

The Adorations

A Novel in Double Time

By Roger Boylan

Ce qui est terrible dans la vie, c'est que tout le monde a ses raisons.

(What's terrible in life is that everyone has his reasons.)

Jean Renoir

Gustave

One

Around Christmas time in 1557 John Calvin was beset by visions, but if they were signs of a special Christmas gift it was a gift (judging by his comments in *Little Reformer, Big Reform*, the unpublishable sequel to his unreadable *Institutes*) that he wished were returnable, like an ill-fitting pair of trousers; and if his visions were the symptoms of illness it was an illness he dreaded more than any other, one he called Dementia Romana, the madness of Rome.

“God preserve me from the haggard hand of the hag of Rome,” raves John in *Little Reformer*, Vol. 2, throwing in Satan for good measure: “And around the waistline [sic?] of their works build ye a ring of fire that none may cross.” Decidedly, having visions was much too Papist a pastime for the great Reformer’s liking, but had it not been for their Romanist associations he might have just sat back and enjoyed the show, for his visions were of a variety and everydayness not often found in the mystical literature—actually, it may have been this very everydayness that he most resented, as few of his visions, oddly, were remotely Christian, or even religious, in theme. Stefanie von Rothenberg and I were far more orthodox in our visionary material. In fact, what Calvin saw more closely resembles the futuristic gibbering of Nostradamus or Madame Soleil than the luxuriant God-insights of the ladies of Avila, Lisieux and Salzburg (or me). Ironically, Calvin’s little mental one-reelers seemed to get going around the New Year, as if in sympathy with the general (if clandestine, in his Geneva) intoxication of the season. To me, one of his visions in particular, stands out. Recounted to his wife Idelette and recorded by her with her customary precision in a journal entry for January 2, 1558—immediately following an account of a visit to the family home in Noyon and an evocative, even poetic, description of her mother-in-law’s goiter (“like a rotting, porous sea-barge moored to the crumbling jetty of her neck the thing is, unsteady, grayish, and moist to the touch”)—this one hit old John as he was crossing Place St. Pierre on his way home from a hard day’s fire-and-brimstone at the eponymous cathedral.

Before him he beheld, “as in a trance, a herd of noisome beast-carriages with eyes of sulphur and gleaming carapaces as of monstrous insects,” huddled at St. Pierre’s very steps, up and down which swarmed spectral human figures “caparisoned in diabolical colors of red, yellow and green”; two of these wretches, a “grossly ill-fashioned male with whiskers” and “a red-clad female, clearly a harlot,” seemed (to reeling, headshaking Calvin) to be taken into the maw of one of the dreadful machine-creatures, “a squatting, malodorous rubicond brute” which then departed, snarling and exuding noxious vapors, thus expressing to our man “all the sins and lusts of Beelzebub.” “Hell itself is at the very gates of my church,” gasped stricken John, faithfully quoted by Idelette (Saturday, 3 January). “These are visions, if true visions they be, of Gehenna, of the final days: the damned in Hell! I must speak of it to my congregation in terms of warning: *Caveat, Homo!* Tomorrow, thou art damned! Idelette, my sermon must be of these things, vision or no.” Oddly, the reluctant visionary himself recorded and dated a memento of his vision, a sketch in the margin of said sermon (“Sermon on the Imperishable Glory of Our Lord And the Undying Malevolence of the Fiend”: *Little Reformer*, Vol. 1, Folio II): Depicted above the poignant inscription “Seen or dreamed? 2 jan. 1558” are two vertically aligned chevrons in a shaky ellipse, a four-and-a-half-century-old doodle, really, an emblem meaningless in itself even to the ever-suspicious Calvin (he appended a curlicued question mark of most unProtestant elegance), but which looked, to me, like the emblem of the French automobile manufacturer Citroën: two chevrons in an oval. Yes, an exact replica, no amendment necessary. *Reductio ad absurdum*, then: Could Calvin, cursed by the visionary gift he didn’t want, have briefly wandered across time and the Place St. Pierre simultaneously, say, to the early twenty-first century? Might his vision have been of nothing more diabolical than the parked and departing cars of church- and (mostly) café-goers (those colors: too bright for earlier times)? Pushing this interpretation to very edge of reason, the “squatting red brute” could well have been, given my frequent nocturnal visits in the vicinity of St. Pierre, my very own car, the one that sits in my garage even now, the Maranello-red, restored (by my own loving hands) 1975 Citroën-Maserati SM coupe with the 3-liter V6 engine, power windows, black leather seats, Bosch automatic and

no damned air bags—not a car, by the way, that one would imagine appealing to the austere tastes of the Genevan Ayatollah. How irresistible to imagine that a glimpse of me getting into my car put the wind up John Calvin at a distance of four and a half centuries! And the red-clad harlot? Could *she* have been...? Well, let us remember that God moves in mysterious ways.

Mind you, Calvin's reaction to the car (assuming that is what he saw, or fantasized) could have been scripted by my ex-fiancée. "Get rid of that damned ugly thing, Gustave!" Françoise had so often said upon coming upon me hovering sudsily over it, cloth and bucket in hand, Sunday mornings as she set out on her lonely way to church (not Calvin's, by the way, no, Françoise was Catholic, despite her eagerness to embrace celibacy rather than me)...and how did the rest of that diatribe usually go? "You're a professor, for God's sake, not a rally driver. You care more for that damned old car than you do for me or my friends. Mad! You're mad!" Or words to that effect. She was partly right about the car vs. herself, at least, and absolutely right about her friends (smug, leftish, over-analytical). Finally she left, after four years of bickering and deepening mutual incomprehension. She now runs a social relief agency in Lausanne and belongs to some association of neo-left activists or other; as for my and Calvin's Citroën—I'm thinking of naming it John, in honor—it sits in the communal garage of my apartment building, and I still drive it some days to and from Farel College, where I, mad or sane as ever, still ply my trade, that of teaching, or rather professing, history to the young (History, Alpine, 11B; History, Italo-Balkan, Modern, 12C; History, History of, 005A) and not-so-young (one of my students last year was 79). . .

Question: Could the great Reformer have been mad? Certainly. Madness strikes in the loftiest places, said Galileo, himself deemed mad by lesser men. Anyway, it all comes down to genetics, like so much else, so the odds that I might have a screw loose were good from the start: Papa was clearly *pazzo*, Mamma clearly not. At least, that was how they appeared to me, back then. Could it have been the other way around? In his own way, after all, Papa was a kind of pocket Calvin, not perhaps so much an out-

and-out nutter as a frustrated reformer, burning with an eternally-frustrated zeal stemming from his orthodox Marxism that in turn grew out of his hatred of (in order of no importance), his parents Tancredo and Adua Terzi, winegrowers, of Custoza in the Veneto (Custoza, by the way, is the only Italian town without a duplicated z in its name, its sole claim to distinction except for the fine grappa that originates there), snobs and prime saboteurs of his career as a car mechanic (and a damned fine one, once he'd moved to Switzerland); the Church; oddly, Russians; less oddly (he was Italian, after all), the British and French; Japanese cars, therefore, the Japanese themselves, as well as their racial cousins the Chinese, despite Maoism; homosexuals, consequently hippies, ballet dancers, actors, beauticians and their ilk; and others of a racial, sexual and professional stamp more conventionally abhorred by your narrower mind. His likes? The standard Italian communist's roll-call, e.g., the Juventus Turin football team; the wines of Piedmont; Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti; Fidel Castro; Sacco & Vanzetti; Lenin (a god); Stalin (demi-); Anna Magnani; Dario Fo; and even Mussolini, up to a point ("But only the YOUNG Benito, ey? The YOUNG Benito. Did you know E was a socialist? Ey? EY?").

Mamma, on the other hand, gave every impression of being serene and above the fray, but I've realized in the intervening decades that still waters run deep, and I wonder how deep when I remember her wry smile in the face of Papa's (and later my) storms of passion, her defiant attendance of Mass, and the long solitary drives she used to take into the countryside at the wheel of our old Fiat 1800. The love she lavished on animals, too, a love that demanded no suffering or hard labor in return—this, too, was odd, and quite un-Italian. But her family, the Caldicotts, had only been Italian since the Caldecotts arrived in Turin from Midlothian around the turn of the 20th century and Italianized themselves to the point of absurdity: Great-grandfather Joe—a man so polite, according to family lore, that he raised his hat to horses and beggars—in halting, Scots-befogged Italian, would give his name as Giuseppe Battista Caldicotto, the "Battista" being mere Italianate adornment . . . Anyhow, King Tut, our Siamese cat, was the main beneficiary of this atavistic animal-love of hers, for on the other, more Italian, hand, Papa's

dialogue with the cat was limited to abrasive shouts of “Fuck off, cat” or “cat, shut up” or, like a line from a Goldoni farce, “Go from me now, swine of misery!”

Befitting a true Italian wife and mother, as long as Pappa was alive Mamma’s mood changes were mercurial but brief, allegro to andante and back to allegro again, like a Mozart concerto, brief shadows passing over smiling uplands. Of course, the post-partum rupture of her uterus and subsequent life-and-death operations had something to do with her moodiness, no doubt. Humiliatingly for an Italian woman, the extinction of her womb meant she would have no more children after she had me—I, hefty even then (something, I imagine, like a huge pinkish grub with the face of a compressed Genghis Khan), requiring, for my existence to get going, eighteen hours of her labor and, ultimately, a nearly-botched Caesarian, all this at the pristine Clinique Beau-Séjour in the placid Malagnou district of our fine city.

So I was off to the races that fourteenth day of June in the year of our Lord (and I say that advisedly) 1950, screaming and kicking and, as we have seen, nearly killing my mother in the process, but nevertheless growing up confident in her love for me. Papa, then as later, was ambivalent. Yes, he had a son, *un figlio*, but one was all he would have, and one was not enough, only one of a dream-brood of sons to educate, indoctrinate in Marxist group-think, drill, and raise into collective manhood: one for the unions, one for the newspapers, one for the university, one for the family business, all four or five (he was the youngest of six) married by 25 (in Papa’s Geneva, as in Calvin’s, there was no fucking around), fathers themselves of sons, of course, before their thirtieth birthdays. But *chez nous* there was just me, christened Gustavo (for an anti-fascist uncle) Antonio (for Gramsci) Ilyich (for...well, it’s obvious) at the Notre Dame cathedral under the aegis of Father Benedetto Sanzio, a left-leaning worker’s priest Papa grudgingly allowed across his threshold for the odd glass of wine and ideological squabble (and who was a close confidant of my mother’s and, later, mine). I continued to be called Gustavo until I took matters into my own ten-year-old hands and informed Papa, in the proud tones of

the first generation, that I was Swiss, that my native language was French (English came later), and that my name was Gustave. He put down his *Humanité* or *Unità* and raised his hand to me in intended chastisement, but the threatened blow wilted into a shrug of indifference and the single syllable “*Bé*,” short for “*Bene*,” and he returned to his armchair and perusal of the proletarian gossip columns wherein he would delightedly chew over such tidbits as “Comrade Thorez today inaugurated Phase One of his ultimate struggle against the democratic imperialists by laying the inexorable steps to be taken by the working classes of France toward final victory” or “It was with great pleasure and deep solidarity that Comrade Togliatti welcomed to Italy Comrade Kim Il Sung, representative of the Korean people’s heroic class struggle.” Ah, the peerless fustian of pinkoes! O Golden Age of perpetual revolution! *Aux barricades!* How bracing it was (what bliss to be alive!) to revile what others revered: the Church, the USA, aristocrats, material goods, free enterprise! Another installment of the *Us vs. Them* soap opera, and by the way you can bury all that nonsense about peace and harmony. What the world yearns for is a stark division between good and evil. Simply put, we need enemies. This Papa understood, and even called himself on occasion “a heretical Christian,” substituting, blasphemously, his cardboard icons—Gramsci, Lenin, Fidel—for the gilded variety; and he carried that flame all his short life long. Suffering Mamma only shook her head when, after an extra *grappa* or so, he’d rant his beliefs in the god Marx. *Magari, Tadzio*, she always said: If only it were true.

