Translated excerpt

Uwe Timm
Ikarien

Kiepenheuer & Witsch Verlag, Köln 2017
ISBN 978-3-462-05048-6

pp. 9-28 & 51-63 & 74-99

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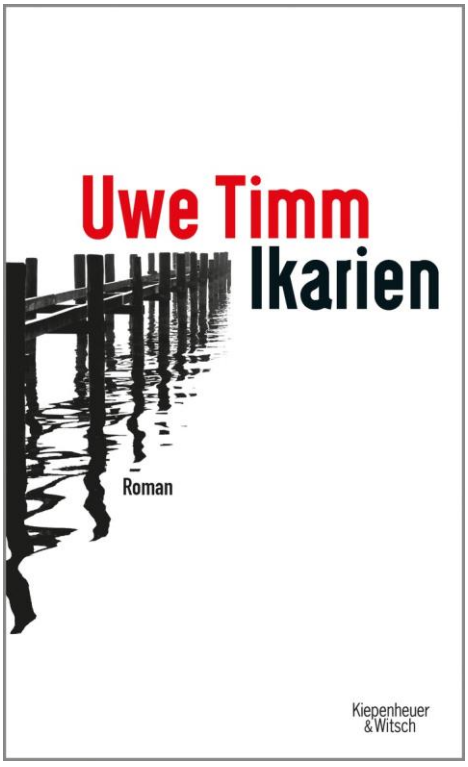

He's alive.
I'm a witness.
He survived.

He moved down the street laughing, yelling, dancing along, a little awkwardly, but still a dance, clapping his hands. No one had ever seen him before. As if he'd fallen from the sky. Sturdy and compact, slurring his speech, dancing down the street, past the ruins of the corner building, along a tarn gray façade dangling white bed sheets, past the dairy shop, the shoe store, toward the fishmonger Grün, and coming the other way Adolf Andersen, not sporting his brown uniform and shiny high boots this spring day, but clad instead in innocuous green, *grün, grün, grün sind alle meine Kleider*, nor did he raise his arm, as only yesterday he had, to call out *Heil!*, no, he tipped his hat, nodding left and right in an over-friendly fashion, then paused in confusion, stood stock still as the awkwardly dancing young man approached him with a grin, stretching forth his stub-fingered hand, which Andersen took, surprised and embarrassed, as the young man was already stumbling on, making strange gurgling sounds, cries, not of pain, but rather pleasure, or perhaps both, cries of pain-pleasure, while from that same mouth, which seemed too small for his tongue, words spilled forth: one seemed to be *Wolke*, another *Baum*, yet another *Himmel*. Or was it Himmler?
No, *Himmel*.
The young man clapped his hands again, yes he was clearly dancing, an awkward dance, you could see it in the slow rhythm of his clapping hands as he drew near a tree, the only one left standing, having outlasted bombs, fires, and the saws of winter, a chestnut with leaves like little green paws. The young man pressed himself against the trunk, ran his fingers along the bark, a gurgle flowed from his mouth. He crossed the street, flapped his arms as if trying to fly, called out hoarsely several times, and followed the crows, imitating their cries.

Three or four months later, having regained a sense of what was supposed to be normal, the children started to tease him. They didn't understand him. He shook his fist

at them. But even if he managed to catch one, he didn't strike him, but said instead: Sleep well! And: Softly now! Why sleep?
He spoke like a child: I was the youngest and stuck with him the longest. How marvelous when he tried to sweep the clouds away with a broom.
When I started to tease him too, my mother asked me, Why do you do that?
Because he's funny.
No, he's not funny, and he's not bad. Children can be bad. But not him. He doesn’t hurt anyone. He'll always be a little childlike.
Our talk went something like that. And bound up with it a feeling of shame, of having betrayed someone to please others.

For twelve years his parents kept him hidden in their apartment.
An apartment building, eight families, fourth floor, a flat at the end of the hall. Two adults and a child lived there. The child was kept inside. They shared the rations meant for two adults: butter, bread, cheese, vegetables and potatoes. It was barely enough for two, let alone three. And the boy ate a lot, was hungry, constantly hungry, the mother said, he ate like a horse, said the father who brought back something from work now and then, carrots, some cabbage, a sliver of soap and on rare occasions a little honey. One of the father's colleagues in the Water Department kept two beehives in his garden. He knew about the boy they kept hidden. Real honey was a feast.
Did the other tenants in the building know about him? One or two might have, for even if they kept their shoes off, those below could surely tell that more than two people lived above them. They didn’t give anything away. He was a little different. He might have been killed.
They kept quiet.
Would they have kept quiet if it had been a Jewish family?
The horror, the things that can’t be said.

It has to be said.

The rubble. In the summer there were trails through hills of debris. Paths worn down. That's where the

Trümmermörder walked through the ruins. Ashes lay there. Fragments of bone. Brick dust. Humus. Thick green growth, lupines and thistles, coltsfoot too. Little clouds flew up from the depressions, white cabbage butterflies. The old folks said there were never so many butterflies as in the summer of 1945. Pests they said. They gnawed at the cabbage, were insatiable, cabbage was scarce too. Children chased them, swung at them with thin willow rods, they fell to the ground with shredded wings.
We were the rescuers. We killed the pests.

In my dreams I could fly. It was easy. I spread my arms and I was in the air. Below: houses, streets, trees, our teacher Herr Blumenthal, hair sprouting from his ears and nostrils, and there was a bicyclist, swaying, about to fall, yes, he tumbled to the ground. I flew filled with joy. I looked forward to going to bed. I looked forward to falling asleep.

What I remember: Karlchen chewing. A steady motion, his jaw grinding slowly. As if chewing on his tongue. His smile pulls his face wide.
What I remember: the jeep, a car, so basic, so transparent in its functions, the wheels bare, the steering wheel, the gearshift, the gearbox a metal block visible behind the rear axle, the spare tire at the rear, on the other side a spade, the front windshield could be tilted up, the car had no doors, the soldiers simply stepped in, when it rained a folding cloth top was raised on metal bars.
The English soldiers occupying Hamburg drove the same jeep, but the one parked that July on Eppendorfer Weg had a star on its radiator, and an American officer in a starched khaki uniform. He was smoking. The driver, who wasn't black, though we later discovered that many drivers were, handed out sticks of chewing gum. An end in itself: pure taste, *lirum larum Löffelstiel*, and the act of chewing, the grinding motion of the jaw that puts the body at ease. The car smelled of gum and of gasoline, a smell that's stayed with me ever since, the distant memory of the Other, the New.
The surprising thing was that the man in uniform understood us and spoke German. He asked the children their names. They told him their first names and their age. Karlchen was far bolder, or perhaps merely more

curious; he touched the metal, the tires, the mirror, and finally, cautiously, with his somewhat stubby fingers, felt the officer's uniform. The man asked: *What's your name?* And Karlchen said: *Karlchen*. He had to repeat his name, and his question: *Can car jump?*
The officer laughed. *No*.
The driver gave Karlchen a stick of gum wrapped in silver foil. And as the boy started to shove it in his mouth, the officer took it back, unwrapped it, and returned it to the boy. Karlchen chewed and clapped his hands.

