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Murder in Berlin

ERIC MAISEL

MURDER IN BERLIN

Eric Maisel

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1.

Hill chopped onions for his spaghetti sauce. His children were due in an hour. His cell phone rang and he wiped his hands before answering.

"Hill," he said.

"Pack," Cohen said.

"Where am I going?"

"Berlin."

"What's up?"

"I'll tell you at the airport."

"At the airport?"

"There's a personal part. The car arrives in twenty minutes."

Hill called his ex-wife.

"I have to go away," he said.

"All right," she said after a long moment.

It was a lovely response. She could have complained or asked all sorts of questions.

"Thank you," Hill said.

"I'll put the kids on," she said.

"I'll just be a minute with them. The car's coming."

"Where are you going?"

"Berlin."

"Berlin," she repeated.

He'd told her stories about Berlin, about the time he'd lived there as an enforcer for the Crescent Stars, a Turkish motorcycle gang.

"Be careful," she said.

"I will."

Hill spoke briefly with his children. Paul seemed genuinely disappointed. Caroline,

who'd gotten it into her head to become a world traveler, said wistfully by way of goodbye, "I have always wanted to see Berlin." Hill stifled a laugh. Luke didn't seem to care one way or the other and only wanted to describe the antics of his new fish.

A truck rumbled invisibly down a cobblestoned side street. His cell phone rang: it was the Parkway driver, letting Hill know that he'd arrived in front of Hill's building. Hill carried his bag downstairs and let the driver stow it away. He settled back and closed his eyes. There was little traffic and they crossed Manhattan quickly. Hill found Lou Cohen sitting in the executive lounge.

The two men shook hands. Cohen stood a good six feet to Hill's six-feet-four. Hill smiled—and hugged Cohen.

"What was that for?"

"Nothing. Can't two men hug?"

"Not too often."

They sat close together.

"What is it?" Hill said.

"A man was found dead at the Pankow Grand. That's our flagship property in Berlin. Murdered—and here's the thing. He's a Jew, Michael Silverstein is his name, not exactly a celebrity but fairly well known. A Jew getting murdered in Berlin can't possibly be good news for Parkway. See what kind of exposure we have."

"Okay."

"I've sent you everything we know attached to an email."

"Okay. I'll read it on the plane."

"The second thing is personal," Cohen said. "My father's family is from Berlin. My paternal grandfather was born in Berlin in 1890 and lived there until World War I broke out. He'd already married my mother and they'd had my father and three other children. The war broke out, he went in, and within months he was gassed to death. Right after that my grandmother left Germany for America—and avoided the Holocaust." Cohen stared off. "My grandfather, Abraham Cohen, is buried in a Jewish cemetery in Berlin. No one has put flowers on his grave in almost a century."

Hill nodded. "I can do that."

"And maybe take a picture of it?"

"You know--"

"I know! It may be gone. It may be desecrated. Maybe I don't want to see it. Use your judgment."

"Okay."

Cohen got up. “And be careful. I know you have history with Berlin.”

Hill stood. “Can I hug you again?”

“Enough!” Cohen. But he gave Hill an old-fashioned bear hug.

2.

They reached cruising altitude. It was eight in the evening, New York time, two in the morning in Berlin. Michael Silverstein had been dead for seven hours. Hill ordered a Scotch from the flight attendant. The Parkway executive jet, with Hill its only passenger, glided noiselessly over the Atlantic.

Hill rubbed his eyes. The onions had gotten to them. He read the notes on Silverstein that Cohen had emailed but he found his mind wandering. He thought of Cohen's grandfather, a Jew defending Germany in that awful trench war and mercifully dying before receiving Hitler's repayment. Then he thought of his ex-wife, whose beauty stunned him every time he pictured her.

The phone beside him rang, waking him up. It was Cohen again.

"Still up?" Hill said.

"Thinking about Silverstein."

"I'm thinking about things, too."

"Look," Cohen said. "I'm setting you up with a reporter. He's an Israeli living in Berlin. He'll paint you a picture of Jews in today's Berlin. The religious ones from the old Soviet Union, the German-born ones, the first-world expats—okay?"

"Okay."

"Are you listening?" Cohen said.

"I'm tired."

"Then sleep."

At 11 p.m. Hill woke up abruptly, got to his feet, and headed to the bathroom, where he splashed cold water on his face. Back in his seat, he thought of Priscilla. The divorce broke his heart. It was a fresh wound and an implacable reality. It was painful beyond words to be a sometimes father to his three children. Who was to blame for their train wreck of a marriage? Priscilla or Hill? He replayed one of their fights …

It was a fight about whether the children should be allowed to know about Hill's father, who ran a dance hall-cum-brothel in a dirt village just south of the Korean DMZ. Hill wanted his father completely out of the picture. Priscilla argued for forgiveness, leniency, and second chances. You shouldn't just write off family! Well,

Hill replied, sometimes you really should!

He dozed, then woke him up again, a smile on his face. He was happy about the murder—not that this man Silverstein had died but that it looked to be interesting. Why had an affluent New York Jew pulled up stakes and moved to Berlin? As tired as Hill felt, that question perked him up. His love of Cohen gave him a stake in the question. He knew how impossible it would be for Cohen to visit Berlin—to even contemplate visiting Berlin. To live there would have been unthinkable! The Holocaust was amazingly fresh in Cohen's mind. But Michael Silverstein was not of Cohen's generation—he was a full generation younger. Did that make all the difference?

At two a.m. he closed his eyes again. Only bad dreams came. He'd been having bad dreams all his life. When he was seven, his father had taken his wife and their three children to live in Korea in a whorehouse. Hill was the oldest. Every night one of the children woke up screaming from a nightmare. If they started screaming before two a.m. no one except the other children noticed, as his parents were downstairs running the bar, where music blared continually.

At three a.m. Hill gave up on sleeping. Berlin was an hour away. He signaled for the flight attendant, who arrived with an insanely perky smile on her face.

"Have a good rest?" she bubbled.

"Let me have some black coffee."

"And some breakfast?"

"Sure," Hill said. "And some breakfast."

She recited a menu. Hill had a hard time concentrating.

"Can you give me that again?" he said.

She enthusiastically repeated the menu.

"I'll have the bacon and egg croissant," Hill said. "And coffee, please!"

Fifty minutes later they landed. Hill stood up, uncoiling his long frame and giving a mental nod to Berlin—a city he'd known all-too-well in the days when he'd been a criminal.

3.

Hill reset his watch. It was 10 a.m., Berlin time. The flight had taken eight hours and the executive jet had crossed six time zones.

Hill spoke English going through immigration. Had he spoken German he would have immediately aroused suspicion. Americans were notorious for their inability to speak other languages. Even a friendly "Good morning!" in German would have raised eyebrows. That had happened to him more than once before he'd learned to act the befuddled English-speaking American.

A driver from the hotel was waiting. He rushed Hill through the postwar, post-wall streets of an undivided city toward the Pankow Grand Hotel, where Mike Silverstein had been found murdered in room 3202 at eight p.m. the previous evening. Hill sat back on the plush leather, thinking. The car swerved right and left through traffic. Ornate pre-war mansions and hideous post-war apartment blocks whizzed by. The driver made a big show of getting Hill to the hotel as fast as possible. This was customary. Employees of Parkway World Properties jumped when Hill was around.

Hill frightened them. His official title was chief investigative officer. His job was to assess risk—and if risk existed, to make it go away. Jewel robbery at a Parkway hotel? Murder at a Parkway resort? Hill flew in and investigated. Once on the ground, he had carte blanche to pursue anything hotel-related that smelled fishy. This driver knew it and Hill felt for him. He was a middle-aged man with haggard look. You could read poverty and pain and something else in his tight expression. Hill leaned forward and touched him on the shoulder.

"There's no rush," Hill said in German. "Don't worry about the traffic."

Hill could—and would—turn you over to the local police if he found out about one of your little scams. And who didn't have a little scam? In the world of hotels and resort properties, little scams were as common as small bottles of shampoo. The haggard driver found it impossible to relax. He kept driving too fast, as if his life depended on getting Hill to the hotel in the shortest time possible.

"Have you been driving for the hotel long?" Hill asked, hoping to calm him.

The man nodded.

"What's your name?"

"Altman. Altman Vogel."

"I bet you've seen a lot of changes in Berlin in the last few years."

The man considered how to answer. "It's getting better," Altman said. "It was worse before."

"Before?"

"Here in East Berlin. I was a writer," Altman said. "The government considered me a dissident. The Stasi arrested me. I spent a long time in one of their jails. No one knew where I was."

Hill leaned back. The Pankow Grand Hotel sat in former East Berlin. The stories Hill would hear on this trip would be colored by the fact that the hotel existed on one side of a line that was now imaginary but that once had been as real as a line could be. The Berlin Wall dividing two ideologies might be gone but the ghosts remained.

"What did you write?"

"Poetry."

Hill nodded. "I'll tell them at the hotel to have you drive me," Hill said. "I'd like to have you drive me while I'm in Berlin. There might be a lot of sitting around but it'll be overtime." Hill watched Altman's mixed reaction. "Unless you'd rather not."

"I can't afford to lose this job," Altman said nervously. He glanced back at Hill. "If we had an accident or something—I can't afford to lose this job."

"What if I promise?" Hill said.

Altman Vogel relaxed a little. "Then I wouldn't mind."

Hill nodded. "Good. That's settled! You always drive on Saturday?"

"And Sunday."

"That isn't so good for family life."

"It isn't," Vogel agreed.

"Okay! Then you'll drive for me starting Monday. This weekend you get a vacation with pay."

"Why?" Vogel asked suspiciously.

"Because of what you went through with the Stasi."

Vogel's eyes welled up.

Hill thought about the murdered man. Did Silverstein not know that Jews were still hated in Germany? Hill had grown up in a place where he was hated. He grew up in a Korean village next to an Army base near the DMZ dividing North Korea and South Korea. Why in God's name go back to a place like that, where he was hated?—the exact thing that Silverstein had done.

In any bar in any back street of any European city, you learned that Jews were still despised. Didn't Mike Silverstein know this? Or had he come to Berlin precisely because he did know this?

Not only had Mike Silverstein moved to Berlin a decade before at the age of 30, but he'd married a German woman a foot taller than himself, had three children with her, and launched a successful chain of day spas. It had to make you smile: a Jew running fancy day spas in Berlin. It didn't compute.

They arrived at the hotel. The hotel had no markings—it was one of those boutique hotels whose lure was that just managing to spot it made you feel like an insider.

"So you're driving for me?" Hill said.

"Okay!" the poet replied.

Hill smiled. "Excellent! I'll see you on Monday. I'll take care of it."

Inside the hotel Hill traveled up a glowing purple escalator from the street level to the lobby. He passed a handsome middle-aged man with a clipped beard who looked like a filmmaker or an architect. An elegant young man in an expensive suit, sporting a day's stubble of beard, seemed to have stepped right off the cover of the Esquire he nonchalantly carried. A spiky-haired, high-heeled woman wore a short leather jacket of the same purple as the glowing neon escalator, as if she'd dressed especially for this trip from the lobby to the street.

This was not your father's East Berlin …

When he got off the escalator, people fell over themselves to greet him. Both the manager and the assistant manager rushed across the lobby. The manager was a tall, thin German by the name of Helmut Kirsch, elegantly dressed in an expensive pinstriped suit. The assistant manager—a Frenchwoman in her early thirties—was likewise overdressed. They introduced themselves and he addressed Kirsch in German and the woman, one Juliette Morel, in French. They gave him that look that Europeans always gave him: was this an American who could actually speak other languages?

Hill was.

He disentangled himself from the German and the Frenchwoman and followed the bellhop across the lobby. Something about the lobby disturbed him—but he let that go. He had a similar feeling of unease as he strode down the wide hallway to his suite. Inside, he called the Berlin police contact Cohen had given him and made arrangements to meet.

After a quick shower he rode down to the lobby, found the security office, and introduced himself to the head of security, a man named Grunewald. Grunewald had been a cop in Bavaria and had the thick chest and square jaw of policemen everywhere. He looked to be about sixty, taciturn, and shrewd enough to feign politeness.

"I was doing something when you arrived," Grunewald said. "An angry guest."

"No problem."

Dealing with security was always tricky. You never knew—they might be involved. That had happened more than once.

"I have a .38 for you," Grunewald said. "Will that do?"

"It will."

Hill took the unloaded weapon that Grunewald handed him.

"Putting that under your pillow?" Grunewald said.

"That makes sleeping uncomfortable."

Grunewald's office was small and chilly. Hill figured Grunewald for the kind of man who preferred hardship to luxury. The Pankow Grand Hotel, with its designer touches and expensive amenities, had to make a man like Grunewald shake his head. Grunewald could buy beer for a week on what it cost to buy a single beer at any one of the hotel bars. A solid, old-fashioned man, Hill thought—possibly even a good man.

"Do you have children?" Hill said.

"Two grown ones. One's in Munich and the other's in Dresden."

Hill nodded. "Why did you leave Bavaria?"

"My wife has family in Pankow. Her parents are aged—her father's crippled and her mother isn't very lucid. She wanted to be near them."

Hill decided that he liked the bulky, taciturn ex-cop from Bavaria. He thanked Grunewald for the .38, left the chilly office, and started in the direction of the lobby. A moment later his cell phone rang. It was the Israeli reporter Cohen had mentioned, announcing that he was in the hotel and ready to chat.

4.

Two minutes later Hill and the reporter found themselves sitting across from one another in the hotel's Library Bar. Ari Cushman, a curly-haired thirty-year-old, wore wire-rimmed glasses to match his wiry frame. They drank coffee.

"Berlin in the second decade of the twenty-first century is such a congenial place for Jews," Ari Cushman said, "that Jewish schools and synagogues are the only non-embassy buildings in Berlin requiring 24/7 police protection." He shook his head. "Jews here hold all sorts of opinions about what it's like to live here. Some say it's a great place—the best place in the world. You can go to the monthly Jewish disco night—I kid you not—and talk to young German Jews wearing t-shirts that read 'I'm kosher, kiss me.' They dance under Star of David and menorah flags and tell you that they're happy and that they never think about the Holocaust. I interviewed one guy who told me, 'There is no country in the world in which a Jew can live better than in Germany.' You have to remember—he was twenty years old."

Hill nodded.

"And he was eleven years old before he knew he was Jewish—his mother thought it too dangerous to tell him."

They fell silent. The bartender muted the sound on the plasma television—a nod to Hill.

"We have Jewish radio programs, Jewish bands, Jewish dances, kosher restaurants, refurbished synagogues—you can even see the Orthodox in their traditional black hats on the streets of Prenzlauer Berg on Friday nights rushing to temple. The Jewish community here is certainly growing—maybe there are 20,000 Jews in Berlin now. Most of them are immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Germany relaxed its immigration laws toward Jews in 1990. Since then, maybe 200,000 Jews have arrived in Germany. Many of them are the immigrant religious—you know, the kind that propagate a lot. So the Jewish preschools are actually overcrowded and you have to fight for a spot in the 'good' ones—you might think that you were on the upper west side of Manhattan." He shook his head. "But growth doesn't equal safety. Maybe the exact opposite. The more of us there are, the worse it may become."

The reporter added another sugar to his coffee. Hill waited.

"It's confusing," Cushman resumed. "You wouldn't confuse P-Berg with Williamsburg. But you can certainly get your head turned around a little and think that it's nicer here than it really is. You know, old P-Berg warehouses converted into

designer stores and restaurants, all the micro-breweries, the boutiques, the cafés, the pubs, the hundred-year-old renovated houses—Jews walking around, some hurrying but some strolling, acting as if they belong, acting as if it's safe. It's very much like the Sufi tale of the blind men and the elephant. Ask one Jew and he might tell you it's heaven. Ask another Jew and you'd get a very different story."

"You knew Silverstein?" Hill said.

"Of course. He was one of our stars. He threw parties. That house of his on Unter Den Linden—it was probably a more important Berlin Jewish monument that any synagogue or Holocaust memorial. A Jew living in a house like that! On Unter Den Linden! Some people were proud of him—a wealthy New York Jew coming to Berlin isn't the same as an immigrant Jew coming from Russia or the Ukraine. He was kind of a poster boy for possibility. Look! Come from Brooklyn! Come from Los Angeles! Come from Tel Aviv! You, too, can make a good life in Berlin! Others thought that he was too 'out there'—too public, too visible. Not that he was political—if anything, he was a kind of an apologist. He would always lead with a 'good German' story. Even marrying that German woman … "

"He was out there, how?"

Cushman smiled wryly. "Well, those parties. He was an impresario. He'd have well-known speakers come to give lectures at his day spas and then throw them a party at his mansion. New Age types—if you wrote a bestselling book on angels or communicating with the dead, he'd bring you to Berlin to speak. Never Jewish speakers!—isn't that interesting? So he wasn't advocating for anything Jewish—rather the opposite. But he was a public Jew—and he looked so Jewish."

Hill couldn't help but smile.

"Would he have been a target?" Hill said.

Cushman shook his head. "I don't think so. I mean, how many skinheads would be aware of an all-day angel seminar or the guy who put it on? I don't think anyone had Silverstein on their radar as 'that Jew.' And no Orthodox would be on him for not being Jewish enough—they're too busy with their Torah studies to notice such things. Plus they don't fight—they let other people fight their battles." Cushman thought for a moment. "Actually, that's not true. I know a rabbi who despised Silverstein."

"I wouldn't mind speaking to that rabbi."

"Not today. It's Saturday."

"What about tomorrow?"

"I'll see what I can do." He snapped his fingers. "I just remembered! Tonight's the monthly Jewish disco dance. You shouldn't miss that. Where else can you see a Jewish recreation of the 80s?"

"Sounds like the place to be."

"Come around midnight." Cushman wrote out the address. "I'll meet you there." The reporter finished his coffee and got ready to leave. "My own feeling? Right now Jews in Berlin at least don't have to fear being sent to death camps. How's that for faint praise?"

"Then what are you doing here?" Hill said after a moment.

"Me? I love Berlin. Go figure."

5.

Hill picked up the waiting digital camera at the front desk and drove himself to the Pankow police station, an ornate building surrounded by gray monoliths. He found Axel Grass's office on the second floor. Detective Grass greeted him like an old friend and offered him coffee, which Hill didn't need but accepted.

"So," Grass began. "At 10 a.m. on Wednesday, two days before his death, Silverstein called to book a room at the Pankow Grand. He asked for a nice room—but first he'd asked if there were any special discounts. There weren't any; so he chose a room midway up the price ladder, certainly good enough for sex, what with the king-sized bed he requested. That he asked for a room with a big bed certainly suggests a sexual encounter."

Hill nodded.

"So let's get to it," Grass said. "The man was poisoned!"

"Poisoned," Hill repeated. "Something an herbalist would know about? An herbalist at one of his day spas?"

"Exactly!" Grass agreed. "In fact, it was an herb. Aconite. Also known as Monk's Hood or Wolfsbane. Nobody's been killed with it in a hundred years—as far as we know—until recently." Grass took a sip of his coffee. "Bad luck for the killer. Not too long ago a woman in England killed her husband with it. It took them six months to figure it out. As it happens our pathologist had just read up on that case. The woman had come to trial and it was in all the papers. Bad luck for Silverstein's killer that the German papers had just done a spread on the symptoms of aconite poisoning."

"Where do you get this Wolfsbane?"

Grass shrugged. "It grows wild in gardens, all over the place. You just have to know about it—and there it is."

"So an herbalist--"

"Right. We're looking into Silverstein's employees. What is an herbalist?"

Hill shook his head. "If you mean, in traditional Chinese medicine, maybe I could tell you. But an herbalist at a day spa? I wouldn't have a clue."

Grass laughed.

"A woman's weapon," Hill said after a moment.

Grass nodded. "Or a smart man's. Make it look like a woman."

"Can't be taken accidentally?"

"Don't see how."

Hill nodded. "Of course, it could have been suicide."

"Of course. But it doesn't play that way. No note. And the poison surprised him. He called down at about seven, complaining of chest pains and asking for a doctor. Then ten minutes later he called down again, screaming. He seemed genuinely surprised." Grass laughed.

Hill wondered about that laugh. Was Grass happy that the return of the prodigal Jew had ended that way?

"How long would it take for the Wolfsbane to kill him?" Hill asked.

"Four to six hours. So he ingested it between one and three on Wednesday."

"Where was he then?"

"We don't know yet."

"Anything else?"

"His wife's family hated him. I don't mean didn't like him. Hated him."

"You got that fast."

Grass shrugged. "It's what everybody seemed to want to chat about."

They fell silent.

"Here's what I've been thinking about," Grass said. "Why did Silverstein, who lived in Berlin, need a Berlin hotel room? The obvious answer is a woman; or a man; but no one saw Silverstein's guest, if there was one. There's nothing on the surveillance cameras. Nor was there evidence of sex. So it might have been that the guest was due later—that makes sense. The other possibilities make less sense." He raised one finger. "A business meeting—about anything, drugs, diamonds, or just ordinary things—but why meet in a hotel room when you could meet at one of your own offices or, if you wanted to keep it really private, in some out of the way spot? Not at a top Berlin hotel. That wouldn't be a smart way to keep a meeting secret. So, unlikely that it was a secret business meeting." He raised a second finger. "A little getaway from the wife—the equivalent of sleeping on the couch. But he could have stayed at any one of his spas—they're all plush. So that seems unlikely." He raised a third finger. "A Friday night Sabbath ritual requiring a king-sized bed and hotel soap." He winked. "I don't think so." He raised a fourth finger. "And this little piggy went to market."

"So," Hill said. "Most likely an assignation."

"Nice word. Most likely."

"What--"

"Yes?"

"I understand how a poor immigrant Jew from the Ukraine might end up in Berlin. I understand why a native German Jew, born and bred here, might remain here. But why would a prosperous Jew from New York make Berlin his home?"

"Why not? Jews are doing well here."

"And you have to protect all of their schools and synagogues."

Grass waved that away. "Mosques get vandalized too. You've seen the graffiti everywhere in East Berlin—we have more angry youths than you can count, all angry at something."

"Do mosques get round-the-clock protection?"

Grass shrugged. "I'll give you that one. But I won't buy this 'new Holocaust' thinking. Silverstein was doing damn well!"

"Except that someone poisoned him."

"He was short. That almost certainly makes it a sexual thing, not a Jewish thing."

"Very funny."

"I'm completely serious. Short men get involved in the weirdest sex things. You can take that to the bank."

"Which explains his tall German wife?"

"Completely!"

Hill finished his coffee. "I'll be going."

"You'll keep me informed?"

Hill nodded.

"It'll be about sex!" Grass said. "You can bet on it."

6.

Hill drove toward the Weissensee Jewish Cemetery where Cohen's grandfather was buried. He had a vague recollection of a large open-air market somewhere just this side of Herbert-Baum-Strasse. Ten minutes later he saw it. A long, narrow street, closed to traffic, sported fruit and vegetable stalls, butchers, fishmongers, and flower sellers. Hill parked in the shade of a lime tree and headed toward the flower sellers.

He wandered for a minute, gazing at the flowers.

"A lovely bouquet for your girlfriend!" an old woman cried out to him. Hill strolled to her stand where roses, asters, carnations, daisies, and a dozen other flowers filled the afternoon air with their scents. The old woman eyed him with a certain speculative unfriendliness. Hill came closer.

"I'd like flowers appropriate for a grave," Hill said.

"Of course! I'll make you a bouquet."

The woman began bustling immediately.

"It's for a Jewish grave."

The woman stopped, turned around, stared at Hill for a long moment, and spat on the ground.

"Get your flowers somewhere else!"

Hill, frankly astonished, stared at her. Her face, contorted and alchemically changed by hatred, looked like a fright mask.

"Go away now!" she cried.

Her cry brought a butcher from a neighboring stall. Wiping his hands on his apron, he approached Hill menacingly.

"What is it, Mrs. Adler?" the butcher said, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"He wants flowers for a Jew grave. I told him to go away!"

The butcher faced Hill. "She doesn't have to sell to you," he said.

Hill nodded. "No, she doesn't." He met the butcher's gaze. "Now take a step back or I will hurt you very badly."

The butcher stood frozen. His was thick through the neck and chest and no doubt

an intimidating presence at the local beer hall. But, facing Hill, he wished himself elsewhere. Hill smelled his fear and reluctance. People gathered around them. Hill waited. He hoped with a hope that communicated itself across the few feet between them that the butcher would take one more step forward.

"Excuse me," an old man said, stepping out of the gathered crowd. "Excuse me. This isn't really necessary."

Hill cast him a glance. "Why's that?"

The old man came forward with a distracted air. "Because flowers aren't really appropriate anyway," he said softly. "It's not the Jewish custom. The custom is to leave a small stone or maybe a few stones. In the old days graves were marked by piles of stones, not by headstones, so leaving stones was like rebuilding the grave. That's much better than flowers."

The butcher visibly relaxed. The old man's remark gave him a convenient out. "So go find some rocks!" he barked at Hill. He turned on his heels and strode back through the crowd, which parted to let him pass.

Hill put an arm around the old man's shoulder. "Thanks for the information." He walked with him away from the market. "Did you see that woman spit?"

"I did," he said, shaking his head.

"What do you make of that?"

"What can you do? Some things never change and some things never end."

"Why—pardon me—why do you stay in Berlin if it's like that here?"

"Ah!" the old man exclaimed. "You're imagining I'm Jewish. I'm not. But I had friends who were. Academic friends. That's why I know some of their customs." He smiled, exposing many lost teeth. "If I were a Jew, this is the last place I'd live."

Hill patted him on the back, strode back to the market, and peered among the flower stalls until he found what he was looking for—a small potted plant with some decorative stones hiding beneath the plant's waxy leaves. He took the jade plant to the flower seller, a young woman who eyed him nervously, and dared her not to sell it to him.

Hill drove to the cemetery and discovered that it was closed for the Jewish Sabbath. He stood at the front gate, jade plant in hand, camera slung over his shoulder, rereading the sign and peering between the bars of the cemetery gates at the plots inside. A woman came into view. She strolled along, reading the headstones. Hill called out to her. She approached the gate at a leisurely pace and smiled absently at Hill.

"Do you work here?" Hill said.

"No, no! I just come to visit."

“But it’s closed.”

“Ah! The fences are in ruins. There are ten different ways in. Just walk along the outside and you’ll see the gaps. Behind the underbrush—keep your eyes open. And mind the mud—it’s been raining.”

Hill thanked her and turned away.

“Wait!” she said. “I’ll show you.”

She took off along the inside path that paralleled the fence. Hill followed along the outside path. Brush separated them and she kept disappearing and reappearing.

“There!” she cried.

Hill stopped. He spotted the footprints in the mud and followed them through a tangle of underbrush. When he emerged at the fence he discovered a gaping hole, big enough to walk right through.

The woman was waiting for him, She held out her hand. “Miriam Rosenberg,” she said. “I come here all the time. I’m a bit obsessed with this place.”

Hill shook hands. “Pleased to meet you.”

“Are you looking for someone in particular? It’s a large place. I know all the dead here.”

“Abraham Cohen.”

“Of course! He’s this way.”

Hill walked beside her. “Tell me. Isn’t this cemetery guarded?

“Of course, ever since the vandalism in 2008. When they came in and knocked over all of those headstones.”

“There wasn’t any guard outside.”

“No. The police guard it but they never show up.”

The cemetery was far larger than he expected. By what miracle had it escaped Hitler’s wrath?

“You were going to take pictures?” Miriam Rosenberg said, glancing at Hill’s camera.

“I was. Is that a problem?”

“Oh, no, no.” She smiled. “I was just curious. Are you doing research of some sort? Sometimes scholars come here. I’ve talked with a few of them.”

Hill returned her smile. “No. A good friend of mine wanted a picture of his grandfather’s grave.”

“Let’s hope it’s not in too bad shape.” She gestured at the plots. “It’s interesting, who’s buried here. They call me Miss Headstone because I like to learn about these people.” She pointed at the headstone on their left. “This one, Herbert Baum, he was the leader of a Communist resistance group during the Nazi times. He set fire to a Nazi exhibition, the Gestapo captured him, and they killed him—or maybe he committed suicide. You can see, he was just thirty years old. This one, Charlotte Holzer, she was a member of Baum’s group, she lived all the way to 1980. Her husband, Richard, he lived to 1975. Can you imagine what they lived through?”

Hill nodded. They continued walking.

“This mausoleum is interesting,” the woman continued. “The opera singer Joseph Schwarz is buried there. Jews on the run during World War II hid in it. You can access the tomb by a skylight way up there. The Nazis never caught on.”

“One small victory,” Hill said.

Miriam Rosenberg nodded. “It’s what I like to think about, those small victories,” she said. “I’ll be going now. Yours is right down this row, maybe the fourth or fifth on the right.”

“Thank you,” Hill said, extending his hand.

The woman smiled. “You have maybe another hour of light,” she said. “If you want to take pictures.”

“Thank you again.”

“Don’t mention it! But don’t stay too late. Who knows what goes on here once the sun goes down?”

7.

Abraham Cohen's grave sat in sad disrepair. Gone were its edged borders. Wispy weeds, spiky weeds, and volunteer grasses covered the small plot. Next to Cohen's plot, leaves and dead insects floated in an open grave filled with rainwater. Cohen's simple headstone, engraved with a Star of David and reading Abraham Cohen, 1890 – 1917, looked about to topple over. Hill stared at the plot and rolled up his sleeves.

It took him twenty minutes to weed. The wispy weeds came out effortlessly but the spiky weeds were another story. His pocketknife proved useless. He searched around and found a rusted screwdriver among broken beer bottles behind a mausoleum. The spiky weeds put up a fierce battle even against the screwdriver. Hill wiped the sweat off his brow, dug out the last spiky cluster, and turned to the short grasses, which had to be yanked out one by one.

Then he went about rebuilding the border. A stone edging had formerly defined the plot; only a handful of stones remained. Hill wandered among the plots, removing a stone here and stone there, taking them only from places where they wouldn't be missed. He knew that in some sense he was desecrating the other gravesites for the sake of Cohen's grave and that thought brought on a headache. But he continued building up the border and, as a last touch, added the stones from his own potted plant.

He was losing the light and had to hurry. He took several dozen pictures, some close up, some at a distance, some just of the headstone, some of the whole plot. Then he found himself wandering, taking pictures of other graves. He took several of the mausoleum in which Jews had hidden from the Nazis. One ruined grave caught his eye and he photographed it from many angles. The light dwindled and he snapped quickly.

Finally he stopped. He felt oddly spent. Night settled around him. He wandered in the darkness among the hundreds of graves, returning to Abraham Cohen's grave with each tour. For a while he sat on a bench and dozed off. When he awoke he saw a plane high up in the night sky. He watched it pass, heading east, in the direction of Russia. All those cataclysmic events seemed to rumble through him, the wars, the vast distances, the tanks, and the screams.

At about eight he heard voices. Some youths had entered the cemetery. He thought he made out the voices of two boys and two girls. One loud boy announced by his tone that he didn't give a damn who heard him. Smashing sounds followed. Hill guessed that he was taking a sledgehammer to a gravestone. He felt his chest tighten. The rage that he worked all the time to suppress rose up in him like a tsunami.

The youths came closer. Suddenly he saw them. They were teenagers—they looked to be high school seniors. The boy with the sledgehammer had the build of a young linebacker. His pal was a head shorter and carried a skateboard. The two girls danced about, as if this were a festival and not an outrage. The one girl, in a short dress and hoop earrings, dropped kisses on sledgehammer, while the other girl, in jeans and a fleece jacket, played tagged with skateboard.

They came Hill's way.

"I have to pee!" hoop earring cried. She looked about for a flat gravestone to pee on. Hill stepped out of the shadows. The girl pulled down her panties and peed a forceful stream on her gravestone of choice. Her pals clapped her on.

Hill didn't wait for her to finish. He walked up to the bigger of the two boys, giving him plenty of time to see him and appreciate what was about to happen, swung a lightning right hand, and broke the boy's nose. Everyone heard the crack. The boy screamed, grabbed his face, and crumpled to the ground.