But Marxist or not, Papa insisted on sending me to the best school in the city, the World Academy, where, he reasoned, my exposure to the conventions of the resident satraps of society’s upper crust would at best gently ease me into his footsteps, and if worst came to worst I would at least learn from the experts the skills wherewith to support my aged parents. Alas, he only lived to learn of my laziness. He died at 56 one warm August afternoon in 1968, on the balcony of our little rented chalet below La Faucille with in his dying eyes the cerulean sky against which Mont Blanc was incarnadined in the westering light. His last word was no word, but an orotund mouth fart blown in my direction as I

rushed onto the balcony waving that day's *Tribune de Genève*, upon the front page of which headlines blared news from Prague: the stifling of Dubcek's spring, Russian tanks circling Wenceslas Square, simian Brezhnev lying fluently to the world. Violent infarction followed Papa's valedictorian raspberry, and lo! He and Czech democracy were dead the same day, victims both (of Marx, of life, of lies). The funeral was at the Plainpalais cemetery. Coincidentally, the tombstone inscribed

Tadzio Termini

1912-1968

E finita la commedia

lies not ten meters from a humbler, much older tombstone, bearing the initials "JC" (but no dates), beneath which lies the dust of a certain Reformer, Humanist, and secret seer.

Mamma mourned; then, recovering, she flourished, all in six months or less. She lost weight, dressed up, took vacations, and sold Papa's car business for a sub-par but comfortable sum. We were, briefly, well-off. I, then a student at Occhetto University in Milan, affected fashionable disdain (it was, after all, '68 or '69, years of insolence) for the tweeds, scarves and Dunhill cigarettes worn by others of the bourgeoisie. I briefly went the scruffy proletarian way, with beret and heavy corduroys, into the twilight of the sub-revolutionary era, emerging into the dawn of another age, that of Aquarius and my own burgeoning maturity. I returned from Milan a *laureato*, educated yet deeply ignorant, better-dressed than but overly bookish and underexperienced, and arrogant in the way of all youth.

* * * *

Mystics mystify me, as I suppose they do most ordinary mortals, so when I became one myself I was quite shocked, as if two distinct, opposing personalities had taken up residence behind my bluff, unremarkable exterior. One personality, the normal one, ate and drank and taught classes at Farel College, wrote the odd poem, worried sporadically about heart palpitations, acid indigestion, joint aches,

eye inflammations, bronchitis, etc., and taught his students, sometimes indifferently, sometimes well. This fellow could be found most Wednesdays and every Saturday at his customary table in the Café Lyrique, working his way through a *demi* of Fendant and the latest *London Book Review* or *TéléGuide* or *Le Monde Littéraire*.

The other chap was the newcomer, the seer of visions, and he was above, or beyond, the merely physical. He, or rather his vision, manifested himself one breezy September night on the Corraterie, Geneva's Bond Street or Faubourg St. Honoré. I (containing both these personalities) was on my way to visit Giulia in her charming garret room in the Bohemian district of Carouge, in the south of the city. Giulia was a law student at the University. She was from Parma, a lithe Emilian with limbs of ivory and an apple-round bum to die for. Trust fate or the Almighty, then, to interject the sacred into my profane life, that evening; for not only was I in a state of erotic eagerness, I was well-wined and -dined within the butter-yellow walls of the dear old Café Lyrique (once, by the way, the watering hole of, alliteratively if not chronologically, Lamartine, Lenin and Liszt), a favored eatery of mine on weekdays when the yearning took hold for *mignons de bœuf* or *magret de canard*. Memory serves up perch from that night, along with a side of sweet *pommes d'Argovie* and bitter Guy Gax, the novelist, a friend—or enemy, I'd never figured out which (I know now)—since the third year at World Academy, where we met during an arm-wrestling match in the lunch room. We went to England together in '69 and did our military service together in the Engadine, back in '74—when one inebriated summer's day he and I, mere corporals, aimed a bazooka at the wrong barn, flushing out chickens and an irate cow, and that night dressed as captains and celebrated the survival of the livestock with a slap-up dinner at the Süsswinkel restaurant in Chur and charged it all to the Federal Armed Services. Upshot: ten days in the cooler and demotion to *soldat*. My military career, for which I never cared a fig anyway, suffered greatly, and I was given an invalid's dispensation in '78 (chronic flat feet). . .

Anyway, the subject at hand that night was a resolutely unmystical one, nothing more elevated than the latest shenanigans of a) Katia, Guy's ex-wife and b) Guy's publisher La Maison de l'Herbe (none of these proceedings excessively oiled, maybe an open carafe of your standard Fendant de Sion)—and BANG, there was the Archangel Michael, awash in shimmering light, hovering inside two concentric luminous circles of gold and trailed by sparkles like Tinkerbelle, right there on the Corratierie. I (or should I say the other Gustave, newly arrived?) recognized him at once. He was unmistakably the same chap Pope Gregory had seen atop Castel Sant'Angelo: his sword, which he held up, then slowly sheathed; his bright blue shield; his halo, discreet but penetrating, like the dome light in a Mercedes; and cinematic, California-lifeguard good looks. He was smiling blandly. The wings, too, were a dead giveaway. He folded them neatly. He was formal and reasonably polite; I, likewise. The exchange went, approximately, thus:

“Good evening, Gustave Termi. Do not be afraid.” His voice was mellifluous yet mechanical, with a hint of the robotic; his speech unaccented, as if he'd learned the language from Linguaphone tapes.

“Ah, good evening. I am not afraid.”

“You are a man.”

“That I can hardly deny.”

“With bestial lusts and the soul of a *hazzan*.” (His Hebrew was better than his French. This means “cantor” in the ancient language of the Jews.)

“Rather, with the soul of a man, a mere mortal, a thinking reed.” I was in good Pascalian form, although I didn't care for that reference to bestial lusts.

“But room for God therein.”

“Oh, yes, room for God. And the other one, alas.”

“To whom we refer, allusively, as the Adversary,” and here he made an extraordinary putty-face, widening his eyes and lengthening his nose and cheeks into a vulpine muzzle, a touch of the werewolf chilling even to a lifelong fan of horror flicks—”but never by any other name.” I was duly warned, and vowed never to practice in my shaving mirror.

“No, never,” said I.

His face collapsed into bland Rivieran handsomeness.

“This is the first visit, Gustave,” he intoned, like Marley’s Ghost to Ebenezer, or Ezekiel to William Blake. “There will be more. Be prepared.” With that Boy-Scout exhortation, he vanished—or, to be more precise, he rose off the ground a little higher (he’d been floating about a half-meter above) then dissolved into a white cloud, like Mr. Tidy in the detergent commercial. All the while, by the way, people were strolling along the street, a drunk was bawling, cars and tramcars were going by, a mild breeze (it was June) was wafting scents of an early-summer city night (tree blossoms, *frites*, car exhaust, the river nearby); clearly, nobody else had heard or seen a middle-aged man conversing with an armed and hovering archangel, nor even that same middle-aged man gabbling at the empty air . . .well, I’ve read enough theology and sci-fi, good and bad, to have a stab at the reason. It’s something to do with Time, our master, being Their slave, and a little zone of non-Time being created around the angel and me, muddling everybody else’s receptors for the nonce. (It muddled mine. For the duration of the encounter I felt on the verge of a momentous stammer, with a touch of nightmarish immobility.)

I worked out that Time theory on my way home, and let me add that I was in no mood for further lucubrations on the subject, not until I’d had a couple of stiff Ricards and watched a reassuringly boring political program on FR3 during the course of which no mention was made of archangels, visions or anything remotely otherworldly (or interesting).

I called Giulia, to apologize.

“Is OK.”

“I’ll make it up to you next time.”

“A-o, *professore*. Is OK.”

“Dinner? At the Boeuf Rouge?”

“A-o. Forget it. See you next week.”

I drank more, then called Gax.

“It’s too late,” he mumbled. “Are you drunk?”

“Never mind that. Something happened to me on the way home. It’s incredible.”

I explained.

“And how do you know he was an archangel, my dear fellow?”

“The sword, the halo. The gilded circles surrounding him. The hair. Like the statue at the Castel Sant’Angelo depicting the vision Gregory the Great had during the plague. Straight out of one of those Victorian mezzotints. Or a Renaissance painting.”

“Well, this is it, Termi.”

Of course, he didn’t mean “This is it, alert the media,” or “This is it, it’s the proof all mankind has been waiting two thousand years for,” or even “This is it, what a story”: no, no. Gax was bilious, as usual.

“You’ve gone off your rocker at last,” he snapped. “After years of expert apprenticeship. Perhaps your imagination is under-utilized, Termi? Stop watching so damn much television. Write more. Get married. Go around the world. If you need a psychiatrist, try LeCluyse, he’s just down the block from you on the Boulevard des Philosophes. He got me off heroin, you know. But if you want my honest opinion, it’s our friends at Al-Anon you’re more in need of.” He concluded his insolent advice with a yawn. “And so to bed. Sleep it off, Termi.”

I was outraged but unsurprised. I might well have reacted the same way, had our roles been reversed. I, too, reverted to banality (we all chant the everyday jingles, while in the shadows lurk demons), fearing as much the effort required to adjust to a blinding revelation of faith as the revelation itself—and the nagging doubts about my own sanity? Brazenly, my initial reaction was: Let them nag. As long as astrology and Islam and communism find followers, who's to say a mere mystic's mad? Then I wondered, too, if I weren't losing my mind—or at least paying a long-overdue debt to alcohol, not that I was an alcoholic (aha! the alcoholic's instinctive protest!), nor even a daily drinker, nor, certainly, an epileptic; but at age fifty-three, in as bibulous a city as Geneva, with the assistance of temperament (artistic) and profession (liberal, easy access to cafes), I probably drank more in a week than entire families in, say, Aleppo, do in a lifetime...but no more than most of my acquaintances, and less than some. Moreover, alcohol played no role in the visions of the great mystics of the past, as far as I knew. I mean to say, consider the dissonance in this composition:

St. John of the Cross;

Bernadette of Lourdes;

Sister Elisabeth of Schonau;

Sister Lucia dos Santos;

Sister Hildegard of Bingen;

St. Therese of Lisieux;

Professor Gustave Termi, history department, Farel College.