Outward Bound

The spray above the waves. On the ship stands a young man, he's on assignment. His name is Hansen, Michael, after the angel the Germans save for themselves. His first name was chosen by his father. Hansen is a perfectly normal, unobtrusive young man. He's tall and women say he's good-looking. You can tell from the way he walks that he plays sports, his movements are calm, strong. He listens well, that's a virtue. And he asks questions. Many good qualities, but nothing striking.
The young man stands at the railing with a comrade, looking out at the sea, across an overcast Atlantic blending into the sky. They're staring intently, like the lookout on the bridge. They're watching for gray wolves. For a periscope, a snorkel, the bubbling path of a torpedo. No wolf in sight. The wolves are being chased with radar, airplanes, depth charges. The ship, a dark gray troop carrier that was once a gleaming white passenger ship, is faster than any wolf.
The young man is one of the chosen.
Why him?
He speaks German and has a driver's license.
Chosen by whom?
By the American Psychological Warfare Division: PWD.
But he doesn't know that yet.

Seven months ago he volunteered for the army and was assigned to the Intelligence Corps, the ones with two crossed flags on their buttons. He received an A-backpack and a B-backpack fastened with straps and snap hooks, carried over the shoulder. He went through basic training, learned to make his bed and the petty tests that went with it: the covers had to be so taut the drillmaster could bounce a quarter off them. He learned to crawl with his rifle held out in front, to keep his balance on beams, to squeeze under rolls of barbed-wire, to climb high wooden barriers, and again, keeping his balance, to run through the woods. He kept up well, had played basketball and tennis at Washington University. He learned how to shoot a rifle. He was recommended for Officer Training with high marks, learned tactics and how to deliver intelligence reports, which had to be brief, accurate and precise, as the Intelligence Corps Colonel

said. They were decisive in any battle. Even the bravest soldiers wound up flailing about in the field if their orders didn't arrive in time or were muddled. The flags on their buttons were once sent commands from mountain to mountain. Now there was Morse code, telephone, radio. And encryption. And deciphering enemy radio transmissions. Reconnaissance. Estimates of troop strength, plans of attack, the mood of enemy troops.
You are the brain and the nerves of our troops, said the Colonel. Muscles, sinews, bones, that's the others, the infantry, the artillery, the tank corps.
Or better yet, you're the angels that bring the tidings. But you see everything too. And you listen. You watch the enemy. Not only which troops are where, but what they are thinking. Their plans. Their mood.

Half a year later Hansen was sworn in as an officer and named Second Lieutenant. A so-called six month wonder. He was fit to be sent against the Germans, the krauts, the Nazis. He was an American, though born in Germany. No one asked him what he felt about having to fight over there, apart from the fear of being injured or even killed.

At home in Ringwood, near New York, they had discussions about it. Why volunteer right after his M.A.? He would have been drafted, but surely they could managed a deferral. But he wanted to. *War is rubbish*, his frightened mother said. She said it in German, and also: you worry over your kids, raise them as best you can, in pain and sorrow, and then the guys upstairs send them off to be killed in war. His father was against it too, but for a different reason. He'd renounced his German citizenship years ago and become an American, but he still said you don't fight against the land of your birth, against your own blood relatives.

Hansen outfitted himself at the military exchange, a close-fitting uniform that differed in style and quality from the one he'd worn as a common soldier. Now he had a dark green jacket with gleaming buttons, rose-colored trousers, shirt, tie, a billed cap with a golden eagle, epaulettes with a narrow band of brass. A lightweight, practical uniform.

Three months before leaving for Europe he'd met Catherine, on a train, just before Christmas. A blizzard brought traffic in New York to a standstill.
He was on leave for a long weekend. The snow set in as he pulled out, and by the time the train entered Grand Central Station the storm was raging. Busses, taxis and the suburban trains were no longer running. He stood in the domed hall beside the young woman he'd chatted with briefly across the aisle on the train. Her boyfriend was to meet her beneath the large station clock. Hansen gave her a few quarters for the pay phone, and she learned from her boyfriend's parents that he'd left, but had called on the way to say he was stuck in traffic. Hansen accompanied her to a little bar across the street from the train station, where they found two chairs at a small wobbly metal table. They sat squeezed in among other stranded passengers. The windows were fogged over by steam from the damp clothing. Now and then the headlamps of a car moved slowly by. They drank beer, ordered the last available sandwich, which she insisted on sharing with him, and talked for a while. At one point she stood up, asked him for more change, and went to the phone. He saw her standing near the counter, speaking into the receiver, how she shook her head, her thick, dark brown, slightly reddish, shimmering hair. Soft gray trousers, a thick light-colored cable-stitch sweater, the gentle indication of her breasts. She came back, said she'd passed along the name of the bar, in case Horace called. The name Horace. Her name? Catherine. They sat in the crowded bar, closer to each other than usual for someone who'd just met. When she laughed he felt her body against his arm. And she laughed often. The conversation switched from English to German. Hansen asked what she did for a living. She was studying anthropology at Columbia, earning her way as a language instructor, German, mostly for soldiers heading for Europe. Was her family German? No, she was French, but they spoke German at home. She came from Alsace. Four years ago, shortly after France surrendered and the German occupation began, her father sent her to America by way of an uncle in Spain. A precautionary measure, since it wasn't clear when the war would end. Alsace had been annexed by the German Reich after the surrender. Her family had to take on German citizenship. But she made it to safety. Her brother didn't fare so well. He'd fought in the French army, and was sent to a prisoner of

war camp in East Prussia after the defeat. Later, with his new citizenship, he was drafted into the German army. What times these were. I hope he's still alive. I hope they are. She'd heard nothing from her parents for the past three months.
Stirred by a sudden emotion, he put his hand on her arm and said: The good thing about bad news is that it generally travels quickly.
She looked at him. He said: I'm in the Intelligence Service. I know about these things. He offered her a cigarette, which she took, saying she only smoked on holidays. They sat together smoking for a while in shared silence.
After a good two hours the door to the bar opened again and a young man in a brown duffel coat entered, covered in snow. Hello, he said, hugged Catherine, shook hands with Hansen, squeezing hard, and Hansen squeezed hard back, a brief test of strength that embarrassed him slightly afterward. He wondered if the other man felt the same. This is Horace, she said, and he said Hello again, sorry there wasn't time to join them, there was no room anyway, and the car was double parked, it couldn't stay there long, they had to leave right away. She wanted to pay. Horace wanted to pay. Hansen warded them off, they could split the sandwich but not the cost, which was true, since the bill didn't divide evenly. But there was still time to exchange addresses. He wrote down the camp address and his parents' telephone number. When they were gone, he looked at her business card. In engraved letters: Catherine Weckmann. He smelled the card, a fragrance, a distant perfume, then put it away as he noticed people nearby looking at him, their faces distant and questioning. It might not have been a good idea to carry on a conversation in German in such an intimate, even conspiratorial tone. They might have been taken for the German spies posters all over New York were warning about.
Hansen and Catherine corresponded over the next three months, in German, letters his fellow soldiers in training camp couldn't read, though there was nothing more intimate in them than the wish to see one another again soon. He liked her German, filled with old-fashioned phrases like *so gehab dich wohl*—Keep well.

