski is the name – holds out a hand that doesn't quite touch. Alt's stare, fixed on something behind his back, makes him turn.

'Is that what's troubling you, Dieter? *Charlie and I?*'

'Dee – ter?' The voice sounds from below, hollow, German in modulation. 'Vag – ner?'

'I thought it was a secret you were here,' says Wagner looking hurt but the *Doppelgänger* is back in the portrait, where he has taken the little girl's place so that it looks as if Alt had painted himself twice, holding hands lovingly with his *alter ego*.

'Charlie! Where are you?' he whispers as the phantom fades and her image alone appears in the picture.

Keen face up an old man stands in the lobby, scanning the spiral overhead; arthritic hands claw at his hips through a

flannel three-piece that may be a little warm for the day. A young woman is with him. Tall, leggy, ash-blonde, she too is looking up into the gallery. Her feet are planted firmly on the ground, in black high heels. A black briefcase stands next to them on the floor; a matching purse hangs from the shoulder of her waisted jacket, like a pendulum stopped in the small of her back. Below that she is naked, her pubes are shaven clean. A man in a flapping raincoat peers at her through his camera.

‘That’s it, as tall as you can!’ he cries. ‘And now, with those endless legs of yours: stride, Ellen – that’s it – you’re coming, confident, tall, right at me – you’re coming! How elegant you are!’

Alt knows only too well who the model is: his on/off girlfriend, critic, expert on performance art – she wrote a book on the subject. As for the photographer, who helped to illustrate it, he’s that Berliner with the English name – Newton Isaac Helmut Kant? Whatever, Alt needs to speak to the guy, sort him out, but that same iron force he has felt before seizes him just as Ellen comes to a halt, pushing him past her and the photographer, who vanishes into thin air.

‘Dieter, what’s wrong?’ shouts the old man in the flannel suit.

‘Dieter!’ Ellen is running after him.

Brakes screech, horns blare as Alt is hurled out the door and into the passing traffic, where he bobs up in front of a

cruising Checker. Presently alongside the driver hauls him in. ‘Zap!’ he laughs at the slamming door, ‘mind if I smoke a little?’ Already the car veers out in a drove of other cabs. For a moment their yellow compacts and scatters further down Fifth Avenue, where they lift off, and the *Doppelgänger* turns from the wheel drawing on his joint cunningly. ‘Flying, Alt. Where to?’

‘Charlie,’ cries Alt though he still can’t utter a sound.

‘Charlie!’

‘Coming up,’ replies the *Doppelgänger*, kicking down the throttle.

‘Great kid,’ teases Ellen, ‘pity about her dad!’ Suddenly over him she grabs Alt’s hair. ‘You’re bad, Dieter, really really wicked – that’s what I love about you!’

‘Then marry me,’ he mumbles in the depth of ample thighs – Jane’s, his ex, sitting on his face. Still choking on her scent he finds himself dumped back at the Guggenheim, teeth clattering, frozen to the bones. Street litter, empty cans, bottles and a whirl of unfolding newspapers come flying in the door and suddenly go up in flames.

*Is this – Hell?*

Alt doesn’t recognize the voice but Tom Fisher, the elderly man in the three-piece, appears on the corkscrew ramp. Ellen, in a trouser suit, and Wagner Bielowski follow close behind. All at once they stop, stare at him blankly and turn to *Charlie and I*.

Ellen steps forward, stroking the little girl. Her lips move. Blindly Wagner runs his fingertips over her mouth and invites Fisher to feel the painted surface, when a telephone begins to ring and a typewriter strikes up in the distance: someone is writing all this down – PICTURESTORY – fiction of images – time to wake up, Alt, take the call ....

**2. Real time: night of Monday, September 22 to 23,  
1986. Neuschwanstein, Bavaria**

Even in absolute darkness we perceive more than what a colourfield painting might render flat black, dependent on light in order to be seen, and so offering an altogether different experience as it were. Under the cover of darkness then, while there's daylight still over Manhattan, and Alt has yet to wake up from his nightmare, what do we get: a night interior, loud with a gale howling outside? Whiffs of disinfectant mixed with beeswax? And life?

Shadows break from a corner. Huffing and puffing they drag something soft but heavy along a corridor and up a spiral stair. Shapeless, all out of breath, they huddle on a landing. Metal clicks and grates in the keep, the main tower of the castle: it's a key, probing the lock in the upper balcony door. A whistle grows fierce, the door springs from the frame, and something – some one – is sucked out of the opening by the storm. Quick hands snap at the balustrade; on her knees Charlie Alt regains both balance and breath, while her eyes adapt to the different lack of light, and she peers through an embrasure: down, where a shooting white stream crashes into a foaming black hole, and great trees bend like playthings in the storm; and up, where the weather-vane shrills under the wind-swept sky with each gust.

‘This is awesome!’ a voice shredded by the storm sounds from behind her then: Andrea on hands and knees. ‘We’ll blow clean off! Let’s go back!’

Charlie shakes her head. ‘You know there’s no return.’

‘There won’t be if you get smashed down there!’

‘You mean *you* might get smashed!’ The whites of eyes and teeth flash from her blackened face, mocking him no doubt. It was he who claimed that he had been climbing even on winter ice; though free from vertigo herself, Charlie never pretended to be a mountaineer.

‘We’re not giving up now!’ she snaps. ‘The holds are safe. Get on with it!’

‘I talked to the others. We’ll take a vote.’

‘On whether you’ll do your bit? I didn’t spend my money for you to shit yourself!’

‘Your father’s money. He’ll appreciate a corpse thrown into the bargain –’

‘Oh shut up!’ Charlie is tired of the *bon mots* Andrea Berlin likes to drop, not just in Italian but German, French and English too, though he never gets down to the writing he keeps on about. It’s none of his business how she paid for everything, including his expenses. She could threaten him with holding back further funds but, ‘I’ll do it myself,’ is all she says.

‘You don’t know what you’re doing!’

‘Perhaps. Just hold in tight – tight as you can when you pass the stuff. All of you!’

Charlie is on her feet, close to the wall. Her face has shut, her respect for the companion gone. A pulley, which she quickly threads with a double length of rope, attaches to the back of her belt; a spring-hook clicks – they practised the routine well enough. She checks her grip on the roof ladder overhead. At once she pulls herself up, reaches, grips and pulls; the gale hits her as if to pin her down right there. She stiffens back and shoulders and moves on, despite the pummelling. Steadily she gains height, when the cap is ripped from her head, her hair fans out in the night, and the rope attached to her belt is snatched away. Sibilant suddenly it flies out in a curve, as if the elements themselves were intent on sounding some strange new instrument strung between heaven and earth. The drag is huge; the next gust sweeps her feet off the ladder.

‘Hold it in,’ she gasps as the wind sucks the breath from her mouth. ‘Get – it – in!’

Andrea can see the danger: on a new rung Charlie has released her harness but not yet reattached it. While she hangs on by her fingertips, he panics. Apparently too light despite his height he means to draw in the slack but barely succeeds in stopping the increase. An even slighter figure bursts from the door – Ingrid, the tomboy from Munich. She knows how to bring in a rope without pulling the climber

down, and she continues to hold it, while Charlie at last pushes on.

The weather vane sings atop King Ludwig's fairy-tale castle, droning like a Jew's harp. With both hands Charlie grasps the staff and wraps her thighs round the copper cone at its base. Through the vibrant metal the storm floods her groin, and she looks out over Bavaria: sheer, black with forests stirred by the gale to the south; pastoral, strewn with twinkling habitation further north – all to witness her work, which will amuse some, make think others, and send a message to her father – Dieter – first of all. She has his letter right here: unanswered because this, so near to completion at last, is to be her reply.

A pair of headlights come on over the brow of a hill in mid-distance, dip, draw a line and swerve as they wend their way through the night on a road she cannot see. Above her the Föhn races zeppelins of cloud, while infinitely higher still there shine the stars bleaching the sky a cold blue the wind seems intent on painting more lurid still despite the warmth of its breath. Or is it relenting, blowing itself out?

There's work to be done, quickly, before the night-watch discovers the break-in. At last Charlie secures herself, belaying the harness on the base of the weather vane. She unhooks the pulley from her belt, fastens it on the staff and takes hold of the rope threaded round the grooved wheels in the block. She gives two tugs: *ready*.

Ingrid receives the signal on the balcony, Andrea responds at the door. With a spring-hook he clips one end of the line to a ring on the material the others begin to unroll from a bale inside the tower.

‘Ready?’ Ingrid hisses holding the down-length of the rope.

‘Ready,’ replies the Italian.

‘Then heave! Get it up, man, get it up!’

### 3. Dieter Alt's Manhattan Studio. Night of September 22 to 23

It's just over a day since the painter's return from the Upper Nile, where he went to see for himself why the people there cannot feed themselves. And it's only hours since his visit to the Guggenheim, where he went to see the hang of his retrospective, due to open next Monday. Jetlagged, nauseous and strangely disoriented in the place that should have been perfectly familiar to him, he found the preview difficult if not irrelevant after what he had seen in Africa. Even *Charlie and I* or *The Double Portrait*, as the painting is also known, and which he had not expected to find there at all, only reminded him of his daughter's silence. Back in the studio he tried to call her once again:

'But where is Charlie? Doesn't she know I've been calling?'

Male, flat south-east London: 'There's a note on her door.'

'Put there a week ago! When I rang from Khartoum.'

'She's been gone longer than that.'

'In term-time?' Exasperated Alt rang off. A different person answers each time he calls the Chelsea house Charlie shares with a number of fellow art students in London, making him feel as if he were some kind of enemy, debt collector, police – anyone but the father who bought the

place they all enjoy as a shelter if not their home. His fibrillating heart reminded him to take his medication, and he thought he'd stretch out for a few minutes on his bed before trying to call Ellen Burns, his on/off girlfriend, yet again; for her too he has been leaving messages, since yesterday, so far without response. The harvest moon was over Brooklyn when the telephone pulled him from the dream we have seen.

'Jane Steinberg,' said a voice he had not heard in years, confirming at a stroke that he had been right to worry about their daughter. Bolt upright he tried to find some words for the woman who had resumed her maiden name despite his fame.

'Charlie,' he said at last, 'I've been calling –'

'I know, she told me about the Concorde ticket. We agreed she'd have her party on Saturday so she could fly to New York for your vernissage Sunday or Monday. She hasn't been seen for days, though, her room's locked, your number is on the door. She's up to something.'

'Like what?'

'Coming of age on her own terms, wrapping the tower of that mad king's castle –'

'Neuschwanstein – you're not serious!'

'Dead serious.'

'But how? Let alone getting permission, she'd need an army of engineers for the job!'

‘There’s a drawing of hers in a cottage on Father’s land. Valentini told me this morning: the castle that looks like a birthday cake, he said; some friends of hers are in the picture. Your idea of opening your show on her birthday presents her with the perfect occasion: go one up on the old man, sock it to him. We need to stop her. Father’s in Australia, I spoke to him. You’re needed here, Dieter!’

Like a great gray glasshouse Alt’s studio gleams in the roof garden atop a dull black monolith high above Wall Street. The full moon alone illuminates the barrel-vaulted structure and the painting he is due to deliver by the end of the week: the double-sided triptych commissioned by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO in short, for its new headquarters, soon to transfer to Vienna, capital city of Austria. Side by side the three panels span over eighty feet; at the centre of the studio, so that they can be worked on from either side, they rise out of the dark and towards the shimmering sky. The artist sits in a pool of creeping shadows at the far end of the space; from memory he resaturates the bleached colours he can see in the ghostly light:

The morning sun illuminates the left panel. A field greening with spring wheat rises to the top of a hill at the centre of the image. Shrubs, bushes and trees line the sides. Distant mountains form an uncertain horizon under the cloudless sky.

The same field in summer is shown in the central panel. Golden and heavy with seeds the ears bow under a fierce sun. Hot air shimmers in mid-distance, making the mountains appear more distant yet.

Red with the low light of sundown the harvested field fills the panel on the right. The machined rows of stubble run up the hill, towards a vanishing point beyond and below its brow. Of a cooling blue the sky spans the glowing expanse.

Alt screws up his eyes, and closes them as if to divorce himself from the sight, but air, he needs air, even if some of the skylights are open. A new wave of nausea drives him to the door, with both hands he steadies himself on the post. The sickness sinks from his throat, and he listens out over the bump-thump of his heart: a ship, the Staten Island Ferry sounding its horn. For a few moments it slides into view and disappears again behind a glass cylinder plugged into the skyline a few weeks ago. Deep within there glimmers a shape twisted like a capital C – for Charlie rather than Clarissa, the most clear one, anything but transparent to him.

*All is sign*, he read in a novel begun on the plane to Africa, *but only a piercing light or shriek will penetrate our blunted sight and hearing. Whose signs if we see them in every thing?* What about words or images to interpret them? Alt flicks on the lights: greens glare, yellows flare, reds sizzle with the lamps' hiss. Those mountains beckon beyond the green field in mid-distance but first he needs his whites, a house

painter's bib and braces that hang with several others on a coat stand; Ed Fink, his helper, is responsible for their supply. A compressor sits by a workbench on the floor, a transparent hose rings the hub of a reel, a spray gun hangs on the stand, at the sink he unscrews the canister. Ed mixed the sky-blue he pours away and replaces with black acrylic and water. From a cupboard he takes a gauze mask, last he slips on a pair of rubber gloves – Alt doesn't mind if he gets covered in old-fashioned paints but dislikes this stuff.

A self-propelling aerial platform is parked at the far side of the studio. Alt drives it to face his painting, switches on the compressor, picks up the spray gun and slings the hose over a shoulder. Dragging the pipe from the reel he steps on the platform. The outline of a tree, a mere patch of undercoat again, stops him in mid-lift. He swings back, retracing it with his eyes – uncharted territory, reminiscent of the first atlas he saw as a boy, with his fantasies filling those empty regions then. A grid of fine lines that Ed drew to facilitate the transfer of the original design remains visible around the edges. Helpful no longer the grid suddenly reminds him of a cage, one that he himself was locked in all the while he has been struggling with his work.

Alt hooks the spray gun to the rail securing his back and lets himself down. He picks up a drill; from a boxed set he chooses a quarter-inch bit. Armed with a hacksaw as well he returns, plugging the drill into a socket on the platform. In

front of the painted-out tree Alt drops to one knee. The motor screams as the bit bursts through the aluminium sheet and into the honeycomb core. A metal thread – blank on one side, white on the reverse – spirals from the point of attack. Alt blows away the debris, the hole is wide enough to accept the blade. With quick sharp stabs he begins to saw.

‘Dieter!’ Alt doesn’t hear the voice, despite its alarm.

‘Dee – ter!’ At last he stops. Leaving the saw stuck in the metal he peers over the side.

Tom Fisher, his mentor, friend and dealer, hovers at the foot of the crane. His loden coat amplifies the flapping of his arms; like a baton a cardboard tube sticks up from his right hand. ‘What on earth are you doing?’ he demands. ‘Cutting it up isn’t going to finish it!’

‘Maybe it will, one way or the other. Anyway, I’m working, Thomas –’

A flurry of strokes returns the blade to the hole Alt bored first; this is hard work, he had better use the laser next. With his palm he strikes the cut-out, which nearly hits the visitor before it crashes on the floor.

‘For God’s sake, Dieter, it’s a commission, five million dollars, remember? Seriously, Wagner is worried you don’t like the hang. Ellen hasn’t heard from you, she seems really hurt, and I have *this* to show you!’

All at once Fisher pulls a figure from the cardboard tube: bits of toy cars and trains form *The Motorman*, a new-age

centaur rolling on rubber tyres, with windscreens and wipers for eyes. Years ago Alt made it for his little daughter.

Putting together the candidate list of works for his retrospective, Wagner wrote to Charlie, asking whether she'd be willing to lend it. *The Motorman* had been living on her bedside table for as long as she could remember, she replied, she'd rather not let him go now.

Alt pulls off the mask as the hydraulic arm under the platform collapses with a sigh. Face to face with the visitor he takes the figure from his hands.

'How come?' he asks convinced already that this fits in with what he has heard from Jane.

'A courier brought it earlier today, from a dealer – an honest one – I know in Milan,' replies Fisher. 'He says he can get two hundred thousand dollars for it if it's really your work – he asked me to authenticate it.'

**4. Ellen Burns' Study, Manhattan. Night of September  
22 to 23**

Ellen Burns in her apartment six floors above a silent street in the upper East Seventies, between Fifth and Madison: the fan of a slide projector whirrs in the dim depth of the room; the *Double Portrait* shines from the wall over a table laden with books, file boxes, index cards and transparencies, many of them on loan, like this one from the Guggenheim. Her ash blonde hair, pale eyes and fair skin seem paler still under the glare reflecting from the image, while a student lamp with a pair of rare amber shades catches her ringless hands in overlapping pools of a rather warmer light. A yellow pencil beats in time with the pulse in her wrist; flatly its shadow breaks at the edges of a pad with blue lines and a red rule for the margin – a page she has yet to begin, blank evidence that she cannot concentrate. Wagner told her that Dieter is back in town, a day earlier than she had expected him, and that he seemed none too happy at the preview of his show, though he said nothing about her or the essay she wrote for the exhibition catalogue. She has left two messages for Dieter – that she has been worried about his safety and longing for his return quite apart from needing to talk to him about the TV pilot programme he has agreed to do with her – but he has yet to get back to her. It's not like him, not to return calls. Something is wrong, she can feel it in her heart. Memories

flood her mind, of togetherness, even love, not separation: Dieter in July, in the ancient Mexican city of San Cristobal, where he inherited her god-parents' winter home; a blaze of paint-splattered whites as he emerges from the house; a presence so strong it has her glued to the spot while he closes the gate behind them; only now does she see that he is barefoot, oddly out of sorts against the backdrop of a bougainvillaea in full purple bloom. All at once she throws herself at him. She knows that in the tropical climate here he usually wears nothing under his whites. At a stroke she rips the braces from his shoulders and they make love right there, with her on the edge of the table that stands just inside the gate. Afterwards, side by side on his bed, she listens to the slowing beat of his heart, deeper and more regular than she remembers it after they last made love. She is drifting when he suddenly turns on his back.

'What's wrong?' she asks, but he only shakes his head.

'Tell me, please!'

'I'm stuck,' he replies at last, 'stuck like never before, situation hopeless but not serious – the Austrian military in the days of the Monarchy used to say something like that, making fun of their archenemy Prussians. It's the FAO triptych: I thought I'd get away from it for a while, work on something else – that's why I'm here in summer, for the first time ever. But I can't forget it. It won't let me and the more I think about it, the more pointless it gets!'

Later, at sundown, he makes drinks for them in the kitchen, Bacardi and the juice of small green oranges, which they take to the sitting room on the other side of the house. On their way across the garden, where the cooling air is fragrant with herbs and the scent of amaryllis, lilies and other exotic flowers, he asks about her parents, whom he met when she was still a child. 'I'm surprised they moved from Siena. I thought they were very lucky to live in such a light and airy apartment overlooking the Campo.'

'They're out in the hills, the Spenders' house, which they always wanted. Now you'll have to visit them.'

'Do I? Have I?' A chuckle, frown, shrug, and he pulls up a chair for her. He too sits down then in the only room with a window to the outside of the house, where the evening sun is on her, not him. A hand that is fine-boned and small but deeply scarred across the palm draws her to the distant peaks. He is still not sure, he says, what they're called – one day, he'll have to climb one of them. Meanwhile, ask a man from Chamula, another from Zinacantan, they won't agree – but she knows all that, she has been here before; even the firecrackers and rockets the locals keep letting off round the clock startle her no longer. He pauses, perhaps annoyed with himself because of his repetition, or thinking back on their joint yet fragmented past. Lonely, isolated, without her god-parents, whose house this was, he goes on, he'll never put

down roots in this place; his Manhattan base apart, it may be time to put a foot back in the Old World. He keeps seeing a small stone farmhouse, set among umbrella pines looking out towards the distant sea, vines and olive trees, maybe Italy after all, with her coming to stay often, for a long time. However, he knows that she is here on business first of all, sadly for three days only. Of course he'll help now that she has her chance of making a whole series of television programmes on contemporary art, for which her interview with him at the opening of his show is to be part of the pilot. Need he repeat it, though: 'You know I've never been comfortable with TV.'

'So you said,' replies Ellen. 'You grew up without it. And then the majority of programs – American even here.'

'There isn't a television in this house, remember? It's in New York on occasion that I let it all come tumbling in, and enjoy it. Seriously: it's the facility to make appear actual as well as whole what isn't whole at all – that's what makes me wary of TV.'

'But don't you have that facility too?'

A smile glints like a blade drawn in defence: maybe, but it's the opposite, he says, to show what's beyond mere appearance, which is of interest to him. He slips back into the depth of his chair, where she can glean but the outline of his face, even thinner than when she last saw him. Suddenly

on her feet, without having given a thought to standing up, she hears herself: 'I can't really see you against the light –'

'I'm sorry – I'll move!' he exclaims and changes to another chair, made by a local carpenter like most of the sparse furniture he carries from room to room, leaving spaces open to view; as people used to live before the burghers of the nineteenth century began to cram their homes with useless stuff or so he once explained. This time he pulls up his feet; even on his soles there is paint and she feels tempted to jump him again just for that.

'I'm so used to placing myself where I can see,' he says smiling as if he had read her thoughts. 'Painting is a selfish pursuit. But what about under – beyond – that surface your camera hits on?'

'I was wondering whether you might be willing to talk about some of the things you have told me privately – your *Diploma Painting* and the encounter with Kid Casper, the pink room at Spoleto –'

'All of which got me into trouble – jail even!' he exclaims and laughs. 'You're a sensationalist, darling!'

The telephone breaks Ellen's memories. Like a startled porcupine a marbled paper box that her god-mother bought in Siena for her birthday once shoots its load of freshly sharpened pencils across the desk. Lunging at the handset she has knocked it over.

'It's me again, it's too early to go to bed,' announces a voice she had no wish to hear again tonight. Resentment flows from the start he just gave her: 'I'm working, Wagner.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be. In truth, I can't work. I was hoping you were Dieter. Have you heard anything?'

'His phone's still off. Thomas says he'll try again later.'

'I know they have spoken.'

'You know more than I –'

'I've been thinking, Wagner: it must be a shock to step from the elevator in your gallery and – bang – there's your working life, spiralling out of sight, all downhill. Hanging pictures at the Guggenheim reminds me of hanging out the washing. The spiral is the line, one that's beginning to date whatever goes on it.'

'That's too strong, Ellen! Unkind too!'

'I'm sorry, forget it please. It's – it's Dieter – I'm upset. But tell me – I'm looking at *The Double Portrait* after what Wagner said about his reaction – you agree he was inspired by Watteau's *Gilles*?'

'Yes, probably –'

'The pierrot suits are exact copies, Wagner. Even the shoes are like the ones *Gilles* has on. What I'd like to know is this: did Dieter know that by the time the picture may have been used by the Italian comedians Watteau painted it for, he was dead?'

Silence.

'Panofsky says Watteau's painting may be a self-revelation if not an actual portrait. In *Et in Arcadia Ego* –'

'Panofsky rewrote that, Ellen.'

'But in the original –'

'Ellen – I – need – to – get – out!'

'Where?'

'P J Clarke's. Give me a beer, I'll listen. May I pick you up?'

Ellen hesitates, Dieter may ring yet. As if to hold on a little longer her eyes stop at a shelf where she keeps some of the books she has been sent for review. *Dali: Life & Art*, she reads on a spine – a difficult, even hackneyed distinction that critics must come to terms with nonetheless. Without a valid understanding of the artist's personality, can one interpret his or her work in modern art? As for Dieter, whom she has known since childhood, when seeing him draw and paint in water colours inspired her to try her own hand at art, has she not come too close, compromising her integrity as an independent critic?

'I have some wine in the ice box,' she replies at last but Wagner has been cooped up in his museum, hanging paintings all of last week as well as the weekend, nor does he want wine but a beer, which she doesn't keep.

'I need to see *real* people, Ellen; I'm done with painted sones!'

'Alright, pick me up,' she says and rings off. *The Double Portrait* demands her attention again. Has she seen something move? Obviously not, this is a still, different from the moving images she is hoping to show with Dieter's interview. Instead of waiting for the curator should she slip out, presenting herself at the studio door?

'I'm sorry, Dieter, Wagner says you didn't like the preview. Besides, I need to talk to you – about us – I'm worried!'

'About us, Ellen? You *and* me?'

She can see him clearly, with those wide-open blue eyes of his: didn't she turn him down twice when he asked her to at least live with him? Restlessly she gets to her feet, stepping into the light beam from the projector so that the portrait is wiped from the wall and the room darkened further still. Angry suddenly she faces the blank surface and the absence it symbolizes; and watches the return of the picture as she moves to her left since the chair bars her step to her more natural right. Her eyes hurt, perhaps the photographer overexposed the shot or the technician copying the original got it wrong – there is something transparent indeed about the man who painted himself with his young daughter; different despite his remaining physical similarity.

'Different?' demands the scholar in her. 'Different from what? Describe what you see.'

The adult figure is tall, slim, athletic – as Dieter would appear even now in that ill-fitting suit of white silk with a ruche-collared, bell-shape jacket and trousers that are too short and so nearly square over a pair of white shoes with pink bow ties. The feet stand closer than in Watteau's work of 1721. A lock of dark hair has escaped from the top of the skullcap traditionally worn under the hat, which sits well back on the head so that the underside of the brim alone is showing, round as the rising moon she saw earlier. But there *is* movement in the image! All at once the colours flow and the figures change their stance as if ready to part, looking out rather than down – dissolving!

Ellen listens. The fan sounds laboured, slow. The projector has been overheating the transparency, making it warp. A touch at the remote control switches off apparatus and light. Hand-in-hand father and daughter vanish from the wall.

Ellen shakes herself. The room is airless, hot. She pulls the curtains, opens the window next. The moon has moved on, reflecting from the roofs across the street. The faint grinding of brakes makes her look down: at a big bearded man – Wagner – extracting himself slowly from a cab.

**5. Neuschwanstein, Bavaria. Tuesday, 23 September,  
noon**

Armoured cars block the road up to the castle, men with guns and two-way radios patrol the footpaths through the dripping woods. No one not on police or otherwise approved official business is allowed anywhere near Neuschwanstein. Controls abound and yet there is chaos – the biggest crowd the village has ever seen cram shops, cafés and restaurants at Hohenschwangau, while thousands mill about in the streets, thankful at least that the rain has stopped, though with little hope even of a glimpse of the castle that remains shrouded in mist. A long time ago the coaches and cars that brought them overflowed from the parking areas in the village. By noon the roads are solid to the Austrian border. Even those who want to leave can no longer move.

Rumours fly with lightning speed, as if to compensate for the jam. Terrorists have occupied the castle, a Yugoslav waiter tells his guests. The roof blew off, a teacher from Minneapolis has heard, reminding her companions of the fallen trees they saw along the road from Oberammergau. A lunatic is threatening to dynamite the Marienbrücke goes yet another version of the disaster that has struck or is about to strike – even that's in the air as some jester remarks. And no

one in authority appears to have noticed that with all this confusion there is still no announcement when Neuschwanstein will be open again.

There are indeed questions to be answered. ‘It’s time we came to a decision,’ insists Max Pongratz, mayor of Hohenschwangau. With his back to the tower he has stared at too long, hat firmly down over the crumpled forester’s face, he stands in the upper forecourt of the castle, surrounded by a group of men in sodden loden coats, whose expressions reflect two things above all: resentment and that they’re wet through. ‘It’s obvious you shan’t be open today,’ Pongratz goes on, addressing the director of the Schloßverwaltung, the administrative offices at the castle. ‘At least let’s announce that.’

‘The problem is –,’ begins the director only to find his speech taken over by a man whose uniform suggests senior police, ‘some of the people are so bloody nosy they don’t want to leave. They want to see what’s going on.’

‘They can’t leave,’ objects a voice further back, ‘even if they wanted to they’re stuck.’

‘We’ll have to start at the end if we’re to unravel this mess,’ breaks in yet another officer. ‘A helicopter – we need to make the rounds.’

‘In this weather?’

‘Try motorcyclists –’

‘Gentlemen, that’s not the problem,’ pleads the director.

‘We mustn’t forget –’

A soldier in battledress is making for the mayor at the centre of the group. Though he is younger than the others, and has yet to speak, he stops the discussion at once.

‘Well,’ demands the director, ‘what is it?’

‘Nothing,’ replies the soldier, ‘so far –’

‘Nothing?’ repeats Pongratz in unison with a journalist from the *Süddeutsche Nachrichten*, who got in among the officials because his paper took a call about bombs in the castle.

‘Not in the tower,’ confirms the soldier. ‘I suspected as much. On the one hand this funny stuff –,’

‘Funny?’ protests someone. ‘This obscenity?’

The soldier shrugs. He is a bomb disposal expert, with his own ideas of what’s obscene: like the little girl’s limbs strewn with those of her teddy bear over the floor of a wrecked airport lounge where he defused a second bomb recently.

‘I meant the warning signs,’ he says.

The mayor nods. He too had a wry smile for the contradictory *Lebensgefahr* (danger of life) and *Todesgefahr* (danger of death) notices at the bottom of the Bergfried stair when he first saw them, taken, legitimately or not, from some old electric works perhaps.

‘Maybe the people who called the papers were outsiders, trying to get in on the act,’ he says to get back to the point. ‘Maybe there isn’t a bomb.’

Quite possibly, replies the senior police officer; to which the soldier adds that he’ll need to check the rest of the castle nonetheless, before anything can be restored to its normal state, which, realistically, should take two, even three days.

‘Three days!’ cries the director just as a police car with flashing blue lights passes through the gate and into the lower forecourt; a black BMW follows close behind. It’s that, or rather who is in it, which makes everyone turn: the Bavarian Prime Minister – *Ministerpräsident* – in person has arrived on the scene; already he is making for Pongratz and his men.

‘Now we’ll have fun,’ murmurs a reporter. ‘Just what he needs to show how depraved the world – the opposition in other words – has become. And how good *he* is at getting things done.’

## **6. Dieter Alt's Studio. Tuesday, 23 September, morning**

Still that same morning, Tuesday, 23 September, a few minutes after nine in New York City, we see young Ed Fink on his way across the roof garden outside Alt's studio. The air is as crisp as his face fresh and happy in the sun. With great feeling Dieter's helper hums the canto from Britten's first cello suite. His step rises and sinks on the gravelled path, a little playfully perhaps for the piece. From a pocket in his lumberjack he produces a set of keys and unlocks the door, pulling it as he backs in. The smell of fresh paint meets him as he turns to hang up his jacket. A colour he has not seen before catches the corner of his eye. Leaden it expands under the neutral north light – eighty feet of it broken by holes showing the windows behind.

The jacket slides from his arms. Sideways, eyes glued to the triptych, he advances to the bentwood chair the painter has left exactly at midpoint of his work. Too stunned to stand Ed sits down.

The gray is not so opaque as the first impression suggested; a wash rather than cover, the colour lies on the pale undercoat he himself sprayed on the double-sided panels, cold and eerie in its uncertain depth. Human figures lie strewn all over the broken surface, and more yet come tumbling through the air. Who are they? Where from?

Mesmerized Ed stares at them and the holes, which must have been cut with the laser, he can see as much. He is groping for a comparison — something like a *Last Judgement* — and about to move to the other side when the telephone begins to ring. His eyes fix on the door to the bedroom, beyond some alpine ferns and the concert grand he plays every now and then. A distant monotone measures out calls and pauses. Ed is on his feet when the signal ceases; directly he steps round to the other side of the triptych, which was finished, or so he believed, when he last saw it: the rising sun is shining through the holes, making the picture difficult to see.

The ringing again. Ed knows his employer is a light sleeper. ‘Dieter?’ he calls just tapping the bedroom door. Tilting his head he tries to listen in; his own pressed breath except, he hears only the bell. His hands drop to the knob. At once the door springs ajar, and the ringing sounds loud as he peers through the gap. The bed is empty though it may have been slept in. The phone reverberates on a painted chest by its side; Ed knows that it’s Tirolean, one of the few things Dieter had been able to save from his grandfather’s farm.

‘Dieter?’ Without reply Ed enters the room. Nothing suggests that the artist has only just returned from his journey; there is no luggage in sight. His mail, stacked on the writing table, has been turned over — Ed himself put it

there. The door to the bath stands open; a light shines from within while the ringing persists, pressing on his ears.

‘Dieter? Are you in there?’

No one is in the bathroom, the lamp over the basin is on. A damp bath sheet hangs on the rail outside the shower while the hot tap drips – a week ago Ed reported it to the janitor. In here too there is a phone; at last he takes it from the hook on the wall.

‘Your wake-up call, Mr Alt,’ announces a female voice. ‘It’s after nine-thirty.’

Ed is about to say who he is when he thinks better of it – the correction might require explanation. His musical ear makes it easy for him to imitate Dieter’s voice: ‘I’m sorry! I was out in the garden.’

‘I read you have a garden round your penthouse! Excuse me for being personal, sir. We took calls from Miss Armstrong, Ms Burns, Mr Fisher, Mr Taylor, Mr and Mrs Auchincloss, and Mr Wagner Bielowski. Miss Armstrong has changed her plans, her rehearsals in Tokyo are delayed, please return her call. Mr Taylor of the *Times* wanted to remind you of the interview, if you could return his call that would save time. Mr and Mrs Auchincloss’ secretary said the Auchinclosses are flying friends to Nassau for the weekend: you don’t know them personally but they’d appreciate very much if you joined – Mrs Onassis will be with them.

Everyone else said they'd call again. May I give you the numbers of the others?'

'Not now,' objects Ed – in the bathroom he has nothing to write them down. 'I'll ask my helper to call you back.'

'Very well, sir. Shall I switch over now?'

Ed hesitates. The answering service usually intercepts calls to the ex-directory number that is changed twice a year but still gets passed on to the wrong people. Early in the morning or late in the day, after the light has gone, Dieter occasionally has it switched through – what if he himself wants to ring in? His helper will take the calls for a while, Ed replies, thanks the woman and hangs up. However, a cup of coffee, something has to be ingested, taken in, as though to make up for the vacuum around him. The remains of a loaf from the Italian bakery in the village, some Parmesan cheese and a dead bottle of Lagrein, a red wine from South Tirol, clutter the sideboard where the coffee beans live in a container. But the phone starts to ring again: it's Ellen, still waiting to hear from Dieter.

**7. JFK Airport. At the time Ed discovers the triptych.  
Memories of Urbino in 1961**

‘It’s an honour to serve you, *Herr Alt*,’ gushes the receptionist in the first-class lounge of British Airways’ terminal at JFK. ‘It must be wonderful to be an artist! I read *all* about you.’

