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Hans Pleschinski
Ludwig's Heights

Translated by John Hargraves

Chapter One

"Have you been a patient here before?" The receptionist found the answer in her computer file. "Please have a seat in the waiting room."

Ulrich Berg picked up a magazine and sat down. Younger people were apparently a rarity in Dr. Gessler's dental practice. Two elderly ladies were engrossed in their reading, two young Turkish women in headscarves were whispering in their language. A pensioner in a bright blue jacket stared at a framed photo of a waterfall.

For Ulrich Berg, it was a simple matter to take the black cards quietly from his jacket pocket. While thumbing through the yachting magazine, he slipped them discreetly between its glossy pages. With a little cough he put back the issue of *Sail & Cruise*, and removed an insurance company bulletin from the pile. He used three more of his little calling cards on this publication, this location. At some point later, a patient waiting in Dr. Gessler's office would come across the stiff, glossy black card, pick it up and read, in elegant gold script:

Had enough? Truly enough?
Can't go on? No way out?
Come, look within yourself.
In total tranquility.
When you see, you will see.

A telephone number was listed.

They had argued about the wording. Monika had suggested the less formal form of the second person. But Clarissa had prevailed: "We're not setting up a summer camp here. The more distanced the tone, the more reassuring for everyone." Given the gravity of the message, the choice of words would never sound exactly right. In the end the phrasing of the questions and the allusions

were as discreet as they were pointed. *When you understand…* Mrs. Fontanelli had understood, and now she was dead.

In any event, dentist's offices were a good source of hopeless cases. Of course, quite different from those in employment agencies. But he had already visited one in the Kapuzinergasse at 8 am that morning. Come to think of it, he could have taken a waiting number for himself.

"Just here for a cleaning?" the receptionist asked at the door. Ulrich Berg was standing up. "I'll be back this afternoon. I almost forgot an important appointment." He looked around the room once more. An Islamic woman in the cellar—that was all they needed.

Now in his mid-forties, he had become expert, within the past week, at smiling his way past office staff on the stairs, then slipping back out again and disappearing. Only in Garmisch, at an internist's office, had an assistant come running after him. "You dropped your keys."

The April sun was barely warm. He pulled up his fur collar and fastened his corduroy jacket. A wind was blowing. He would have enjoyed having his thick blond hair blow over his eyes and face. Tempi passati. His hair had long since thinned, and what remained was curly. This attenuation went with the creases around the eyes, the thinner lips, and the tensed-up shoulders. Taken all together, these signs of agin actually enhanced his masculinity--Robert Redford, at any rate, had aged in similar fashion. The attention he had once paid to small details of his appearance, hardly necessary for a self-assured young man with good teeth and a confident air, had become transformed into a more general vanity as a defense against an ongoing process of shrinking and greying.

But things had not yet reached that stage. He still looked good in jeans.

Ulrich Berg turned into Maximilianstraße. The opera house was decked out with fantastic green and purple banners. Off to the right, on the upper bank of the Isar, the Bavarian Parliament spread out its great stone wings. Its gold mosaic work gleamed faintly. Even if only seen at a glance, the whole splendid mile remained the impressive act of will of a king wanting to leave something imposing, beautiful and unique behind. Facades, colonnades and illusions could sometimes hold life together on the outside when things were shaky inside. Reality could be born from appearance. That was, at least, the late monarchistic idea of the Wittelsbachs, who had cut slashes of magnificence into forests and fields, and into apathy and resistance. In retrospect, everyone was pleased that their tax monies had relentlessly been converted to columns and statues.