Two days before he was to leave for Europe on the carrier, he made a date to meet her in the evening at

Keen's Steakhouse. They talked, drank cocktails, and ordered dinner. She asked him what his family did.
An ape had brought them to America.
She laughed, thinking it was a joke.
Really. His father was a taxidermist. He'd prepared a gorilla for display in Germany at the Berlin Museum of Natural History. The Director of the Natural History Museum in New York saw it while he was touring Europe and was struck by how life-like it was. His father was offered a job at the Museum and left for America. Two years later, in 1932, he brought over his entire family, his mother, his older sister, and Hansen. His mother had another child later, a boy, much younger than me, Hansen said, a late arrival, a quiet, dreamy child. You'd think he longed for the Old World he never knew. But one more thing about the gorilla. It was so life-like that visitors who entered the dimly lit room unawares received a shock. The ape looked threatening, and seemed truly alive. A powerful figure, he stood by a large branch as if he was about to swing up on it. Whenever a class of little girls visited, the museum had to cover his lap with a small apron.
They laughed a lot. About his drillmasters too, the red-faced sergeant, his comrades, and Hansen, who generally preferred to ask questions, to listen, was transformed into an avid storyteller by the cocktails, and even more so by her laugh — a bright outburst that faded melodiously. To hear that laugh was pure pleasure.
When they finished, it was too late to catch the train to Ringwood. He would have to find a hotel or go to Officer's Housing.
She invited him to spend the night in the apartment she shared with a girlfriend. She could sleep in her girlfriend's room.

At the apartment a young woman appeared in a pullover and pants. Her glasses were shoved up on her hair.
This is Gillian, she's preparing for her exams.
The three of them sat down at the table, talked a while.
You can sleep on the sofa, Gillian told Catherine, if my light doesn't bother you.
Catherine changed the sheets on her bed where he was going to sleep. He had a momentary urge to tell her that wasn’t necessary. He would have liked to sleep in her old sheets. She brought him two hand towels. Then he heard her moving about in the bathroom. The water ran. She

came back, stuck her head in the door and said: Your turn. He showered, dried off, sniffed the little bottles till he discovered her perfume. He lay down on the bed and could smell it there too. Jasmine? He turned out the light. He heard the women talking softly in the next room. Then suddenly silence. He thought they'd gone to bed. As he was falling asleep he heard the door open in a flash of brightness and close again. He heard her bare feet approaching. She lifted the covers and got in beside him. Gillian has to study, she whispered, and I can't sleep with that light on. She was breathing rapidly, as if she had just climbed a flight of stairs. And a moment later her voice: but we'll have to be quiet.

A narrow face with regular features, blond hair, parted on the left. A young man with a calm mouth and thoughtful eyes. This too must be taken in account given the surprising turn that evening took, unexpectedly, yet longed for. And what neither of them had talked about, the coming journey to the battlefields of Europe, where, unlike the Pacific, the war was coming to an end.

The future was never mentioned. They gave themselves in place of words.

The next morning her roommate left early. Catherine spoke with her briefly and returned. Were we too loud after all? No, don't worry about Gillian, she said. She's gone to the library. Now we need calories, we need fruit juice, we need cheese, toast, eggs and milk. She took the elevator down. He looked out the ninth floor window of West 78th Street, hoping he could see her leave. No chance, she was probably already walking along the side of the building. He looked at the two silver-framed photographs on her desk. They showed an elegantly-dressed family, the man in a dark suit, the woman in a white ruffled dress, her parents no doubt, the young man, her brother, in a sailor suit, and a little girl, her, in a white dress.
In the other photograph a young man sat at the tiller of a sailboat. He was smiling, showing a row of white teeth, his tanned skin contrasting sharply with his white polo shirt. Hansen didn't recognize Horace at first, who'd appeared at the bar muffled and wet with snow, without that bright white smile, to free her from the snowy chaos.

The clothes, the long sailboat, all indicated a well-to-do family.
She came back to the apartment with a paper bag. He took her in his arms, she brought the smell of fresh air in with her, of sun, her hair loose, tussled, blown about. They sat at the table and ate toast, drank coffee, and when she reached her hand across the table to him, he pulled her up—she left the toast she'd started on the table.

Catherine took Hansen to the train for Ringwood. In the end he asked her about Horace.
Horace? Yes. After a pause she said they planned to get engaged. In two months. She spoke a little evasively. And after a further hesitation: she would have to tell him, Horace, what happened. The word regret. No, not that, but just thinking about Horace made her sad, and of course she was apprehensive about the talk to come. And what would happen, she didn't know. How could she.
A conversation about parting was their farewell. A long hug, during which he asked her not to come to the ship the next day. He had to look after his mother and siblings, and his father too, and taking leave was always painful and complicated for him. At train stations, on docks, even as a boy, the long, drawn-out wait, staying a little longer and then, finally, the departure. She didn't see it that way, for her both sides felt clearly that they were being separated from a part of themselves.
She came after all. The carrier lay on the Hudson, painted gray, with jagged dark gray stripes, a cubist camouflage. Soldiers crowded on the decks above. Crew members climbed the gangway with bags over their shoulders. Family and friends stood on the dock. Shouts from above to those below. Hansen's officer's trunk was carried up by a sailor. His professor had given him two books for the journey: Ernst Bloch's *Spuren* and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Nacht-Stücke*, with forty-eight drawings by Alfred Kubin.

Hansen stood with his parents, his sister and little brother, while his father gave him the names of relatives he should visit after Germany surrendered, which they surely would. And write as soon as you get there, his mother said. Yes, I promise. At that moment he saw her. Catherine stood in her flowered dress on the dock. He left, ran up to her, and said, How nice of you to come,

but as he started to hug her she said sharply, Don't touch me! I just wanted to say good-bye. And don't write! She turned around and left. It was like a physical blow.
He stood there confused, unsure if he should go after her, should ask her what she meant by that violent rejection, since she'd come to say good-bye. But she'd already disappeared among the crowd of people waiting and waving. His little brother came up and pulled him by the hand to his parents and sister. He replied confusedly to their questions and advice, until his father said: You're already far away, better leave now.

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- 27 April –

Columns of German prisoners on the road, marching toward a camp in the north. They looked ragged. Hard to believe that this gray mass was once ready to rule Europe. And on the other side of the road, heading south, equally ragged and worn figures, forced laborers from Poland, the Ukraine, Russia, prisoners from the concentration camps, then more prisoners of war, Belgian, French, now and then German refugees from the East, women, children and old people, horse-drawn carts, loaded with bundles, suitcases, baskets, a handcart pulled by women, a cow on a rope, baby buggies piled high, two streams passing each other in opposite directions. Those who had suffered took no revenge, made no threatening gestures, no shouts, nothing, a long silent line. Drizzle. The added gray. But it's said that away from the roads the Germans were plundered, raped, even murdered. Farmers had their cattle slaughtered.

- Frankfurt. 2 May –

The lodgings – a requisitioned villa that four weeks ago a manager at IG Farben called home. A small castle of sandstone and brick, with false Gothic windows, bays, little towers. A large reception hall, a pompous staircase, a gallery on the upper floor, all paneled in thick oak, grim solidity, a massive chandelier, heavy Chinese vases on cabinets, oil paintings on the walls, bearded men, faces of founding fathers, two landscapes with cows grazing in the evening glow, carved into the woodwork: FORTES FORTUNA ADIUVAT.
Well.