*About me? Or him?* Weary and beyond impatience Alt registers his detachment, and looks at the woman’s painted face: artful, no doubt, concealing rather than expressing who she might be; in any case, he has heard claims of the kind before, too often. *I need to find my daughter*, is on his lips; as if to remind him to keep his mouth shut his morning medication, a beta blocker taken dry in the cab, has left a numb spot on his tongue. He might have found some bottled water in one of the limousines Fisher’s secretary usually orders to take him to the airport, and yet he grimly savoured the change: galloping over potholes with the driver shouting over his shoulder while around the ill-fitting window there whistled the chill morning air charged with the stink of burnt gasoline; hurtling against the rolling metal tide of commuting traffic in those outer regions of New York Hell, where he has made his home but Charlie was frightened before he could get her there that one and only time Jane allowed their daughter to visit him. Gangs of youths and the looted wrecks of cars on the way from the airport impressed

themselves on the twelve-year-old before anything else.

Later, from the top of the World Trade Centre, she tried to spot the road from Kennedy. No sooner was he pointing than she asked why he had never painted those poor kids, as she called them.

‘Why don’t *you* paint them?’ he asked. ‘Would you like to?’

A slow serious nod. Back at the loft he lived and worked in then she began on paper, canvas next, but WYSIWYG the receptionist is done, putting Alt’s boarding pass in line with a few others – first class in the wide-bodied 747 is almost empty; the painter’s claustrophobia rules out Concorde, which most businessmen seem to prefer. She turns to the monitor on her desk: it’s early in the day but departure times, flight and gate numbers crowd the screen as last calls light up and destinations shift with suddenly tumbling lines while others wipe out altogether: wysiwyg, WHAT YOU SEE IS WHERE YOU GO. Alt still has a little time, the *Doppelgänger* announces with an air of cunning then, he might like a cup of coffee; indeed, he motions at a couple of other travellers: ‘I have some Champagne on ice, *Herr Alt.*’

Alt shakes himself, of course it’s the receptionist before him. He needs to make a call he says remembering that the courtesy phones in the lounge serve NYC alone. A searching look dampens the glow on the star-struck face; polished nails

flash at things behind him, like a thin red rag they catch the light but fail to make him angry. It's international, he says, someone in London, and her stare relents for now she *understands* – there is a pay phone round the corner.

Clutching a short cardboard tube the painter walks away; a canvas satchel swings from his shoulder in aged sympathy with the trench coat, also bought in his early London days. Directly she picks up the phone, shielding her mouth from the other guests in the room:

'This is *BA Queen*. Dieter Alt's about to board: Gate Four at ten. He looks sick!'

Moments later her contact at *People* alerts their roving JFK photo-reporter more or less as the painter comes back into sight. 'Get through, *Herr Alt*?' The voice carries far enough to turn some heads in the lounge.

Not Mr Alt? This is the third time the woman spouts the address he never grew used to – she should know if she read all about him; he has not been back to his native country since the end of his student days, when Austrian politicians, police and not a few others hounded him out. His gaze meets her head-on and sinks inside her, where the butterflies presently begin to stir. Surprisingly she hears him that there was no reply; and, please, he'd like some coffee after all. In the far corner, where there is no one else, he puts down the satchel and cardboard tube, pushing aside the newspapers on the table. He opens the bag and takes out the book ordered

before his African trip: *The Enigma of Piero* by Carlo Ginzburg. Its cover, showing a detail of the *Flagellation at Urbino*, made him pick it from the mail he found on his return, replacing the novel he had felt too despondent to resume on his flight back from the Sudan. Slowly he leafs through the plates. There is something vibrant, even alarming, in their aspect, despite his familiarity with the images shown.

‘Ten minutes,’ says the receptionist putting his coffee on the table. Unasked she takes his coat to hang it up. ‘I’ll let you know.’

Alt nods distractedly, in his mind he is with Charlie now, wondering once again where she might be, doing what, which suddenly throws him back on his own time as a struggling young artist. His memory, visual as ever, comes into play. With him we see the image of a young man – Dieter at twenty – perched on the ramparts atop the hill facing the Duke’s Palace at Urbino; his legs dangle over their brick slope; one red and one green sock set off the white plimsolls and faded blue jeans; his head is bowed over the pad on his knees. A drop of water falls from the paintbrush in his hand. Warm almost it spreads on the other wrist – the air is sharper now than he felt it pulling himself from his sleeping bag an hour ago.

*Careful, Alt, gently,* he says to himself. *That pale brick’s tricky. There’s more red in those shadows than you can see.*

‘They’re *not* shadows,’ insists his other voice. ‘Against the sun – still below the horizon – there’s an absence of light –’

*Words, Alt, words!*

‘You like words. You’re using them to describe your painting.’

*Yes, but how can you show that those walls – silent, flat, gray a writer might call them – await the rising sun?*

His left hand – Dieter writes with the right but draws and paints with the other – parts from the paper. The point of the brush slips from the *Giardino Pensile* – or rather his picture of Duke Federico’s Garden of Contemplation. A quick twist of the tool completes the departure, taking away excess moisture and pigment. He looks up, surfacing from that illusionary space of recreation, exchanging one image for another as his eyes let go of the paper and refocus in the depth of the subject itself. A faint flush heightens his cheeks; he loves to work out, like a pianist who must practice every day; already he picks up a thicker brush. In the lid of the paintbox he mixes his palest blue with traces of ultramarine and emerald green. Fresh water from a small canister thins the balance, a touch of blue confirms it. With long horizontal strokes he sets out from the top of the sheet. Carefully he angles the pad on his knees, tilting it toward him for a faster, more even distribution of the wash.

He is down to the palace roofs when he stops. Once again he looks up, lids aflutter, taking in temperature and tone

rather than shape – the gradated blue of his tint is firming up; clear water is all he needs to fill in the whitish strip of light over the gables.

The painting is finished, the pad lies spread on the parapet. Precariously Dieter stands next to it on top of the wall. Last summer, to end a night out at the close of term, he took his girl to the hills above Vienna and attempted a poem later, about night clinging to the face of the sun, but his face now exchanges day for night as he shuts his eyes. He arrived late in Urbino. At Rimini, his previous station, it had been noon already by the time he emerged from his first view of a painting by Piero della Francesca still in its original place, with hardly a car he could have stopped on the road. Piero apart he has come in search of what – refuge, salvation, himself? All of them, no doubt, hoping his confusion will abate as his distance from Austria grows, and the pressures that drove him out might relent – pressures he himself has caused, and his family only made worse. Karl Alt, his adoptive father, called him both reckless and naïve, sillier than Parsifal; while Wolfgang, the architect's brother and a well-known painter himself, accused the nephew of arrogance, undermining his standing with the very men who had made him an Honorary Professor; and Erika, Dieter's adoptive mother, though not normally interested in art, speculated about the fate of the diploma work he had submitted to the Academy.

‘Perhaps they burnt it, Dieter?’ she said on the telephone from Innsbruck, making it sound as if the thought only pleased her; so that he, suddenly angry, called her an unrepentant Nazi and hung up. Earlier, at sixteen, Dieter had found out that, unlike her husband, Erika Alt had been an active member of the party, who also joined in the burning of books. A few days later he asked how she could have done such a thing. They were young and impressionable, she replied, though not nearly as dedicated as his mother; didn’t he know who she’d been working for and where she had borne him: Steinhöring, in Upper Bavaria, a place set up by her employers, the SS. Speechless Dieter heard her go on about the Führer’s children and the master race that was to be bred there: he was one of them.

‘But my father,’ he protested, ‘Michael Alt, *was* my father! I look like him!’

‘Maybe, though your mother never married him.’

The day itself seemed to darken around Dieter then. His very life, all that he remembered about those happy days when his grandfather and great-aunt had brought him up, slipped away as if it had been nothing but an illusion. The thought that he would have to keep those circumstances to himself, forever and always, imposed itself on him, and yet he let them surface far enough to cause the scandal of his diploma work.

A flicker of warmth tickles the refugee's cheeks and plays on his lids. He draws in the verdant air – at Hochleiten, the mountain farm in Tirol where he grew up, the grass was usually mowed at dawn. Over Urbino the scent of rain has all but faded. Abruptly all seems silent, and he listens. With one cry the birds resume their chorus, shouting release – the sun has pierced the horizon. Rugged hills are touched by the tips of its long low shafts and emerge brilliant in an ocean of still lifeless colour. Closer, a more hesitant sheen caresses the veils spring has hung on the trees below the ramparts. Leaves seem to shiver under the teasing light. Waxen buds glow suddenly gilt with the promise of fruit; only the palace walls, facing west, remain cold while the gables above them have yet to be found by the light.

Through wide open eyes Dieter takes in the universe around him. Only a few weeks ago Gagarin circled the Earth, the first man ever to do so in space. Plumb spits of smoke rise here and there from the huddled roofs at his feet. A fleeting feeling overcomes him. From deep within it reaches out as far as he can see, and further still. His breath is that of those mountains, their silence his – he belongs. A new age is dawning, clear and visual as never before; not only are the Earth and stars to be observed as they have just been shown from space – everything is subject to that vast new perspective pulling him both out and in. He is going the right way – forward, not back. He is a painter, who needs

little not within him for his work. He'll live abroad, never speak German again if he must.

The spark of fresh light prances on the palace gables, the dormant colours of terra-cotta spring to life; with heightened contrast the west walls reflect hills and sky. A deeper depth seems to shape Duke Federico's garden while Dieter stands bound in contemplation until the tang of kindling on a fire breaks the spell. It's a gentle letdown though, setting him back on his way.

Slowly he gathers his things and the little watercolour. People often come up to him when he sits working at some picturesque spot but he'll never sell this. Children especially love to watch as he makes up and draws entire stories for them – picture strips that he always gives away. As a tight-rope walker who had better not know what vertigo is he passes over the parapet, pad in one balancing hand, satchel hanging from the other. The sun catches his face – blind but happy for the moment. Sparrows squabble at the foot of the wall, all at once they whirr away. The scent of the fire has made him hungry, he'll go back to the student hostel first, for a *cappuccino* and some fresh bread. At nine, then, when its doors are due to open again, he wants to be at the great house he just portrayed. Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, the painting he came to see above all in Urbino, hangs in one of the rooms there.

## **8. Munich, Bavaria. Tuesday, 23 September, evening**

The television is on. Charlie, Andrea and the others are waiting for the early evening news deep within the rambling old digs Ingrid rents in the Bavarian capital. Already the signal tune is over and the presenter draws breath to list the main items on the programme: 'Terrorists attack Neuschwanstein. Prime Minister Mahler takes charge. We have live coverage from the castle.'

'We're first!' cries Ingrid.

'Terrorists?' asks Charlie. Has she misheard, not understood?

'Splendid!' An older man tosses back his head, flashing big teeth and straw hair. Drink in hand he lounges in a chair while the youngsters fidget and in their denims and battle fatigues complement his professorial air. In English, which he speaks with Scandinavian precision, he turns to Charlie: 'You are getting the exposure we needed.' But she shakes her head irritably; it's not him she is anxious to hear.

'This is what happened earlier today,' announces the presenter. A still of the castle appears as a more distant voice-over sets out to give the background, and Andrea complains, 'They're too fucking uptight to show what we did!'

Maybe the fog stopped them, throws in one of the others, just as the picture changes and there is indeed mist on the

screen. Police, soldiers and civilians in loden coats mill in the pair of connecting courtyards at the foot of the tower. The Prime Minister's BMW arrives. Only the fanfares are missing as the driver opens the door; the politician, with an instant wave for the camera, steps from the car; and the mist begins to lift.

'There,' cries Andrea, wide-eyed and wild, 'just *look* at that!'

'It's big,' exclaims the Scandinavian. On the edge of his seat he glances at Charlie, who stands dumbfounded. 'This is it, big art!'

'A rainbow! Look!' shouts one of the others.

'Jesus Technicolor Christ! A rainbow rubber-fucked by the biggest prick on earth!' says Andrea.

Admiringly Ingrid looks at Charlie: 'I had no idea we were putting a condom on the tower!'

'Prime Minister Mahler in person took over then,' continues the voice-over, 'ordering that the *Fremdkörper* –'

'A *Fremdkörper*?' Andrea laughs shrilly. 'You hear that: a foreign body for a close-combat sock?'

'– was to stay up not a moment longer than could be helped. His helicopter, on which he had flown to Füssen earlier in the day, was to be made available to assist in the removal.'

The camera zooms in on the politician's air transport. Slowly it circles the tower, while the viewer in the armchair

tops up his glass from the bottle of Scotch on the floor, remarking on the image – a bumble bee, attracted by the scent of cock. Over its sheathed top, the aircraft comes to an unsteady halt. The cabin door slides back. A rope ladder drops from the opening, a man lowers his feet to its rungs.

‘They’re going to rip it off!’ protests Ingrid.

‘They spotted they can’t get at it from inside,’ rejoins one of the others.

‘Bastards,’ swears Andrea. ‘He doesn’t even have a proper harness. They haven’t got the first idea!’

Nonetheless the man climbs to the bottom of the ladder. Holding on with one hand he tries to get a grip on the sheath with the other. For a few seconds he fumbles but succeeds in attaching some kind of line. He waves, signalling up, up, and the helicopter lifts. The line snaps its hook, lashing back at the man, who falls, but is caught upside down in the rungs as the ladder swings out and returns like a pendulum. With an angry roar the aircraft swerves and suddenly sounds stalling when a different camera, belonging to an American company according to the caption on screen, takes over. In super slow motion the helicopter slips towards the yawning chasm just south of the castle; the white water of the Pöllath comes shooting from the mountains and falls to its bottom there. All at once the aircraft dips and drops like a stone; dead-on it hits the metal structure of the pedestrian bridge spanning the gorge. The rotor flies off and disappears in the waterfall

as the steel girders bend under the impact and the rope ladder swings with the climber into the void below them. Wedged in the rails of the bridge the wreck ends suspended between heaven and earth.

Charlie turns from the television, the blood has drained from her face. ‘My work was a straight wrap,’ she whispers moving in on the man in the chair. ‘You changed it! Your obscenity – you killed them!’

‘I made it a little more explicit.’ The Scandinavian puts down his glass. He too appears shaken, shades paler than a moment ago. But he points, getting to his feet: ‘He’s the one who’s obscene! He!’

The Bavarian Prime Minister is back on screen, this time live. ‘*Herr Ministerpräsident*’, asks a woman identifying herself as a reporter from the leading Frankfurt daily, ‘artists have proposed exploits of the kind before – carried them out in fact – wouldn’t it have been wiser to wait?’

‘Take no action?’ demands the politician. ‘Are you implying this outrage is art?’

‘It may have been the intention,’ counters the journalist. ‘So I’m asking you, Prime Minister: was it necessary to act so hastily?’

‘My dear lady,’ protests Mahler, ‘Neuschwanstein is a symbol of our country! I had no choice!’

‘You had!’ disagrees a male voice off camera. ‘Mayor Pongratz warned you it wouldn’t work. Why interfere,

perform a stunt? The men in the helicopter weren't even equipped for the job!

'Electioneering, that's what it is!' shouts someone else, presenting the politician with a chance to duck the question, while, just for a moment, Mayor Pongratz appears on screen – organizing the rescue, too preoccupied to waste time over recriminations or so he excuses himself, looking quite sick.

'Prime Minister,' begins the correspondent of a well-known Hamburg weekly then, 'given Aids, obviously the condom has acquired a significance far beyond what we would have imaged even a year ago. And King Ludwig *was* homosexual.'

'This is outrageous!' At once the politician spots his chance: though their forebears deposed him, the Bavarians still treasure the memory of their erstwhile king. 'Are you suggesting this outrage – degenerate piece of filth – can tell us something about the most colourful man in our history? He was a spendthrift, yes, bad at governing – but he had vision! A romantic's vision, which not only supported Wagner and Bayreuth but resulted in three magnificent castles all the world now come to see. People like Mayor Pongratz had better remember that if they want to hold office in places like Hohenschwangau – our heritage is under attack. Nor, to come back to the other part of your suggestion, does the Holy Catholic Church permit condoms. If you have no sense of decency – I do!' An indignant nod,

and Mahler walks out. Someone claps slowly and others fall in while there are whistles and boos, altogether contradictory sounds.

‘Degenerate art –’ the Scandinavian stops by the screen, ‘recognize the expression?’

‘It *is* degenerate! Nothing to do with Nazis!’ screams Charlie flying at him with flailing fists, drawing blood from his lips with the first blow. ‘We killed four ordinary men!’

‘We haven’t! Look! Look!’ The others point excitedly, at the helicopter on the bridge, back on screen. From the right a man is on his way along the twisted, sagging girders over the gorge, slowly, even gingerly, as the voice-over explains that the wooden floorboards are mostly broken or detached, and he must avoid making the otherwise all-metal structure vibrate or swing. The use of another helicopter has been ruled out; its downwash could be powerful enough to tilt the precarious balance while the rails on either side of the cockpit are blocking the doors but can’t be cut – not before careful inspection or their weakening too might trigger the collapse of the bridge begun in 1866 and named later, Marienbrücke, after King Ludwig’s mother. Someone waves from the aircraft, perhaps a signal to the man in the girders who is heading for the rope ladder now – when it was still light that is, for this is a live transmission only in part. Meanwhile the rescue has been going on, in the dark for more than an hour already; news of its progress will be

broadcast in due course. Miraculously even the man on the ladder, shocked and in hospital by now, got away with bumps and bruises; but the danger is by no means over as the crew in the wreck have yet to be released from their trap and brought down on safe ground.

‘Pray for that!’ Charlie buries her face in her hands as a police siren sounds in the distance. Whooping it closes in and passes. Andrea shuts the window with a joke about being able to tell whether it’s for them that the police are coming but no one pays him any attention. Then even he is drawn back to that box of flicking picture strips fit for consumption by morons only – or so he has always been saying.

**9. Dieter Alt's Manhattan Studio. Tuesday 23  
September, afternoon**

Ellen calls at the studio door: 'Is anyone here? May I come in?'

Slant sheets of light appear wedged between the glass roof and the paint-splattered tiles on the floor. Dust particles shimmer in the rays that like spotlights falling from a cloudy sky penetrate the holes in the triptych. Instantly it strikes her as hostile, a barrier, strange, and yet at first sight she can see Dieter's hand. But voices sound from a door at the far end of the space: leading to the kitchen, she knows. She has advanced halfway when a man steps through the frame, a slight figure suddenly bathed in light.

'Ed,' she exclaims, 'Dieter left a message on my answerphone. About having to go to London, because of Charlie – I don't understand –'

'He invited her over for the opening but she hasn't replied. No one seems to know where she is. He's gone to find her.'

'But we're due to film tomorrow!'

Fisher enters through that same doorway. 'The contract specifies authorship and size, Wagner,' he says, 'delivery, the price, nothing about the subject –' Seeing Ellen he stops and falls abruptly silent; behind him the curator nearly bumps into his back.

'Thomas – Wagner – your secretary told me I'd find you here.' Ellen addresses the dealer, perhaps to justify her presence where no other critic has been allowed to enter. Once again she explains that she has but three days to get her television interview with Dieter done. 'Otherwise –' her hand slices the air in front of her throat, 'I and the whole series –'

'I know,' cuts in Fisher. 'Dieter told me – maybe you could film on Friday, he should be back by then. Meanwhile, would you mind letting us have your views? Like myself, maybe Wagner too –' he bows to the curator just slightly, 'will not give his for the moment.' With a flourish the dealer invites the critic to make her appraisal: '*The Reverse of Plenty*, finished at last!'

Ellen steps back, instinctively widening her aspect of the triptych, though what's going on, whence the title, why the show? With reluctance she begins her inspection. One by one she spots the bodies but can't relate them to the cut-outs. On a different picture plane, beyond the broken surface so to speak, they lie on the devastated ground: ragged, dead or dying from starvation as the skeletal outlines suggest; with thorny black bushes in between.

Ellen moves on, comparing the central panel with its neighbours. The picture of bodies strewn as far as the eye can see is similar in all three. The way the holes have been cut suggests change, maybe the flow of time. Silent she

stands at the far end of the studio, and moves on to the other side of the triptych. Except for the holes, the three images of the field in spring, summer and autumn look as she last saw them. Abundant, glowing, as she thought of it then, the painting appears almost abstract now: smaller and sculptural, too, with the studio and surrounding cityscape beyond coming into play. Slowly she returns to the side she saw at her entrance and the chair that has not been moved. With both hands she holds on to the bent-wood back.

She addresses Fisher: 'What did you call it?'

*'The Reverse of Plenty.* Dieter left a note.'

'The reverse,' repeats Ellen. 'It's strange, I feel the holes hold the two sides together. Anyway, starving, dying children and their mothers, that's what I see: three frames, as on film. The images themselves are what we keep seeing on TV. Harrowing as they are, they show but symptoms. We need to look for their cause. The point is, what are we doing to stop the evil that keeps coming to the surface with such appalling regularity? We all know that the story behind those images remains the same: droughts, which may be the result of global pollution, all made infinitely worse by local wars, corruption, bad government –'

'And a miserable story it is,' cuts in Fisher. The sun glares at him through one of the holes; all at once his enthusiasm for the work appears to have gone: 'I've never seen it, of course, but from what he told me, these bodies make me

think of his diploma work: four panels showing an execution in a concentration camp. I'm afraid of what the Viennese will make of it this time.'

'A meal, no doubt,' quips Wagner, 'though there is the other side, bearing all that golden wheat –'

Fisher frowns.

'It reminds me of Gruenewald,' interjects Ellen, 'the *Isenheim Altar* – that too is double-sided, with that vast dark land behind the crucifixion. There's a storm brewing –'

'That's just it,' snaps Fisher, 'it reminds me – it is –'

'What?' asks Ellen only to see him shake his head, and fall silent herself. True, powerful, obliterating all that went before in his work, she has on her tongue. Nor does she wish to bring up what she gleaned at San Cristobal, even if it appears to fit in with his fears: while Dieter will still not sell to museums or other public institutions in Austria, the idea of a major work of his on permanent display in a United Nations building there – a place, in other words, where it could be seen from outside yet remain beyond local interference or jurisdiction – had obviously tempted him, like an invitation to cock a snook at Vienna and the Viennese as it were. However, this is his reply to her too, her belief in television mocked, or so she suddenly feels in view of the punctured screens. Tears are welling up in her eyes, as they did after the third beer she ordered last night, much to Wagner's surprise. On her nineteenth birthday Ellen

resolved to give up sculpting because she no longer believed in her talent. Now should she give up her work as a critic too, saving herself in the history of old art instead? Or should she merely give in and marry Dieter as he asked her?

‘I don’t understand,’ she continues at last. ‘This sudden departure! I don’t mean him going to London –’

With an embarrassed look for the curator Fisher offers her the chair, which she refuses. Dieter has been supporting those flying doctors doing eye operations in the African bush, he explains then, secretly, nearly a million dollars over the last five years.

‘Inevitably someone talked and other charities approached him for the starving in Africa but he was not convinced. Then this commission came up, he linked the two, FAO and Africa, and got blocked. In the end he had to go and see for himself why we keep being presented with the same horror year after year – only then might he be able to work again –’

And so the meeting breaks up soon after, as a mirror fractures, reflecting different aspects of what held together only moments before. Fisher leaves with a set of the photographs Ed took earlier; it’s one of his jobs to record Alt’s works, Polaroids first, large-format transparencies later.

In the elevator Wagner tries to comfort Ellen: no doubt Dieter will be in touch once he gets to London; and given

the television company's facilities, might she not interview him there, via satellite?

Ed stays on and will still be at the studio with the dying day as the triptych looms before him darkly, and he plays the piano instead of the cello he meant to practice at home – Schubert's *Impromptus* Dieter used to ask him for every now and then.

**10. Further Memories of Urbino in 1961 – on the way  
from JFK to London, Tuesday 23 September 1986**

Some thirty-thousand feet over the Atlantic Alt looks at the frontispiece of Ginzburg's book, a reproduction of the painting, detailed also on the jacket, that he wanted to see above all when he first went to Urbino:

Christ stands bound to a grecian column in the depth of a loggia, on a black and white marble floor foreshortened by the central perspective. Two soldiers raise their whips while a man with an elaborate turban commands the proceedings, and Pilate, sporting the cap and crimson stockings of a Byzantine emperor, sits watching on his throne.

A separate group, of three men, stand in the foreground. They seem unaware of the torture behind them.

Christ's eyes are the only expressive part of his face still intact. A break cuts across below them and on through the width of the panel. Raised just slightly they look towards the three men – bystanders and yet not, of another time, the present even, or so their pictorial separation and prominence of treatment suggest.

Who are these men? Why did Piero place them where they stand? Indeed, without apparent interest in the flagellation behind them, why are they here at all?

The figure on the left, most central of them in the painting, with the hat and beard of a Greek scholar, faces a

man in a richly embroidered gown, probably Italian. Are they talking? The Greek's left hand is raised at the wrist, as, imperceptibly almost, he appears to be rocking back on his heels, while the Italian's obviously firmer stance may be that of a man delivering a message. A rather younger man looks out between them, obviously not taking part in their conversation – his gaze is distant, fixed on something we cannot see; his curls evoke a halo of flames, one that Apollo, the sun god, might have devised for himself. Unlike his companions he is barefoot and dressed in the simplest of clothes: a scarlet tunic proposes a time different from theirs, antiquity perhaps; and a country of his own, Arcadia even. Though grouped with two elders he stands alone, connecting neither with them nor Christ.

'Isn't this a strange picture? The young man in the middle, Kid –'

The words come softly, with a faint scent of limes. All at once they break into Dieter's contemplation. A new sketchbook, his third since he left Vienna, is open in his right hand; he holds the pencil in the left.

'He gives me the creeps,' replies an American with startling blonde hair. 'What's he staring at?'

Kid Casper – the peroxide mane leaves no doubt! With electric speed a volley of images – collages, assemblies, prints – flashes from the picture store in Dieter's memory. He can't

help but stare himself now: at a rather older man than blue jeans and a glittering baseball jacket suggested at first sight; bony, even worn behind huge pink glasses.

‘Who knows, the future, the Second Coming?’ The first speaker offers the choice. Above the crumpled envelope of an old-fashioned linen suit he inclines his head so that the light from the window to his left leaves the gray of his short-cropped hair and slips over the hook of the nose, where it presently illuminates the nearer half of a face that Dieter also knows, though he can’t think why.

Casper chuckles, caught by Dieter’s drawing in the sketchbook. Their eyes meet. Transfixed the youngster will not yield when the American approaches. ‘Look at this!’ he exclaims pointing. ‘Turned inside out! May I?’

Dieter nods, and Casper takes the book, tilting it towards the painting on the wall. Sharp as needles under the pink wash of the glasses his eyes dart between the two images. ‘You’re standing at Piero’s vanishing point,’ he says at last, ‘your own you shifted, blocking the view with what the blonde guy here might see – yourself, peering into a box of chessmen on a board?’

Dieter blushes. A slight lisp softens points and edges of his English, perfected during two summers in Cambridge: ‘The way Piero puts his figures into space reminded me of something I read – a writer invents his characters and observes how they will behave. I’m the one who is doing the

observing here – perhaps if I paint it one day I shall think of something better.’

‘Better? He draws like an angel!’ says the older man to Casper. Directly he turns to Dieter: ‘Don’t you think you’re good-looking enough?’

‘I meant something else altogether,’ replies Dieter wishing the glow in his face would go away.

‘It’s good,’ says Casper, ‘don’t change it.’

‘The experiment with his characters,’ says the Englishman or whoever he is, ‘that’s Musil – you *read* Musil?’

Surprised Dieter looks at him again. There are traces of a foreign accent in his English but he still can’t place him. He shrugs. ‘Not many people do – he is difficult –’

‘But you have read his essays.’

‘I am interested in the theory of writing, *why* writers write. I have the diaries too.’

The older man nods; he obviously knows where Dieter found the passage about the writer experimenting with his characters. ‘Do you write as well?’ he asks then.

‘A little poetry, nothing important. But I’d like to write a novel one day – if I can find the right subject.’

‘A story, that’s what you need,’ says Casper. ‘I was in Vienna in March. I did the lights for Merce Cunningham.’

‘I saw it,’ says Dieter recalling the American troupe among the sculptures of the Museum of the Twentieth Century – movement invading the merely static; live art

from New York, a city with a population double that of shamed, post-nazi Austria. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows the trees in the Schweizer Garten provided a backdrop as bizarre as bronzes and dancers inside. Restlessly he returned to work on his diploma painting, promising himself that one day soon he too would go out into the world – where he now stands, facing the star who only a few weeks ago was guest of honour at a White House dinner given by the President and Mrs Kennedy. ‘I saw your name on the poster,’ Dieter goes on. ‘I looked for you –’

‘But you couldn’t see me.’ Casper smiles, flattered perhaps. ‘I was there all right – behind the lights.’ A laugh suggests how much he enjoyed himself, screened by the dazzle of his projectors. He is not going to explain that in Austria he wore a dark wig and dispensed with glasses altogether.

The older man intervenes: ‘I thought you might just be Italian –’

‘I have relations in South Tirol.’

‘In the mountains! Where were you born?’

Dieter hesitates, tempted to tell the truth as he has never been before; there is something unusual about this man – fatherly, civilized – he might understand; but as usual he names Innsbruck, in the north of the country. ‘I studied in Vienna – at the Academy.’ The blush feels as though it is about to explode in his cheeks; he knows he must not talk

too much and yet he goes on: ‘They rejected my diploma work. People don’t like being shown the truth in Austria.’

‘Showing the truth?’ Casper looks startled. ‘That’s not easy anywhere – is it, *Herr Doktor*.’

‘So you keep telling me.’ All at once his companion falls into that curious mix of German and popular Viennese the Kaiser himself allegedly spoke: ‘*Und was war der Gegenstand Ihrer Arbeit?*’ (And what was the subject of your work?)’

Again Dieter hesitates. A glance at Casper, and he replies in English: ‘I painted an execution – in a concentration camp. I put myself into it, as the executioner, and the Austrian Chancellor, assisting me. We’re all guilty.’

‘You were hardly born!’

‘I didn’t hurt anyone but it’s like – I don’t know the word – *die Erbsünde* –’

‘Original sin,’ translates the older man. ‘Few people believe in it, not just in Austria. So what happened?’

‘They confiscated the painting. Then the police broke my door and took away everything else – of my work I mean.’

The doctor, Viennese or whoever he is, sighs. Obviously moved he looks at Dieter. ‘Memories,’ he says nodding slowly. ‘I too had to leave Vienna once. Anyway, is that why you are so interested in this painting?’ He motions at the torture scene on the wall when Casper interrupts: ‘I’m sorry, guys, but I’d like to buy this drawing. Would you mind cutting it out?’

‘Take the book,’ says Dieter. ‘I just started it.’

‘How much?’

‘I don’t want money for it – not from you.’

Casper smiles. ‘So we’ll swap. Come and choose one of mine; or I’ll do a new one for you. Are you going to Spoleto by chance? I have a show at the festival.’

‘I know.’

‘You do?’ For a moment longer Casper looks at the drawing and closes the book, clearly his now. ‘Can you come to the opening – July six?’

‘In the evening,’ adds the doctor. ‘My name is Thomas Fisher, what’s yours?’

‘Alt – Dieter –’

‘A relation?’

‘I used to call him uncle.’

‘You *used to call* him uncle?’

‘My father was a second cousin –’

‘Ah! And he is well?’

‘He is fine I think – happy at last in his fame. You know Wolfgang Alt?’

‘I did – before the war.’ At once Fisher’s humour seems to have flown, and they face each other, grasping what has been implied rather than said. A promising expressionist once, Dieter’s distant relation abandoned his art for the realist style favoured by the Nazis and to end his career as a still

more commercial painter, the doyen of Austria's Fantastic Realists.

'Wolfgang Alt,' Fisher says pensively and as though to weigh up the youngster. But he smiles, 'I'm sorry, we really must go. You're a fine draughtsman – remarkable – I'd like to see more of your work. Come early. I mean it, do, we're taking a big house in Spoleto. Best to ask for us at the gallery – leave a message there – you'll see the posters.'

Moments later Dieter finds himself on his own again, left not quite so easily as met. Spellbound he remains where they shook hands, and he watched the artist and his companion walk away, wondering about their relationship. The Festival of *Two Worlds* has been on his itinerary from the time he planned his trip, originally promised himself for his degree; inadvertently he is to go there invited, to trade a drawing with Kid Casper! His elation at sunrise revives: he is going the right way, forward, not back, and at last he returns to Piero's painting. There as well three men stand in the foreground, as he just stood between his new acquaintances; not unlike his diploma work it consists of more than one scene, portraying torture and suffering. And yet, no longer is the picture open to him; the discordant images of Casper's art are pressing on his mind. He'll be back but now he too must leave, without appearing to be running after the star.

*'Und hier meine Damen und Herren, Die Geißelung, eins der wichtigsten und schönsten Werke von Piero della Francesca!'* (And

here, ladies and gentlemen, we have the *Flagellation*, one of the most important and beautiful works by Piero della Francesca!)

He freezes. A group of tourists is pouring into the room, German *and* Austrian, as he hears from the chatter over their plodding, scraping feet. Already the guide is beginning to explain: the mysterious youth in the painting is a portrait of Duke Federico's brother, Oddantonio, Count of Urbino; flanked by his wicked counsellors, Manfredo dei Pio on the left, Tommaso dell'Agnello to the right; both of whom were killed with Oddantonio in the plot of 1444 ....

Dieter steps aside. He knows the interpretation is wrong, even if some art historians will still stick to its tradition. Should he raise his voice, *Meine Damen und Herren*, that's the wrong text? I'm afraid we lost the message connecting these two scenes in fore- and background – that is, it never came down to us, regardless of the words Piero may have copied from the Bible and attached to the frame that is no longer here. Or is he, an artist himself, to allow some forty people to go away under an illusion Piero never intended? Of course they prefer a story to a few open-ended speculations about the artist and his political works, like the Arezzo cycle, for example, commissioned to promote a new crusade! But they turn, drawn to Raphael's *La Muta* next on the wall, and Dieter slips to the door. For an instant he stops in the *studiolo* – the little study – through which he came; a keeper

pointed out some of the detail in the *intarsie* – among the first still lifes in European art – that decorate the panelling. Now the room is empty, faintly scented timbers encasing half light. Silence, calm, were they what the architect, led by Piero maybe, tried to impart? Or has Federico, the Renaissance prince who used to complain of having wasted a day if he had not learnt something new in its course, himself lent a hand in the design? Whatever, contemplation, peace, little could be further from Dieter's mind. Where is the exit, where are the guards? Halfway down a gallery he has not seen before he turns back, to the Duchess' apartment. A faint echo might remind him of the discourses Castiglione set in the *sala delle veglie* – about the *noble art of painting* not least – but more distant voices suggest the direction of the staircase. At breakneck speed he dashes down the long shallow steps better suited to the quadruped gait of a horse than his; past a startled ticket seller he darts across the inner courtyard and out into the open.