Ulrich Berg looked at the window display at Louis Vuitton. Some of the shirt fabrics, he could tell, had come from Tuscan looms in Prato. He could tell from the tailoring that they were ready-made selling for thirty times wholesale. Not far away was the spot where Moshammer, a latter-day reincarnation of Ludwig the Fairy King, had run his salon. A while back Ulrich had seen Daisy, the murdered couturier's Yorkshire terrier, (just as press-savvy during the trial as Moshammer had been in life) snoozing on a neo-Baroque footstool in the store window, surrounded by blazers and neckties. The Bavarian designer, who had aspired to be a top singer as well, had at least had the courage of his convictions. Other more recent birds of paradise seemed less capable of prolonged flight: their careers ever briefer, if more intensively covered by papparazzi—and, often enough then ended up living in terraced houses. Where could you find truly worthwhile eccentrics these days?

Winter grit from the past few weeks crunched under his boots. In Munich, apparently, they only swept the sidewalks monthly. Idlers and customers who dropped large sums at Bulgari, Vuitton and Pralinen-Cordes for life's little pleasures were few and far between on Monday morning. Clerks standing by cash registers and shelves neatened up already tidy stacks of notes and blouses.

He felt something hit him in the back of the knee. Then, a bit ahead of him, he saw an umbrella dangling loosely from a lady's arm. Indifferent, in her tartan poncho, she didn't even turn around. "Stupid cow" he hissed, and rubbed his smarting leg. Turning into the Kosttor, a Volvo honked at cycle rider, who had caught her tire in the trolley tracks, but managed to free it. Across the street, in front of the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, a taxi driver watched impassively as an old lady with hat and cane struggled to get into the back seat.

Was all this just because it was Monday?

Or was this the onset of *Föhn*, the ill-tempered Alpine wind? If they'd had a stiletto at hand, some passengers on the S-Bahn looked like they would happily ram it into the stomach of the person seated across from them. Of course, in the depth of winter, the atmosphere on public transport was even more charged. In many faces you couldn't tell which was stronger: aversion to one's fellows, or disgust with oneself. The reasons would be hard to name. Too little joy, a surfeit of everything else: a new kind of slavery? There was an obvious fury in people--important not to get drawn into it.

He turned around; he could leave off a few of his glossy cards in the *Backstage* café.

A famous fashion designer, concentrating on some knitware orders from H & M and Escada, entered the café just in front of the *Kammerspiele* theater. At a window seat was a TV detective, who together with his younger sidekick, in their casual yet sincere manner, helped law and order win an occasional victory in Munich. By his teacup, still dangling its teabag label, was a well-thumbed stack of papers in which the actor was making sweeping underlines. A filmscript, a text for tonight's reading? You always saw a celebrity or two in here. Once he thought he recognized Senta Berger in the face of a red-haired woman, (more wrinkled than onscreen, of course) but when she left with her companion she

was speaking Spanish, and she had a decided limp. Further back, in the hall leading to the theater lobby, a writer well known for photo interviews was having breakfast. Popular for her sensual, sexy stories, she'd supposedly had some wild years in Mexico, an uncertain number of marriages and liaisons. Now here she was, dipping a croissant into her café au lait, smiling at some private thought, in a flamboyantly red sweater with a wide shawl collar.

Having gotten up so early, Ulrich had an espresso at the bar. He didn't feel hungry. He slipped some of the gold-lettered cards in the menu beside him. *Had enough? Truly enough?* Artists, especially, theatergoers, intellectuals, sensitive people in general were susceptible, needy.

In a life that was harsh, difficult, often unbearable, they could be helped. In a certain way. Ulrich Berg did not want to think about the consequences of his dangerous activity. He was good at repressing unpleasant thoughts, thank God. And even the worst of times pass eventually. Legally he was unimpeachable. At least he hoped so. He looked down in revulsion at his hands. Dreadful! But they were merely tools. He tried chewing his aniseed biscuit, but after a gulp of coffee slipped it underneath his cup. He had never liked these little Italian pebbles. Behind the bar an orgy of foaming, steaming, mixing was in full swing. All of Germany seemed to have fallen into a capuccino-, steamed milk- , latte-macchiato-fueled frenzy, and yet no one seemed to know whether all this caffeinated slop revived or wore you out.