This jarring note rang harshly in my ears. It upset my digestion. Worse, it took over the dreamspace formerly occupied by women, art, cars and memory. It finally drove me to spend my free hours researching my new avocation, or curse. My inquiries began at the top, or as near as mere mortal ever got, with the only Teresa d'Avila work that I owned: *The Way of Perfection*. My perusal was brief, not only because of the profound boredom religious enthusiasm inspires in me, but also because of a

sneaking suspicion that I was unworthy to be, however remotely, of the same company as the sweet madwoman of Avila, who believed in utter denial and gut-wrenching austerity as the means to God, her whole life spent divided between the worldly (10%) and the divine (90%). Her travails, and those of her chum John of the Cross, although not as physically horrible as those of, say, Miguel Servetus—burned at the stake here in Geneva (but now honored in the name of our Second League football team, F.C. Servette), courtesy of Big John Calvin, for farting on Sunday, or something equally offensive in the eyes of Papa John—elevated mysticism to the rank of pure spirit, a saintly pastime far out of the reach of a workaday sinner such as I. Anyway, such transports were substitutes for, or successors to, Art, for which I had no need of substitutes, thanks very much. They were akin also, as visions of God, to the music of Palestrina or J. S. Bach, i.e. sublime transcendence, a white liqueous light illuminating the way ahead, immortality just around the bend (hard on the heels of your average mystic)—and I always preferred Mozart and Mahler and Wagner's *Parsifal*. But the visions of Teresa were certainly not just phantoms of, say, a too-hastily consumed pork chop, or bottle of acidic Gamay (although come to think of it, the plonk I had that night at dinner with Gax *had* tasted a trifle corked); no, nothing so mundane, and here was the crux of my dilemma, sensuality being the essence of my life. I'm no Picasso, but I love the first bite of a morning smoke, the soft stroke of a spring breeze, the smoothness of a woman's thigh, the muffled purr of a well-tuned engine, etc., etc....ah, but all these things are of God, too, you will say, if you are the sage I take you for. Yes, but that God is the humanist's God, and these things are primarily of the world, and no mystic I'd ever read about had ever been a man, or woman, of the world, or a humanist. All were austere, self-denying, abstemious, in a word, crazy; or, at least, so devotedly antiphysical that craziness came naturally, as a result of no food or drink or sex for years on end. Their love of a God of the spirit was absolute, fanatical, uncompromising. My love of God? Awe, perhaps, at one remove, as deep as anyone's, but I stress that remove, through the prism of art and science and the works of Man . . . perhaps "love" never entered into it, now that I have all this under the magnifying glass. Who, post-Auschwitz, loves God? Love was for calmer times, when news of horrors never

traveled, or could be dismissed as myth, or the outlandish behavior of heathens...no, in my approach to the Almighty I was more of a Hebrew, fearful, respectful, admiring, humble before His works, yet detached and skeptical to the core, spiritually closer to Abraham, God's questioner, than to Aquinas, His unquestioning servant: Dr. Aquinas, consummate theologian, sage Doctor of the Church and heavyweight levitator. No, Aquinas was no example for me. His spirituality was beyond a layman's reach, and a layman can't have visions of the Almighty and His minions...or can he? What of Blake? Here indeed was a precedent: secular mystic, poet and visionary, man of the world (printer, sensualist, rebel) who above all yearned for God, the Divine, Infinity, the Universe, the Great Fuck, or something: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite." Why, yes! Cleanse those doors, I say! You there! You, too, can rub elbows with infinity! At the mere age of ten didn't wee Willie see angels clustering in a tree? What of his encounter with Ezekiel in a field? Tea and scones with Jesus? O Brother mine! O great prophet of Orc, of Los, of Urizen! Full many a week had I slavered over his work back in my Edinburgh days—and it was there, too, now that I come to think of it, that I had what one might call my first mystical experience.

* * * *

Edinburgh! Well-matched to Geneva, Knoxian Avignon to my Calvinist Rome, both stern and crenellated windswept citadels of the past; both, in the episodic sunlight of their hilly realms, as coyly beautiful as their mercurial skies; both solid, too, and stolid, and deeply alcoholic. I'd arrived from Milan as an assistant lecturer in French and Italian, with doctoral ambitions. I found rooms on Balcarres Street, a semi-suburban stretch of Victorian highway bound on one side by a cemetery, on the other by long-disused, weed-grown railway tracks leading straight into that rank and silent place where Romance and Horror embrace. Balcarres Street was remote and unfashionable, which suited me. Also, I had a view, beyond the graveyard, of the Pentland Hills, yellowish-blue in the sun. On rainy days the winding paths up the hillsides glistened wetly like the mucal trails of giant snails. I roomed in a ground-floor

bed-sit for two years of my Edinburgh sojourn, sharing the rent with guitarists and language teachers and a ne'er-do-well named Willie, a linguist from Glasgow with whom I found instant companionship. My love of solitude and select debauchery coincided with his; my need of occasional outbursts, too, found a ready response in the high jinks that came so naturally to the Calvinist-born rebel he was. For instance (and here my digression returns, more or less to its, point), it was in Willie's company that the veil was first lifted and I saw, one Halloween . . . a spook? A stain on my eyeglasses? A mirage? An angel's harbinger? No angel, at least, not then. Willie and I were drunk, and in a cemetery at midnight on Halloween, it being common in the Scotland of Willie's childhood to spend All Hallows in a graveyard on a dare. As we had a graveyard handy, and were Dutch-courageous after an evening's drink, why, Willie and Swiss Gus were game, *och aye!* So there we sat, with our beer, on a broad new tombstone near the main gate, across from a small mourners' pavilion. As one a.m. tolled and rolled away, in that pavilion—as if responding, on cue, to the simultaneous pops of our beer-can ring-tabs—something gathered itself mistily into existence and rose and limped, rather than walked, in our direction; something foglike and pale and vague, yet with discernable features like a much-erased Identikit drawing; not the features of an archangel, nor a demon, either, but not quite your standard ghost, no mere spectral passerby . . . anyway, whatever it was or wasn't, it was invisible to Willie—"a spook, och aye, away yourself, fer Gawd's sake"—but THAT FACE a haunting severe enough to linger in my mind for days afterward, a visitant (or revenant) from deep within the spidery undergrowth of M. R. James, or the clammy vaults of Poe, and maybe, for all I know, no more or less than a direct, digestive consequence of that evening's Vindaloo and dozen or more beers. I yelled, pointed, bolted, caught my foot on a railing, went down face-first, endured Willie's jibes, returned to the flat, took in an aria or two (Puccini? Verdi?) and slept, to dream of who knows what. Gravely, I reconnoitered the graveyard on the following day, hungover, ashamed, and doubtful. The best I could come up with, anywhere near the pavilion, was the tomb of a deacon deceased since 1890 or so. Oddly, the tomb was

surmounted by an inordinately spectacular, Neapolitan-style of the Archangel Michael, somewhat militant in stance; downright prescient, if you credit Memory with recording, rather than inventing, abilities.

Back home, I never made much of my encounter in the cemetery. It was just a dinnertable yarn that first amused, then worried, my colleagues at the College, skeptics and freethinkers all. But if I'm a mystic, then Edinburgh was the crucible, and not just because of the ghaistie in the boneyard. The city itself simmers with long-suppressed magic that no amount of artistry, or art, can disguise. As does Geneva, beneath its bland facade of international do-goodery.

So, all those years later, I found myself mentally revisiting, with the clarity of long-disused memory, the bonnie braes of the Pentlands, where I'd often strolled (or "rambled," to keep the Romantic spirit), innocent at heart, *Innocence* in hand: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/ And Eternity in an hour." I'd returned hopefully to the works of Blake, the great mad polymath, and spent most of one Saturday morning (the howling wintry Bise cooperating to make the outdoors inhospitable) rereading "Jerusalem," an intense exposure to quirky genius that, in the end, tired me out: Ah, Brother William. Alas. *Già basta*. Did He who made me make thee? The man was brilliant, yes, visionary, quite possibly, and mad, beyond doubt, all these in an entirely English way that was appealing mainly in short doses or from a distance. He utterly lacked, however, that skepticism, that detachment, that touch of world-weariness that is the stamp of my kind, my song of experience—that is, let me say it plainly, so Italian. (Swiss that I proudly am, I am also, dear Papa, as Italian as Venetian grappa, or the bordellos of Pompeii.) Blake always reminded me of one of those bicycle-riding, ruddy-cheeked, half-a-pint-a-night Sunny Jims in corduroy trousers who sing in Gilbert and Sullivan societies at British universities and who, frequently, belong to political clubs or religious groups: too earnest by half, our William. But a crank, a genius? Oh yes. Those, if nothing else.

Post-“Jerusalem,” and running short of other sources at home, I braved the Bise and made a visit to the eminent Central Library on the Boulevard Helvétique. (This would have been, let me see, a week or so after my run-in with the Archangel.)

“Have you mystics?”

“Beg pardon, monsieur?”

“I seek mystics. Their memoirs. Biographies. Et cetera.”

“Ah. Avila and company?”

“Yes. And/or Lisieux. And others.”

Well, they had some such, yes. See under “Religion,” which section was in a dusty, little-used corner of the library, adjacent to the heavier traffic of the “Mysteries” section—tsk, tsk! what an eloquent commentary on our Godless age!—dimly illuminated by flickering fluorescent strips. On the bookshelves, under the rubric “Religious Works,” I first investigated Michael. I knew, of course, that he was the mightiest of angels, a great favorite of Jews, Muslims, and the Orthodox; and sure enough, there in the *Lex Vaticana*, Vol. III, was a photo of the effigy atop the Castel Sant’Angelo, sheathing or drawing his sword. “St. Michael is one of the principal angels,” I read. “His name was the war-cry of the good angels in the battle fought in Heaven against the enemy and his followers.” Well, we all know who *that* is, don’t we? I remembered the archangel’s blood-chilling imitation and shivered—I am tempted to add, in good literary style, “although it was a warm day,” but in fact it was quite chilly. “Four times his name is recorded in Scripture,” lectured the *Lex*. “Following these Scriptural passages, Christian tradition gives to St. Michael four offices:

- ∞ To fight against Satan.
- ∞ To rescue the souls of the faithful from the power of the enemy, especially at the hour of death.

- ∞ To be the champion of God's people, the Jews in the Old Law, the Christians in the New Testament; therefore he was the patron of the Church, and of the orders of knights during the Middle Ages.
- ∞ To call away from earth and bring men's souls to judgment (*signifer S. Michael repraesentet eas in lucam sanctam*, Offert. Miss Defunct. *Constituit eum principem super animas suscipiendas*, Antiph. off. Cf. *Hermas*, Pastor, I, 3, Simil. VIII, 3).

“Archangel Michael,” gushed the *Lex*, “is known for his great powers of protection. His mighty sword cuts away anything which no longer serves: cords and bonds, astral energies, etc. He is associated with the color electric blue. His feast day is September 29th.”