The midday sun hits him face-on. White-hot it stops him in his tracks, making him gasp and blink. Schoolgirls mill in a coach about to leave the square. A precocious brunette flirted with him in the palace as he hastily sketched her friend on a window seat across the room but felt too shy to talk. Coal-eyed she gazes at him, as if to reproach him for their separation. He swallows, still breathing hard, but at last gives a wave. Her hand rises, he can see the beginnings of a

smile. With her friends she suddenly turns to look at something on the other side – a Cadillac parked where the coach hid it from his view, shocking pink, longer than a pair of little Fiats nose to nose next door. Presently its top begins to lift from the windshield and yards of cream material fold into the body. Casper lounges in the boat-like cabriolet, playing the ivory wheel with two fingers. Fisher sits beside him on the white leather bench, upright and straight as he peers from under the brim of an old-fashioned Panama; Dieter's sketchbook is in his hands. The car rolls forward, describes a half circle and behind the coach glides downhill – a glimpse of America, success and fame; and old Austria, where even under fire once her officers rode out in white tunics.

## **II. London Heathrow Airport. Tuesday, 23 September, night**

‘Thank you, Mr Alt.’ The immigration officer glances at the British passport but for a moment. One of the first passengers to disembark, the painter returns the smile of recognition, descends into the custom hall and crosses its floor. Under the Perspex hood of a pay phone he sets down the cardboard tube and realizes, address book in hand, that he has no English money. A porter is pleased to change a five-dollar bill for a handful of coins; even he seems to have a good idea who the arrival is.

‘It’s Dieter at Heathrow. Any news?’ At once his shoulders drop and his voice falls to a resigned low: ‘I’ll be at the Connaught. I’ll call you in the morning.’

Blearily Alt eyes the customs hall at the end of day. His flight number lights up and a baggage carousel starts up creakily while most of his fellow travellers have yet to clear immigration. Those through flock around the still bare conveyor, stop and walk away to return with measured impatience. For a few minutes the artist observes the patterns of their paths: circling, spiralling lines, with dots and blots for the halts, like the bodies he saw in Africa strewn on barren land. A group of young men breaks the image. Noisily, with similar holdalls each, they come bouncing through the hall when Alt spots the pretty blonde

among them: athletic yet feminine, with an animated glow on the cheeks. At once she notices the painter's stare, and her face darkens: you're too close. She says nothing to her companions, though. At their centre she escapes from his sight. Charlie, too, he reflects for a moment, has grown into a stranger.

Alt slips his address book back in the satchel, forgetting the second coin, which he placed in the slot but didn't need to push down; he had better find a porter. To the same man who changed his dollars: 'An old trunk, please – they may not get it on the conveyor.' A luggage tag changes hands, and he sits down on a chair, looking forward only to getting to his bed at the Connaught, where he usually stays. Years ago he was at home in London and yet not, just as he never settled in Vienna or with his adoptive parents in Innsbruck. Only at Hochleiten, which they sold on his behalf, had he felt he belonged, as he might have in the Marches, Tuscany or Umbria one day. Ellen, preparing for the interview, asked him about changes he had seen in his lifetime; reminding him she'd been a young girl half his age when they first met. (But she caught up so to speak, increasing her share of his years all the time, involved with a writer older than him on and off.) A little jealous then and reluctant too because of its loss Alt began with a description of Hochleiten – his first world of solitude as she presently called it, whence all comparison must flow. In a steep meadow, on a mere hint of

a terrace, whitewashed walls squatted under the timbered upper floor and a shingle roof weighed down with rocks. The bread oven, the barn and a motley of other outbuildings sprang from the mountainside around the house that had neither running water nor electric light; pipes bored from pine trunks with long corkscrew-like drills fed the fountain outside it; the *Abort* was a shielded seat on the balcony, ablaze with geraniums for a few weeks in summer. The forest surrounded the meadow, which was so steep that even the hens needed crampons or so someone joked. Clouds often lay at its foot. Hopelessly the people in the valley looked up at them then while the sun coloured all that young Dieter could see.

‘I got it, Mr Alt.’ For a moment the painter does not respond – the porter is back with a beat-up old trunk on his cart. ‘Shall *I* take that?’

Alt shakes his head, too tired to wonder how the man knew his name, too weary even to open his mouth. In a straight line, clutching the cardboard tube he makes for the green – NOTHING TO DECLARE – exit from the hall. He pays no attention to the solitary customs officer watching his approach. Determined to find a taxi, get to his hotel and to bed fast, he neither hears his call nor notices that the porter is being stopped behind him. A tap on the shoulder pulls up also the passenger.

‘I was calling you, sir. May I see your passport?’

Disconcerted Alt searches the pockets of his coat, he has to put down the cardboard tube to find it in his satchel.

Looking the arrival up and down the officer compares him with his photograph. His own face is cheesy, of a mere boy, who spends his life indoors. 'Are you resident in this country, sir?' he asks a little pompously.

Alt points: the second page, open at the end of the young man's nose, actually gives the reply.

'But where do you live, sir? New York?'

'And Mexico.'

'But are you resident there, sir?'

'Where?'

'In Mexico.'

'Not at the moment. In fact, I'm selling the house.'

'Then – are you about to take up residence here again, sir?'

Should he be taking up residence in London again? The idea irritates Alt. Nor does he care for uniformed men prying into his affairs – in allegedly post-Nazi Austria he grew wary of them.

'No,' he replies firmly. 'Could we get to the point, please?'

The officer takes a step back. Even if he had seen a photograph of the artist before he might not have recognized him now: hollow-eyed and drawn, sporting more than two days' growth of stubble on his fading tan, all of which goes to make the appearance nothing short of disreputable,

dangerous even, while Alt's usual warmth drips to an icy chill. This arrogance, as the younger man perceives it, presently tilts the balance of his judgement. He is almost certain that the passenger has nothing to hide but it's too late to back down, especially in front of a porter; a semblance of dignity has to be preserved. His cheeks are flushed. 'Would you mind opening this?'

For a moment Alt stares at the man but then helps the porter to heave his trunk from the cart on a low table along one side of the screened corridor. Passengers are beginning to trickle through as he undoes the locks and folds back the doors – a small wardrobe to all intents and purposes, complete with drawing and painting things, stands ready for inspection. The officer does not probe deeply, though, patting rather than searching the clothes rehung at Khartoum. He pulls out a drawer or two, pushes each back, and seems satisfied. 'What's this, sir?' He motions at the cardboard tube.

Alt shrugs. 'Something I made for my daughter once, a figure.'

'Can you open it, please?' The officer watches more keenly each time yet another layer of tissue paper comes off; he can't help but notice the deep scars, obviously old, across the passenger's palms. Toy cars and trains form the *Motorman* – a mechanical centaur – who rolls on rubber

wheels and has windscreens complete with wipers for eyes. 'I just got it back,' says Alt holding it up with a smile.

'May I see?' The customs man means he wants to touch. Opening up his hands he receives the little work. 'You made it but had to get it back?'

'It had been sold without my knowledge –'

The officer almost tut-tuts: 'And how much did you have to pay for it, sir?'

Alt hesitates, he has no intention of giving away what Charlie might have done or not, while the price too inadvertently embarrasses him. 'One hundred and fifty five thousand dollars,' he declares as he must.

'A hundred and fifty thousand dollars!' the young man gulps. Never before has he held anything so valuable in his hands. 'Have you a receipt?'

'I told you – I made it myself. In this country. In any case, as far as I know, art's duty free.'

'But it's toys! Cars, engines, little men. Who says it's art?'

'I do, if it helps,' snaps the painter as a sly grin creeps over the porter's face, and an older customs man approaches from the landside of the corridor.

'A hundred and fifty thousand dollar!' blurts the junior, nearly dropping the figure on the table. 'He says it's a work of art.'

'This?' A sharp look from the senior sizes up the arrival and his odd pieces of luggage; he is experienced enough to

see that Alt is no ordinary man. 'There is duty payable on it if it isn't,' he says then. 'And tax.'

**12. Ingrid's Munich digs. Night from Tuesday to  
Wednesday, 24 September**

He knew nothing about a bomb, still can't believe it, protests Zora Berlin and turns to the window overlooking the street. Where is that car his brother went to get? What more can he say before he escapes? His voice is about to fail he has talked so much, defending himself over the changes to the wrap Charlie had had in mind. A modicum of trust has to be restored in the girl – until she too will be out of the country – or she may give them all away yet.

'This is big art, Charlie, you said so yourself, bigger than any of us now that it's out in the world! It was your idea, of course, but then we all contributed to making it what it is on this scale –'

'You should have told me that you wanted to change it! You nearly killed four men! May kill three of them still!'

'They'll get them down!'

'Will they?' A glance at the television, buzzing with some German soap by now, and Charlie falls to a chair, a bundle of anger and fear, hope and doubt, long in need of rest, of course beyond sitting still. Already she pulls herself up again, with his first step towards her. In tweeds and flannels – *all'inglese* for autumn – Berlin stops by the screen. Something ghostly appears about his straw complexion and hair next to the flickering blue light – smudged, she thinks, seeping

because of the Scotch he cannot stop drinking. He avoids her eyes even as he tries to sound assertive; his lower lip is swollen and split where she hit him earlier: 'Of course they'll get them down, Charlie. You saw the rescue team –' The door bell rings; at once he picks up his bag. 'Mahler can say what he likes if we don't speak up! Is that what you want?'

A shake of the head.

'I'll share – accept – responsibility! We'll talk it over, Charlie, must – but please let's get out of the country first! Are you sure I can't exchange that ticket? I could make the reservations straight away.'

'I'll have to sign for it first.'

'Of course.' Short of opening the door he holds out his hand but she only backs off further. 'I'm sorry, Charlie – I thought you'd agree. In New York we'll explain what you meant to do. Even in this country Mahler has opponents – half the electorate! He alone is to blame for the accident. You mustn't torture yourself!'

Torture: on her own then Charlie sits by the radio, waiting for news. AFN Munich, serving American forces stationed in the country, are more forthcoming and less grave too than the Bavarian stations she has heard. The German TV crew at the castle has long signed off, with a dramatic last report of a technical hitch, something about a leaking fuel tank and the equipment for cutting through those rails. A single spark, someone was bound to mention the danger of it

happening. Instantly her imagination conjured up a ball of fire with the three men still trapped on the bridge. But they must have extinguishers in the cockpit, the others tried to reassure themselves more than her, and left minutes later as there remained little to look at but one another; making themselves thin on the ground or so one of them recalled the original plan. Exhausted after their sleepless night Andrea and Ingrid crashed out in the room next door. They are to be up again at four, heading for the Karwendel, this time with their hiking rather than climbing gear. There are several railway stations on the Tirolean side of the mountains, where they'll split: Andrea and his girl for the Brenner and Italy; Charlie for Innsbruck airport or so again her plan.

Raindrops tap on the window panes Berlin peered through earlier, a clock strikes at a church she cannot see, twelve slow clonks followed by plaintive bells. Shivering Charlie shuts the window and opens it again. It's a childish thought, if only she could turn back time itself – she would were it not so long since the day she told Zora Berlin how she meant to mark her coming of age! Like so many painters, sculptors, writers and composers, anyone in the arts, he frequented Grandfather Steinberg's Umbrian house, where his theories on the role of artists and intellectuals in modern society started many a lively discussion. From their first meeting *il professore*, as he was often called because of his connections

with the University of Rome, took an interest in the young Londoner, quizzing her about papers and magazines, shows and TV, which was only natural for a man who had recently given a series of lectures *On the Terror of Mass Media*. Soon he won her trust.

‘Wow, it’s *big!*’ Amazed Berlin looked at the sketch she had produced, showing the main tower at Neuschwanstein in a straight pink wrap. ‘Just think: TV is bound to pick it up, it’s going to be news, *news art* –’

‘Big art, full scale, broadcast in real time, all over the world,’ interjected Charlie.

‘What an idea! And the image! How shall I put it – upstanding? Maybe you could make it a little more explicit –’

‘I’d rather let people use their imagination.’

‘But you’ll need money.’

‘I can raise that.’

‘I know the people who made the wraps for one of Christo’s works. Shall I ask them?’

Charlie had heard of Berlin’s contacts, names dropped from his lips more readily even than ideas. Steering him to a seat in the lemon garden she took him into her confidence: she had found height, diameter and details of balconies and roof in a book containing the principal plans of the castle; and verified them by comparison mainly with photographs taken during a recent recce. But she’d also need help getting

the stuff to the top – an experienced climber, though she was not afraid of heights herself; she had made sure of that too, with a course in a Dolomite *Klettergarten* at the beginning of summer.

Berlin gazed at her in amazement. ‘I have heard your grandfather saying – not without concern, I recall – that you’re something of a daredevil. But you’ll need troops – *schlepping* – driving, picking locks. My brother is doing postgraduate work in Munich. He and his girlfriend go off to the mountains every weekend.’

The couple arrived a week later. At first sight Charlie took to Ingrid but disliked her friend, who was a post-graduate student of philosophy, politics and economics. Though she knew that they shared only their German-Jewish father, a noted Etruscologist settled in Italy after the war, the difference disconcerted her: painfully thin, angular, dark, Andrea Berlin looked the exact opposite of his jovial half-brother; at times the very way he moved seemed to express nothing but arrogance if not contempt. Nonetheless he appeared genuinely interested, even keen when it came to working out who or what exactly would be required for her project; nor did he ever question her role: Charlie had no doubt that he accepted her as the artist whose vision alone was to be shaped just as she saw it. At Malaspesa, an abandoned farmhouse on Grandfather Steinberg’s land, they made their secret workshop. Zora, teaching a summer course

at the Foreign University in Perugia, provided the link with the outside: among them a firm of sailmakers at Leghorn, and a Milanese art dealer soon after.

None of that charged time revives in Charlie's memories now, nor can she think of what she initiated as her work anymore. She had meant to let everyone guess who put up the wrap; her parents alone would have known better. On the eve of her birthday she would send them a message, favouring neither father nor mother with what she would say: I have come of age; thanks to you I too am an artist but now I stand alone. Zora and his brother have crossed every one of her intentions, and yet, how can she distance herself from what they did? The accident and the suspense of its outcome only heighten her fear that the fault is hers alone.

Of course she can escape to Tirol; from Innsbruck by air London is but two hours away. Dieter's birthday present and the Concorde ticket to New York are awaiting collection there. In America she'd be safe – behind what, whom?

From the battles her mother fought with the ex-husband Charlie knows of the lawyers protecting his interests. Maybe they could defend her against extradition, even conviction – Zora was not altogether wrong about Mahler's responsibility for the crash. Who, though, will take away her shame? The Berlin brothers have vandalised her work. More than once has she read about women raped by men they trusted; too often in those reports she detected the slur of complicity –

that at least she is not prepared to accept. But the music in the background fades, *News from the Castle* the AFN announcer has begun to call it: the guys in the chopper are down, back on Earth, safe! Charlie barely hears the rest. All the while she has held back her tears but now they break, streaming down her face. In the dark she fumbles for her anorak, some time ago she emptied it of the bits and pieces of climbing gear. Only her money, driving licence and passport remain in the pockets, together with Dieter's letter. Earlier she noticed some stationery on the desk where Ingrid does art-work and paste-ups to supplement her grant.

Charlie keeps a few coins, sealing everything else in a padded envelope. There is an automat at the railway station where she'll get stamps. She is at the door when she hears a rustle.

'Where are you going?' asks Ingrid wrapped in the duvet from her bed. 'News?'

Charlie clutches the envelope, out of the light. 'Not yet,' she croaks. 'I need air.'

'Mind you don't get stopped.'

As Ingrid slips into the bathroom Charlie lets herself out of her flat.

**13. London Heathrow, night from Tuesday to  
Wednesday, 24 September. Dieter's memories of  
Spoleto in 1961**

Alt must wait. At the same time as Charlie leaves Ingrid's digs (minus one hour for BST of course) we see him outside a dimly lit glass box, somewhere in the depth of the terminal he entered two hours ago. The senior officer who will have to decide what's to be done about the *Motorman* is busy over a minor drugs haul; police and an interpreter have joined the customs men in his cubby-hole. Watching their shadows as though on screen Alt follows the ups and downs of their arguments, and soon drifts back into his past. With him we hear a voice we know from Urbino, where young Dieter first met Kid Casper and Fisher:

'I'm no fucking house painter. Who d'you think I am? Young Hitler?'

The door flies into Dieter's face. 'Mr Casper,' he says nimbly stepping out of the way. 'How are you?' An indignant stare makes him change his inquiry: 'Is Dr Fisher here?'

'Tom?' The peroxide mane flicks from the apple frames of new glasses; irate patches point up the cheek bones below. 'Sure. Go right in.' Socks flash – one red, one green – and Casper is gone.

Taken aback before he has arrived so to speak Dieter hears out the steps at the bottom of the stairs. His instinct is to leave, run for it himself, but he grips his satchel to which he has strapped no less than eleven sketchbooks by now. The light is soft on the landing and the air rather cooler than outside where a heat wave sent midday temperatures into the nineties a week ago. Hardly a sound filters into the palazzo an exhausted noble gave up to the *comune* of Spoleto after the war – a shelter still from the bustle of the little hill town; encouraging even the youngster as his eyes fix on the gallery door, rich with inlays once, now stripped of its surface, forbiddingly dark and poor. He presses the handle; limply it gives way under his touch. The smell of glue and saw dust mingles with that of fresh paint. A few men and women look as cut-outs against the glaring windows at the end of the space blitzed by Casper's tantrum.

In shirtsleeves and white flannels Fisher breaks the silence: '*Ci vuole un po di colore!*' He gestures at the walls, which have yet to dry. His arms rise as he begins to turn; and drop as he stops on unsteady feet, shaking his head hopelessly. 'I mean no disrespect – there are better buildings in your city – but it's Kid's work we want to show, not this monument to provincial ambition.' He falls abruptly silent, freezing Dieter on the threshold. As with Casper at first there shows not a glint of recognition in his eyes.

'Dieter Alt. In Urbino –'

‘But of course! We talked of you only last night, and here you are, thinner, or is it the tan?’ With both hands Fisher pulls him into the room. Again he motions at the walls. ‘Kid hates them. Do *you* think the white’s too hard?’

Dieter blinks. ‘What is it you are going to show?’

‘Why – Kid’s work –’

‘I meant which of his works.’

‘Ah!’ Mysteriously Fisher puts a finger to his lips, and points at the sketchbooks. ‘You’ve been busy, haven’t you? Here, put them on the chair. I can’t wait to look if you let me. But tell me first – where have you been?’

Starting with the day after they met, soon four weeks ago, Dieter recounts his moves. He speaks rapidly, bursting to share what he saw – only once, with a Franciscan, has he spoken German in all that time. He went to see Piero’s works at Borgo Sansepolcro, his birth place; Monterchi, Arezzo, Florence and Perugia but stopped in other cities too – Siena above all in his estimation. Drawn by the painter he returned to the first three from there – what stillness, he has no better word, almost abstract space and tone, though Piero’s figures remained breathtakingly human, real people! Indeed he fell in love with the fairest of them all – the *Madonna del Parto* at Monterchi – no doubt the most beautiful woman he’ll ever see! He even earned a little money, his watercolours sell themselves more or less; a Dutchman tried to buy his entire sketchbook in the Campo

at Siena but Dieter couldn't let it go – his sketches of the Madonna were inside. Now he'd like to stay put for a week or two, provided he can find a cheap place.

'But you're staying with us!' exclaims Fisher. 'We invited you!'

Disconcerted Dieter looks at the man, a stranger still, whose relationship with Casper he can but guess. Or has he seen him before? With improbably red hair, but that same almost military stance which seem curiously forlorn and boyish too; with a copy of the *New York Times* in one hand, a bunch of white chrysanthemums in the other, while ghost-like faces filled the windows of a railway carriage behind him – one of several *Alts* the portrait hangs in the Austrian Gallery at the Belvedere in Vienna. Amazed he shakes his head; a chuckle expresses relief at the overdue discovery: 'Wolfgang painted you, right?'

Fisher grimaces as though to distort all possible resemblance. Once again his hands go up, brushing the graying crop on his head. 'He never came clean about why he made my hair so red – my sympathies were never proletarian. I wished for fairness, no more. But I left before the paint was dry; I gather he filled in a lot, including those funereal flowers. He challenged me: I could have my portrait if I returned to collect it.'

'But he sold it,' objects Dieter.

‘After I had refused his offer – it implied that I had left without good reason. I meant to go to New York but stayed on with a cousin in London, an art dealer, instead. After the war I started out in America – with modern art. Even professionally I had no reason for going back to Vienna.’

Dieter nods, disconcerted not a little by the confidence he could not have expected. His gaze fastens on the butterfly in the dealer’s collar. Animate with the faint heaves of his breath the old-fashioned piece of silk nestles in the folds of the exquisitely laundered shirt. In the background the helpers have withdrawn to the windows beyond their work table, planks rigged up on wooden trestles, laden with paints – pale ones or so the splashes on their tins suggest. He says, still shy to accept the invitation no regular Austrian would have extended. ‘I’m sure I can find a room. I didn’t mean to invite myself.’

‘You’re not!’ Fisher sounds quite stern: ‘You can help me straight away. The walls are too obtrusive. Kid refuses to get involved in the purely environmental. I find it difficult to imagine – perhaps a shade of yellow would soften things? What do you think?’

Already Dieter has visualised the suggestion and rejected it. He has yet to hear what’s to be shown he reminds the dealer.

‘Ah!’ Fisher’s voice drops to a murmur: ‘You mustn’t talk about it. Not to anyone – least of all Kid – unless I give you

the all clear. He's thinking of it in terms – we're calling it a *Post-Industrial Assembly*.'

'So there'll be nothing on the walls?'

Exactly. I just showed his last batch of *Multiples* in New York. He feels he needs to do something new.'

Dieter read about the exhibition and has seen pictures of Casper's *Auto Motive Assemblies* before that. During his election campaign Jack Kennedy inspected them at a Madison Avenue gallery (Fisher's presumably) and promptly made a speech: he considered the *Assemblies* – created from motor industrial debris, rigidly immobile despite the name – challenging art; not necessarily beautiful or comfortable but sharp with the younger generation's desire to rebuild the future – nothing less, in similarly heightened words, than an artistic expression of his own quest for *new frontiers* ....

'Is it colourful?' asks Dieter now, wondering how dominant the new sculpture could be in the space that once upon a time was the grandest of all the salons in the house. Despite their modern aspect he thinks of Casper's *Assemblies* in traditional terms. But Fisher says no, the work isn't colourful at all. It must be huge if there is only the one, ventures Dieter but again the dealer only shakes his head.

'You mean – it's immaterial?'

'Exactly.' Abruptly Fisher grips the visitor's elbow and pushes him out the door as a pair of motorscooters depart noisily from the courtyard below. 'Imagine it – imagine it as

imaginary. Purely imaginary.’ The dealer pulls a handkerchief from the depths of his flannels; a whiff of two-stroke fuel, incompletely burnt, has risen to the landing and now mingles with the scent of limes Dieter first noticed in Urbino. ‘Post-industrial,’ continues Fisher. ‘Without industry, nothing will be made. A post-industrial assembly – as you said – must be immaterial by definition then. Of course we can’t *tell* anyone. Mustn’t! There’s got to be surprise – *total* surprise!’

Dieter frowns at the logic; industry isn’t the only producer of things. People outside it also make objects that are tangible – artists, for example. The notion of a gallery full of people, assembled to see a major new work by the superstar of modern art, when, in fact there will be nothing of the kind, is amusing, perhaps; appealing to the prankish also in him; but not new. Is Casper finished, burnt out, as his looks may suggest? Or is there more after all to the idea? De Kooning, no less, one of the grand old Europeans in USA, gave a major drawing for the express purpose that a younger artist might rub it out.

‘There’s a balcony – where the master of the house could watch what was going on below. Kid’s installing a pair of cameras there,’ Fisher explains as if he guessed those misgivings. ‘The visitors won’t be aware of them. Mechanical images – Kid wants to make a film of it all – that’s what it’s all about.’

Back in the gallery Dieter looks around. Across the width of the building the room is perhaps a hundred feet long, half that in depth. The windows look up to the fortress – *La Rocca* – high above town. Despite the heat of approaching noon the white of the walls chills the light that modern panes let in undistorted.

‘You should go for a colour,’ he suggests. ‘Something fairly strong.’

‘The building is protected. The *comune* sent all these –’ Fisher’s head inclines just slightly, ‘busy bodies. They’ll be up in arms before you can even mix a colour they don’t consider traditional.’

‘We can paint at the last moment,’ insists Dieter sizing up the walls, ‘after everyone’s gone to bed. In the morning you don’t let them in – you’re installing the work itself. No one will have an idea until the guests arrive in the evening.’

‘Have you done something like this before?’

‘I have painted walls. My adoptive father, Wolfgang’s brother, is an architect. I used to work for him during my holidays. We’ll need a compressor – nothing big.’

‘And what colour,’ a curious fire suddenly gleams in the dealer’s eyes, ‘have you in mind?’

Dieter smiles. ‘Why, pink of course!’

‘Pink!’

‘Like his glasses, the Cadillac –’

‘I’m sorry you had to wait, Mr Alt – Mr Alt?’ The senior customs officer on duty has dealt with famous travellers more often than he cares to remember. Too many of them believed that they, higher mortals, stood above the law, though they were prone to expose themselves as common indeed once brought down to earth. Nonetheless he believes that Dieter Alt is no ordinary man. Instantly he associated an abundance of colours with the name his subordinates had reported, of hills rolling to the distant horizon, where the landscape gave up its geometry to the sky – like the image of a promised land the painting had drawn the officer into the spread he unfolded not long ago in the supplement that came with his Sunday paper. He no longer remembers the title of the work; but recalls vividly how he would have liked to have entered and made himself a garden among the hills in mid-picture, a world as tranquil and remote as could be from the dismal bowels of the terminal he inhabits at LHR. By the suddenly open door to his office his reception disarms the arrival.

‘Good evening,’ he says cheerfully and with a pleasant voice, though it’ll be midnight soon, and only now the painter focuses on him. ‘Roy Holmes is my name. I’m sorry my colleagues didn’t recognize you, Mr Alt. I hope we have a misunderstanding here. Please take a seat.’

With reluctance Alt steps over the threshold and sits down in the smoky interior vacated presumably with an

arrest – disconcertedly he concludes that he never saw the people, whom he had heard and even observed for a while through the glass, come out. The *Motorman* grins at him on the desk he looks across, one point in a threesome of heads above the field cast by a single anglepoise – the light too has changed; the fluorescent tubes on the ceiling are off.

‘Judging by the toys in this work,’ Holmes presently begins the interview, ‘you must have created it some time ago.’ A smile betrays appreciation as well as a sense of humour. ‘I have four granddaughters – two sets of two – they’d love a thing like this. Can you recall when?’

Alt tries to think, searching for an incident or event the memory of which would allow him to pinpoint the date. The harder he concentrates the more his sense of time seems to diffuse as if that same past, which keeps returning of its own will, had never been his. Annoyed he shakes his head.

‘Charlie – my daughter Clarissa that is – was three – four at most when I made it for her. She’ll be eighteen next week. I’ll reconstruct if you insist.’

‘Not at all! Can you recall whether the work has ever been on show?’

‘Just once, my dealer showed it, with a number of similar things. It’s never been offered for sale, though.’

‘But those others were sold.’

‘Some of them. Others I gave away.’

‘So there can be no doubt that they – including this –’ the hand, which is big and rough, obviously a gardener’s, touches not quite, ‘are *bona fide* works of art.’

‘I hope so.’ Alt shrugs and sees the officer take a piece of paper and unscrew an old-fashioned fountain pen.

‘And does it have a title?’

‘Charlie called it the *Motorman*.’

A smile and Holmes begins to write. Mesmerized the artist observes the hair and shadow lines as they flow from nib to paper, blue-black on not quite white (there is a good deal of pink in the lamp), ascenders and descenders, curving, then straight. Long, long ago he himself was taught to write like that, his teeth on edge as he engraved his slate with a slate pencil at the single-class school in the valley below Hochleiten. Why is it that he has always been more familiar with old people than the young – because his grandfather and great-aunt brought him up?

‘Mr Alt, are you with me?’

The painter starts. For a split second he wonders why the question was not asked in German; and, of course, Holmes looks a little older than himself – ten years, maybe less. ‘I’m sorry – watching you write with a fountain pen –’

‘They’re back in fashion, I gather. My father’s, this.’

Wistfully the officer eyes the instrument. ‘Now then, I understand you said you bought the *Motorman* back recently. Isn’t it unusual for an artist to do that?’

‘Perhaps!’ Alt shrugs. ‘I have yet to hear why it was sold. I had no warning, I was in Africa, suddenly it was on the market. My dealer heard about it and bought it back.’

‘In New York?’

‘Milan –’

‘And the price?’

‘One hundred and fifty five thousand dollars, US.’

Holmes downs his pen; with visible reluctance he picks up a reference book. ‘It must be obvious to you,’ he resumes, ‘that we have never seen a case like this, and I’m certainly no tax expert. Works of art are exempt from duty but not, unfortunately, from tax. On the face of it, if you insist on bringing it into this country, Mr Alt, you appear liable to VAT. On the other hand as it was in fact bought in an EEC country – which Italy of course is – maybe the value added tax paid there could be reclaimed, offsetting –’

‘How much?’ breaks in Alt.

‘Fifteen per cent –’

‘But I made it here, like myself it used to live here! Now you’re asking me for – how much is it?’

Holmes produces a calculator, unable at first to come to terms with the keys that seem to small for his fingers. At last he arrives at a result, frowns at its sight and calculates it again with pen and paper. ‘Twenty three thousand two hundred and fifty dollars,’ he announces with a sigh. ‘In pounds of course.’

‘That’s not right!’ exclaims Alt, the principle is wrong, even if the sum proved correct. His heart is pounding, his mouth bone dry, but those windscreen eyes that he himself put in, are they mocking him? Or is their glint suggesting something?

‘What,’ he asks, ‘if I take it apart? Bits and pieces – you need to tax them?’

Holmes looks startled. ‘I don’t know – I guess you may be right, why not! What do you need to undo it? We have some tools here, a screwdriver –’

Alt shakes his head, there are no screws in the *Motorman*. With both hands he takes the figure to pull off the head – of course he can put it all together again but the neck is more solid than he thought. His knuckles go white with the strain; his legs suddenly will not stand! Gasping – he had better take another beta blocker straightaway – he fumbles for the chair behind. Headlong he falls and hears his own crash though what on Earth is this? He is up on the ceiling, hovering in a corner of this dim glass box! Down below he sees Holmes on his knees. The *Doppelgänger* lies before him in a pool of light. Pummelling his chest the officer shouts: ‘Mr Alt - *alt* – Alt – *alt* –’

**14. Munich. Wednesday, 24 September, morning**

*'Ich habe den Turm eingewickelt, in Neuschwanstein.'*

'Was ham'S tan? Can you speak more clearly?'

'I put that thing on the castle!'

'The French letter?' A flash of amusement strikes doubt and sinks in disbelief. 'You?'

'I did. I want to give myself up.'

Polizeimeister Gerhard Liebl, himself not yet thirty, pricks up his ears – what's in this voice: English, American? There are not a few US kids in Bavaria, off-spring of the forces still stationed here. As if he could tell from her appearance he eyes the bedraggled figure who moments earlier has rung the bell to present herself at the bullet-proof window between lobby and front office of his station. With a shiver he notices the dripping rats' tails inside the collar of her anorak. Anyone as wet would feel distraught. He asks, 'Have you nowhere to go? Are you hungry?'

Charlie shakes her head, should she beat it, like some *Gammler* or tramp? Here, before she enters, is her escape. 'I'm alright,' she replies rattling the few remaining marks in her pocket. 'What happened at Neuschwanstein – it was my fault.'

Liebl frowns. No doubt there's American, English at any rate in her speech, while the German sounds approximately local enough. It's early, not yet six. Near the end of an

uneventful shift the policeman wishes she'd go away, come back if she must – an hour later by when the day chaps will be taking over from the three officers (one *Dienstgruppenleiter*, two *Wachbeamte*) manning the central Munich station for the night. Liebl got only a glimpse of the news. He gathers that as with so much else now that the elections are coming up the Ministerpräsident personally meddled in the Neuschwanstein prank, accident, case or whatever it may yet amount to. Terrorists, even a bomb were mentioned but then everyone nowadays seemed only too prepared to blame them – whoever they might be, as long as the distance was safe.

'I'm serious,' insists Charlie still in the lobby but the officer shakes his head. 'Listen at least,' she pleads falling into English. 'Please!'

Liebl sighs; at his buzz of the electric release Charlie advances into the front office. It's warm in here, and rather more with it than the London police station she was taken to after a demo once. A cigarette, propped on the rim of a brewery ashtray, sends a spiral of smoke into the stillness she ruptures – all at once the smoke diffuses, swirling in the draught she caused opening and shutting the door. An L-shape counter runs the length of the room almost; a flap, for entrance and exit, breaks the chest-high top. A desk on a platform, under a map of the city and its environs, stands near a silent telex machine. Two doorways, one of them

open, lead into the depth of the building, while a fanlight gapes behind a half-drawn curtain over three more desks and typewriters. Even inside the station the splashing rain sounds constant and strong.

From behind the counter Liebl observes her approach. A drag on the cigarette ends the watchful eyeing phase. 'Your father's a soldier – where's he stationed?' he asks.

Charlie rocks back on her feet. 'My father's nothing to do with this.'

'But you're American.'

'English. Half.'

'Still a soldier's daughter.'

Only now Charlie understands what the policeman is driving at, and recalls the American military license plates on the roads. There are British forces too stationed somewhere along the Rhine, or so she has heard. 'I'm here on my own. My father came from Innsbruck.'

'*A Tiroler!* Where's he now?'

'I don't know.'

'Not a *Schilebrer* –'

Charlie does not miss the grin. A boy at school made a similar suggestion once, and she put him on the floor in reply. This conversation too is beginning to verge on the ridiculous, however grim she feels within. 'I don't think so,' she snaps and lies not quite: 'I don't really know him.'

‘You don’t know him,’ repeats the officer slowly. No doubt he has heard something similar before. Suddenly:

‘Your mother – where does *she* live?’

‘In England.’

‘And you say you wrapped that thing round the tower.’

‘I did.’

‘On your own.’

‘On my own.’

Liebl laughs out loud. ‘You think I’m stupid – or what? You’re making this up!’

‘I’m not!’

‘Look – it’s true we’re relaxed here in Munich, we like a good joke. All the same it’s an offence to waste police time. You’re not telling me you handled a thing as big as that on your own. I do a bit of mountaineering myself, you know? I only got a glimpse of it last night but I saw it was big. If you’re responsible you must have had some help!’

‘It was my idea.’

‘It’s who did it that counts.’

‘But I planned, paid for it. I smuggled the stuff into this country, disguised as camping gear. I alone climbed to the top of the tower. I’m to blame. It’s immaterial whether anyone helped!’

For an incredulous moment the policeman stares at the girl. Who is this waterlogged mess sporting the kind of clothes he and his wife also put on in their leisure time?