No matter. Still…

He turned his gaze away from the plump, wooly-red writer: she appeared to be removing a glob of marmelade from her paper with a knife.

Soon he would be well off, rich enough, in Brazil, or wherever, to have breakfast served to him in bed. From a modern silver service. He would soon get

used to truffle paté on his toast and fresh langoustines for breakfast. He would have to be careful not to get sluggish. After some calisthenics and a few laps in the ocean, he would have breakfast on the terrace under an awning. There would certainly be friends and acquaintances – in Bahia, Acapulco, or in the Seychelles – with whom he could alternate dates for brunch. Casual, last minute things, before taking a run someplace in the boat.

A line of black BMW's filed by the café. The Bavarian president was probably taking a guest from the State Chancellery, his Kremlin- on-the-Isar, to a reception at the Landtag, the parliament building. And at least within Bavaria, that heroically tiny sovereign state (in fact a good deal larger than Saxony or the Rheinland-Palatinate), many people imagined that such drives actually impacted global politics. They were making decisions which would doubtless affect someone or other, and as a voter one had to keep vigilant on issues affecting one's physical well-being and dignity, one's civil rights and duties.

No, it really wasn't Senta Berger coming in. It was that Spanish woman, with an orthopedic shoe: apparently she lived in the area.

Ulrich laid three coins on the marble bar. He reserved several glossy cards for the return trip, the train station, and the S-Bahn. Clarissa had everything under control. Particularly in this case it was good to abdicate power to women. They could be more draconian. He zipped his jacket up again. A fantastic looking platter of beef in aspic paraded past. As he put his gloves back on, he could see the various sections of the city already awash with his little cards.

Chapter Two

Schäftlarn-Ebenhausen, just south of Munich, was known throughout the Bundesrepublik, and not just for its "Forum on Science and Politics." As a part of

the village of Schäftlarn, the eponymous Benedictine abbey also belonged to this twin municipality. Well-preserved and well maintained, the cloister quadrangle with its splendid basilica and beer garden commanded the whole Isar valley. In good weather it attracted day-trippers who would lock up their city bikes, mountain bikes, Kawasakis, tandems or rickshaws in the parking lot before having a liter of beer or a cider spritzer.

The valley beneath the wooded upper banks near the river and its pebble beaches was a little piece of paradise. Visitors in groups, pairs or alone, would look out into the greenery exploding around them, while enjoying a plate of wurst-salad or crisp-roasted pork, pretzels and a glass of wheat beer under shady chestnut trees. Later on they would get up reluctantly, and tipsily, before travelling on or heading home. Once remounted and pedaling unsteadily up the steep hill, they were already perspiring heavily as they said their farewells. What with the hops and malt and a half a roast duck, many of them would get off their bikes in Schäftlarn and push them uphill. Others, suddenly worn out by the sun, fresh air and wine spritzers, fell into bushes and grass at the side of the road and slept, often with their cycling helmets still on. Every hour the Benedictines' bell would peal above the blissful summer slumberers in the elderberries.

Far above this Elysian scene, where children frolicked unrestrained by parental discipline, cats jumped impudently up on benches and tables, and music blared from cars driving by, up above the hairpin curves and beyond the S-Bahn train tracks, lay the town of Ebenhausen, spreading out into the hilly countryside. Its long-standing residents were few. Managers, bankers and professors had settled in the upper part of town, whence they commuted to corporate headquarters or university offices. An ambitious modern opera director lived in Ebenhausen with his partner, played host in his antique farmhouse to famous conductors and singers, where, amid model theater sets in his cellar, he would party with his artists into the early hours. His shutters were locked whenever he left town to mount a production of *La Traviata* in London, *Woyzeck*

at the Met, or *Salome* at the Maryinski Theater in St. Petersburg. After one particular musical bacchanale, an occasion with taxis hired as designated drivers, one of the world's most renowned Schubert interpreters tumbled down the length of the steeply sloping lawn; she awoke next morning in the dewy grass beside a mediocre steel sculpture. Milk was delivered to the door every morning from a neighboring dairy.