Brrrrr, indeed. According to my rough mental calculations, as it was now mid-October I'd seen him in late September sometime, very likely on the 29th . . . And by the way I quite like electric blue, but I didn't like that part about bringing men's souls to judgment, or rescuing the soul at the hour of death. Perhaps I was a secret Jew and he'd found time in his busy schedule to prepare me for the news?

(Or an even more secret Christian?)

Or about to die?

But he'd told me nothing, really. And—for God's sake! (As it were.) Enough of archangels. I turned for light relief to the short shelf of Mystics and found, as expected, Teresas three, those superstars of piety Avila, Lisieux, and (completing the trinity of Teresas) Saint T. of Calcutta, this last a biography by a Vatican groupie and correspondent for *Einstein* magazine. Bored, I was on my way out. Then, like the close of an office workday, came release from tedium: a slim volume red with the gilt lettering of a Douai Bible, or a cardinal's robes. Its title was *ADORATION: A LIFE OF STEFANIE VON ROTHENBERG*. A composite gold logo formed by a cross and a swastika adorned the spine. The author was one Martine Jeanrenaud, a TV journalist whose doctoral dissertation this book had originally been.

Intrigued, I took it down, the hesitated; if this Martine Jeanrenaud was to guide me I needed to know more about her. I wanted no leftish exegesis, no postmodern propaganda, no ideological hawering. On the Table of Contents verso page, I came upon a short bio, with accompanying photograph of a pretty woman in her late thirties or so with shaggy hair and round glasses. Martine Jeanrenaud was, according to the blurb, a master's graduate of Geneva University and a doctor ex-Sorbonne-Paris II, with studies at Princeton also to her credit. (Aha! I sensed Career Woman at best, Feminist Scholar at worst.)

Furthermore, she was the author of, apart from the present volume, "*James Fazy: Radical Bourgeois*," and currently a TV reporter at Télé Suisse 1, known for her work on the "popular documentary series" *Priests of the People: Wholesome Rebels* (featuring among others Father Leonardo Boff and the Abbé Pierre) and producer of something called "*Land Beyond the Yaks: Bhutan, Modern Shangri-La*"...so, this Jeanrenaud person had a notch or two on her belt, that was clear. Her qualifications to write history were less so, but these days any journalist deems him- or herself qualified to craft the great book of life in all its forms, fictional, dramatic, historical, autobiographical, sexual, and we have only Time the great winnower to fall back on in our quest for culture.

I borrowed the volume, hurried home and settled myself deep in my armchair. With a cigarette and an espresso at my side I embarked on Page One, reserving the right to resume at any moment my browsing elsewhere.

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Adoration: A Life of Stefanie von Rothenberg

by Martine Jeanrenaud

Linz

Linz on the Danube; Linz, third city of Austria; Linz, placid, contented, aloof; Linz, June 28, 1907. The city simmered in the heat of the summer morning. It was ten o'clock by the bells of the Martinskirche. After dutifully noting the hour, the bells started pealing their joy, in unison with the bells of the Pfarrkirche, the Minoritenkirche and the Cathedral: The Archduke was coming! Which Archduke? Why, the Heir Apparent, Franz Ferdinand, of course. He and his lady, the Duchess Sophie, were coming down from their Bohemian retreat at Konopiste to celebrate their seventh wedding anniversary by dining and regiment-reviewing and paying a visit to Leonding stables, just outside the city, where His Imperial Highness kept fine Lippizanners. Among the populace few knew and fewer cared, Linz being a pro-German town and the Archduke not being the popular idol his cousin Rudolf, darling of Mayerling, had been, despite which the joy broadcast by the pealing bells was quite genuinely felt by the townsfolk, at least in part. Truth to tell, as far as most Linzers were concerned it might as well have been Michaelmas, or St. Jude's, or the birthday of the Sultan in Constantinople. No matter. Like all Linz holidays, it would be a day of slow strolling along the riverside promenade of the Donaulände; of the gentle clown-music of tubas by the Holy Trinity pillar on the Hauptplatz; of foamy steins in the beergardens of Urfahr; of grilled *Bergsteiger Wurst* and *pläcke* potato cakes; and *Linzer torte*, and the coarse *Nuss-Zopf* bread of the provinces; of laughter, and forlorn hopes, and piercing desire, and once-prim gazes suddenly burning with the unnamable. Only the carriage-horses would hate the day, but even for them there would be extra feed, and a good rub-down under the linden trees. As for the humans—well, there was time enough, tomorrow, to nurse the hangover and stammer apologies to earn the deeper opprobrium of Herr Direktor, or Herr Doktor, or Unser Vater im Himmel. Today, a holiday, was made to enjoy. Relax! Drink deep! Work has made you free (for a day) . . . !

At ten-ten the joyous pealing rippled into silence. The air was still. Along the Donaulände a few family groups were taking the air, working hard, in their Austrian way, at

having a good time, and any one of them could have been any one of the others, all typically consisting of heavily-whiskered Pappi in his Sunday best, a Franz Josef in miniature striding ahead and making pontifical comments on the blindingly obvious while Mamma was leading, or carrying, the young ones, oblivious to Pappi's dull discourse.

"The boat to Vienna, Mutti," he said. "Fifteen minutes late."

He paused, raised an expectant forefinger: the bell of the Pfarrkirche, newly returned to yeoman service, announced the quarter hour. The Vienna mailboat steamed by, downstream, under the Urfahr bridge.

"Get along, Papi," said Mutti. "We'll be late for church."

On the bridge, looking down at the now-swift mail boat, a young man in artistic garb—floppy hat, neckerchief, ivory-tipped cane—consulted his pocket watch and, turning to the young woman beside him, he (being Austrian too) made the same predictable remark as our *bürgerlich* Pappi, but in his voice was a slight tremor, as if what he was saying were merely a salve to the nerves of a young man on a date.

"Look at that. It's nearly quarter of an hour late today."

She ignored the remark, admired the watch.

"Oh, how pretty. Is it new?"

"No, no. My father's. Twenty years of service in the Habsburg civil service." He said this sarcastically, yet with a hint of pride.

"May I see?"

She took the watch, turned it over. It was as big as an onion, gleamingly gold, or (more probably) gold-plated, with a smooth Swiss moonface (Audemars Piguet, Geneva) and Roman numerals. On the back was an inscription: *For Esteemed Colleague and Friend Alois Hitler! With Respect and Best Wishes, Office of the Royal and Imperial Customs, Braunau-am-Inn, the 27th of May, 1895.*

"It's very fine, Adolf. It suits you, especially today." She handed it back. "And that suit! Such respect for the Archduke!"

“The Archduke, pah! But I have the greatest respect, ah, er, for.” He paused, wound the watch-stem once, and tucked the watch back into his vest pocket. “For certain distinguished young ladies.” Then, the Austrian male reflex: rapid coordination of heel-clicking and head-dip, hardly a bow, more a ritual tic. But Adolf, daringly, went further: “I mean, of course, for certain distinguished young ladies, in particular, ah, for you, Fraulein Stefanie.” Then, racked with nerves, he made sure the moment had passed, he hurried it on its way by abruptly raising the ivory-topped cane (a recent affectation) and pointing it, while uttering a hoarse bark of a laugh, at a straw-hatted cyclist passing them on the Donaulände.

“Ha! My goodness, look. I believe it’s Gustl. Now him I can talk to. He respects me, I think. He agrees with me, anyway.”

The cyclist waved, wobbled, nearly collided with the *bürgerlich* family in duck-procession (or another one just like it), regained his balance, waved again, laughed. Adolf frowned.

“I wonder if he knows who you are,” he said. “I’m sure he’ll have many questions. Where is she from? How old is she? Is she rich?” He chuckled. “It’s his main fault, he’s too curious. I had to tell him more than once that the business he was inquiring about was mine, not his. Of course, I would never intrude on *your* business, Fraulein Stefanie.” Again the half-bow, the moment of peerless awkwardness that was, however, not unusual, neither with young Hitler nor in most Austrian middle-class circles, where formality generally forestalled grace. As the daughter of minor provincial nobility, Stefanie was used to it, but she sought release from it whenever possible, this time from a plume of smoke drifting skyward.

“Look,” she said. “Isn’t that the Vienna train?”

Adolf stiffened to attention.

“Yes,” he said. “Ah yes yes. The 10:20 express. I will be taking that train. Actually, I took that very train last year when I went up to Vienna. Our imperial capital, ha! In fact, it is a splendid city, Fraulein Stefanie, a splendid city. The buildings! The music! The coffeecakes! A bit dirty, and there are human dregs everywhere, even in the most elegant neighborhoods, but Paris is like that, too, I hear, and London, of course, and even Berlin. Shall we walk on?”

They did so. Anyway, it was a command rather than a suggestion. Adolf strode ahead, swinging his cane. Stefanie hurried after him like a meek hausfrau, somewhat resenting this (but he was a man, he was an Austrian...). He was talking over his shoulder as they descended the stairs from the bridge and came onto the Donaulände. Stefanie caught the tail end of his peroration.

“Vienna in October, you know, to study at the Academy. Perhaps sooner, except I will be sitting the admittance exam then. In any case, after I pass the exam I plan to keep a studio there and maintain my residence here, in Urfahr, with my mother. My mother is not well, these days. Too much worrying about her children, but this is so typical of mothers, ja? Or perhaps I will take an apartment on the Graben, depending on the extent of my artistic success.” He slowed down, again aware of her. “You must come to visit me, Fraulein Stefanie!”

“Yes. I’d like to.”

Vienna! She’d been to Munich, a nice town and more worldly than Linz, certainly; but Vienna, she knew from her reading, and letters from her Kahane cousins, was on another scale entirely: Habsburgs and the Hofburg! glamor! the theater! the arts! *Herrn* Klimt, Schnitzler and Mahler! The Opera! Lehar!

“Everything absolutely respectable, of course. Absolutely. Yes, I am an artist,” dreamy I-am-an-artist expression wafting across Adolf’s features, “above all I am an artist, God be thanked, but please don’t think that because of that I have no morals, no, no, I have the utmost respect, believe me. Not that I...”

He slowed down to interrupt himself, gave her a sidelong glance, slyly. True to prim form, Stefanie smiled, placidly awaiting resumption of the monologue. Inwardly she was assessing him, responding to his peacock-display: almost handsome, with those blue eyes, that mobile mouth, but not quite, with that beak of a nose, that oddly weak chin; but he was hardly ugly, and by no means stupid, a bit self-important, in fact pompous in the extreme when he started on his ideas, like so many men she knew, but he was passionate, at least, unlike most men, and so utterly courteous when he was paying attention to her that he was almost

like a character in the theater, as if he'd only rehearsed his good manners, never practiced them. Most of all, he was an artist, and a good one, judging by the watercolors he'd shown her with that same odd combination of self-effacement and arrogance: Pah, it's nothing, only genius! He was a real artist, anyway, not just a talker, although a talker he certainly was, too . . . of course this was all part of the artistic personality, or so she'd heard.