Could they be climbing hands? Her fingers are small but sinewy, the nails short, chipped, broken in places, while there appears to be paint under some of the others. Of course it takes a climber to get laden to the top of Neuschwanstein and back – a strong if not mad one. But what is she about? How can she believe it's immaterial whether she had accomplices? She doesn't sound that simple nor naive. Or is she unconcerned because despite her protestations she didn't do what she has come to accuse herself of? Is she another of those self-centred cranks with a mission, determined above all to have stage and limelight to themselves?

Liebl stubs out his cigarette. 'Let's have a chat,' he says and goes to the far end of the counter, where he presently opens the entrance. 'Come in. Have you any ID?

## 15. Slough Hospital. Wednesday morning

Tousled silver, the hair fans out around the unshaven face. Teeth set on a transparent tube the mouth gapes slightly under the oxygen mask, arms and hands lie palms down on the sides of the bed. Electrodes have been stuck with pieces of plaster to a number of points on chest and limbs; a network of wires connects them to a set of machines at the head of the bed; their measurements show that Dieter Alt's heart is still beating; a drip feeding into a vein suggests there is a purpose yet in maintaining their flicker.

His lids tremble, flutter, open, and the pupils begin to adjust to the light reflecting from the ceiling. Shadows spread a fleeting veil, more vivid, defined, to his left. Blues drift in uncertain shapes, while tinges of yellow come floating over their edges – in and out, warmer here, cool there. A window, his mind concludes, behind a net curtain, with an autumn tree outside perhaps. But he doesn't want to look for the window, nor the tree, long his symbol of life – the light would be too bright. His head rolls to the darker side instead: he sees a woman, in a blue shift; bent over a table, she is busy arranging things on its top; a white belt gathers the shift over her hips. Their swelling shape, under those same colours, reminds him of a Picasso he once saw.

*She's laying out the instruments to cut you up. Like the triptych, remember? Those poor children you couldn't save.*

The nurse puts down whatever she just picked up. ‘Mr Alt? Are you awake, Mr Alt?’

But he feels no need of answering.

With the insistence that presumes a negative reply: ‘Can you *hear* me, Mr Alt?’

His eyes slip away, the lids slide shut. A door flaps, the scent of hospital air stays with him as Uncle Wolfgang begins to recite his fellow Academicians’ report:

Called to defend his diploma work before the Board of Examiners this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of May 1961, the candidate, attired in the customary dark suit but with a white T-shirt and tennis shoes instead of collar and tie, explained his painting meant to demonstrate some of the things he had been taught at the Academy: namely, to paint figures in action; a nude; an interior; and a landscape; all by employing various methods of perspective, with a single vanishing point in each of the first three panels – at the left, right and centre – while placing several such points within and without the fourth panel. As for the format of his work, the candidate explained that he had been inspired by *Christ’s Passion* in Hans Multscher’s altar at Sterzing, in South Tirol. *Picture Strips*, as he called them as if with reference to *Comic Strips*, were an ancient and once very popular form of art; entire churches had been decorated with them.

Professor Walde, Rektor and Chairman of the Board of Examiners, then ordered the verbatim transcript of the following questions and answers:

REKTOR

Tell me, this older figure – offering the injection to the executioner – might it not be seen as a portrait of the Austrian Federal Chancellor?

CANDIDATE

Just, sir. I made it very vague.

REKTOR

But you admit that the similarity was on your mind.

CANDIDATE

Yes sir – the idea –

Professor Winkler rose. He wished to apologize, to the Rektor and Professor Navratil, his other colleague on the Board, for the blatant slander perpetrated by the student, who had joined his class only this last year, after Professor Bertolini's retirement – all facts that Professor Winkler wished to put on record. He had had no warning of the submission, which had been painted without his but

perhaps on Professor Bertolini's advice, entirely outside the Academy.

The Rektor accepted Professor Winkler's apology. There were more questions, though, that he needed to ask in order to understand the submission:

REKTOR

As regards that younger figure – the executioner himself – would you explain it, please?

CANDIDATE

It's my portrait, sir.

REKTOR

We can see that.

CANDIDATE

I tried to make it as obvious as possible, sir –

Again Professor Winkler broke in, challenging the candidate to elucidate the libellous presumption of pairing himself with the first man in the land. Professor Navratil now objected that the President of the Austrian Republic, not the Chancellor, was the Head of State. Professor Winkler retorted that that was a matter of opinion; in any case, both,

currently, were members of the conservative People's Party. Professor Navratil disagreed: constitutionally the President of the Republic stood above all parties, even if he had been a Conservative before his election; nor should his colleague forget, as it once again appeared, that in Parliament his party held but a single seat more than the socialist opposition.

The Rektor reminded the Board that they were here to decide on a matter of art, not politics. He asked the candidate whether there was anything else he wished to say, especially in reply to Professor Winkler:

#### CANDIDATE

I want to say, sir, that Austria can't go on hiding behind the Germans forever; we were not their victims! The best Nazis were Austrian, like Hitler and Eichmann. We need to share this guilt or we shall fall again, hating, persecuting people because they might not agree with us. I know the Chancellor can't have been a Nazi, but I, too, didn't do what I painted. I never knew her but my mother was a Nazi. She worked for the SS.

REKTOR

Your mother?

CANDIDATE

Yes, sir, my mother. She died in Munich, in an air raid.

REKTOR

So there! Instead of dirtying your nest, shouldn't you be angry about that?

Silence. The Weißferner beckons at the end of the valley. A pair of eagles, wings stretched straight, draw their circles over the backdrop of the glistening glacier. Wagner stands by the organ in the little miners' church. Shyly he slides a hand over the keys, to feel, not press them.

'The sound of music,' hisses Uncle Wolfgang sitting on a stack of unsold paintings, 'by the son of a Hollywood composer! You should have said sorry, Dieter, that's all you need have done, say sorry, sorry, I won't do it again! Are you listening to me?'

Silence. The sky is a deep violet, as deep as the gentians around Grandfather Alt's house. In a linen shirt, black suede breeches and thick white socks his body lies in the coffin, an open box made from larch-wood planks. His mouth too is

open, gaping, dark, finally set. A pair of beeswax candles burn to either side of the head. Imperceptible almost their flames sway in the draft and reflect from the studs in his ears, tiny spheres of gold that he wore to protect himself from deafness. His dress shoes, with the old silver buckles, are missing. A little girl comes skipping down the Hochleiten road in them – hop – skip – hoppedihop – until they trip her, and she howls. Aunt Cecily, dead long before Charlie was born, picks her up. ‘Cry little girl, cry – the pain flies away with your cry!’

Silence. A different presence takes up Alt’s bedside. Shrouded, as he always imagined her, Death looks down on him. Somewhere behind that veil is a face, still and detached; he can see her cheekbones now, even eyes, gentle, peaceful eyes. And yet she took them all: his father, herself, grandfather and great-aunt; Uncle Wolfgang, even Ludwig, the architect, in his prime. Only Erika, his adoptive mother, survives.

**16. Munich again. Wednesday, 24 September, morning**

In the Bavarian capital meanwhile Charlie has progressed within the station she entered an hour ago. A blanket instead of the sodden anorak covers her shoulders as she sits on the single bunk in a cell at the back of *Polizeiinspektion Eims*. Glass bricks filter the gray rain-light falling from high overhead into the room, which is divided by a massive iron grating. A washbasin, waste bin and central heating radiator make up the furniture in the outer half. The bunk, a single seat and a lavatory are within the part inhabited by the prisoner, where even the lavatory bowl has been encased in concrete to protect it from kicks, and the sloping floor drains into a central gully; like a stable's it can be hosed clean. The seat and bunk too are of a similarly solid construction, concrete cubes with stripped pine tops. It all looks surprisingly modern, as if from a *Habitat* catalogue, Charlie thought at her first inward sight through the bars that allowed no doubt about the purpose of the accommodation. So whence her progress?

‘Look,’ said Liebl, ‘what’s the point coming here if you won’t say who you are?’

‘What I did is the point. A helicopter crashed, the *Marienbrücke* has been wrecked – four men could have been dead.’

‘But they aren’t, we’ve been over that! Don’t you want people to know about you?’

A shake of the head.

‘Why not?’

‘It should have spoken for itself.’

‘The condom?’

‘The wrap.’

‘Which was your idea –’

‘That’s what I said: I had an idea for a wrap. I am not important.’

Suddenly angry Liebl tore the interview form – *Erbobene Personalien* (Established Personal Details) – from the typewriter, for he had established nothing, least of all the young woman’s identity, though her person seemed entirely tangible before him. Like the duty officer at a police station in central London, where Charlie had snatched a racist banner, set it alight and driven an entire column of right-wing demonstrators before the petrol flames, he despatched her to the cells, to ponder there whether it was possible to remain anonymous nowadays. Then the Bavarian went home, glad to leave the case to the dayshift – that’s how we see the prisoner now, with the door to the outer half of the cell opening. A man in uniform trousers and open-neck shirt presently unlocks the grating to the inner part. ‘Hot!’ he says and holds out a mug. ‘Coffee?’

Only now Charlie looks up at the new face – a little older and more senior than Liebl perhaps; handsome in a brutal sort of way, with a sandy moustache and fashionably short hair to match the sporting grin. She gives a nod to receive the steaming drink, her first sustenance of the day.

‘Just took over,’ announces the arrival then, making himself at home on the seat a few feet from the bunk.

‘Branntner – *Oberkommissar* – in charge of the new shift.’ He pulls a pack of cigarettes from the breast pocket. ‘Smoke?’

‘No, thanks.’

‘Hungry?’

‘Not really.’

Branntner puts away the cigarettes he borrowed from one of his men. ‘Why won’t you give us your name? Problems with your parents? Don’t they understand you? I’d like to understand. Help, if you let me.’

Charlie sets down the mug. A copper she saw in a weepy with that Fifties idol – James Dean – spouted lines of the kind; Dieter had told her about the film. She is aware that the newcomer has not lit a cigarette for himself – Liebl, who also offered her one, did. Quietly she repeats that it doesn’t matter who she is, they have her confession. But how are they to investigate, objects Branntner, if they don’t know anything about her? How can they check she told the truth?

‘I gave you plenty of detail. More than enough to tell it was really me there on the tower.’

Branntner sighs, while Charlie sips her coffee. 'If you came from abroad – you're English, you said – where's your passport?'

A shake of the head.

'You know it's an offence not to identify yourself?'

A shrug.

'At least let's have a name! It'd be so much easier to talk!'

Silence.

Branntner frowns, what can be the idea of giving oneself up and yet not? He has travelled a bit – Italy and Spain, even Morocco last summer – but never to England, where neither weather nor food would please a Bavarian like him. Already he senses the grit under this bedraggled though not unattractive exterior he can't get through. Or is it because she is foreign to him that the young woman appears so detached? He has never met a terrorist – only amateurs so to speak, privileged kids out to make themselves interesting until they glimpsed the consequences of their ill-considered stunts, as one inevitably got in a city with a major university. He remembers an internal piece of information about the *New Wave*, circulated days before the murder of the head of the *Deutsche Bank*: how blindly some extremist groups still believed in their cause; how convinced even after Baader-Meinhof they remained that it was their mission to sort out the world – a *Scheinwelt* – sham – no normal person recognized as their own. Young would-be artists inclined to

such political make-believe, or so Brantner convinced himself a few years ago on the beat round the more avant-garde galleries of the city. Though not on the WANTED LIST, the stranger might well fit in with that mixed bill – how else is the policeman to assess what he can only see before him; as we too may but guess the intention that brought her here? All the same he has another go: ‘I saw what you did. Frankly – between you and me – the wife shrieked with laughter. The kids of course – a bit embarrassing – but they didn’t understand, no harm done. If that helicopter hadn’t crashed we’d be laughing still! Why did you do it? What for?’

‘Just that.’

‘For a lark?’

‘To make you think.’

‘Me?’

‘Anyone.’

‘But weren’t you trying to – to –’ Brantner nearly says desecrate as he has heard Mahler, ‘defile Neuschwanstein?’

‘Not at all. I quite like it.’

‘What about us – our country?’

‘It’s beautiful.’

‘And the people?’

‘Jolly, friendly if treated with respect.’

‘You really believe that?’ Brantner scratches his head.

‘Then why not say who you are? It was an accident. What’s the problem?’

‘Your colleague told me I have the right to remain silent. It says so on the form.’

‘So it does. Nevertheless there’s an obligation to provide proof of identity. I know you don’t have ID cards in England but here it’s an offence to go out without. Did he point that out to you too?’

‘You just did,’ snaps Charlie and turns to the wall.

Brantner gets up, taking the empty mug. ‘You’ll be going on then – if that’s what you want. Don’t blame us if you don’t like the move.’ A final question – potential complication – strikes him: ‘How old are you?’

‘What’s that got to do with it?’

‘It has a bearing on where you’ll be sent.’

‘Not to jail?’

‘Not if you’re under age.’

But she is of age, Charlie affirms, old – *alt* – enough for what she did. Still facing the wall she hears Brantner leave, and, moments later, back in the door.

‘Food for thought,’ he says rattling his keys, ‘the Mayor of Hohenschwangau, who organized the rescue, has had a heart attack.’

Charlie winces. When she saw the helicopter fall, that same feeling grabs her by the throat: ‘He’s dead?’

‘This morning.’ The officer advances to the bars separating him from the prisoner. ‘Max Pongratz would still be alive if you hadn’t caused such mayhem. You killed him – you – think on that!’

**17. In the new FAO Building, Uno-City, Vienna, Austria.**

**Wednesday, 24 September, morning**

‘Gentlemen, please!’ In the lobby of this nearly finished glass tower we hear the voice, commanding rather than pleading. A youngish man, tousled and fashionably unshaven in a black leather jacket, Armani jeans and silver Nike trainers, motions a gang of telephone engineers to get out of his way; busy around the reception desk they’re blocking his view through the centre of the building. ‘Thanks – are your phones connected yet? Tomorrow? Good work!’

Step by step then he backs out over the freshly tiled marble floor. Behind him the automatic doors slide apart, which he presently fixes in the open position. Once outside he resumes his position on the central sightline at right angles to the front and holds up the two Polaroids an Austrian Airlines courier delivered first thing this dismal morning. His gaze peels from the photograph in his left hand and turns to that in his right; next he focuses just beyond the reception desk; it’s there, against the backdrop of the surrounding park, that Dieter Alt’s triptych is to stand some twelve metres in from the rear elevation, also made of glass. The images in his hands are small but crisp, making the reduction less than it might have been otherwise. Straight away he is struck by the difference in colour and scale between the two sides. While the field glows vividly in

all its seasonal stages, and extends to the brow of a hill and on towards a horizon of distant mountains beyond, the figures appear almost black and on much closer ground, without even the hint of a limit to the more or less monochrome space. Only the holes, projecting slant shafts of light when Ed took the pictures, relieve the deadly scene: one reason no doubt why Fisher sent but a terse four-word message with the consignment: PLEASE TELEPHONE ON RECEIPT

Christof Holub will call, as soon as the time difference between Vienna and NYC allows it. It was his idea, inspired by his love of sacral art, to place a double-sided painting by an important contemporary artist in this building; through Fisher he approached Dieter Alt, long one of his heroes. A few weeks later he met the artist in Paris, with a model of the lobby and the free-standing triptych within. Surprised by its completeness Alt considered the proposal only for a moment. The idea of a work that was to be seen from outside as well as inside of the building appealed to him. There and then he agreed to the architect's dimensions and proposed delivery date, only on the subject would he not be drawn: at no stage would he be bound to even discuss the matter, let alone show anything before the work was finished. As for the price he left it to Fisher to negotiate it: five million dollars as became known soon after Holub had won the international competition for the project.

For a moment longer the architect tries to visualize the triptych in its place. He has no problems with the bright side, as he presently calls it, nor the holes in it; indeed he is pleased with their sculptural aspect and the way they appear to link not only front and back but the space throughout the lobby. He can see, too, where the dark side is coming from, of course, and how it is meant to contrast the reverse.

Altogether there can be no doubt about the validity of the work or its power – reminding himself of its sheer size Holub can feel the hair at the back of his neck stand on end. Why? Because there is rather more than just present-day Africa to those emaciated human shapes?

Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, suddenly nauseous Holub accepts the association with the images he has seen of concentration camps. Inevitably he is reminded of the still simmering row over Alfred Hrdlicka's bronze of the street-washing Jew, placed a short while ago in the *Albertinaplatz* to commemorate the horrors of the *Kristallnacht*. Like *Heldenplatz*, Thomas Bernhard's new play, named after the square where hundreds of thousands of delirious Viennese welcomed their *Führer*, is this to be another slap in Austria's face, scandal in the making? The architect may have his Alt so to speak but this is rather more than he bargained for.

Slowly the first-generation Austrian slips the photographs into his breast pocket, as if to hide them there. He forgets the engineers waiting for his permission to go back to their

work; frowning he stalks out into the rainy Donaupark. There is a telephone in his new Porsche, whence he might wake Fisher at home, but first he must think: success, reputation, hopes of future commissions and money – everything he has achieved in this small yet totally politized county his parents fled to from the Sudetenland at the end of the war seems inadvertently in danger.

**18. Stadelheim Prison, Munich. Thursday, 25  
September, morning**

‘How much longer do you expect to hide here?’

Silence.

‘Refusing your name, spoiling the police  
photographer’s work – can you really believe that we shall not  
find out who you are? It will take an extra day or two –’

First thing Thursday morning Charlie faces a lawyer from  
the Bavarian Public Prosecutor’s office, and shuts her eyes  
under his stare, as if she could detach herself not only from  
him but this labyrinth she must share, and yet not, with  
hundreds of others; or the procedures she endured on her  
way in, and just now again, spat out halfway to the interview  
room, where a window overhead admits not a hint of the sky  
over the prison complex. Awake rather more than asleep she  
has spent the night with that same conclusion: even her  
surrender to the Bavarian authorities has been rendered  
meaningless by Mayor Pongratz’ death. Andrea said that she  
was a dolt in political terms, photographed and fingerprinted  
since, received in good health as the prison doctor found; in  
jail garb after the obligatory shower; pushed along by a  
couple of women warders on the way to a single cell. Should  
she have given up then, calling on her family – mother,  
grandfather, even Dieter – for help? Charlie needs all the  
courage she can muster in order not to abandon her plan.

Blearily the *Untersuchungsbäftling* (prisoner in investigatory custody) eyes the *Staatsanwalt* (public prosecutor) then and can't help but register the pedantry with which he has laid out his papers on the table between them. One except, Charlie has no idea what they are – notes, she assumes, the beginnings of files appertaining to her case, skeletal like the hollow-eyed man who brought them, remarking in English, which he insists on, that if she wouldn't give him her name then neither would he give her his. As for that exception among his papers, Charlie recognizes well enough the form Liebl attempted to fill in at the police station. Two boxes, to be ticked on top, would have specified its purpose: either *Beschuldigten-Vernehmung* (interview of the accused) or *Erhobene Personalien* (established personal details, which, in a fit of grim humour, she translated as *lifted personalities*), while below these alternatives, after a short paragraph explaining the rights of the accused, one box was to mark her agreement *sich zu äußern* (to express oneself), the other the opposite. It was there, with an angrily crossed out tick that Charlie's case parted from the structure of investigation proposed by the form; and the prisoner, who had attempted to express herself at Neuschwanstein, was forcing judicial procedure to take a turn before it might revert to its proper course: she still clings to that, willing to talk about what she did but not herself.

Another beginning then, in English as before, and a little further on in the story we have heard so far: ‘And those sailmakers, who tailored the material, how did you find them?’

‘I don’t want to say.’

‘What did they work from?’

‘Plans.’

‘So they knew it was for Neuschwanstein?’

‘They were intrigued but we wouldn’t tell – ’

‘We?’

‘I – ’

The prosecutor nods, noting her reply plus correction in parenthesis. ‘How did you get the measurements?’

‘I found the building plans in a book. I verified them.’

‘How did you accomplish that?’

‘Going there, taking photographs.’

‘Inside? How?’

‘With a hidden camera.’

‘When?’

‘In April.’

‘In April,’ repeats the prosecutor, perhaps calculating the time elapsed since then. ‘All this must have cost a great deal of money. How much?’

‘I don’t know. I haven’t added it up.’

‘Approximately – how much?’

‘I don’t want to say.’

‘Who financed you?’

‘I had the money.’

‘You? The sheer size of the undertaking suggests an organization.’ With pointed fingers the prosecutor pulls a single sheet from his papers. ‘Most newspapers, TV and radio stations in the country received one of these last night.’

**KIRCHNER ZWEIG BRIGADE: KOMUNIKATION EINS ZUR  
HERBST TAG UND NACHTGLEICHE - BIG ART**

Not depraved art but the mentality of the Reich brought about the Neuschwanstein accident. Art is beneficial to those opening themselves in spirit. **BIG ART** is here to make a difference. Mahler closed his mind to it and Pongratz paid the price. In memory of the artists and writers who suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

**KZ-BRIGADE**

Charlie holds her breath; *Big Art* was her idea but KZ Brigade? She has seen paintings by Ludwig Kirchner, and disliked them for their violent colours. As for Zweig: she may just have seen the name among the books in Grandfather Steinberg’s library. For a moment, when she first thought of giving herself up, she saw the act as a kind of sacrifice, comparable with that of the Jews who had gone to the gas chambers. But they hadn’t sacrificed themselves,

they had merely – merely! – been murdered. There can be no point in connecting Hitler’s Germany with what happened as a result of her actions at Neuschwanstein, whatever that politician spouted about degenerate art.

*‘Was ist Tag und Nachtgleiche,’* she asks, ‘the equinox?’

‘That’s right. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of September.’

*‘Ich weiß wer Kirchner war, aber Zweig?’*

‘Stefan Zweig was an Austrian writer who fled to Brazil from the Nazis. He killed himself there with his wife –’

‘So here they are, to make up KZ? I’m Jewish myself but this is mindless,’ insists Charlie. ‘Baader and Meinhof are dead.’

‘You know about them?’

‘I saw the film.’

‘Where?’

‘At the National Film Theatre –’

‘In London –’

Charlie shuts her eyes, surprised that the prosecutor should know of the place; and angry with herself that once again she has given away more than she meant. ‘Yes,’ she admits as he notes her reply.

‘You ought to read the book,’ he resumes the interview then. ‘Anyway we have heard of KZ Brigade before. The RAF still exist –’

‘But Big Art, which was my idea, and KZ Brigade, which I’ve never heard of – it doesn’t fit,’ insists Charlie. ‘The Baader-Meinhof trial too was rigged.’

‘And you don’t believe they were guilty –’

Her chair screeches as Charlie slides away from the opponent. ‘Of course they were,’ she asserts. ‘That’s what was so pathetic, rigging the trial after all they’d done!’

‘You’re well informed,’ snaps the prosecutor.

‘Surprisingly well informed for someone without political motivation as you claim! How come?’

‘My father and grandfather, my mother’s father, taught me German. I like to see German movies because I want to keep up with it.’

‘You speak German with them?’

‘Occasionally. Anyway, they live abroad –’

‘Where?’

‘I don’t want to say –’

‘But you do want to say that you didn’t plan that there would be any messages –’

‘I bought some old signs, about danger of life and death, that were left at the castle. Apart from them there wasn’t going to be a word – that’s how I wanted it!’

‘You did.’ As though to regain distance himself the prosecutor gets to his feet and turns away. ‘If you really were the one with the ideas,’ he begins afresh, ‘the art director, so to speak, how come?’ I mean, I know you do these things

early in Britain – aren't you a little young, though? Have you had any formal training?'

Charlie hears the challenge well enough but has yet to come to terms with the message from KZ Brigade.

'Aren't you going to reply?'

*Big Art and Zora – he too might stand for the Z.*

'For example, are you a sculptor or a painter?'

*Andrea was writing something at Ingrid's desk when you were talking to his brother. Maybe he wrote the text – it's screwy enough.*

'If you aren't either – what materials do you work in?'

*Zora was spouting about artists, criminals and terror only the other day – Nietzsche, he said, Baudrillard –*

'At least can you draw?'

A shrug.

'No?'

'A little,' Charlie has on her tongue and suddenly sees the challenge in a different light. 'What day is it?' she asks.

'Thursday –'

So the opening at the Guggenheim is only four days off – she might just get through them without giving away who she is, especially if she establishes credibility by other means. She remains astute enough to sense the danger of presenting an image of defiance as she saw in that film about Stammheim and the Baader-Meinhof gang. A piece of writing paper and the prosecutor's pencil are the only implements on hand – good enough as she begins to draw,

and he watches from the other side. Gone suddenly seems the delinquent opposing him with unusual coherence. A different person, still very, very young, vulnerable and attractive, too, has come to life before him. Indeed, he wonders, is she of age? *Oberkommissar* Brannter suspected her self-assurance might be the product of big-city life but here she draws like a professional, fluently, though with visible concentration. Upside down the lines make shapes he can't discern, until he inadvertently begins to see: the wooded slopes leading up to Neuschwanstein; now the mass of the *Ritterhaus* with its pitched roof, gables and turrets rising from that – all towards the *Bergfried*, the main tower, which presently grows from the flowing lead. But what's that? For a few critical seconds the prisoner gazes at her finished work, screwing back the point of the pencil. Then she turns it, for the prosecutor to see. There stands King Ludwig's fairytale castle, perfectly, yes, beautifully, drawn, but a finger rises in place of the belfry, as if warning the observer to stay away. For a while they sit in silence, he in contemplation of her drawing, she, as it were, of her nails. But she can feel that she has disconcerted him; all at once she finds him almost human.

'Just how did you get yourself into this mess?' he breaks their silence then. 'I assumed there was a point to the condom. One of the papers claimed to have had a call from you to that effect.'

‘Not from me. I designed a wrap, fleshy pink. I wanted everyone to work out for themselves what it means. Someone changed my design. I saw the material only after it had been rolled into a bale. It sounds pathetic but I was betrayed.’

‘By?’

‘Myself first of all. My imagination went one way only: what people would think – feel – when they saw my work; what they’d do, not what I was doing to them. Of course I thought of King Ludwig, his homosexuality, and AIDS nowadays – all very obvious. But I also thought of Kitsch, for example, and our acceptance of it. I saw myself as a woman making her mark for a moment just long enough to fix the image once and for all – on a really big, world-wide scale, as even men normally don’t try. I called it *Big Art*. I overreached, and got duped by two men.’

‘Who stand for KZ Brigade?’

‘I don’t think so. Perhaps they have connections if you’re sure they exist. But I told you I never even heard the name!’

‘We need their names!’

‘I will give them to you on Tuesday if they haven’t come forward by then.’

‘That’s five days, for them to carry on! I can see you are an artist. I am willing to believe that your motives were artistic first of all. Your accomplices though, helpers as you called them – they’re terrorists, with an agenda of their own.’

Can't you see that you are protecting them by not telling us who they are? Complicity too is a crime. And don't forget, we have the election coming up, with the Prime Minister out for a scapegoat for the mess he made at Neuschwanstein. So I urge you, in your own best interest: please give me their names now!

**19. Slough Hospital. Dieter Alt continues the dream of his past. Thursday, 25 September**

‘Dieter! Die – ter! Die – ter!’ Jane is calling when the light changes, and Kid Casper has taken her place at the top of the stair. ‘Still flying?’ The American grins, playing the wheel in the Cadillac. ‘I thought I could.’ The car surges, and his hair fans out in the wind, platinum into blue as Dieter stays behind in a room he shall not forget: ‘Pink! Why I never saw it look friendlier.’ The Principessa Tasca Fedrigotti smiles; even her ancient pearls come alive under the chandeliers. ‘Pity old D’Almerita never thought of painting it like this – it might have cheered him up. But where is this thing?’

‘It’s yet to come,’ replies her youngest son, himself in his sixties. ‘A surprise. There, Mama, look, by the door.’

‘Telegram,’ shouts a postman to make himself heard in the din, ‘I – have – a – telegram – for *signor* Alt – Dieter –’

‘Here!’ cries Fisher. ‘Here! We’re coming.’

There is something theatrical about the manner the postman waves the missive overhead as he wades into the crowd – for all to see, including the cameras on the secret balcony – while the dealer’s hand too is up, marking his and his protégé’s path through the press. They meet at midpoint, where a small circle opens for them in the throng. ‘It’s from Kid,’ exclaims Fisher. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a

message – from Kid Casper to Dieter Alt! Dieter will read it to you directly.’

Miraculously a chair appears, earlier the room was quite empty. Flashlights blaze and a television crew roll their camera as Dieter climbs atop – white shirt, blue jeans and sneakers, with those red and green socks Casper copied from him. The guests fall silent. Wide open the windows let in the sounds of distant bells and a woman singing to the clang of pans in a nearby kitchen. ‘To those at the opening of my show – welcome,’ Dieter intones and falters. Why is everyone so serious all of a sudden? Once he had seen the dry paint on the walls (not so shocking after all though it matched the Cadillac exactly, and indeed pleasing next to the stone cornices and whitewashed ceiling) even Fisher had begun to look forward to the event that twenty dozen bottles of pink Champagne would make all the more palatable. At the Gymnasium Dieter learnt to address a crowd, albeit smaller than the one he faces now, all eyes on him. He has no choice but to read on, a light but clear English voice, untinged by Casper’s drawl within the week since his arrival: ‘May your expectations and coming together here, and your questions – what is art? – what not? – lead you to cross the frontiers of new understanding, for, without it, we cannot understand ourselves. You are what I meant to create: a gathering of minds ready to repeat the eternal questions: who are we, why are we here, what for? Your interest and

assembly are my doing, your perception and feelings too are my work. I – Kid Casper – am your creator in these moments. As I cease to work within the limits of walls and museums I leave it to younger men – like Dieter Alt – to begin once again the cycle of traditional art. Who better to restart the wheel than a divinely gifted draughtsman like him? It shall be through the mechanical media that I will speak to you in future.’ The telegram falls with the reader’s hands. Are there tears in his eyes as Giorgio Tasca Fedrigotti claps and his mother joins without conviction? Dieter steps from the chair.

‘What did he say?’ whispers a retired school teacher in her Sunday best.

‘He said,’ translates her companion, ‘there’s nothing to see because we – that we came here tonight – are his creation.’

‘His creation? This isn’t funny! Presumptuous – that’s what it is – blasphemous! Who does this boy think he is?’

‘Yes, indeed, what does he mean?’ Voices grow loud, more insistent over the muttering crowd. English rivals Italian: ‘Why – new frontiers – that’s Kennedy, with a lunatic script! Is this some kind of joke? Explain! Explain!’

Fisher glances at Dieter. Parting Casper warned them not to enlarge on the text he would send from Rome. But the demands come from all sides now – the dealer, not Dieter,

will have to explain. Supporting himself on his shoulder he climbs on the chair as a siren sounds, and another, followed by a third – ambulance, police, the fire brigade, all coming to someone’s rescue, his own included, or so he might hope unexpectedly. Already the sirens enter the street, more piercing as they close in. Tyres screech, and the wail stops under the windows, silencing the crowd for the second time. Voices bark ahead of the trample of boots in the staircase. A man in a gray pinstripe suit despite the heat presently brandishes yet another piece of paper at the gallery door. A swarm of uniformed police bulldoze their way towards the dealer, who stands rigid as a post on the chair.

‘Are you in charge here?’ demands the civilian but receives no reply. With obvious distaste Fisher peers at the policemen around him.

‘Who painted the walls?’ The civilian points accusingly, while the officers tighten their ring.

Fisher looks at the walls as though he had not noticed them before. ‘They’ll be restored,’ he answers calmly, ‘though they’re prettier now –’

‘Who did it?’ insists the civilian.

‘I asked for it to be done.’

‘Who – painted – them?’

‘I did,’ says Dieter, still holding the back of the chair. ‘It was my idea.’

Instantly the police grab him by his arms and shoulders. Metal clicks, and his wrists are locked behind his back. A barrage of flashlights hits him face-on as he is jostled from the room, across the landing and down the stairs. Unintentionally perhaps a regulation boot trips him on the last flight – headlong he crashes on the flagstones in the doorway. Rough hands pull him up by the back of his shirt and hair; dazed he finds himself in the rear of the car, sat on more or less by a man on either side, while the sirens come on again, the blue lights flash, and the convoy speeds away. What a drama this is, tearing at the guts of this little hill town, as *cittadini* and visitors alike are pressed to the walls along the streets without sidewalks. Or is a *spettacolo* after all, one of the events that most of the locals never get to see, and not a few among them view only with suspicion? For a split second as the civilian stormed in waving his warrant, Dieter believed that this might be another of Casper's famous pranks. This is in anger, though; cameras on the secret balcony or not, the performance is over. Bewildered, frightened, bruised, he knows very well that his arrest is for real or is it? Why is he so hot, so short of breath? Someone keeps calling his name in this nightmare. He must wake up but already the Alfa Romeo shoots through the arch and into the courtyard of the Questura. The second car blocks the entrance while the prisoner is pulled from the first, frog-marched past a circle of uniformed men arguing about

something on a desk, and pushed into a space under vaulted walls, where a single light glares over a once sturdy table. Brimful with cigarette butts a sardine tin sits on the bare top, next to a stack of yellow paper. The plain-clothes man enters, dismissing the officers from the prisoner's sides with a flick of the head. He pulls out a chair from under the table, banging it as if to ensure it will stand up to his weight. A tap expels a Lucky Strike from a pack without tax band and he lights up with a Zippo – like most of the affluent in Italy he saves money by buying contraband. Stained fingers claw for a piece of paper from the stack, the other hand searches for the pen inside the double breasted jacket. 'Your papers,' he demands, producing a bright red Parker.

For a moment Dieter can't think of the Italian words. 'They're at home,' he replies at last, frightened suddenly and dizzy as the lights sways in the draught overhead.

'Villa Elsa?' The detective nods. 'What about Südtirol?' he asks mangling the German name.

'Südtirol?' Perplexed Dieter returns the question: 'What's that got to do with the gallery walls?'

'Nothing,' grins the Italian rocking back on his chair. 'Alt, Dieter, born 7 July – tomorrow – we know about you!' He pauses, no doubt watching for effect.

Dieter bows, unwilling to admit his alarm. Stains and burns mark the scarred table top separating him from the interrogator. Can he see a pattern there, not one, but many,

as long as he makes the connections? The back of his neck is stiff, his breath shallow, not least because of the way his hands are manacled behind his back. Why has he been watched? All he did was decorate a room, making it look better than before! 'I don't understand,' he protests, looking up. 'I'm a painter. I had a choice at school – between your language and French – I chose yours. My favourite artist is Italian. I've been studying at the Academy in Vienna for the last few years. No one even talks of Südtirol there!'

'You learnt well as far as your Italian was concerned.' The detective gives a grudging smile. 'But that's not what I asked. I – want – to – know – what – you – think – about – Südtirol!'

Dieter shrugs. 'It's beautiful.'

'You know it well?'

'My mother came from there.'

'Did she! From where?'