In the village there were still a few farmers selling eggs and vegetables, so along with Porsches one saw chickens scratching about, and the occasional ancient cow still forced early morning joggers to go around her. In the town of some three thousand, the newer properties were built in such a way that joggers or pedestrians could not see inside. Rows of ferns planted behind high hunter's fences blocked off any view. Tall bamboo was planted around the terraces. The metal jalousies of one half of many a two-family house would not be raised for months at a time. Whatever happened behind those aluminium shades was anyone's guess. Behind these geranium boxes, for instance, lived the daughter of the last East German Federal Bank president, married to a vascular surgeon. A few years back, the police found the body of a man, in his junk-filled house, crushed to death beneath a huge pile of *Neue Revue* issues dating back to 1960.

Sometimes on clear mornings in the Hailafinger Leite road one could hear Strauss' *Alpine Symphony* or the surging strings of something by Bruckner, and be sure that behind the gabled windows a dreamer was gazing at the far-off Alps. Well into the summer, fields of snow would still be gleaming in the dark, jagged peaks. And even for someone who did not appreciate these giant stone formations to the south, for whom the Alps were simply a cruel and indifferent lineup of ravines – whose craggy abruptness had been feared for centuries--, even for those who equated mountain climbing with a cold, wet, and quite likely injurious waste of time, the peak of the Karwendel chain still beckoned as the first outpost of Italy. Beyond those ridges and glaciers lay Verona, Mantua, and palm trees reflected in the waters of Lago Maggiore. Perhaps it was both depressing

and sensible in equal measure that a barrier divided the one sphere of existence from the other. The rocky frontier evoked goals, desires, contemplation. In those far-off heights, the wind snarled all year long.

Dragonflies hovered above the last remaining puddles. An immaculate May day was beginning. It may have been six o'clock.

The property upon the Ludwigshöhe heights was certainly one of the most picturesque and secluded in the town. Even a prying early riser, taking his dog for an early morning walk, could barely tell from the village road if the garden continued behind the house, or whether the damply shimmering black shingles belonged to an outbuilding or to a neighboring property. The box hedge of Ludwigshöhe 3 grew thick and as tall as a man. Chestnut tree branches and larch boughs projected far out over the road, probably in violation of town regulations.

The property on the edge of the town was known as the "Hungarian House." This name came from the unusual garden entrance. Its gate was made of tightly fitted wooden slats, varnished brown. Above the two bowed swinging gates was a dark archway, made of a single wooden beam, gaily decorated with colorful woodcarving. On either side of the date: *1911,* couples in folk-costume were dancing the polka or the csardas,with legs flying and ribbons aflutter. It was either the intentionally primitive work of an artist or the design of a good-humored carpenter. The painted figures, country maids and shepherds with hands placed on hips or hat, were meant to be Hungarian: or so the abundant sheaves of red peppers and sunflowers strongly hinted.

Perhaps before World War I some Bavarian manufacturer had brought his new Hungarian bride from the southern reaches of the Habsburg Empire into her new home through this gateway. But at that period there had also been lots of artistic sanctuaries in the Isar Valley, summer hideaways teeming with creativity, cosmic visions, love affairs, passions, archaic pursuits,or bitter feuds, and

political revolutionaries boozing, bonding and bathing nude. But a peek through the slatted gate and the Hungarian dancers revealed nothing particularly foreign about the house or its style. Its bright yellow paint glowed through the surrounding woods. Vines framed the windows, here and there clambering up onto the roof. The Hungarian House would have been just a plain oblong block, were it not for two onion domes to the corners of the façade, added by the client and his architect. The left dome ended in a pointed lighting rod, the other in a weather-vane, rusted and permanently pointing West.