"You have no idea how lucky you are," Hill whispered, kneeling over the writhing boy. "I am really, really angry but I am not going to kill you." He glanced around. "Crawl into that grave!" he said, gesturing at the open grave filled with rainwater. "Go!"

The boy hesitated, looked up at Hill, and crawled over on all fours. He lowered himself into the grave with an audible gasp.

"All of you!" Hill shouted. "Get in that grave!"

Skateboard thought about running. Hill saw him glance around and pick his escape route. But apparently it struck him how cowardly it would feel to leave the others behind, because, giving Hill a wide berth, he joined sledgehammer in the grave. The girls followed.

Hill paced round and round them. He could hear the youths' teeth chattering. He thought of Cohen; he thought of all the untold, uncounted dead. Then he saw his mother, who had always wanted something better for him than a brothel and that life in Korea. Hill kneeled down in front of hoop earring, whose teeth were chattering the loudest.

"You like peeing on gravestones, do you?" Hill said.

"I'm so sorry!" the terrified girl cried. "Please! I'm so sorry!"

Sledgehammer decided to get out of the grave. Hill watched him slowly push himself up and out. It took him a long minute to get to his feet. Water dripped from his shirt and pants. The flow of blood from his nose had stopped and that gave him back the use of both hands. He stood uncertainly in front of Hill.

"Now what?" Hill said.

The boy got into a parody of a fighting pose. Hill hit him with a lightning left, breaking his nose in the other direction. Sledgehammer screamed and fell back into the grave with a tremendous splash. He paddled helplessly and his pals tugged and pulled at him to get him upright. Blood streamed from his nose.

"A lot of people have died terrible deaths," Hill muttered, kneeling beside the youths. "If you'd met me ten years ago, you'd be among them." He stood up and stared at them. There was nothing else to do or say.

"Get out," he said.

Their soaking clothes weighing them down, it took them a long minute to crawl out. They stood in front of Hill, looking at their feet. Sledgehammer had nothing left in him. They kept their heads bent and waited for whatever Hill had in store for them.

"Let's go," Hill said.

It took them a moment to understand. Finally skateboard moved. The others followed. Hill trailed behind the bedraggled youths as they made their way toward the fence, through it, and out to the street. "Stop!" Hill said. The four youths obeyed. "I will be here every night, waiting for you," Hill said. "Do you understand?"

They nodded in unison.

"Go!" Hill shouted.

He watched the disheveled teenagers trudge away. None of them looked back.

8.

He found a bar and drank Scotch. At midnight he drove to P-Berg. He parked down the block from the converted warehouse that now housed the hotspot nightclub where the Jews held their dance. A bouncer perched on a stool manned the front door. At the sight of Hill he got to his feet and barred the door.

"This is a Jewish dance," he said.

"Ari Cushman invited me."

"And if I looked on my list?"

"Thomas Hill," Hill said.

The bouncer reluctantly grabbed the guest list and scanned it.

"Okay, so you're on it," the bouncer said.

"Does that mean I can go in?"

"You don't belong here."

"Can I go in?"

"Don't make trouble in there. I don't care how big you are."

"Thank you," Hill said.

The bouncer eyed Hill suspiciously. "For what?"

"For doing your job. For giving a damn."

The bouncer moved aside. "Okay," he said. He stared at Hill. "Have a good evening."

"Thank you."

Inside it was pandemonium. A loud band played. Menorah and Star of David flags flew from the rafters, just as Cushman described. Men in baggy pants and yarmulkes danced with women wearing "I'm kosher, kiss me" t-shirts. Strobe lights flashed on and off. The music was amped to the max. Hill involuntary put his hands over his ears.

Cushman touched him on the arm. "Come this way!" the reporter cried. He led Hill past the bar and down a corridor to an oasis of small tables for two. Here the music was merely loud.

“So what do you think?” Ari said.

“Pretty crazy.”

“That’s what it’s called!” Ari cried. “‘Meshugge.’ Meshugge means crazy in Yiddish. These monthly disco nights are called Meshugge!”

Hill laughed.

“The band’s called Jew Review,” Ari said. “They tried playing in Hanover at a street festival and got stoned by Arab youths. The youngest stone-thrower was nine years old. They shouted all the usual things. The police made a dozen arrests. The Jewish community in Germany acted astonished that such a thing could happen. Funny, isn’t it?”

“Wishful thinking,” Hill said.

“Me, I prefer realism.” Ari clapped his hands. “Let’s go back and take a look. Some of the women are gorgeous.”

They returned to the main room and positioned themselves near the dance floor. A stunning brown-eyed brunette in a red dress, dancing just a few feet from Hill, smiled and waved him onto the floor. Hill shook his head. She stopped dancing, strode up to him, and poked him right in the chest.

“You must dance!” she said, laughing. “Can’t you see how many more women there are than men?”

“Talk to me,” Hill said.

“About what?” she said, surprised.

“Let’s get a drink.”

He took her by the hand, led her off to the bar, and ordered them beers. They sat together in a relatively quiet corner.

“On the street,” Hill said. “Do people know you’re Jewish?”

She hesitated. “They do.”

“And what’s that like for you?”

She shook her head. “I’d rather not say.”

“Why not?”

“I like to think positive.”

“So the street is bad?”

She hesitated. “Facebook is worse. People ask me to befriend them and then they say the most awful things. They’re out looking for Jews to curse.” She stared at Hill with eyes that began to tear. “I’m down to only a very few people I know and trust on

Facebook. I hate that. I wanted to be really open and friendly. But they wouldn't let me."

"What do they say?"

"I won't repeat it."

Hill took her hand. "I'm sorry."

Two angry youths approached the bar. One was skinny and wore a blue yarmulke. The other was fleshy and wore a black yarmulke. They were in the middle of an argument.

"That's ridiculous!" the fleshy one shouted. "It's time to forget all that!"

"Forget the Holocaust! You're an idiot!" the skinny one cried. "Maybe because you need your German clients. But there should be real reparations--"

"We aren't entitled to a thing because of the Holocaust!" the fleshy one interrupted. "Nobody owes me anything. I have no claims on Germans. A don't have a single Gentile friend who had anything to do with the Holocaust. I don't need them to feel guilty and I don't want them to look at me like a third-generation victim. Screw that! It's all ancient history."

"Idiot!" the skinny one screamed.

Hill got to his feet and stepped between them.

"Easy! Easy!"

"He's a Holocaust denier!" the skinny one cried.

"He's got 'victim' tattooed on his forehead!" the fleshy one shouted back.

"What are you drinking?" Hill said.

That stopped them. He bought them drinks. They settled into a black silence. Hill returned to the girl. She was smiling a pretty, mischievous smile.

"Do you have a place we can go?" she said.

"I do," Hill said. He stared at her. "But let's not."

"Why?"

He shook his head. "Something about it would make us both sad."

"I don't think so." She took his hand across the table. "I told you, I have a positive attitude."

Hill smiled. "Keep that positive attitude! Just—I don't think so."

"Then I'd better dance," she said. She got to her feet and Hill rose to his. She held out her hand. "My name is Ruth."

“Thomas.” He took her hand to shake it and she squeezed it in both of hers.

“Are you sure?” she said, smiling up at him.

“No!” Hill laughed. “Go dance! Have fun! I’m sorry I asked you those questions.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Ruth said. “Just find me later.”

9.

Hill stepped out for some air. A stiff breeze blew and a different bouncer manned the door. Hill recognized him instantly.

"Jumper," Hill said.

The man turned. He stood eye-to-eye with Hill.

"You," Jumper said. He flexed his right hand several times, remembering.

"Me."

"It's been a while."

Hill glanced at the tattoo of a small bird on Jumper's left wrist. It was the sign of the Gypsy Joys. The Gypsy Joys were a minor gang compared to the Hells Angels and the Banditos but they did a good bit of mischief, committing armed robberies and running girls and drugs. Lately they'd taken to robbing cash-rich poker games.

Before coming to Berlin a decade before, Hill had been living in Budapest, up in the hills of Old Buda. The police got wind of him and Hill had to leave quickly. A Turk he knew suggested Berlin and put in a good word for him among his Turkish pals there—Crescent Star gang members. Hill arrived in Berlin late one night in the middle of a thunderstorm, made his way to the address he'd been given, and entered a world of curved knives and sweet coffee.

The Crescent Stars protected the Turkish interests of Berlin's immigrant neighborhoods. They preached self-respect and community service and their women ran food drives, day care centers, and free clinics for the flood of immigrant Turks. The Crescent Stars, a cross between the Black Panthers and ordinary thugs, embraced Hill—because he came vouched for, because he spoke Turkish, and because they had an immediate use for his gun.

Tensions between the Crescent Stars and the Gypsy Joys had been growing. A Crescent Star got caught alone. Two Gypsy Joys got jumped. Finally all hell broke loose. There were knifings, beatings, and shootings. That much blood spilled forced the police to take an interest. Feeling the pinch of the police and the pain of their losses, the two sides called a truce meeting. Three Crescent Stars and Hill sat down across from four Gypsy Joys in a blank room in an East bloc apartment.

The talking went nowhere. In fact, it was an ambush. Hill could feel it coming. The leader of the Gypsy Joys made some remark that made no sense except as a signal. No

doubt they were sanguine about their chances—they had the drop, they had the light behind them, they had everything. Unfortunately for them, they didn't know Hill's story.

All they saw in Hill was another thug. They didn't know that to save his life and to protect his sanity, he'd trained every day from the age of twelve until he was seventeen to become the fastest shot in Korea. He'd made a friend at the provost marshal's office at battalion headquarters, two miles down the road from his dirt village, and there he shot at the indoor pistol range where officers re-qualified on their .45s. Hill shot with infantry officers—and out-shot them.

Hill worked obsessively on his speed. At close quarters, in the back alleys that he knew he would inhabit one day, speed was more important than accuracy. It wasn't hard to hit the torso of a man if the man was seated across from you at a table or menacing you from ten feet away. What was important was that you got the first shot in.

In fact, he was also accurate. But it was his speed that set him apart. His friend at the Provost Marshal's Office, Sergeant-Major Washington, the highest-ranking enlisted man in the battalion, thought that Hill could make the Olympics with his skills. Hill didn't want to make the Olympics. He just wanted to get ready for the future he saw coming.

The Gypsy Joys knew nothing about Hill's speed. The bare instant the first pistol appeared at his left, Hill had his pistol out and leveled. He was so fast that he had time to think. Calculating that genuine carnage could only make it worse for the Crescent Stars, he decided not to kill anyone. He'd only relieve them of their weapons. In that split second of reflection three more pistols appeared on the other side of the table. Hill shot four times in rapid succession, hitting nothing but hands. He spared the Gypsy Joys all the pain and paralysis that could be spared while becoming a legend.

The wind gusted up. Jumper stared speculatively at Hill. Jumper had been one of the four Gypsy Joys at the truce table. Hill found himself smiling.

"Protecting a Jewish dance?" Hill said. "That's a little odd."

"I lost a bet."

"Right! A Gypsy Joy protecting a Jewish dance from Gypsy Joys. Isn't there some adage about foxes in the henhouse?"

Jumper shrugged.

All at once three boys and two girls came out to smoke. The boys wore yarmulkes and the girls sported long dresses. They joked, laughed, and poked each other in the ribs. Hill and Jumper watched them. Both men were thinking. Finally the young Jews crushed out their cigarettes and took their tipsy energy back inside.

"You ambushed us," Hill said after a moment.

Jumper nodded. “We did.”

“I could have killed everyone there.”

“I know.”

“So?”

“Well, we won’t be sending you flowers and a thank-you note.”

“Maybe not. But what about a truce?” He stared at Jumper. “It was a long time ago. And I shot for the guns.”

“It was a long time ago. And you did.”

“Those other three--”

“One’s dead and two are in jail.”

“So! You hold the gang memory of that night. You could explain exactly what happened.” He inclined his head. “Or—maybe you never saw me tonight.”

Jumper stared at him. “All of that’s true.”

“And?”

“I’ll give it some thought.”

Hill laughed. “Look at you,” he said, shaking his head.

“Look at both of us.” Jumper grunted. “How long will you be in Berlin?”

“A week. Ten days.”

“We could probably just avoid each other for a week.”

“No,” Hill said. “I need to know if you’ll be looking for me. I need a definite answer.”

“Fair enough.” He flexed his right hand several times—the hand Hill had shot. “I’ll let you know.”

“Here’s my cell phone number.”

“You ride anymore?”

“No.”

“So you don’t jump either?”

“No.”

“I do, a little. But I’ve been breaking things. My bones, I mean, not glassware or china.”

Hill laughed.

"You were very, very fast with your gun," Jumper said.

"And very, very accurate."

Jumper nodded. "I understand."

"I'll wait for your call."

Hill returned to the dance. Everyone was singing Havi Nagila. The Hebrew folk song sounded edgy and fierce, more like an anthem than a wedding staple. Hill watched these young German Jews sing and dance. All he could think was, "You haven't a clue!" Did they really think that a rousing folk song could drown out worldwide hatred? Did they even know who was guarding their own front door? He spotted Ruth—she was dancing with a good-looking boy. Hill left quietly.

10.

Hill drove slowly through a silent East Berlin. Back at the hotel, he fell asleep the instant his head hit the pillow.

He dreamed of Korea. Easy Queen dominated his dream. It was the looming mountain that he'd seen every day of his childhood. He saw it from his bedroom window. He saw it when he crossed the rice paddies in the afternoon on his way to Camp McGovern, where he would call out 'Number one girls!' to the GIs on the other side of the barbed wire. He saw it in the wee hours of the morning, when the fights had finally ended. On its slopes thousands of soldiers had died. It was the mountain of his youth.

His father had been a GI stationed in Korea and for reasons that Hill never understood and that he could never ask about—his father being a tinderbox of a man always on the verge of exploding—his father had made the strangest decision. Several years after his discharge, he took his young American wife and their three children and brought them to a Korean village two hours north of Seoul, one of those villages that existed only to serve GIs. There he bought himself a bar and brothel.

It was preposterous, an American hated by the local Koreans opening up a bar and brothel in a tiny dirt village of bars and brothels and bringing his wife to such a place and raising a family in such a place—in such a dangerous, inhospitable, criminal place. His father took on a Korean name and made the family live native. Hardly a day went by that Hill didn't have to fight for his life.

The family name was a German name that Hill had never heard pronounced, only seen written in documents. By sixteen he was as angry as his father. One night, when he was eighteen years old, he got into a fight with a Turk—after the Americans, the Turks made up the largest contingent of UN peacekeepers in Korea. The Turk came at him with a Turk special—a fork with the outside prongs bent back: a weapon meant to gouge your eye out. Hill had killed him.

Hill's father got him out of the country—not to save his son but to preserve his own way of life. Hill ended up in Marseille, where he lived in the underworld and learned the languages of all the criminals operating there, the French, the Italians, the Slavs, the Arabs. It was a toss-up as to which he hated more, his life or people.

He went by his German name, which he learned to pronounce as he learned German. If he had gone by his Korean name!—he would have had to fight someone every time he said his name and the other person laughed. But that German name—people would nod, as much as to say, I get it, you are dangerous.

He killed a man in Marseille. It was an underworld thing, gang between gang, but the man he killed had friends on the police force. He had to leave France. He went to Rome; then Moscow; then Budapest; then Berlin. There were other stops, other crimes, and other killings. He wanted out of that life but it was all he knew. He turned 26, 27, 28 …

The turning point came entirely by accident. He was drinking in a Manhattan bar and a fellow in his late forties or early fifties who looked like a crooked cop and sounded like a college professor struck up a conversation with him. After several drinks the man began to muse about a problem he was having—a puzzle he couldn't solve about a jewel robbery in a hotel. Hill listened—and solved the puzzle in half-a-minute. The man looked Hill over.

"Tell me your story," the man said.

For some reason Hill did.

At the end of Hill's recitation the man said, "Do you want a job on the other side of the law?"

"There is no other side of the law," Hill replied.

The man—Lou Cohen—laughed. "Fair enough! Let me put it another way. Do you want a job with Parkway World Properties?"

"Doing what?"

"Protecting our interests worldwide."

Hill thought about that. "I have high moral standards," he said. "I'm not sure I can work for a corporation."

Cohen laughed again. "Hilarious. Give it a try. You can always go back to some alley."

He changed his name, apprenticed with Cohen, and worked his way up to become invaluable. More than once, he'd saved their brand. A certain kind of scandal could bring your brand down overnight. The world thought of you as squeaky clean, child-friendly, and above reproach. But if it came out that the manager of your hotel in Tangiers was a pedophile or that the cruise director on your cruise ship smuggled heroin you could find your brand swirling down the toilet bowl. Those things never came out, which was why Hill could afford a loft in New York and private schools for his kids. Parkway paid him well to protect their brand.

Hill awoke from his dream. For a moment he wasn't sure where he was. Then he remembered. It was a spring morning in Berlin. He was in a suite in a high-class hotel. He was investigating a murder. What was next? He scratched his chin. Next had to be seeing Mike Silverstein's wife in the house of mourning—if, that is, they were in mourning.

11.

He called the Silverstein home. A woman answered and introduced herself as Gabi Lange, Silverstein's sister-in-law. No, Hill couldn't come by today; but her sister Martha, Silverstein's wife, just might be able to see him tomorrow. If Martha didn't feel up to it then she, Gabi, would be happy to chat. She named a time and gave Hill the address on Unter den Linden. Hill whistled internally, remembering that Silverstein lived on that celebrated street. Silverstein had been doing very well indeed.

Ari Cushman called as Hill finished his second cup of coffee. The rabbi would see Hill at eleven. Hill spent the next hour writing a long, cheery email to his sister, who was always in the dumps. It was an open question whether she or their younger brother had survived their childhood the worst. Cathy suffered continually from aliments that couldn't be diagnosed and from bouts of the blues so dark that she'd tried to take her own life three times. Hill placed their brother's incarceration and Cathy's depression squarely on their father's shoulders.

In the email Hill painted a cheerful picture of Berlin, spent more lines than he thought possible on Luke's new fish, and finished as he almost always did, telling her that their mother had loved them very much. He didn't really know if that made her feel better or worse—maybe he added that sentiment each time because it was something he needed to hear. He sent the email off to Cathy and then emailed Cohen the pictures of Abraham Cohen's grave.

He read for a bit in what he'd come to call "my field." His field was the relationship between fathers and sons. He read everything that he could find that spoke to that relationship—Turgenev's Fathers and Sons, Sartre's autobiography, Sartre thanking his lucky stars not to have had a father, Freud on the Oedipal Complex, and so on. Currently he was reading a retelling by a contemporary Icelandic novelist of an old Iceland folktale about patricide.

He read for a bit, put the book down, and called Cohen. He got his boss's voicemail. "Lou," Hill said. "See what you can find out about Silverstein's father." At 10:30 he drove to P-Berg and made his way to the meeting place, a bustling Jewish bakery. Hill walked in, spotted the two men at a corner table, but found his attention drawn to the array of breads. He eyed the pumpernickels and ryes. The pastries looked sweet and dry but the breads excited him.

"Give me one of the pumpernickels," Hill said.

"Sliced?" the orthodox woman in a wig and apron asked.

"Please."

Hill sat down with the reporter and the rabbi and offered the bread around. The rabbi shook his head. Cushman took a slice from the middle. Hill started with a crusty end—he had a desire to chew.

"He speaks Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish," Ari said. "I can translate."

"I speak Russian," Hill said. He turned to the rabbi. "So, Michael Silverstein."

The rabbi eyed him narrowly. "A miser," he said. "And a pervert."

The rabbi wore a black, broad-brimmed hat and a long black coat. He had a way of casting his eyes about, as if the bakery were his domain to protect. Indeed, several Yeshiva boys were scattered about in twos and threes, arguing the finer points of Torah. Whenever they raised their voices, the rabbi gave them a stern stare.

"That he's a miser means that he wouldn't contribute to your synagogue," Hill said. "What does the second mean?"

The rabbi glared at Hill's remark.

"I can't tell you," the rabbi said. "It's too grotesque."

"Try me."

"He didn't believe in Israel!" He spat the accusation out and followed it with several more spitting sounds, as if the words left bile in his mouth.

"In what sense? Surely he believed it existed."

"I heard it with my own ears! He called Israel a stupid idea. He said that Israel should move, just pick itself up and move to an island in the South Pacific or somewhere. Since Arabs will never change, Jews should be smart and move. I heard that with my own ears."

"A perfectly reasonable idea," Ari Cushman said.

The rabbi glared at him. "And leave the Holy Land! It's monstrous!"

"Interesting," Hill said, addressing Cushman. "Two Israels, a religious one that gets left behind and a secular one that rises up on some balmy island paradise."

"The religious one would vanish in a week," Cushman said. "The religious Jews need secular Jews to defend them."

"Maybe God would," Hill said.

"God would prefer the island."

"Stop it!" The rabbi banged his fist down on the table.

"Now, now," Hill said. "Don't you believe in a wide range of opinions?"

The rabbi turned his chair away. Cushman shared a smile with Hill. Three boys at a nearby table began squabbling in rapid Hebrew.

“What’s that about?” Hill said.

“A fine Torah point about the obedience of women.”

Hill laughed and started in on another slice of pumpernickel. “I wonder if there’s a fine Torah point about the obedience of Jews to the Pharaoh.”

The rabbi pushed his chair away from the table and got to his feet. All the yeshiva students in the bakery fell silent.

“Perverts!” the rabbi cried.

“By the way,” Hill said. “Did you poison Silverstein?”

“Perverts!”

“Or maybe you know who poisoned him?”

The rabbi pointed two sharp fingers at Hill.

“Is that a special curse?” Hill said.

The rabbi rushed out of the bakery. The yeshiva boys packed up their books and belongings and hurried after the rabbi.

“The religious,” Ari Cushman said, shaking his head.

Outside, Hill and the reporter shook hands.

“I’m off to Israel,” Ari said. “My girlfriend lives there.”

“That’s quite a long-distance relationship.”

Ari shrugged. “It’s not so bad.”

Hill smiled. “Doesn’t she want you permanently back in your homeland?”

“She’s Persian,” Ari said. “She doesn’t look at it quite that way.”

12.

As he stood on the sidewalk in front of the bakery his cell phone rang.

"We have your answer," Jumper said.

"What is it?"

"Let's meet."

"The reception's just fine. I can hear anything you want to say."

"Let's meet."

"In a nice, safe public place."

"Museum Island. In front of the Old Museum."

"When?"

"We're on our way."

Hill sat in the car for a moment and gnawed away at a slice of pumpernickel. That Silverstein publicly advocated for Israel's relocation made him an unusual Jew. How many Jews supported that radical idea or had even contemplated it? It would be anathema to orthodox and conservative Jews alike. Nor would it have been that much more palatable to liberal and pacifist Jews, who wanted peace and justice but not what amounted to surrender. Hill watched a young Jewish mother and her three daughters in identical pink dresses enter the bakery. Shaking his head, he started up the car.

He parked off the island and walked toward the museum. Loud music assailed him as he turned the last corner. Upwards of twenty motorcycles were lined up along the curb. Their owners, the Gypsy Joys, were milling about in front of a wall. Tourists and Berliners gave them a wide berth. One of the Gypsy Joys shouldered a boom box that blared out Nazi rock.

Jumper and a second biker stepped forward to meet Hill. The second biker sported the gang tattoo of a small bird on his left wrist, but his bird perched on a branch. That made him the leader.

"This is Phil," Jumper said.

"Not a very awe-inspiring name for a gang leader."

"It's short for philosopher. Phil reads."

"Well," Hill said. "Phil."

“So,” Phil said. He was a head shorter than Hill and Jumper but powerfully built. “You’re Thomas Hill. You had a German name back then, didn’t you?”

“I am. And I did.”

“You don’t look Turkish.”

“But I can make a mean Turkish coffee.”

“So,” Phil said. “We have some history to deal with.”

“We do. Thank you for not just reacting.”

“He’s very polite!” Phil said to Jumper. “He’s learned excellent manners in his new life.”

“He may be polite,” Jumper said, “but don’t try to out-draw him.”

Phil nodded. “Since our paths have never crossed,” he said to Hill, “I have no personal history with you. So I’m not inclined to start a war. Maybe you could make some reparations and we’d call it even?”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Just a small thing.” Phil smiled. “There’s someone we’d like dead and it would be nice not to have our fingerprints on the murder. What do you say? He’s an asshole and no one will miss him. You’d be doing the world a service. In fact, I believe that was your motivation before, wasn’t it? Cleaning up the world one gang member at a time?”

Hill smiled. “You have had a good education!”

“I went to Heidelberg. Studied philosophy and psychology. But I couldn’t find a job that suited me.”

“I know how that goes.”

“So,” Phil said. “Will you do us this little favor?”

“No.”

Phil inclined his head. “Even if your ‘no’ annoys me a little?”

“Even if.”

“I could give you a thumbnail sketch of the asshole. You’d see what a pleasure it would be to kill him.”

Hill laughed. “I’m sure it would be a pleasure! Still, I’m afraid not. Let me make you a deal. Because of my current job, the police take me seriously. I can always make a call and ask for a favor. Leave me alone and I’ll owe you one favor—a small one, not a big one, but one that you may find useful. You can call it in even after I leave Berlin. Jumper has my number.”

Phil nodded speculatively. “Give me a minute to think that over.”

"Take your time."

"Very polite!" the gang leader cried, punching Jumper in the arm. "This man has been cleaned up and groomed and can go anywhere!"

Hill nodded. "I look forward to your answer."

"You mean, you look forward to a positive answer."

"No," Hill said, losing his smile. "I look forward to it either way."

Phil stared at him. "You know," he said, "I believe that's true."

Hill waited on the gang leader. Thirty feet away, the shaven-headed Gypsy Joy with the boom box turned it up even louder. All three of them glanced involuntarily in his direction.

"That music is very loud," Hill said.

"We call him Noise," Phil said, "because he can't stand silence."

"It's pretty rude."

Phil shrugged. "We're into rude." He stared at Hill another long moment and suddenly thrust out his hand. "Agreed."

"Okay." He shook Phil's hand. "Don't take offense, but Noise has gotten on my nerves."

"Not to worry," Phil said. "He gets on everybody's nerves."

Hill started toward the shaven-headed Gypsy Joy, who smiled at Hill's approach. Noise set the boom box down in the grass and crossed his arms.

"That yours?" Hill said.

"What of it?"

"Playing it that loud is rude." Hill gestured at a tourist couple fifty yards away. "Look, you're making them wince."

"Fuck them. Fuck you."

"Berlin needs its tourists."

"Fuck them. Fuck you."

Noise flashed his switchblade. He thought he was fast but Hill already had his .38 out and was firing. The switchblade flew out of Noise's hand. Hill waited two beats and put a bullet in the boom box. It shattered with a great racket. Then there was silence.

Hill backed away.

"I'll make that a medium-sized favor," Hill said as he passed Phil and Jumper. "But really, isn't the silence blessed?"

13.

Back in his suite, he stretched out on the bed and let his mind wander. His remark about blessed silence brought to mind the silence of museums, a silence he loved. He thought about the new painting he'd recently purchased. About seven years before he'd discovered that he loved modern art. Certain paintings stimulated him and moved him. At first he'd only visited museums and bought art books. Then one day he'd taken the plunge, spending $2000 on a small red painting by a contemporary Italian painter.

Priscilla hated it. Of course she had that right; but it became a wedge between them. He was forced to hang it in his study, which in fact was the most natural enough place for it. But they both understood that it had been banished there. Neither spoke about it but it became one of those small things about which you don't speak that ultimately dooms a marriage.

He loved his newest purchase, a large black painting with red and blue markings. He'd coveted it for months. Then the down art market hit and its price sank by 30%. Hill snapped it up. Hanging on the brick wall of his loft, it looked like the night sky of an alternate universe.

Hill's cell phone rang.

"I just looked at the cemetery pictures," Cohen said.

"I never claimed to be a photographer," Hill said, getting to his feet.

"The grave looks remarkably well-tended."

"I spruced it up a bit."

"Thank you. But you forgot the flowers!"

Hill laughed out loud. "You are some expert Jew! An old-timer told me that Jews don't put flowers on their graves. They leave small stones instead. You didn't know that?"

"Is that right?" Cohen laughed. "No, I never knew."

"Maybe they only do that in the old country."

"Flowers. Stones. Whatever. You did good."

"Thanks." Hill sat down. "Some kids showed up intending to wreck a few graves."

"You didn't hurt them too badly?" Cohen said after a moment.

"No."

"Good."

He heard Cohen rustling some notes.

"About Silverstein's father," Cohen said. "There's not a lot on him and what there is isn't very remarkable. He was a pharmacist in Brooklyn. He opened a pharmacy in Brownsville, in a truly bad neighborhood. He lived near Coney Island. He sold to blacks and then came home to Jews and Italians. There doesn't seem to be a lot more to say."

"To set up your pharmacy in Brownsville and be a white face in that neighborhood, you couldn't be a weakling."

"No, you couldn't," Cohen agreed.

"I bet he was a big man. A presence."

"I see him that way, too."

"Someone who would come home and want dinner on the table and no noise from the children."

"Probably. That would make him completely typical."

Hill nodded. "A large, scary father coming home and screaming at his runt of a boy to shut up—what does that do to a boy?"

"If it was like that," Cohen cautioned.

"Right," Hill agreed. "If it was like that."

"Well," Cohen said. "Time for breakfast."

"And the Sunday Times," Hill said, hanging up.

Hill sat there. Sunday was always a quiet day at the brothel. In the morning the three children had chores, cleaning up after the Saturday night mayhem. There was always vomit and broken glass to clean up—sometimes they found a ten-dollar bill or a twenty-dollar bill in plain sight where a drunken GI had dropped it the night before. They also helped out the girls, repairing a chair that a GI had thrown or bringing up ice for a black eye.

While they tended to their chores, their mother cooked chicken. They had chicken, rice, and kimchi every Sunday. Hill loved the chicken, tolerated the rice, and hated the kimchi. While they cleaned and their mother cooked, their father slept. Sometimes he would sleep until one in the afternoon. They would hear him tossing and groaning. When he woke up he started on beer and the children hid until dinner.

Hill clenched and unclenched his fists. They felt the blows he'd struck the linebacker at the cemetery. He thought of soaking them. He pictured Michael Silverstein's father in Brownsville. What possessed him to open a pharmacy in a neighborhood where everyone hated him, including his customers? Was it an economic

decision? Was it a liberal decision, like willing yourself to teach in the worst schools? Hill shook his head. It had been terrible for him in Korea but he wasn't sure that he'd be willing to trade that life for that of a Jewish pharmacist in Brownsville.

The room phone rang. Hill reached over and plucked up the receiver.

"Thomas Hill," he said.

He sensed a caller. Finally a man spoke.

"I know who killed Mike," the caller said.

Hill paused. "You should tell the police."

The man grunted. "I called them. They say the family isn't offering a reward. The police certainly aren't! I thought that maybe the hotel--"

"Maybe the hotel what?"

"It just might pay you to know," the caller hissed. "There might be a good reason for you to know. Maybe the hotel--"

"Don't say another word." They were on a hotel phone. "Let's meet."

"All right." The caller named a place and a time. "You can find it?" he said.

"I can find it."

"Have a number in mind," the caller said and hung up.

Hill sat there. If the caller knew what he was talking about and the hotel was involved, that changed everything.

14.

Hill had time to kill before he met the informant. He decided on dinner. The fancy restaurant didn't interest him, nor did the too-quiet Library Bar. The main bar, packed with young singles, pulsed too electrically. He chose the sports bar with its several televisions. He sat by himself at a corner table and ordered a turkey sandwich and a beer from the waitress, who tried to smile but was clearly afraid of him.

Three television sets had on the same football game—no doubt an important match to Berliners. One team wore red and the other team wore black. The fourth set had on some winter games. It was spring in Germany but in the Alps they were still skiing down the slopes. Hill watched one skier after another slalom down the steep mountain. Several skiers fell at the same point on the run, a spot called the devil's hairpin.