'Tramin – Termeno to you.'

'To me. A Roman place name – older than the German, older than your entire language – obviously you can't accept it's Italian!'

Obviously? Dieter has never heard of a Latin version for Tramin but he must stick to his beliefs so that he at least can be sure of what has been said: to him Tirol does not amount to much without the south; one only needs to look at the map – all that Austria has left of the duchy that joined her in

1363 – voluntarily – are two unconnected pieces, north and east, each smaller than the south at their centre.

‘You poor people!’ sneers the Italian. ‘Lost a piece in your jigsaw, eh? What about the Trentino, Lombardy, Veneto, Tuscany? You want them back too? They were all part of your over-blown monarchy once!’

‘Maybe. However, they were Italian then and they’re Italian now.’

‘But the Alto Adige –’ no longer is the detective prepared to use the name of the old duchy, ‘isn’t.’

‘You know very well it never was.’

‘So we should give it back.’

Dieter moans, nowhere near heated enough to fall in the trap. Why is it, though, that he can’t get away from Austria – her history, people, himself? He is still struggling to come to terms with the lesson of his second interview at the Academy. There, denied the return of his diploma work, and offered only that he might resubmit next year provided he chose a conventional subject and treated it as such, he lost his temper and retrieved it only after he had walked out. He enjoys no such freedom here.

‘How could you?’ he asks quietly. ‘Ever since Mussolini you’ve been flooding the country with the poor from your south. Where would they go after so many years?’

The detective freezes. ‘I see,’ he whispers, ‘Mussolini – the greatest leader in our history – it was his fault – of

course!' Suddenly he is halfway over the table, sending his chair crashing to the floor. 'An irredentist, are we? I wonder what we'll find at Villa Elsa – dynamite – or do you want to tell me now?'

'You'll find nothing of the kind! I'm an artist! I'm sorry if some crackpots keep on blowing up your power lines – I have nothing to do with them! Nothing!' shouts Dieter as the door flies open, and the two officers come rushing in to restrain him. The detective stops them, though, allowing them to put his chair alone back in its place. 'What shall we find at Villa Elsa then?' he asks with a leer.

Indignant Dieter looks at the hateful face. Fear and resentment extinguish the glow of good will he kept alive within – naively, it dawns on him. And yet, why will the Italian not understand, let him be? He is not so old – thirty – thirty-five at most. 'You'll find painting things, a few books, Italian poetry. You have no right to hold me just because you don't like my views. I don't like yours either!'

'So I gather,' snaps the Italian. 'Take the pansy away.'

'What did you say?' Only once a man jealous of Dieter's looks used a similar expression to his face. Of course he has been seen with Kid: at the gallery, concerts, restaurants, most enviably perhaps in the open Cadillac. But nothing happened between them – handing over that promised drawing only a few hours after his outburst at the gallery the American jokingly acknowledged that sexually they were

obviously not going to hit it off. For hours on end then Dieter listened to his nightly monologues, about the movies he intended making, though Kid refused more or less to talk of his past. Angrily Dieter steps forward now, hands on his back or not.

The policemen answer the challenge. From either side he smells their fetid uniforms as the bigger of the two pulls him forward and the other knees him in the groin – inexpertly, hitting the thighs instead of deeper between. A double from the detective aims at stomach and heart but causes contempt before pain. Then another assault by the uniformed men knocks him off his feet, so that he falls, talking one of them with him. ‘Enough gasps,’ the Italian. Surprisingly his compatriots let go, and the prisoner too staggers to his feet, not so easy with one’s hands tied behind the back. For a moment then they all eye each other, catching their breath. A taste of blood is on Dieter’s lips as the officers march him out, further along the hallway he was brought. Steps lead down to the cellar, an iron grate secures it. A row of metal doors gives on to a dank space, the acrid stench of rotten piss wells up from the black hole they push him in. Suddenly claustrophobic Dieter tries to stop the door from being shut, and is hit face-on. On his knees he hears the key grate, and the bolt slide home. Voices die, leaving him to his rage. In his booming head he sees flashes of his diploma work. There he attempted to show how it felt to lose all

freedom, even life, though he portrayed himself taking them. What had the girl done? Who apart from the friend he used as his model had she been?

For six days Judas has held out at the bottom of the well, refusing to reveal the whereabouts of the true cross. On the seventh, two men haul him up with block and tackle. As he emerges at the end of the rope an official grabs him by the hair. Now will he talk? Or is he to be thrown to the bottom again, as the Empress Helena ordered? A club is in the officer's other hand, ready to make further refusal more painful still, and yet the scene, minor among the ten Piero painted in San Francesco at Arezzo, appears calm. The officer's mouth is shut. His gaze says all: up or down? Life or death for the Jew?

Why such reticence on the artist's part? Because, in his time, many of the viewers would have known the answer, just as they were familiar with the rest of the legend? Because those who counted understood that its rendering here was to convey a political message perhaps not unrelated to that of the *Flagellation* – given the split Church, it was time to launch another crusade?

Commissioned to call for strife before reunion, maybe the master from Borgo Sansepolcro (c1420 – 92) deliberately stripped it of its surface, imposing his own message on that he was to be paid for – because too many of his

contemporaries had a taste for violence? Or because it was visible anyhow, with public executions commonplace? We can only guess. Though appointed a city councillor when still relatively young, we know very little about Piero's life, and much of his work has been lost. He may have stopped painting altogether in later years, dedicating himself to writing; three books have come down to us, on perspective, the abacus, and the five regular bodies of geometry.

Rage, hate, fear beneath them – hours pass but Dieter will not live them down, even if he pushes speculation about the girl he painted far from his mind. Thoughts of the kind must wait, as he did after a dim-witted farmhand had locked him in the cellar under the workshop in his grandfather's house, because, trying to carve too hard a piece of wood, he had broken a chisel there. Knees pulled up sharply, head and shoulders propped against the wall, the prisoner squats by the door, extending minimal length into the surroundings he paced but can't see – four by three metres, of vaulted stone like the interview room, or so he imagines remembering the old silver mine that same idiot had told him of. Below Hochleiten, near a little white church, the boy discovered one of its tunnels; next day he crawled in, holding up like some combined weapon and charm the candle taken from the cupboard in the best room, until he backed out as he had come – on his stomach, feet first now, for even the nine-year-

old found not enough room to turn. Unperturbed though he resurfaced, blinded momentarily by the snow fields on the glacier at the end of the valley. Again and again he went back, until he found his grandfather waiting at the entrance one day. The old man took him by his hand and into the little white church instead, something he had never done before. Early in the fifteenth century, he explained, the miners had built it with some of the wealth extracted from the mountains. A shrine at the rear of the nave showed men trapped by falling rock, another a flood rising in a shaft – all of it in graphic detail, as so-called primitives are apt to convey. ‘The silver has gone but the danger remains,’ Anton Alt told his grandson. Years later Dieter began to wonder whether his claustrophobia began with those simple paintings.

What’s that? Already the prisoner presses one ear to the door. His plimsolls squeak as he shifts his weight from one foot to the other, denim scuffs the wall, not a sound comes to him from outside. He slips to the floor again, as a key suddenly scrapes and the bolt slides back noisily. A figure he has not seen before darkens the doorway, ordering him out. Some three hours since his arrest he is marched back to the interview room, afraid more than curious to learn what is expecting him there. One of his escorts knocks on the door, alone Dieter goes in, where the detective sits next to a

uniformed man with a face that might have been cut from creased brown paper, while his eyes seem stranger still – barely darker than the silver hair they watch the prisoner come to a halt two steps into the room; whence Dieter can see his passport on the table, motley beige and mauve atop a buff file.

‘The manacles,’ says the officer; the detective gets up. Fingers tug behind Dieter’s back, metal clicks, and his hands fall. Instinctively he brings them up to rub his wrists when the uniformed man invites him to sit. ‘I’m Maurilio Teso from the Ministry of the Interior, State Security. Detective Bossi tells me your Italian is fluent. Where did you learn it?’

‘At school and – we usually spent my summer vacation by the Adriatic. I mean my adoptive mother and I.’

‘Whereabouts?’

‘Jesolo, near Venice.’

‘Did you like it there?’

‘I did – except we always stayed too long – six, seven weeks even. Of course now –’ Dieter hesitates. Who is this man, obviously senior to the detective? What’s the point chattering about matters concerning a travel agent perhaps? But he goes on: ‘I heard it’s all built up. When we went there, there were a few hotels, the odd villa –’

‘– and a lighthouse at the far end of the beach, you remember?’ Teso nods with the prisoner. ‘You sound as

though like Italy well enough, yet Detective Bossi tells me you say we must return Südtirol. Is that true?' The hands, which stirred only once with the speech, fold one into the other, tanned backs to either side, white fingers neatly entwined. Soft man, hard man – Dieter frowns and notices with the kind of distraction fear sometimes prompts that the sardine tin has gone, while the stack of yellow paper remains in place. 'I said,' he begins cautiously, 'it's a pity we should have lost the richest and most beautiful part of the country.'

'I can understand that,' admits Teso. 'How old are you?'

'Twenty –' Dieter motions at the passport, 'twenty-one tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow! I didn't register. Congratulations!'

Dieter smiles until he feels the pull around his damaged lips.

'I was no older myself when I was sent north at the end of the Great War,' the Italian goes on, 'all over people were displaced. They stationed us a Bressanone – Brixen, as you call it – not my kind of country, up and down all the time. Only on top was it open to the view, across forests and pastures, with the peaks sticking out higher still. Beautiful but deceptive views! What seemed to hang together, hills rolling into the distance, was sharply divided in fact by the valleys we had climbed from. It disturbed me how deep they were, concealed like trenches in the landscape. I for one – from flat Ferrara – prefer things out in the open. But I don't

feel at home in Sicily or Sardinia either, and yet they're part of Italy. As for you, you can visit Südtirol freely. And the German speakers there, aren't they as free to go to Austria? With two wars behind us, and a more united Europe on the horizon, wouldn't they be content if it weren't for a small group of fanatics determined to prevent peace – at any price?'

Dieter nods, reminded of the one occasion when he touched on the question with a cousin on his mother's side. An innkeeper, who tended to speak only for himself, he offered a question in return: what would be the advantage of belonging to Austria today? Even in the Monarchy Tirol had been too far from the heart, a playground of Habsburg archdukes, pawned more than once after things had gone badly in Vienna. 'I said it was probably too late to think of turning things back.'

'You said nothing of the kind!' retorts the detective.

'I did.' Dieter looks the man squarely in the face, even if it is impossible to stop his shifty eyes. It's obvious, he had better restate his view: 'I said it was a shame Austria lost Südtirol in 1919. I said without the south the country made little sense to me – north and east don't even hang together any more. I told you my mother came from there.'

'Nevertheless,' insists the detective, 'you did say you regretted –'

'Naturally! But didn't I also say that Austria shouldn't have occupied the other territories you mentioned? What

are you trying to pin on me? You say Mussolini was your greatest leader – I don't agree. And I'd like to know what Südtirol has to do with the walls I painted, and you came to arrest me for!

'Mussolini our greatest leader?' Teso raises his hands and lets them fall, as if to rid himself of something dirty.

'Steinhöring, *Herr* Alt, where is that?'

Disconcerted Dieter eyes the questioner, and registers the red face beside him. 'In Bavaria,' he replies at last.

'But you're Austrian. Why were you born there?'

'My mother was working in Munich at the time.'

'And your father?'

'My father was a pilot in the *Luftwaffe* –'

'So was it at Steinhöring Lebensborn that your mother gave birth to you?'

Dieter hesitates; and lies: 'I don't follow –'

'Didn't your parents tell you? Surely you know about Lebensborn!'

'I never knew my parents. My father went missing over France, my mother was killed in an air raid soon after. My grandfather, father's father, and his sister brought me up on his farm.'

'Where was that?'

'In Tirol. In a side valley of the upper Inn.'

'Where did you go to school?'

‘In the village below us at first. Then my grandfather died. Unfortunately my great-aunt couldn’t cope with the farm on her own, and I was adopted by distant relations in Innsbruck. I went to the Gymnasium there.’

‘The Gymnasium,’ repeats Teso as if he knew the school; and indeed: ‘Behind the museum, right?’

Dieter sits up sharply, alarmed by such detailed knowledge.

‘Tell me,’ asks Teso then, ‘do you belong to a fraternity?’

‘No.’

‘Did you ever?’

A shake of the head.

‘Why not?’

‘I was an art student.’

‘Is that a reason?’

‘There are no fraternities at the Academy nor do I believe in them. What’s the point beating each other over the head with sabres?’

‘It takes courage. Have you ever watched a Mensur?’ The German term, albeit of Latin origins, sounds as though the interrogator approved.

‘They’re not open to the public.’

‘Not even friends?’

‘I wouldn’t know. None of my friends ever were in a fraternity.’

Teso lifts the passport and opens the file. He glances at a photograph – a reproduction of a newspaper cutting as far as the dotted gray halftones and black solids tell – and tosses it across the table. Dieter gasps. The picture was taken after his entire class had been admitted to and passed the Matura, the final pre-university exams. Both Innsbruck papers reported the event that had brought out the rare white flag on the school for the first time since the war. The caption lists all the names, his own included.

‘These two –’ Teso points, ‘on either side – need I remind you? Their proximity – does it not suggest they are your friends?’

The Gasser twins, Wieland and Helge, not even Professor Vinatzer, their form teacher for eight years, was able to see the differences in their pointed mountain faces. Sullen, bandy, dark, rather more Tirolean than their Germanic names suggested, they kept to themselves by and large. Their father, imprisoned for his Nazi past after the war, had been friendly with Erika Alt. She committed her sixteen-year-old stepson to show his face at a gala of old Gasser’s fraternity. But Dieter did not enjoy the evening, the main purpose of which was to begin the process of recruitment among forthcoming freshmen. He disliked the gassy beer and positively loathed the singing, especially of student tunes. Even as theatre the old-fashioned costumes and speeches did nothing but put him off.

‘They’re on my sides because I was the only one in class who could tell them apart,’ he explains. ‘The man in the middle.’

‘Exactly – in the middle.’ The imprint of a big stamp, its compartments filled out by hand, flashes on the reverse as Teso slips the photograph back into the file. ‘Where are they now?’

‘In Innsbruck, I believe.’

‘You want me to believe.’

‘They’re reading law.’

‘You mean they enrolled to read law. When did you last see them?’

‘At Christmas, when I went home.’

‘You went to theirs?’

‘I have never been to their house. We met by chance, skiing. We talked, queuing for the lift.’

‘So they are friends.’

‘Schoolfriends – eight years in the same class!’

‘And you knew they were members of the Vandalia.’

Dieter bites his lip. ‘I forgot,’ he admits and bows.

‘And you also knew that in protest to Viennese indifference over Südtirol they bombed the Andreas Hofer statue on the Bergisel.’

‘I heard a rumour.’

‘Only a rumour?’

‘I knew the police had interviewed them, without making charges. Anyway, it was a childish thing to have done!’

‘Childish?’ Teso seems startled.

‘The monument wasn’t even guarded at the time.

Children take out their anger on their toys!’

Teso considers, perhaps not entirely unconvinced. ‘*Herr* Alt,’ he resumes, ‘I’ll get to the point: your school friends and a band of your compatriots are in Italy. Last night they claimed the derailment of a train near Bologna. We had to check before we released the information because –’ Teso glances at the man by his side, ‘as usual someone else, from our own extreme right, also wants to be in on the act. You must have seen the news: twenty-nine people injured – a miracle no one was killed. Detective Bossi is not unjustified if he suspects that you too may be here in connection with activities of the kind.’

Soft man, hard man, sickened Dieter shuts his eyes and opens them wide, grasping for something to hold on to. ‘This is all new to me,’ he whispers. ‘I was locked in the gallery all night, painting those walls. I’m appalled, I am sorry, but I know nothing!’

Silence absorbs his protest. Stock-still Teso sits at the far side of the table, as if he had not been heard at all. A train derailed. Twenty-nine people hurt, children perhaps among them. Boys he knew from the age of ten – no sooner had he lost them from sight and they prepared to kill!

Bossi breaks the hush: 'I don't believe you're an artist. Painting walls doesn't exactly require talent nor much skill, or does it?'

Next to the speaker the stack of paper catches Dieter's eye. Before he knows why he reaches for a sheet, turning it over: 'May I use your pen?'

'If you must –'

Nodding Dieter picks up also the cap and puts it on the blunt end of the Parker, for better weight and balance. With his left hand he begins to draw – fluently, not once going back to correct a line while the interrogators watch spellbound, quite unable to make out the growing image. Suddenly the lines come together, connecting in the picture of a head. Already the prisoner lifts the pen, changes it over to his right and signs it DA, a deliberate inversion of Albrecht Dürer's initials. Looking up only now, he shoves the sheet across the table.

'It's you, Bossi! With all my words I couldn't have described you as well!' Teso laughs. 'Now I understand why you wear such a stuffy suit in this heat. He's seen right through you – that actor – Bogart! I'd like a word.' Already he is on his feet. Red-faced once more Bossi picks up the file and follows him outside.

From the door Dieter's gaze returns to the drawing before him. Picasso said that all good portraits were caricatures in some degree, and his diploma work also contained them,

causing him at least partly to be where he is – without his premature departure from the Academy he might not have met Kid or Fisher, and would have come to Spoleto later probably than so soon. No doubt art played its role in his life but so did the carabinieri's enforcement of the law, demonstrated by the two men he glimpsed as the door opened and shut, even if they are standing guard there now as a result of something begun with a pretence of being art. He hangs his head, aching suddenly and frightened again, when Bossi alone returns, file, cigarette and sardine tin in his hands.

'How much longer were you thinking of staying?' he asks and sits down.

Dieter pricks up his ears. 'In Italy? I'm not sure – to the end of summer, early autumn perhaps. I was hoping to move on to Rome.'

'You know anyone there?'

A shake of the head.

'Are you aware you must register?'

'I didn't think of it when Dr Fisher invited me. I'm sorry.'

'You could be fined for that – but we won't – provided you register in future. Don't forget, we'll be keeping an eye on you.' Bossi stubs out the cigarette in the tin he just emptied.

'You're free now. May I keep the portrait?'

Dumbfounded Dieter looks at the passport the detective is holding out, takes it, and rises from the chair. 'Of course,' he says backing to the door, 'please keep it.'

The file flaps shut. With the tips of index fingers and thumbs the detective holds up his portrait and tears it slowly in two, and again, until even its detail is unrecognizable, shreds piling up in the tin before him. He flicks the Zippo. A thread of black smoke presently cork-screws from the paper, and straightens fast all at once.

'You don't mind if I burn your work?'

'You're burning yourself,' retorts Dieter. The draught fans the flames in the Italian's face as he opens the door and walk out to the courtyard. Free almost he draws in the air and looks up at the stars above the frame of eaves set against the inky sky. Flashlights blaze. There is clapping and shouting and Fisher embraces him.

'I'm sorry they took you alone,' he says. 'Are you all right?' His eyes are damp; familiar by now, Dieter smells the scent of limes.

'I'm fine -'

Already the press grows tight. Dieter tries to see those swarming around them but the lights are too bright. Questions, requests, commands come thick and fast: 'How are you Mr Alt? This way, Dieter! One more time please, looking this way! Why were you so long? Did they treat you as badly as they did when they snatched you from the

opening? Are you free now or will you have to go back? Are you going to do another show? Yes, what's next Dieter Alt? Is this the first time you exhibit abroad?

*Exhibit?*

Fisher comes to the rescue; raising his hands just over his shoulders he demands silence. 'Dieter needs a rest,' he cries, 'so allow me to speak for him. He is an outstanding draughtsman, the best I know! Very soon Dieter Alt will have a show of his own. We look forward to seeing you there.'

*Where?*

Fisher takes hold of Dieter's elbow. 'The car's over there,' he says pointing. 'Let them go after us.' Half answering a question here, another there, he makes for the opposite corner of the square.

'*Signor* Alt, is there anything *you* would like to say?'

The question, from the RAI Television crew, brings the dealer and his protégé to a halt.

'One thing,' replies Dieter, 'I'd like to say to my family and friends in Austria in case they hear what happened – please don't worry, I'm alright, nothing broken, nothing fallen off.'

The television men laugh as he raises his hands and looks down on himself. They like this youngster. Even in front of the camera he moves and speaks naturally.

‘How do you explain what happened?’ asks the interviewer.

‘I can’t.’ Smiling Dieter feels the pull round his mouth and nose. ‘A misunderstanding –’

‘Do you regret having painted the walls?’

‘Not at all. I thought they looked good. But we’ll restore them, as promised.’

‘The exhibition was meant to be Kid Casper’s. Yet you read his statement, which mentioned also you. Whose idea was that?’

‘Kid Casper asked for Dieter’s help,’ interjects Fisher.

‘The pink, though usually associated with Kid, was Dieter’s choice. As I said, I hope to show his work very soon. You’ll see then what an outstanding artist Dieter Alt is – quite different, in his own right.’

Once again the dealer turns his protégé from the press.

‘We said what’s needed. I’ve mentioned your name seven times, often enough. They’ll remember for a week or so –’

Soft top down the Cadillac is parked by the littered tables and toppled chairs of a bar the journalists abandoned the moment Dieter appeared on the far side of the square. Fisher opens the driver’s door for the passenger to slide across the leather bench. Chin up, glasses, which he needs when driving, aglitter, the dealer threads the vast bonnet through the crowd. It doesn’t matter that he can barely see –

he aims straight at the flashlights. The journalists part, the car surges, and the clamour fades in its wake.

‘I thought Kid took his car to Rome. Is this right? A quarter past eleven?’ Dieter points at the clock in the dash.

Passing under a streetlight Fisher glances at his watch. ‘Ten minutes slow. The car’s mine, bought for this trip. Anyway I’d almost given up for the night. Bossi, the man who arrested you – nasty piece of work, leading neo-fascist in town despite his American act, absolutely hates the festival. The mayor, communist, on the other side, but nothing he was going to do for us. There’s been an attack on a train, people hurt, seems your fellow countrymen are to blame.’

‘They told me a couple of my school friends were in on the act.’

‘That’s too bad!’ Negotiating a corner Fisher falls silent, and they remain so, while the car glides ahead, up and down, over cobbles and flagstones, through streets barely wide enough for the alien machine.

‘I thought they were your countrymen too,’ Dieter says then.

‘I’m Hungarian.’

‘My God, more monarchic than me!’

‘But of course!’ exclaims Fisher. ‘I used to write my name with a V – two Vs – von Vischer. Now I’m a British subject I write it the English way. Did they give your passport back?’

Dieter holds it up. 'What's it like to be a subject,' he asks, 'humbling?'

Fisher laughs. 'Not unless you want to. You know the country, rather more tolerant than what's left of our lot. My ex accused me of being more English than the English, something that happens to many refugees. My father was a general, one of the last in the Monarchy. Some of the stiffness may have rubbed off.' That laugh again, self-deprecating and relieved, as they're nearly home, and the bonnet swings round and rises across the pavement. Moths dance in the headlights, behind the wrought iron gate. Mario, gardener and general factotum, pulls back the wings. Windows shine behind trees; a substantial house with a Palladian portico and columns comes into view at the end of the drive, which is lined with cars.

'We locked it just in time,' says Fisher taking the car right up to the house.

'Why lock it?'

'Early days in Austria – I learnt then when to expect a search, without warrant, of course.'

'And they came?'

'But of course!'

'And you gave them my passport –'

'Through the bars, on handing over a receipt.'

They stop. Heels first Dieter digs into the gravel, crunching, reassuring ground. Voices sound, laughter rings

from the garden, the heady scent of stocks hangs in the air while someone is picking a tune on the piano in the *salotto*, the smaller of the two drawing rooms.

‘A little party,’ explains Fisher, ‘to surprise you on the eve of your twenty-first – I’m glad you made it. Kid wants us to join him in Rome tomorrow but there’s something I want to tell you now, before we go in: you have star quality, Dieter, on top of your talent. I can make you famous – rich – if you let me.’

*Star quality, famous, rich* – Dieter hears the words clearly enough but what have they to do with him?

‘I want to be your exclusive dealer. To begin with I can offer you a thousand dollars a month. That’s my guarantee.’

Dumbfounded Dieter looks at the companion. All at once he is difficult to make out, curiously dark against the light reflecting from the columns in the portico above them. Who is this man, cultured friend and mentor for one moment, businesslike, even sharp next? Given his pedigree and personal history, isn’t he obliged to disclose his own, rather less impeccable origins to him?

‘Well,’ says Fisher, ‘will you trust me?’

‘You only saw my sketchbooks,’ objects Dieter.

‘We’ve seen you draw every day, like an angel, Kid said.’

‘An angel,’ repeats Dieter and shakes his head. ‘There’s something you must know: my mother worked for the SS; I

wasn't born in Innsbruck but at Steinhöring Lebensborn, one of those places –'

'I gathered that,' says Fisher, cutting him short. 'I saw your passport. You told me in Urbino that you felt guilty –'

'I *am* guilty!'

'You're a victim. Of circumstance and sensationalism, too, Dieter. How old was your mother?'

'Nineteen.'

'And your father, you said, was a pilot –'

'Michael Alt *was* my father, I look like him.'

'Which proves that much of what has been written about these places is untrue. First of all stop feeling guilty. And keep quiet about it, especially in New York. Innsbruck will do fine as your birthplace.'

'But a thousand dollars!' Incredulously Dieter shakes his head, then somehow nods, quite unaware he does.

'That's agreed then,' Fisher holds out his hands. 'Let everyone guess. Just say, I'll be arranging a show soon – in London, New York after that. And by the way, let's say *Du* in future, call me Tom or Thomas, if you like –'

Side by side then they enter the house, where no one seems to recognize the latecomers at first. From the drawing room at its centre a great self-absorbed crowd has spilt over most of the ground floor. English is the preferred language, though there are Italians and other Europeans present too.

The air is close in here, the mood animated yet mellow, as though ebbing already beyond the climax of the night.

‘He’s here,’ remarks someone then.

‘Who?’

‘The youngster who read the telegram –’

‘Dieter –’

‘Happy birthday!’ cries a woman, and the message of his release spreads. All at once the guests try to squeeze into the room or so it feels to those inside.

‘Give the man a drink,’ shouts a Scotsman merrily while an American calls out, ‘Let’s hear what happened.’ And others demand: ‘Speech! We want a speech!’

Bewildered Dieter sees the throng before him, and feels the press behind. Why are there so many Americans here, and British, in the heart of Italy? Why do they seem so at home, to the almost total exclusion of other nationalities in audible, even visual terms?

‘Speech, speech!’ they clamour, and he grasps well enough that it is his turn to reply. What can he tell them though? So much has happened since he switched on the compressor in the gallery! But the crowd fall disconcertingly silent. For the second time this night he is committed to speak.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he hears himself though he has no idea what to say next. ‘I’m glad to be back.’ He pauses, looking over but not into the faces before him, as he was taught at the Gymnasium.

‘Thomas Fisher got me out and I must thank him for that first of all. The man who arrested me said that because I am from Innsbruck and went to school with two terrorists who may have derailed the train near Bologna last night, I must have something to do with them. I haven’t and all I can say is that I feel ashamed for them. Not only are they heartless; in the end they only make things worse for the people they say they must help in self-defence. South Tirol, where my mother was born, is not a free country – not yet – although the government in Rome promised autonomy. But the days of Mussolini, when Tirolean who knew only German were not allowed to speak their mother tongue, those days are over. Europe is drawing together, and we shall all be better off without the terror of self-appointed nationalists, whichever side they’re on!’

Visibly angry he pauses once more. Not a sound is heard in the room until he recovers his smile and continues in Italian:

‘I know there are Italians here – I love your country, I am very happy here, and I shall always be glad to come back without even a thought as regards politics! At midnight I shall be twenty-one, grown up as it’s called, but I expect I shall feel not so different from how I feel now – only a little drunk perhaps. I am happy to be here and glad you are here with me. Thank you for listening.’

He bows to a roar of applause, though there are a few whistles too. The piano strikes up, and a man with a booming voice intones the birthday tune Dieter has heard English tourists sing in Tirol. A few grinding bars, and the house reverberates with its drone. Cheers follow, and someone shouts, 'He still hasn't got a drink! For God's sake give the man a drink!'

'Nice speech – even if some of the Italians didn't quite buy it.' With both hands Fisher offers a book wrapped in pink paper. 'From Kid, as you can see, and myself – open it later if you like.'

But Dieter has to see it now, already he pulls the ribbon. *Piero della Francesca by Kenneth Clark*, head- and baseline read on the jacket. A black and white image reproduces a detail from the *Arezzo Cycle* – the Empress Helena and two of her ladies. From memory Dieter adds the rest of the scene: the moment when Judas revives a dead man, proving which of the three crosses they have dug up is the true one.

'Thank you, Thomas!' he says and begins to open the plates, to the *Madonna* at Monterchi, as others also are trying to get a look in. All at once he feels choked; his emotions have yet to find their discharge on the night. 'It's beautiful – I'd like to go to my room.'

'Stay a while,' says Fisher; his touch, on Dieter's arm, steadies them both. 'Tomorrow we'll take the day off. There are some interesting people here –'

‘I’m Jane,’ says a young woman as if on cue; in a sleeveless dress she holds out a glass of the pink Champagne he never got to taste at the opening. ‘Many happy returns’, she toasts him with glittering eyes.

Dieter is unaware of the dealer’s look: an odd smile seems to say he knows who she is, and he slips away. The scent of the bubbling drink in the shallow glass, of the birdbath type, makes Dieter feel suddenly parched. Unexpectedly sharp it prickles in his mouth. A swell of English washes over him as though to confirm that those cities Fisher mentioned, London and New York, are expecting him – more urbane than the world he left behind in Vienna, and just again, outside the gates. English is alien to the excitability of Italian, and strange beyond the for him unshakeable clarity of German. For an instant he wonders how his mother tongue must sound to one who can’t understand it.

‘There are so many English people here,’ he ventures puzzled by her name – Jane looks Italian despite her height; her dark eyes, chestnut hair and luxuriant skin would allow little doubt had he not heard her speak.

‘And Americans,’ she rejoins. ‘There’s a whole colony of expats here.’

‘Expats?’

Jane laughs. Her face is his age, eyes and body are more mature. An image of figs he sketched in the market comes to his mind. Swelling purple, moist as her lips, one of them

had been cut open by the stallholder. Lack of money stopped him from buying after he had bagged his crayons again. Now he'll be able to buy all the fruit he desires, and more.

'Expatriates,' she explains, 'people who don't live in their country.'

'You live here?'

'My father does –' she looks over her shoulder, perhaps to point him out, but he is not in sight. 'We were late for the opening. Have you been in Spoleto long?'

'Seven days,' replies Dieter and promptly feels an outsider, without right or background required to be present. Though he has yet to acquire the taste, he drains his glass. 'I'm thirsty. Would you like some more?'

'*Will* you have some more,' she says with a laugh. 'I'm not sure – maybe it's only when offering one's own that one should say will –' A shrug shifts the curls on her tanned shoulders, deep chestnut brushing over *café au lait*. 'I didn't mean to give you an English lesson – I love your accent. The Champagne's next door.' She turns. Her dress swings with her hips, making the hem of the skirt fly out and overshoot the movement. *One day you'll meet a girl like this, next she'll be your wife*, murmurs the daemon inside him as he registers the flash of her knees: fronts, sides and backs. On perilously high heels she strides ahead and through the crowd in the

straightest of lines, while he follows not at all surprised that the idea should have come to him now.

Their glasses replenished, they also want cooler air.

Dieter suggests the *loggia*, at the rear of the house. A small group is breaking up from conversation there, when Jane spots an older woman. 'This is Dieter – Dieter, meet Mrs Bordages.'

'Many happy returns! Please call me Jo.' A scarab gleams on the hand spontaneously offered, while her figure and sleek dark hair, which is tightly held by a white headband, suggest a former ballet dancer. The voice is resonant and warm, American no doubt: 'We liked your speech. Let's hope Europe will be united soon, all with their own identities. But I seem to have lost Asa –' she motions at a bench under the sweeping low branches of a cedar, 'let's sit for a moment.'

Jane stops her there. 'Jo used to edit an art magazine,' she explains. 'Asa, her husband, is a writer – they're my father's neighbours for the summer.' As if reminded of something she looks over her shoulder again. 'I'll be back directly. Don't let him escape, Jo,' she says with a laugh, puts down her glass on the balustrade and disappears into the house.

Side by side Dieter and his new companion descend the steps to the garden. 'I guess you've not known each other long,' she ventures.

'We just met –'

'And Tom?'

Dieter hesitates, waiting for the woman to sit down before he takes a seat. 'We met in front of the *Flagellation*.'

'In Urbino! If you like Piero, I imagine you went on to Sansepolcro –'

'– and Monterchi, and Arezzo,' adds Dieter leaving out Rimini, Florence and Perugia for the moment. 'But of all his paintings, the one in Urbino is the one I understand least.' He opens his book just for a glimpse. 'Dr Fisher – Thomas – told me that Kenneth Clark writes that the figures on the right stand there for the two churches, Rome and *Byzanz*, we call it in German –'

'Byzantium –'

'But there is the young man in between. I want to know who he is. Is he really an angel?'

'I doubt it,' says Mrs Bordages as Jane reappears in the loggia. The light catches her skirt, deeply enough to reveal the seemingly endless lines of her legs. 'Stan Hope buttonholed Father and Asa!' she exclaims. 'Asa slipped away when I arrived but poor Father – stuck with him, I wish he were as patient with me some times!'

For an instant Mrs Bordages smiles, perhaps because she understands the remark about patience, though she seems less than amused by the rest of the news. 'I had hoped –' she pauses, striking a match, 'Hope had drunk himself under a table by now.' Veiled in fresh smoke she looks quite

forbidding or so Dieter finds as she inadvertently addresses him: ‘You met him?’

‘Stanmore Hope,’ says Jane.

The poet! Of course Dieter never met him. Only recently, though, he saw a translation of one of his poems in a literary magazine, and wondered whether the original could have been as crude. ‘He is here?’

‘Hhe – ss – ure is,’ slurs Jane and laughs. ‘Come on, help me liberate my father.’ She holds out a hand but Mrs Bordages motions they remain a moment longer.

‘One thing, Dieter,’ she begins, ‘I wanted to ask if you don’t mind: is Tom going to be your dealer? He told me what an outstanding draughtsman you were.’

The question and that already he should have been spoken of disconcerts Dieter. Once again he wishes that he would not blush quite so easily, even if the light is low enough to soften the glow. ‘I hope so,’ he says. ‘In fact, yes, he is my dealer.’

‘Good! Tom is outstanding. Knowledgeable, straight, with the right contacts also on the West Coast – rather more than you might hear about other dealers. But be a painter, not another star – you understand *Ersatz* better than I.’ Mrs Bordages rises. ‘I had better find Asa. My goddaughter Ellen and her mother are due to arrive in Rome tomorrow – we’ll have to make an early start. Come and see us, Dieter. Jane

knows where we live. We're here for the rest of the summer.' A wave, and she is gone.