A weasel darted past the cellar door.

"I'm afraaaiid." The sound of sobbing penetrated through the green shutters into the surrounding woods. "I'm afraaaiid, I'm afraid…" The voice from inside died off into whimpering and moaning: "Let me…help me. Sleep…afraaaiid. Quiet…Ahhh."

The lamentation stopped. Some pigeons alighted on the rain-gutters, cooing. After a short time a shutter was pushed open. A sleepy face looked out. A hand holding a cane came into view. One sharp, warning blow against the rain-gutter sent the pigeons flying up into the treetops and away. The main gate was slightly ajar. A cat glided over the threshold. She found the full dish of milk on the topmost stair landing. Lapping up the milk and grooming herself in the morning sunlight, she stared fixedly at two figures in the front garden.

To the left of the center pathway a man was kneeling under a copper beech. He wore a dark coat and shawl. He stared at the ground, motionless. Finally he bent over forward. Supporting himself on both hands he let his forehead sink down to the dirt. He dug his fingers into the moist darkness. He inhaled the aroma of the earth. "To you, mother, to you." He pressed his lips to the dirt and grass. "Good – peaceful – nurturing…" He stretched himself out fully, held onto the beech's roots and, smiling, pressed his cheek to the earth. He stayed in this posture for a time, caressing the ground.

On the opposite side of the rough pathway, beside the old garden-shed, a sunlit jet of water splashed into the basin of a fountain. At its mossy granite edge a woman in a long red dress crouched on a towel. Closing her eyes, she slowly lowered her face into the water. She kept her face submerged among the water lilies, letting no air escape. At length she pulled her head out of the water with a gasp, pulling back her wet blond hair. The water ran down her face, beading on her skin. Barely forty, she murmured in quiet ecstasy: “I am everything…I am nothing…All is resolved. How good to know. How wonderful!” Taking another deep breath, she submerged her head again in the fountain, her hair streaming in the water.

The chorus of birds grew louder.

The cat stretched itself on the worn doormat. Then suddenly it was on its paws, arching its back.

“Good morning, Chouchou. Have you had your breakfast?” The cat relaxed its back and rubbed up against a leg. A woman in a white housecoat and slippers spoke to someone behind her inside the dark house: “How awful. –Herr Lehmann actually went through with it. I wouldn’t have picked him.”

“The quiet ones are often the most determined,” someone said from inside.

“Yes, and that forced cheerfulness can hide an abyss. A colleague of mine was like that. ”

“Herr Lehmann was a tax consultant,” said the invisible male voice inside.

“That doesn’t mean a thing, Herr Deutler. Who knows what was going on inside?” The woman in her morning semi-dressed state waved back into the hall: “Are you ready? Let’s go.”

“Was he in debt? – Depressed? – Wife run off? – Defrauded?” The voice sounded like a boy’s.

“He had stopped talking,” the woman lifted her hands, “that’s the thing. When they stop talking, it’s a tipoff. But sometimes it’s those words that nobody paid any attention to…at three last night, when I heard the steps, and then that horrible snap, I thought nothing of it. – So are you coming finally? It’s broad daylight now.”

“We should wait, Frau Hoffmeister, we have to wake up the others.” Herr Deutler, barefoot, stepped gingerly outside. He was wearing only jeans. His skinny chest was hairless. Large, deepset eyes below a shaved head. His nostrils flared nervously. The young man had not slept well.

“No, let’s not panic everyone else.” The woman, who could have been his mother, had wound her white towel into a turban, took her companion by the hand: “Let them sleep, those who can. It could be their last night.”

“Ghastly thought!”

“Well, that’s a bit inappropriate, Herr Deutler.”

“Should we send for a doctor?”

“We can’t.”

“So what are we supposed to do, Frau Hoffmeister? Cut him down?”