"Not that I am incapable, or unaware," he resumed, standing with his hands behind his back, wagging the cane gently from side to side like a headmaster about to administer punishment. "Of shall we say, oh I don't know, deeper feelings? As in, as with—have you seen *Tristan and Isolde*, Fraulein Stefanie? I saw it last year in Vienna. Magnificent! But perhaps you are too young...?"

(Another quality he had was that of conveying his own nervous energy, almost to a fault: She felt slightly giddy, unsure yet elated at the same time, as if a great wonderment awaited.)

"No. No, I haven't seen it, but not because I'm too young, Adolf. My father wouldn't let me."

Young she was, barely eighteen, but eighteen, in that day and age, was young no longer; girls were mothers by then, and farmwives, and courtesans. Naivete was for the spoiled, ignorance for the extremes of rich and poor. Stefanie was neither especially naive nor ignorant, and, although spoiled, as is normal with an only child, she had sufficient grace and spiritual wherewithal to temper the effects. The worst that could be said of her was that she was, perhaps, overly hopeful and determined, but these were, for the most part, qualities derived from her solid stock, the von Rothenbergs of Salzburg and environs. Her father, *Herr Doktor* Hermann, physician and part-time church organist, claimed descent from the same minor nobility as the great poet and dramatist Hans von Rothenberg; yet "minor" was hardly apt in view of the way he carried on in all of Salzburg's best salons, for all the world as if his name were Habsburg. It was arrogance, but it imbued his daughter with a self-confidence and assuredness well beyond her years, qualities that normally come, if at all, only in opposition to life's unremitting tests. That self-confidence had enabled her to accept young Herr Hitler's invitation. It hadn't deserted her yet, but she felt it wavering at his mention of *Tristan and*

Isolde, undermined by the suspicion that Adolf was, in his clumsy way, coming around to a declaration of some kind. Certainly mentioning that opera was a sign of unusual, not to say cosmopolitan, interests. *Tristan and Isolde* was still frowned upon in certain formal family circles like her own: Her father was wont to call Wagner “that Italian,” implying not the glories of that nationality but the perceived over-amorousness, the lack of restraint, emotional extravagance...in brief, she knew the story, the great sweep of romantic passion, Nordic sensibilities allied to universal demands of the flesh.

Foolishly, her heart raced.

“Of course I know what it’s about,” she said, lowering her gaze.

“The great hymn of nationhood,” said Adolf. He relaxed his stance, resumed walking, swung his cane. Over his shoulder he shot her intermittent glances, as if to make sure she was still following him. “German culture. In opposition to French. Do you understand? It is the greatest art ever created. I cannot begin to tell you of the esteem in which I hold Wagner. I would give anything for a chance to visit Bayreuth. Actually, I wrote a letter last month to Frau Winifred Wagner, wife of the Master’s son Siegfried. Such a lady, ah, she is a lady of distinction. I have not received a reply, but I am hopeful. Of course, she has many correspondents. So, Fraulein Stefanie. May I invite you?” Another pause, a direct blue gaze, for once hoping to elicit a response. Oh he is an artist, she said to herself. Unpredictable, moody, passionate. A difficult man, but his good manners will keep him in check.

“Well, invite me where?”

“To the opera, of course! Next week the State Opera performs Wagner here. Kubizek is going, you can meet him.” (As if his friend Kubizek’s presence were an added attraction, the clincher, Adolf’s company by itself not being enough of a draw.) “They will be performing *Rienzi*, a truly magnificent work of art. Do you know it?” He paused just long enough to draw breath. “The story of a noble Roman senator who led the people against stupidity and tyranny. It’s not merely a great opera, Fraulein Stefanie. It’s a cause, a manifesto, a declaration! But

most people don't pay attention, you know. They think it should be all vulgar entertainment, like the music-hall. Unless you point it out to them."

They were walking again. As they approached the nearby Hofgasse, the sounds of thumping drums and burbling tubas could be heard coming from the Hauptplatz, the main square. A loudmouthed party of soldiers in leopardskin waistcoats and green-white-and-red regimental plumes headed past them in a disorganized way, intent upon the music and beer tents and ready—as suggested by their sly glances at Stefanie (and brief, loud sniggering at the sight of her dashing companion)—for recreation.

"I thought *Tristan and Isolde* was about love," said Stefanie suddenly.

"Ah yes, yes. Did you see those soldiers? Hungarians, pah. What kind of country is this. One wonders what business they could possibly have here in Upper Austria. Doesn't Budapest need defending? Against gypsies, for example?"

This was evidently a joke, to judge by Adolf's subsequent cough of laughter. Stefanie ignored it and repeated her question.

"Love?" said Adolf. "But many things are about love. Most works of art are about love. But you must ask yourself, is that all they are about? Do they not have secondary purposes, meanings for the intellect? Is Goethe about love? Is, ah. Schiller?" Startled, he turned. She was speaking; indeed, she had interrupted.

"Oh yes," she said, firmly. "Goethe is about love, Adolf. Read *Elective Affinities*! The love of man for woman, woman for man. 'Eternal Womanhood Leads us on High,' as he said." At the Realschule, as Adolf would hardly know, having left the year before (a no doubt touchy point which she forbore to bring up), they had just finished with *Elective Affinities*. Amorous, intellectual, generous, oft-despairing yet ever-hopeful, the Sage of Weimar was for Stefanie the summit of male perfection, a classical genius with Romantic panache, spirit and flesh co-existing in classical harmony.

"His love for Friederike of Sessenheim, Charlotte Buff, Maximiliane, Charlotte von Stein? Ach, Adolf, he was a great lover."

Adolf sensed her sincerity, even knowledge. *Von Rothenberg*, after all. The name, when brooded upon, implied a world of formality and letters and breeding foreign to the young Hitler, customsman's son of woodsman stock, from tight little Braunau and the deep wild weald of the Waldviertel. He turned sullen and uncommunicative, feeling spurned in favor of the glamorous dead, Goethe especially. *Concerning German Nature and Art* was the only Goethe piece he'd ever read in its entirety, hoping for a screed; in fact, he'd found it a bore, and parts of it decidedly unGerman. As for *Young Werther*, *The Eternal Jew*, *Wilhelm Meister*, *Faust*—yes, he'd dabbled, but the rigidity, the classicism, the wigs and silk stockings...he needed more. He needed paganism, but not Goethe's genteel Hellenismus; Germanic paganism, brute force, kicking down the doors of the past; he longed for the purity of passion (blonde women like Stefanie), mountaintop bonfires, Nietzsche (except for the Frenchified later Nietzsche, gaga from syphilis anyway), Beethoven, Wagner. Especially Wagner. Adolf's exposure to the great music-dramatist was of recent vintage, and his obsession had become quite dictatorial. In the absence of God, the ex-aspirant to the priesthood needed a God, and he'd found Wagner, who, in his opinion (however unfairly to Wagner), had it right, bringing together the pagan and the romantic, with a nod to Germanic Christianity: the Teutonic Knights, Parsifal the Conqueror, the Grail-Seeker, the Avenger, the Hermann of Teutoburger Forest, Frederick Redbeard, Frederick the Great, Walpurgisnacht, every woman's dream, every man's inspiration, purity and manliness personified. *Tristan*? A masterpiece, undoubtedly, but Tristan himself was a bit too French, too languid, too much the sexual athlete. Typical of a woman to go for that one and overlook *Parsifal* and *Rienzi*, the real masterpieces...but this was no time, Adolf Hitler reminded himself, to tell her how wrong she was, she, Stefanie of his waking and sleeping dreams, his Minerva; she, Stefanie, glimpsed from afar on morning walks; Stefanie, whom his friend Kubizek had so often heard called "My lady" or "The goddess" (of course Kubizek must have recognized her on the bridge, how could he not, after weeks of hearing about her!) or even, with dubious jocularly, "My future missus"; incredibly, she'd responded, a month previously, when he'd approached her on the Kaiserplatz, more nervous than he'd ever been in his life but somehow carried along by that intoxicating confidence that came over him at odd times...and when Adolf had telephoned a week later she—instantly recognizing his

guttural accent over the telephone at her aunt's—had agreed to go out with him, without a chaperone, even! Well, she'd made inquiries, of course, and her Aunt Marie was acquainted, distantly, with Frau Hitler, through mutual relatives in Linz and Leonding, and of course the late Herr Alois had been a civil servant of unimpeachable probity and standing...young Adolf's reputation was more uneven, however, and essentially came out as one of rebellious Bohemianism which Stefanie, aspiring actress-playwright-dancer-poet and general Woman of Letters, found sorely lacking in placid Linz and dull Leonding.

So she'd lied to her aunt, or they'd have a chaperone now.

"Kitty's meeting me and we're going to the Getreidegasse Theater."

Kitty would be apprised. Stefanie hated the deception, but she knew there were some things beyond the moral compass of her family. She was certain that meeting Adolf was one of them.

They left the riverbank, crossed the nearby Hofgasse, and made their way to the Hauptplatz, the bustling heart of Linz. It was a little before eleven, and preparations were underway for the great day ahead. Banners stirred feebly in the muggy riverine air. Standing about were groups of soldiers from different regiments, Austrian mostly, with a sprinkling of Serbs and Moravians, and German-speakers from the marches of Bessarabia, and Slovenes from Capo d'Istria, and the already-noted Magyars; most were laughing coarsely and smoking, ogling the women and not-so-gently mocking their escorts. One such escort, a student to judge by his general dress and demeanour (plumed hat, lace shirt, swagger) turned on them and screamed obscenities. Adolf, too, screamed briefly, then fell silent, intimidated by the sight of a regiment of strapping lancers strolling in his general direction.

"You got something you want to discuss?" one of them shouted. "Herr Wandervogel?"

"Careful," said another. "Maybe that's a swordstick Herr Doktor Professor Artist is carrying."

Stefanie was nervous, but elated. There was something of the larger world in it all: the soldiers, the bantering, the undercurrent of male rivalry, the pervasiveness of sex. Almost, she

thought, as if they weren't in Linz at all. Her breath caught in her throat; her heart skipped a beat, as if in fear, or great excitement. She had a familiar swooning sensation of elevation, a passing giddiness, and a mist floated before her eyes, then yielded to an equally abnormal, almost painful, clarity, limning distant things. A moment later she felt calm, lucid, ready for anything.

"There must be scenes like this in Vienna all the time," she said, as they walked away from the defenders of the Empire.

But Adolf seemed to have no further interest in Vienna. He rankled yet, over Goethe. Thoughts of stark Germanness had taken over. There was a faint throbbing in his temples. He felt thwarted, pent-up, unmanned.