Hansen had to share the room with a lieutenant, George, a lanky, freckled psychiatrist from Austin who, Hansen thought, resembled Schiller, at least to judge by the portrait Professor Kuppitsch had hanging over his desk. The large, high-ceilinged master bedroom had three windows, shrouded by dark green velvet curtains. The marriage bed was in two sections on wheels, and could be rolled apart on small tracks. Did they roll them apart

when they had a fight? Or did they only shove them together to have sex?
I have to tell you up front that I snore—and then some. All my girlfriends have complained. I hope you can put up with it.
George was only three years older than Hansen and had treated wounded men at a field hospital at the Battle of the Ardennes. He said the military didn't take psychological problems seriously. Career officers had the emotional sensitivity of rhinos. They didn't believe in mental trauma. A general wanted him to examine German prisoners who had fought at Stalingrad, were flown out wounded, and then, when they'd recovered, were sent back into battle. Severe cold, hunger, hopelessness and yet they held on, it was astounding. It deserved study. The general, who was responsible for motivating the troops, was fascinated. What's all this talk about traumas? Save it for nighttime, do your duty by day.
As far as the military was concerned, handling shock was a matter of will power. They refused to believe in deeper psychic disturbances. As long as the war lasted, patients were always suspected of malingering. There were striking cases of battle fatigue, like Private E-2, who went blind every time a gun went off. He couldn't react, couldn't even aim his gun, let alone fire it. He went blind, even though his hands never shook.
Although he'd been assigned to study mental stress, there were so few doctors when George landed in Antwerp that he was sent directly to a field hospital in the Ardennes. Up to that point, he said, his practical anatomy had been limited to corpses. All at once he was performing operations, minor ones at first, removing shell fragments, sewing up wounds.
I hope people aren't mad at me when they look in the mirror.
Surgery had never interested him, he'd only covered the basic requirements in medical school: observation and adding a final stitch now and then. That was it. The brain interested him. And suddenly he had to use a scalpel on legs, chest and arms: learning by doing. An experienced medic helped him.
Then he'd been ordered here and laid the scalpel aside. He treated cases like this private, who went blind whenever he tried to fire his rifle. He'd sought shelter in a ditch when a grenade went off, and then watched as a

Sherman tank was hit by a German bazooka. One of the tank crew pushed his way out of the conning tower, tumbled to the ground, and lay there with his lower body in flames, the upper half pressing upward, screaming, as if he were doing pushups, till he died. I declared him unfit for duty. And yet the war in the Pacific is still dragging on.

George did snore loudly, and at length. Hansen didn't know if he snored himself. No one had mentioned it in the barracks, and there were no other witnesses. The subject had never come up with the three or four women he'd known briefly. A few days or weeks of intimacy weren't enough to talk about snoring without breaking the romantic mood.
Whenever he thought about Catherine — and he thought about her often — the night was filled with her rapid breathing, her mumbled words in sleep. He lay there awake, flooded with happiness at her every movement, her every breath. At one point he woke her gently, and after a brief pause, she simply said Yes. The narrow strip of light beneath the door was still visible. Toward morning it finally went dark, and Hansen heard her roommate quietly lock the apartment door as she left.

Twice he started to write to her, then wadded up the letter and threw it away. A command: Don't write!

One Friday Hansen rode with Major Alexander from Frankfurt to Dillenburg in the back seat of a Horch. I made sure we got a comfortable car, said Leo Alexander, I didn't want to take a jeep in this lousy weather. We'll have a nice country outing, even if our task's not that pleasant. We'll take it easy. The man we're going to see is the acting director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research, the man who discovered the Hallervorden-Spatz syndrome, HHS, in other words a star in his field, a star who's has been helping the SS since 1933 of course. He joined the Euthanasia campaign too. They're true believers, said Alexander. Hitler's directive of 1939 speaks of a physician's discretion. This was interpreted broadly enough that we now estimate there were over one hundred thousand people killed between nineteen thirty-nine and nineteen forty-one. There were six *Tötungsanstalten*, or killing centers. The incurably ill faced what was called mercy killing—the

Gnadentod. This act of mercy was kept strictly secret of course. The patients were gassed. With carbon monoxide. I saw the Hadamar Centre. The facility had been dismantled, but the staff, the orderlies, the doctors, the nurses were still there. We interrogated them. The patients were brought in by bus and undressed in a room. A superficial physical exam by a doctor. Cause of death: inflammation of the lungs or appendicitis. The victim was photographed, then led with other patients into a tiled room disguised as a communal shower.
Bureaucracy even there: only the *Tötungsarzt*, the doctor tasked with the killings, could turn the gas on. He watched them die through a small window. Twenty to thirty minutes. The door was opened. The bodies were loaded on a cart and wheeled to the two ovens, where they were burned. The SS men who worked there were called *Heizer* – stokers. The ten thousandth death was celebrated in 1940 with free beer. For the whole staff, the secretaries, the nurses, orderlies, stokers and doctors.
Of course there were a growing number of complaints. Those living nearby were upset by the smell from the burning. And rumors were spreading. It was said that the elderly would soon be killed too. All those who were useless. There were protests. After all. The Catholic Church too. In August 1941 Hitler ended the campaign.
Do you know why?
The war with the Soviet Union?
Yes. They didn't want to damage morale in the homeland. And at the same time another, broader campaign was set in motion. The stokers could apply their skills in the East.
After a longer pause, said Alexander, hospitals and clinics renewed the efforts on their own, with or without a directive from Hitler, through malnourishment, or by administering Luminal, or Veronal, or injections of scopolamine-morphine. The day before we arrived at Hadamar a young man and a girl had just been killed with Luminal. Both were mongoloid. The staff hadn't fled. An orderly said: Why should we leave, we haven't stolen anything. And the Director, Dr. Wahlmann spoke of the beds that had to be freed up to treat the wounded, and bombing victims.
After that Alexander and Hansen sat silently side by side, each looking out his own window into an early summer landscape. The fruit trees had finished blooming, but

their leaves were still bright green. Above them luminous white clouds drifted by.

The Institute for Brain Research had been transferred from Berlin to the small Hessian village of Dillenburg and housed in a complex of Quonset huts.
Everything is quite simple, but the Russians are far away and research continues, including genealogy in particular, since it moves in a circle, Professor Hallervorden said, a vigorous man in his sixties, gray hair trimmed short, blue eyes behind a pince-nez, which he kept removing, winking at us, and then replacing. Was it a tic or due to the strained conversation? Coffee was brought in by a secretary. Genealogy is hocus-pocus. We take a strictly scientific approach. Hallervorden offered Alexander a cigar, and then, after a brief hesitation, held the box out to Hansen as well. Both declined.
Hallervorden took one himself, lit it carefully with a long match, and pointed out that it was pre-war stock, not some garden weed. Yes, he knew about the *mercy killing* directive, of course. But I never had the slightest connection with euthanasia. At any rate, he said smoking, as a brain specialist I never had that sort of direct contact with patients. His work had been pure research. He felt, morally, no worse than a doctor who dissects an executed man because he needs as fresh a body as possible for his research.
Leo Alexander read a report aloud to him: *The Görden/Brandenburg Institute, in which Prof. Hallervorden worked as a prosector, became a direct neighbor to a "Liquidationsanstalt" in 1940, when a carbon monoxide gas chamber was installed in the old Brandenburg prison.*
That's right, said Hallervorden: *In the course of that summer I was able to do an autopsy on 500 brains of the mentally deficient and prepare them for research.*
So you knew the patients had been killed?
I heard that they were going to do that, so I went to them and said: "Look here, boys, if you do kill all these people, at least remove the brains, so the material can be used." They asked me: "How many can you use?" So I said to them, however many you have—"The more, the better". I gave them the preservatives, glass containers and boxes, and explained how to remove and preserve the brains, and then they simply came and delivered them like a furniture van.

Like a furniture van?
Yes.