Two bartenders tended the long bar. The older one looked like a bodybuilder. The younger one had wavy hair. Something was clearly on his mind. He kept glancing at Hill. Hill knew that look, that hectic uncertain decision-making process behind the eyes. He frowned—he felt certain the bartender would be coming over with some bit of dirt to share.

The wavy-haired bartender made a last swipe at the counter with his cloth, put the cloth down, and headed toward Hill. Hill watched him approach. The bartender stumbled once, righted himself, and continued on. At the table he pulled out the chair opposite Hill and sat down—but only as far as the edge of the seat. He glanced around nervously, looking everywhere but at Hill. Finally he had no choice but to meet Hill's placid stare.

"You're the man from New York?" he said.

"I am."

The bartender nodded. "I can tell you something in all confidence?"

"Of course."

"I know who's robbing the place," the bartender whispered.

"I'm looking into a murder," Hill replied.

The bartender's face fell. "Robbing isn't important?"

Hill shrugged. "Who's robbing the place?"

The bartender held his tongue. His eyes gleamed; it still excited him that he had some dirt to reveal but he no longer knew if it was smart to speak. He rubbed his hands together anxiously. Hill wondered how much resentment had built up in this man over

the years, all the orders he'd had to take, all the young, hip hotel guests taking no notice of him, with his fellow bartender twice his size pushing him around.

The bartender continued biting his tongue.

"Look," Hill said. "Now you've got the problem. You've known about some thefts and you didn't report them. Your only chance now is to get that off your chest—because you've really stepped into it."

The bartender's face collapsed. You could see how he would look in thirty years—jowls appeared out of nowhere. He slumped down. It took him a moment to regain his composure.

"The head of housekeeping goes around and steals the tips!" he said excitedly. "When the guests check out and before the maids come through. His motto is, 'Fuck the maids.'"

Hill nodded. "That's it?"

The bartender threw up his hands. "Isn't that something?"

Hill dismissed him. "Okay. Go away now."

The bartender slunk away. The second bartender shot him a dagger look. He gave the bodybuilder a wide berth and parked himself at the far end of the bar, where he made a big show of wiping off some wineglasses.

Hill finished his beer and strode to the security office. He rapped loudly and Grunewald grunted. "Come in! Come in!" Hill entered and Grunewald recognized instantly that something was wrong—and that he had a problem.

"The head of housekeeping," Hill said.

Grunewald nodded. "Dragoslav. He's a Serb."

"Doesn't he go into the guest rooms an awful lot?"

Grunewald scratched at his chin and thought about that. "Now that you mention it."

"The bartender in the sports bar, the one with the wavy hair, says that Drogoslav's been stealing the tips, after the guests leave and before the maids go in."

Grunewald's eyes went black. "That asshole!" He knew that he'd dropped a notch in Hill's estimation—and that maybe he was even in trouble.

"You'll look into it?" Hill said.

"I will!"

Hill stopped at the door and turned back. "And fire that bartender. He knew about it all along. And if he's lying about the Serb—same difference."

"I'll throw him out on his ass!"

Hill nodded. It was time to meet the informant.

15.

Hill walked through a silent East Berlin. Some of the streets were familiar to him. He'd lived in Neukolln, an immigrant neighborhood full of Turks and Arabs. But he knew Pankow too. His business had been at night and he knew these streets best in the dark. During the day he slept and read, giving himself an education in German literature. He read Thomas Mann and Heinrich Boll and even medieval pieces like the Lay of Hildebrand, the story of a tragic encounter in battle between a son and his unrecognized father.

The streets were empty. Every so often he passed a late-night kebob place, a patch of light in the darkness. The streets were wide, wide enough for trams and cars. A tram came out of the darkness—a strange, prehistoric animal rumbling by. In front of the bars and the kebob shops young men huddled together in twos and threes. They looked him over with that gleam in their eye, that look that said, "Is this one meat?" They didn't take him for meat.

He turned off a broad avenue into a street of featureless concrete apartment buildings. A half-mile later he turned into a narrow, old-fashioned street of attached three-story homes sporting balconies with wrought-iron railings and overflowing flowerpots. The cobblestoned street ended abruptly. Hill looked around. He spotted a passageway to his left, hidden in shadows, and hurried through. A few echoing steps later he found himself on a silent street of darkened apartment buildings. Nothing stirred.

Dead quiet in Pankow, Berlin north. This was where he was supposed to meet the man.

Someone came out of the shadows. He had a lit cigarette in his left hand and the nervous look of someone in over his head. Hill had seen that look a million times before. The informer scared of informing; the novice scam artist; the crook making a play at a higher level in the pecking order. This man was scared.

"I'm Ernst," the man said, not extending his hand.

"Your last name?"

"Morgan. Ernst Morgan. You're authorized to make a payment for information?"

Hill listened. Silent streets at night carried sounds—magnified them. You had to be careful not to make too much of the occasional noise. A cat in an alley could sound like an army. A door closing could sound like a detonating bomb. Hill thought he heard something—and that he could barely hear it worried him.

"What do you have?" Hill said, paying attention to the man but also paying attention to the deep darkness behind the man.

Morgan bit his lip. "Three things." He raised one finger. "First, it wasn't a Jewish thing." He raised a second finger. "Second, it wasn't a family thing." He stopped. He was maybe thirty and couldn't keep a certain ironic smile from dancing on his lips. He wore jeans, a leather jacket, and boots but on him the outfit looked like drag.

"And the third thing?" Hill said. "You know who killed him?"

Morgan nodded. "I know exactly what happened and your fancy hotel--"

Shots rang out. Morgan screamed and fell to the ground. Hill dove for cover and pulled out his .38. He heard retreating footsteps echoing through the night. The shooter was on the run—at a good clip. Hill waited to hear a car engine turn over. No car engine. The footsteps faded. Then nothing. The man must have stopped running. Or else he'd traveled out of earshot. Or he lived nearby and had arrived home.

A deep silence settled over the empty street. Morgan was done for—no twitches, no moans, nothing. Hill slipped out his cell phone and called the police.

"A man's been shot," he said. "His name is Morgan. That's all I know about him." He gave his location. "My name is Thomas Hill and I work for Parkway World Properties. I'll wait."

He hung up. While he waited he went through Morgan's pockets. No weapons—not even a penknife. Some lose change, some dandy stuff—a breath freshener, a comb. A wallet containing the usual—including one business card, Morgan's own, with the legend "Ernst Morgan, consultant" and an email address and the name and address of a wine bar.

The sound of sirens grew louder. Two police cars pulled up. Lights came on in the windows. The night filled with noise—doors opening and shutting, excited voices, more sirens in the distance. Hill, his identification out, waited.

"Tell me," the older officer said.

"The shots came from there," Hill said, pointing at the darkness. "The shooter ran off. I called it right in."

"One shooter?"

"Yes."

"You didn't see him?"

"No. I dove for cover when the shots rang out."

"You know who the shooter was?"

"No."

"What were you doing here? What are you—an American?"

"I'm an American. I work for Parkway World Properties. I'm investigating the murder of Michael Silverstein at the Pankow Grand Hotel. This man called me and set up this meeting. He said he had information for sale."

"And did he have any?"

"Maybe. But he got shot."

"Your passport, please."

It took Hill several hours to deal with the German police. They drove him down to the station and took turns interrogating him. It was four in the morning before he got back to his suite at the hotel.

16.

He slept fitfully until ten, showered, and called the desk to have Vogel bring the car around. As he strode down the corridor to the elevator, Hill had that same feeling of unease that he'd experienced the day before. It hit him again as he crossed the lobby with its canopied ceiling, its exposed brick walls, its friendly paintings and glowing neon wall sconces. He glanced at the waterfall behind the registration desk and at the eclectic half-hidden seating areas, some with leather sofas, others with hypermodern plexiglass seating. He shook his head. Something was surely off. But he didn't have time to ponder the matter.

Hill stepped from the lobby floor onto the glowing escalator and descended to street level. A bouncer-cum-doorman in a Pankow Grand outfit, purple muscle t-shirt and black pants, opened the door for him. He stepped out into a beautiful spring morning. Altman Vogel hopped out of the car and opened the door.

Hill got in and gave Altman Silverstein's address. They pulled away from the curb. Hill studied Altman—something was on his mind.

"How are you?" Hill said.

"Good, good!"

Altman snuck several peeks at Hill.

"What is it?" Hill said.

The driver made a self-deprecating noise.

"It's nothing! Only … I brought you a chapbook of my poetry. I mean, just in case--"

"No, thank you!" Hill said. "I look forward to reading your poetry."

Altman Vogel smiled a crooked smile.

They headed toward Mitte, the showpiece neighborhood of a resurgent Berlin. Once surrounded at its north, south and west boundaries by the Berlin Wall, Mitte held Berlin's most famous tourist attractions—and the tourists were out. They came for the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag, Checkpoint Charlie, and Museum Island with its museums and Berlin Cathedral. They were already lined up at the sausage stands …

They also came to stroll down Unter Den Linden, the boulevard running from Lustgarten Park to the Brandenburg Gate and named for the lime trees lining its grassed

pedestrian walkway. Hill tried to picture Silverstein, his tall German wife, and their three children taking a Sunday stroll down Unter Den Linden …

"How old are you?" Hill asked Vogel.

"Fifty-two."

Hill nodded. "You grew up and lived in East Berlin?"

"Yes."

"And you hated it?"

"Yes."

"Because?"

"Because my parents were smart people who knew the difference between freedom and the way we were living. They told me—and they would whisper, even though we were in our own apartment—that we were living a tragedy. They'd read world literature and spoke English and French … to them, East Berlin was an abomination."

Hill sat back. His mother also whispered. She was afraid of her husband, not the secret police. Even if he was asleep, she still whispered. She gathered her children around her and whispered stories to them. Hill shut his eyes against the bright sunlight.

17.

Silverstein's home was huge and had the look of an embassy. Hill guessed that it was built after the war in a style called "Stalinist classical": columns, bay windows, intricate plaster details, and as much opulence as a Communist eye could muster.

The housekeeper who opened the door invited him into the entrance hall and went off to get Silverstein's sister-in-law. Hill looked around. Beyond the entrance hall was an enormous room with a grand double staircase leading up to the second floor. The moldings were gilded; a huge chandelier dominated the center of the room. But there were important nods to the 21st century. You would have expected a cold marble floor—this floor was a light-colored wood—maybe bamboo. You would have expected heavy drapes over the enormous windows—these drapes were light and modern. Most particularly, you would have expected period furniture and period art on the walls—but the furniture was a contemporary mix of glass, wood, and metal and the art was cutting edge.

Every wall sported an over-sized painting—museum-sized—and the effect was that of a trendy art gallery rather than a Stalinist mausoleum. Hill recognized none of the artists. He guessed that this was the very latest German art—some pieces reminded him of the violent work of the German Action Artists who were reputed to have painted using their own blood. Hill's eyes moved from painting to painting—until his hostess appeared.

He watched the woman he presumed was Silverstein's sister-in-law come down the curved staircase. She was drop-dead gorgeous, the epitome of a German model—not skinny like a French, British or American model but tall, full-figured, blond, a valkyrie right out of a Norse legend. And she knew it.

She wore a feminine rather than an austere black dress and in her heels stood over six feet tall. She approached Hill with a coy smile—no doubt an automatic reaction to meeting a man taller than herself. There wouldn't be many of them. She extended her hand and Hill took it.

"Gabriele Lange," she said. "Gabi."

Hill smiled. "Lange" meant "tall" in German.

"Appropriate," Hill said.

"Funny name 'appropriate,'" Gabi replied.

They were flirting.

"You speak excellent German," she said.

"So do you."

"In fact," she continued, not missing a beat, "you can't be an American, speaking German that well."

"And you can't be in mourning, having this much fun."

That stopped her. He watched her decide how to answer.

"I could take him or leave him," she said.

"Is that right?"

She nodded. "Not my cup of tea."

"And not good for your sister?" He gestured at the room. "All of this didn't count for something?"

"Money isn't everything."

He waited for her to continue. She didn't.

"Any idea what he was doing at the Pankow Grand?" Hill said.

"No."

"Or who would want to poison him?"

"No."

"No?" Hill said. "I heard that your family hated him."

She made a face. "He – there were conflicts." She shrugged the accusation away. "Nothing important. My father hated all of this--" She waved an arm at the room. "My father was … is … a socialist. Not a Communist, mind you. This is the exact opposite of the socialist ideal. Maybe it did rise to the level of hatred, his feelings for Silverstein's money. But he wouldn't kill the father of his grandchildren."

Hill granted her a nod. Her remark interested him. Hill had conjured with the Jew-in-Berlin idea but not with the capitalist-in-East-Berlin idea. That was a new wrinkle …

"Where did all of this come from?" Hill said, gesturing at the furnishings. "From the day spas?"

"Michael was very successful back in New York and invested in the right artists. He made a small fortune buying and selling art. Did the same here—got art for a song that is now highly regarded. He had a gift."

Was she being ironic? Hill knew how the reputations of artists got made. Did Silverstein have a "gift"? Or was he a player in the international art scene, one of those wheeler-dealers who not only bought and sold art but also made and broke artists? If so, that was another angle …

"Can I pay my condolences to your sister?" Hill asked.

Gabi shot him a glance. "Do you mean that? Or do you intend to question her?"

"No, I mean it."

He wanted to get a look at Martha. He needed to see Silverstein's wife for himself.

"I'll go see. If she's willing, I'll wave to you. Then you can come up."

"Okay."

She was a sight to watch crossing the great room and ascending the stairs. Hill smiled to himself. Whatever the interests of Parkway World Properties were in this Silverstein affair, his own interests might have shifted just a little.

18.

A clock ticked. The housekeeper entered the great room, glanced around, and left. Hill waited.

After several minutes Gabi appeared at the top of the stairs. She waved Hill up. They stared at one another as he ascended the steps. When he reached her, she smiled.

She led him into a small room—some sort of study or den. He heard the sobbing before he entered. Martha sat on a loveseat, her head in her hands. She looked up, dabbed at her swollen eyes, and made a gesture, as much as to say, "Give me a second."

The art in this room was different from the art downstairs, not large and cutting edge but small, pastoral, and spiritual. There were two small watercolors of springtime meadows, all daffodils and lavender; a print of angels and doves; and another print of an idealized Christmas scene.

The drapes were drawn. Two table lamps dimly lit the room. At either end of the loveseat a wingchair sat at a right angle. In the wingchair on the left sat a middle-aged woman—no doubt Martha's mother. In the other sat a middle-aged man—no doubt Martha's father. The one radiated coldness and the other hostility.

Martha was tall, thin and plain—and disheveled. Her makeup had dissolved into multi-colored streaks that made her look like a circus clown. Her pale blue eyes were differentially swollen, her left eye more swollen than her right, as if that one had more tears ducts or more experience of life. She wore a formless, long-sleeved dress and her hair looked uncombed.

Hill came forward a step or two. "I wanted to express my condolences," he said, half-bowing to Martha.

Martha nodded. A weak "thank you" escaped her lips.

The man Hill presumed was Martha's father sat straight up in his chair. "Don't worry," he said acidly. "We're not suing the hotel."

Hill stared at the father. He was a handsome man, sixty or so and at the peak of his powers. His hostility didn't seem feigned—but there was more than hostility going on.

"I didn't think you were," Hill said.

"Well, we're not!"

"Nor would you have any reason to."

"As I say, we're not!"

Hill waited. The moment stretched on. Gabi stood at his shoulder, smiling nervously.

"Is that all?" the father demanded.

Hill wondered if it was. He felt like making a scene—saying something provocative just to see what these people were really up to. Maybe he should innocently ask if the Silverstein mansion was a former embassy and how an old socialist liked living it up with capitalists. Maybe he should allude to the poison. Something in him wanted to disturb this set piece. But at the last moment he changed his mind.

"It's all I wanted to say," he said, addressing the father. He turned to Martha. "I'm very sorry for your loss."

The father responded with unbridled fury, so out of proportion to the inconvenience that Hill posed that Hill stood there shaking his head.

"Get out now!" Martha's father shouted.

Gabi took Hill by the hand and led him out of the room. She put a finger to her lips. They descended the curved staircase in silence, Gabi in the lead. Her curly blond ringlets danced as she moved. She was such a princess … with a bit of bloom off the rose, just enough to make her real and interesting.

19.

At the foot of the stairs she turned to him.

"They're having a hard time," she said.

"Is that it?"

"It is!"

"Fair enough."

They stood facing one another. The sexual tension between them was palpable. In fact he had the sensation that they were making love already. She smiled and lowered her gaze. A clock chimed very deliberatively. Silence descended around them. They stood inches apart, speaking without speaking.

"How long are you in Berlin?" she said.

"I don't know."

She nodded. "I wonder if you might want my phone number?"

"No need," Hill said. "We can make a date right now. What about tonight?"

Gabi laughed. "You can see me tonight. But I'm going to be with friends. You can meet me at a wine bar." She named the wine bar—the same one on Ernst's Morgan's business card. "It's in a Turkish neighborhood," she said mischievously. "Don't let that scare you."

"I will definitely see you there," Hill said.

"I should mention—my Turkish boyfriend will be there."

Hill smiled. "I won't tell him that you offer your phone number to stray Americans."

"My former boyfriend," she said.

"That's better."

He had a sudden thought. "And before that?" he said.

"Before that what?"

"Who was your boyfriend before the Turk?"

She thought for a moment. "An Argentinean race car driver. Formula One."

Hill nodded. “And before that?”

“Why these questions?”

“Indulge me in one more.”

“I’ll have to think.” She put a little girl finger to her chin. “Let me see. Oh, yes, of course! A very beautiful Greek who dove for treasure.” She blushed. “Under the sea.”

“Gabi, Gabi, Gabi,” Hill said. “You must stop dating these dangerous men.”

She returned his smile. “Does that mean that you won’t come by tonight?”

“Oh, no, I’ll be there!” He pulled out his cell phone. “But give me your number.”

They exchanged numbers.

She brushed her hair back. It was time to leave but his feet weren’t moving. Their eyes were locked. He felt waves of desire—and waves of what he could only call danger. They cycled, a wave of desire, a wave of danger, just as they had cycled in him when he was a boy living among the twenty prostitutes in his father’s brothel. There was always something that he shouldn’t be seeing or knowing—the girl leaving her paying GI “just for a moment” to service another customer, the scars the girls came away with when the sex play turned to sadism.

Hill blinked.

Gabi was still there.

“You’re mind wandered,” she said.

She leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips. The kiss shot right through him. He stared at her for a second, turned abruptly, and headed for the door.

“Thomas!” Gabi called.

He didn’t turn around. He could hear her following.

“Thomas!”

It was a plaintive whisper. He stopped. She came around him, faced him, and put her hands on his shoulders.

“What’s the matter?”

What was really the matter? That her kiss had hit him like a ton of bricks? Or that she was a Lange and her family might be involved in Silverstein’s death?

“I’m investigating your brother-in-law’s murder,” he said. “I shouldn’t be kissing the suspects.”

“I’m a suspect?”

Hill shook his head. “Let’s talk tonight.”

“All right.”

Gabi followed him to the front door. At the last instant Hill turned around.

“Is there a bathroom?”

Gabi blinked. “Of course. Right through there--”

“Go be with Martha. I’ll let myself out.”

She nodded uncertainly and left. Hill turned toward the bathroom. He needed it; but he had another motive in mind. He wanted to snoop around.

20.

He used the bathroom. Then he wandered a bit, opening and shutting doors.

He opened a door near the end of the hall. It turned out to be another sitting room, larger than the one upstairs and one of those rooms that you imagined never got used. High ceilings, more gilded moldings, plaster decorations—and a boy reading.

The boy had to be Silverstein's oldest—maybe nine years old. He was dressed in a suit that he seemed not to notice he was wearing. He didn't notice Hill either. His book completely absorbed him.

Hill cleared his throat.

Nothing.

"Hello," Hill said.

Now the boy looked up—but without interest. He glanced at Hill and returned to his book.

Hill came closer. "What are you reading?" he asked.

"Pirates," the boy said.

"Any good?"

The boy nodded—and kept reading.

Hill had only one question for the boy but he didn't know how to ask it. He stood there, framing it.

"I think pirates take pride in never crying," Hill said after a moment.

The boy looked up. "I think that's right."

"Even lady pirates. What do you think?"

The boy thought about that. "I bet that's true. I read a book about a lady pirate and she didn't cry."

Hill nodded. "Your mother's been crying a lot."

The boy agreed—but without interest.

"Does she usually cry a lot?"

The boy shook his head and returned to his book.

Hill studied the boy. What should you expect from a nine-year-old in these circumstances? Not grief, maybe. But this indifference, if it was indifference?

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Fred."

"Do you speak English?"

"No."

"Your dad didn't speak English around the house?"

"No. He only spoke German. He wasn't very good."

"But he took you to New York?"

"No."

"You have grandparents there, don't you?"

"No. They're in Florida."

"You've visited them?"

"No."

"Your dad would visit them?"

"Yes. Lots."

So—Mike Silverstein didn't take his children to visit their grandparents. Why? The reason that came to mind was that the grandparents couldn't stomach the idea. They couldn't stomach having German grandchildren and a German daughter-in-law. They would be of the generation born right after the war, Jewish boomers growing up with the Holocaust as their touchstone, their most important historical event. The generation born at the same moment as Israel.

"Have you been to Israel?" Hill wondered.

"No," Fred replied. "Where's that?"

So—no Jewish education. Why was that? Had Silverstein set out to repudiate his Jewishness? If "repudiate" was the right word …

"So you don't go to temple?"

"No. What's that? We go to church."

"What church?"

"We're Lutherans."

Hill knew by the way the boy said "Lutheran" that he'd been schooled in his Protestant creed.

It didn't make sense. No Judaism whatsoever? It was one thing to favor one religion over the other in a mixed marriage. But how usual was it to excise one religion altogether?

Did that mean that Martha was strong and that Mike was weak? But he'd seen Martha and knew a lot about Mike and that didn't ring true.

Had Fred gotten it wrong? But certainly he'd know if he'd been going to temple or not!

"But you do know about Jews?" Hill asked, a note of exasperation in his voice.

"Yes. Germans killed millions of them." He stared at Hill. "Do you know why?"

He had no answer. The boy returned to his book. Here he was, an engrossed, well-dressed Lutheran boy in an opulent home in a modern neighborhood that just years before had sported bullet holes … no matter that Morgan had said it wasn't a Jewish thing. Whatever else it was, it had to be a Jewish thing also.

He had a sudden thought.

"What's your whole name?" Hill asked.

"Frederick Felix Lange."

There it was! Mike Silverstein's oldest son was called Frederick Felix Lange.

21.

He left the boy to his reading and peeked into another room. A very old man, a shawl on his lap and a liqueur glass in front of him, looked up, put down his copy of Variety, and smiled.

"Come in, come in!" the old man cried. "Who are you? Someone who knew Michael?"

Hill approached the old man. Presuming him to be half-deaf, he joined him on the sofa.

"No," Hill shouted. "I work for the hotel where … where he was found. I'm trying to understand what happened."

The old man's eyes twinkled. "Is that right? Or are you trying to make sure that the hotel isn't liable?"

"Exactly," Hill laughed.

"What are you? You speak good German—but you're not a German."

"I'm an American."

"Don't pull my leg!" the old man exclaimed, cackling and showing his missing teeth. "Americans can hardly speak English, let alone another language!"

"No," Hill laughed, "I really am an American."

"Yeah. Tell that to a virgin."

Hill smiled. This must be the grandfather—the patriarch of the clan.

"I'm Thomas Hill," he said, extending his hand.

The old man extended a large, knobbed hand. "I'm Hagen Lange, the dead man's grandfather-in-law."

Hearing the old man's name, Hill made a face.

"No!" the old man cried. "That proves it! No American would know that Hagen is a rare name in Germany. But you knew that mothers don't name their sons Hagen because it's Siegfried's murderer in the Nibelungenlied! You knew instantly. Tell me you didn't! You are no American!"

"Let's leave it that I am," Hill laughed.

"As you like it!" He reached for his drink and raised it unsteadily to his lips. He

took one sip and a second sip; and, just slightly misjudging the distance, returned the glass to the table with a mighty rattle. “So, what do you want to know?”

Hill shrugged. “I don’t know. What do you want to tell me?”

The old man shrugged in return. He jabbed a finger at the Variety in his lap. “I can’t believe that god-awful movies make billions and billions of dollars. Can you?”

Hill shook his head.

“What’s their allure?” the old man continued. He picked up his glass and got it to his lips.

“Their production values,” Hill said.

“Could be!”

Hill smiled. “Why do you read Variety?”

“I was in Hollywood during the war. That was my war crime. I played young Nazis in tons of B movies. I was too young to play a camp commandant or a U-boot commander. I was the one with the pang of conscience when I had to bayonet an American—the good bad German soldier. I had a very nice small career.”

“They hired German nationals during the war?”

The old man shrugged. “I arrived in California in 1938. Maybe you remember your history? In the years before America entered the war, there was a lot of pro-German sentiment in the States. A lot. Even a lot during the war! It’s hard for an American to get his mind around this now, but German immigrants—nice, white, hard-working German immigrants—were everywhere. Germany was the beloved Fatherland for an awful lot of Americans. Did you know that America has 50,000,000 folks who claim German descent?” He took a shaky sip. “And we didn’t bomb Pearl Harbor.”

Hill nodded.

“So, no, it wasn’t hard to get work,” the old man continued. “My wife worked, too—she was an actress and a dancer. Gabi looks like her—only Gabi’s taller. My wife got in some musical comedies—but I had the steady work. Lots of roles back then! You’re not going to know a single one of these titles. Underground, directed by Vincent Sherman. Sundown, directed by Henry Hathaway. The Day Will Dawn, directed by Harold French. Know any of those? Of course not. There were twenty war movies made in 1942 alone—and that just counts the American ones. The Brits were making them, too.” He glanced at Hill with a twinkling eye. “Casablanca was one of those twenty. Maybe you’ve heard of it?”

The two men laughed.

Hagen Lange leaned forward as if letting Hill in on a secret. “I loved acting,” he said. “I love the movies. Still do! Our whole family acts. We could have been the Barrymores of some little Berlin playhouse!”

22.

Hill was thinking what a good time he was having when Martha's father stormed in.

"What are you doing here?" Felix Lange shouted.

"Talking to your father about old movies," Hill said.

"Get out!"

"Felix, Felix, be calm," the old man admonished. He gestured to his son to sit down. "This man—Hill, he calls himself—he's interesting. Have you listened carefully to his German? Do you also speak French?" he asked Hill.

"I do."

"Say something in French."

Hill quoted a Verlaine poem. "It cries in my heart like it rains on the city--"

"There! Hear it! Marseille," the old man said. "You've lived in Marseille and Berlin."

"You're quite the detective."

"And Italian?"

"Rome," Hill laughed.

"What else?"

"Oh, Russian, Turkish, Arabic … I forget."

"There!" the old man cried. "Is this an American? You should think twice about throwing such a linguist out on his ear."

Hill kept smiling. He watched father and son. They were certainly not on the same page. The grandfather had nothing to hide—or so it felt. The father, on the other hand …

Hill turned to Hagen Lange. "How did communism treat you?" he asked the grandfather.

Hagen Lange shrugged. "How did communism treat actors? About as well as it treated writers, painters … you name it. It was heaven for interrogators and bureaucrats. Not so good if you had a brain or a need to express yourself. I don't know why I came back here … or why we stayed."

"We came back because you felt guilty about having it so easy during the war," his

son grunted. “We stayed because of the wall.”

“True on both counts,” the old man agreed. “I loved the simulated drama of acting but not the real drama of crossing the frontier. I wasn’t brave enough to risk that—so we stayed here.”

“And when the wall came down?” Hill asked.

“Euphoria!” the old man exclaimed. “Then reality. Then Silverstein!” Hagen laughed. “What a strange thing, this little Jew joining our family. Seeing him and Martha together was like a visual joke. You had to smile internally—it was just preposterous. On the other hand, he was quite a fellow. Day spas! What an idea! And they were a complete success. And all this art—because of Michael I met more interesting German and Austrian artists than you can shake a stick at. Performance artists who stood on corners demanding to know what you did during the war—that artist who painted heads with nails in them—I have to thank Michael for all that. Jews are cultured!”

Hill reckoned that only the last remark was sarcastic.

“And not just artists,” the old man continued. “All those—what do you call them?—New Age types. He’d have some famous person come to Berlin to do a workshop at the spa and then he’d throw a party here at the house in that person’s honor. Each of them had some ‘secret’ about how you could get whatever you wanted just by clapping your hands or farting. They should all have lived in East Berlin under the Stasi and tried out their ‘secrets’! Complete snake oil salesmen—and the women, they were just as bad. One went on and on about my past lives and another had some urgent message from my dead wife. That one I almost smacked in the face. But Michael would also invite some genuinely interesting people to those parties. I quite enjoyed those parties. They won’t be happening again.”

He reached for his liqueur glass and missed. Hill handed it to him.

“Thank you.” He took a shaky sip. “But he also had several bad habits,” the old man continued. “He was always bringing up ghosts—rehashing the war. Not necessarily directly—maybe you said something about eyeglasses and he had a story about some blind Jews who survived because of some piece of heroism on some German’s part. Or you mentioned a trip you’d taken to the south of France and he had a story to tell you about Vichy and the French Resistance. Was he out to make everybody uncomfortable? Or did he actually not know what he was doing? What do you think, Felix?”

“The hell with him!” Felix Lange exploded.

“Felix,” Hagen said softly, “no need to speak that way of the dead.”

Felix Lange wanted to say more. But he bit his tongue. In the silence that followed his father grew sleepy.

“I’ll let you rest,” Hill said. He got to his feet. “Did you like Los Angeles?”

Hagen roused himself. “Loved it! Why did I bring the family back here? I could have played a Nazi for decades in Hollywood. The older I got, the more important a Nazi I could have become! I could have been … any of the tall ones!” He laughed. “Not a submarine commander. No room in a sub for a Lange!”

Four generations of Langes—Hagen, Felix and Erna, Martha and Gabi, Fred reading so intensely. Some fleeting thought passed through Hill’s brain but he couldn’t quite capture it.

23.

As he left Silverstein's home he took a last look around the living room. Many of the paintings were vaguely figurative, filling the room with ghosts. He glanced up the stairs, wondering if Gabi would reappear. She didn't. He let himself out into the warm spring sunshine. Just then his cell phone rang.

"We've learned some things about Silverstein's timeline," the Berlin cop Grass said. "At about noon on Friday he had a bowl of miso soup at the spa—apparently he had that every day, rain or shine. That's a little early for the poisoning, but it's just possible. The way it worked with the soup, someone brought it to his office at noon, whether he was in his office or not—and on Friday he wasn't. He was doing something else and didn't get back until 12:15. So, it's just possible that someone went in and put the poison in his soup. It could even have been a guest of the spa who knew his routine—though that seems far-fetched. More likely an employee, if it happened there."

"Agreed."

"At one o'clock he went to lunch—at the Pankow Grand."

"Damn!" Hill exclaimed.

"Exactly," Grass continued. "He had lunch with a woman. Anybody from the hotel could have poisoned him at lunch—but of course the woman is the most likely suspect."

"And you know who she is?"

Grass laughed. "She was dressed up as an Orthodox Muslim woman! Wore the full burka. Completely covered up."

"Brilliant! And she wasn't really an orthodox Muslim woman?"

"She drank like a fish. And talked loudly. And laughed a lot."

"Quite a show!"

"Exactly. For sure, people remembered her. She ordered traditional German food. Meat, cabbage, and potatoes, offered up in a small portion so that it could be priced sky-high. He had some Asian fusion thing. Full of seaweed or something—not a bad place to put an herb!"

"How did she eat with that garb on? It covers the mouth."

Grass thought about that. "Don't know. Carefully?"

They were silent for a moment.