The woman in white remained standing with her hall-neighbor under the door light for a moment—after her first peek out into the gloomy orchard, she had waked him by banging on his door. They could see Herr Kipphard out there under the copper beech, pressing his cheek to the soil. And at the fountain, Ute Wimpf was rehearsing her final symbiosis with water.

Fräulein Wimpf, a high-school teacher from Augsburg, had not minced words in describing herself to Hilde Hoffmeister: she was “empty,” she was “burned-out.” Her students had not only ambushed her with pepper-spray, but a “tenth-grade degenerate from a down-and-out family” had stabbed her in the leg with a pair of scissors. She said she had become a teacher “out of passion,” but now red with anger, her feelings had come bursting out: she just wanted “to shoot ten-to-sixteen-year-olds, the ones who kick the glass doors in, who use the school computers to make porno pictures, and at graduation cover the halls

with graffiti saying *Go to hell Schaiss Knast.* Of course Augsburg-Oberhausen is a tough neighborhood. But it's their souls that have rotted." Before the scissors attack, , when a colleague had defended herself against that same student, his parents had had her arrested and interrogated. Give that kind of brutalization and apathy, which drags even the good kids down to the lowest level, it seemed absurd for a history teacher even to hint of a united Europe. She entered the classroom now "with heart palpitations and tranquilizers." Another colleague, with personal and school-related troubles, "jumped in front of a train." Still, she, Ute Wimpf, would never "put all the students in one basket— never. There were still nice, goodhearted students, and some determined ones," but on the whole the inability to concentrate and the increasing trend toward violence had reached the point where "I just give up…during class they sit there and make obscene noises at us." Stab teachers with scissors. Spell *Italy* with two l's. With parents even more neglectful and inert than their children. –"In Lower Saxony the primary schools have sleep nooks for children who feel overburdened." – How will they be able to take charge of their futures like that? Hilde Hoffmeister and Olaf Deutler watched as the schoolteacher, calmed down now, lowered her head in slow-motion back into the fountain. The water splashed out of the pipe onto her neck almost cheerfully.

"What a desperate situation, Frau Hoffmeister."

„Well, it hardly matters now, Herr Deutler."

"We're still alive."

"More or less."

The two neighbors, one barefoot, one in slippers, descended the stone steps.

"As for me, I'll never get through it, Frau Hoffmeister."

"Life? Or the other?"

"But you—you're a strong-minded woman."

"It's not even been three months since they brought me to this madhouse. A long story. Suddenly—no, not suddenly, but slowly, gradually, I didn't know myself any more. On my daughter-in-law's birthday I smashed all her china. I

grabbed the glasses from the cupboard and threw them at the wall. One after the other. Everyone just sat there stunned. I continued this way after I got home. Hormones? Well, twenty years ago she took my son away from me and turned him into a dishrag, needing her permission to do anything. He's welcome to her, the wimp. I'm completely fed up, with everything."

"With everything?"

"I have one adventure still awaiting me."

"It's a beautiful morning. A gift from heaven. Isnt' that a hoopoe, Frau Hoffmeister? With the red crest?"

"I don't know birds." The vigorous, powerfully built woman walked ahead, and Olav Deutler, half a head shorter, walked behind her. They turned towards the orchard and passed by the rainbarrel. The paving-stones were uneven and forced them to step through the damp, cool grass. Hilde Hoffmeister avoided the snails. Behind her back, Olaf Deutler's face began to twitch.

"Maybe he was sick."

"He had stopped talking. He gave up."

"Not of his own free will, Frau Hoffmeister."

"Why are you crawling along behind me?"

"I'm not crawling. I'm a human being." The scrawny, half-naked set designer, pants rolled up, carefully avoided stepping on bright shards of glass. Grapeleaves brushed his light stubbly hair. On closer examination, two long reddish scars were visible on his wrists.

"I'll never get that image out of my mind."