"Let's go over here," he said, and abruptly changed course. They were just behind the reviewing stand, which faced a famous old drinking establishment, the *Alte Welt*. Grandees had fought duels in the *Alte Welt*; artists had cried over spilt wine in its cavernous cellars. In 1889 a Triestine count had, à la Prince Rudolf, shot himself and his mistress in a discreet room upstairs, and Anton Bruckner's ghost had been seen draping itself humbly around a beer. Today the *Alte Welt* was filling up with soldiers and members of the archducal entourage: hussars, grenadiers, dragoons. Adolf, suddenly self-conscious, had no desire to engage in an exchange of witticisms or abuse with men twice his size. He might get beaten up. Also, he was in the (for him) unusual position of having a lady's feelings, and impressions, to consider. Momentarily, he was at a loss; his hands kneaded the air; he was sweating. His hat was askew, revealing the pink line made by the hatband.

"Shall we?" he began, interrupted (again) by a sudden flurry of activity. Soldiers stopped lounging and assumed the rigid pose of review. Mounted units cantered in. An open carriage appeared in the distance. "Shall we," mumbled Adolf again; then he cleared his throat and fell silent, yielding reluctantly to external events utterly indifferent to him. . . and Stefanie had eyes only for the arriving palanquins of the archducal parade. (And anyway, there were people about, pushing and shoving. Adolf's walking stick, intended as an adornment, was rapidly becoming a liability.)

“Oh, look!” Stefanie exclaimed. Two soldiers of the Leibregiment, the royal guard, mounted on chestnut bays; Hussars in leopardskin and bandoliers, riding sturdy Andalusians; two Dragoons, plumes nodding, breastplates afire, atop solid Lippizaners; a brace of Arab-mounted Bukovinans (red, green, and gold uniforms, shakos shaking, swords shining) from the Archduke’s favorite hunting grounds in the Empire’s easternmost marches; a couple of Linz policemen in uniforms so disproportionately extravagant—silver piping, polished jackboots, braided epaulettes—that they nearly outshone their charge, His Imperial Highness himself, the archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the twin thrones of the Dual Monarchy, seated ramrod-straight in the rear of the carriage next to hismorganatic wife the poor Duchess Sophie, both unsmiling, neither waving, His Imperial Highness rather acknowledging the existence of the crowd by giving a series of curt nods beneath the lowering plumes of his archducal helmet, he and his Sophie fading adornments on the frothy Sachertorte that was the Austrian Empire.

“Anybody could shoot him, with him sitting there like that,” said Adolf, momentarily restored at the thought. A veteran of the Cowboy-and-Indian wars of Old Shatterhand, fought in the sagebrush and chaparral of Braunau and environs, he mimed a gun, pointed, fired. “Pow!” As if in synchronism (or premonition) the Archduke glanced around. His eyes met Adolf’s for a fraction of a second; he frowned, and was borne away. Stefanie nudged Adolf impatiently.

“Show some respect,” she said, herself showing (he thought) none for him. “The Archduke! He’s your future Emperor.”

“Pah,” said Adolf. “Emperor? Yours, maybe. Not mine.” He said this sotto voce, aware of most of the crowd’s adulation of Habsburgs (the fools). Not everyone was charmed, not in pro-German Linz. Cries of “*Heil*,” the Germanists’ salutation, vied with the pro-Habsburg “*Hoch!*” Cheers and jeers and comments adulatory and scornful were made. Franz Ferdinand and Sophie appeared oblivious to them all.

“Oh look! She’s so pretty.”

“If only he’d smile more.”

“Yes, but they say he’s quite nice.”

“They didn’t bring the children.”

“How many *do* they have? Three?”

“Four, I think.”

“Get rid of the lot, I say.”

“God save the Archduke!”

“Ach, piss on them.”

“Germany forever!”

“Heil!”

“Hoch!”

The imperial procession had passed, slowed, and come to a halt at the Rathaus, farther up the Hauptplatz. The burgermeister and other notables bustled forth and proceeded to fawn over His Imperially Bored Highness in their best professional manner. Fortunately for Franz Ferdinand, at the end of the speeches there was lunch and a gallop around the stables and a cruise down the Danube, just His Imperial Self and his Sophie (and a retainer or two, or ten)...Stefanie was excited, even thrilled, and deemed the day a success, if only for this. And Adolf—well, Adolf was an artist, and you’d expect an artist to be grumpy and cynical, in this kind of situation. Still, there was artistry in the pomp and circumstance, and Stefanie, for all her longing for a *vie de Bohème*, had a deep reverence within her for the settled order, and family, and God; and she was Austrian enough to love it all. Momentarily, she waxed patriotic.

“God save the Archduke!”

“I’m hungry. Why don’t we, um.”

Plaintively, Adolf pleaded. He was hungry, and tired, and fed up. It was getting on for noon, and he wasn’t used to this kind of excitement and attention to another person not his mother. He was also sweating, and found himself almost (but not quite) longing for his quiet room in the flat in Urfahr (that attic window, those rooftops, the forested Pöstlingberg beyond). Not that Stefanie was any less alluring—somewhat more so, even, with a high color in her cheek and her blue eyes glistening with the emotion of having seen a genuine Imperial; and

yet there were moments, and they were becoming more frequent, when he found himself damning all this man-woman rigmarole, the niceties of social life, the insincerity.

“Monchskeller,” said Stefanie.

“Begging your pardon, what?”

“The Monchskeller, on the Badgasse. It shouldn’t be too crowded, and they do a wonderful Linzer torte.”

Now, this appealed to Adolf. He perked up, even gave his cane a swing. Things were better now, with Linzer torte on the menu! An excellent idea. Few things got his juices flowing like a slice of pie in a restaurant and the concomitant opportunity to sit across from someone and expound on subjects of his choice. Inspired in advance, he offered Stefanie his elbow. She accepted, and arm-in-arm like Biedermeiers they crossed the square again against the melodious background of bells tolling twelve. The crowd was breaking up, with clumps of people gravitating mindlessly toward the Rathaus entrance from which, in an hour or so, the Archduke must emerge. The archducal phaeton sat outside, manned by the postern who had periodically to rouse himself and swat away curious boys. Adolf glanced back.

“What a fine carriage,” he said. “Someday I would like to ride in a carriage like that.”

The expression of this desire was in itself sufficient token of his improving mood; but when they arrived in the Monchskeller, and discovered an astonishing dearth of customers, with plenty of room next to the tall garden windows, Adolf was nearly euphoric. The long tables gleamed in the leafy green light from outside. Flags adorned the low ceiling beams, and in the corner behind the bar counter stood a souvenir of past campaigns, the military standard of the owner’s old regiment, the Styrian Jaegers. The owner himself, Herr Herzl, met them with a toothy grin and “Esteemed lady”s and “Fine gentleman”s galore. Adolf, responding in kind—good Austrian lad that he was—bowed and heel-clicked; masterfully, he selected the middle table of the row nearest the back, adjacent to the trellises of the as-yet empty wine garden; swashbucklingly, he tossed his cane, with a clatter, into the corner. His hat landed on the table. Stefanie settled herself, smoothed her skirts, and gazed into the garden, beyond which a blue

patch of the blue Danube was visible between the neighboring houses and a spreading elm tree.

“Look,” she said. “The river.”

“Ah yes?”

Stefanie watched her companion as he finger-combed his hair, rapidly and nervously, adjusted his collar, cracked his knuckles, and arranged himself in what for him was an informal pose: torso forward, arms folded, a hearty scoutmaster on the verge of laughter, or anecdote. Both: he chuckled, then waxed expansive.

“Ah yes, the river. The beautiful blue Danube, *ja*? Haha? Our glorious Austrian heritage. Do you like the music of Strauss? I too, but a genius, our beloved Herr Johann? Well, frankly, no. Too much the musical *patissier*, too many fancy confections—not that I have anything against fancy confections, quite the contrary! I’m looking forward to this torte, you can believe that! But I’m sure you know what I mean. The Austrian character? The soul of old Vienna? All cosmetics, no substance! Now, as to the Habsburgs, the Archduke, *ja*, I was less than enthusiastic, earlier. Should I apologize? Not at all! Of course, I understand your need for some kind of higher power to adulate,” he said, chortling. “Many people feel that way, hence religion, not so? And of course when one’s gods are also one’s leaders, and gaily caparisoned they are in fancy uniforms and plumed helmets, with a thousand years of aristocracy behind them—well! It’s appealing, I don’t deny it! Like a permanent fancy-dress ball. But their day is done, their time has come, it’s all over with, they should be booted out. No more kings and emperors and queens and archdukes. Ousted, I say!”

Stefanie reclaimed a small corner of the conversation.

“Altogether, I don’t entirely disagree with you, Adolf, but I wanted to express my admiration for His Imperial Highness. I think he’s the best of the lot. And he has handsome mustaches.” She smiled, signifying flippancy, but Adolf had the unfortunate habit, born of literal-mindedness, of marrying high spirits and magisterial contempt for others. He waved a dismissive hand, as if to a servant.

“Handsome mustaches? Best of the lot? That bunch of syphilitic fops? Pah. Look at ‘em. Half Jewish, half Hungarian, and entirely Habsburg.”

“Jewish? The Archduke?”

“Oh yes, yes. Jewish! Well, you know. Not literally. In the way they use the term Jewish in Vienna, the way Herr Lueger uses it, it’s more of an idea than a fact...”

“However Herr Lueger uses it, it’s a fact in my family. We have Jewish cousins by marriage. In Vienna.”

Adolf was nonplussed. Herr Lueger, the Mayor of Vienna, was one of his heroes—a lesser presence in his personal empyrean than, say, Wagner, or Karl May, but a beacon in the ambient darkness, nonetheless. (And once again Stefanie had shown spirit, forthrightness, even insolence: contradicting him, dethroning Herr Lueger, enshrining Goethe, revealing Jewish links by marriage...where was it going to end?)

“Ah! So? Jewish in Vienna, eh? Well, of course. There are, I know, many Jews there. But your, ah connection is by marriage, you say?”

“By marriage, yes. A wealthy industrialist, knighted by the Emperor. Ernst von Kahane, Baron Ottoheinz. He married let me see my aunt Liesl, so. Yes. Cousins, but not by blood. I’ve heard their house is something grand indeed. You should visit them when you’re next in Vienna.”

“Ah. I don’t think so. Well, who knows. Perhaps, although I was planning to stay with my godparents, Herr und Frau Prinz. Distinguished folk, you know. Tell me, are these Jewish relatives of yours wealthy patrons of the arts? Or artists?”

“No. Well, they’re wealthy, of course. And they go to concerts and the opera and they have chamber music recitals at home, yes, and chess tournaments, Baron Ernst is a keen chessplayer. But art? No, I don’t think so.”

“Jews are very good at chamber music and chess.”

“Well, that’s very Austrian also, isn’t it? I mean, you can’t....”

Adolf narrowed his eyes. Their torte arrived. Initially courteous to the publican to the point of obsequiousness, Adolf now ignored him, so intense was his concentration within himself on topics dear to his heart. He stuffed his mouth with torte, chewed vigorously, swallowed, laid aside his fork. His eyes darted; his mouth worked; he blurted his thoughts.