On the drive back to Frankfurt, Hansen sat in front. He'd asked to because even as a child, sitting in the back seat made him slightly nauseous. Alexander sat in back jotting down notes. At one point he said: from Hallervorden's point of view, it all makes sense. The people were going to be killed anyway, why not take the opportunity to examine their brains? What bothers you about his logic?
Hansen thought it over: The phrase: The more, the better. And how he puffed away on his cigar as he said it.
Yes, said Alexander, exactly.

- *(undated)* –

My new commanding officer is Leo Alexander, he speaks German with a Viennese accent. He was an assistant in psychiatric research at the Frankfurt University Clinic up to 1933, then came to America, and was later a professor at the Harvard Medical School and at Duke University. In 1942 he enlisted in the Medical Corps. Now he's serving as a major and wears an elegant uniform, tailor-made, something only generals are usually allowed to do. One of the few cigar smokers. Alexander's assignment is to interrogate those German doctors under detention who were in charge of euthanasia and human experimentation. They'll be put on trial.

The Assignment

In Frankfurt Hansen was ordered to join the staff of the Psychological Warfare Division. Major Engel gave Hansen his marching orders to Munich. The major had studied philosophy with Husserl in Freiburg and traveled to America on a fellowship in 1932. He sympathized with the Third International, and when the Nazis took control of the government, he stayed on in the States and taught Classics at Harvard.
Have you heard of eugenics?
Heard, yes.
You'll be dealing with it soon.
It seemed to Hansen that his superiors didn't know what to do with him. They were simply moving him about. But before Hansen could even raise the question, Major Engel continued, Don't worry, those of us in the *Society of the Tower* — you're a literary scholar aren't you? — are keeping an eye on you. You've seen the harsh reality. That was the initiation. Now you come to the spiritual. You've been chosen. If I may use that solemn phrase. By the way, Engel said, speaking in German with a Berlin inflection, I've always been sorry my name didn't end in S. You know what I mean? So. You're off to Munich. Here's the address. In 1936 the man was being considered for the Nobel Peace Prize. A specialist in eugenics and the founding father of racial hygiene.
No point in interviewing the family, that's hopeless. It's always the good-hearted *pater familias* who hid the eggs at Easter time, and stood with tears in his eyes when the little children lined up for their Christmas presents and recited their poems. Our office has found a man who once worked with this doctor in the USA. The doctor is dead now, but his assistant is still alive. They went through the registers. The office wants to know just what they did there. And about the secret societies he founded: Pacific, Nordic Bow, whatever else they were called. Do they still exist? Members? Goals? Those are the things the office is interested in. We go deeper. We're interested in how the theory of racial hygiene evolved. The man conducted a series of experiments over many years on heredity. Dr. Alfred Ploetz. Ever heard of him?
No.

So much the better. Look up his famulus. Interrogate him. You have full authority. Confiscate his archive. Requisition the castle.
Requisition it?
Yes, All you need is your uniform and two or three men.

George was sent to Munich too, to join a team investigating medical experimentation on the inmates of concentration camps. Hansen and George were taken in an army car from Frankfurt to Munich. They were assigned a room in an occupied hotel in Neuhausen.
Only one room? asked Hansen.
You're not here on vacation.
Hansen feared he'd never be rid of the snoring Texan. The hotel was on Nymphenburger Straße. Only a few buildings had been destroyed there, a bombed-out section now and then, the ruins still smelling of mortar, others already overgrown with grass and weeds.

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The Old Man

Wagner walked slowly and cautiously, step by step, along Schellingstraße. He'd fallen nine months ago. His right leg was broken, a multiple fracture that had been placed in a splint. The surgeon didn't want to pin the bones, since Germany was in the throes of the *final battle*. An eighty-year old wasn't worth the trouble. The lazarettos were crowded with young German soldiers who had to be patched up quickly and sent back into battle. The old man's right leg healed and was three centimeters shorter. The site of the break was painful too, particularly when the weather changed or the Föhn set in. More intense pains in his head, not migraines, in the skull itself. A scar, also poorly stitched, runs through his hair to his brow. A blow from a truncheon. Artfully carved in the club by its owner: EIN GRUSS DER VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT / SA-STURM 3
This old man tapping his way so slowly along the street, avoiding the broken bricks, spent the *Tausendjähriges Reich* in a cellar. He'd been released from Dachau in 1933 because his former *Meister* had protested to the *Gauleitung*, a fact he was unaware of. His *Meister* had even spoken by phone with the Interior Minister for Public Health, Arthur Gütt. *Hello, Arthur. Hello, Alfred.* Gütt mentioned he was hard at work on the Law for the Prevention of the Spread of Hereditary Disease. It was to go into effect on July 14, 1933. A strong signal to the world that Eugenics was a matter of national importance, and not just some makeshift private affair. The *Meister* had a favor to ask: Wagner, like the composer Wagner, always good to mention that, had worked with him for years and was now interned in Dachau for sympathizing with the Socialists during the Weimar *Systemzeit.* He wished to intercede strongly on his behalf, the *Meister* said. Gütt said he'd see what he could do. Then the conversation returned to the law he was working on. Now we can take some sensible measures. We can shield the body of the *Volk* from malign diseases. Forced sterilization can finally be introduced. A path already taken in the USA, Denmark and Sweden. Now we have the administrative tools we need. Yes, Ploetz said, it's the fulfillment of my life's work.

That April Ploetz had sent a written declaration of loyalty to Hitler. With heartfelt reverence he shook the hand of the man who by sheer force of will had led German racial hygiene through the thicket that barred its path. It could now enter the broad field of unfettered action.

A few days later, Wagner was released from Dachau, euphemistically called a *Schutzhaftlager*, or protective custody camp. Thanks to his *Meister's* intervention, he was given a job at the Antiquariat Axthelm, a used and rare book store on the Schellingstraße. He worked there for twelve of the Thousand Years. But first he had to find a place to stay, since the moment his landlord heard that Wagner was being sent to Dachau, he had summarily cancelled his lease.
When he was released at the end of July, a taxi was waiting for him outside the gate inscribed with the words: *Arbeit macht frei*. The camp was new back then, and you could still be picked up in front. That only happened a few times, but even so there was some latitude. He came through the gate, the taxi driver took his cardboard box, then said he'd been told to pick him up and take him to lodgings they'd rented for him on Adalbertstraße.
The taxi was already paid for. Frau Oberhofer, a widow who owned the small attic apartment, told him that the rent had also been paid in advance for the first six months: one room, a kitchen, a washbasin in the passageway, and a toilet down the hall.

Hansen was given Wagner's address at the CIC Office. He asked how they came by it, and the Captain said: I don’t know everything, but still, many things I do know. That evening Hansen climbed the worn wooden stairs and rang the bell unannounced. The old man didn't seem at all surprised to see an American officer standing there. As if he'd been waiting for Hansen. Hansen introduced himself and said he'd been assigned to examine the papers of Doktor Alfred Ploetz, the racial theorist and eugenicist, who died in 1940, and to question witnesses. He, Wagner, was among those witnesses.
Hansen surveyed the little attic apartment with its sloping walls. A bed, a table, an armchair, a chair. On the only vertical wall, a tall bookshelf with narrow, black pilasters on both sides, crowned by faded golden capitals. Beside it two pictures, one of a house with a chestnut tree in

front, sunlight playing in its leaves, in the foreground a pond. The other picture was partially cut off by the angle of the roof and you couldn't quite tell what it was. From the dormer window you could see other roofs.
Hansen emphasized that this wasn't an interrogation, but an interview, an enquiry, simply in the interest of science. They wanted to collect statements from witnesses. Asked how many times they would have to meet, Hansen said three or four, possibly. He asked Wagner to come the next day to the McGraw barracks. Headquarters of the 3td U.S. Army, Tegernseer Landstraße, Bau 10.