"Well," Grass continued. "Then Silverstein went home. Lots of people there—his wife, her parents, some others. Everyone agrees that he had some herbal tea while he was there. So it's entirely possible that he was poisoned there. The soup, the lunch, the tea—that's what we know so far."

"Did he usually go home in the afternoon? Seems early for a entrepreneur with a chain of spas."

"Good point. If he didn't—if he wasn't expected—that probably makes it less likely that the poison was introduced there."

"Unless someone took it as an opportunity. Wasn't expecting him—and just decided on the spur of the moment."

"And had the Wolfsbane sitting around?"

Hill laughed. "Rushed out into the garden. Picked it. Put it in his tea. Went back to reading a book. I can see it."

"What you can see is how bad it is that he had lunch at the hotel."

"Exactly."

"I wanted to let you know about the hotel," Grass said.

"Thanks for that."

"And another thing."

This sounded worse.

"Some folks from the hotel came over while Silverstein was eating. Apparently he knew people there. The assistant manager came over to say hello. So did the manager. They came over separately, the manager first, then the assistant manager. Silverstein's waiter, who did not want to be quoted, said that they both looked upset—'panicked' was the word he used."

"Terrific!"

"So there we are," Grass said. "I doubt it was a hotel chef with a grudge!"

"They forgot to mention any of this to me. I'm guessing they didn't mention it to you?"

"Nope. Couldn't really be forgetfulness," Grass said. "Do you think?"

Hill tried to picture them. They'd been nervous when he arrived—but top staff was always nervous when he arrived. They'd seemed overdressed—but that might be the hotel's style. He needed to know more about them and that was a job for Cohen back in New York. He made a mental note to call Cohen right away.

"I'll be having a chat with them," Hill said.

“Me, too.”

“By the way,” Hill said after a moment. “Did you know that Silverstein’s children go by the last name of Lange?”

“No!” Grass exclaimed. “What do you make of that?”

“No idea.”

“I’ll have to ponder that one.”

“And the oldest boy, who knows all sort of things, can’t place Israel.”

“Well! Curiouser and curiouser.”

Grass said goodbye. Hill thanked him. He stood there in front of the Silverstein mansion, thinking.

24.

The car was parked a hundred yards down the boulevard. Hill approached the driver's window rather than the passenger's door. Altman rolled down the window.

"I'm going to walk back," Hill said. "Tell them that you're off duty." He noticed Altman's expression. The weathered poet wore an expectant look. "And tell them to have somebody bring your chapbook up to my suite."

"No," Altman cried, suddenly agitated. "Please! They'll think I'm pestering you with my poetry."

Hill smiled. "All right. Give it to me now. I'll carry it with me."

"If that's not inconvenient for you--"

"Why? Does it weight a ton?"

Altman smiled for the first time. "No, it's quite slim."

He opened the glove compartment and pulled out a book. Hill expected something fancier—then he remembered that the chapbook had an East Berlin pedigree. It was lucky that it wasn't published on toilet tissue …

"Thank you," Hill said.

"Thank you," Vogel replied.

It was a balmy afternoon. Every now and then he sat down on a bench and read a bit of Vogel's poetry. He had to reread each poem—he didn't find poetry easy. But soon it began to penetrate. It was hardly aggressively anti-socialist or anti-communist or even particularly political. It was mostly about solitude and the reverberations caused by gusts of wind and birds' wings fluttering. That the Stasi would arrest you for this could only mean that their political agenda was secondary to their primary objective: to give full vent to their hatred.

As he neared the Pankow Grand, Hill stopped at an S-Bahn station. He found a pay phone inside the entrance. He had his cell phone but too many people could monitor cell phone calls nowadays. He called Lou Cohen in New York, where it was still morning.

"So," Cohen said. "What's the story?"

"I met a man last night," Hill said, "an informant. He claimed to know who killed Silverstein. Someone shot him before he could tell me."

"Very dramatic."

Cohen often took Hill's oldest boy to Coney Island. Coney Island certainly wasn't Coney Island anymore—but Cohen had childhood memories that made it a nostalgic place for him. Paul would come home from a day with Cohen full of Nathan's hot dogs and sand in his shoes.

"I fired a bartender," Hill said. "And probably the head of housekeeping."

"Excellent. It's always good to fire a few people. What else?"

"The hotel may be involved. The manager and the assistant manager."

"That's not good."

"No. Something smells fishy."

There had been a time in Paris. Hill had been sent to investigate a murder in a hotel in Montmartre, one of Parkway's properties. The hotel overlooked the Montmartre cemetery and sported a fancy ground-floor restaurant that was always empty. As soon as Hill walked into the hotel he'd had that same feeling—that something was fishy.

At the very end of his investigation he'd come upon that "something" by accident. It was the lighting. The beautiful lobby had terrible, harsh lighting. The whole hotel was miserably lit, the fancy restaurant included. The manager had given one of his cousin's the lighting contract, padding the cost in the bargain and making a real scam of it, and the cousin had botched the job. That was the "something" that Hill had felt—the incongruously harsh lighting.

"I'll get you more background on them," Cohen said. "I'll have it for you by the end of the day today—tomorrow morning for you."

"And there's something about the hotel itself. Something feels off. I don't know what."

"What sort of what?"

"I don't know. I get some feeling walking through the lobby. Also walking to my room. Let me think about it."

"Okay."

Cohen had served in Vietnam—had enlisted. He never could explain why. The closest he could come was "boys with toys"—that at eighteen he'd needed to play with guns, even in the context of a miserable war. He'd fired expert on everything he touched—he loved to shoot. Cohen could only shake his head—"A Jew from Brooklyn enlisting to go to Vietnam!"—and express wonder that he'd survived. Hill was glad that he had.

They loved to shoot together. There was a place on Long Island they visited once a month, a place used by police from Long Island, the boroughs, and parts of New Jersey. You walked through a simulated neighborhood and had to make instant distinctions between the pop-up good guys and the pop-up bad guys. Since they were keeping their

own score they sometimes opted for maximum speed and shot everyone.

"Tell me this," Hill said. "Why does an affluent Jew from New York come to live in Berlin? It's not like his company sends him here. It's not like he has some special business here that he can't do anywhere else. Why?"

Cohen didn't miss a beat. "To show he has balls."

"That's very succinct."

"It's called counter-phobic behavior," Cohen said. Not everyone knew that Cohen had gone to the trouble of becoming a licensed psychologist—a profession he immediately abandoned. "You're afraid of something and you do the super-sized version of that something. You're scared of heights so you go skydiving. You're scared of snakes so you buy a boa constrictor. You're scared of Germans so you go live in Berlin." Cohen paused. "He was testing himself."

"That's the 33% answer," Hill said.

"You want the 100% answer?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because it interests me."

"It interests me too." Cohen paused. "It's still freezing here in New York. How's springtime in Berlin?"

"Warm," Hill said. "And heating up."

25.

He approached the hotel. The only characteristic distinguishing it from some nondescript office building were the two bouncer types on the sidewalk in front of the building—the guys who grabbed you cabs and kept things moving in front of the doors. They looked like rope-keepers at the hot clubs: short-sleeved purple t-shirts to show off their bulging muscles, black pants, boots. They made a point of not seeing Hill. If they didn't see him, they didn't have to cow-tow to him, and subservience wasn't their thing. Hill let them play their game.

The building itself was narrow where you entered. It fit in between two much larger-seeming buildings: a department store on one side and an oversized, sprawling restaurant on the other, the kind with every dish ever created on a nine-page, small print menu. You walked into the Pankow Grand through anonymous doors and instantly found yourself in a futuristic world.

Directly to your right and your left, glass doors led to an ominous parking structure that you accessed from another street. In front of you was a single set of escalators—one up, one down—glowing purple. They were made of plexiglass and glowed from the inside. As you rode up you passed niches in the walls and inside the niches were odd things—a skull, a cigar box, a transistor radio from fifty years ago, a glass sculpture of a distended goat. It was all meant to disorient you a little—to give you the feeling that this boutique hotel was a little dangerous and very hip.

At the top of the escalator you entered a fantastic canopied lobby of brick, leather, fiberglass and glowing neon. The seating arrangements were organized to give you the sense that you were in one secret place or another. There were lots of pillars and minimal lighting. In one corner you might come upon some purple plexiglass to sit on and in another corner four lovely leather chairs, so comfortable that an involuntary sigh escaped your lips. This juxtaposition of leather, fiberglass, metal, and brick—of things that were clubby and things that were futuristic—carried into every corner of the canopied lobby.

The colors were purple and black with other neon colors for accents—glowing green sconces, growing blue sculptures—and everywhere on the towering brick walls were huge paintings of an idealized German life. Behind the registration desk a waterfall serenely cascaded down, creating just a hint of mist. Everything seemed perfectly coordinated—except that somehow it didn't. Hill shook his head. He wished he had a very savvy interior decorator by his side, someone who would look around and exclaim, "What you're experiencing is this! This is the thing that doesn't fit!"

He sat in a comfortable leather chair and watched the goings on. The guests weren't

a business suit crowd—it was more the architect, movie director, fashion designer crowd, with almost everyone in supple leather jackets—some black, some brown, some burgundy—and jeans and boots. Shoulder bags—men and women alike. No children. No families. The rooms weren't really suitable for families. They were small, cramped, verging on the truly uncomfortable.

Plus the rooms sported adult features. Many of the rooms had a wall of glass between the tiny bedroom and the shower stall, so that, if you wanted to, you could watch your lover shower before or after making love. There was a futuristic curtain to pull if you didn't want that experience—but still not very kid friendly! Most of the people crossing the lobby, coming or going, looked like they would be happy to watch their lover showering—and be watched in return.

There was a brightly lit bar right behind his back, brightly lit on purpose so that you could see your next conquest sitting at her tiny, saucer-sized table across the room. This bar was the place to see and be seen. It was completely empty now—and therefore even more garish. To the left of the lobby was a clubby bar, the Library Bar, with built-in bookcases full of art books, a pool table, a few computers, all wood and leather. To the right of the lobby was a third bar, the sports bar, the one where he'd had his sandwich and beer and been approached by the bartender. The canopied lobby, the hidden seating arrangements among the pillars, the glowing neon, the three bars, the throb of people coming and going—Hill sat and watched.

It was cool, dark, sexy, and just right. Except for the thing that wasn't right, whatever that was.

He remembered a Parkway hotel in Kashawazaki, Japan. The issue had been a sex scandal involving Japanese schoolgirls. But the hotel itself had bothered him. Moving about it he felt as if he were aboard a ship. He found himself losing his balance—once or twice he had to lean on the nearest wall for support. He suspected he had an inner ear infection. Finally he learned that the hotel had been damaged in a large earthquake and that management had shirked the needed repairs, paying off the inspectors. Hill's discovery cost Parkway a ton of money but no doubt spared them bad press and saved countless lives, as another earthquake in the Niigata region was surely coming.

Lost in thought, he glanced up and saw the assistant manager—the Frenchwoman Juliette Morel—appear behind the front desk. She gave some instructions to one of the desk clerks and looked ready to disappear again. Hill got to his feet and strode her way.

26.

"Let's go into the Library Bar," Hill said.

"I'm very busy," Juliette Morel replied.

That was interesting. She was going to fight him. That meant that she didn't care if she lost her job or else whatever was bothering her was worse than losing her job.

"Come walk with me," Hill said. "I want to stop at the concierge desk."

"All right."

As they crossed the lobby Hill got out his cell, called the Silverstein mansion, and got Gabi on the phone.

"Hey," Hill said.

"Hey yourself."

"What does your grandfather drink?"

"My grandfather?"

"I met him today at the house. He was drinking something. Do you know what he drinks?"

"Schnapps, I think. Cherry."

"Thanks! See you tonight."

The fellow at the concierge desk clicked to attention.

"Can you get a nice bottle of cherry schnapps to an address?' Hill asked.

"Of course, sir!"

"Thanks." Hill wrote down the address and Hagen Lange's name.

"Is there a message, sir?" the concierge asked.

Hill thought for a moment. Then he wrote down, "Not a submarine commander—but what about captain of the Bismarck?"

"Very good, sir!" the concierge said.

He half-expected that when he glanced to his left he would find Juliette Morel gone. But she was still there—slim, attractive, well-dressed, nearing forty, and so agitated that she couldn't keep one high-heeled foot from tapping on the lobby's planked floor.

"I need to—" she began.

"There's nothing you need to do except talk to me."

"Don't bully me!" Juliette Morel exclaimed. There were beads of perspiration on her upper lip. The concierge turned away, not wanting to be a witness to this.

Hill shook his head. "Think about it," he said. "I don't have the same agenda as the police."

The concierge moved further away.

The Frenchwoman thought about that. "All right," she said. Hill moved them into the Library Bar. The bartender stood wiping off some glasses. When he saw the two of them he stopped in mid-gesture, a rag in one hand and a glass in the other.

"What do you want to drink?" Hill asked Juliette.

"Nothing!"

"Two mineral waters," Hill said to the bartender. The bartender put down the glass hard. Hill half-expected it to shatter.

He led Juliette to a table. She sat down, crossed her legs, and mechanically smoothed her skirt. She looked down into her lap. Hill smiled. He enjoyed speaking French—which meant by extension that he enjoyed being with this Frenchwoman, even if the business was going to be unpleasant. He meant his smile. He hoped that she wasn't up to her ears in something too dreadful.

"Here's what you need to know," Hill said. "The police are aware that you spoke to Silverstein at lunch—that you went out of your way to visit him at his table in the restaurant—and that you forgot to mention that to the police. You forgot to mention that you knew the murdered man. So this isn't going to go away. You understand?"

"So I knew him!" she exclaimed. "So what? What's the crime in knowing someone?"

"The problem is in not mentioning it," Hill said patiently. "That looks dirty. Do you have an explanation for not mentioning it?"

"I do! I'm not well. I'm taking medication for anxiety and this job is really too stressful for me. I feel sick every day. I get headaches. I feel like throwing up every day. Many days I do throw up! My stomach hurts all the time. So this all happened and I just haven't been thinking straight. I have the most terrible migraine! I've had it for two full days. I just haven't been thinking clearly!"

"That's why you looked to be in a panic when you spoke to Silverstein in the restaurant? It was just your everyday anxiety?"

"Yes! I'm always like that!"

The bartender arrived with the mineral waters. He'd taken longer than expected.

Like the concierge, he hadn't wanted to put himself in the position of listening to confessions or tongue-lashings. He'd contrived to make a beautiful tray of lemon wedges, lime wedges, nuts, and olives in addition to the pair of mineral waters—all to give the man from headquarters and the assistant manager a little time for a private chat.

Hill ate a few nuts. "That may work," Hill said. "As an explanation. What I mean is, I believe you—up to a point. I believe that you're stressed out and get headaches and experience stomach pains. I entirely believe you about all of that. It's just that you're also lying." He ate another few nuts, then an olive. It was a good olive. He had a second one. He kept his eyes off Juliette. He wanted her to relax—and much as that was possible—and think. He wanted her to realize that she just wasn't very good at lying. He wanted her to sigh and come clean.

But it wasn't going to happen.

Juliette Morel leaped to her feet and strode away. Her whole body was shaking. Hill couldn't tell if she was sobbing or having a fit.

27.

Hill watched her retreating figure. He returned to the nuts and olives. There was a wall of art books next to him and he pulled one out at random. He didn't recognize the artist's name. The imagery was abstract but clearly sexual. He had the idle thought: would Silverstein buy this artist's work? Would he? He studied the work for several minutes, turning pages.

After a few minutes he got up and returned to the lobby. Juliette Morel was nowhere to be seen. But her boss was.

Helmut Kirsch was roaming behind the front desk, putting out the small fires that arise every few minutes in a hotel—the furious guest who doesn't get his crucial wake-up call (those calls were automated, but still someone had to get the request right), the anxious guest whose ride to the airport hasn't shown up, one small fire after another.

Hill watched from a distance. Kirsch looked engaged and efficient—not at all a slacker. He had a practiced air about him and you had the feeling that he had seen a lot, dealt with a lot, and wasn't about to turn small guest complaints into battles or crises. He would put out all those small fires calmly, giving a guest an upgrade here, a special apology and a dining voucher there. You expected him to handle such matters smoothly and suavely.

But he had lied about Silverstein.

He had lied by omission, by not mentioning that he'd spoken with Silverstein at lunch—that he'd gone out of his way to speak with Silverstein by approaching him at his table. It was an odd lie: with so much restaurant staff coming and going during lunch service, surely someone would have seen him talking to Silverstein. Why not make up a simple cover story, if there was something to hide? And if there was nothing to hide, why not mention it? Could it possibly have been forgetfulness? But this wasn't a scattered, dithery man and you wouldn't expect him to forget such a thing …

Hill approached the front desk, arriving off to the left away from the clerks. Kirsch came right over. He leaned over the desk—whatever Hill had to say, he didn't want the desk clerks hearing.

"I need to talk to you about Silverstein," Hill said. "About you talking to him at lunch on Friday. About whatever it is you haven't told me."

A resigned sigh escaped the manager's lips.

"Come back into my office," he said. "All right?"

Hill nodded.

Hill passed through a door to the left of the front desk and entered a corridor, down which were a series of offices, including Grunewald's security office. Kirsch entered the corridor from the direction of the front desk and led Hill to his office, the last one on the right. Across from it, Juliette Morel's door was closed.

Kirsch's office was homey. Family photographs on the desk; some management awards on the walls; hospitality management books in a bookcase sporting mementos—an African stone sculpture of a giraffe, a colorful Bavarian beer stein. Kirsch sat down wearily behind the desk and Hill folded himself into one of two red leather chairs facing the desk.

Kirsch was wearing a black suit, a purple tie, and a band of sweat above his upper lip—the same band of moisture that had appeared above Juliette Morel's upper lip. He looked resigned but also scared—not the kind of scared you looked if you were caught scamming but that other fear—the more primitive fear of being hurt.

"What's going on?" Hill said quietly.

"You wouldn't understand," Kirsch said after a long moment. "You don't know what goes on in Berlin in the shadows."

Hill almost laughed out loud. He'd lived in those very shadows! He knew what went on in Berlin at two in the morning and three in the morning and four in the morning. He leaned forward. "I bet I will understand," he said. "But whether I do or not, you have to tell me what's going on."

A resigned sigh escaped Kirsch's lips. "I just couldn't tell you about it," the manager said. "Not the police, not you, not anybody! It's not easy to talk about. Yes, it's making me sweat! It makes everybody sweat. It's all so long ago, you wouldn't think it would still be dangerous, but the young ones keep it alive. And the politicians! The National Democratic Party! Those rock bands like Landser that they ban from the radio but their bootlegged copies are everywhere. So maybe the old ones are past ninety, maybe approaching a hundred. So what! It just keeps going on and on! They're everywhere!"

Hill stared at the frightened manager.

"What are we talking about?" Hill said.

"The last Nazis!" Kirsch said. "The war criminals! The ones that Germany and Israel are still looking for. We're talking about Neo-Nazis. We're talking about all of that!"

"Why are we talking about that?"

"Because that was what Silverstein was doing here!"

28.

Kirsch rubbed his temples. Hill waited.

"The skinheads," Kirsch finally said. "The neo-Nazis. But not just them! Politicians. Everyday Germans. The same sadists as always." He stared at Hill. "Generation after generation. The fire-bombers. The ones who hunt down Poles and Turks. So we enact laws against them. Then the NPD gets 10% of the vote in Saxony! The German Alternative, the National Offensive, the Homeland-Faithful German Youth—you think it's a joke?"

Hill shook his head. "Calm down, Helmut. Whatever it is you're talking about, I don't think it's a joke. Please tell me in very simple language what it is that you're talking about and what it has to do with Silverstein's murder."

Kirsch slammed his fist down on the table. Hill blinked. It was a large gesture—theatrical. Was this an act? But, no—Hill believed the terrified man.

"He was an amateur Nazi hunter!" the manager exclaimed. "He was on the trail of a war criminal! And the trail led him here."

"How do you know that? Help me, Helmut. You're not being coherent yet."

Kirsch took a big breath. "Silverstein was sitting in the lobby reading a newspaper. It was months ago—maybe three months ago. It was winter. I'd say January. I took no particular notice of him. I didn't recognize him as a guest, but he looked plausible, like he was waiting for somebody. But then I began to see what he was doing. He was watching a very old man who was seated on a sofa in the next seating area. I could smell that something was up. I almost called security."

Kirsch reached abruptly under his desk and pulled out a bottle of water. He unscrewed the cap and took several gulps.

"I didn't call security. Instead I went up to this man—Silverstein—and said, 'Can I help you?' He smiled at me and said, 'No, thank you, I'm just meeting someone for lunch.' I knew that wasn't true. As I say, I almost went to get Grunewald. But then Silverstein—I didn't know his name then, of course—he said, just out of the blue—maybe he'd been dying to share his discovery, maybe he was going to tell the very next person he met—he said, 'Do you know who that is?' He pointed to the old man. I said, 'No. Who is it?'"

Kirsch gulped down some more water, then stared at Hill with feverish eyes.

"Silverstein said, 'It's Josef Gerste.' Josef Gerste! I couldn't believe my ears. But I didn't ask him to repeat it. I didn't want to hear that name a second time! I blurted out something like 'You must be wrong!' and he just smiled at me. He said, 'Oh, no. That's Gerste. He's the third most wanted Nazi left.' It was the last thing I wanted to hear! Just having that information scared me to death! I wanted both of them out of there—but what could I do? Call the police and have the Pankow Grand be the place where Josef Gerste got arrested? That would pretty much guarantee that we'd become a rallying cry for skinheads. 'Let's go firebomb the Pankow Grand.' 'Yes, let's!' So I did nothing."

He got to his feet. He had the look of a caged animal. He strode to door and back, three paces to the door, three paces back to his chair, and sat down with a solid thump.

"The old man left. I watched him leave. Silverstein followed him out, and that was that. I prayed that was that." He took a breath. "And it seemed to be! Then on Friday … I saw Silverstein go in to lunch. I must have turned nine colors. I didn't know he'd rented a room – I thought he was just here for lunch. No, what I actually thought was, 'Is that other one here again?' I looked all around—no Josef Gerste. So I said to Silverstein—it wasn't very diplomatic, there he was having lunch with a woman—I said, 'What are you doing here?' He just smiled and laughed and said that he was having lunch. So I relaxed—half-relaxed. And then he was murdered. I got really scared. They're everywhere, the sadists, and you can bet that one of them killed Silverstein! They're everywhere. I pledged to myself to keep my mouth shut."

Hill took a moment. Finally he nodded. "But you can't, you know. The police will question you. They know you spoke to Silverstein at lunch. You have to tell them what you just told me."

"I won't talk to them! I won't tell them anything. The police … who knows about the police!"

"I'll have to tell them, then," Hill said.

Kirsch leaned across the desk and grabbed Hill's forearm. "Don't! You get to leave Berlin … and I have to stay here! I have a family … "

Hill stared at the frightened hotel manager.

"I'll think about it," Hill said after a long moment. "I'm not going to say anything to anybody today. I'll think about it. If I decide that I have to tell them what I know, I'll tell you first."

"Please don't tell them, Mr. Hill."

"This is what Juliette is so afraid of, too?"

The manager's expression changed completely. Hill watched him carefully.

"Yes!" Kirsch exclaimed.

That last part was a lie. But not what had come before. Hill nodded. “I will definitely let you know if I go to the police with this.” He got to his feet. “Those were the only two times you saw Silverstein?”

“Yes.”

“And you didn’t poison him?”

“No!”

“And you don’t know who poisoned him?”

“No!” A look of terror suffused his features. “But of course it was them!”

“Okay,” Hill said. He left the manager to his sweat-soaked panic.

29.

Hill returned to the Library Bar. The bartender glanced up and said, "Mineral water?" Hill shook his head. He moved to one of the hotel computers and looked up Josef Gerste.

There were more than a hundred thousand entries on the man. He had a Wikipedia page, he appeared on lists, there were pictures of him dating back to when he was thirty-five and forty years old.

His crimes were only beginning to be known back then and he had lived freely in Munich. An unrelated investigation in the late 60's brought his story to the world's attention. An arrest was imminent and as he was about to be arrested, Gerste vanished. As other war criminals died off, Gerste climbed the ladder of most-wanted war criminals, always on the "presumed to be alive" and not "known to be alive" lists. There had been no sightings of him for a very long time.

His crime occurred near the end of the war. Gerste had been 24 in 1944, a young SS officer stationed in Italy. One day in March of that year members of the Italian Resistance ambushed thirty-three German soldiers who were marching along a road in Rome. The word of the attack got back to Hitler, who ordered that ten Italians be killed for every German solder killed. Apparently there was a fierce debate at Hitler's headquarters as to whether it should be fifty, thirty, or ten Italians killed for every German soldier—making the final number a "compassionate" one.

The German command in Rome quickly put together a list of Italians to kill—communists, Jews, radicals, and just everyday people—gathered them up, and took them to the Ardeatine caves, where they were massacred. Gerste, although only 24 at the time, was put in charge of that organizing and killing.

The total number of Italians the Germans killed in those caves was 335—an important number, as it represented Hitler's 330 plus five more added by Gerste for no reason that he could possibly justify. The 330 could be put down to "carrying out orders" (and directly from Hitler, at that); the other five, not. That became the central matter in his trial in absentia, the trial in which he was convicted of war crimes.

Was it sadism or initiative or a kind of misreading of the instructions to add those extra five Italians? Was he evening some personal score? But if he were evening some score, why not include them in the 330, bury them, as it were, with the others? Was it just a matter of not bothering to count very carefully? That might be the crime! Just not bothering to count very carefully …

Gerste was convicted of war crimes in absentia. At the first hint of trouble he'd

fled Munich and probably left Germany too. But at some point, probably decades later, he must have returned to Berlin … to be recognized, after all this time, by Mike Silverstein …

Hill sat there in front of the computer screen, thinking.

Could Gerste actually have been recognized? Even by someone actually looking for him? That seemed highly unlikely … to have seen the picture of a forty-year-old man and then to have spotted him as a ninety-year-old … no, it seemed completely unlikely that Silverstein had stumbled upon Gerste in some "visual" way, say at the supermarket …

What then? Gerste hadn't walked up to Silverstein and said, "Hi, guess who I am." Silverstein hadn't been drinking in some neo-Nazi dive where the conversation turned to reminiscences of the good old days. None of that was possible. It could only be the following: somebody who knew Gerste had pointed him out to Silverstein.

Somebody who hadn't wanted to turn Gerste in himself or herself, but who at the same time apparently didn't mind if somebody else turned him in …

Hill got up and ordered a draft beer at the bar. His mind was filled with the minutia of the problem—how this could be and how that could be. But as he watched the bartender fill the mug he felt himself step back and take a wide-angle view of the matter.

Hill thought about Gerste's crime. All soldiers had done violence to innocents—that was the nature of war. They'd all followed horrible, immoral, unlawful orders—every soldier had, in every war, on every side. They'd all been involved in massacres and atrocities—every soldier had, in every war, on every side. How were our twenty-five-year-old heroic pilots firebombing cities and burning up women and children not guilty? Well, they weren't guilty because no one was taking them to trial. Just committing atrocities did not make you a war criminal. What did? Well, first of all, you had to lose the war …

Had Gerste committed what Hill would label a war crime? Had he crossed the line from ordinary soldier with blood on his hands to war criminal? Certainly the world looked at it that way. As the older war criminals had died, Gerste climbed that most-wanted list. He became ever more wanted, ever more heinous, ever more iconic. Especially in Italy—he would be very wanted in Italy.

Hill shook his head. If you dropped a bomb on something called a legitimate target and killed ten thousand extra people as collateral damage, that didn't stick to you—that wasn't your fault. But if you were ordered by your supreme commander to kill 330 innocent people and you killed 335 innocent people instead, that outraged the mind.

Didn't Gerste know not to kill those extra five?

30.

Hill sipped his beer.

Only those Nazis who had been in their mid-twenties at the end of the war, that or younger, could still be alive. The ones who had been forty or fifty back in 1945—the leaders, the planners, the camp commanders, the mad doctors—they were all dead.

The end of the war was more than 65 years ago! The masterminds would be a hundred and fifteen by now, or a hundred and five at least. That is, dead. But the ones who had been twenty-five at the end of the war, they were the last war criminals standing. A trillion lifetimes ago—yet some of them would still be very much alive today—in their nineties, to be sure, but still alive … as alive as Hagen Lange, who was that age.

Hill caught himself smiling. It would be too simple and too wonderful if Hagen Lange were Josef Gerste! But he wasn't—Hill had just looked at Gerste's pictures and could judge that Gerste was short and Lange anything but. That couldn't be altered, a man's height.

On the other hand, it was not at all preposterous to imagine that Gerste and Lange had somehow become acquaintances or even friends, maybe through the simple activity of sitting on the same bench in some Berlin park and striking up a conversation. Two very old men chatting first about how everything today was a great mess and then, maybe during their second or third conversation, getting down to the thing on each of their minds … and what did you do during the war?

Two hours before, all that had been on Hill's mind was seeing Gabi at the wine bar that evening. Now he was thinking a million things at once—which meant that he wasn't really thinking. He'd met Gabi; seen Martha; seen the parents; seen the boy; seen the grandfather; and then the interviews with Juliette and Helmut; and now this trip back 65-plus years to the world of Josef Gerste. It was too much.

Hill's cell phone rang.

"Dad!"

Hill's heart skipped a beat.

"Paul!"

"Dad," Paul said, "I have to write about a country for school. I'm thinking about Brazil or Korea. What do you think?"

Hill knew what he thought. But he had to be careful.

“You’ve been to Brazil,” Hill said.

“You don’t have to have been there—“

“But that you’ve been to Brazil—wouldn’t that make Brazil easier?”

“I don’t like easy things.”

That was a mouthful! A picture of a world of future difficulty sprang to mind. Hill wasn’t sure whether he felt proud or scared.

“Maybe easier isn’t the right word. But you’d be able to picture Brazil.”

“I didn’t see that much. Mostly the beach and the hotel.”

“But still.”

“I kind of want to do Korea.”

“What does your mother say?”

“Mom? She says I should do what I want to do. She says that they’re both great places. That I couldn’t go wrong choosing either one.”

Hill hesitated. “If you did Korea … you’d want me to tell you things?”

“Sure!”

He made up his mind. “Paul, I have to ask you to do Brazil.”

“Why, dad?”

“I could make up a story. But I’m going to tell you the truth. I don’t like talking about Korea. You know that I’ve never told you much about Korea—and that wasn’t by accident. It’s just something I don’t like to talk about.”

Paul remained silent for a while. “Will you tell me about it someday?”

“Yes. I promise.”

“Okay. Then I’ll do Brazil.”

“Thank you.”

Paul paused again. “Do you hate Korea, dad?”

“No,” Hill replied instantly. “No, no, it’s not that. It’s just … I promise I’ll explain one day.”

“Okay.”

“Hey,” Hill said suddenly. “What are you doing home from school?”

“I have a kind of fever.”

“Paul! Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, dad. Everybody at school’s been sick. But this is just a little fever. 100.2,” he said. “That’s just 1.5 percent above normal.”

Hill smiled. They’d been talking a lot about percentages recently because Paul was obsessed with batting averages.

“Is your mother there?”

“She is. Do you want to talk to her?”

“No. But thank her for me.”

“For what?”

“She’ll know.”

“Tell me!”

“For not saying that you should do Brazil. For giving Korea a chance.”

“Dad! Of course she’d give Korea a chance.”

They hung up. Tears welled up behind his eyes.

Josef Gerste and his ilk existed. But so did Paul. Paul and Gerste didn’t balance out some ledger, because there was no ledger. But Paul did make it a less inauspicious universe.

One thought came clear. If this Silverstein business turned out to have anything to do with Josef Gerste, Parkway World Properties would want it to go away. But would Hill? What if he concluded that Gerste needed to be brought to justice? Then he would need to take care of it himself and keep Parkway World Properties completely out of it.

31.