'You look thunderstruck!' Jane laughs. 'That word, what does it mean?'

'*Ersatz* – plastic bananas, not the real thing –'

'An inferior substitute? Fizzy wine instead of Champagne?'

'That's it!'

'She obviously likes you. But your drink's finished, someone took mine –'

And so they go back inside, where the air has grown loud and thick even in the biggest rooms. New guests have arrived, while others are drifting back from parties all over town, friends and acquaintances in tow. Only slowly the couple make their way to the sideboard where an unceasing supply of bottles float in a great maiolica cooler.

'No clean glasses,' says Jane quick to survey the scene. 'You mind if I share yours?'

'Be my guest,' Dieter repeats Kid of a few days ago. Putting down his book he reaches for a bottle as someone knocks into him; Jane stops him from falling over. Her breasts cushion his stop, her legs part at the unintentional assault of his knee, and his face ends buried in her scented hair.

'I'm sorry,' he murmurs as she runs a hand down to the small of his back, pointed electric fingers, telling him not to

feel sorry at all. A necklace slips from her collar as they disengage, the Star of David shines gold over white on her dress.

‘You’re beautiful,’ he says.

‘So are you,’ she replies gripping his arm. ‘Will you make love to me? Now?’ Her eyes fix on him darkly, iridescent in expectance.

‘Where?’

‘I know a place,’ says Jane and lifts a full bottle from the cooler. ‘My car’s outside.’

Already she is leading the way, while Dieter suddenly wonders whether he hadn’t better tell her too about his origins now, and if she’d still want him then. *She’s Jewish. How could she?* Her step is measured and self-assured, though, as if to carry him off into that Anglo-Saxon world of hers without further discussion. *She’s the most beautiful woman you’ve met in all your life. You love her, Thomas just said to keep quiet, go on.* They are about to cross the hall, heading for the front door. Her father has not moved from the place where Stanmore Hope pinned him down.

‘Jane!’ he calls out.

‘Merano!’ exclaims Hope, projecting rasping voice and execrable accent. ‘He won’t say so but I know he picked the perfect place for his declining years – resident Italian yourself you can’t be a stranger to what I’m trying to say. I

tell you, Steinberg, to me the Italian north holds more that is remarkable than the south. If you compare –’

‘Daddy, I’d like you to meet Dieter,’ breaks in Jane.

‘Happy birthday!’ says Charles Steinberg; a big man, he crushes Dieter’s hand, shaking it cordially as the youngster recognizes the bearded face. ‘Or am I too early?’ The author raises a solid wrist and expensive watch, blinking for want of better light. ‘Six minutes,’ he booms merrily, ‘and the age of irresponsibility is over, young man! Live those precious moments! *Carpe diem!*’ He grins, all at once mischievous:

‘Have you had the pleasure – meeting Mr Stanmore Hope?’

‘Not yet,’ says Dieter with a smile, while a pair of glowering eyes come disconcertingly close, more or less level with his own. Fleshy cheeks glow below their pink-rimmed stare that suddenly grows distant as the poet rocks back on his feet. A mop of dirty hair caps the swarthiness of the man who is big too and grossly overweight, looking older by far than the number of years for which he has been abusing his body, some forty odd in all.

‘Tirolean,’ sneers Hope. ‘Who let you in here?’

‘He lives here, Stan,’ retorts Charles Steinberg. ‘Didn’t you hear his speech?’

‘This is his party,’ says Jane. ‘You’re his guest, Mr Hope!’

‘Never listen to speeches,’ the poet dismisses the intervention, rocking towards Dieter again. ‘But I was just telling Steinberg, before you interrupted so rudely, I went to

see Ezra Pound, at Merano. I gather you're still intent on getting the province back – he told me how you tried it on before. His friend Mussolini put an end to that!

*Not Mussolini again!* Dieter groans and for a moment even wonders whether Bossi, the detective, has joined the party in yet another American disguise. Woodrow Wilson too is brought back to his mind: ignorant or deliberately dismissive of the background, the US President sanctioned the Italian land grab at the Peace of Saint Germain en Laye in 1919 – at least so he was taught in unforgiving tradition. He can see that the poet, American like Wilson and Pound, is drunk; and knows well enough that there is one thing only he ought to do: leave the man alone, let him believe what he wants. But too much has happened since he last slept, soon forty-eight hours ago; and ate, when Fisher sneaked his breakfast into the gallery. Dehydrated he has downed rather more of the Champagne than he would have otherwise drunk. He should walk away and might do so yet but for Jane's presence – her angry looks convince him that he owes a reply.

'Ezra Pound is wrong,' he snaps remembering without pleasure the *Pisan Cantos* he once attempted to read.

'Pound's wrong?' cries Hope. 'Wrong!' He advances spewing contempt: 'Who are you to judge Ezra Pound?'

'A reader,' says Dieter, retreating from the shower of the poet's speech.

‘You – can – read? I demand satisfaction!’ shouts Hope slapping Dieter’s face. ‘Now!’

Unparried the blow hits the nose damaged in what has gone before. Tears well up in Dieter’s eyes, the sting makes him sniff. Humiliated he puts his book on the floor and lashes out as he comes up, repaying insult and pain. Alarmingly his fist sinks into the pulp of Hope’s gut, who doubles up and stumbles, rasping for breath. Has he struck too hard? Already Dieter wishes the American would get back on his feet.

‘I’m sorry,’ he says, ‘but you did ask for this.’

‘Hear, hear,’ agrees Charles Steinberg, and yet a hush absorbs their joint assertion. As a slow echo it grows, hollow and laming, making Dieter hang his head without reply. Once again he is the focus of attention, the villain himself this time, he clearly feels that. He picks up his book.

To Jane, rather loud: ‘Are you coming?’

But she won’t budge, as if she understood his English no longer. A glance leaves him standing and stops at her father who readily puts an arm around her shoulder.

‘I agree – you had better leave Hope,’ the writer speaks up again. ‘Let’s move on, Dieter, we’ll find better company.’ Directly he turns, steering daughter and young friend from the hall.

‘I’m not going to be abused by a Nazi schoolboy! I demand satisfaction!’

A sharp blow, as though from a stick, strikes Dieter across the back. Hope has pulled an antique sabre from the wall, where, one of a pair, it has been hanging for decoration. Incontinent with fury he waves the blade in the air.

‘Take up that sword,’ he roars as the double-edged blade gleams with all the dim light there is in the hall. Like a demented actor he stabs at the twin on the wall. ‘Defend yourself, sir – fight like a man or die!’

Dieter stands mesmerized. With the point of his sword the poet prises the other from its hooks. Fisher is trying to get into the hall as the weapon crashes on the floor, at his protégé’s feet.

‘You’re drunk,’ says Dieter and turns away; Fisher’s cry warns him to duck. His shirt rips, already there arrives another blow, forward, to the right of his neck. Blocking the attack with his book he tries to get hold of the blade, which seems pointed but blunt enough along its edges. With both hands he grabs the steel, snapping it on the knee he brings up. Unbalanced he falls but gets up again. A man with flowing white hair has pulled Hope to the ground. Fisher is by his side, trying to pin down the madman’s flailing arms and kicking feet.

The broken blade sticks in Dieter’s hands, a curiously dark tint seeps from between his fingers. Faint all at once he tries to unclench their clasp but they will not move. Drops thud or so he hears them, a dull ache explodes in pain.

‘Help me!’ he cries unable to grasp why his arms also should suddenly be on fire, and why his hands, so controlled when drawing, will obey him no longer. ‘Help me, please!’

‘Sit down, son,’ says the man with the flowing white hair, and Dieter realizes who is with him.

‘His tendons,’ says Mrs Bordages, ‘better get him to the American hospital in Rome.’

Asa, her husband, cries out: ‘Is there a doctor here? We need an ambulance, fast!’

Vischer-Fisher replies in a language Dieter can’t understand but first he must talk to Jane, pale pale Jane so frightened in her father’s arms. He has got to reassure her or is she the girl in his diploma work, about to be killed on the chair? Everything turns, he staggers a step, now two, behind. His new age, visual as never before, is about to end at dawn. Already the vanishing point has moved east of Urbino, while the sun broods silent and dark, undecided yet whether to rise or set. Fires blaze in a pair of chimneys, his four canvases hang in between, and he descends through the forest below Hochleiten, where he wasn’t born. Night falls, he is still walking; a storm blows up and it begins to snow. In the old silver mine he finds shelter, holding up the smoking candle stump to a man at his easel.

‘Here it is,’ cries the painter, ‘first line: in mid-life he went to Hell! Had a little crisis, poor chap, strayed from the road, got lost in the woods –’

‘Holly – wood, Uncle Wolfgang. *Kasperl* made films, took an overdose of LSD.’

‘Dreams and drugs, acid TV, pretension too can provide a spectacle of sorts!’

Professor Alt throws away the script, and Dieter at last recognizes the *sala del trono* – empty; the room next door – deserted; the single fireplace – cold. *Putti* play pipes and flutes; in half-relief their acorn willies shine on the mantelpiece frieze. *Paesani* row in a bar.

‘You can plan those things!’ one of them shouts banging the table.

‘No, you can’t,’ hollers Shutup who brought his nickname back from the States, ‘the last five-year plan –’

‘But friends, this is flower power!’ The village teacher unbuttons her blouse. ‘New sociology, white-hot technology, human engineering! We measured the thickness of your skulls – now we have better ideas, we’ll get through to you yet: beautiful images, we’ll implant them direct in your brains.’

‘Demands, you mean, which had better be met!’ The secretary of the PCI clammers on a barrel. ‘Comrades, let’s tell them, loud and clear –’

‘But who’s going to listen?’

‘The polls will register –’

‘The Poles?’ A bent little priest in a threadbare cassock scratches his head. ‘The Holy Father comes from Poland –’

A buzz of Vespe cuts him off. Girls in billowing skirts ride side-saddle behind their young men, as the peasants flock round a newspaper spread on the ice cream box. Pictures of Gagarin's spaceflight illustrate the piece that started the row: Vostock 1, the spacecraft, here; the astronaut, in pressurized helmet and suit, there; Nikita Krushchev, kissing the hero, in between. Dieter interrupts, he has lost his way but the peasants will not listen to him, no longer one of them. Alone he advances into the square he once drew outside Pilate's house, hopeful still for the human experiment. Like a looking glass turning under the sun, the *Flagellation* flips and he steps into the space it mirrored, King Solomon's palace, as Piero painted it at Arezzo. The monarch is at the centre, greeting the Queen of Sheba and her women. Giovanni Bacci, the Italian in the brocaded gown, whom Dieter first met at Urbino, stands among the King's retainers. As a long lost friend Dieter approaches him: 'You knew Piero. Did he believe in what you paid him to paint?'

'Whether it'd make a difference?' The donor of both the *Flagellation* and part of the *Arezzo Cycle* seems astonished. 'In the end he always did what he wanted. He knew it would outlast the message he was meant to convey.'

'So why did he turn to maths?'

Puzzled Dieter walks away, passing among the courtiers, who are rather more distant from each other than he judged

looking up from the choir floor. Again he tries to say why he came but fails to order his words in face of the King, despite Solomon's attention, kindness even. A slight, almost imperceptible nod, and the royal gaze falls back on Aunt Cecily's bosom, where it has rested for the last five hundred years. The *Madonna del Parto* at Monterchi, where Piero's own mother may lie buried, she'll hear him, to her Dieter reaches out, through air to the picture plane. As on a stage the two angels by her sides drop the curtain they have been holding back.

'*Sono Gagarin,*' one of them speaks up; her twin, reversed from the same carton, flaps her wings.

Dieter laughs: 'You're who?'

'Ga - ga - garin.'

'You're ahead of your time, old girls. At least get rid of your halos if you want me to believe your stories.'

The newspapers are back on the tables. Gaga sweeps them into a sack, but each time she removes one, another takes its place. Furiously she rushes about, faster and faster until she grows transparent to the eye, and at last the sack gains shape. Garin shakes it down..

'The future,' she says crossly and jumps on the sack.

'*Esagerato il futuro.*'

Gaga opens her wings, a rag of empty jute lies on the floor. Like a pair of bats the sisters fly off and disappear in the shadows that underline the Urbino eaves at noon.

‘Dieter!’ The call comes from far away, too far to connect. ‘Dieter!! Die – ter!!! Dee – ee – ee – ter!!!!’

Alt holds his breath, still in the presence that came to his bedside, frozen at an all-time low, where past and present converge in total prostration. Life or death for the painter? His eyes, always with a will of their own, fasten on the imprint he shall never erase. Painfully his alertness grows with the surface signals of the person who left him years ago. Once again his heart would break with the memory, could he not see those shadows of concern – surely not for him.

‘Jane,’ he croaks as something gritty at the back of his throat threatens to choke him. His tongue lolls from side to side, making him feel quite stupid.

Jane holds up a newspaper she wants him to see. Like a scared animal their daughter snarls in the police-style mug shot.

‘Clarissa – is – in – a – German – jail. They – don’t – know – who – she – is.’

Charlie, he must sit up! In the wash basin, on the far wall, the snow-ball heads of chrysanthemums come into view with his raised sight: flowers for the dead only where he was young, while his pulse thumps as though to nail his confusion once and for all: Charlie never replied to his invitation; then Jane called, and he set out for London. Alt falls back on the bed.

‘I phoned you,’ she says observing his groping, frightened looks. ‘Don’t you remember?’

He nods.

‘You collapsed at the airport, some fuss at customs over the *Motorman*. Thomas just told me that Clarissa had sold him. Don’t shut your eyes, please! You – understand – what – I am – saying?’

**20. Wagner Bielowski's Apartment, Manhattan.**

**Thursday, 25 September, early morning**

The telephone! The first ring has Wagner on his elbows. His head hurts, a couple, maybe three glasses of wine too many after a day that had begun with Dieter's disappearance in London; continued with the sudden despatch of the triptych to Vienna; and ended with Ellen asking if he knew or had ever met Christo, the Rumanian artist famous for his packaging and wrapping of major buildings, even bridges. He can see the face but not the hands of the Bakelite clock on his bedside table.

'Mr Vagner?'

'Yes?'

'Are you ze gentlemen responsible for ze Dieter Alt retrospective exhibition at ze Guggenheim museum?'

'I am.'

'Zen we hef a proposition to make you – concerning Dieter Alt.'

The caller pauses while Wagner blinks at the gap between the curtains. Dead-still, as if to contain his resentment, they drape the partly open window. A shimmer of blue says it's no longer night.

'Who are you?' he demands. 'How did you get my number? You know the time?'

'I em not sure what ze time is in New York. I em too soon? Vat ve hef is very important.'

For a moment the curator considers telling the man to call him at the office later, but too much has happened to Dieter – is happening still – so he sits up instead, switching on the light as he swings his legs over the bedside. The time is 6.02.

'You have something to sell,' he says.

'Correct, Mr Vagner.'

'A work by Dieter Alt.'

'By himself. Correct.'

'But we don't buy exhibits for the show.'

'Ve are in ze possession of en early vork, Mr Vagner. A lost vork zat should be in your show. You are interested?'

'You mean the *Diploma Work*?' The curator is on his feet, too excited to feel the boom exploding in his head. 'It exists?'

'Ze one he does for ze Akademie – zat is correct, Mr Vagner. You are interested?'

'I told you the museum can't buy paintings for the show! If you want to lend it – providing it's genuine – I could still fit it in. You could sell it later, I'm sure. Tom Fisher is Dieter Alt's dealer. You ought to talk to him.'

'Mr Fisher – is he a Jew?'

'What's that got to do with it? If it helps – I'm Jewish.'

'You, Mr Vagner?'

'The name's Bielowski. Wagner is my first name.'

'Vagner is your first nem? Forgive me, Mr Bielowski, zis sounds like a bed choke, *ja?*'

The voice erupts in laughter, which grows and grows until the whole room seems to reverberate with its infernal rasp and it still will not stop. The curator can no longer breathe, his excitement is dead, the man mad of course! With an anguished roar he slams down the phone and flees to the bathroom just in time to throw up.

**21. Stadelheim Prison, Munich. Thursday, 25  
September, night**

Though Dieter never took her there, her *Vaterland* is Tirol, her mother tongue English. The coincidence suddenly worries Charlie, though she tries not to think in terms of Jew or goy. She can speak German fluently but not write it as she intends to Mayor Pongratz' widow now.

Surprisingly a copy of *Cassell's German & English Dictionary* (the fifth edition, London, July 1961, foxed and showing signs of use as much as of age) was delivered from the prison library only a couple of hours after her request in the afternoon, together with a ballpoint pen and some sheets of lined, gray A4 paper. Straightaway she sat down to her task and wondered about the woman she meant to address: who was *Frau* Pongratz, and how could she even think of comforting rather than upsetting her yet more? Unable to visualize the woman Charlie began to browse in the dictionary. Though the interior lights have been turned out long since, those around the perimeter reflect brightly enough for her to read the words she now writes out in translation.

*Ausdruck* – expression, phrase, saying, term. *Bild* – picture, image, figure, illustration, portrait, likeness, representation, counterfeit, effigy, idea, simile, metaphor, emblem, symbol. *Beschreibung* – description, portrayal. *Einbildung* –

imagination, fancy, conceit, presumption. *Vorstellung* – introduction, presentation, performance, representation, complaint, remonstrance, expostulation, imagination, idea, notion, conception, mental image. *Wirklichkeit* – reality, actuality, truth.

Isn't there something missing? Once again Charlie recalls the word games Dieter sometimes played with her, and Zora touched on, holding forth on the philosopher Heidegger the other night.

*Auseinandersetzung* – statement, explanation; discussion, argument, altercation ....

Talking about drawing Dieter brought up the word: not only could he translate it literally – *apart-setting* – but split the German further still, by separating *aus-ein-ander* – all of which he related to the way he'd look at a potential subject, taking it to pieces before he understood it well enough to attempt a drawing, thus putting the components together again: his interpretation, so to speak. And indeed, given the dictionary's rendering plus Dieter's literal one, might the word describe not only the draughtsman vis-à-vis his subject but herself now, separated from normal everyday life, even the world? She was born an already famous painter's daughter. Dieter did not need to encourage her to pick up a brush, nor did he try to interfere, believing the girl's talent natural and strong enough to find its way. Then he went to

America, and Charlie stopped drawing and painting altogether.

A light flickers, a projector securing the prison walls goes out and is replaced by another. With a fresh slant the bars in the window cast their shadows across the pages she has written, while her hands throw their own more diffuse patterns over them. Or are they below, caused by the obstacles in the light's path closer to herself? And where do those near parallels cast by the bars point? In? Out? At the vanishing point, in infinity, where they allegedly meet?

*Fluchtpunkt* – point of flight – is the German equivalent of this technical term. Dieter first explained it to her with a simple drawing, placing a single vanishing point at the end of a central perspective, itself based on convention – as we believe we perceive but don't really see the things in our view. A little later he asked her to look for the vanishing points in one of his paintings, within and without the frame, and she found half a dozen, quickly, unhesitatingly, pleasing Dieter with this proof of her painterly eye. Even in her imagination she does not want to be outside now – where in this chaos she caused could she belong? First she must come to terms with herself! Even the admission of guilt contains elements of defiance, which demand her withdrawal now, as artists also need distance from the canvas they are working on. She remembers the form Liebl attempted to fill in on his typewriter, and the prosecutor brought back: *ich möchte mich*

*nicht äußern* – which Charlie translated: I don't want to outer myself.

*äußern* – 1. v. a. utter, express, give voice to; advance (an opinion, etc); manifest; *er -te schon früh einen Hang zur Satire*, he early displayed a turn for satire. 2. v. r. express one's opinion; make itself felt; manifest itself; *eine Rückwirkung -te sich bald*, a reaction soon set in.

Perplexed she rereads the entry. Is this her problem: she was too gregarious despite her parents' money and fame, on the way out of herself until she went too far? All the while she was looking ahead with sharp new eyes, or so she believed afflicted by tunnel vision in fact. If she had been streetwise, which, given her nature, she might have grown up to be with a different, rather less privileged set of parents, would she have been duped so easily? Refusing to say who she is, is she not doing one thing right at last?

*Verschweigen* is one opposite to *äußern* – keep secret, conceal (from); pass over in silence, suppress; *ich habe nichts zu -en*, I have nothing to conceal. And *verinnerlichen* another – intensify, deepen, or, as she translates it – to go deeper inside, to withdraw.

Again she looks about herself: she is indeed inside as the saying goes, confined within a little over two metres by three, with two and a half on top or so: some eighteen cubic metres of interior not hers. She is the inmate, who can but withdraw yet further into herself. And assuming that one

day she shall see the light of day as a so-called free woman again, what is she going to be? An artist still? Or does she already stand condemned to remain what she made of herself, not deliberately, though just as effectively: a criminal in short, as well as a fool, who failed to realize the first major project she had planned? Sick to the stomach all of a sudden she drops the pen. Who *could* forgive her for what she did – not only to Mayor Pongratz, his wife and the men who crashed, but to her mother, Dieter, Grandfather Steinberg, the Bavarians and their castle? How shall she ever be able to try anything new again – she, duped dolt, who had been so sure of what she wanted to do? All at once she feels desperately tired, an aching, deep need to sleep. She doesn't know just how ill she is: tiredness is one of the symptoms of depression.

Steps stop outside, a key grates in the lock harshly.

'You're leaving us,' announces a woman warder the prisoner remembers for her elbows. Two men peer over her shoulders; in plain clothes they look oddly relaxed.

For an unreasonable moment Charlie believes that she is about to be thrown out, back in the streets she came from, her withdrawal reversed. Another jail is where she is going, she understands that well enough

'Where to?' she asks. 'At this time?'

'*Zum Teufel,*' says the warder with an unpleasant laugh.

'To the devil –'

**22. Jane and Dieter's suite, Hotel Bayrischer Hof,  
Munich. Friday, 26 September, afternoon**

'Madam – *Herr Alt* – I'm afraid I never got to see your daughter.'

'They wouldn't let you?' demands Jane.

'She's no longer in Munich. An hour ago we were informed that she was moved to another prison.'

'Where?' asks Dieter.

'Dachau?' breaks in Jane.

Felix Heuschneider, born 1957, blinks. Barely into the room the Bavarian eyes the woman who took two steps back, while her ex-husband came forward to shake his hand at the door to the suite they share at the Bayrische Hof. Strangely off colour for someone of his *métier* and fame – plain gray compared with her strained, nevertheless luxuriant looks – no doubt there showed just a flash of irritation in the painter's eyes just now.

'She was taken to Stammheim,' retorts the lawyer, 'one of the most modern penal institutions in Europe.'

'Stammheim,' cries Jane, 'Clarissa's no terrorist!'

'KZ-Brigade threw a red dye into the cascade at Linderhof last night – another Big Art event, like a river of blood I just heard on the radio in my car. It can't be stopped. Only the running water will wash itself clean.' Heuschneider shudders

and raises the folder in his hands; already he recovers his smile. 'Could we? I brought some papers I need you to sign.'

Dieter pulls out a chair from under the dining table for Jane, then one for the visitor, who resumes his report. Clarissa, as he too refers to their daughter, was transferred overnight, which took everyone by surprise; someone high up in the judiciary must have decided to remove her from Bavaria – inconvenient but perhaps only wise as Stammheim is near Stuttgart, in the State of Baden-Württemberg, some two hundred kilometres away. Heuschneider motions at the *Süddeutsche Nachrichten* and the *Münchner Merkur* on the table: the Conservatives are in disarray; the polls this morning show that Prime Minister Mahler (not one bit like the late Franz Josef Strauß) has lost ground since his handling of the Stammheim affair. Clarissa gave herself up on Wednesday. She was told as a matter of course about her right to be represented but refused legal assistance. Nor has she asked for it since or so the investigating judge has assured Heuschneider, showing him the charge sheet she had signed with a cross.

'Now the complication: on the telephone you told me that your daughter will be eighteen on Monday. Today, in other words, I represent a minor, on her parents' behalf – but I shan't next week.'

'Despite her not being of age when she committed the offence?' asks Jane.

‘It will be her decision alone how she wishes to be defended, Mrs Alt – I’m sorry – Steinberg.’

‘We’ll get her to ask for a lawyer. If she hasn’t understood – we’ll tell her how serious this is!’

‘We don’t know a thing about her motivation nor her involvement with others,’ retorts Dieter and gets to his feet. A tram pings its bells under the partly open window, as if to remind him of Vienna, where Fisher checked in at the Hotel Imperial and promptly went underground, or so it seemed when he tried to call him there. Once more the bells ring, and the tram moves off, revealing a line of demonstrators on the far side of the road.

‘IN MEMORIAM MAX PONGRATZ, BURGO-MASTER OF HOHENSCHWANGAU,’ reads the banner held up by couple of young men in lederhosen; and a placard, over two women in dirndls: ‘HANDS OFF OUR KING’S CASTLES’

Dieter frowns. Who told these people that Jane and he were here, barely an hour and a half after landing? Who organized them and their rustic get-up, which could be Tirolean just as well? There’s another message, ‘ALT GO HOME,’ joining from around the corner. As a little boy, before Erika took charge of him, he used to wear lederhosen and knitted jerkins. Though Tirol, unlike American-occupied Salzburg and Bavaria, had fallen in the French zone, he saw the almost identical, ‘AMI GO HOME,’ daubed on

barns in the valley below Hochleiten – less than a hundred miles from where he finds himself now; the closest he has come to it since Uncle Wolfgang's intervention at the Academy resulted in an unwarranted police raid on his digs and his flight from Vienna. Jane and Charlie are English, but he – in this allegedly global village, where the news of his departure from the hospital has spread with surprising speed – who, what is he? Still resident in London he heard that Hochleiten was up for sale. Although the farm had become his alone after great-aunt Cecily's death; and his adoptive parents should never have been allowed to dispose of it even in his own best interest as they had claimed; the local authorities rejected his offer to buy it back because of his naturalization in the UK. Unlike Jane, who was allowed to keep the Austrian nationality acquired through her marriage to him, Dieter and Charlie are British only.

'ALT GO HOME', he reads again, reminded once more of where he was born, right here in Bavaria. However, a man is pointing; from her apron a woman produces her glasses. Before she can put them on Dieter steps back into the depth of the room. He doesn't want Jane to see the demonstrators now; no doubt they'll have to face them later. Inadvertently he addresses the lawyer in German: *'Warum KZ?'*

*'Kirchner Zweig – natürlich wollen die auch an die Lager erinnern. Die Brigade –'*

'I don't understand German,' interrupts Jane.

'I'm sorry!' A glance at her face, and Heuschneider once again abandons his grin as well as the excuse – that he had assumed she understood German; many Jews did where he had perfected his English, in America. 'Herr Alt asked me about KZ,' he goes on, 'short for *Konzentrationslager* though the brigade claims it stands for an artist and a writer who took their lives under the Nazis. As you know, your daughter admitted that she had helpers, though she won't say who they are. It'll be difficult to conduct her defence as long as we know nothing about them, especially if she is suspected of shielding terrorists carrying on the fight – one of the reasons, no doubt, why she has been isolated.'

'She's in solitary?' cuts in Dieter.

'It's a standard precaution during investigatory custody – for her own safety too.'

The painter shuts his eyes, not quite suppressing a moan. 'What's it like, Stammheim?' he asks quietly.

'A fortress!' cries Jane. 'Built for those terrorists they bumped off there – a bunker without windows.'

'There are many windows at Stammheim, Mrs Steinberg! Every cell has one,' retorts Heuschneider. 'There's a high security tract on the top floor. Your daughter may be up there – I'm afraid I have been able to learn little about her conditions there. I heard she is in good health, no more. I hope you will be able to see her for yourself.'

'When'

‘We’ll have to apply – ’ the lawyer taps his papers, ‘however – a practical problem – it’s Friday, almost the end of the week in working terms.’

‘We’ll stay however long it takes!’ As if to illustrate his determination Dieter sits down again.

‘We’ve got to do better than that!’ insists Jane. ‘What have we here – a consul – a British chargé d’affaires?’

‘Charlie broke the law in this country,’ Dieter reminds her. ‘We have no evidence she’s being treated unfairly.’

‘She’s your daughter! For God’s sake, you’re respected, famous, bring your weight to bear!’

‘Pressure?’ Dieter shakes his head. The only child of a famous author Jane grew up using his name (through boarding school, landing a job with a Bond-Street auction house, establishing her own business in rare books soon after) and despite all expects to do the same with his. She has changed with the years of their separation of course and not to her disadvantage as he senses – ever since she awakened him at the hospital (calling the ex-husband back into shared life so to speak) she has been trying to be civil, even considerate. He has not forgotten though that during their marriage too Jane was apt to dole out kindness with consideration for what she might get in return. Naturally it’s her child’s release that she feels compelled to bring about, whatever her differences with Charlie or him; equally naturally she is afraid to fight alone in this foreign country –

all at once Dieter fears that she may have to do just that.

The early morning journey has tired him. A mere hour and a quarter in the air have turned into a prolongation of the days and nights flying, working and flying again before his collapse. The consultant at the hospital warned him that he was not fit to go; indeed he was risking the very life Holmes had saved with his prompt resuscitation.

‘I think you should take a look from the window,’ he says going back on his earlier decision; if Jane is to fight on her own she had better see what’s in store.

‘At what?’

‘Go, take a look.’

Heuschneider gets to his feet, only then Jane follows him. Speechless she gazes at the line that has more than doubled in depth and length since Dieter saw it. Some fifty, sixty people by now stand along the kerb, all in national costume, with a handful of policemen at either end. ‘ALT SENIOR HATES AUSTRIA – ALT JUNIOR KILLS IN BAVARIA,’ screams a new banner at the centre.

Someone points, jeers rise, and Jane picks up the vase and flowers on a table between the windows. No one could throw them that far says Dieter and puts an arm round her shoulders, their first deliberate touch after all those years. Gently then, as he feels her trembling, he takes the vase from her hands and leads her to a chair. Over her sobs and the more distant shouts since Heuschneider has shut the

window, he asks who is going to decide when they may see their daughter.

‘The investigating judge,’ says the lawyer, ‘provided the prosecution has no objection.’

‘Could you ask them still this morning?’

‘I can try.’

‘You must – please!’ Dieter motions at the phone. ‘I understand we may ask only. However, we’ll do what we can to help find out who the people with Charlie – I mean Clarissa – were. Surely that’s in the public interest?’

### 23. Vienna, Austria. Friday, 26 September, morning

In the Austrian capital meanwhile, a few minutes before nine, we might have seen Fisher in front of the Hotel Imperial waiting for a tram to go by before he crossed the Ring and turned left, towards the opera house. For a moment he hesitates in view of the building that reminds him of his student days. Though he used to feel quite at home in the gods there, as architecture he did not care for it then and dislikes it even more in its rebuilt form, exact copy and yet not, without the softening so-called time may bring. He turns right though he could have gone straight on. Heading north he avoids both the unlovely facade and the memorial Holub took him to see after dinner last night: Alfred Hrdlicka's *Against War and Fascism* as the lumps of marble scattered round a blob of bronze, allegedly representing a street-scrubbing Jew, have been named.

Fisher enters Kärntner Straße, pedestrian since his last visit, and different entirely from the years before the Great War, when his mother took him and his little sister shopping here. Only Lobmeyer's, where the countess would stop on occasion to order replacements for the family crystal, sparkles with something reminiscent of its old magic, enough to pull him up at the window for a moment. Through a maze of side streets then he reaches a small square and presently confuses himself with the numbering, until he spots the

name plate by the door : *Neumann & Neumann, Rechtsanwälte* – lawyers in a word. On the second floor of the house without lift he rings the bell and is admitted into darkness until his eyes adjust: an apartment once, the cavernous rooms and high ceilings give on to a dismal courtyard at the back; the faint smell of chicken broth hangs in air. A middle-aged woman takes his coat, admiringly she brushes the camelhair before she hangs it up. In London or New York Fisher usually wears a loden coat but not here. The woman opens yet another tall dark door.

‘*Herr Doktor Fischer,*’ she announces the visitor to man reading by a pair of lamps with tattered silk shades..

‘Bernd Neumann,’ the lawyer introduces himself as he rolls off his seat and extends his hand at the end of an arm that seems too short to reach across the desk. ‘I’m grateful for your visit,’ he says in German. ‘Your secretary warned us you’d be pressed for time. Will you sit? Coffee?’

He has had breakfast says the dealer but accepts the chair. ‘Was it you who called Mr Bielowski?’

Neumann winces, his partner made the call. ‘His English is better than mine but his sense of humour – a survivor, *three years in Mauthausen*, you must understand – they don’t see things our way.’ The lawyer shrugs, even shudders. ‘I’m sorry he upset Mr Bielowski. He’s not in today, not well. Please accept and pass on my apologies!’

Fisher nods and points at the table in the depth of the room. Straightaway he spotted the four rolled canvases there. 'Is this it? May I see?'

The lawyer hesitates. First he ought to explain, or so he insists, how his client, whose name he is not at liberty to disclose, came into possession: '*Herr* Alt's uncle, we guess, got hold of the painting on the way to the incinerator so to speak. Most probably he was afraid to let anyone know, including his family, though he may have been jealous of his nephew – who knows? Professor Alt's companion, who had been living with him –'

'You mean *Frau* Larcher?'

Neumann frowns. 'I'm not sure – my partner handled the will. Do I understand you knew Professor Alt?'

'He painted me! However, you *saw* the will –'

'As I said, my partner did. Anyway, the person who inherited Professor Alt's estate never unrolled the canvases for all we know but owned them long enough for them to become hers. Her heirs found the work after her death last year but recognized it only a few days ago, having seen something in a local paper about Dieter Alt and the scandal then.'

Fisher yawns and openly inspects his watch. The time in New York is three in the morning, he says, softening his show of disinterest slightly. 'Your client wishes to sell.'

Neumann rocks back on his chair.

‘At what price?’

‘Two million Swiss francs. Payable in Switzerland –’

‘– into a numbered account!’ The dealer stands up and steps to the door. ‘I don’t do business like that, *Herr* Neumann. Please tell your client, a painting by Dieter Alt has to have provenance and history, which must be clean, or it may become quite unsaleable in future. As regards the price, it ought to be established rather than picked out of the air.’

The lawyer too is on his feet now, his hand on the door.

‘You don’t want to see it?’

‘I do – for years I’ve been wondering whether it hadn’t been saved after all – but not on your client’s terms.’

Perhaps he’d like to look at it privately then, pleads Neumann. ‘Allow yourself the pleasure!’