The transcripts are numbered in order by day. There are no dates. The interview must have stretched over a period of slightly more than three months.

25

Day 1

When did you last see Doktor Ploetz?
In nineteen thirty-six. He'd just been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Not that he'd been trying to avoid me, a marked man, he hadn't, but he was ensconced in his castle, looking out on the snow-covered Alps Zarathustra once stamped through, conducting his research.
Almost everyone, the Press, all the *gleichgeschaltete* who had fallen in line with the new Reich, and above all his colleagues, were convinced he would win the Prize. As you probably know, there was a strong eugenics movement in Scandinavia and America, the so-called negative eugenics, in contrast to the positive one which focused on mate selection. In Sweden enforced sterilization was legalized in 1934, and it had been practiced even before that in Denmark. It was the Social Democrats who voted it in by the way. Enforced sterilization was also practiced in the USA. My *Meister* and former friend was celebrated around the world as the *Spiritus Rector* of what he referred to as the weeding out of inferior and diseased genotypes. He was nominated primarily because he viewed war as a force counter to natural selection. Yes, he was against war. A notion somewhat at odds with his belief in the struggle for existence. For that was constantly being waged. When I met him, all the world was waiting expectantly for the Oslo committee's decision.
I didn't work upstairs in the antiquariat very often back then, but in the cellar instead, a dry cellar, where books of lesser appeal — including cheap fiction — lined the shelves. Anita, his wife, knew where to find me, and visited me now and then, called me up from the cellar, the lead chamber. She arrived from the countryside, from Ammerland, with its baroque series of hills formed during the Ice Age, and always brought along a sausage, a chunk of ham, and a few eggs. And of course a rabbit, freshly slaughtered, which I would trade later for bread, despite the annoying pangs of hunger I felt as I did so. I had a maybe inexplicable but strong aversion to this meat, just because it came from the castle.
I climbed the narrow metal stairs leading up to the shop. The rectangular opening could be closed with a trapdoor cut into the parquet floor. I can show it to you if you'd like.

- *unintelligible* –
That trapdoor saved me twice from being arrested. Closed tight, with a small table shoved over it — a few books piled on top — no one suspected it concealed an entrance to the literary underworld. Christoph Axthelm deserves a word of credit, even though he joined the Nazi party early, in the Twenties. But when they came to power, he let his membership lapse — despite several reminders, some personally delivered by a uniformed block warden pressing him to pay up. Put simply, he left the party by not paying.
Axthelm not only kept the fact I was in the cellar secret, but covered for me as well, saying I was ill and had gone to stay with relatives in the Rheinland. The address? That he didn't know. I heard him talking up above in the shop. I sat in the cellar below, where I lived for another four months. When the shop closed for the day, Axthelm would open the trapdoor and pass food down to me.
I explained that to your comrade, if that's the right word, the interrogation officer, when they tried to cancel Anthem's book dealer's license. Axthelm revered Stefan George. Perhaps you know his work, *secret Germany*, that sort of foolishness. The poet as visionary. Divine wisdom through verse. Poetic speech as revelation.
Axthelm wasn't in the resistance. The Nazi notion of the Third Reich was simply too vulgar for him. As a conservative, he was put off in particular by its members, who struck him as tasteless philistines. Axthelm's world was the bookstore. He sat reading through offers and rare book catalogs late into the night. Every year he compiled an elaborate, richly illustrated catalog that I helped with. *The beautiful book: Poetry on hand made paper. First editions.*
In the summer of thirty-four, barely a year after my release from the camp, the Gestapo were hounding me again. A small, illegal cell had formed, and I was one of the collaborators. We hadn't made it beyond talk and plans, we wanted to issue broadsides, hand print them and leave them in entryways at night. A comrade had managed to sneak a small hand-run duplicating machine from the union hall and hide it in a allotment garden shed in Pasing. But before the first broadside was printed, the cover was already blown. As it happened, I'd already left.
- *Why?* –
I was still being watched. The Gestapo were less obvious than the cops who followed me around in Breslau, two

men who pretended to be deep in conversation whenever I turned around. The block warden had his eye on me. Another reason I left was that new people suddenly started joining the cell. They claimed to be anti-Nazi, but they were so radical and provocative they had to be spies, outside agitators. Which turned out to be the case.
I'd already broken off contact before the group was arrested. From that moment on I was free, so to speak. I no longer belonged to any organization. I was free, but not from further surveillance. No one was. There was a double surveillance system, one public, immediately recognizable by their brown and black uniforms, and one civil, all those who hoped to gain some advantage by denouncing others. Some men paid a visit to my landlady, Frau Oberhofer, the widow of a butcher, a simple and totally apolitical woman, who spent her old age crocheting fancy coverlets. She came to the antiquariat to warn me. Two of them guys in leather jackets came by askin about you, but I said I didn't know nothin.
You live right under his room, they said, you must hear him going up and down the stairs.
No, nothin, I'm hard a hearin.
That same day I moved into the cellar. I stayed down there for almost four months. I had plenty of time to think about things. I reviewed my life beneath the dim light of a twenty-five watt bulb. Later we put in a sixty-watt bulb. When I finally dared to emerge into the light of day, I had to wear dark glasses, Axthelm got them for me. Submarine crews have to wear them when they resurface after a long mission.
My name had been noted. I was being watched, and I'm sure you can see why I had no wish to go on rough vacation again. That's what they called it back then— a rough vacation. So I withdrew to the cellar and slept on an army cot in a dry but musty room filled with thousands of books. By day I could hear shoes scraping overhead, and could tell from their steps what bookcase they were browsing through. Art books. Poetry. Novels. French, English or German literature. The antiquariat also had a case for American literature, until the USA declared war in December of 1941. Then those books had to move underground too.
At first we kept the German literature that was *verboten* in a locked poison cabinet: Kafka, Heine, Heinrich

Mann, Brecht, Feuchtwanger and Döblin. You know Döblin, Brecht?
Yes, I studied German Literature. In Saint Louis, with an Austrian emigrant. That's my field.
OK, sorry. In the fall of 1934 an inspector arrived from Nazi headquarters and asked Axthelm if he actually intended to sell those books instead of tossing them on the garbage heap. So we had to empty the medicine chest and remove the books in order not to have his shop closed down. I convinced him to hide them in the cellar.
Hide them?
Yes. After some hesitation he agreed. I carried the books down to the cellar and put them in a bookcase filled with remainders, along with travel guides, crime novels and romances of the worst sort. Kafka's *Der Heizer* wound up beside *Lieselotte's Voyage to Happiness.* And Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* beside *The Bride Who Ran Away*. I made sure, however, that nothing I admired wound up beside some Nazi hack like Kolbenheyer, Blunck or Vesper.
Over the years other books found asylum in the cellar. They were brought into the shop, and for a few marks we got first editions of Erich Mühsam, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Toller and Heinrich Mann. An elderly man moving into an retirement home gave us Ernst Bloch's book of essays *Durch die Wüste* for free. He came into the shop and said, I don't want to throw the Bloch away and I can't take it with me to those pious ladies, perhaps you can find a safe place for it. A fine copy by the way, if you're interested, with an autograph presentation from the author.
I have Bloch's Spuren *with my gear. But I haven't had a chance to read it yet.*
An astonishing book. Read the story of the Rabbi who gives a candle stump to a traveling Jew. And how the seemingly useless can still illuminate and save our lives. *Spuren* is in the cellar too. And little by little, I assembled the entire works of Gustav Landauer, including an extremely rare copy of *Wie Hedwig Lachmann starb,* published in a small private edition while he was living in extreme poverty. A gripping tale of the death of his young wife, a poet and translator. A rarity. Those books were the partisans in the cellar, surrounded by trivial, consumable, conformist, nasty volumes.