Hill crossed the lobby. There was a ruckus going on at the far end. Grunewald and someone else from security were escorting a young couple out of the hotel. The girl was laughing and the boy offered up a mock protest, exclaiming things like "Just let us finish!" and "We'll be losing money!" Grunewald kept repeating, "Come along now! Come along now!" The foursome disappeared down the escalator. Two minutes later Grunewald reappeared. He saw Hill and came over.

"Fucking design," Grunewald said.

"What's that?"

"Whoever designed this lobby, they made all these dark corners. It's become popular to have sex in the lobby, like joining the mile-high club. 'Have you had sex yet at the Pankow Grand? No, I don't mean in a room, I mean in the lobby!' They make bets with each other. Maybe once a month we catch some kids going at it. That doesn't count the ones we don't catch!"

Hill nodded. "Do you have a few minutes?"

"Of course."

"Let's go up to the gym. I need to ride a bike."

"Let me change my shoes."

Ten minutes later they found themselves side-by-side on a pair of hypermodern exercise bikes with enough electronic settings to reach the moon.

"So," Grunewald said.

Hill explained about Silverstein, Gerste, the manager and the assistant manager. Grunewald listened. He listened so well that Hill filled in the Bavarian ex-cop on life at the Silverstein mansion and the death of Morgan.

"The restaurant," Grunewald said after a while.

"That part's got your attention?"

"It's probably nothing. But there's a line cook in the kitchen, an older man from Korea, and I've never believed his story. He's too educated and he let's things slip that a man of his station shouldn't know about. We had a conversation recently and he got a faraway look and he started talking about how, if your company buys an oil tanker, you can limit your liability. When I asked him how he knew such things he blinked and claimed not to know a thing about it. But he'd just been talking about it! It was

a strange lie to tell right to my face but he seemed completely comfortable telling it. There's something about him—I quite like him, but he isn't who he says he is. He's no line cook."

Hill nodded. "But lots of people fall down in life and drop to a lower station. Refugees, alcoholics--"

"Agreed. But there's something about this man's vagueness that puzzles me. When I asked about his family it was as if he couldn't remember one way or the other. He wasn't faking. He said he had no family but you could see him wondering, trying to make up his mind. It was so odd that I asked him to look in his wallet and see if he had pictures of a family! In that vague way of his he complied, he pulled out his wallet and looked through it and said, 'No.' But he seemed a little surprised, like he was expecting to see some pictures there!"

They pedaled on. Neither spoke for several minutes.

"I like them," Grunewald said. "The manager and the assistant manager. Helmut and Juliette. Not that they might not be up to their eyeballs in something. But I like them. You can tell about people, you know. Not what they'll do if they're tempted—none of us really know what we'd do if someone tempts us. I don't have affairs but don't put me on a desert island with a pretty girl. Temptation aside, if there were only two groups of people in the world, the good ones and the bad ones, I'd number them among the good ones."

Hill nodded.

"About Gerste," Grunewald said. "It's coming back to me. I saw him on television more than forty years ago. It was that moment just after his crimes had become known and before he was indicted. Probably he fled right after the television interview when he realized that he'd gone from a nonentity to a celebrated war criminal overnight. My overall impression of him was that he had zero insight. That was my feeling about most of those characters from the war. They never reflected about anything. I bet the philosophers say that self-awareness is a feature of our species but I'm not so sure about that. Most of the people I run into have never looked in the mirror their whole life."

"What else did he seem like?"

"Arrogant. Puffed up. Proud of something. The way all of them talked about following orders, they never said it with regret, they always made it sound heroic. As if thinking for yourself would have been the real war crime!" Grunewald shook his head. "I don't know. It's hard not to fight for your country. In every war there are only a handful of pacifists and who knows if they're right? You might say, that depends on whether your country is right or wrong. But how easy is that to know?"

Hill nodded. They pedaled on. Grunewald changed settings and bent forward, pushing himself up the mountain he'd just manufactured.

32.

Back in his suite Hill ordered dinner, showered, and let his disconnected thoughts bump up against one another.

Silverstein had not turned Josef Gerste in yet—or else the whole world would have known about it. Second, Silverstein probably kept notes, maybe a diary of his Nazi-hunting, maybe a computer file. Would the police have his computer? That would depend on how forthcoming the Langes had been—which meant, probably not. It was even less likely that the Langes would have turned over his private papers to the police. So the information of Josef Gerste's whereabouts probably remained locked away somewhere in Silverstein's mansion—and maybe the Langes knew about it and maybe they didn't.

Ernst Morgan, the man shot in the street, the man who claimed to know Silverstein's killer, had said that it wasn't a Jewish thing. So, was this all a red herring, all this drama about Josef Gerste, the infamous Josef Gerste of the Ardeatine caves? It could be—Juliette Morel for one was worried about something entirely different. That's what the hotel manager Helmut Kirsch's lie implied, when he said that she was worried about Gerste—because when he said that he was certainly lying.

Hill let the powerful spray of hot water rake his scalp.

When he got out of the shower he found his dinner waiting. Hill had ordered a glass of wine but the manager had sent along a nice bottle, an Italian red from the Veneto, not so fancy as to seem like a bribe but several steps above an ordinary red.

Hill had a high tolerance for alcohol. Of course that was one of the warning signs of alcoholism. His father had been one of those people, too—someone who could drink more than the next person. But both of them could take alcohol or leave it. Alcohol was not the drug of choice of father or son. Rage was. His father controlled his rage by winding himself tighter than a drum. Everyone knew that he was a powder keg waiting to explode. Maybe once a year he did explode—that was a horrible thing to see. Some poor GI who thought himself tough would find himself in the hospital drinking his meals through a straw. Hill had the same explosive rage—he knew it and he hated it.

That was among the reasons why he would never return to Korea. One sight, one smell, and all the rage would come rushing back. One sight, one smell or one sound—maybe it would be the blaring siren. Every Army base had huge bullhorns on the top of poles blasting messages throughout the compound. You could hear those messages clear in the village. "Private Henry, report to the orderly room!" Almost always the

bullhorns ordered someone to report somewhere. But once every two or three months they began shrieking … the signal either that North Korea had attacked or that an exercise was beginning.

Throughout his youth it had only been exercises …

The compound would come alive. The armored personnel carrier drivers ran to the motor pool to bring their tracks around to the company staging area. The GIs rushed to their respective arms room, one arms room per company, grabbing their rifles and machine guns and grenade launchers and recoilless rifles. It all took maybe fifteen minutes – each armored personal carrier would fill with GIs, the rear hatch would shut, the driver would sit ready in his turret, the squad leader or platoon sergeant would sit ready in a second turret behind the driver, his .30 caliber machine gun loaded … and then the waiting would begin.

The order to move out never came through the bullhorns, but by radio … so it always came as a surprise when the tracks started moving toward the front gate with their characteristic lumbering gait.

Hill sipped his wine.

Everything about that remained as clear as a bell. The following years were shrouded in darkness—maybe because so much of them were lived at night. But the U.S. Army mobilizing for some exercise on a sunny day, with water buffalo relaxing in the rice paddies and the Korean boys who hated Hill and who worked in the compound as servants feverish with excitement—because, with the GIs gone, there so many transistor radios just purchased on R & R in Tokyo for them to steal … that all remained crystal clear.

What had Mike Silverstein's crystal clear images been?

Whatever they were, they had brought him to Berlin. Silverstein had not arrived in Berlin by accident, like some employee of a corporation who gets sent somewhere or some hippy who ends up in Norway rather than Sweden because he hops the wrong ferry. Silverstein had come to Berlin on purpose.

What were Silverstein's crystal clear images?

Hill sat there, sipping his wine and wondering.

33.

Finally he turned his attention to Ernst Morgan. He dressed for a visit to a wine bar in an edgy Turkish neighborhood—armed and casual.

When he got downstairs his car was waiting. Hill gave Altman the address. After they'd been driving for a minute Hill asked Vogel, "Can you recite your poetry from memory?"

The driver nodded. "Yes."

"I'd love to hear some of it in your own voice."

He thought he might have to ask him twice. But Altman replied instantly, "Do you have one in mind?"

"There's one about the silent sounds of birds at night."

Altman nodded. "I like that one." He began reciting. The transformation amazed Hill. The haggard, frightened poet turned into an orator. Hill closed his eyes and listened. Vogel finished reciting and without being asked began a second poem. He recited four, all related by their night imagery, and then stopped. The sudden silence was pregnant and strange, like the silence that arises when great music ends.

"Do you ever give poetry readings?" Hill said.

"No."

"You should. You have a very strong presence."

Vogel didn't reply immediately. "I know it's no longer dangerous to recite poetry," Altman said. "Maybe I'm just too shy. Plus, I'm a dinosaur."

They drove for another ten minutes. Altman began peering out at the buildings, trying to read the addresses. In the dusky light the wine bar appeared like a mirage between two nondescript apartment buildings. In front of the buildings men sat on folding chairs in three and fours, smoking pipes and drinking tea. Some wore conical red fezzes, some embroidered black fezzes, some—the younger ones—sat hatless.

The wine bar was easy to miss. It had a small front and no sign. Windows on either side of a door—that was it. It was dwarfed by the apartment building into which it was built. The car pulled up.

"You're off duty now," Hill said.

"No!" Altman Vogel looked dismayed. "I can't leave you here."

"I'll be fine. I'll call a cab later. It may be very late."

Hill stood on the sidewalk for a moment, taking in the scene. The Turks kept smoking, drinking, and chatting—but not one of them was unaware of his presence.

Hill walked into the wine bar. It was a pleasant place, small and homey. In front of him was a tiny counter and behind it an espresso machine and some open bottles of wine with stoppers in them. To the left was a single table for two, to the right two more tables for two. To the right of the counter, through an arched opening, you entered the rest of the bar, a much larger space.

The main feature of this front room was a wall-sized wine rack on the right-hand wall holding hundreds of bottles of wine—many of them dirt-cheap.

There was only one other customer, a tiny Arab man of about forty, wearing traditional white garb and an embroidered black fez, who sat sketching and smiling. He reminded Hill of a gnome. Hill nodded to him and the Arab smiled back, made an inviting gesture—as if to welcome Hill to the wine bar—and said, "Do you mind if I sketch you while you drink?"

Hill shrugged. "Go ahead."

A young German came out from the back to serve him.

"Hello!" he said in a friendly, solicitous way. "What can I get you?"

"Give me a glass of red—anything," Hill said.

"Do you prefer--"

"Really, anything will do."

"I'm going to pour you a nice Portuguese red. Tell me if you like it."

Hill glanced at the wine rack as the young man poured out a hefty glass. Many of the bottles were just four or five Euros—five or six dollars—to take away and eight or nine Euros to drink in. Individual glasses of wine started at a euro-and-a-half. This was one of the lures of Berlin, along with cheap housing—cheap wine. Berlin was still a cheap place, which was why arty youth from around the world flocked there.

Hill took his glass to a tiny table opposite the Arab painter. The Arab painter smiled. He began sketching Hill. Hill sat back and relaxed. He had a seat by the window and the setting sun shone red between the apartment buildings. It was at once light and dark out, not so much dusk as fiery evening. It was quiet on the street—some traffic, Turks, Arabs, and Germans coming home from work, all the usual things. The Turks who'd been sitting around had moved indoors—it was dinnertime.

Hill's attention was drawn to the back room, which he could just see through the arched opening. It had the same homey feeling as the front room. The chairs were mismatched, the art on the wall unframed. A folding table was set up in one corner, the kind of table that back home might hold happy hour snacks. The room was empty

but you had the feeling that a crowd was coming. Hill smiled to himself—he wouldn't mind "consulting" out of such a place! Somehow it put Ernst Morgan in a more favorable light …

For a second he wasn't sure where he was—or who he was. He had that feeling that sometimes came over him of being without age, without nationality, without history—almost without species. It was a good feeling. It meant that he was comfortable in his own skin and comfortable in the universe. It was a feeling that rarely lasted for more than a minute, but that he could feel it at all seemed a blessing.

34.

When Hill looked up he saw the Arab artist smiling at him. After a moment the Arab put down his pencil, got out of his seat, and crossed the few feet to Hill's table. Hill judged him to be five foot two or three.

"How are you?" The Arab said in German.

"I am excellent," Hill replied in Arabic.

The gnome's eyes opened wide. "This is not strange!" he exclaimed. "Not at all strange that you speak Arabic!"

Hill smiled. The Arab introduced himself as Rafi Moghadam. "May I join you?" he asked.

"Please."

The Arab brought his tea over to Hill's table, leaving his sketchbook and paraphernalia where they were.

"I'm from Morocco," the Arab said. "But I've lived in Berlin for fifteen years now. I am very German—heh-heh. Don't I look German? No? Well, I am in disguise! I am disguised as a Moroccan Arab but I am a very good German."

Hill smiled. "It's an excellent disguise."

"Thank you! By the way, I must sell you a painting. I try to sell everyone a painting—especially rich Americans. You are a rich American?"

"We've been speaking German and Arabic."

"Nevertheless! I infer that you are an American and that you have a little bit of money. Clue one. You didn't care if Alfred—that's Alfred who served you—poured you a cheap wine or an expensive wine. Clue two. You sat down and became very comfortable—that means that you are used to privilege and being left to sit without being hassled. Clue three. Your German is good and your Arabic is good but neither is your first language. Clue four. You look like you can kill people with your bare hands but you also look like you would think twice before doing so. I translate that as American noblesse oblige. You have wealth, power, and prestige but you are aware of your responsibilities. You are an American king."

Hill laughed out loud. "You must not have any trouble selling your paintings! You are very good!"

"So—let me show you what I do."

He went back to his seat, retrieved his portfolio, and rejoined Hill. He pulled out postcards of his gallery shows. He was apparently a well-known painter. Hill looked at the cards. Moghadam's style was the triptych.

The paintings were portrait triptychs: a distorted face against a blue background on the first panel, a realistic face against a yellow background on the second panel, a skull against a black background on the third panel, that sort of thing. There was something in them that reminded you of North Africa and something in them that reminded you of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud.

A thought crossed Hill's mind.

"You knew Michael Silverstein?"

"Of course. Very sad."

"Did Silverstein collect you?" Hill asked.

"Yes!" Moghadam exclaimed. "He bought three of my paintings and I was angling to sell him a fourth one, a triptych called 'The History of Humiliation' that I just finished. I know he would have liked it. He had a good eye—a great eye. And I don't mean just because he collected me. He had some kind of radar. You knew him?"

"No. But I'm learning about him." He looked the Arab in the eye. "You don't happen to know who poisoned him?"

Rafi Moghadam smiled. "You hear things, you know things, and you guess things. All I can say is, it is not strange that someone did."

Hill stared at the Arab. The Arab returned his stare evenly.

"And Ernst Morgan?" Hill said.

"An enterprising fellow. Yes, I knew him. Another unfortunate death!"

"Yes?"

"Certainly. Maybe he was just a tiny bit shady—but that was his disguise! He was really a good German, just like me."

The last light of day disappeared, making it dark outside and bright inside. It was seven-thirty in the evening. The Arab chatted—and as he did, people began to arrive. They came with casserole dishes, bags of chips, twelve-packs of soft drinks; they warmly greeted Rafi as they passed into the back room. Arabs, Turks, Germans—many arriving in couples—most in their late twenties or early thirties. A potluck. A celebration. The new Berlin.

"A birthday," Rafi Moghadam explained. "It's somebody we love who's been fighting cancer. She is maybe on the mend. There will be a lot of food. You must join us. This is not strange, you joining us. All right?"

Hill smiled. “It will be my pleasure.”

35.

The wine bar filled up completely. People came and went to the potluck table. The front room and the back room were full to capacity. Hill found himself in the back, having been ushered into the middle of things by Moghadam. Hill was talking to an attractive black woman in her mid-thirties—her name was Bella but everyone called her Bella from Birmingham. She was a Brit and a recent arrival to Berlin and her German was spotty—which made Hill Heaven sent.

"Have you ever been to Birmingham?" she asked.

"No."

"Don't bother!"

She told him about how she'd fallen into a job that required her to come to Berlin suddenly, how she was picking up German on the fly, and that her big regret was having to leave her teenage daughter behind. Her daughter was staying with her mother …

"What do you do?" Hill asked her, having to raise his voice against the din.

"Two things. I have a job at an organization that matches immigrants with vacant housing. That's what I'm trained to do and they asked me to come right away. That's my day job, so to speak. But I have a second love." She was practically shouting. "I'm into alternative medicine. I also work as an herbalist at a day spa."

Hill laughed out loud.

"What's funny?" Bella said.

"Nothing! Except that you're the prime suspect in a murder!"

"What murder?"

"Well—it just may have been your boss. Michael Silverstein?"

"No!"

"You've heard?"

"Of course!"

"Poisoned with an herb," Hill said. Bella gave him a strange look. Hill shook his head. "Never mind!" he cried. "I'm going to get some food."

He edged his way to the potluck table. There were dishes from around the world, German sausages, ground meat in phyllo dough, pickles from North Africa, and a cabbage dish with a smell that overpowered him. Suddenly the most terrible rage filled his chest. He wanted to crush something, smash something. The smell reminded him of Korea.

He saw his mother.

His mother had been thinner than thin. What sort of terrible, preposterous life had his father foisted upon her, bringing her to that dirt village to co-run a brothel and raise three children?

A real bully, he'd made them all eat kimchi—not semi-palatable restaurant kimchi like you got in a Korean restaurant in New York or London and that was more like cabbage salad—no, the worst kimchi, rotten, smelly kimchi—watery, with brined fish in it—that had been fermenting since the beginning of time.

His mother could not tolerate it and ate it and got sick and spent most of her life holding her stomach and looking gray. Why had his father done that?

Hill could hardly keep himself from smashing something. He put his plate down on the potluck table and pushed his way outside. He turned right and strode down the empty street. The way he walked and the way he looked, you knew to get out of his way. He walked for twenty minutes, ten minutes straight ahead, blindly striding, and ten minutes back. By the time he arrived back at the wine bar his breathing had almost returned to normal.

He slowed down as he approached the bar—Bella from Birmingham was out front, smoking a cigarette.

"I thought you came out to smoke a cigarette," she said. "I came out to join you."

"No. I just went for a quick walk."

She looked at him over lowered eyes. "Does my smoking bother you?"

"Not at all."

"Because some men … "

It was a beautiful evening. In his rage, Hill hadn't noticed it. Now he did. It was balmy out—a warm spring evening with a clear hint of summer to come. For a second he forgot everything. No Silverstein. No Korea. Nothing. He met Bella's eyes and smiled at her.

"What was that about me being a murder suspect?" she said.

"Silverstein was poisoned."

"But I--"

"Of course not! Don't think twice about it."

“I mean, I didn’t really like him … ”

Hill watched her carefully. No, she hadn’t killed Silverstein; he was sure of that.

“Can I ask you a question?” he said.

“Of course.”

“Your German—it isn’t that strong.”

Bella looked embarrassed. “I know! I’m trying to catch up.”

“How do you dispense herbs if you don’t quite know what your clients—is that what you call them?—are saying? Aren’t you afraid of killing them off?”

He said it lightly—but he was actually curious.

“Right now, I have a translator,” she said. “In a few months that won’t be necessary. That’s been working okay.”

Hill nodded. “The customer pays extra for that?”

“No,” Bella said. “I’ve been splitting my wages with the translator. Even with the day job, it’s been tough. I’ve been sending money home to my mom for my daughter. She’s sixteen and needs decent clothes—you know, she needs a chance. That’s why I’m living in the place I’m living! A room in a kind of boarding house for artists.”

Hill stared at her. She met his gaze and stared back at him.

“I wouldn’t mind seeing that,” he said.

Bella from Birmingham smiled and touched him on the arm.

“That seems possible,” she said. “I’d love to show it to you.”

He continued staring at her and she didn’t look away. He nodded slowly. She smiled. They made their date and cemented it.

Hill felt happy. He’d supposed that he would be sleeping with Gabi tonight and that thought, rather than pleasing him, had been disturbing him. Was it the electricity of her kiss or something else? Whatever it was, he was happy that he would be spending the night with Bella from Birmingham and not the German Valkyrie.

36.

As Bella ground out her cigarette a thought popped into Hill's head. "Everybody knows something," he said to himself. "But they may each know a different thing!"

At that moment Gabi arrived. She wore a long dress frilly at the bottom, a short jacket, a scarf, a kind of turban hat, and stiletto heels. With her was a man almost as tall and well built as Hill—this had to be Gabi's Turk.

Gabi and Bella hugged and cheek-kissed—several times, like best friends. The Turk appraised Hill and Hill appraised the Turk. He had a scar on his left cheek, white with age, milk-colored against his very brown skin. The scar was beautiful, even mesmerizing. His eyes had a depth and luster that only come with intelligence. Stupid actors can't fake those eyes—it can't be done.

He was wearing jeans and a leather jacket but on him the standard outfit looked special. Hill presumed that he carried a knife or a gun or both. Hill's immediate reaction was that he liked him.

"My two boys," Gabi said, stepping between Hill and the Turk. "Thomas Hill, meet Cabbar Ozan."

There wasn't a ghost of a chance they were going to shake hands. Both nodded slightly.

"Now, boys!" Gabi said. "Be nice."

"I'm very nice," Hill said.

"I'm equally nice," the Turk said, smiling. He had a rich voice full of barely-suppressed humor. The smile revealed a fierce and beautiful set of teeth. No teeth knocked out, Hill thought—which meant that he didn't actually fight or that he was very good.

"I'm guessing you're not an accountant," Hill said.

"I do keep good accounts," the Turk replied. "But professionally, I'm a consultant."

"Like Ernst Morgan."

Ozan shrugged. "We consulted about different things."

"He was a friend of yours?"

"A dear friend."

"So you're broken up by his murder?"

"Very broken up."

He was about as broken up as a slab of concrete. Yet Hill also believed him.

Gabi flirted—but warily. Hill sensed a change in the weather from earlier in the day. This was not the Gabi who had kissed him at the mansion. She had something on her mind—and seemed pleased, rather than jealous, to find Hill and Bella from Birmingham an item. "I've been taken off your hands," Hill thought, watching her. "And you're relieved about that."

The four of them went inside, pushed their way into the back room, and rejoined the party. Gabi and the Turk pushed further on, all the way to the back, and Hill and Bella squeezed in near the potluck table.

Hill found that he was ravenous. But he couldn't stomach going back and smelling that smell again. Bella made herself a plate and Hill ate off of it. She smiled at him a lot.

"Did you known Ernst?" Hill asked.

"I've seen him around and I've talked with him. I've only been here a few months—I don't know anyone all that well."

"Gabi seems like a good friend already."

"We hit it off immediately! I know the fellow who runs this place, so this is where I've been hanging out for the last month. I've spent a lot of time with Gabi."

"And you know her sister?"

"Martha? No, Martha doesn't come here."

"Did Michael Silverstein?"

"I've never seen him here."

"Tell me about your daughter."

Bella beamed and began telling proud mother stories. Hill listened and smiled gratefully. It wasn't often that you found a place like this. It had gemutlichkeit—the sense of coziness, good cheer, and social acceptance—that the tourist guidebooks claimed you could experience in any Munich beer hall. In fact, those places were xenophobic and breeding grounds for mayhem. This wine bar was the genuine article. Small, with no room to move and hardly enough room to breathe, it made you feel genuinely welcome.

A lull hit the room. Hill took that as his moment. He stood up and clinked his glass several times, the universal signal for an announcement or a toast.

"Let me introduce myself," Hill said. "My name is Thomas Hill and I work for the

company that owns the Pankow Grand Hotel, the hotel where Michael Silverstein died on Monday night. I think that many of you knew Michael, or at least knew of him. So if you want to help bring his murderer to justice, I'm the man to talk to. Second, I met with Ernst Morgan last night. I was with him when he was shot and killed. I think that he was a friend to some of you—if you know anything about that murder—about either murder—let me buy you a drink and we can chat."

Then he repeated his message in Arabic.

Then he repeated it in Turkish.

Then he sat down.

There was a long moment of silence. Then the room exploded with conversation. Hill gauged their reaction. Nothing much had changed! He hadn't suddenly become a pariah. He was glad. He liked the place and felt grateful that he could stay longer.

37.

He hadn't gotten himself booted out but he did step outside. In case anyone had information for him, he wanted to make himself available. He waited outside the wine bar on the dark, quiet street.

After a few minutes a woman emerged. It was the guest of honor—the woman with cancer. She looked to be about forty-five. Hill had heard her name: Rachel. She had on warm winter clothes and wore a hat over her wig. She shivered a bit as she approached Hill and wrapped her scarf a little tighter around her neck.

Hill nodded. Rachel returned the nod.

"I knew Michael," Rachel said.

"Yes?"

Hill waited.

"You probably won't get this perspective from anyone else," Rachel said. "I'm Jewish. I'm an actual German Jew. My parents were German Jews. My grandparents were German Jews. We go back hundreds of years." She glanced away. "We always hid it. Every generation acquired papers—on paper, we were Catholic. We were a decent, well-respected German Catholic family. Can you imagine keeping a secret like that for hundreds of years?"

"I can't," Hill said.

"I think it's amazing, a one-of-a-kind story. Except that there were others with the same story, too. In the last twenty years I've begun to hear about them. A Lutheran family that was really Jewish. Another Catholic family that was really Jewish. We've come out now—some of us."

"You mean there are still families of German Jews passing?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Because it's still not safe?"

"Safe?" It was a small, explosive noise. "That's not quite it. They have a good life. They would lose that good life in an instant. It's not that they would be carted off somewhere. They would just suddenly lose access to all the places where an hour previously they had been completely accepted. They would lose their friends, their social circle, their standing—everything."

“All their friends?”

“Would some friends remain loyal? I wouldn’t want to bet on it.”

She rubbed her hands together.

“Tell me about Michael?” he said.

“Michael.” She made a face. “There is a kind of Jew called a self-hating Jew. Michael wasn’t that. Nor was he assimilated and blasé about being Jewish. He was intensely Jewish but in a very odd way. It’s really hard to describe—maybe because I never did understand it. He would use Yiddish expressions in a room full of his German acquaintances. Was it to rub their noses in it? To remind them that we Jews had survived? Or was it a kind of intimacy? He would tell stories about his grandfather, very Jewish stories, lower Manhattan garment industry stories. But you always found yourself asking, why? Why this story? Why … why introduce all that Jewishness into--”

She struggled to find the right phrase.

“Into polite conversation?” Hill said.

“Exactly!”

The woman fell silent. Hill watched her shiver.

“You’d better go in,” Hill said. “Thanks for talking with me.”

Rachel nodded. “I didn’t really have anything to say. Maybe just—maybe I wanted to acknowledge that he’d passed. That’s all.”

“Thank you.”

Rachel returned to the warmth of the wine bar. No one else came out. Hill waited another five minutes and went back in. He buttonholed the young German working behind the counter—the owner of the wine bar.

“Who were Ernst Morgan’s friends?”

The young man shrugged. “Nobody in particular.”

“Is that right?”

“That’s right.”

“Apparently this was his office. What did he do here? His business card said he ‘consulted.’”

“No idea,” the young man said.

“Did he meet with people here? Did it look like he was having meetings?”

“I never noticed.”

"Late in the afternoon, with nobody around, just as empty as it was this afternoon, you didn't notice if this regular customer of yours was or wasn't sitting with strangers and talking to them?"

"That's right," the young man said. "I never noticed."

He wasn't defiant and he wasn't frightened. He had a very easy way of lying.

Hill smiled at him. "Thank you very much." He stared into the young man's eyes. "By the way, were the police here today?"

"No."

"They will be tomorrow."

Hill returned to the party. He smiled and drank a lot. Another hour passed in the most pleasant way. Bella from Birmingham sat across from him and engaged him in a conversation that mingled New Age pleasantries—Bella had a lot to say about the Law of Attraction and other things that Hill could only smile at—with foreplay.

He and Gabi kept some long distance connection across the room. But her attitude had changed over the course of the last hour. She seemed even more preoccupied. It had something to do with the Turk—their head-to-head conversations in the corner were serious. Somehow it reminded Hill of conversations between a pimp and his whore. The Turk was explaining things to her, warning her …

Then the Arab gnome joined Gabi and the Turk. The conversation remained serious-looking …

Bella gave Hill a look. It was time to leave.

"Give me a moment," Hill said.

He made his way to the back of the bar where Gabi, the Turk, and the Arab painter were huddled together.

"Goodnight, Gabi," Hill said. He nodded to the Turk. "I enjoyed meeting you," he said to the Arab.

"It was my pleasure," Moghadam said. "Come to my studio some time. Let me try to sell you a painting!"

Hill smiled. "That's a date." He stared for a moment at the Turk, who returned his stare. Then he turned his gaze on Gabi—one of world's great beauties.

"Looks like your evening isn't over," Gabi said.

"Something about the Law of Attraction," Hill said. "I don't quite understand it but I think I like it."

Gabi laughed. "I believe in that too," she said, saying a last smoldering thing with her eyes.

38.

Bella lived in an upstairs room of a building that had once been a mansion and was now a New Age café and meeting place. You could rent out the café for concerts, classes, and parties; the upstairs had a boarding house feel, with five or six single rooms and a large shared bathroom at the end of the hall.

Bella opened the door to her room and held it open for him. Hill walked in. It was a bare room, with a mattress on a wooden platform, a simple table, two chairs, a wardrobe, and not much else. But the ceiling was high, the window large, and a night breeze blew in. Bella turned to Hill and they kissed.

"Can we sit for a minute?" she said.

"Of course."

They sat down opposite one another in the pair of chairs. Bella leaned forward.

"What herb was it that killed Mike?

"Wolfsbane."

"No wonder!" Bella exclaimed.

"Why do you say that?"

"It was mentioned in the Harry Potter books. She called it the 'queen of poisons.' Naturally someone would think to use it."

Hill nodded. "You know about it?"

"I do."

"You can get it in Berlin?"

"It's in the garden right out back of the café, if you know what to look for."

"And other places?"

"Any garden that dates from before the war—there's a decent chance you'd find it there."

"You didn't by any chance poison him?" Hill said, smiling.

Bella smiled back. "I didn't. I'm vegan."

Hill laughed. "That's the best explanation for not killing someone I've ever heard!"

He paused. “You ate every damn thing at the potluck!”

“I’m not vegan at a potluck. I’m no idiot!”

They rose from the chairs simultaneously, kissed, and held one another close.

He pushed her away a bit and looked her in the eyes. “You’re sure you didn’t kill him?” he said.

“No. But I know who did.”

He stared at her.

“A meat-eater!” she cried, and bit him lightly on the neck.

He loved sex. That didn’t make him so unusual; but an awful lot of men had a knack for getting in their own way. They were meek, amateurish, ungainly, prideful, or something else that cost them. Something in their psyche made it more complicated than it had any reason to be. The repression, the squeamishness, the performance anxiety—Hill shook his head. Bella from Birmingham was there in front of him, which was lovely, and that was all there was to it.

He thanked his lucky stars that growing up in a brothel in Korea hadn’t ruined him—hadn’t turned him against women, hadn’t turned him against sex. In a normal life, you grew up to kiss the girls. In the world of his youth, you were schooled never to kiss the girls because you didn’t know where their lips had just been. Thinking that way could ruin you early. “You don’t know what she just had in her mouth!” There was all that sex and all that hatred of the girls.

The worst scenes were between the GIs and their “long-time girls.” You could rent a girl for an hour or you could rent her for a month, play house together, and make like you were a couple in love. But of course the girl wasn’t in love and she would turn tricks on the side; and the GI would learn about it and all hell would break loose. The GI who’d been paying seventy dollars a month for her services would actually feel hurt and betrayed. Girls had died over that.

Hill hadn’t learned to hate the girls. His rage was never against them. He pulled Bella close.

They made love and then fell asleep. At three in the morning Hill woke up and sat bolt upright in bed.

According to Kirsch, Silverstein had been following Josef Gerste back in January. No doubt he’d learned where Gerste lived. A man in his nineties was not going to elude a tail. So why hadn’t Silverstein turned him in?