“My mother is not well, you know. She has a cancer. She has a new doctor, a certain Bloch. He is Jewish, by the way. I would prefer she found someone else. I have no faith in his competence. Not because he is Jewish, incidentally, but because I have heard so-so reports from others. Well, I even looked here in Linz for another doctor, but nobody wants to make the trip out to Leonding, and they didn’t take to me, I could tell that straightaway, they thought I was too much the artist, or the outsider, or something, snobs, petty bourgeois in such a typical Austrian way...anyway, to get back to our subject, why am I using the term Austrian in the first place? What does Austrian really mean? Austrian, Austrian. I ask you to consider what that means. Germans of the Eastern Empire. Actually, it means nothing. The only distinction between the Germans of the Eastern Empire—Austrians—us—and the others, the Germans of the Greater Empire, is that conferred by us being ruled by that gang of overdressed syphilitic gypsy barons you seem to admire so much. Their fine mustaches, ha! I’d clip their fine mustaches, I can tell you! Not that I have much more use for the ruling clique of Prussia, I hasten to add. The Kaiser and his crowd, no, thank you very much! Red-faced Junkers with the brains of insects. They’re even worse than our lot, if that’s possible. Now. Allow me to describe to you my ideal form of government.”

The thought passed through Stefanie’s mind, otherwise aswim with pro-Adolf (or at least pro-artist) feelings (or at the very least responding favorably to the mating dance of the eager male), that young Herr Hitler could on occasion be quite overbearing, when the mood took him, as the mood seemed to take him now—well, perhaps overbearing wasn’t quite the right word: importunate? Yes, but with such enthusiasm that he was hard to resist. The very opposite of monotonous, anyway. With his gestures he parried, feinted, and thrust; his face and hands were constantly on the go; he stared, lip-licked, and finger-fiddled. He demanded one’s attention, which almost guaranteed that he wouldn’t get Stefanie’s. Such self-confidence, she

thought, would be apt, no doubt, in the presence of worshippers, but she worshipped him not, and couldn't imagine anyone else doing so...he was an artist, after all! No one took the political ravings of artists seriously. Such palaver was for late nights in the smoky confines of a small garret eave-secreted in some great city's Bohemian quarter (she dreamed, for a second, of herself in just such a garret: Life, Love, and Art, the blessed triumvirate of youth's empire!). No, no one would ever beg him to repeat himself. No one would dream of designing society along his lines. No one would restructure his or her life according to the ravings of Adolf the Artist! She felt pity (constant companion of her future life), pity for the intensity and seriousness and probable future failure of a bright but muddled young man. Only eighteen she might be, but she'd already seen, in her own family, in her own father and uncles and cousin and various distant relatives, enough shortcomings and fallings-short and half-measures and life-imposed compromises to recognize failure in the making. Poor Adolf. And yet! The intensity was rare.

A shiver passed through her, heralding another of her spells. Migraine, the doctor had said. Nonsense, had been Stefanie's reply. She rubbed her eyes.

Adolf didn't notice. He had moved from the specific, his audience of one, to the general, an abstract, celestial audience of Hermanns and Frederick Redbeards and dumb but willing German yeomen. Talking all the while, he was gazing through the window at the sliver of blue Danube and the wooded Pöstlingberg beyond, momentarily indifferent to ambient banalities. He appeared to ignore, for instance, a mild metallic burning odor that caught in Stefanie's nose right away.

"Uggh."

The smell seeped faintly into the air, as if a frying pan had been left on the fire in the kitchen; then, suddenly, it was gone. Stefanie took a deep breath. She blinked away the rosettes of eyestrain. Specks of light danced before her eyes, then disappeared. In the distance there was a low screech, as of a chair being dragged across the floor. A warm breeze played over her neck.

“German ideals, of course,” Adolf was saying. “We Germans have never had much luck with the parliamentary style of government. We have our own needs, our own dictates. Why should we try to imitate countries that after all are decaying from within? These liberal and socialistic parties speak constantly of importing the French, or the English, or the American, system...”

Adolf’s ideal form of government, however tedious to Stefanie, seemed to be arousing interest in other quarters, which was hardly surprising, she thought, as Adolf had developed a very audible, indeed hectoring, tone of voice; however, she had not been aware of other customers sitting down nearby, but one or two must have, behind their backs. Anyway, she was definitely having another of those attacks, longer than usual. She wondered if something obvious triggered them: strain, anticipation, excitement? Such attacks in a girl her age were quite absurd and irritating, like an insistently recurring bout of heart palpitations or some other ailment she associated with nervous old people who spent most of their lives taking their pulses and sipping muddy water at thermal spas...a violent throb in her temples was followed by a swiftly-dissipating mist that yielded to prism-like clarity with a hint, too, of prism-like distortion, or refraction, around the edges, like a shimmering gilded frame. On this particular occasion, while Adolf spoke of his ideals, through the dissolving blur and subsequent lens-sharpness Stefanie discerned the hard-edged profile of a stranger sitting in part-shadow at an adjoining table, smoke rising from an invisible pipe or cigar (odorless? perhaps it was a cigarette), his hands cupped in front of him, his legs crossed in somewhat grotesque fashion, as if he were seated sidesaddle on a horse. Was he a cripple? An athlete? Another artist, or agent provocateur? Stefanie idly shifted her full attention from her haranguing companion to this new arrival. Adolf seemed not to notice. The man’s face, apart from its profile—whose aquiline nose, weak chin, and high sloping forehead were as sharp as if they had been etched in glass—was oddly vague and imprecise, like a much-erased drawing. His shoulders, or what Stefanie could see of them, seemed to be shaking, as in silent laughter, although there was no corresponding mirth reflected on his features: perhaps he was ill? His eyes seemed to be closed, or deep in shadow. Stefanie’s attention was drawn again to his legs, which were as

imprecise in outline as his face was in feature, as if heavy clouds were blotting out the sun (but they weren't, because she could see through the window into the cheerful sunlit world beyond), yet in some way those legs were grotesque, incomplete—not that she could see at all clearly under the neighboring table....

“...I firmly believe, and I'm aware that I probably offend you, I know some educated young ladies of liberal conscience would be quite shocked at my words, *ja, ja*, but I must say it, I do believe in the importance of maintaining national characteristics, that is to say: No foreigners! Now of course—before you say how shocked you are, before you remind me how Goethe would disagree, and so on—when you think about it, this is precisely the Greco-Roman ideal. Have you read Chamberlain? One of the most eminent English authors, I only recently discovered him, and I must say I am finding him very stimulating... but I see you are shocked.”

Stefanie was indeed shocked, but not at Adolf's theorizing. She had found a precise comparison for the mental image evoked by the spasmodic shifting, or uncrossing (with hoof-like clattering of feet), of her neighbor's legs: the stables at her Uncle Karl's farm in the Salzkammergut, specifically (she remembered the acrid mingling of the smells, hay-urine-manure) the momentary loss of balance of a cow being milked. Or a horse stung by a fly. Or—and she squarely faced the final, diabolical image—a goat, startled, stumbling...the image was absurd, then terrifying for a second, then absurd *and* terrifying; then, as soon as the image began to fade, so did the mysterious stranger at the neighboring table, gathering up him- or itself (what was the appropriate pronoun for an angel, fallen or not?) and heading for the door in the corner (what door? there was no door there), but on his or its way out—moving in an ataxic, jerky, pantomime-horse kind of way—turning to look back, as Stefanie thought, not at her but at Adolf, and in an unaccountably intimate, devouring way, like a lover, or long-lost family member, enormous eyes flaming with a hideous immortality, a misshapen head that seemed to culminate—yes, she could have predicted it (*had* predicted it)—in an odd, stiff little coiffure that resembled horns...*were* horns. Of course.

Then, thank God, he, or it, was gone, fading into a small whirlwind of shadow. The smell that lingered was one that had earned its place in folklore.

Stefanie shook her head violently.

“My God! I have seen the devil,” she murmured, head in hands.

“Ah,” said Adolf. “You are ill?” There was a touch of impatience in his voice at this further sign of the unpredictability of this young woman, or women in general; indeed, his mind reluctantly filled with images of horrible illness setting in, unseemly dashing to and fro, a cab commandeered for the hospital, encounters with family members, feeble explanations offered and instantly dismissed, himself made to feel inferior again...

“No, I’m quite all right,” she said. “But I will go home now, I think.”

“But.” He was confused, nonplussed, surprised. “It’s not even two o’clock.”

“And it was this morning we met! Already we’ve spent four hours together. It’s enough, Herr Adolf. It was enjoyable, yes, but it’s enough. My Aunt Marie will be wondering what has become of me. And I need to rest.”

With a firmness of demeanor that impressed Adolf, while simultaneously pushing him to the brink of despair, Stefanie made preparations to leave. Sensing departure, their host Herr Herzl appeared, hovered, allowed a touch of hand-wringing impatience to show at Adolf’s laborious (because reluctant) counting-out of coins that nonetheless ended with a surprisingly large gratuity being tossed disdainfully onto the table (thus restoring the landlord to the state of bluff grovelling that was his trademark).

“Many thanks, esteemed young gentleman. Your servant, Fraulein.”

Adolf retrieved his cane, clapped his artist’s cap on his head, and bowingly gestured for Stefanie to precede him. They went through the door into the burning sunlight of the Hauptplatz.

“I would be most grateful”—oh now he reminded himself how lovely she was, with her hazel eyes, golden hair and honey-brown skin, his longed-for Stefanie, dream-companion of his haunted nighttime hours!—“if you would consent to accompany me again, Fraulein Stefanie, perhaps to the opera performance I mentioned?”

“*Ja*. Perhaps, Herr Adolf.”

“And now? May I? Escort you, perhaps?”

“I have a visit to make. Thank you, but no.”

“I kiss your hand, dear young lady.”

Adolf Hitler did so, and bowed, relief and disappointment struggling within him: Relief, that he no longer had to play the courtier (not that he did so very well), pay attention, laugh at jokes, agree with the nonsensical opinions of another, flutter about, think of banalities, spend money; and disappointment, of course, at leaving the current object of his desire, who might now be on her way elsewhere for good, outraged or shocked or disappointed or disgusted—yes, he could all too easily imagine the type of smooth-talking middle-class or aristocratic Hungarian and/or Jewish skirt-chaser who might win her heart, a man with a box at the opera, a yacht at Fiume, a house in the Vienna Woods, and a well-rehearsed line of seductive patter; exactly the kind of suave Romeo, in fact, he had disapprovingly taken note of in Vienna. Just the type, he was sure, who would eagerly engage in silken chit-chat about Goethe and with supreme confidence offer his arm on the dance floor; raise a cape-cloaked arm to summon a cab out of nowhere on a rainy night; airily speak French, and Italian, and English, and say “old chap,” and order expensive aperitifs; the kind of devious, disloyal, untrustworthy cosmopolite, in short, who would undermine Adolf’s very notion of nationhood, i.e., civilization itself. Through his confusion he glimpsed, as he often did, salvation, with himself as Wagner reborn, successfully manning the barricades in a great social and cultural revolution, a French Revolution for Germany...and Austria, too...anyway, Stefanie was too young, that was it. Deeply as he desired her, he knew himself to be too mature, too seasoned, too steeped in learning and philosophy, too elevated by the fates and ambitious to waste time on a girl, or girls. Some day one would heed the call and join him in his quest; but she would be more pliable, more understanding, more loyal, than the temperamental, if beautiful, Stefanie. The thought of the future and what it would hold reassured him, as it always did. He gave his cane a flourish and took out his pocket-watch. (Faintly, regret trembled, prompted by the fresh memory of Stefanie’s awe; then it vanished, vanquished.) Two fifteen. That would give him a good three hours or so in the library. He was halfway through Chamberlain, and wanted to finish the book

before going home to Leonding. He would tell Mamma he had shared a torte with Stefanie von Rothenberg. She would be impressed.