And then you came. The Sherman tanks rolled down Leopoldstraße, and as the first of your comrades passed along Schellingstraße, all things hidden and concealed came to light, literally. We brought the books of Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Alfred Döblin, Heinrich Mann and Gustav Landauer up from the cellar and placed them in the shop windows. They too were freed.
- *unintelligible* –
If you wish. Yes, I was in the underground. The cellar wasn't comfortable, an army cot, a Portuguese colonial chest made of sandalwood that a customer had left behind. I would sand a small bit from time to time to smell the fragrance of distant lands. In the chest lay a few shirts and change of underwear. Axthelm took them to the laundry. The toilet where I washed was upstairs in the shop, and could only be used at night. A covered chamber pot got me through the day. If the shop bell rang, I listened for the steps. What a relief to hear the delicate click of women's heels. How unsettling, on the other hand, the solid tread of boots. Is that the sound of a man in leather? The books on the shelves gave me no sense of security, but they offered a distraction. I began to rearrange them. Where to place them and why was entirely up to me. My system wasn't easy to discern: it wasn't classics here, modern literature there, nor was it alphabetical or chronological. Even Axthelm couldn't find things any more.
Gustav Landauer would have been pleased by the arrangement. I applied his political concept of decentralization to the books, saving them from seizure and destruction.
- *unintelligible* –
Axthelm knew what I was doing and accepted it without comment. During the day I would seek out the books he requested by the light of a single bulb, then hand them up to him at night to sell to book lovers. Among them beautiful copies from the library of Thomas Mann that Axthelm had purchased for a pittance through his party contacts when Mann's house was seized.
You were going to tell me about the last time you saw Ploetz.
Right. One afternoon in the fall of 1936, Axthelm sent me down to the cellar. An illustrated three-volume edition of Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* had been ordered by telephone. That edition was relegated to the

cellar because the ownership stamp read Bernheim. You see? It would have meant tearing out the flyleaves. The beautiful set would have been ruined because of the Jewish name. So I added them to the books being rearranged in the cellar. After a brief search I found the set again. The bell rang above in the shop. When I climbed the stairs and re-emerged through the trapdoor I saw shoes, polished black leather shoes, one with a small hole cut out of the leather on one side, probably due to a corn. Above them dark gray trousers with a narrow light gray pinstripe. I heard a voice. I paused on the ladder and looked up into his visage, no other word fits, into grayness, the gray beard, white hair, and his gray-blue eyes gazing down on me like God the Father. I stood there, and at that moment, it was as if the phrase struck dumb had been coined just for me.
Lupus in fabula, I heard him say. And he bent down, somewhat laboredly, and said, Come, I'll help you, addressing me with the brotherly Du. Hand me the books!
He took the books from me so I could use both hands to emerge from the cellar, which was always a bit difficult. He looked at the title. Very nice, he said, and recited by heart a stanza from *Abendlied*:
Das Abendlied gesungen ist,
Das Kännchen ist geleert,
Lass sehn nun wie du Kerl aussiehst
Mit deinem blanken Schwerdt.
He didn't ask, when I was halfway out of the cellar, how I was, since that might have led to an embarrassing reply. Of course the Greek had informed him of my situation.
The Greek?
Anita, his wife, that's what we called her, because her mother was Greek. He said: If you have time and feel like it, let's go somewhere for tea or a soda. Do you need me, I asked Axthelm, who replied with exaggerated friendliness, Of course not, go on, take as much time as you like. And turning to him: Herr Professor, do you want to take the books with you now, or should I send them to the castle? Yes, he'd just been given an honorary professorship by Hitler. He asked to have the books sent, there was no rush, next week would be fine.

We walked along Schellingstraße, past the building where that disgusting racial Nazi rubbish was printed.
What rubbish?

Der Völkische Beobachter. We walked side by side, talking about the weather, always a good topic in Munich, the onset of the Föhn. I said nothing about the piercing pain I felt on the left side of my head whenever the weather changed, especially when the Föhn arrived, a pain that always reminded me of the *Deutschland erwache* and the SA.

We went into one of those simple Munich pubs. He ordered tea, and I asked for beer, which he noted with a small ironic smile to indicate that he'd softened somewhat and wasn't going to start in about the negative effects of alcohol. He asked the waiter for a little cold milk for his tea. That hadn't changed, he still took his tea the English way. Lost in meditation as he watched the milky cloud swirl in the tea glass, he said, I read your essay on the Amana community a few years ago. Very interesting, but a bit pious. Have you given in? Have you defected to the churchmen or the sectarians?

Me? I'm who I am, you know that. I haven't changed.

Back in the days when he was my friend, a convinced atheist ranting militantly about the perversity of God, I'd told him theodicy didn't interest me. He thought of God as an impotent old man sitting in the theater watching the human drama. Murder and homicide. Wars. Plagues. Entertaining himself in his lost omnipotence with the theater of the Comédie humaine.

To spend time debating God's existence always seemed to me a waste of time, while waging a door-to-door battle against suffering in this world made sense. We sat across from one another. Facing the gray beard and stone brow of the prophet, I told him I found his atheism too sweeping, his materialism too simple. The word simple irritated him, or rather it struck home, as I saw in his eyes. I could tell he wasn't accustomed to being contradicted anymore. I said again I wasn't interested in the question of God. It couldn't be answered. The question that mattered was how should I live? How should we live? In a common battle against suffering and death. For happiness here on earth.

Fine, fine, he said, I see you haven't changed a bit. You know best how far the minor repairs of social-democracy have taken you and how the beautiful world of the anarchists turned out. What we're experiencing now is a true awakening. It's the beginning of a new age. An awakening that has a common goal, a power emerging from the people, a force that draws a bow and aims it at

something more than higher wages and shorter working hours. This power is forming a community, a higher and constantly evolving community of undreamt-of magnitude. The Berlin Olympics were a clear and visible sign of this blend of power and beauty. Or take the *Arbeitsdienst*: haven't we always said how important work is, for everyone, at every level? Now young men and women have to join the *Arbeitsdienst*. Drain fens, build dikes, reclaim land from the sea. Hasn't poetry become truth?
Yes. And Philemon and Baucis? The house has been set afire over their heads.
The old must fall. That's Nature's law. All else is social sentimentality. At last we have a chance to implement our knowledge. That was the goal of all our work, our research — he kept saying *our*, although he knew I was not part of it. He sat there: a powerful *Pluralis Majestatis*.
That brought the force of his views raining down on me again. He presented his arguments with the self-assurance and conviction that must have moved the Old Testament prophets. Where there is no God, man must take over God's task, and that means the task of the species too, to evolve beyond itself.
But in the meantime much had changed, I had said No decisively too often in the last few years, had been forced to say No out of conviction.
- *unintelligible* –
We talked about that too, about those in power. These flat-footed, brown potbellies represented the powerful Germanic race? Was that the Nordic ideal? The promised *Übermensch*? Himmler, with his bookkeeper's face? Yes, thanks to our long friendship of earlier years, I could still speak openly with him. With anyone else it would have been highly dangerous to talk that way: that tub Göring? Goebbels, the nagging midget, called the tadpole, because – begging your pardon — he was all *Schwanz* and *Maul*? The Party? That crowd of beer-drinking philistines? They were clowns, clowns you would laugh at if they weren't carrying pistols.
He hadn't joined the party yet, but the man who always said a scientist should steer clear of politics and organizations, replied only, Well.
And *der Führer, Herr Schicklgruber*? Could you call out *Heil Schicklgruber*? Only changing his name to alliterate with Heil made the historic catastrophe possible.