"If you face the humanity of it squarely, you'll be able to deal with it. But in any case, I'm not going back there alone, Herr Deutler."

"That's always the question: do you just run away? Or do you stay and face it?" The young man folded his arms.

"There's no formula for that either. Keep moving towards the pear tree."

"I'll follow you."

From some instinct the two stopped heading toward the kitchen garden. Instead they edged along the vine-covered wall. Hilde Hoffmeister walked right into the hose reel.

“I’m still behind you,” murmured Olaf Deutler.

“Thank God,” he heard her say, ahead of him.

“Horrible. I always had stage fright. …It killed me. Even on the tightest budget, I always designed terrific sets. But as early as the first blocking rehearsals began, I couldn’t speak with anyone. When lighting rehearsals started, I had to see a doctor. Diarrhea, fever, everything. But, actually, it started much earlier,” he panted. “I was the class whipping boy. I could never assert myself. Maybe lots of set designers feel that way, mediocre or bad…I never know what’s right. Never! Everything affects me, pulls me in opposite directions. I burst, I disintegrate. It’s all wrong—or is it?”

“In any event, we’re still talking,” the nervous escort heard the voice ahead of him say. They passed by the barred dining room window.

My last job was *The Captain from Köpenick* in Coblenz, I only got as far as the designs for the first act…’But will that work?’ the director wondered. Every criticism gave me stomach cramps. Because I wanted it to be brilliant! – Maybe she didn’t even mean anything bad by her remark? --- Maybe my dick is too small, maybe that’s why I can never assert myself…”

“Herr Deutler, please!” she barked at him.

“You’re so decisive.”

“And besides, I don’t believe it.”

“But really, it’s not big. And when you’re afraid it’s too small, it gets even smaller. And you along with it.”

”Get hold of yourself!”

“A tragedy. All because of a few centimeters. Anyway, when we showed each other our dicks at school during gym, mine really was small, since I was nervous. I covered myself with my hands right off. A more auspicious moment, and everything would have been different. Or maybe not. Do you understand? …I just can’t go any further.”

The air in the shade was cool. But they weren't shivering from the cold. Hilde Hoffmeister held Olaf Deutler's hand so tightly that his face started to twitch as if in pain.

"Cut him down and shovel him under ," he whispered. And that'll be that. Horrible. But he's over it now. He's in darkness, at peace. God wanted him back."

"He wanted Herr Lehmann?"

"Let's stop right here. We're still talking, yes, but this is getting to be too much, Frau Hoffmeister. I brought him another pillow yesterday. He was sitting at the window. A fine man."

"What do *we* know?"

"He was sitting there, motionless, in his suit. With a white shirt and tie. He had sensitive hands." Olaf Deutler leaned against the wall and sank back into the vines. He closed his eyes, trembling, with his jaws clenched. Frau Hoffmeister ventured the last few steps alone. The little orchard spread out in front of her. Years ago someone had taken great care in planting it. By the plum trees there were rows of morello cherries, mirabelles, and other types of fruit trees leafing out and budding. The ancient gray tree trunks shimmered damply. The glass panes of a greenhouse were clouded with dirt, or broken. The gnarled peartrees were growing into the woods.

A garden stool lay tipped over in the grass. The tax consultant, whom Frau Hoffmeister had only seen in outline from her window, was hard to make out even now. Karl Lehmann was just a pattern of sunbeams hanging between the twigs and branches. His handkerchief poked rakishly out of his jacket pocket. His shoes were polished to a shine, three feet above the ground. Frau Hoffmeister bent her head down and folded her hands. Behind her a voice was singing from the wall—but in a monotone, cracked and unsure, sobbing--, a song perhaps from childhood, something from a confirmation class which had stayed in his memory:

Jerusalem, thou fairest
How brightly dost thou shine!
What lovely songs of praise
In thy calmness sound.
O how great our joy and rapture
As the sun is now arising,
Now begins that day of days
Which now will never end.