As for Stefanie, deeply shaken, she tried to explain her experience to the statues and altar and immanent God at the Mariakirche, a dark, chilly place dimly illuminated by red-flickering candles honoring the forgotten dead. But for a priest, the church was empty, yet it was full of the vast echoes of a living silence: footfalls; a creaking beam; a door closing; a scuffling churchmouse...dear God, said Stefanie to God, make me normal again. If what I saw was real, make me blind; if a vision, make me see as others see.

There was, of course, no reply. Then the priest shuffled by.

“Father.”

“Yes, my child?”

“I want to make my confession, Father.”

She confessed, but Father Rupprecht was an old priest who'd been in Linz since the days of Metternich and wanted only an easeful slide into dotage and death, with no sudden intrusions of mysticism and hallucinations to upset his nice parish and tear open his neatly-wrapped package of a remote Christ triumphant and remoter God serene. Grudgingly (he had an appointment with an osteopath, then a game of chess at Meinherr Schmitz the barber's) he heard Stefanie's confession, which she watered down accordingly; then, paternally, impatiently, indifferently, he extended the benediction.

“Go in peace, my child.”

In turmoil she went.

* * *

Gustave

Two

My reading of the Jeanrenaud book had been interrupted by sudden sleep yielding to unsettled dreams of little Hitlers here and bigger Hitlers there. A busy morning followed; then halfway through the afternoon I had an appointment with Gax's shrink, the afore-mentioned Dr. LeCluyse. I was kept waiting for half an hour before being ushered into the presence. A spidery corolla of hairs played around the doctor's bald head in the faint light from the half-shuttered window. Hunched forward, not looking at me directly, he fidgeted with a glass paperweight containing edelweiss, "Souvenir of Zermatt." A mingled stench of mothballs and deodorants roared out of his oversized suit when he raised an arm and bade me take a seat.

"You have seen an angel, you say, Mr. Termi?"

The psychiatrist was unctuous, yet patronizing, in the way of his kind.

"Yes. Actually, it's doctor, doctor. Doctor Termi."

"Of course. A doctor of...letters?"

"Yes." I almost apologized.

"And you were recommended by Mr. Gax, the ah journalist?"

"Yes, yes."

I was tiring of this interrogation. I had begun to regret my decision to consult a psychiatrist, even (or especially) one recommended by Guy Gax, the moment I walked through the door of Dr. LeCluyse's richly appointed surgery and realized that at that instant, even if I promptly turned on my heel and left, I would be seven hundred and fifty francs the poorer.

He deposited the paperweight on the table and spoke, smilingly.

“Ah yes. Well. What a coincidence, sir. Angels. Tsk-tsk. Tell me: Do you suffer from the migraine?”

“No.”

“Ah. Sometimes what we call migraine aura can cause hallucinations, you see...well, then. Oh, such visions—angels, devils, monadian entities, and so on—are not unknown, in fact they’re quite popular these days. Angels are definitely in the wind. You know, one of my patients maintains that she came upon a naked angel hunkering on his hams in her bathtub.”

“Ah yes? What bullshit.”

“Precisely. Wishful thinking, eh? But note I use the masculine pronoun, whereas angels are traditionally presumed to be neuter. Not in this case, oh no. The naked male figure, the fetal position, the bathtub...need one pursue it any further? I think not. Besides which, the lady has always claimed to have visions of nude males. Once, as I recall, while she was watching the skiing silver-medal contests on the television she had a vision of Johnny Hallyday, the singer, dressed in a very louche tutu, making suggestive gestures astride her sofa. No, no, I think we know only too well what lies down that road. By the way, she is now an outpatient at the Bel-Air clinic, and sings in a choir in one of the suburban churches.”

“Doctor, the lady in question can be a deep-sea diver or a rugby champion for all I care. I hardly see the relevance. My vision was in no way sexual, I assure you.”

“Ah, you assure me, do you? And yet, sir. And yet you say—I have my notes right here—the vision presented itself as a kind of ‘Aryan poster boy;’ a ‘blond youth;’ a ‘young man with long blond hair;’ ...now I wonder, Mr. Termi, I truly wonder, if such terminology could be described as not containing a sexual element.” The wretch leaned forward, clearing his throat in an exaggerated, cinematic way: ah-HUUUU ammmhem. “I understand you are unmarried?”

“Yes. However, it may interest you to know that I was on my way to visit a lady friend when I had the vision,” I said, cravenly. “A lady friend I visit on a weekly basis.”

“How instructive. A forlorn journey of abandoned heterosexuality interrupted by a sudden vision of the poignantly homosexual truth. The old story, ah I’ve heard it told a hundred times in a hundred different ways. Although, admittedly, the angel adds a, shall I say distinctive touch. Incidentally, Mr. Termo, when you were younger, did you have any especially close friendships with other boys?”

“Yes, indeed. One of them was with Guy Gax, who recommended you, and whom I’m going to kill, as soon as I leave here.”

I rose and departed stonily, preserving I hoped some small shred of dignity; after all, it was my money. As I passed through the waiting room on my way out I overheard the secretary, a porcelain *allumeuse* of a certain age, call out the name of LeCluyse’s next victim over the speakerphone:

“Mademoiselle Jeanrenaud is here, Doctor. If you’re through with Mr. um.”

I stopped, turned. A lady, laterally lighted by the desk lamp, was sitting on a sofa on the far side of the waiting room. A couple seconds’ scrutiny confirmed a resemblance to my memory of the photograph on the back flap of *Adoration*, the photograph from which I had been, in an idle moment, trying to tease an identity: sociable? sapphic? atheistic? good-time gal? bluestocking?

Mademoiselle, at least.

I stepped forward, impressive (I hoped) in my Burberry, elegant leather gloves held limply in my left hand.

“Mademoiselle Martine Jeanrenaud?”

“Yes.”

“Ah!” I exclaimed. “Aha! It is you, then!”

“It is I, monsieur. And I see it is you, also, whoever you are.”

Not totally unused to being accosted by strange men, then, attractive as she was, holding her own well: I'd give her, I thought, 40 or so, maybe just this side thereof. She was cool and appraising, with a half-smile of anticipation on her face, face cocked slightly to one side like a curious dog; and of course her face in life had the odd wrinkle that was charitably absent from the photographed, airbrushed version. She was subtly clad in maroon tweed that went well with her (as I had surmised) russet hair, hair a bit fuller than in the photograph. Only in translating to celluloid her round, owlish glasses had the camera been entirely faithful to the original.

“Gustave Termi. *Dr. Termi*,” I amended, with the pomposity of the forlorn. “I'm reading your book *Adoration*.”

We shook hands.

“Oh? You're in a very small minority, then. Do you like it?”

“Very much. I'm intrigued. Very intrigued. Not only for reasons of history—I'm a professor of history, by the way, at the College...”

Dr. LeCluyse appeared at the door of his office. He looked back and forth, disapproval chasing obsequiousness across his face like a pair of battling lizards.

“Mademoiselle Jeanrenaud?”

“Sorry, doctor.”

“Never mind him,” I said. “The best he could do was tell me I was homosexual, which I most emphatically am not. Utter waste of time, Mademoiselle. You'd be better off having a coffee with me.”

“I think not, Monsieur...Termi? This is a long-standing appointment.”

“Later, then? There are serious points of history I would like to discuss.”

“Oh, dear. What did I get wrong?”

“No, no, it's not that. It's more the mystical angle. May I call you, then?”

Flustered, under Dr. LeCluyse's gimlet eye, she confessed to being "in the book."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

I bowed slightly, tipped an imaginary hat. And called her that evening, after first canceling—again—with Giulia.

"Giulia, I'm terribly sorry."

"Is all right, *dottore*."

"But this is two weeks in a row, my dear Giulietta. I feel I must make it up to you in some way."

"A-o, *professore*. You want me, you gimme a call. AO-Kye?"

Fair enough. It was all too characteristic of me—so professorial, some would say—to sentimentalize a purely economic (and sexual) relationship; yet I did, for Giulia was an honest, spirited girl of my blood, *paesana mia*, a kissing cousin in all but name. Then I called Martine. Oddly, in an age of infernal answering machines, she answered in person.

"Mademoiselle Jeanrenaud?" It's, etc.

"Ah, my sole reader! I thought I recognized your voice, monsieur."

Oh, but you underestimate the significance of your work...blablabla. Standard banalities after that (weather, cost of living, cost of psychoanalysts)—with the brief exception of, from my end, a barrage of animus directed at Dr. LeCluyse, on whose behalf she said, "Now, now, he's helped me through a couple of rough patches"—and in closing the expected invitation *à la danse*, or a drink, or at the very least a cup of coffee or tea, say mid-afternoon the next day (a Monday)? Mid-afternoon was less compromising and more businesslike, and there was scant likelihood of awkward advances amid financial magazines and thunderous cigarette-coughing of the Ovaltine-sipping elderly and the brisk comings and goings of office workers.

Almost as soon as I hung up, the phone rang again and Guy Gax's aggressive baritone barged down the wire.

"Meet me for dinner," he said, peremptorily. "Lyrique at eight."

"Now, you're not going to..."

"Not at all," he said, with an attempt to inject geniality into his tone of voice. "No mockery of celestial visions, I promise you. Although I might ask a couple of questions, purely out of scientific interest. No, I have just a good old-fashioned litany of complaints, mostly about my ex-wife."

I had an Italo-Balkan History class at one o'clock and planned to be seated immediately afterward, or as fast as my bulbous legs could carry me, at a marble table in the corner next to the newspaper rack at the Café de Rive, with in front of me hot tea in a glass, Russian style. The Rive district is, or was, Geneva's Little Russia, with such accents of the Motherland as said tea in a glass, and Slatkine's bookstore, and the gilt-domed Russian church on the Rue Beauvais, just up the way in a quiet neighborhood of handsome two-story town houses that has something about it even to this day of Saltykov-Schedrin's Saratov-on-the-Volga, or Tolstoy's dusty Kazan. All this was Geneva's legacy from that doughty bunch of Russian expats (one named Lenin, another Plekhanov, and a third, Bukharin, who saluted Geneva as "the Holy City of Russian thought") when the world's worst horror seemed to be inequality, and serfdom, and starvation, and the Tsar's Cossacks on horseback. Then those who'd fled returned in '17 and got to work on horrors beyond all imagining, yielding the stage only, and not much, to Stefanie von Rothenberg's boyfriend, once he got going....

I arrived early at the café and filled the time waiting for Martine with another visit to the Europe of her gods and devils.