Hill stared into the darkness. Then he shook his head and went back to sleep. Bella was snoring beside him.

At first light he awoke and trundled down the hall to the communal bathroom. Back in Bella’s room, he pulled on his pants and buttoned his shirt. When he was ready to

leave he woke Bella. She stretched and smiled.

"Going?" she said.

"Must."

"There's a place for coffee just across the street. They open early."

"Can't." He touched her gently on the cheek. "So who did kill him?" he said softly.

"He was a bastard, you know," she said sleepily.

"How so?"

"I'm not sure. But I just know that he had an ugly side. He seemed like a friendly, passive, little New Age workaholic. But there was something else going on."

"Can you name the ugliness?"

She shrugged. "Can't, love. Though with men that short, how could it not be about sex?"

Hill nodded. "Did he ever come on to you?"

"He came on to everyone, man and woman alike, but verbally, with jokes and innuendoes, all self-deprecating and sly. I'm not sure what he wanted. I don't know if it was sex or to be patted on the head or what. Like he would tell me stories about the sexual practices of women in Africa. What was that about?"

"So," Hill smiled. "Would you say that he did or that he didn't come on to you?"

"Ah, love, you're asking me to really wake up!" She sat up higher, exposing her breasts. "I would say that he did come on to me but that he also didn't want me. He came on to me … but not from taste."

"Lovely," Hill said. He bent over, kissed her on the lips, and left.

39.

He made his way back to the Pankow Grand Hotel, only stopping for a cup of coffee at a small café. The streets were quiet. A woman in a housedress walked her dog. Some housepainters lugged supplies to their truck, the older one berating the younger one about something. Half-empty trams rattled by. Women carrying shopping bags began their shopping rounds. Men with work piling up somewhere stopped for a quick cup of coffee and a pastry at the pastry shops.

He strolled along working class streets. The sun was just high enough to bring a hint of warmth. It was going to be another lovely spring day. No one looked at him twice. Few neighborhoods are suspicious or mean in the morning. At eight a.m. you can walk almost anywhere, because the hoodlums, who have been wreaking havoc all night, have finally gone to bed.

It was nine in the morning when he got back to the hotel. He let the glowing purple escalator take him to the lobby level, where he made himself known by walking slowly across the lobby to the elevators. That way anyone with something to tell him—Grunewald, the manager, the assistant manager—would know that he'd returned.

As he crossed the lobby he stopped once or twice. What felt off? The high ceiling with its canopied netting? No. The lighting? No. The waterfall behind the front desk? No. The hotel uniform—black pants, purple shirt? No. Something that ought to be present that was missing? If so … whatever it was, it wasn't coming to him. He shook he head and continued on.

In his suite he booted up his computer. There were emails to answer—he ignored them, except for one from his sister and one from Cohen. He answered his sister first, making an effort to cheer her up by describing Berlin in the spring. He reread the email and sighed. It wasn't a very evocative picture. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. He retrieved Altman Vogel's book of poetry, thumbed through it, and found a poem about buds and birds that, while nothing like cheerful, at least had the virtue of being beautiful. He told his sister about Altman, appended the poem, and sent the email off.

Cohen's email contained information on the manager and the assistant manager. Hill ordered breakfast from room service and read about the German and the Frenchwoman. They were mostly ordinary things. Kirsch hadn't started out in hospitality management—he'd wandered into the hotel business in his early thirties, having held various sales jobs before that. He started out as a desk clerk and worked his way up to manager. His evaluations were good to excellent. He treated staff fairly, handled guests adroitly, and kept to budget. Nothing to suggest that he'd have a reason to poison Michael Silverstein.

Juliette Morel had bounced around in the tourist industry—tour escort, travel agent, that sort of thing—before landing in the hotel business. She came from the south of France but had lived most of her life in Paris. By coincidence, she'd worked at the Parkway hotel in Montmartre with the harsh lighting, but years before that scam had occurred. She wasn't exactly liked but she was respected for her diligence and hard work. Nothing there to suggest a motive for murder.

If Cohen wanted you to notice something he starred it. There were only a few starred items—that Helmut Kirsch had spent time in the Balkans, which almost guaranteed that he'd been up to something; that Juliette Morel had a distant Vichy background on her mother's side, meaning nothing in particular except that she might have a residual genetic preference, as it were, to favor old Nazis. She'd also worked on cruise ships as an art auctioneer—that was a lovely scam, Hill thought, selling middle-aged couples "fine art" as they sailed from port to port, getting them to bid against one another as if the art had value. Morel had that in her past and that didn't speak well for her.

But in the main they looked pretty clean …

His breakfast arrived. He was hungry. He finished the bacon, sausages, cheese, scrambled eggs, and bread and downed a pot of coffee. Then he took a shower. He dressed in workout clothes, made his way to the gym, and spent an energetic hour working the weight machines. No one approached him in the gym or as he passed back through the lobby. Back in his suite, he took another shower. He finished drying himself off and downed the last dregs of cold coffee. Then his cell phone rang.

40.

It was the reporter Ari Cushman calling from Israel.

"Something occurred to me," Ari said. "When I was sitting with the rabbi before you came, he mentioned that he had never met Silverstein in person—people had told him this and that about Silverstein but he'd never met the man. With you, he said that he'd heard Silverstein's thoughts about moving Israel 'with his own ears.' He was lying to me or to you."

Hill thought about that. "Any hunches?"

"Probably just congenital. In my worldview, all clerics are liars. But I did have a thought. The rabbi has a pretty daughter. You spoke with her at the dance. Ruth. If the daughter knew Silverstein in a biblical way that might better explain the rabbi's animus. In which case he'd be more of a suspect—and then he wouldn't want it known that he'd actually met Silverstein. So the lie would have been the one he told me—and in the heat of the moment he may have told you the truth. But that's a lot of ifs."

"Agreed. Plus it doesn't look like he had the opportunity to poison Silverstein. I can't see him wandering around the day spa unnoticed, or the hotel restaurant, or Silverstein's house."

"He could have sent someone. He has followers. They call him 'the Berlin rabbi,' like he's a legend. He could have sent that woman, the one Silverstein had lunch with."

Hill laughed. "I'm guessing his followers don't have much of a sense of humor. That woman in her Muslim get-up was having far too much fun."

"Agreed. So—it was just a thought."

"Which I appreciate!" Hill laughed. "How's Israel?"

"As a matter of fact, terrible. The tensions here are excruciating. It makes everybody crazy."

"But you and your girlfriend?"

"We are a small, subversive unit of sanity in the Middle East! We don't get out of bed much."

Hill laughed and hung up. He headed for the hotel's main kitchen. In that beehive of activity they busily prepared food for the bars, the restaurants, and the rooms. Room service orders came in and carts left. Hill asked for the Korean cook Grunewald had mentioned.

“Kang?” a fry station cook said. “Down this aisle, make a right. He’s chopping vegetables.”

Hill proceeded down the aisle and turned right. Two Korean cooks stood side-by-side preparing vegetables. The shorter one, his face pockmarked, attacked the vegetables while his partner, taller and leaner, approached his chore so serenely that he seemed on another plane.

“Look at this one!” the pockmarked cook said in Korean, spying Hill. “He’s the one from New York.”

The serene cook nodded absently.

“I hear he fires people if they just fart in his presence!”

Hill approached the two cooks.

“No, sometimes I like the smell of farts,” he said in Korean.

Both cooks stopped what they were doing.

“I’m so sorry!” the pockmarked cook exclaimed. “I--”

“Forget about it.”

The serene cook cocked his head. “You speak fluent Korean.”

“I lived in Korea from the time I was seven until I was eighteen. Are you Kang?”

The man nodded. Hill turned to the other cook.

“Can you give us a moment?”

The pockmarked cook hurried away.

Kang studied Hill. “But you don’t have a Korean parent. Neither your mother nor your father.”

“No. My father was GI and after he got out of the service he took his family to Korea. He bought a dance hall.”

“A dance hall,” Kang said.

“A whorehouse.”

Kang nodded. “Yes. Next to some Army camp?”

“Exactly.” He moved a step closer. “What did you do in Korea?”

Kang shook his head.

“Please,” Hill said. “It’s a simple question.”

“I never think about Korea,” Kang said.

“That doesn’t mean that you can’t think about Korea. Or do you have amnesia?”

The man raised a hand to his temple. He began rubbing it.

"Here is why I ask," Hill said. "The man who died in the hotel on Friday was poisoned. And he ate lunch in the hotel restaurant. So it's just possible that somebody who prepared his food killed him. The more you look mysterious and the more you won't answer questions, the more you look like a suspect."

"I did nothing," Kang said.

"I believe you," Hill said. "But you would convince me more if you didn't seem guilty of something."

"I did nothing."

Hill nodded. "These vegetables," he said, trying a curve. "Are they different from the ones you ate in Korea?"

"Yes and no!" Kang exclaimed. "The cabbage is similar. But we use so many potatoes here in Germany! And we have so many different varieties. They differ greatly in their starch content. I'm in charge of making the potato pancakes and I had to learn all about the starch content of the different potatoes."

Hill stared at him. Kang seemed to have completely forgotten that he was a suspect. He spoke guilelessly about potatoes and looked ready to talk about potatoes at length—about anything, Hill guessed, except his past.

"Back in New York," Hill said, "I have an excellent staff that is perfectly capable of finding out who you are. I'd rather not put you under a microscope. Just meet me halfway. Tell me who you really are."

Kang grew agitated. He glanced around rapidly. His eye alighted on his paring knife. He picked it up and raised it, not quite brandishing it.

"Stop," Hill whispered. "You're going to cost yourself your job. Calm down! I don't want to torture you."

The Korean cook looked at the knife. He seemed to be deciding. "I was president of a steel company," he said in a faraway voice. "Problems every day. I must have cracked under the pressure. I left my wife and family."

Hill nodded. "Put the knife down."

The cook complied. Hill approached him and put an arm around his shoulder.

"Now that you've said it out loud," Hill said, "you may not be able to live like this."

"Said what out loud?" Kang replied.

Hill stepped back. He stared at the cook.

"Nothing," Hill said.

Kang nodded. "Excellent meeting you! And excellent chatting about Korea."

Hill stepped away. The cook resumed his chores. Soon he was whistling.

41.

Hill called Cohen. He described his interaction with the Korean cook.

"So," Hill said. "What was going on?"

"Here's my best guess," Cohen said. "It's called a fugue state—it's a particular anxiety state. It goes like this. Somebody in a high-pressure job, a surgeon, a CEO, an air traffic controller, decides to get out of his stressful situation by running away. He doesn't know what he's planning, it's all going on out of conscious awareness, and he has no memory of his past life after he flees. He wakes up one morning in another city, rolls out of bed, gets himself a job as a dishwasher, and lives pretty contentedly with no memory of his past life. The people he left behind never hear from him again."

"Is he dangerous?" Hill asked.

"No. He'll work well and make zero trouble. But one day somebody's likely to find him hanging from the rafters."

"Does he need--" Hill hesitated.

"Help?" Cohen said. "I have no idea."

"Okay. So the Pankow Grand has one amnesiac line cook."

"And I bet he's a model employee."

Hill hung up and searched out Grunewald.

"The cook is fine," Hill said.

Grunewald glanced at Hill. "You had a real conversation with him? His German is sketchy."

"I speak Korean," Hill said.

He had the odd feeling that he and the cook were brothers. He wanted to talk about his life in Korea exactly as little as the cook did.

"I lived there once," Hill said, forestalling questions.

"Okay," Grunewald said. "I'm glad he's fine. I like the fellow."

Hill called for his car. Silverstein's day spa was next. Random thoughts passed through his mind as he waited in the lobby. He pictured some improbable images: a lone Afrikaner boy in a Soweto school, a lone French boy in an Algerian school, a lone

German boy in a Turkish school. Each would be the tangible representative of the hated enemy—and no matter how friendly or admirable that boy was, he would have to learn to fight his life. Hill had been that boy in Korean schools.

He had been only one lone, lanky boy but he represented everything American to his classmates. Their older sisters were whores in his father's brothel. He had learned to fight for his life and to inflict maximum harm and terror. He didn't blame his classmates. His didn't blame America for the careless humiliations it inflicted on other nations. He blamed his father. To put an American boy in a Korean school in those circumstances …

A beautiful woman crossed the lobby. She brushed back her hair and smiled.

He thought about Silverstein's murder. In fact, he hadn't come to solve the crime. Actually solving the crime could prove awkward. One time, on one of his first solo assignments for Parkway, he'd spent a full month in Vienna, determined to solve a crime that had tentacles everywhere, in city government, in the federal government, and in the closed world of physicians and insane asylums. Cohen had given him a long leash, no doubt so that Hill could learn from experience under which rocks he might safely look and which rocks ought not to be disturbed.

He had solved the crime and, as a side result, gotten a young girl released from a Viennese asylum. But in the process all hell broke loose and Parkway World Properties came within an inch of getting bad press and taking a serious hit. Cohen had flown in to do damage control. All he said to Hill was, "Learn anything?" Hill remembered what he'd replied. "Apparently my job description isn't 'Sherlock Holmes.'" Cohen had patted him on the shoulder and cleaned up his mess.

Nowadays he didn't usually make a mess. But often enough he left a mess behind not of his own making. Others would come in and clean it up—usually lawyers. Maybe there was someone who needed to be paid off. Maybe there was someone to fire—maybe a whole staff. Maybe there was some smoothing to be done with the local authorities. Maybe there was a misdirection play to make by helping the local press bite into something that had nothing to do with what had really happened. The lawyers would come in and handle all of that.

A clerk approached him.

"Your car's ready, sir."

Hill nodded. He rode the neon purple escalator down to the street level, strode through the door held open by a bouncer in a purple muscle t-shirt and black pants, and stepped out into another beautiful Berlin spring day. He glanced down the bustling street teeming with tourists hunting out lunch and spotted Vogel. Vogel hurried up to him, upset having kept him waiting for a few minutes.

"I was fueling up!" Vogel cried.

“Not to worry.”

“Sorry!”

“I just sent one of your poems to my sister.”

“Oh!” Vogel smiled.

Hill followed Altman to the car, settled back, and let the poet hurry him at breakneck speed toward Silverstein’s spa.

42.

Altman suddenly braked.

"What is it?" Hill said.

"A rally."

A long line of traffic stretched ahead of them, halted at the distant intersection where marchers passed from right to left.

"What's it about?" Hill said.

Vogel peered over the dashboard, trying to make out the banners.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. He shook his head. "It's a pro-nationalist rally. Ostensibly it's a celebration of a football victory. But its organizers are people who think that Germany has apologized enough for its past." He turned off the engine. "This new nationalism is everywhere. German songs are coming back, kicking American songs off the airwaves. Goethe and Schiller are bestselling authors again. Every day a book comes out about discovering Germany—walking tours, classic train trips, how to make the perfect weekend car excursion. At least a dozen books have come out about why Germans should be proud of their heritage. It's all Germany, Germany, Germany."

"What do you think of it?" Hill said.

"I think that we are doomed to repeat our history," Vogel said, turning in his seat to face his passenger. "Here's one trifling example. You know the film director Volker Schlondorff? No? It doesn't matter. He's from my generation. He was so embarrassed by his German roots that he made a point of learning unaccented French so when he traveled he wouldn't be taken for a German. I just read that recently his daughter painted German flags on her cheeks to celebrate a football victory. You see? That's not a big deal in itself—it almost sounds innocent. But that's where it starts."

Hill noticed scores of angry protesters shouting at the marchers.

"Who's protesting?" he said.

"The Left," Altman said. "The Left see this new nationalism as fascism all over again."

"I think I'll get out for a minute."

He made his way along the sidewalk past milling gawkers. Tourists questioned each other in English, Spanish, and Italian. Who was marching? What were they marching

about? And who was protesting?

Hill neared the intersection. In front of him a three-deep row of protesters chanted against the march. The majority of the marchers refused to notice. Some cursed back. Banners passed proclaiming, "It's our time again!" A marching band played a patriotic song. Some organization came by on horseback. Next came a string of floats celebrating aspects of football: striking, marking, goalkeeping.

The woman next to him had tears running down her cheeks. She looked to be in her early sixties. She glanced at Hill, shook her head, and wiped at her tears with a tissue. She glanced again at Hill, who met her gaze.

"This is horrible," she said. "I can hardly believe it."

"Maybe it's just about celebrating football?" Hill said.

"No! Look at them! My own granddaughter, she's eighteen, she says that she's 'not touched by the Nazi era.' Not touched by it!" She pointed at a passing sign that read, 'The Nation of Beethoven.' "Is that about football?" she said. "You know the philosopher Habermas? He calls us a 'self-absorbed colossus.' You don't hear our jackboots stomping into other countries—yet! But moving the capital back to Berlin has done something bad to us. Bonn was a Western capital, a European Union place. Berlin is pure Germany. Just look at them!"

A crowd of men carrying beer mugs passed next. They chanted as one, "Fatherland! Fatherland! Fatherland!"

"Fascists!" the woman cried at the marchers.

"Fascists!" others began shouting.

The men took notice. Several broke away from the march. Cursing, they headed toward the protesters. More joined them. The protesters pushed forward. The half-dozen police manning the intersection, caught between the two factions, turned on the protesters. A bearded youth carrying a makeshift sign swung at the first policeman. The rushing men brandished their beer mugs. The unarmed protesters prepared to meet them.

"Get out of here!" Hill said to the woman. He took her by the hand and pulled her away from the intersection. They headed back through the crowd of frightened onlookers. Tourists were ducking into shops for cover. Drivers hurried back into their cars and locked their doors.

"Go!" Hill said to the woman. "Go home!"

She glanced at him a last time and hurried away.

Hill got back in the car.

"Are you all right?" Vogel said.

“Yes.”

Vogel was shaking. “You noticed which side the police took,” he said.

“Yes,” Hill said. “I noticed.”

43.

Riot police appeared. Ambulance sirens sounded in the distance. The melee took fifteen minutes to quell but it was another hour before traffic moved again.

Then they sped along.

Silverstein had built three days spas, one in the former East Berlin and two in the former west. The East Berlin one had been the first and was still the flagship spa. Altman drove in that direction.

When Silverstein had started out, real estate prices in East Berlin had been so cheap that the space he'd been able to purchase was huge. Four full floors of a building right on one of East Berlin's better streets, a street now bustling with shops and tourists.

You walked in through a quiet courtyard that housed small boutiques. You had no sense of what was waiting for you. You rode up a small elevator to a reception area, where you found all sorts of things for purchase—towels with spa logo, soaps, shampoos, essences, teas, crystals, singing bowls—and a receptionist happy to explain everything. You could get all the facials, mud wraps, herbal treatments, homeopathic medicines, and specialty massages your heart wanted. There were massages for couples, massages with hot rocks, even massages for babies!

Hill walked in, glanced around, and headed for the reception counter. The receptionist, an Italian, took Hill for a prospective customer. She greeted him with a friendly smile and slid a brochure and a rate sheet across the counter toward him. She began explaining the spa's amenities. She was short and attractive, with long brunette hair that accentuated her shortness.

Hill glanced at the rate sheet and did a double take. He'd rarely looked at the rates of services at spas—maybe only while browsing through some magazine or brochure—and these prices seemed astronomical. The woman reacted to his double take and said, "We also have a lot of specials. Would you like some information on our specials?"

Soft, repetitive music played over speakers—New Age music, Hill figured. The low lighting included dozens of scattered candles. Incense burned—sandalwood, Hill thought.

Hill said, "No, thanks. Actually, I came to ask a few questions about Michael Silverstein."

The woman tensed up. Hill pulled out his card and slid it across the counter toward the woman. She took the card and read it several times, as if not understanding it—or

else buying herself time.

"I work for the hotel where Mr. Silverstein was found murdered," Hill said. "We like to do our own investigating. Do you mind?"

She nodded grudgingly.

"Okay," Hill said. "Who's running the spas now?"

"Each spa had its own manager. The three managers are running them. Michael's wife is … working something out, I think."

"It was Michael? Not Mike?"

The Italian woman shrugged. "Some people called him Michael and some people called him Mike. It's kind of funny, but the people who liked him the best called him Michael—maybe as a sign of respect. He was short, you know, and it was kind of easy to put him down. I always thought that using 'Mike' was a kind of further putdown. But he didn't seem to care, one way or the other."

"So you liked him?"

She lowered her eyes for a moment and then raised them. "I did."

"By the way, do you prefer that we speak Italian?"

"No, no, I've lived in Germany for more than a dozen years.

A stream of women entered the reception area from the back. An exercise class had ended. The women were lithe and sweaty. They hadn't expected to see a man—and certainly not a man like Hill, who stood six-four and radiated danger and sex. They did what they no doubt usually did—purchased bottled water from a dispensing machine, unwrapped the lunches they'd brought with them, sat together at small tables in a café-like corner of the large reception room—but they kept their voices lowered, their usual post-exercise banter quieted to a muffled hum by Hill's presence.

"You say you liked him," Hill said.

"I did."

"But a lot of people seemed not to."

She made a gesture of irritation. "He was successful, powerful, smart and Jewish. What would you expect of Berliners? He was also very outspoken—he would talk about the war out loud and not in whispers. He would say things like, 'Did you know that right down the block was where a cousin of mine lived before he was sent to the camps?' He would say it with wonder and almost boyish enthusiasm—not as a jab or an indictment, just as … I don't know what. It never went over well. I thought it was brave of him."

It seemed unlikely that Michael Silverstein hadn't been sleeping with this woman, who'd clearly loved him at least a little.

“I don’t think I caught your name,” Hill said.

“Adelina Conti.”

Hill nodded. “And you knew about Josef Gerste?”

Her eyes narrowed. “No. Who’s that?”

He reacted with mock surprise. “I’m sure you know that name. He’s very much hated by the Italian people. He was a Nazi who massacred hundreds of people in Rome. Ring a bell now?”

“No,” Adelina said. “For the people of my generation all of that’s ancient history.”

Hill wondered if an Italian woman of about thirty would or wouldn’t be expected to know that bit of history. He couldn’t say. The manager of the Pankow Grand, who was in his late forties and German, had reacted instantly to the name. Would the name of Gerste fall on deaf ears if you were only thirty and Italian? Hill admitted that the name had meant nothing to him when he had first heard it …

“And did you know that Michael had somehow stumbled upon this Josef Gerste?”

“No!”

“He had. So,” Hill said, “what’s your best guess? Who do you think poisoned Michael?”

“I know who poisoned him! Someone in his wife’s family! They hated him.”

“For sleeping with you?” Hill asked.

“That’s none of your business!” the Italian woman exclaimed. “And I have things to do.” She turned on her heels, gave Hill her back, and busied herself with papers. Hill glanced around—all the women were watching him.

44.

Hill wandered around the spa. On the fourth floor he found an enormous gym—every piece of equipment you could imagine, many times over, including things you would have thought could only interest an astronaut in training. Women were on treadmills, on bicycles, doing arm curls, some listening to music, some watching small television sets built into the exercise equipment. A full third of the gym was given over to punching bags and a full-sized boxing ring.

A muscular man was minding the store. Hill approached the man and introduced himself. The man extended his hand.

"Janos Kovacs," he said.

Hungarian was not a language that Hill spoke, despite his months in Budapest—although, bizarrely enough, Hungarian was related to Korean. It belonged to the Ural-Altaic group of languages that included Hungarian, Mongolian, Finnish and Korean. But Hungarians knew German—there was the little matter of the Austro-Hungarian Empire …

"Do you mind if I pick your brain?" Hill said. "About your boss's murder?"

"Not at all. You're from the police?"

"I'm from the hotel where he died. We're doing our own investigation."

Kovacs nodded. He was a strong, lithe man, a shade under six feet and a shade south of two hundred pounds, the kind of man you pictured as an aerial acrobat in a circus, except that he was too big for that. And his ears were a bit too battered for normal wear. An ex-boxer, Hill reckoned.

"Tell me about the ring," Hill said. "It seems like an old-fashioned idea."

"Actually, it's making a comeback," Kovacs replied. "The ladies like to box and to kick-box. We have lessons every day. They learn self-defense. But probably the real reason it exists is that Michael liked to box. He was a good amateur. He would spar almost every day."

"With you?"

"Mostly. I boxed professionally for a while."

"Light heavyweight," Hill said.

Kovacs nodded. "Michael maybe weighed 140 pounds soaking wet. But he packed

a punch. He was the perfect height to pound your stomach but he also had an uppercut that could surprise you and pop you right up under your chin. I don't mean he was world class—but he wasn't some turnip off the street."

Hill smiled. "Did he ever sucker someone into the ring? Someone he didn't like?"

Kovacs grew thoughtful. "I don't know about not liking. But he did spar with a few folks who were a bit surprised by the beating they took."

"Um-Hm," Hill said. "Who were they?"

"I really don't know who they were."

"Not a big Turk? A heavyweight?"

"No."

Hill laughed. "Or a little Arab, maybe five-two, five-three?"

"No."

Hill had a sudden thought. "Or his father-in-law?"

"I don't know him." Kovacs scratched his chin. "Michael invited teachers from all over the world to come and give workshops here. You know, on New Age subjects. Mend your chakras, attract your soul mate, align your spine with sound vibrations, that sort of thing. He sometimes spared with them—but they weren't a match for him. He would hit them a little too hard—hard enough that they'd go home with nice purple bruises."

Hill nodded.

"Do you have any idea why his children have their mother's last name?" Hill asked.

"No idea at all. Don't think I even knew that."

"What about Martha? How were they together?"

"Never saw her here. I gather she was something of a recluse. Maybe that's not the way to put it. But I've seen her a few times, once at their house for a party, and she seemed tremendously uncomfortable and self-conscious."

"How so?"

"How to put it?" He thought about it. "Like she had a secret she was ashamed of."

"Not … marrying a Jew?"

Kovacs shook his head. "No. I don't think so. And not something from the past—more like something she was wearing, like her slip was showing, so to speak. I don't know how to put it."

They grew silent for a moment. The women moved from exercise machine to exercise machine, engaged in some programmed routine. There were maybe a dozen

women all told—free enough to do this on a weekday afternoon.

"Apparently Michael was tracking an elderly Nazi war criminal," Hill said. "Did you know anything about that?"

Kovacs stared at him. "No! Michael? It doesn't sound quite right … "

"Why not?"

"I don't know. It was like he was trying to give Germans a pass. Like, let bygones be bygones. He had a ton of stories about Germans saving Jews during the war. A ton of 'good German' stories. There was one about all these blind Jews--"

"I've heard that one."

Kovacs nodded. "So it was more like that …"

"Maybe that was all a front. Maybe he really hated Germans. Maybe including his own wife."

Kovacs thought about that. "Well, he was convincing," he said. "I really thought that he was trying to put the past to rest." He paused. "But what do I know? There are people I hate—and you wouldn't know it."

Hill nodded. "Me too."

Two more women came in.

"He rented that room at the Pankow Grand," Hill said. "Was he sleeping around?"

"Yes."

The directness and succinctness of Kovacs' answer surprised him.

"A lot?"

"A good bit."

"With customers?"

"Yes."

"And the staff?"

"Yes."

"Adelina was one?"

"Yes."

"He was straight?"

"Entirely."

"He went to hotels?"

“He had a very nice, private spot right here. On the third floor. But maybe he also went to hotels … ”

“Could that have been his wife’s shameful secret?”

Kovacs shook his head. “Could have been, of course. But I don’t think so.”

“She knew about the affairs?”

“I have no way of knowing.”

“But it was pretty widely known?”

“I knew. But I’m pretty alert.”

Hill nodded.

“Any thoughts on who poisoned Michael?”

“None whatsoever.”

“One last thing,” Hill said. “Did you like him?”

“Well enough,” Kovacs said, turning in the direction of the exercising women. Hill stood there, thinking.

45.

Hill left the spa. As he got off the elevator his cell phone rang.

"So," the German cop Axel Grass said, "anything for me?"

"Not yet."

A woman came out of the small boutique opposite carrying several shopping bags, each with its own designer logo. She had both hands full. She glanced at Hill, smiled, and, unable to brush back her hair, threw it back instead. Hill met her eyes and nodded. She flushed a little and hurried on.

"Not much here either," Grass said. "Just a little more about Ernst Morgan. Remember that his business card said that he was a 'consultant'? We've run that down a bit. It turns out—get ready for this—that he was an art consultant."

"Perfect," Hill said.

"Apparently he only had one client, an artist by the name of Clemens Richter. Richter's a super big deal, money-wise if not reputation-wise, one of those painters who's turned himself into a brand and a franchise. He runs his own shops all over Germany—all over Europe, actually—and he paints a particular kind of kitsch. Sunday dinner around a big table. Christmas dinner around a big table. Perfect families—adoring father, adoring mother, angelic children. The perfect alpine meadow with a charming cottage and wisps of smoke coming out of the chimney. Crap like that. He makes millions and millions."

"What would a painter like that need with a Morgan?"

"Exactly."

They both fell silent.

"At least it slightly connects to Silverstein," Hill said. "The art connection. Although what this Richter does and what Silverstein liked couldn't have been further apart. Silverstein would have loathed him."

Grass laughed. "Some motive in there, maybe? Silverstein sends Richter a note that says, you suck, a peeved Richter poisons him …"

"You do like to make up stories."

"I ran this Richter down. He's doing a booksigning event at a department store here in Berlin today. He has a book out—get ready for this. The Painter of Love. It's his

memoir. I went over there and talked to him ten minutes ago. Smart-ass answers. He travels with a bodyguard and needs one—I almost hit him myself. His story is that he barely knew Morgan and that Morgan was pitching him some sales ideas and that was that. He wasn't sure if he liked his own answer, so he clammed up. No doubt about it, they were up to something together. I guess we'll look into—wouldn't want Morgan's killer to go unpunished," Grass concluded ironically.

"Was the department store event starting or ending?"

"Starting. Long lines of women waiting to get an autographed copy and gape at the great painter. He'd still be there, if that's what you mean."

"What department store?"

"Galeria Kaufhof. It's in Mitte."

"Thanks."

He wished Grass well and hung up.

"Galeria Kaufhof in Mitte?" Hill said to Vogel.

"I know it," Vogel said, nodding.

There was an American artist like this Richter, an artist with a franchise whose idealized, saccharine work could be seen in virtually every mall. Hill couldn't remember his name but he remembered a story about him, something he had read in a magazine in a waiting room, in which buddies from his college days were interviewed. None of them were surprised by his success—he was always talking about only one thing, money.

That reminded Hill of another anecdote. Andy Warhol, early in his career and at a loss as to what to paint, had asked a friend for suggestions. The friend had replied, "What do you really love?" The light bulb went on over Warhol's head. "I said, 'I love money!' That's when I started painting dollar bills!" Hill remembered reading that Warhol's painting "200 One Dollar Bills" had recently sold for forty-four million dollars.

They turned onto a busy shopping street.

"It's on the next block," Vogel said.

"Okay. Just drop me off. I'll walk back."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

Vogel double-parked in front of the department store and Hill got out.

The department store was packed. Hill made his way to the book section. Whole racks of books had been moved out of the way to make room for stacks of Richter's

framed prints and for piles of Richter's books. A Richter store had been created in this corner of the Galeria Kaufhof. The line to meet Richter was still a hundred-people long. Each person in the line clutched a copy of his book. You had to buy the book before you could meet the man.

Hill glanced at the framed prints. They looked familiar—but of course that was their intention. They were supposed to warm your heart and dull your mind with their apple strudel sentimentality. Richter had perfected the cliché. They were so familiar that Hill found himself shaking his head. If you weren't careful, these images could turn you into simpering mush.

Hill maneuvered into a position where he could see Clemens Richter. Richter was sitting at the signing table, flanked on one side by a store employee and on the other side by a huge man who had to be his bodyguard. That was interesting. Richter was of the class of celebrity who traveled with a bodyguard. That implied all sort of things, including that when he made messes, other people cleaned them up. He had people to spin for him, lie for him, and fight for him. He'd made it.