Pleasure? Fisher shudders. In Urbino still Dieter began to tell him of the execution his diploma work had showed, and followed the description with a sketch in Spoleto. Even then the dealer said nothing about his sister’s fate. He opens the door; before the secretary can get up from her desk he takes his coat. Wolfgang Alt was gay and *Frau* Larcher his housekeeper, he says, hardly the companion Neumann described. He knows too that the Professor left everything to his sister-in-law, his only surviving relative apart from Dieter. And so he might just buy his own painting back, provided Erika Alt can prove title in view of the years that

she had possession. Meanwhile the Guggenheim would like to borrow it – that in itself would enhance the price. An arrangement has been made with a bank here in Vienna: half a million dollars to guarantee the return after the show, though none of this is to be misconstrued. Dieter knows nothing of the reappearance; he might well be justified demanding his work be given back free of charge.

The lawyer moans. ‘He’ll sue?’

‘If necessary –’ Fisher smiles. For the next few hours he may be reached through Dr Czernin at the Länder-Bank, they could make the exchange at her office. Surprisingly agile then he runs down the stairs and out into the city he can’t wait to leave.

**24. Jane and Dieter's Suite, Hotel Bayrischer Hof,  
Munich. Friday, 26 September, afternoon**

With his papers duly signed Heuschneider rushed to the public prosecutor's office, where that same *Staatsanwalt* who interviewed the client he has yet to meet had offered to see him still before lunch. Not quite forgetful of the consultant's warning Dieter lies on his bed with the Bavarian papers he had glanced at earlier, while Jane paces up and down in the living room smoking, though she never really acquired the habit. There is nothing to hold his interest in the papers. He can't help but visualize the scene at Linderhof, the smallest of King Ludwig's castles, where KZ-Brigade emptied several canisters of an as yet unidentified red dye into the waterworks. His adoptive parents took him to the place, where a guide explained that it was a copy of the Petit Trianon at Versailles. From the foot of the regal bed Dieter marvelled at all the gold and the mirrors around it – their opposing inward reflections caused him to look out instead: at a slope so close to the window he thought that he could have jumped in the fountain at its bottom; the cascade rose above that. A river of blood, Heuschneider described that steeply stepped waterfall – his own words or repeating the radio? To the painter it seems obvious enough that the kind of imagination conceiving the giant prick might also have struck on dyeing the cascade. Restlessly he picks up

Ginzburg's book again. *Further thoughts on the Flagellation* – the chapter has caught his eye before; a sentence hooks him in mid-text:

*There is, however, one figure in the picture which our account has deliberately ignored hitherto: the mysterious blond youth.*

*None of the very numerous interpretations proposed over the years has offered an acceptable explanation of his presence. His clothes, his face and his attitude all seem incongruous with what is going on around him. Barefoot, clad in a simple tunic, he stands between two men who are shod and wearing elaborate modern dress. He neither speaks (like the man on his right) nor listens (like the man on his left). The former's solemn gravity, like the latter's attentiveness, leaves him unmoved. His beautiful face is unruffled by any recognizable emotion or sentiment. His eyes are fixed on something that we cannot see.*

*The young man is dead.*

'I need to get some cigarettes,' says Jane sticking her head through the door. 'You look as though you'd seen a ghost!'

Dieter holds his breath; should he tell her? 'I have,' he replies at last. 'Remember that young man in Piero's painting?'

'Oh him, in Urbino –'

'Exactly. Thing is, this writer says he's dead. Listen: *Hitherto we have been trying to decode the political and religious implications of the Flagellation. Now we have arrived at its most intimate and private core. We propose to identify the young man as*

*Buonconte da Montefeltro, the illegitimate son of Federico, who was made legitimate in 1454 and who died of the plague at Aversa in the autumn of 1458, aged seventeen.'*

'Charlie – Clarissa – is seventeen,' says Jane. 'You're not superstitious?'

Dieter smiles. 'I was afraid you might be. It's just – it's that all these years I've been wondering who he was – remember when you introduced me to Jo? We talked about it then.'

'You were obsessed with him. From the beginning,' says Jane smiling herself now. 'I'll be back in a second.'

Alone again Dieter reads on:

*Enamoured as he was of manuscripts and of classical antiquity, Federico had given the young man who he intended to be his heir a complete humanistic education. In 1453 Bessarion and Flavio Biondo were staying at Urbino. While they were at table (so Biondo, writing a few years later, relates), Federico showed Buonconte a letter that was written in vulgari materno (the vulgar mother-tongue) and common in its expression. Buonconte, then twelve years of age, translated it into elegant Latin. Already at this time, perhaps, or anyway not much later, Federico had appointed as his son's tutor the peasant-humanist Martino Filetico da Filletino ....*

*Buonconte, although still very young, soon began to take a part in the responsibilities of government. In 1457, during his father's absence, he wrote to Sigismondo Malatesta to deplore the damage done by soldiers near Sassoferrato. The following summer, he left*

*Urbino in company with Bernardino, the son of Ottaviano Ubaldini della Carda, and travelled to the Aragonese court at Naples. On their way through Rome, they were received by the Pope: 'and he was astonished,' wrote Guerriero da Gubbio in his chronicle, 'as were the other Cardinals, to find so great a cleverness in so small an age.' Bessarion must surely have been proud of his pupil.*

*From Rome, the two young men went on to Naples. At Aversa, they fell victim to the plague. Buonconte died at once; Bernardino on the journey home, at Castel Durante, not far from Urbino. When this happened, we do not precisely know: but Biondo, in a letter to Galeazzo Sforza, Count of Pavia, dated 22 November 1458, speaks of Buonconte's death as a recent event ('nuper defuncto') which had caused a great stir throughout Italy ....*

*No portraits exist of Buonconte. To identify him as the young man is thus to offer a conjecture. However, various features do make the identification probable. First of all there is his angelic aspect, which assimilates him to the dead: as has been noted, his bare feet and his tunic recall Piero's angels, whether those in the Baptism or those in the Nativity in the National Gallery, London. There is his pallor, which contrasts with the athletic solidity of his body and calls to mind the similar unnatural pallor which indicates, in the portrait of Battista Sforza in the Uffizi, that the portrait is posthumous. There is his detachment from his surroundings – a detachment not merely psychological but existential, so to speak, as of one who does not see and cannot be seen. There is –*

The telephone rings. Back from the lobby Jane takes the call; indistinctly Dieter hears her through the half-open door. Moments later she enters the room. 'It's Ellen Burns,' she says. 'She's going to fax us the details of the people who made the wrap. She wants to speak to you.' The door shuts behind her as Dieter puts down his book and picks up the phone.

'Ellen, you're a star,' he exclaims. 'Thank you! Thank you a thousand times! How did you find out?'

'I begged Christo for a list of people who had made wraps for him. He told me, a few months ago he'd been asked the same question by a guy called Berlin. Wagner's secretary helped me making the calls. Anyway, I worry about you!'

'I'll be fine. I'm only sorry about your interview. I'll try and get back –'

'Be careful, please. Don't risk another collapse. I'll think of something, Wagner and I, we'll improvise. I miss you, Dieter. Looking at the triptych has changed my life.'

'Your life!'

'My outlook. How I see your work and mine, and myself in relation to you. If your proposal could be revived – I'd love to be your wife!'

**25. In the new FAO Building, Uno-City, Vienna, Austria.**

**Friday, 26 September, afternoon**

From Neumann's office Fisher rejoined Christof Holub, tousled and fashionably unshaven as usual, in the FAO lobby. The telephone engineers are long gone. A team of art handlers have been working through the night more or less, and are about to set the last panel of the triptych on its easel.

'Not quite straight,' Holub calls, 'or are you?'

One of the art handlers produces a spirit level, another a plumb line, and there results an almost imperceptible shift, enough to satisfy the architect's eye. He smiles at the visitor: 'Isn't it amazing? These vibrant colours! The way it all fits in? But let's go outside.'

Along a line of newly planted maples they make their way to the back of the building; under the autumnal canopy of an old copper beech they come to halt. Darkly the triptych gleams at them there through the faintly tinted glass, defined by its perforations above all. Far-sighted Fisher screws up his eyes, tracing some of the figures in the painting.

Inadvertently it threatens to overwhelm him. Holub sees him tremble and takes his arm, afraid that he might suddenly collapse.

'I've been trying to hold back,' Fisher explains turning to the companion at last, 'my mother and I – Father died before the war – we lost my sister and her husband. He was

Serbian, a doctor, just qualified. Both of them full of life had the German occupation not turned them into partisans! I never could picture their deaths, they were separated after their arrest – but now – now I have to accept that this –’ accusingly he points at the triptych, ‘I suppose that’s what was left of them in the end!’

Holub bows. Hill-farmers in the mainly German-speaking Sudetenland before the war, his parents found refuge in this Second Republic of Austria, where he was born. Thirty-nine by now he is little more than half of Fisher’s age, too far behind to appreciate what Dieter still can: old, monarchic Austria, which his grandfather and Aunt Cecily embodied. Nor does Holub care much about the more recent past of this country, which afforded him an education as though designed to suppress the memory of the First Republic and the years that followed under the Nazis. Indeed, this is the first time in his life that someone talks to him from personal experience of them. An old man, forced to flee in his younger years, had to come back to tell him! And so Christof Holub too begins to see the triptych for what it is: heartfelt, real, drawn from deep passion and yet without pointing fingers, for here is a work transcending mere gestures, calling on images that would have been valid thousands of years ago even if they now show part of the human condition at the end of the second millenium AD.

**26. Dieter and Jane's suite, Hotel Bayrischer Hof,  
Munich. Friday, 26 September, evening**

As Dieter and Jane are waiting still to hear when they may visit their daughter at Stammheim, the television is on in their living room. Already Linderhof has featured in the evening news. Another cache of the dye has been found in the complex waterworks at the castle; the fountains too have begun to spew red, while the cascade is running redder than before. Prime Minister Mahler is expected to declare a state of emergency in order to prevent further attacks by KZ-Brigade. Right now the Bavarian cabinet is in session. And there have been demonstrations not only in Munich but the Austrian capital too, where a new work by Dieter Alt is causing uproar.

WYSIWYG, here we fade in with a clip from a press conference earlier this afternoon:

1. ESTABLISHING SHOT – EXTERIOR. A GRAY NEO GOTHIC BUILDING – THE RATHAUS (TOWN HALL) IN VIENNA. DAY
  
2. ESTABLISHING SHOT – INTERIOR. LIGHTLESS KAFKAESQUE CORRIDORS. CRYSTAL CHANDELIERS. CARVED DOUBLE DOORS.

3. MEDIUM SHOT, OFFICE. A MAN BEHIND A GILT DESK. JOURNALISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

PRESENTER (Voice Over)

Franz Karl, Vienna's conservative Vice Burgomaster, called press and television this afternoon to explain why he wasn't prepared to countersign a cheque passed to him earlier in the day by his socialist boss, Burgomaster Navratil.

4. ONE SHOT – MIDDLE-AGED MAN – *HERR* KARL – BEHIND DESK

5. CLOSE SHOT – CHEQUE, HANDS

KARL

Five million dollars for a so-called work of art that once again is nothing but an insult to Austria!

6. ONE SHOT – KARL, STILL HOLDING UP CHEQUE

KARL

Dieter Alt in Vienna, his daughter in Bavaria, together now they're on the attack. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not prepared to countersign – that's why I called you, it's as simple as that, whether the city offered to pay for the new FAO building or not. My party stands for moral standards, a

sovereign state within the European community, impervious to the dictates from abroad! When the Jewish World Congress tried to force them to abandon their presidential candidate, the Socialists stood firm and we with them. They seem to forget that the battle goes on. Tonight at six we'll assemble in front of the Rathaus. I'm appealing to all citizens – all *true* Austrians – to join our march to Uno-City.

7. MEDIUM SHOT – OFFICE, JOURNALISTS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, TOWN HALL STAFF

#### SOCIALIST JOURNALIST

*Herr* Karl, have you actually *seen* the offending work?

8. ONE SHOT – KARL

#### KARL

I've seen this ....

(The politician puts down the cheque, in Austrian shillings and for the second half, not the whole of the commission, in fact; he holds up a black and white photograph instead.)

Isn't it enough? Yet another concentration camp scene, plus this –

(He produces the front page of a newspaper.)

– obscenity at Neuschwanstein! Violence and sex – of course, none of us ever saw it but you may have read the description of Dieter Alt's so-called diploma work in the *Kronen Zeitung* – then already he combined violence with sex in his attack on Austria. And as if that combination were not enough, he has brought in his own daughter on the act –

9. MEDIUM SHOT – OFFICE, JOURNALISTS ETC

WOMAN (VO)

You're making this sound nothing short of incest!

INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

You can't see a thing in this photograph! Reflections from the windows it was snatched through!

MAN

You can! A prick and perforations, tastefully decorated with dead bodies!

SOCIALIST JOURNALIST

Come on *Herr* Karl why won't you admit why you're so miffed? The FAO building is extra-territorial. Christof Holub wouldn't let you in before the commissioners –

CONSERVATIVE JOURNALIST

*Herr Vizebürgermeister! Herr Vizebürgermeister!* We campaigned hard to have Alfred Hrdlicka's street scrubber banned from Vienna. This question too we've asked before – far from prestige as our red Burgomaster asserts, what *do* we get *out* of those UN organizations in our city? They do nothing for us! On the contrary, tax-free and privileged, like ticks they grow fat at our expense. Yet another piece of our beautiful Donaupark has been sacrificed to *Herr* Holub's ghastly greenhouse – what for? To shelter this insult to the Austrian people?

10. ESTABLISHING SHOT – EXTERIOR.

RATHAUSPLATZ. DUSK. PEOPLE WITH TORCHES

11. MEDIUM SHOT – MEN AND WOMEN WITH TORCHES. REPORTER

REPORTER

It's after six but there's hardly anyone here for your march. Why is that?

YOUNG MAN WITH ARMBAND

There wasn't enough time to get organized. Now, if the press conference is shown on the news – we'll have to wait – at seven, half past, maybe we'll be ready.

REPORTER

We heard that the police has yet to sanction the demonstration – not enough notice was given. But where is *Herr Karl*?

YOUNG MAN

I don't know. Perhaps he went to get that permit. In any case, he's not here.

FADE OUT

'That's just typical,' fumes Dieter, 'inefficient, useless but *very* nasty! *Herr Karl* indeed – Qualtinger would have invented a different character had he known this guy! That photograph didn't show a thing!'

Jane glances at him uneasily, still caught, as it seems, by the news. At last the presenter embarks on a different story, and she turns to him:

'What did you paint?' her tone is doubtful, accusing even.

Starving children and their mothers, Dieter explains; what he saw in Africa a few days ago, and the whole world has been watching for years on TV.

'I had no idea Thomas would move so fast. How dare the man lie so? Charlie part of the plan! The irony of it, my own work played back through this idiot box, with its stamp of

visibility all over! Some fathead holds up a blank – you can't see a thing – but *he* can! Now everybody *knows* what I painted. You too seem to believe him!

'I'm sorry.' Jane stubs out her cigarette. 'If it's Mahler's decision when we may see Charlie this can't have helped. It's getting late.'

'I'm aware of it, I'm worried too! When Ellen asked me about the interview – that's exactly what I told her about TV!'

Jane switches off the set, then approaches the ex-husband.

'I didn't mean to doubt you. We're on edge, Dieter, but we mustn't fight. I know it's not your fault. I – I need –'

A shake of the head and she shuts her eyes, not quite ready to say what they both know and feel: that they need each other. Restlessly she moves away again. By a sideboard she pours herself a drink, Scotch on the rocks. She holds up the bottle.

'Yes?'

He hesitates and remembers that he had better take a pill before he makes up his mind – he'll have both, the pill and a whisky and soda, which Jane presently hands him before they part again to sit at opposite ends of the room. No sooner are they settled than reception calls from downstairs, Heuschneider is back at last.

**27. Stammheim Prison, near Stuttgart, Baden-  
Württemberg. Saturday, 27 September, morning**

TRANSLATION

Stuttgart Prison  
Stammheim, 27 May  
1981  
-E4433-

Stuttgart-

HOUSE RULES  
for Adult Prisoners

Preface

You are now in a large community which requires responsible conduct and mutual consideration. We ask you for this reason to observe the existing rules which were issued in your interest, too, and which are necessary for the maintenance of order, cleanliness, and security.

The house rules take into consideration the special conditions in this prison. They supplement the "information on the Prison Law" you have been given. The law applies not only to finally sentenced prisoners but analogously for pretrial prisoners insofar as the Code of Penal Procedure and the Regulation on the Execution of Pretrial Confinement do not provide otherwise and the nature and purpose of the pretrial confinement do not conflict.

1. Daily Schedule

The prisoner must follow the daily schedule of the prison. In order to assure a frictionless cell opening with the receipt and sending of letters and petitions, it is necessary that you get up immediately at the wake-up signal and carry out personal hygiene, cleaning and airing out of the cell, and bringing the prisoner area into an orderly and openly visible condition. Otherwise reference is made to No. 20 numbers 1 and 2 of the "Information on the Prison Law."

2. Visits

Finally-sentenced prisoners may receive half-hour visits twice a month; the period between two visits will be 14 days (regular visits). As a substitute, finally-sentenced prisoners may receive one one-hour visit per month.

Pretrial prisoners may receive visits with the permission of the judge or public prosecutor. The visitor's permit will be issued by the appropriate judge/public prosecutor. It authorizes a visit lasting 30 minutes unless otherwise provided. As a rule, a visit is permitted every two weeks.

For further details, especially the monitoring of visits and the handing over of objects at visits, you are referred to the pamphlet on prisoner contact with the outside (see section I therein).

### 3. Correspondence

The exchange of correspondence by the prisoner is handled by the prison. This duty is performed by the mail room.

The correspondence of finally-sentenced prisoners is monitored by the prison (mail room). The letters are to be turned in in an open envelope. This applies also to letters to courts, the Ministry of Justice, and other authorities.

The monitoring of the correspondence of pretrial prisoners is the responsibility of the appropriate judge or public prosecutor. The pretrial prisoners put their unsealed letters into a censoring envelope which is given out by the section guards. The censoring envelope is to be sealed by the prisoner. The prisoner should put his name and - if known - the appropriate court and the file number in block letters on it. More than one letter subject to censoring can be forwarded in the same censoring envelope.

Correspondence with defence counsel is not monitored. The prerequisite for being treated as defence counsel correspondence is that the attorney designated as sender or addressee actually has the position of defence counsel. For this, it is necessary for the attorney to identify himself by presenting a power-of-attorney or the court order assigning him as defence counsel. In addition to the notation "Verteidigerpost", the person named as defence counsel must be so characterized as sender

or addressee that no doubt as to the correctness of this assertion ....

Hopeless, tired and barely able to concentrate on the text, Charlie is reading when someone begins to unlock the door to her cell.

'*Besuch,*' announces a man in shirtsleeves and uniform trousers, whom she has not seen before. As if to express her surprise her papers rise with the draught from the door. Last night she read Leaflet No2 – *Verkehr der Gefangenen mit der Außenwelt* – appertaining to the house rules and available in German only. Saturday is not a visiting day. In any case, she expected no one. Putting her hands on the fluttering table top she stands up, in Stammheim denims, shirt and jacket, and a pair of down-at-heel lace-ups oddly bigger than she thought she had chosen. Her hair has been cut to match-stick length, not because of the rules, but because she asked for it. Turning she pushes the chair against the cot behind her, clanging metal on metal, and looks out the door at the cells across the corridor she has seen seven times so far: on arrival; being offered breakfast and lunch; going to and returning from her solitary exercise on the adjacent roof terrace, which is caged overhead even on the seventh floor; being brought supper and breakfast. Like her evening meal of brown bread, margarine, a tin of sardines and tea, she ate also the latter – only now she feels unexpectedly sick.

‘Who is it?’ she asks.

‘Patience,’ replies the section guard with a smile, a second warder is rattling his keys behind him. Compelled by their presence more than curiosity she steps outside. A different, almost watery light filters through the glass brick wall at the inner end of the corridor, while yet another man stands guard behind the grate separating the high security tract and its twelve cells from the rest of the jail. Once again Charlie wonders just who is behind the doors on either side. She has no memory of the numbers she might have spotted in that movie she saw: Andreas Baader died in 719; and Ulrike Meinhof, before him, in that same cell; Jan-Carl Raspe shot himself dead in 716, while Gudrun Ensslin hanged herself in 720 – the very cell Charlie inhabits now. Long after nightfall a woman called the new arrival from one of the cells on the floor:

‘KZ-Brigade – why did you give yourself up?’

Frightened Charlie heard the name she had taken for the product of an overheated mind, Andrea’s probably. Because she was guilty, she answered, fearful to raise her voice to someone she couldn’t see. For a moment she believed that she had not been heard, when that same woman sneered:

‘She – says – she’s – guilty.’

Laughter mocked Charlie, and the woman again: ‘Now you’re here, what’s in a name?’

‘Nothing!’

Silence absorbed her protest, and has not been broken since. Heels pumping in those ill-fitting shoes she plods towards the grate. The section guard follows while his colleague relocks the cell, when some of the doors around them suddenly sound to the hammering of fists from inside.

‘Alt! Charlie Alt!’ screams that woman again. ‘Here’s a message for you: KZ-Brigade will kill your father if you spill any names!’

Again the doors reverberate as other voices join in the chant: ‘No names! No, no names!’

Charlie stops dead in her tracks. How has she been discovered, the brigade got in here? The section guard takes her by the arm and leads her out on the landing.

‘Don’t take any notice,’ he tries to reassure her as the chant grows louder, and they wait for the lift with their backs to the sentry box in the middle of the floor. The cabin arrives, they step in, and the voices die behind the shutting doors. Even from here a closed circuit television system transmits their moving images, as it also monitors downstairs, where Dieter has progressed to the lobby at last, clutching a plastic sack of grapes bought moments earlier from an automat inside the security check – only things obtained there, in strictly limited quantities, may be offered to a prisoner. Waiting for him Jane stands by a bench along the wall, unwilling to sit down. ‘They searched me with a metal detector,’ she says.

‘Me too. Like getting on El Al –’ Dieter abandons the joke as he utters it. ‘I’m glad Heuschneider warned us not to bring anything. They x-rayed my pencil and took away. The transistor too – Charlie will get it once they’ve looked inside and sealed it.’

‘Why seal it?’

‘To make sure it won’t be changed into a transmitter.’

Jane shakes her head and points, at some writing on the opposite wall: ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

For a second Dieter’s eye is caught by the prison officer in the window below the words he registers only now. Speaking on the telephone the man stares at the visitors. Because that – vigilance – is his job? Or because an exception has been made, allowing the visitors to see their daughter on a Saturday? The light is gloomy, subdued even near the glass doors. Altogether the lobby appears curiously sombre after the sixtyish high-rise they spotted on approaching the jail. Like a Hilton, remarked their driver, who is waiting in the car park outside the perimeter fence now.

Dieter screws up his eyes. ‘*Vollzugsdienst ist Facharbeit am Menschen,*’ he reads as though he too had difficulty with the words. ‘*Vollzug* means execution,’ he begins, ‘don’t misunderstand – not by firing squad – but discharging one’s duties. They used to have two kinds of prisons in Germany, I believe – *Gefängnis* and *Zuchthaus*. Now, it seems, they’re all

*Vollzugsanstalten* – institutions where the courts’ judgements are discharged.’

Jane looks bewildered.

‘You may remember *Dienst* – service. *Fach-arbeit* – a composite – means skilled work. You know what a *Mensch* is. Roughly then: *prison service is expert work on human beings*, that’s what it says.’

‘*Like Arbeit macht frei*, the motto over the Auschwitz gate!’

‘Not at all, be fair! If you left the prisons to ignorant bullies *then* you might get concentration camps again!’

‘*Herr Alt?*’

Dieter turns. Embarrassed he stares at the bearded man who has come up behind them.

‘Rudolf Ehrmann, *Anstaltsleiter*.’ Watery eyes fix on Jane. ‘I wrote the words, Mrs Steinberg.’ The voice is light and pleasant enough, from the north of Germany perhaps: ‘It’s a reminder, to all of us here. Rehabilitation is the most important aspect of our work.’

‘I’m afraid my – Mrs Steinberg is very distraught,’ interjects Dieter shaking the governor’s hand, which seems big in relation to his height, with all the signs of use – another gardener, like Holmes, or a sailor’s? In Cornwall Dieter saw seadogs with similar paws unload their catch. Altogether the man might be a navy officer rather than a jailer.

Ehrmann bows slightly. 'I admire your work, *Herr Alt*. I'm sorry you have not been well. I hope your daughter will not have to stay with us long – we try to help – but we are the servants of the law –'

Dieter wonders inadvertently how does one become a jailer nowadays, on that level?

'I believe they're ready for you now,' the governor goes on. '*Herr Stumm* will be in charge. Incidentally, your daughter knows nothing of the visit. Nor did we tell her that we know her name –'

As if on cue Stumm appears with another warder in tow, through an entrance in the opposite corner of the lobby. A powerful man, with a hooked nose, pointed paunch and the glint of one who knows his strength, he leads the way back to the metal and glass door he came from, opens it with a bunch of keys chained to his belt, lets the visitors pass, and leads on again, while his colleague locks up behind them. A similar door is negotiated in identical fashion, and they enter a short corridor, still on ground level. A third, solid door gives on to the left; presently it is unlocked to a room thick with smoke. From the head of a short table a man in shirtsleeves stares at the visitors – a tanned bony face, frozen in observation. A pack of *Rothaendle*, matches and an ashtray sit scattered on the wooden top around the hand holding the cigarette. A leather jacket hangs over the back of his chair.

‘*Herr Kaltenberg,*’ Stumm introduces the stranger who rises slightly. The second warder shuts the door from outside.

Dieter frowns, reluctant to breathe in the cigarette smoke; altogether the room seems too crowded – his claustrophobia grips him but now is not the time to let it come to the fore. Heuschneider warned his clients that a *Terroristenjäger* – a terrorist hunter from the BKA, the federal Criminal Office – might be present at the interview. There is a lever, connected by a long rod to the skylight behind the grating overhead. A step forward, and the painter puts the grapes on the table; another and pushes up the lever, opening the window. Cold air presently falls from the gap. Kaltenberg stubs out the cigarette, slips on his jacket and gets to his feet.

‘I feel faint,’ whispers Jane in English. ‘Why can’t they leave us alone?’

Dieter sees her sway. ‘Sit –’

‘Hold me, please,’ she says refusing the chair.

Outside, the section guard enters that same corridor the visitors passed moments earlier from the opposite end. Charlie follows and waits, while yet another door is unlocked and swings open. Her parents stand inside; Mother and Dieter, with his arm round her shoulders, as she has no recollection of them. Stumm looks straight at her though the section guard is whispering something in his ear before he leaves the room. And there’s Kaltenberg, rigid and

strangely formal in his stance by the table, as if this coming together around it were some kind of ceremony. In suburban Essex Charlie was invited to a wedding once in a register office that looked not dissimilar.

‘Clarissa!’ cries Jane, wide-eyed at the appearance of short-cropped hair, prison garb and a face that looks wan, thin, penitent, almost strange to her. ‘What have they done to you!’

‘Mummy,’ cries Charlie, smothered in her embrace, ‘Mummy!’

At last Jane lets go, her cheeks blotchy with tears. Dieter comes forward. ‘Charlie,’ he says and chokes as they too embrace, watched all the while by Kaltenberg and Stumm.

They must speak German here, begins Dieter as Charlie and Stumm take their places opposite Jane and him, with Kaltenberg looking down in between from the head of the table.

‘Your mother shan’t be able to say much. Perhaps she’ll understand if we speak slowly. We have thirty minutes only. We brought you these grapes – that’s all we were allowed – and a radio, which you’ll get after inspection. How *are* you?’

For a long and still tongue-tied moment Charlie gazes at her father: an older, incomparably grayer man than she remembers since they met one Saturday morning in spring and drove to Cuckmere on the East Sussex coast in the rag-top Golf he had bought her on passing her driving test. They

walked over the Seven Sisters and back, some six miles or so. He seemed fit as ever up and down the cliffs, easy to keep up with only because she too liked to walk. Now he looks brittle and sounds short of breath – physically ill or merely upset like her mother? And how did they find out that she was here?

‘I’m all right,’ she replies at last. ‘They are treating me well. Better than I deserve.’

Stumm smiles and shakes his head.

‘We saw your picture in the papers,’ resumes Dieter. ‘What happened to your hair?’

‘I wanted it cut.’

‘Why didn’t you want to say who you were?’

‘I didn’t want to spoil your vernissage.’

‘You were going to pre-empt it, though –’

‘Yes, but then things went wrong. I had meant to do a wrap. Someone changed my design.’

‘You mean Professor Berlin.’

‘Zora!’ exclaims Charlie; and in English: ‘How d’you know about him?’

‘*Deutsch, bitte,*’ breaks in Kaltenberg. ‘*Was haben Sie gesagt?*’

Their daughter wanted to know how they had found out about Zora Berlin, explains Dieter.

‘Could you spell that, please?’ asks the terrorist hunter or whoever he is.

'Zeppelin, Otto, Richard, Adolf,' replies the painter and stops himself there; the authorities in Munich have the information. He returns to Charlie: 'I understand what you meant to do. If Berlin hadn't changed your design – without the accident – which your mother and I consider a direct consequence of his tampering –' Dieter pauses as if to make sure the statement goes on record, 'it would have been fine by us – daring, fun, hurting no one, though I'm sorry you sold the *Motorman*. However, of all people, how could you trust Berlin?'

Because he was there while you were saving someone else's children in Africa, Charlie has on her tongue, above all because I wanted to show what I could do without you! But she only stares at him: charismatic even in this dismal hole; ill yet in charge; sorting out the mess she got herself and the whole family in. She cannot accept his fight is for her – his and Jane's child, regardless of her age.

'Who told you all this?' she demands, incredulous even more than resentful.

'Ellen Burns,' Jane surprisingly replies.

'Who's she?'

'Jo's god-daughter,' says Dieter. 'Don't you remember? She's an art critic. She thought the wrap might have been made by someone who had worked for Christo in the past. That's how we found out about Zora Berlin. Thomas too heard that he'd been involved, selling the *Motorman*.'

Dieter shifts on his chair; unintentionally he kicks the board separating the long sides under the table, which is fixed to the wall at the end opposite that taken by Kaltenberg. He can see the embarrassment and anger he has caused. They hurt him too, and he wants to contain them, or might they spill more readily what Charlie has yet to tell? They have precious little time left, he had better come to the point. Softly, reminiscent of the barbers they used to play:

‘We need to know about KZ-Brigade, Charlie. They’re carrying on. Yesterday they put a red dye into the water works at Schloß Linderhof.’

Yesterday, Charlie strains to think back. So much has happened, she has lost her sense of time. It seems ages ago that Andrea and Ingrid prepared to return to Italy, and Zora was still planning to fly to New York, which rules them out as regards Linderhof. The others are still in Germany, or so she believes. However, they are harmless, too unimaginative to attempt such a thing. Despite what the prisoners on her floor just shouted, she is convinced that the *schleppers*, as Zora called them, are not KZ-Brigade.

‘The public prosecutor too asked me about KZ-Brigade,’ she replies at last. ‘Last night a woman on my floor shouted the name. It’s someone trying to make capital out of what I meant to do. Someone I don’t know.’

‘But your helpers, apart from Berlin – we need their names, at least so you clear them.’

‘You sound like the prosecutor!’

‘I’m your father, trying to get you out of here. If you’re so sure that they’re not KZ-Brigade –’

‘I know they’re not! Please stop!’

‘Alright. We heard you intend to write to *Frau* Pongratz. Before you do that, for your mother’s peace of mind – and mine – will you agree to have a lawyer?’

Charlie sits up sharply. ‘How did you hear about the letter?’ she demands bristling with indignation. ‘What *don’t* you know?’

‘Most things!’ Once again Dieter bangs the board under the table, struggling to recompose himself, mentally more than physically. ‘We heard about the dictionary, you said you wanted to write to her. It’s alright, a good thing to do. But you mustn’t prejudice your defence, Charlie! It’d be only prudent to show your letter to your lawyer first. Felix Heuschneider – he’s young – he could visit on Monday if you agree –’

‘I can tell the truth only once! One way!’

‘That’s a gross simplification – as an artist you ought to know! Everything has different aspects! More than anything it needs to be presented with care – as we hope –’ Dieter turns to Kaltenberg and Stumm, ‘it shall be interpreted too! You just said yourself that there were people trying to make capital out of what you wanted to do. KZ-Brigade or not,

you must stop them, Charlie! We need the whole picture, including the people with you!

‘I told the prosecutor,’ insists Charlie in English again, ‘my helpers are harmless! Zora and his brother Andrea changed my design! They’re no longer in this country.’

‘*Fräulein Alt,*’ interjects Kaltenberg, ‘*wenn Sie nicht Deutsch sprechen, müssen wit den Besuch leider abbrechen.*’

‘Do,’ shouts Charlie, still in English, on her feet. ‘We, we, we – you’re all in this together! You say you understand – but if I tell you something you won’t believe me. You say you understand – your lawyers will make sure I turn it the right way. You say you understand – but you don’t listen! I want to go back to my cell!’

Stumm pulls the back of her jacket. ‘Come on, sit down. Of course we listen,’ he says suddenly in English too but stands up himself when she will not respond.

‘Charlie, please!’ whispers Jane. ‘I’m not allowed to speak here, without interpreter. Calm down. Speak German, please.’

‘You’re walking out on yourself,’ says Dieter trying to block the door, when Charlie attacks him fists flailing before he succeeds throwing his arms around her. With an anguished cry on his shoulder she gives up the unequal struggle. She has all the talents in the world, he implores her, most of her life still ahead, they didn’t mean to doubt her, all they want is to let her be.

‘You can’t be yourself here!’

But Charlie is far from willing to take on board this canon of paternal protestations, even as he lets go. Instinctively she finds but the standard juvenile reply, to reject him. In the dictionary she groped for a hold on the nightmare she has landed herself in; a semblance of order attaches to the lists of words she has made so far, numbered on the table in her cell. Writing the letter that Dieter wants her to clear with his lawyer is a step she must take, without lengthening yet further the string of readers before the rightful addressee. All she wants to admit is that she was wrong, even if it means to pay more than the price her parents, she suspects, want to negotiate for her. At the end of childhood, already in a jail for adults; able neither to accept nor adapt to their different views, she cannot discern that this price will be set by others anyway, taking advantage but insufficient regard of the terms she is willing to offer. Through stinging eyes Charlie observes her parents: her mother, who for the first time ever called her by her own preferred name just now, speechless, too horrified to cry; her father, still in front of the door, though obviously sick and in charge no longer; a couple split for as long as she remembers almost, incongruously together again. A show, put on for her? She knows it’s not and yet can’t dismiss the idea, just as she sensed and now believes in her father’s jealousy of Zora the man. Why do young people turn to the Berlins of this world? Why will they open

themselves to strangers like the public prosecutor, who seduce them by making them feel grown-up? Indeed what's so tempting about that – the escape from adult oppression? The leap from frying pan into fire? She needs to go back to her cell, she insists; and to her parents:

'I'm sorry, I'll write –'

'*Charlie, bitte!*' whispers Jane.

'Let's just talk for the remaining minutes,' begs Dieter tasting blood on his lips. 'About anything you like!'