He laughed. *Der Führer*, and said again, *well*, he screams a bit too much, but after all, he doesn't drink, not alcohol at any rate, and laughed as he pointed at my glass of beer. When I see it I get thirsty too. *Der Führer* probably doesn't.
At least he still retained some self-irony.
And this gloomy hatred of Jews?
Stupidity. Stupidity. Particularly among the angry *petits bourgeois*, who are afraid the Jewish warehouses will give them competition, sell fur coats, jackets and leather purses cheaper, as if the Aryan department store owners would treat them with more consideration. No, he said, that's the profit motive at work, and that’s part of this economic system, of capitalism.
He could still say things like that, an insight arising from the depths, but an insight again compromised as he noted the encroachment of the Jews, particularly in the courts and the world of finance, which he found quite problematic. But these excesses, that's stupidity, no doubt it will correct itself over time. What you have to realize, he was happy to say, is that the government has put his research, his life's work, into practice. That's our only chance, historically, he said, as if I were included, it's a gift for the international Eugenics movement. How they've gone about it, in organizational terms, is exemplary. Yes, he'd placed himself in the service of the movement.
I mentioned the Nobel Peace Prize, he waved it off, said he didn't care about it, but of course if he received the prize it would be a great boost to the Eugenics movement worldwide.
Well then, I said, we can drink a toast with tea and beer to the coming *Übermensch*. *Grüß Gott!*
What's God got to do with it he asked, irritated.
My only response was to snort through my nose.
It dawned on him only slowly that we'd drawn so far apart that our shared past could no longer bind us together. His power to convince, which is a form of potency, was gone. And no doubt it was clear to him that my earlier admiration for his work and for his vision of the future had turned into total rejection. Movingly enough, he tried to reestablish our old former intimacy. He said, I know it's not easy for you. You can come to us any time. The Greek told me about the conditions you have to live under. He never mentioned her by name in

my presence, but from the time we first met her, referred to her only as the Greek.
I'm not complaining. I chose my situation freely.
Still the same old dreams. Dreams we shared. Important for me too, he said, even if I've learned new things and gained new insights in the meantime. And then, after a brief pause, he said he'd been impressed by a short essay on pain and tears he'd read in a journal. Just recently.
I waved it off. Something I wrote on the side. Yes. And yet what I wanted to say was how much his words meant to me. How open to bribery by praise and support we become in our loneliness. The journal was long since banned. The editor arrested.
I sensed he wanted to add something else, something was stirring inside him, but he remained silent, then finally said, It's time, the car is waiting, I have to go.
We shook hands, without any touch of drama, said good-bye and wished each other well. I watched him walk down Schellingstraße, broad, grave, a black hat on his head.
Are you tired? Shall we stop for today?
No. I want you to know I've waited for this moment, yes, you might say I've been waiting for this moment for almost twelve years. I knew that at some point I could bear witness. I kept telling myself, you have to hold on. What I've been talking about are things I've often told myself before. I made notes in case my memory faded. I hope it hasn't bored you?
No. That's why I'm sitting here. So you parted back then?
Yes. I can still see that black hat as it disappeared. I returned to the antiquariat. A warm fall day. Passers-by came toward me, in uniform and city clothes, one greeted me, tipped his hat, startling me, since I didn't know him, and his nod seemed like a sign he'd caught me. But perhaps it was the simple courtesy of a distant acquaintance or customer whose face I'd forgotten.
Axthelm said, I didn't know you and the professor were, you know… on such familiar terms.
I simply said, yes, and Axthelm asked nothing further.
I went down into the cellar and sat in the leather chair I had carried down two years earlier and placed directly under the light bulb, where there was enough light to read.
I awaited the end in that cellar. I'd known since Stalingrad. And heard it from one who knew. The crest of the brown epidemic had passed. Every pestilence has a

point where it reaches its peak and then, with statistical certainty, starts to decline and finally collapses. I spent several years gathering material to support this thesis — I took a course in statistics in Zurich — and even tried to formulate a statistical law, but all that was confiscated and probably destroyed. Stalingrad was just such a point in this epidemic: the greatest expansion, but even this surge carries within itself its own negation. One has to try and hold on till the end. And I was determined to experience that end. Can you imagine that as a goal in life? An end to the horror, because the horror never seems to end? That was my wish: no Versailles peace treaty, but total defeat, a radical defeat that would sweep away once and for all the dirty dreams of great national power and a chosen people.

-unintelligible-

I regret with all my heart, if I may put it so dramatically, that my former friend did not experience this end: the rubble, captured German soldiers arriving in their stocking feet. And how they once marched off to battle, snappy, stiff-legged, past the great loudmouth, hobnailed jackboots, calling out, all *chingderassa-boomboom*, and now, now these brown-clad *Übermenschen* shrink into themselves, ditch their uniforms, dress in old clothes like they're heading for a beggars ball. No more talk of *Aufartung*, improving the race, now they long to pass unnoticed, to be ordinary, mediocre. To melt into the crowd. They are what they always were: fat, dumb capons.

They say you were his Adlatus, that you worked with him as his aide.

Yes, it's true, as a young man I served as his aide. I stood at his side, and felt comfortable there. I admired him. I was nineteen when I met him, he was four years my elder. And if I may say so, it was almost my destiny to join him. My life would surely have been different had I not. And I was given the opportunity to see his life. Yes, I can bear witness. To his pride and to his fall. He was magnificent in his persistence and in his dedication, in his belief that he could ennoble Mankind, could lift it to something higher and better. And the unconditional selflessness of the scientist must be added, though it can't be denied that in order to reach the goal of his research, centered so clearly on the health of the people, he was clearly forced to make compromises.

He often quoted this passage from Darwin: *A scientific man ought to have no wishes, no affections, --a mere heart of stone.*
My friend took that quite seriously, as he did all things, for he lacked any playfulness of spirit. He took whatever served his research. Justification was found in science. In knowledge. Only true and false existed. There was no in-between. Cold logic. He considered everything else contemptible sentimentality.
Of course he was a father too. A caring father. He had three children, two boys and a girl. Watched over house and home, in his case castle and home, and the staff and workers. He also took care of Uncle Erich, his brother, an older one, who emigrated to Brazil and turned a little peculiar there.
An overseer managed the estate while Ploetz sat in his room, bent over his microscope or going through his tables, computing and thinking, constantly visiting the laboratory he'd set up in various outbuildings. All this was made possible by his wife, a woman who brought a princely sum into the marriage, enough to purchase both the castle and the estate. A strong, gifted, beautiful woman.
We'll stop for today. I'll come on Thursday to your place.
Yes. Thanks.

[END OF SAMPLE]