Hill watched Richter. It took him a moment but then he noticed the telltale signs. Richter was drunk—fully functioning and completely drunk, as alcoholics can be.

46.

Richter was a tall, fleshy, dissipated man with a lot of charisma. He had a big crocodile smile, a loud voice, and barked orders—demanding of the bookstore employee that she run, not walk, to get him an iced tea, yelling at a woman in line to lower her voice—to lower her voice!—and smiling his big crocodile smile at every pretty woman who came up to the table, making sure to touch her somewhere—on the hand, on the wrist, on the arm, even on the face, as if to say, "Yes, I am the painter of love!"

A young couple was next in line. They came up together, the beautiful young woman clutching Richter's book, the diffident young man hanging back a little. Richter glanced at them and smiled his biggest smile. "You!" he said to the woman. "You are my muse for today! You will sit beside me while I sign. You!" he said to the young man, "you will go away for an hour. Don't come back for an hour!" The young man stood there, not understanding. "Go, go!" Richter cried. "Go away now!"

The couple glanced at one another. The young man gave her a quizzical look and the young woman shrugged. Richter was on his feet. He came around the table and took the young woman by the hand. "Come, come!" he cried. "Do you want me to die from lack of inspiration? Come sit with me." He turned to young man, over whom he towered. "Go away! Come back in an hour." He pulled the young woman along with him—she resisted slightly and then stopped resisting. She turned and cast her boyfriend a rueful look.

The young man stood there.

"Next!" Richter bellowed. "You!" he said to the young man, "you're in the way, come back in an hour!"

The young man, his shoulders slumped, moved away. Richter ensconced the young woman on a seat to his right and immediately put his hand on her thigh. Just like that.

Hill shook his head. He'd seen enough. He came around the side and approached Richter's bodyguard. The huge man watched Hill impassively—until Hill's size registered. Then he slowly got to his feet and took a few steps in Hill's direction. They met several feet to the right of the signing table, the bodyguard placing his huge body between Hill and his employer.

"What can I do for you?" the bodyguard said.

"Your employer is a very rude man," Hill said. "He deserves to have his ass kicked."

The bodyguard stared at Hill. He looked about to say one thing and then changed his mind. “It’s my job to see that doesn’t happen,” he said mildly—almost apologetically.

“What if I needed to scoot him away for ten minutes for a private chat?”

“I’d have to prevent that.”

Hill nodded. “Of course. But what if he said to you … what’s your name?”

“Big.”

“I’m Thomas, Big. What if he said to you, ‘Big, I’m going off with this fellow for a few minutes, you stay here’?”

“I’m afraid I’d have to say to him, ‘Don’t, Mr. Richter—he means to rough you up.’”

“And if he insisted?”

“I’d have to insist back. Because after you roughed him up he’d fire me … that’s the kind of asshole he is.”

Hill stared at Big. “Fair enough.” He held out his hand. Big shook it. “I’d hire you,” Hill said.

Hill turned to leave.

“But,” Big said.

Hill turned back.

“In about ten minutes I go off duty. Someone else comes on. And he is as big an asshole as Clemens. If he got fired … ” Big shrugged. “If he got fired, I have a pal who could use the job.”

“Thank you.”

Hill moved off to the side, to where the young man whose girlfriend Richter had stolen was shaking with rage.

“He’s quite an asshole, isn’t he?” Hill said.

The young man didn’t hear. “What?” he said distractedly.

“That Richter,” Hill said. “He’s quite an asshole.”

“Yes!”

Hill turned to the young man.

“I think that in about another minute you’re going to decide that you have to smack him, even though he has that bodyguard and even though he’s twice your size. I completely understand what you’re feeling. It’s what he wants you to feel. So I’d like

to ask you to do me a favor. Wait just a few more minutes. There's going to be a change of bodyguards and then I'm going to walk Richter away for a few minutes and maybe punch him in the gut a few times and while he's away you can take your girlfriend back." Hill paused. "Don't be too hard on her. Richter is a pro at this kind of crap. He could get the Virgin Mary to sit beside him and Jesus to take a slug at him."

The young man stared at Hill. He seemed only to have half-heard. "I should do something."

"I wouldn't stop you," Hill said.

He thought about it some more. "Will you hit him in the stomach once for me?"

"My pleasure."

The young man nodded. "Then I'll wait."

They only had to wait a few minutes. A man not quite Big's size arrived—an unfriendly man whose false smile matched his employer's. Big nodded to the replacement bodyguard and left—in Hill's direction.

"Give it a few more minutes," Big said as he passed Hill, "so that I'm not even in his memory."

"Will do."

47.

The line moved slowly. Richter seemed to be winding down. Probably he needed a few drinks to restore his equilibrium. Hill expected him to pull out a flask or even a whiskey bottle. Richter gulped his iced tea, petted his muse, signed books with a flourish, but looked unfocused and lost.

Hill and the young man waited. Richter removed his hand from the young girl's thigh each time he signed a book and then returned it to her thigh for a moment until the next person in line came forward. He smiled his crocodile smile at her and she smiled back shyly. She wasn't as upset with Richter's antics as the young man beside him needed her to be. Hill knew that he couldn't wait much longer.

"Okay!" Hill whispered. "I'm taking him away now. As soon as we're gone, go retrieve your girlfriend."

"If she wants to come," the young man said angrily.

Hill approached the bodyguard. Unlike Big, this muscle man immediately got up on his heels. He stretched to his full height, which stretching was itself supposed to intimidate you, and intercepted Hill.

"What do you want?" he said, putting his chest right up against Hill's.

"Just say to your boss, Ernst Morgan. He'll want to stop fondling that girl for a minute and talk to me."

"Is that right?"

Hill smiled. "I know someone who wants your job. Don't know why, but he does. See what happens if you don't give Clemens my message."

The muscle man glared at Hill—then turned on his heels. He strode over to Richter and whispered Hill's message into Richter's ear. Richter glanced over at Hill. Hill smiled and waved. Richter nodded to his bodyguard and got to his feet. "Do not go anywhere!" he bellowed to the remaining customers in line. "I will be back in two minutes. Start reading my book—you'll love it!"

Richter strolled toward Hill with an alcoholic's casual, controlled effort. Crossing from the carpeted area to the marble floor, he tripped a little and had to steady himself by grabbing on to a rack of books. He laughed out loud, as if amused that a drunk could have such a good life.

As soon as Richter got within a few feet of him, Hill could smell the alcohol

evaporating from Richter's pores. Richter's alcohol-infused sweat filled the air.

"Can you have a conversation without your flask?" Hill said.

"What do you want?"

Hill took him by the elbow. Richter was almost as tall as Hill and weighed more than Hill but he was all bravado. He let Hill lead him away from the book section towards men's clothing. Hill found a spot between two racks of suits where they wouldn't be seen. He let go of Richter's elbow and turned the painter of love to face him.

"You were running some kind of scam with Ernst Morgan," Hill said.

Richter held onto the nearest rack to steady himself. "What are you? You're not the police."

"I'm someone who is about to hit you in the stomach and make you vomit."

Richter's eyes opened. "I'm going back!"

"Not until you tell me about your thing with Ernst Morgan."

"No!"

"What about Michael Silverstein?"

Richter stared at Hill. "The little kike? What about him?"

"You tell me."

"What's there to tell? He's a little kike."

"You didn't kill him?"

"Kill him?" Richter's eyes widened. Then he smiled. "I didn't know that someone had done us such a service."

"Who's us?"

"Germans," Richter said. "Real artists. Anybody with a sense of smell."

Hill hit him hard in the stomach. It wasn't the best way to get information—but he didn't care. Hill stepped to one side. Richter started retching, cascading vomit on some very nice suits.

Hill stood over the bent-double painter. "You should fire your bodyguard," Hill said. "He was a fool to let you come with me."

Richter coughed and choked. Hill wanted to lift him up by his chin and hit him again and again. Instead he strode away.

He circled back to the book section. The young man and his girlfriend were gone. But there were plenty of pretty, starry-eyed women still in line, happy to wait for as

long as it took to get the autograph—and maybe a taste—of the painter of love.

48.

On the way back to the hotel he stopped for a beer. He was shaking with fury—Richter had activated his rage. He stopped at one of those bar-restaurants with menus in German and English and a sliding wall of windows that open up to the street.

Several tables were taken up with tourist foursomes—pairs of couples traveling together. There was a lot of beer in huge steins in evidence and a lot of generic food on big platters. Hill ordered a beer and sat at a small café table next to the sidewalk. He tried to breathe but found himself forced to listen to the loud conversation of the nearest tourists. Two fat American men and two fat American women complained loudly and bitterly about Mexicans.

"They don't work in Mexico, they don't work after they sneak across the border," one of the fat men announced. "Always with their hands out."

"Hire one and you might as well call the police—you know you're going to be robbed," the other fat man grunted.

The fat women nodded their agreement.

They went on in that vein longer than Hill thought possible. He drained his beer, got to his feet, and moved behind one of the fat men. He tapped him on the shoulder.

"Being born a white American sounds incredibly hard!" Hill said. "If you'd been born Mexican, you'd have had it so easy!"

It took the fat man a moment to process Hill's comment. He tried to hoist himself out of his chair but only got half way up.

"Don't even think about it," Hill said.

The fat man took a closer look at Hill and sat back down.

"Waiter, waiter!" he began shouting in English.

Hill shook his head and left the restaurant.

He'd hoped the beer would calm him and clear his head but the Americans stoked his rage. He strode back to the hotel, unable to think. Morgan the art consultant, Richter the painter of kitsch, Silverstein sleeping around, including with his Italian receptionist, Martha with her shameful secret, and then the Turk from last night, and the Arab gnome, and Bella, and Gabi …

As he walked, he began to settle. He looked around him. Berlin was alluring. That

was the word. He couldn't process all the information that had come his way and he couldn't get his thoughts straight, but his uppermost feeling was one of pleasure. It wasn't just sleeping with Bella and flirting with Gabi. It was Berlin. It was this perfect spring day, the scents in the air, the edgy art on the walls of Silverstein's mansion, and even the allure of those ancient deeds—the Roman caves, the extra five Italians put to death by Josef Gerste.

By the time he arrived at the Pankow Grand he was smiling a little. He was in Berlin and he was happy here.

He saw her from far away. She was flirting with the doormen-cum-bouncers in front of the Pankow Grand Hotel. She had on a flamboyant outfit and looked like a gypsy girl—the tallest, blondest gypsy girl anyone had ever seen. She was practically stopping traffic—you could tell that passersby thought that maybe it was a photo shoot or that a movie was being filmed.

"Hello," Hill said.

"Thomas!" Gabi said, catching sight of him. "I've got something to show you. Let's go up to your room." She turned from one to the other of the doormen who, now that Hill had arrived, extinguished their smiles. "Can someone spare a cigarette?" Gabi cried. The doorman on her left pulled out a pack, extracted a cigarette, and offered her a light. She held his hand for a long time as she lit her cigarette. Hill smiled. Gabi, Gabi, Gabi, he thought. You have not worked a day in your life.

They went inside and stood side by side on the glowing purple escalator, facing one another, just about touching.

49.

In the suite Hill said, "What is it?"

Gabi had pulled a journal out of her oversized purse and put it on the bed. A tingle went down Hill's spine. He had a suspicion what it might be …

"It's Michael's," Gabi said. "Martha asked me to look through his desk. She wasn't up to it. This was in there—not even under lock and key. It may explain everything."

"What does it say?"

"Michael had found a war criminal."

Hill picked up the slim book and thumbed through it. Only a few pages had been used. The first entry was undated. He sat down and began reading. Gabi sat next to him, close by his side.

An Austrian art dealer came to town. I'll leave his name out of this. He said that I had to see the work of a young German painter—just twenty-two years, but great, he said. I completely trust this man's judgment and I made an appointment to meet with the artist. He painted out of his apartment—as cheap as Berlin is, he couldn't afford a separate studio. He was living hand-to-mouth, that was easy to see. Probably virtually every penny went to canvas and paint. But, ah, the paintings! They were amazing. They were nightmare scenes of indescribable sandstone-colored landscapes with numbers and letters embedded in them, maybe a little like an imagined Afghanistan or Turkey, with cliffs and caves and strange rock formations—amazing.

I said to him, "Where does this come from?" and he said, "The past." He was silent for a long time and then he said, "I'm the great-grandson of a war criminal who murdered innocent people in the caves of Rome. His name is Josef Gerste. He is a man I love and adore and he is a monster and this is my past." He waved at the paintings. "There is nothing I can do to change the past and to think that I'm transmuting anything or healing anything or reconciling anything by making these paintings is absurd. But I make them anyway."

I said to him, "This is great work and I want to buy all of it." He said, "It's not for sale, it's for burning." I exclaimed "Why?" and he replied, "I'm tortured by it—but that's not the same as being willing to turn him in." We stood there with these amazing paintings all around us. I didn't know what to say. I wanted the paintings—I didn't care about Gerste. So I said, "If you don't tell people what these are about, they won't know the truth. You could keep it a secret—I would too." He shook his head. He said, "No,

look, I even put a part of his address in each one of them. In every one—see, the "Bim" in this one, the "baum" in that one, the numbers—someone will think to wonder what the numbers and letters mean and will come up with 173 Bimbaumring, Number 344--" I interrupted him. "No one will ever figure that out!" I said. "It's impossible. You don't have a thing to worry about!" Really, no one would have known—he was being paranoid about that. But he insisted.

I couldn't make him change his mind. I said that maybe he could paint over some of the numbers and letters, leaving Gerste's address incomplete, or just burn one painting, so that the address would be incomplete—I presented many rational ideas. But he wasn't being rational. The thing he was worried about was no real problem but probably it was a stand-in for the problem he was really feeling, guilt for his great-grandfather, guilt for his people, all those Berliner and German things. We left it that I would come back the next day and talk some more, because I had no intention of giving up. They were great paintings.

I came back the next day—and the door was open a crack. I walked in. The apartment looked like a parade had passed through it. He had turned all his paintings into confetti and the bits of canvas were scattered everywhere. It must have taken him virtually every minute from the time I left to the time I returned to reduce all those paintings to confetti. You couldn't put them through a shredder! He'd hand cut them … and then cut himself. He was in the bathtub. I stood there at the door to the bathroom for maybe fifteen seconds. Then I walked right out and went home and didn't even think of calling the police. I had no interest in getting involved—only the paintings had interested me.

The next morning I woke up and realized that I had Josef Gerste's address in my mind and that I was in a position to turn in a Nazi war criminal. I didn't know anything about him, so I looked him up on the Internet, maybe with the thought that if he turned out to be very bad I would turn him in and if he turned out not to be so bad I would forget the whole thing. I read about his part in the massacre of Italians, including that he'd received a direct order from Hitler, and I wasn't really sure what I thought or felt.

Had he done something worse than our pilots had done in Vietnam, with their napalm? Would I have gone out of my way to turn in one of our pilots? I felt stuck—and maybe as a temporizing measure I decided to see this Gerste for myself. Probably foolish—you don't just walk into such things and come out the other side untouched. But that's the path I chose. I went over to the address—because of the way the apartment complex is built, you can stand in its courtyard and look up and see all the doors to the apartments above you, like in a motel. Each floor had an open balcony with a railing and I stood in the courtyard, feeling weird, and waited for someone to come out of number 344. If it had taken very long I probably would have dropped the whole thing—but within ten minutes of my getting there the door opened and this little old man came out, very slowly. He was completely bent over—his head was almost perpendicular to his body.

That day he just walked to the market, maybe a block away. It took him a very long time to walk there, make a few purchases, and come back home. I felt like I was wasting the whole day. There was nothing interesting about him—and I wasn't feeling much of anything. Maybe somebody else would have felt a great deal, knowing that they had Josef Gerste in their sights. I felt nothing. Still, I came back a second day and a third. I don't know why. The third day Gerste appeared all dressed up and had called a cab—this time I had to follow him in my car. He went to the Pankow Grand—for lunch. First he sat in the lobby, enjoying being out. I sat and watched him. I was feeling—oddly relaxed. Someone came over—the manager, I think—and I said something like, "Do you know who that is?" When I told him it was Josef Gerste he almost ran away. That woke me up. That made me think.

The second—and last—undated entry was written in a shakier hand.

I am through with this Gerste business. Done!

Hill looked at Gabi. "But maybe it wasn't through with him," he said.

"And now," she said, "you have the address."

50.

He was aware of the silence in the room. A clock ticked—it seemed like an old-fashioned sound in a digital world. Maybe they gave you a ticking sound on purpose, Hill thought, for sentimental reasons. But the sound was more unnerving than nostalgic.

"You have the address too," Hill replied. "Either one of us can turn Josef Gerste in."

"I don't think I will," Gabi said.

They sat close together on the bed. She stared at Hill for a long time. Hill stared back. Neither of them spoke.

"Do you want to make love?" she said.

Hill looked into her eyes for a long moment and got abruptly to his feet. He paced to the window, paced back, and continued pacing up and down.

"What's the matter?" Gabi said.

People talked a lot about how intuitive they were —and yet they still made mistake after mistake. Hill suspected that what most people meant by intuition was "what I want." They wanted to do something easy rather than hard and had an "intuition" that the easy thing was the thing to do. It was just another way of letting yourself off the hook, claiming to be intuitive! When he had an intuition, it involved doing something he didn't want to do or not doing something he did want to do. He wanted to make love to Gabi—who wouldn't? But his intuition told him not to. Now, would he listen?

"Let's get something to eat," Hill said. "Not in the hotel. You pick a place."

She was silent for a moment.

"There's a famous old beer hall. You can dance downstairs and they have a gypsy orchestra upstairs."

"Let's do that." He crossed back to her, took her hands, and raised her from where she was sitting on the bed. They stood almost eye-to-eye. He stared at her. "What do you do?" he said. "How do you lead your life?"

"I …" She hadn't expected that question. She blinked, looked away, then recovered. "I model some. That pays very well when I do it. I've trained in several things. I've trained in iridology—you know, seeing how healthy you are from the colors and patterns of your iris? I liked that a lot. I've … you'll think this is ridiculous."

"No," he said softly.

"I've worked as a psychic. I specialize in past lives." She smiled a beautiful, tentative smile. "Would you like to know about your past lives?"

He smiled back. "No."

"I've acted some, I've waited tables--"

He didn't say, "You can't live on any that, love." He didn't say, "Oh, I get it, men keep you." He didn't actually know that was true. Maybe her parents supported her. She was old to be supported but some arty New Age types had to be supported forever, since nothing they trained at had a ghost of a chance of paying the bills.

"What do you want to do?" Hill said.

"Marry, have babies, and write a book."

"About what?"

She shrugged. "I don't know."

Hill laughed. He guessed she'd just told the absolute truth. He stepped forward the few inches that separated them, touched her hair, turned up her face, and kissed her gently. The same electric charge shot through him. He didn't pull away—he kissed her again. There was nowhere else to go but to bed or to dinner.

"Take me to that beer hall!" Hill said merrily. "I need a sausage!"

"They have good schnitzel," Gabi said in a small, shy voice.

"Then schnitzel it is."

He took the car and driver. Dusk settled into evening. Hill thought about Silverstein calling down to the desk at the Pankow Grand, surprised to be dying. Was his last thought, "I shouldn't have come to Berlin"? Was it of his wife and family? Or was it that wordless, primitive surprise, not a thought at all but more like a realization that an eternity of not existing was about to begin? Hill felt for Silverstein—even though he suspected that he wouldn't have liked the man.

It was surprisingly hard to get a coherent picture of the man. Smart businessman. Art radar. Boxer. Miso soup at noon every day. Philanderer. Ambitious. But meek, if that was the right word, in agreeing to have his children called Lange. Funny but humorless. Forgiving of Germans, almost an apologist for them—could that be real? Hill tried to make a single coherent picture out of the contradictory parts. Gabi sat close to him on the back seat of the hotel car, her hand on his wrist.

"Did Michael come on to you?" Hill said.

She hesitated. "No. I was too big for him."

"Martha is just about as tall as you are."

Gabi shrugged. “Yes. But she’s skinny—self-effacing. She plays small. I play large. I wear heels. I have real breasts, real hips. We may be about the same height but I must have seemed twice as big as Martha.”

Hill thought about that.

“Why do his children go by the name of Lange?”

Gabi didn’t answer. She turned her face away and stared out the window.

“I know you know,” Hill said.

“I don’t know,” Gabi said, still not looking at him. “But whatever it is, it’s family business. I wouldn’t tell you … even if you didn’t have the job you have and even if I did know. I wouldn’t tell you even if we were dating. I’m not sure I’d tell you even if we were married.”

Hill nodded. “I understand about family secrets,” he said.

She turned back to him. “You do?”

“I do,” he said. “There are things about my childhood I would never tell anyone … not even myself.”

Gabi’s look softened. “I could love you, you know,” she said.

“Let’s start with schnitzel.” He leaned over and kissed her gently, just once, then sat with the electric residue of the kiss until they arrived at the restaurant.

51.

The landmark restaurant had a lantern-lit terrace and an enormous first floor that was part dance hall and part restaurant. Couples danced to piped-in polka music. The décor was more beer hall than restaurant and everyone except the couples dancing looked to be tourists. Upstairs was a second room where a gypsy orchestra played most evenings. But it was too early for that.

They found a table on the first floor and received menus from a harried waiter whose game was to act harried. This place had an act—a little sullen, a little dark, a little boiled potato and red cabbage edge to it, about as much edge as tourists could tolerate. Hill heard Polish, Italian, and English. Every guidebook recommended this place—though some only for the rudeness, the nostalgia, and the kitsch.

They didn't have much to say. They both ordered the schnitzel with white asparagus and boiled potatoes. Some stale bread arrived. The silverware was just clean enough not to be returned. They listened to the piped-in polka music, watched the dancers—the regulars of the place, the Berliner couples of the last generation who purchased beer but not food here—and thought their own thoughts.

If you could call what Hill was doing thinking. He felt tired. He hadn't slept much since he'd arrived in Berlin. He hadn't slept much or very well at home, either, for that matter. And the Gerste thing was like a bit of lead around the neck. It wasn't that amusing to be given the option of turning in or not turning in a Nazi war criminal. Maybe it was amusing and exciting in theory, but sitting in this dark, dowdy place nothing in you craved the past. You wanted sunlight and a strong detergent.

They were seated next to a long communal table at which a large French family of tourists parked themselves. There were three generations, a lot of chatter, and a lot of hungry energy. Naturally, because they were hungry, no waiter came. No doubt behind the swinging doors some waiters were having a merry time withholding menus from these hungry French. Hill could almost hear them cackling, "Let's make them wait twenty minutes!" "No, thirty!" He had the sudden powerful remembrance of Josef Gerste adding those five Italians to the roster of the soon-to-be-dead.

The French started grumbling. As long as a restaurant meal took in Paris, you might have expected them to be expert at waiting. But they wanted a beer at least! Hill suspected that they had no German. Gabi, too, was noticing. She turned to the woman nearest her, a woman of about forty, the mother of the children and the daughter of the old-timers in the group.

"It's maddening, isn't it?" Gabi said in perfect French. "This rudeness!"

"Thank you!" the woman said. "I wasn't sure if it was rudeness. You'd think you could at least get something to drink and maybe some bread. And some menus!"

Gabi spied a waiter at a distance and began shouting at him. "Come over here!" she shouted. "Right now!" She wasn't shy. Hill watched her. She was getting red in the face—she had a temper.

The waiter came by on the fly with no intention of stopping and said, "Someone will be there soon."

"Don't give me that crap!" Gabi shouted. "Get them some bread and some menus and take their drink order. I'm not joking!"

It made Hill take pause. Gabi's outburst crossed the edge from assertive to ugly. The waiter did what he was told—in a completely grudging, non-complying sort of way. The mother thanked Gabi. Their schnitzel arrived—it was passable. More stale bread arrived—as if to say, we'll serve you, but look with what! Hill wondered if they had spit in the second round of beers.

When they'd finished their dinner Hill said, "Martha's been crying a lot."

"Yes," Gabi replied. "Of course."

He didn't believe that "of course."

"If she didn't like him that well, why all the tears?"

Gabi shrugged. "Martha's emotional. She even cries at movies with ambiguous endings."

Hill smiled. He watched Gabi unable to pull off flirtatious. She'd grown thoughtful and a little sullen. Her mood matched the gloominess of the place. A Berlin landmark! It seemed as if every few minutes the lights got dimmer. The dance floor emptied. Hill paid the bill.

"I'll drive you home," he said.

She nodded without protest.

Vogel was waiting by the entrance to the terrace. Hill and a sullen Gabi got in the back.

"What's the address?" Hill said.

Gabi gave it.

"Where's that?"

"In Pankow."

Hill repeated it to Vogel, who nodded. They took off through the night.

They arrived at a quiet residential street.

“Where?” Hill said.

“It’s there,” Gabi said grudgingly. “On the third floor.”

It was a nondescript building. Gabi was living on the cheap.

Hill got out and opened the door for Gabi. She refused to look at him. There was no question of whether he’d be invited up. She strode away from the car.

“Gabi,” Hill said.

She turned back reluctantly.

“Don’t get rid of that diary,” Hill said.

“Why not?” she said petulantly.

“Think about it,” Hill said.

He got back in the car and slammed the door shut behind him.

“The hotel?” Vogel said.

“No,” Hill replied. He gave Vogel the address of the wine bar.

52.

He let Vogel go. He stood for a minute in front of the wine bar, staring at it and locking it in memory.

The wine bar was half-empty. No birthday party tonight, no potluck, just some regulars in the back, drinking and chatting. Including the Turk and the Arab gnome. They sat together at the furthest table, sharing a bottle of wine.

"It is not strange to see you again!" the Arab painter exclaimed. He seemed to be in perpetual wry good humor—a useful persona. Hill smiled and shook his hand. Hill turned to the Turk. "Take a walk with me?" he said.

The Turk thought about that. He slowly got to his feet.

"If I don't come back, I'll see you tomorrow," the Turk said to the gnome.

Rafi Moghadam nodded. "I still intend to sell you a painting!" he called to Hill, who was walking away. "A very large triptych—very expensive!"

Hill laughed. "And I bet you can ship it anywhere."

"Anywhere!" the Arab painter agreed. "I sent one to the Amazon jungle once!"

The night was soft and warm. Hill and the Turk walked in silence.

"Let me tell you a story," Hill said after a while. "A wild story, all hunches. My sense of Ernst Morgan, in those few seconds I got to know him, was that he was an anxious man. Not a coward—but someone who wouldn't mind a little friendly muscle by his side. I think he asked you, his good friend, to accompany him to the meeting with me. Obviously he didn't think that you'd killed Silverstein. He was going to give me real information—at least, what he thought was real information—and clearly it wasn't information about you. But there was something about him passing along that information that you couldn't allow. If my hunch is right, I don't know why you didn't kill him sooner—it would have been much better for you if he'd never shown up for the meeting. So, that's a mystery." He glanced at the Turk. "Why didn't you kill him sooner?"

The Turk said nothing.

Hill nodded. "All right. Here's why I think it had to be a friend, someone he'd invited along. It's just possible that someone followed him—but it's very hard to follow someone in the dead of night down deserted streets. If Ernst was as anxious as I think he was, he would have been looking back over his shoulder all the time. So his tail

would have had to hang back and then try to catch up—and if you aren't careful at that time of night your footfalls sound like explosions. It's possible that someone could have followed him but I think it's unlikely. What seems more likely to me is that he brought a friend—and the friend killed him. You were his friend?"

"I was his friend," the Turk said.

"And—according to this story I'm telling you—you didn't kill Silverstein. Not involved in any way—or else Ernst wouldn't have invited you along. And I'm looking into the Silverstein murder, not the Morgan murder. I'm not the police. I don't have their agenda. I'm only looking out for the hotel. So … is there anything you care to tell me?"

The Turk smiled. "Why would I?"

"Fair question. Not for the money I could offer you. You'd find that insulting. Not to avenge your friend—since you killed him." He glanced at the Turk, whose face gave away nothing. "Maybe to misdirect me? Send me off on some wild goose chase? You might enjoy that."

The Turk smiled. "I would enjoy that."

Hill nodded. "But that isn't quite reason enough. To get it off your chest?"

The Turk laughed out loud.

"Or to get me off your ass," Hill said quietly.

The Turk stopped. The two men faced one another.

"I could do that myself," the Turk said.

"I'm not just a street fighter anymore, Cabbar." He met the Turk's mildly amused gaze. "I have an organization behind me. Maybe I told them, 'Something happens to me, go find Cabbar Ozan.' And they don't work like the police," Hill said. "We have no rules."

"Neither do the police."

Hill nodded. "Agreed."

They stood facing one another.

"Here's the flaw in your thinking," the Turk said. "If I killed Ernst, it was because there was something about the Silverstein thing that I didn't want known. Which I still wouldn't want known."

"That would only be a flaw if I was a cop," Hill said. "But I'm just interested in what concerns the hotel. If what you have to tell me doesn't hurt the hotel, I could give a rat's ear."

The Turk stated at him. "I wonder if that's true."

“You don’t believe me?”

“That’s exactly right.”

“Why?”

“Because if I told you something that made you angry, you wouldn’t go corporate. You’d do whatever you had to do. So would I. This ‘it only matters if it hurts the hotel’ line is bullshit. That’s not how we operate.”

Hill stared at the Turk. “You’re absolutely right.”

“So, let me buy you a drink and let’s talk about other things,” the Turk said.

“All right,” Hill said. “Maybe I’ll get you drunk and you’ll let something slip.”

The Turk let out a good, hearty laugh that echoed through the night street.

“Worth a try,” Cabbar Ozan said.

“By the way,” Hill said, “There was a time I worked for the Crescent Stars.”

Ozan stopped in his tracks. He took Hill by the shoulders and stared into his eyes.

“The Crescent Stars?” Ozan said.

“Ask around. I had a German name then.”

Ozan shook his head. “No need. Nobody makes that up.”

53.

They stopped at the first bar they passed. It sported a lot of glowing neon inside and out. The Turk went in first. Hill followed.

They sat in a corner. Customers gave them a wide berth.

"Know any Nazi war criminals?" Hill asked the Turk.

"Nope," the Turk replied after a moment. "Just ordinary everyday criminals."

Hill nodded. "And what about Ernst's client, Clemens Richter?"

"You know a lot."

"I know some things."

"More wine?"

They finished the first bottle and started on a second. The Turk didn't get drunk and didn't let anything slip.

"You were never a Crescent Star?" Hill said.

"No. I'm an independent fellow."

"That's allowed?"

The Turk shrugged. "We're friendly. We've made our arrangements."

Hill nodded. "I just had to make some arrangements. With the Gypsy Joys."

Ozan laughed. "Gabi certainly has an eye for men!"

One in the morning came and went. Hill said goodnight and left the Turk sitting there. He walked back slowly through the silent streets of Pankow.

He was feeling Berlin. Cities were such astonishing places—New York, Paris, London, Tokyo, Berlin—nothing like the mere accumulations of their bricks and mortar. If the brain was the most complicated piece of matter in the universe, cities came next, millions of people and billions of interactions and an energy made up of stardust, hope, and hype.

Even at night. Even with no one around.

His cell phone had an application called "the street art of Berlin." You punched in your address and a map appeared with icons and information about the nearest art

installations. Hill stopped in the dark, punched in the street and the nearest house number. A map appeared.

He followed the map and entered a narrow path between two apartment buildings. It led to a small triangular park. He found himself in pitch darkness opposite a sculpture of the earth exploded out into twisted shards, the metal shards like the planet's last screams. There were semicircular benches on either side of the sculpture. Hill sat down.

It was very dark but still not as dark as the darkness he'd once known. He doubted that he would ever experience anything as dark as night in Korea. On a summer night the insects came out and droned continually. Billions of stars appeared. The village was alive with GIs—most of them drunk. Many arrived drunk, having started drinking at five in the afternoon at the enlisted man's club. At the EM club, every night a different drink was a quarter—a quarter for a shot of bourbon one night, a quarter for a shot of vodka the next night. The GIs were drunk before they left camp. Then they came to the village and drank some more.