Even Stumm, believing it'd be only counterproductive if he mentioned now what the section guard whispered in his ear about the message from the other prisoners, pleads that she should reconsider, her parents will not be allowed to come back for some considerable time. Kaltenberg himself, afraid he has gleaned barely a thing: 'It may be weeks before your parents will be admitted again.'

But the section guard has to take the prisoner away, behind her the door falls shut. One by one the barriers separating the child from her parents are locked again as she is led back into the depth of the jail and up to her cell, while Dieter glances at his former wife and she at him, both asking themselves – with all the good will, including that of the officials and their daughter's at first, how has all this happened? How could it have gone so wrong?

## **28. Back to Munich. Saturday, 27 September, afternoon**

The black limousine that brought them back from its space in the car park, describes a quarter turn towards the perimeter fences and draws up in front of the gate. The driver comes round the back and holds open the door when Jane stiffens. She can't leave Charlie here, she says removing her arm from her ex-husband's support. 'I want to stay!'

'Here?' Shakily Dieter motions at the jail, and his gesture fades before the empty backdrop of the fields surrounding it. There's nothing left for them to do here, not until they shall be allowed back. The authorities, their lawyer – only in Munich can they try to help Charlie. His voice is low, his eyes are damp.

Incredulous Jane hears him and looks up at the building. Their daughter hides inside that jumbled concrete at the end of a road that once upon a time might have been the beginning of a country lane; on the top floor, she never told them where she looked out from there, what she could see. But Dieter is right, there is nothing they may hope to do for her here, nor in nearby Stuttgart, only wait. In Munich they'll continue their fight; and there's something else they must try, all at once the idea presents itself. At a stroke it eases the pain of separation – they'll go forward, not back! Another, last glance, and Jane turns away. After her and from the other side Dieter gets into the car. Slowly now, he

says to the driver as if to express his own reluctance to leave; and to Jane:

‘It was my fault entirely, I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have pressed her so!’

‘You were only reasonable.’ It’s she who needs to touch now, the back of his hand gripping the armrest between them. ‘You mustn’t blame yourself, I understood well enough. You got used to her as a friend. Today she treated you like me – as a parent.’

‘I wanted to be her father! I wanted a family!’

Jane retreats, taken aback by his bitterness, which she can’t help but feel directed also at herself. Silent in their corners they are transported through Stammheim, neither village nor suburb, and back to the road they came on. Her idea still offers hope. As the driver takes them on to the *Autobahn* and settles in the middle lane she says:

‘Charlie mentioned Andrea, Zora’s brother.’

‘When?’

‘Just now, when she was shouting –’

‘I missed that.’

‘So did everyone else – I thought that man, Kaltenberg, would pick up on it but he obviously hadn’t followed her English. Anyway, Valentini said that there were people in that drawing in the cottage on Father’s land. Charlie’s friends, he called them. We ought to take a look.’

Dieter sits up, suddenly revived. Perhaps they can catch a plane still today, he ventures, but Jane objects, one journey a day is enough for him, he needs to rest. If they could take a flight to Pisa or Rome first thing in the morning, and went on by helicopter from there, as her father's guests occasionally did, they might get back to Munich in the evening. There's enough time left to make the arrangements before the day is out, says Dieter and asks the driver to speed up. Back at the hotel, where the demonstrators have dwindled to a token half dozen or so, he calls the airport, Heuschneider and his London correspondent, while Jane telephones the *fattore* at her father's house. Over supper then, which they take in their suite:

'After so many years – surely the Italians no longer want to question you about those schoolfriends of yours?'

'I hope not. Wieland's been out for some time,' says Dieter and returns the conversation to their daughter. 'I've been wondering at times: does Charlie ever tell you what our outings are like?'

'She won't talk about herself, not to her mother. I learnt not to ask.'

'I've been trying to involve her – exhibitions, concerts, plays – but it's difficult to know what she thinks. I know she's talented, I'd like to know more about her work, but that too is difficult. Nor is she really interested in my work.'

Sometimes she makes me feel I hardly know her. I let her get away.'

'Away,' repeats Jane while Dieter nods, and they carry on eating in silence, without appetite or pleasure.

'I did try to exclude you at first,' Jane resumes their conversation then. 'Clarissa – Charlie was angry because you had left. I should have told her that it was me who had wanted the divorce – I excused myself, that she wouldn't understand. Anyway, pressure to conform or join in usually results in her withdrawal – and you can't argue with an absentee!'

'As we just saw,' agrees Dieter. 'This morning, on the road I told myself, remember, we must all grow up and break away. Of course I recall – I was fourteen, fifteen – all at once it seemed so much easier to get on with strangers than one's own people. But just occasionally you come across a family where they succeed in keeping their relationships going – that's what I longed for! I let my obsession with my work –'

'You weren't obsessed,' interjects Jane, pushing aside the plate she has barely touched. 'You were focused, as you needed to be – Father said so whenever I complained but then he too is an artist. Instead of accepting what you were about, both of you, I assumed that you were excluding me. I took the easy way out! Only now I realize that I'm even more dissatisfied!'

‘But you built up your business! You deal in beautiful things.’

‘Exactly – things! Books that others wrote, illustrated, edited, bound – objects – not ideas. People seldom buy rare editions because they want to read them. And it was easy – I had Father’s money. With the base he gave me I can take risks few competitors can afford, and so I do better still because of what was given.’

‘Your father’s talent, mine and Charlie’s – that we can draw – they were only given. You mustn’t belittle yourself for what you find in yourself.’

‘Like what?’ Jane sounds dismissive. ‘You used to needle me because I never read or listened to anything difficult. Three years ago I shut myself away. I started with *Pride and Prejudice* – an early edition I hadn’t sold. It’s not a difficult book but it was as if I’d never learnt to read at all! It hurt, it wouldn’t go in until I persevered, loud in the bathroom, where no one could hear me. I was reading Kafka, *The Castle*, before all this blew up, I remembered you telling me about the way Max Brod had arranged the chapters. I even enjoy the odd opera nowadays but still I only consume!’

‘You’re doing more than that,’ rejoins Dieter, ‘you’re talking about it, reflecting on it, making it part of what you know! Without readers or spectators where would artists and performers be?’

Jane shrugs, and his hand rises from the silk sleeve of her dressing gown, breaking their fourth deliberate contact of the day, since their separation even. Gradually their conversation begins to bridge rather than circle the rift between them. Their perception of Charlie as they are agreed at last to call her is part of this reconnaissance, with her reflections falling on each other from opposing banks as it were, while the water runs between them darkly, and both parents have to turn her mirror image within themselves and then again for the other to see – as their child really is? It's a delicate exchange, charged with memories and their love of their child. Towards the end of their bottle of Mosel, of which they have partaken without pleasure or thirst, Dieter inadvertently changes the subject:

‘I never told you that I was born here.’

Jane looks nonplussed. ‘I don't understand,’ she says at last, ‘you were born in Munich? You always said Innsbruck.’

‘I was born fifty miles from here, in one of those places set up by the SS – Steinhöring Lebensborn. My mother was working for them, first here in Munich, then in Danzig.’

‘Now you're telling me!’ exclaims Jane. ‘So who was your father? A Nazi big shot?’

‘You know who he was! You've seen his picture, Jane!’

‘But they were breeding the master race in those places, Nazi bigwigs and strapping blonde maidens! How did *he* get in?’

‘He didn’t. My mother had started to work for the SS when she was sixteen, as a typist. She believed in the cause, worked hard, became a top secretary. My father was a student at the technical university, aeronautical engineering, that’s when they met. When the war started he was a fighter pilot in the *Luftwaffe*. I was an accident, before they were married, so my mother was offered the opportunity to go to Steinhöring. That’s all it was really, a place where women connected with the SS could give birth to their children. I too believed for a while that Lebensborn was a breeding place. It’s a myth!’

Jane frowns. ‘When we met – were you afraid I wouldn’t have you?’

‘Yes, I’m sorry!’

‘Have you told anyone else?’

‘Only Thomas, on the night, just before I met you. He advised me to keep quiet. *Would* you have married me?’

‘I don’t know, Dieter! The fact is I *did* marry you and I *had* Clarissa with you! It’s been a long day – I need to sleep!’

Jane stubs out her cigarette; behind her the door slams shut. Too late Dieter understands that it would have been kinder to keep his secret to himself. Long overdue yet spontaneous as it was, his confession has only made him feel worse. The circumstances of his birth remain the same, even if they are not nearly as sordid as some writers and film makers have been making out. He’ll continue to live with

them, but Jane and Charlie too shall have to share them from now on; guiltily he reflects on that. Withdrawing to his bedroom he is convinced that Jane wouldn't have married him had he come clean. But then Charlie wouldn't have been born, and both their lives would have been so much emptier and poorer for it, he has no doubt about that.

## 29. To Italy. Sunday, 28 September, morning

Together then and yet not we see Dieter and Jane early next morning as they take off in a private jet from München Riem. Barely airborne on the transparent autumn day they are over the crags of the Karwendel and Tirol, the north of it, his father's native part of the land. Stiffly Dieter points out the Weißferner to Jane. Under the glacier, can she see the little white miners' church, with its pencil tower near the end of the valley? And Hochleiten above? Nodding absent-mindedly she screws up her eyes, while his chest feels suddenly tight – he too has not seen the house in twenty-seven years. Erika pushed her late husband into selling it, and lives down there still, in nearby Innsbruck; ever since his marriage to Jane – *mit der Jüdin* – has she been refusing to speak to him. Given his rejection when he tried to buy Hochleiten back, and the hostility he continues to arouse not only in Austria but in neighbouring Bavaria too now, shall he ever return? Could he? He was brought up there and grew into a stranger, at home where? Surely not with Jane ....

Already they're crossing over to his mother's south. How unnatural that this homogenous mountain terrain should be split but then so are many landscapes he surveyed from on high, all over the world, ignorant even of their names. The strip of barren land between East and West Germany, and the Great Chinese Wall were borders he could make out

from the air. In one of the Austrian papers that he bought in Munich he read that once again there loomed problems in Südtirol – this time the Italians are the ones with a grievance. Too many Germans from the Federal Republic have adopted the country as their favourite holiday resort, where they visit in such numbers that for miles often there appears not an Italian-registered car on the road. Their money brings prosperity, of course, demanding more and more jobs that mono-lingual Italians can get on menial levels only, if at all. The pendulum is swinging back then, though not smoothly, as history never does: neutral Austria remains outside the European Community and has thus become even less important than before to her erstwhile province; in that same article Dieter also read about a revival of the terrorism the Gasser twins had engaged in and paid for so dearly. Wieland is still alive, a wreck after twenty years of hard labour in an Italian mine, protesting still that he is Helge, the less guilty twin, who blew himself up making a bomb in Rome. At the trial Wieland changed identities for the last time; his parents confirmed the switch. Only Dieter might have proved them wrong.

‘A glass of *Sekt*, Madam – *Herr Alt*?’ The stewardess is at their side, with a couple of flutes of the sparkling wine on a tray.

‘Go on,’ says Jane as he is about to reject the offering.

‘To Charlie,’ he says raising his glass, ‘that we may get her out soon.’

‘We shall,’ replies Jane. ‘I’m sorry about last night. I felt good being with you. I was unprepared –’

‘It was a self-indulgent thing to do. I’m very sorry, Jane. I shouldn’t have told you.’

‘I’m glad you did. But it can make no difference, to me or Charlie, where you were born. May I kiss you?’

Astonished Dieter looks at the woman who is slowly but deliberately moving in to kiss him on the mouth.

‘Is this your reply?’ he murmurs as his lips now brush her ear. ‘You *would* have married me?’

‘Of course!’

‘But your father –’

‘– was always on your side. I couldn’t sleep last night. I very nearly came and knocked on your door.’

Her gaze drops with his, and his eyes fasten on the fullness of her breasts. An almost irresistible desire to hug, even make love to her right here, arrests his breath.

‘Is it – is it because we lost Charlie?’ he asks at last. ‘Because we might have another child to replace her?’

‘Don’t be silly. You know I can’t.’

‘But instinct, Jane. I too feel drawn –’

‘Do you? I regret our divorce. It was my fault!’

‘We were very young –’

‘I thought I was mature enough! Please, hold my hand.’

Silent then they look out as the Alps begin to lose height, melting white under the southern flight path. As if to point the way back Lake Garda lies entrenched like an arrow, until it widens into softer, lush land; for a moment Dieter remembers those eye doctors and nurses he supports in the African bush. He spots Salò and the bay around which Mussolini's republic of a hundred and twenty days withstood the test of time even less than the *Reich*. Of a seasoned terra cotta Verona comes up a few degrees to the left, as the land levels with the curvature of the Adriatic Sea on the eastern horizon and sinks deeper yet (so he learnt at the Gymnasium) along the dammed-up banks of the river Po south of which it undulates and soon grows rugged again with the Apennine mountains. He can't help but give himself up to his eyes, dissecting, comparing before he reassembles the parts. Is there a painting here?

*Second Journey to the Centre of the Universe* – all at once the title presents itself, and he imagines a sequence of landscapes on transparent panels, one behind the other – white peaks and glaciers, green hills and a fertile lush plane studded with umbrella pines before the sea – so that they show separately or together, depending on the observer's point of view, while around them revolves the great machine of the stars, sun and moon. His grandfather spoke of it as a great celestial clock – *das Sonnenwerk* – and the courtiers at Urbino called it *the one great and noble painting, composed by the hand of nature and by*

*God.* Of course his title connects with Castiglione, whom he has not read in years, and his return to the country he has seen from the air only in more than twenty-five. Once, on their way to Nice, he glimpsed it with Charlie. Directly she wanted to know why he never visited Grandfather Steinberg there – despite the divorce he would have been welcome in his house.

The sound of the engines drops. The shimmer of water beckons and they slip across the aisle, to the windows on the other side of the cabin. Elba and the many smaller islands of the Tyrrhenian rise from the mirror sea – stepping stones towards Corsica and, further south still, Sardinia on the horizon.

The stewardess returns from the cockpit. At Pisa, she says, where they will presently land, would they mind going through immigration and customs, like scheduled passengers?

Of course they want to keep moving, the less attention they attract, the better; even for the German demonstrators their departure was too early, there must be a good chance that they are still ahead of the news. Within minutes the jet is over the airport, lands, taxis and parks next to a helicopter. Down six steps the travellers emerge into soft humid air; the stewardess walks them to the arrivals hall, where there is no one in attendance.

‘Too early now the tourist season is over,’ remarks Jane while Dieter raises his face, sniffing the Italian interior.

‘Smells just the same,’ he says and turns away. ‘Let them rest.’

They may have difficulties later warns the stewardess as they return to the plane. The captain stands there, chatting with the helicopter pilot, who has flown Jane before. A customs man has joined them, informed by now just who the arrivals are.

‘No baggage, *signor* Alt?’

Dieter offers his satchel and passport for inspection but the official wants to see neither his nor Jane’s. Minutes later the helicopter lifts off, and they are back in the air.

### **30. Stammheim Prison. Sunday, 28 September, morning**

As Dieter and Jane are flying over Tirol, we see Charlie with the radio her parents brought, tuned to the morning news. KZ-Brigade have attacked Herrenchiemsee at dawn. A boat packed with Semtex probably and on remote control exploded close to King Ludwig's version of Versailles. Two guards have been hurt by splintering glass, one of them badly. Windows, mirrors, priceless chandeliers, the damage on the island is greater by far than that at Neuschwanstein or Linderhof. In Vienna meanwhile there have been demonstrations over a painting by Dieter Alt for the new FAO building. Local politicians are complaining that the work is but a reminder of the concentration camps. Having failed to stop payment of the painter's fee, the city's vice burgomaster is about to visit Prime Minister Mahler in support of his stand against the terrorists, with whom both Alts, father and daughter must be linked. In New York City a warning not to go ahead with Alt senior's retrospective has been received by the Guggenheim ....

'Enough!' screams Charlie and switches off the radio. 'Enough!' Directly she pushes out the call rod by her door, to signal that there is something she needs.

'She's ready to give her helpers' names,' the section guard reports to Stumm then; the Bavarian state of emergency demands that they take no chances. From the acting

deputy's office Stumm telephones the governor at home. She should have talked yesterday, with her parents here, says Rudolf Ehrmann, having introduced himself to the prisoner barely an hour later. 'But tell me what worries you so. May I sit?'

Charlie pulls out her only chair for the visitor; restlessly she perches on the edge of the bed only to jump up again. She speaks rapidly, with abrupt, short sentences as she tries to explain what happened during her parents' visit. She had not expected them. Discovery and shame turned into aggression. Like a petulant child she refused their help. She pauses. A hint of colour has come to her cheeks. Her voice grows firm:

'I just heard about the attack on Herrenchiemsee, it makes me sick, I am very sorry. I will prove that I have nothing to do with KZ-Brigade – not as far as I know. I will give you the names of all the people who helped me, provided you pass on this message to my parents today.'

She picks up a sheet of paper from the table and begins to read:

*'Dear Dieter and Mother, I am deeply sorry for what happened yesterday. I hope you will get this message still today. I will tell everything I know, but please don't expose yourselves to any danger. I love you – both of you – more than anything in the world. I'd die if you got hurt trying to track down KZ-Brigade. With all my love, Charlie.'*

She holds out the paper to the governor. 'Will you take it, please?'

Ehrmann frowns, unwilling to accept the message as yet. A public prosecutor and judge earlier in his career, he knows very well that withdrawal of free communication and uncertainty resulting from that are part of the punishment every prisoner must suffer. This one, hardly arrived, has already enjoyed a number of favours because of who she is, though circumstances too seem determined to make her more than equal before the law. On the other hand she has yet to be convicted; obviously regrets what she did; is proving increasingly co-operative and may be found a victim just as much as a culprit when finally sentenced.

'I'll have to speak to the investigating judge,' he explains then. 'Only he can authorize another conversation with your parents, any communication between yourself and the outside in fact. It might be easier to obtain his permission if you gave me a list of the names now, without conditions.'

At the point of truth Charlie hesitates for the last time. Barely two days ago she decided to withdraw, until she'd come to terms with what she has done. Jail seemed entirely suitable for repentance and soul-searching, hard enough of a shell to hide in; but events, the world outside, are breaking in fast, in ways she never imagined. She must come out of herself quickly, as far as she can.

‘I understand,’ she says, exchanging her message for a clean sheet of paper. ‘I’ll write them down now.’

**31. Malaspesa, Umbria, Italy. Sunday, 28 September,  
afternoon**

Prompted by Jane's call Valentini, the *fattore* in charge of olive groves and vines, visited Malaspesa in the morning but found the house deserted as usual. Artless, ill-proportioned, mean it comes into view on the back of a low curving hump. Part brick, part stone, the single building stands at the end of an overgrown road, with walls and roof intact to the approaching eye, though there are not even frames left in the windows. Presently the track widens on stony ground, and Jane parks the old Landrover right there. With his satchel Dieter jumps from the car; Jane leaves the key where she found it in the ignition.

The scents of dry earth and of a grass or herb Dieter remembers from the roadsides of his hitch-hiking days mingle in the heat of the afternoon. Now that they're stationary, and the diesel engine is dead, they perceive not a breath of air, hear not a chirp from a bird. A gun sounds in the distance, and another, like a rapid-fire repeater. Maybe that's why the animals keep so quiet: the hunting season has begun. Through a thicket of brambles and other inhospitable shrubs Jane and Dieter complete their journey. For a few hundred yards more it seems only wise to keep to the middle of the path.

A rambling fig diverts the painter's eye to one side of the stair leading up to the single storey, traditionally above ground-floor stables. An abundance of blackish fruit lie in the grass of the forecourt; he caught their whiff before he saw them. They stop, listening into the shell, but hear only the wasps outside, scavenging on the fermenting flesh. They have not forgotten the *fattore's* warning: in most of the many abandoned houses here the beams supporting the floors are as rotten as the roofs, Malaspesa not except. But the stone treads appear strong enough as they climb to the front door and enter the kitchen. The light is soft, as though waiting to absorb the scuffing, rustling noises of their intrusion. Once again they halt. For a moment Dieter imagines the corresponding rooms in his Chiapas home and Hochleiten, where Aunt Cecily used to cook over an open fire. Broken tiles and bricks from the chimney lie on the hearthstone, under a plastered timber hood. The floor too is strewn with shards. A single doorway stands open to the rest of the house. The shimmer of a clearer light beckons ahead.

Jane now leads the way over a floor resonant to their tapping soles. Through a space giving away not a clue of how it might have served its inhabitants once they reach the third room. There, across a wall some eighteen feet or more, is a charcoal drawing of Neuschwanstein. Charlie's portrait immediately proves her authorship – curiously old-fashioned in their group pose she stands surrounded by a number of

others at the foot of the castle; as though to give notice of her plan she gestures at the tower. Her face is intact, most of the others are disfigured. Their eyes have been gouged out down to the brick, the plaster chips lie below. A broken table knife, a screw driver, a rasp without handle and a pair of wooden blocks, presumably used for mallets as their battered sides show, all suggest that the destruction is incomplete, as do the footprints on the floor. They are too disturbed to see a warning in this freshness, nor do they ask themselves now how Valentini could have missed them.

Like death-heads the hollow-eyed faces stare at them; Dieter forces himself to contemplate the drawing. Despite its size Charlie has fitted the image into the room, so that it pulls in the viewer, tempting him with fine detail before sending him back again, to behold the composition. The lines are clear and strong, competent also architecturally, while the figures stand in the foreground, entirely life-like if Charlie's portrait is the standard, vibrant within the overall design yet self-contained on their separate level.

Unexpectedly he finds himself reminded of Piero again: the *Resurrection* at Borgo Sansepolcro. In that mural too he observed a double perspective, with one vanishing point for the sleeping soldiers on the ground, another for the risen Christ above and the landscape behind them.

On his knees the painter opens his satchel and takes out the Leica Heuschneider procured. A faint noise seems only

natural, the whirr of bird wings, perhaps a breath of wind after all. The interior is bright enough for the high-speed film he loads with trembling fingers. For a few seconds he shuts his eyes, trying to breathe, lest he shakes too much. One by one then he focuses on the faces and takes their picture, until he comes to the figure of a girl and another man, portlier than the rest – Zora Berlin? Yes, says Jane.

There is one final photograph Dieter wants to take, of the whole drawing if that is possible with the single lens he has brought. Peering through the viewfinder he slides the zoom to its widest angle and moves back, until he is stopped by the wall. A window offers extra distance from his subject. Sitting on the sill he leans out to the point where he has everything in view, when a shot rings out. Inches to the side of his head the pellets blast the stone wall.

‘You hit him! You hit him!’ a woman cries in German as Dieter finds himself on the floor. An odd taste is in his mouth. Falling he has bitten his lip, and there is a speck of blood on his shirt, spreading on his left arm, red creeping into blue. Surprised that he should not feel any pain he wonders about the cry they heard – jubilant or anguished?

Jane tears the material to look at the wound. Only a scratch she breathes so close he feels her warmth, and yet she is quite pale.

Rustling, stamping feet grow loud in the thicket outside and Dieter recognizes the sound he paid insufficient

attention before. There is another, final space on this side of the house, warm with the westering sun and the promise of escape. He held on to the Leica in his fall, the satchel is within reach. Over undulating tiles they crawl next door. This room too is quite empty.

‘Stay out here,’ they hear a man speaking German right under them then. ‘Hold it like this – with both hands.’

‘A pistol,’ whispers Dieter, pushing himself up close to the wall, where he can’t be seen from below. They hear steps on the stair. The floor vibrates and a gangly young man in blue jeans and a white T-shirt appears in the entrance to the work room. His hair is gray with dust, a double-barrelled shotgun in his hands. He freezes, gazing through the doorway ahead. A few more steps bring him to the threshold of that, a stab of the gun motions at the Leica.

‘Give it to me,’ he demands in English. ‘Come out, one after the other!’ His voice sounds pressed. For an instant only he looks the painter in the face.

Retreating Dieter covers Jane as they back to the far edge of the room, towards the window opposite where they first heard the man. The woman is down there now. She may not shoot or miss like her companion before. If they could get to the thicket they might also make it to the car. His grip tightens on the camera.

‘Why,’ Dieter demands in German, ‘you believe Charlie should be the only one to take the blame?’

‘She didn’t have to,’ retorts Andrea still in English, and spits. ‘It was her decision to give herself up.’

Only now he enters the room, sliding his feet, so that Dieter suddenly understands why he is so afraid to approach.

‘So she knew about KZ-Brigade?’

‘Hardly! Charlie’s a rich kid, not the material for the serious fight. Not even my brother Zora –’

A creak grows rumbling, suddenly fast, when the floor caves in around the terrorist. In a cloud of dust Dieter hears him curse and Ingrid scream as he pushes Jane on to the window sill when the roof too comes down, before he can jump after her. A beam strikes his shoulder, another hits him over the head. At once his is knocked back inside the wall. With their adversary he ends buried under the remains of the ruin Charlie once made her workshop and home.

**32. At the Guggenheim Museum, Manhattan. Monday,  
29 September, evening**

A cloudburst delayed the guests at the opening of Dieter's retrospective on Monday. Traffic jams and the usual shortage of cabs whenever rain and rush hour coincide in a city caused them to trickle rather than flood through the door, a circumstance appreciated only by the armed detectives casting a sharp but discreet eye on whoever entered, strictly by invitation, double checked. Yet by seven o'clock the Guggenheim is packed. At full cry the hubbub hits the inside walls, evoking the buzz of a giant beehive from outside, while rows and rows of double-parked cars choke the side streets up and down Fifth Avenue – a static correlative to the happening in the museum. Shoulder pushing shoulder the guests mill on the ground floor, and find themselves pressed upward into the circles of the gallery. It's no reflection on Dieter if they turn their backs on his paintings. No one expects to *see* a show at an opening; glimpses only will be caught if it's successful; proper views require further visits; and the vernissage itself must be seen in context. Although he disliked the task Wagner checked the guest list personally. Despite certain imbalances – for example, as usual a marked preponderance of artists might beg the question who ultimately art is for – the crowd is well structured: rich and influential at one end, poor but creative

at another. In between those extremes all sorts of producers and consumers of art make up the stuffing.

In sporting defiance of the crush then a couple of serious gentlemen are about to complete their inspection down the spiral ramp. Side by side where the press allowed it, they have made slow but steady progress and presently arrive on level ground as an arc light comes on, and Fisher, who is one of the two, sees Ellen's pallid face reflect the glare. Wagner stands in front of her. A man with a video camera records her question, another holds a microphone in between. The light shifts to the curator who begins his reply while Fisher steers his companion towards them. 'Ellen? Wagner? May I introduce Doctor Hoffmann?' he asks as soon as the light has gone out.

Spontaneously the curator holds out his hand to the German colleague he has heard of quite a bit this past year, and Ellen says, 'Christof Holub has just told me you travelled together from Vienna – what do you make of Dieter's triptych?' Her make-up does not conceal the rings under her eyes; the voice is scratchy.

Karlheinz Hoffmann, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt am Main blinks, extracting himself from Wagner's grip.

'Dr Burns is not only one of our most perceptive critics, she is also Dieter's friend,' intervenes Fisher, 'a close friend!'

Hoffmann, whose youthful looks might befit a tennis star, relaxes. It's a most impressive work, passionate and uncompromising, he replies. 'I'm only sorry Dieter Alt can't be with us tonight, though he is fortunate, as are we, he's alive. I look forward to seeing what he'll do next.'

Ellen nods. 'May I ask you a few questions for the record? The tape will be edited. It'll go out later tonight –'

A second camera and more lights arrive on scene, and the interview begins.

#### ELLEN

Dr Hoffmann, you're the director of a museum in Germany – the Modern, so to speak, of Frankfurt on Main – yet you came via Vienna to attend this opening on the day when Dieter Alt is recovering from his encounter with the terrorists who seized on his daughter's work. What have people in Germany made of her idea to wrap the tower at Neuschwanstein?

#### HOFFMANN

I doubt whether the majority of Germans understood what Charlie Alt meant to do. Both, Zora Berlin *and* KZ-Brigade spoiled her idea, abusing it for their own, different motives. I believe she's very talented, a young artist who has made her mark despite it all.

ELLEN

So you don't see what she tried to do as an attack on Germany?

HOFFMANN

(after a moment's deliberation)

Not at all. Zora Berlin turned her work into an affront and so gave cause for the accident. His brother, I gather, went further yet with his links to KZ Brigade. I hope they will be brought to book soon, though Prime Minister Mahler's handling of the matter can't have helped. I hope our courts will confirm this purely personal view of mine. The fact that Charlie Alt has been allowed to join her parents in Italy gives me hope also for her.

ELLEN

To Vienna then. Dr Hoffmann, we hear that some of the same people who objected to Alfred Hrdlicka's memorial – *Against War and Fascism* as it's called – are trying to get Dieter Alt's latest work out of the new FAO building before it's even opened officially. They claim it is a deliberate reminder of the concentration camps rather than the starving people in Africa, though that too the vice mayor of the city considers a – quote, *tasteless and unworthy*, unquote – subject. We saw the triptych here just for a day before it was flown to

Vienna. You saw it there – did you find it a reminder of the camps?’

HOFFMANN

I didn’t, despite the prompts. Quite frankly, I think there’s no comparison between Dieter Alt’s triptych and Hrdlicka’s group of so-called sculptures.

ELLEN

You don’t like the street-washing Jew?

HOFFMANN

(hesitates)

I think the work misses the point. For example, where are those coercing him, the good citizens of Vienna who rounded up their neighbours, spitting and jeering as they got down on their knees to scrub the streets? There’s a vacuum around the figure of the Jew, which for me, in itself has the expressiveness of a toad, albeit a grotesquely biblical one. Further out we see some half-carved pieces of marble about getting bombed and the horrors of war, as though to detract from the terror of the *Kristallnacht*, which I thought had been the point of it all. It’s a shame official Vienna will still not accept guilt – Dieter Alt included himself and the portrait of a former chancellor in the painting the academicians confiscated. Really, the Viennese ought to

take that and put it in the same place, in a bullet proof glass box. Its restitution after we believed that it had been burnt, that in itself would be the kind of gesture they appear to be incapable of.

ELLEN

Aren't you too hard on them? After all there have been demonstrations. In the press and on television too there have been voices arguing precisely what you just said.

HOFFMANN

True, but I was talking about official – or should I say officious – Vienna? As you mentioned, I flew to New York with Christof Holub, the architect who designed the FAO building. Before we got on the plane he announced that he'll return to Austria only to complete the building. After that he'll emigrate, regardless of the decision the commissioners have yet to take over the triptych. I have no doubt Christof Holub will do well, wherever he may settle. As for the triptych – I'd like to say here and now that we'd consider it an honour if we could put it in our museum in Frankfurt instead, together with the diploma painting for which I have made an offer already.

ELLEN

And has it been accepted?

HOFFMANN

(turning to Fisher)

I understand we'll have to wait for the artist's decision.

ELLEN

Thank you, Dr Hoffmann.

The lights go out; with the dealer, the German comes closer. He pronounces his English words meticulously, as though to inspire an equally careful reply: 'May I ask a question, Dr Burns? You say you saw the triptych before it was despatched – what's your view of it?'

All at once Ellen is reminded of Fisher's misgivings. Are there doubts after all in Hoffmann's mind?

'I never thought of concentration camps,' she replies at last. 'There's an inevitable similarity of images perhaps but I hope – believe – the triptych will prove a new beginning. It's Dieter's most important work to date. One that belongs in its commissioned place rather than a museum.'

'And you Mr Bielowski?'

'Wagner, please! I agree. An end to hunger and starvation, what could be more important to an international food and agriculture organization? I'll be writing to the Director General –'

Voices, shouting, cut the curator short. Ed, having left his invitation at the studio, has been stopped at the door.

‘Dieter,’ he calls out, ‘Dieter’s here! They won’t let us in!’

Wagner tells the detectives to give way. As the hubbub abates the guests look from the circles of the gallery. Limping, bruised and cut about the face, the artist enters his show. Fisher embraces him and Charlie, on her birthday, then Jane. Wagner follows while Ellen must remain with her crew, commenting on the surprise – or did she know about Dieter braving Concorde? Deliberately he sets off up the spiral, making the crowd part before him and his family, walking where only a week ago he felt paralyzed in his dream. In front of the *Double Portrait* he stops. Charlie takes her father’s hand as she held it fourteen years ago, posing for the painting.

‘I wish I could buy it back for you,’ says Jane; tearful suddenly she looks at them. ‘Forgive me, please!’

Dieter shakes his head and holds out his free hand to her. Side by side then they go on, silent, at the same steady pace, as if there were no one present but the three of them, until Fisher shows the way into the uppermost circle. The four canvases of Dieter’s diploma work hang there, framed as he never saw them.

‘The sound of music,’ he murmurs remembering Uncle Wolfgang in his dream. He turns to Fisher:

‘I never stopped wondering whether the old devil hadn’t got hold of it after all –’

‘He saved it and left it to your stepmother. She heard of your show and meant to let you have it back but then a lawyer got involved, trying to rip everyone off, including herself.’

‘Lawyers!’ exclaims Dieter and laughs. ‘We’re not buying?’

Fisher frowns. ‘I spoke to Erika on the phone. She was still angry, how much better it would have been if you’d never made the work. So I told her, this is something you don’t know, that my sister disappeared in a camp. So she said – Erika said – then perhaps I ought to have it as a gift – to keep alive the pain!’

‘Thomas!’ Dieter embraces him. ‘She’s mad – I’m sorry!’

Over Fisher’s trembling shoulder he looks up at last and focuses on Ellen, waiting for the interview and his reply as regards their future life; Charlie, bailed for a misdemeanour, not the crimes committed by Andrea and KZ-Brigade; and Jane – with her bare hands she dug him out of the rubble at Malaspesa as Ingrid tried to save Andrea, too late. The crowd meanwhile are back on full cry, already their noise approaches the level and pitch his arrival broke but for a few moments. Immobile still he observes them on the spiral below, nodding here, shrugging there, whether he is watching or not. It’s his turn now to view his work, with distance and detachment after all those years. That academy report we have heard in part already described it thus:

One – view to the left. A female nude on a chair, in an empty room with a single window, light from there. By her left, a male figure (*a portrait of the Austrian Federal Chancellor*) in a white coat holds up a hypodermic syringe, offering it to a similar, though younger white-coated figure (*a portrait of the candidate*) on her right.

Two – view to the right. The younger man accepts with a bow, while the other has stepped behind the girl, who is barely adolescent. He grips her wrists, pulling them round the back of the chair. She cries out, obviously in pain.

Three – view to the centre. From the side, the young man puts the injection into the girl's chest, presumably the heart. His companion holds a hand over her eyes while her body twists in agony and the mouth continues her cry.

Four – view to the exterior. The victim's body has been taken away. Side by side the two men stand by the empty chair, immaculate white coat-backs to the viewer as they look out through the open door, over rolling green hills to distant snowy mountains lit brightly by the sun.