Every bar in the village had loud music playing. There were four or five competing bars-cum-brothels, decent-sized wood structures with rooms in the back for sex. In between the bars were dozens of ramshackle huts, some of them little "diners" where a GI could get an omelet at three in the morning—a cat, rat, or dog omelet, but the GIs didn't know that.

During the monsoon season the dirt paths turned to mud. During the winter, when it went down to thirty degrees below zero, the paths never thawed. Mud and ice, ice and mud. He'd walked those paths a million times. He knew every rut and every shadow. During the day, the village stank.

Every night someone got hurt.

Every night the MPs came.

Sometimes you heard screaming from a distant village. There was a village south of them where the Turkish soldiers drank. American GIs and Republic of Korea soldiers never went there. That village was possibly the most dangerous place on earth. One time a Turk accused one of the girls of giving him a disease and he sewed her up between her legs. You could hear her screaming all the way to Hill's village.

A cat inched by and hissed.

He sat on the bench, his eyes closed, almost wishing some denizen of the night would wander in and take him for a mark.

If he'd been a German youth in 1940, where would he have ended up? No doubt he would have ended up a pawn like millions of young men since time immemorial, tricked by their sense of adventure and their hormones and their inchoate patriotism into saluting and shooting and sitting for whole nights in the dark, on some hill, in some bunker, waiting to kill, waiting to die.

He stared at the sculpture of the exploding earth.

But would he have added five names of his own choosing to a death list?

He really couldn't say that he wouldn't have.

There was a sliver of moon. The exploding earth shimmered in the darkness. A siren approached from far away, passed nearby, and receded. He had lived in this darkness for too long, for too many years in childhood and for too many years as an adult. Here he was, visiting it again—communing with it.

Finally he got up.

He wanted to have a conversation with Mike Silverstein. He wanted to know about that terse second entry. I am through with this Gerste business. Done! He knew that he would be visiting Josef Gerste tomorrow and he needed to get some sleep now.

54.

If you'd asked him to guess what he'd be dreaming about that night he would have said Nazis or Korea. Instead he dreamed about Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., the rat pack and old Las Vegas.

The dream centered on a Dean Martin song—the audience wanted Dean to sing a certain song but Dean refused. His buddies on stage got into the act and started pestering him to sing it. They weren't fooling around.

Sammy Davis Jr. went into a tap routine that was like a war dance, threatening Dean with some terrible fate if he didn't sing the song. Frank Sinatra became the Frank Sinatra of the Godfather and played the "offer you can't refuse" card, complete with severed horse's head. The horse's head bled all over the stage. Peter Lawford—was that his name?—smoked a cigarette. As it burned down it became clear that he was going to stub it out on Dean's bare arm if Dean didn't sing the song.

The song?

That's Amore

When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore …

Hill woke up abruptly.

It was nine in the morning—late. He ordered breakfast and hopped into the shower. If he could have stayed in the shower a week, he would have.

He ate breakfast and checked his email at the same time. A sweet email from his oldest son—he tapped back a quick note. More information from Cohen on the manager and the assistant manager—nothing that made them seem shadier but nothing that made them seem cleaner, either. A sad email from his sister—she was plagued by the same stomach troubles that had made their mother's life a living hell.

A knock sounded. It was Grunewald, head of security. Hill, dressed only in his shorts, ushered him into the room. He knew that Grunewald would take away some information from seeing him in the flesh.

"The head of housekeeping is gone," Grunewald said. "And the bartender. Anything else I can do?"

Hill sat down on the bed. He waved Grunewald to a chair but the former Bavarian policeman remained standing.

"Does anything about this hotel strike you as funny?" Hill said. "When you're just walking around?"

Grunewald made a face. "Everything does! All the neon. Purple neon! It gives me a headache. And all the dark corners in the lobby—too many dark corners for sex. 'Let's do it at Pankow Grand!' That drives me crazy. Don't know how that got started but it's all over the Internet now. I see people crowing about it. Though a lot of them are just making it up—it can't be happening that often! And everything in the hotel is the wrong size. Some tables are too small, some tables are too large. It's like Alice in Wonderland. And the bathrooms—they're too bright! Like someone is shining a spotlight on you. The only thing I like is the art. And the homemade liverwurst in the restaurant."

Hill laughed. "Liverwurst on a Kaiser roll? With onions?"

"That makes me a happy man."

"Do me a favor," Hill said. "Take somebody and go out late tonight, say one or two in the morning." He explained what he wanted done—an experiment to see how likely it was that someone could have followed Ernst Morgan without Morgan noticing. "Run it twice. Have the fellow you bring wear tennis shoes the first time and shoes with heels the second."

Grunewald nodded.

"And another thing," Hill said.

Grunewald waited.

"The manager and the assistant manager are up to something. Do you have a guess?"

"No. But they're sweating buckets."

"No guess at all?"

"None." Grunewald paused. "It's not that I'm loyal to them. I just haven't heard anything or seen anything. They work hard and they seem professional. I don't get any shiftiness from them. They seem pretty straight and pretty decent."

"When did you get here?"

"Most of us got here right after the renovation. The Pankow Grand was redone about four years ago. It was a dowager of a hotel before that, a mausoleum. Parkway completely gutted it and turned it boutique. Tripled the number of rooms by cutting the rooms down to shoeboxes. But guests love it here. Juliette and Helmut came here before the rest of us—Parkway hired them to oversee the renovation. So they've been on board maybe six years, right from the beginning, when Parkway first decided to buy the old Berliner State Hotel and turn it into the Pankow Grand."

Hill thought about that. "How much did the renovation cost?"

“Tens of millions!” Grunewald exclaimed. “I have no idea.”

Hill nodded. “And they made all the decisions?”

“I don’t know how that works. There must have been architects, a design team, consultants—I have no idea how such things work.”

“Thanks. I’ll check in with you tomorrow about our little experiment.”

Grunewald grunted. “Thanks for not making a big deal about that tip scam.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Grunewald turned on his heels and left.

Hill dashed off an email to Cohen, asking for details on the Pankow Grand renovation. He would have loved to work out, to sweat a little, but the day was rushing past. He wasn’t really sure if it was any of his business, but it was time to see Josef Gerste.

55.

He went on the Internet, looked up Gerste's address, and got a view of it from overhead and from street level. It was a four-story apartment complex with Gerste's apartment on the third floor. A U-shaped building, five apartments along the central corridor, two at either end. Flat roof. Double-gate out front, closed with a latch. You walked into a courtyard without needing a key or a code. Then an outside staircase on either side of the courtyard led up to the apartments.

You entered the apartments from along an open balcony walkway, like in a motel. Silverstein reported that Gerste came and went on his own. Did that mean that he lived alone? Maybe yes, maybe no. Hill loaded the .38 and packed extra ammunition. He called for the hotel car and met it in front of the hotel.

He glanced at Vogel. "When we get where we're going, I'll be going into a building," Hill said. "If I don't come out in an hour, call this number." He gave him a slip of paper. "It's the number of a cop, Axel Grass. Tell him 'Thomas Hill said that you should come right away' and give him the address. All right?"

Vogel's eyes opened wide. He took the piece of paper and didn't know quite what to do with it.

"It's all right," Hill said. "You can fold it up and put it in your pocket."

They drove to Gerste's building. It was a quiet street with little happening. The parked cars were old and beat up. A few young toughs walked into the building. Hill watched them from the car. They ascended the staircase, stopped at the third floor, and entered an apartment directly next to Gerste's.

Not a good sign.

If there was a commotion, the balcony would fill up with skinheads.

Hill got out of the car.

"The clock starts now," Hill said. "One hour."

He unlatched the gate and entered the courtyard. It was weedy and unkempt, with trash littering the decorative flower urns. Nothing stirred. He ascended slowly, watching and listening. The staircase was cement, as was the balcony walkway. He approached Gerste's door. He could hear voices inside—the voices of young men. He rapped loudly on the door.

"Yeah?"

One young man's voice, clear as a bell—the voice of a tough. Hill knocked again—harder.

"What the fuck?"

A blue-eyed boy opened the door. He looked like an angelic choirboy—only with muscles.

"Good afternoon," Hill said. "I'm looking for Josef Gerste."

He glanced past the boy into the apartment. A shambles. Not the sort of place you expected an old man to inhabit. Two other youths got to their feet. They stood behind the blue-eyed boy.

Hill watched the boy consider how to respond. He could say, "Nobody here by that name!" and slam the door shut—but then he'd never know who Hill was or what he wanted. Hill watched the blue-eyed boy think through his answer.

"You've got the wrong address," he said, faking a friendly smile. "But that name's very familiar. Any reason I should know it?"

"Invite me in and we can talk about it."

Hill knew that he was being foolish on several counts. There were the three of them he could see—and more in the next apartment. It was just possible that he had wandered into skinhead central. What was he going to do, shoot his way out? But the rage that had no appropriate way to release itself in his everyday life was rising up in him. Here was a legitimate target—as many skinheads as this apartment complex could throw at him.

"By all means," the blue-eyed boy said. "Forgive the mess."

Hill stepped in and edged around a coffee table. He found himself standing between the end of a sofa and an opening to the kitchen. He glanced into the kitchen—a bigger mess even than the living room; but something caught his eye. A huge amount of German potato salad had just been prepared. The kitchen was still steamy from the boiled potatoes. It was the kind of potato salad you made with bacon and with vinegar, not mayonnaise. It was still warm—and smelled delicious.

"You supply restaurants with potato salad?" Hill said.

"No." The blue-eyed boy stopped smiling. "Who are you?" he said.

"It's a long story. Since you don't know a Josef Gerste, why bother hearing it?"

Hill watched the blue-eyed boy debate with himself.

"As I said—it has a familiar ring."

Hill nodded. "He was a Nazi who killed Italians for the fun of it."

"He--" The blue-eyed boy stopped himself. "No, I don't think the name's ringing a

bell."

"I've been looking at pictures taken of him when he was about forty years old. That would be more than fifty years ago. I can see the resemblance. What is he—your grandfather? No—your great-grandfather?"

The blue-eyed boy made an involuntary fist. "You've got one minute to tell me who you are and what you want."

The three youths started moving forward. Hill smiled and sat down on the sofa. That stopped them in their tracks. In made no sense—to sit down as three men intending you harm approached you. The glimmer of understanding appeared in the blue-eyed boy's eyes first. He glanced at Hill's right hand. The .38 stared back at him.

"Here's the deal," Hill said. "I'm not from the police. I'm worse."

Hill watched the blue-eyed boy relax. The .38 made sense to him. An unarmed man walking in and sitting down on the sofa—that made no sense. That was a lunatic thing to do. This made sense. You needed information and so you pulled a gun.

The blue-eyed boy smiled. "Give me a good reason to tell you something," he said. "Apart from the gun, that is."

56.

"If I satisfy your curiosity, can I get some potato salad?" Hill said.

"We'll all sit down now," the blue-eyed boy said. "We'll have a nice conversation." He sat down in a battered armchair directly across from Hill. The other two, one in shorts and a t-shirt, the other bare-chested and wearing jeans, took their places. T-shirt sat down on the sofa—far from Hill. Bare-chest sat across the room—near the door.

"So," the blue-eyed boy said.

"I work for the Pankow Grand Hotel. My interest in your great-grandfather has to do with whether you killed a man named Michael Silverstein because he accidentally discovered your great-grandfather's identity. Silverstein died at the hotel. He was poisoned in the afternoon, maybe at the hotel, maybe elsewhere, but he definitely died at the hotel. If his murder turns out to be about a Nazi war criminal killing a Jew, that will not be good for the hotel. It might bring us a few new Arab customers—but you know what I mean."

The blue-eyed boy listened carefully.

"So," he said. "If I follow you, you don't care about this in the abstract. You don't care if the heinous war criminal Josef Gerste gets brought to justice—maybe you don't even care if he's dead or alive. You just want to know whether the hotel has anything to worry about?"

"That's it."

"And how … how do you know any of this?"

"Silverstein kept a diary," Hill said. "Which is in a safe place."

The blue-eyed boy nodded. He sat in thought. Hill waited. It was a little hard to concentrate—the apartment smelled of bacon. He wanted that potato salad.

"So, this is about that Jew?" the blue-eyed boy repeated. "And whether your hotel has to worry?"

"That's it."

"Well, that wasn't us."

"You can speak for all skinheads in Berlin?"

"He was poisoned?"

"He was poisoned."

"We wouldn't poison a Jew. We'd stomp him."

Hill nodded. "In ordinary circumstances. If you happened upon a Jew in the night. Absolutely, you'd stomp him. But this is a special case. You would want to be clever. How what better way not to make it look a skinhead thing than to use poison?"

The blue-eyed boy thought about that.

"Agreed," he said. "But wouldn't it have been smarter if we'd just made him disappear entirely?"

"Yes. But maybe you were concerned that he had left a record—which he had. Maybe you wanted to make it look like another kind of murder, so that whoever had that record wouldn't associate his death with you."

"That doesn't make perfect sense," the blue-eyed boy said. "If he left instructions for something to go to the police after his death, it wouldn't matter what that death looked like. So that play at misdirection wouldn't have helped much."

"Yes, it doesn't make perfect sense. Tell me what does."

"That we didn't do it."

"Lay it out for me."

"All right." He leaned forward. "But we'll deny everything if it turns out that you think you need to take this somewhere. You're not wired, are you?" he said.

"No."

The blue-eyed boy nodded. "We didn't kill him. It happened this way. My great-grandfather liked to go out a lot. Have lunch in hotels, go to movies. He liked to feel independent. But he was very old, very stooped over. So one of us always went out with him—but we kept our distance. As soon as the Jew got on his tail, we knew it. Don't know how that happened."

"I believe you have a brother who committed suicide?"

The blue-eyed boy stared at Hill. "Yes."

"He told Silverstein. It was in another context. He gave Silverstein this address by accident … if it was an accident."

The blue-eyed boy nodded. "It probably wasn't an accident. But he wouldn't have said, 'Here's my poppy's address, go arrest him.' He would have let it slip in some upside-down, crazy-ass way."

Hill nodded. "That's exactly what he did."

"So," the blue-eyed boy said, "we saw that the Jew was following poppy. So we followed him. It took us a little while to make up our mind what to do about him.

There were a lot of votes for stomping him. Of course, it was my decision, because it was a family matter—but we all had a vested interest. So we discussed it. We had to consider that he might have left instructions. Seemed like a thing a Jew would do. It took us some time to decide what to do—maybe two days. Once we decided we had a conversation with him."

"Which went?"

"We said we wouldn't kill his three children and he said he would drop his vendetta."

Hill nodded. "I believe that worked. There's a diary entry that pretty much confirms what you're saying."

"And then it stopped mattering," the blue-eyed boy continued. "This all went down in January and poppy died in February."

Hill thought about that. "And you told Silverstein?"

"We did. We told him that he had better still keep his mouth shut but that he had no reason even to think about opening it, since Josef Gerste was dead."

A silence descended. The three youths looked relaxed. They liked their story.

"So Gertze's dead," Hill said. "So that's that." He watched the blue-eyed boy carefully.

"That's that."

"Well, I have a friend on the German police force and I owe him a favor. If Gerste had still been alive, I think I would have kept this all to myself. But since he's dead, and since it has nothing to do with the hotel, I think I'll just give him a ring. You don't mind, do you?"

The blue-eyed boy tensed up. "I mind a lot."

Hill raised the .38. "Enough to die?"

57.

He took out his phone with his left hand, scrolled through his contacts, and dialed Grass.

"Axel," Hill said. "Do you like potato salad?"

"Love it," Grass said.

"There's a lot of it where I am. The whole place smells of fried bacon." He gave him the address. "This is an interesting apartment. Up until February Josef Gerste lived here. In case the name doesn't register, that's Josef Gerste, war criminal."

It took Grass a very long time to reply. "Now he lives somewhere else?" he said in a tight voice.

"Now he is apparently dead. So says his great-grandson, who is sitting here across from me—looking at my gun."

There was another long silence.

"I'll be right over," Grass said. "Do I need an army?"

"I don't think so. Though the building is crawling with skinheads." He glanced at the blue-eyed boy. "By the way, the three boys in the apartment will be telling you a very different story from the one I just told you. So be prepared."

Hill hung up and called Vogel. The driver answered instantly. "Forget about that hour," Hill said. "It's very friendly in here. Just sit tight and I'll see you when I see you."

Vogel exhaled—as if he hadn't been breathing for a while.

Hill and the three toughs sat in silence. Hill glanced around the living room. Nothing to suggest that an old man had ever lived here. No photographs from bygone years, no old-fashioned figurines or decorative plates or faded prints … nothing. It looked more like the apartment of these boys—car magazines, beer bottles, ashtrays, just what you'd expect. You were not going to find a trace of Josef Gerste here.

"I don't suppose I'll be getting any potato salad?" Hill said at the ten-minute mark.

"Don't worry," Hill said at the twenty-minute mark. "I'll bet you a beer to a donut that they aren't going to stir up a hornet's nest over a dead Nazi. It hurts Germany every time one of these ghosts gets exhumed. They'll want to bury this—just like you did."

The blue-eyed boy stared at Hill with hatred. “Thanks for your concern.”

It took Grass another twenty minutes. He arrived with his partner, who remained outside on the balcony. Grass entered, nodded at Hill and his revolver, and said, “You can probably put that away.” He turned to the blue-eyed boy.

“So, Josef Gerste lived here.”

“No,” the blue-eyed boy said. “My great-grandfather Karl Schmidt lived here until he died in February. This asshole is blowing smoke out of his ass.”

Grass nodded. He wandered around the apartment. There wasn’t much to see. He glanced into the bedroom, took a half-step into the kitchen.

“What’s with all the potato salad?” Grass said.

“Is there a law against potato salad?”

“Depends how you use it.”

“We’ll be eating it at a family picnic! You know, tomorrow’s a holiday.”

“That sounds lawful.” He disappeared into the kitchen and came back with potato salad on his fingers. “Good,” he said, licking his fingers. “A little too much vinegar for my taste, but good.” He turned to Hill. “The vinegar hurts my lips.” He faced the blue-eyed boy. “So,” he said. “The notorious war criminal Josef Gerste lived here until February and then he died. Potato salad isn’t a crime but harboring a war criminal is.”

“The man who lived here was Karl Schmidt—my great-grandfather—and that’s all there is to it.

Grass turned to Hill. “Do you have some independent evidence that Josef Gerste lived here?”

“Not really. Just what this boy told me.”

“Which I deny,” the blue-eyed boy said.

“What other evidence is there?” Grass asked Hill.

“Well, the fellow who claimed that Gerste lived here is very dead.”

“Silverstein.”

“Silverstein.”

“And what was his evidence?”

“Somebody told him. In January.”

“And in February Gerste died.” Grass nodded. “Sounds like hearsay all around.” He stared at Hill. “I suspect we’ll have to let Josef Gerste—I mean Karl Schmidt—rest in peace.”

Hill nodded. “Looks like it.”

Grass got on his cell phone. “A Karl Schmidt died in February. Can you tell me if that’s right?” He waited for an answer. No one spoke. It took three or four minutes. Grass nodded. “Pneumonia? Okay, thanks.”

“Sorry for your loss,” Grass said to the blue-eyed boy.

The blue-eyed boy stared back.

“About the potato salad,” Grass said to Hill. “Your American potato salad, with mayonnaise, it can kill you if you don’t refrigerate it. Yes? Ours, made with vinegar, it can sit out in the hot sun and never kill a soul. I believe that makes ours better than yours.”

“I believe it does.”

“Nevertheless, it is smart to refrigerate it,” Grass continued. “It gets better overnight in the refrigerator.” He turned to the blue-eyed boy. “You won’t be eating the potato salad until tomorrow?”

“That’s right.”

Grass nodded. “Then you should refrigerate it.”

“I had every intention. Then this asshole arrived waving a gun.”

“Very unfortunate,” Grass said. “All this mistaken identity stuff. I hope it didn’t cost you too much time from your hard day’s work?”

The blue-eyed boy had no choice but to let Grass’s sarcasm pass.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen,” Grass said. “A little less vinegar next time,” he said to the blue-eyed boy. “Then it would be perfect!”

Outside Hill and Grass exchanged glances. Grass gave him just the smallest nod.

Down in the courtyard Grass said, “We’ll have it watched.”

Hill nodded. “Let me know. I need to be there.”

58.

Vogel appeared greatly relieved to see him—thrilled, actually.

Hill got in. "The hotel," he said.

He settled back. Nondescript East Berlin streets flashed passed … old-fashioned cobblestoned streets, featureless apartment buildings, derelict blocks of abandoned houses and empty lots strewn with rubble … the ubiquitous graffiti … and then every so often a beautiful building, some heartbreakingly evocative pre-war building with cherubs and balconies that made you think of violin recitals and vases full of flowers …

It seemed that Morgan had been right. It probably wasn't a Jewish thing, at least as far as the Gerste thing went. The blue-eyed boy and his friends had no particular reason to kill Silverstein. Their threat of retaliation had silenced Silverstein. Why kill him?

So, if it wasn't a Jewish thing …

Morgan was supposedly an art consultant—which was preposterous, of course, but also something of a fact. He apparently did 'represent' the schlock artist Clemens Richter. It seemed likely that Morgan would know more about Silverstein's art dealings than about his spa dealings. So you had to give odds that it was an art thing …

Who else might know about those art dealings?

He pondered that. Then it came to him. Maybe that Arab gnome—Rafi Moghadam. The Arab painter might know something. Silverstein collected Rafi. Rafi was a wine bar regular and a pal of Morgan's and the Turk's. Rafi knew all the players. Plus he was amusing …

Hill pulled out his phone.

It was nine a.m. in Manhattan. Cohen would be on his fifth cup of coffee. Hill dialed.

"Thomas," Cohen said. "Good to hear your voice."

"Same here."

"Catch me up."

Hill paused. "Well, there's an ancient Nazi war criminal involved, probably only peripherally. Josef Gerste is his name. Hated by the Italians—look him up if you're interested."

Cohen didn't reply immediately. "Berlin," he finally said.

"Berlin," Hill agreed. "It connects to Silverstein but not to his murder—at least, that's how it looks right now. Which means that the Pankow Grand probably isn't going to get known for some Jewish-Nazi thing. That was the big threat. Anything else—I doubt it matters."

"So you could come home."

"I could."

"But you don't want to."

"Exactly."

"Because?"

"Well, I could say that it's about the manager and the assistant manager and something that smells funny at the hotel. Which is true and a nice, appropriate reason to stay longer. The assistant manager especially—Juliette Morel—something's going on there. But the real reason is—I still want to know."

"What Silverstein was doing there?"

"What Silverstein was doing here."

"Bit of an indulgence."

"Maybe for Parkway. But it's important to me."

"Fine." Cohen paused. "About the manager and the assistant manager?"

"Yes?"

"They'll need to be replaced?"

"That would be my guess."

"But you don't know what they're up to?"

"Not yet."

They fell silent.

"Do me a quick favor," Hill said. "There's an Arab painter here in Berlin by the name of Rafi Moghadam. Can you get me his phone number and address?"

It took Cohen under two minutes. A thought rushed by as Hill waited—and eluded him. Cohen came back on the line with the information. Hill jotted it down.

"Thanks."

Hill didn't dial Moghadam's number immediately. There came a point in a case where you had to reconsider what you were doing. What was he doing now? It wasn't that he cared about Michael Silverstein. "Cared" was the wrong word. But he was

certainly intrigued. No, that wasn't the right word either.

It had to do with that one specific question that struck a deep chord in him. After the Holocaust—even three-quarters of a century after the Holocaust—why would a Jew from New York choose to live in Berlin? Hill's version of the question was—would he ever return to Korea? Korea had been the scene of countless horrors and the man he hated more than anyone else in the world, the man who also happened to be his father, still lived there, in that same village, in the same brothel.

Maybe the real question was—why was he even thinking about going back to Korea?

They were within a mile of the hotel. Hill dialed the Arab painter's number.

"Of course!" Rafi Moghadam exclaimed after hearing what Hill had in mind. "I'm at the studio. In Lichtenberg. Come on over!" He gave Hill the address. Hill thanked him, hung up, and spoke to Vogel.

"Change of plans," he said. "We're heading over to Lichtenberg." He gave Vogel the address. Hill felt the car immediately slow down.

"Do you know what that is?" Altman Vogel said.

Hill heard the repressed emotion.

"No. What?" Hill said.

"That's Stasi headquarters," Vogel said. "The former headquarters of the East German secret police."

59.

They drove into an enormous courtyard in front of an eight-story office building as long as a leg of the Pentagon. Hill shook his head.

"Did you arrive here at night?" Hill said.

"Yes."

Vogel shut off the engine.

"Go on back," Hill said. "I'll get home on my own."

"No!" Vogel protested. "This isn't a place to leave you."

"And it isn't a place for you to sit around and wait. Go on back."

Hill got out and after what seemed like a long time Vogel restarted the engine and pulled away.

Hill entered the derelict building. Hand-lettered signs pointed visitors to makeshift businesses and artists' studio. What used to be Stasi headquarters was now full of entrepreneurial squatters. Hill read some of the signs. "Escorted African Tours." "Carpets to Order." "Small Business Accounting Services." Hill started up the stairs.

Rafi's studio—an immense conference room large enough for an awards ceremony—was on the fourth floor. Entering it was like traveling in a time machine back to 1955. The conference room had blond paneling on the walls, a gray industrial carpet, an ugly acoustic drop ceiling, and chrome light fixtures. It was the blond paneling especially that caused you to think that you'd stepped out of a time machine.

You couldn't miss this room's institutional bones—but it was also a painter's studio now. Twelve of Rafi Moghadam's unframed triptychs hung on the walls. One long wall held works in progress. The gray industrial carpet was paint-splattered and several old conference tables served to hold Rafi's paints, brushes, and palette knives, the oversized jars of gesso, the cans of turpentine, all the tools of his trade.

"I squat here," Rafi said. "Nobody pays rent in this building." He showed Hill around. "This whole place is full of people running businesses out of the old Stasi offices. Some are former Stasi prisoners. Do you think it's strange to want to run a business in a building where you were once a prisoner?" The Arab painter's eyes twinkled. "I don't find that so strange."

Hill walked around, looking at the paintings. Rafi, smoking a hashish pipe, followed

him, explaining the art.

"This one is about the history of humiliation," he said. "It's the one I think Silverstein would have wanted. Do you have some nice wall space where you live?"

Hill smiled. "I do. I have a large loft with exposed brick walls."

"Excellent! Then you might like this one. No better subject than humiliation. Plus it's very beautiful—don't you think? The blues—blue is the world's favorite color. Did you know that?"

Hill stared at it. It was very beautiful—powerful and beautiful. Each of the three panels had a cobalt blue background. The one on the left reminded you of the night sky, with vaguely discernible faces for stars. The one in the middle had a diagonal slash of red and tormented faces peeking out from behind the red slash. The one on the right had yellow figures, or what could be taken as figures, in positions of pain. The painting's title felt earned.

"It's quite something," Hill said.

Rafi nodded. "I'm sure you'll buy it. Though maybe not today."

Moghadam continued leading Hill around.

"Let's sit down," the Arab painter said after awhile.

There was a living corner with a beat-up old sofa, some ratty chairs, and a low wooden coffee table decorated with painted-on pornographic cartoons. Rafi filled a pair of wine glasses.

They drank, relishing the silence.

"I have a wife and a mistress and six children," Rafi said after a bit. "Three by each woman. The children are preparing a theatrical. They're dramatizing a Persian folktale. They'll put it on tomorrow night. We'll have some company. You're welcome to come."

Hill smiled. "Thanks. I'll think about it."

"My wife and my mistress are sisters. You should see them. They're very beautiful."

Hill laughed. "I don't doubt it!"

Hill sipped at his wine.

"So," Hill said after awhile. "You probably know everything about both murders, right?"

Rafi raised his hands. "Not everything!"

Hill waited for Rafi to continue but the Arab painter held his tongue.

"Tell me this," Hill said. "Your friend Ernst 'represented' the painter Clemens Richter. What kind of crazy deal was that?"

Rafi shrugged. "As much money as that asshole Richter makes, it isn't enough. He's one of those big, fleshy, cowardly people who bully people and get away with it. Nothing is ever enough for him. He'll walk right up to the woman you're with and talk dirty to her right in front of your face. Don't you wonder how such people keep from getting their brains beaten out? That's all by way of saying, he was certainly making a fortune with that crap he painted—which he didn't paint, by the way, he had a stable of slaves painting away at his 'paintings of love'—but that wasn't enough. Ernst proposed a way for him to make some more money, Richter listened, and they did some business together."

"What was that way?"

"I'm not sure."

"Yes, you are."

"More wine?"

An hour passed pleasantly. Night fell. The harsh overhead lighting made you think of interrogations—or of meetings so boring that they were their own form of torture.

"I consider myself an anthropologist," Rafi said. They were on their second bottle of wine. He'd brought out crackers, cheese, olives and nuts. They ate and drank. "I keep a family of monkeys at home. In a huge bamboo cage I had custom-made in Thailand. My own family is also interesting. So is the Lange family. I suppose, so are most families. But there's nothing quite like two artists—or an artist and a prospective collector."

"Like me and you?"

"I was thinking of Richter and Silverstein."

Hill glanced at him. "Tell me about that."

"They had a run-in. I don't know the exact circumstances. But Richter and Silverstein found themselves at the same event. Silverstein made some disparaging remarks about Richter's art. Richter spit on him. Silverstein whacked him a good one in the stomach and made him vomit. Richter's bodyguard did a little squashing of Michael. Wrestled him to the ground—despite the hundred pounds difference in weight, I don't think it was that easy. I think Michael actually got a little hurt. But probably the main thing was being spit on." He glanced at Hill. "I should have put that in my 'History of Humiliation' painting."

"So Silverstein wouldn't have minded getting a little even with Richter," Hill said after a moment.

"No," the Arab painter said, "I don't think he would have minded that at all."

60.

"Can you call me a cab?" Hill finally said.

"A cab! I'll drive you."

Hill's cell phone rang as they were driving toward the Pankow Grand.

"Can I see you?" Gabi said.

"Where are you?"

She hesitated. "At my sister's."

"I'll see you there in a little while."

"I'd rather meet somewhere else."

"I'd rather meet you there."

There was a long silence.

"If you insist," she said, and hung up.

"Can you take me to Silverstein's?" Hill asked the Arab painter.

"Of course." They were coming to a corner and he turned abruptly. The tires screeched. "You'll see one of my paintings in the main room and a second in a back library. The third is upstairs."

"I don't think I'll be invited upstairs."

Driving along through a city like this one, you could trace something back in your soul, as far back as … Hill smiled. Should he let Gabi tell him about his past lives? What if she told him that he'd been in Korea before in similar circumstances to that of his childhood—and worse, that'd he'd been living there again in a future life?

Hill laughed.

"What?" Rafi Moghadam said.

"A psychic who claims to know about your past lives. Would she also claim to know about your future lives?"

"For an extra fee."

They arrived at the Silverstein mansion. It gave off the same impression of privilege and wealth as it had the first time Hill visited. The house was lit up invitingly.

“Don’t forget to take a look at my paintings!” the Arab painter said by way of goodbye.

Hill waited a moment before ringing. He thought of the four generations of Langes—the great-grandfather who had played German soldiers in Hollywood movies of the Forties, the generation of Felix and Erna Lange that had grown up right after the war in Communist East Berlin with the Wall, the Cold War, and the Stasi, the two sisters, Martha and Gabi, the one tall, thin, and forlorn, the other tall, fleshy, and theatrical, and the children, only one of whom he had met, the boy reading so intensely about pirates. Into that world strode a self-made Jew from New York.

Gabi answered the door. Hill had gotten in the habit of expecting her to look theatrical—like a gypsy, a water nymph, a Valkyrie, a pin-up girl. Tonight she looked normal. She had on jeans, a tank top, and flats. Not only did she look normal—she looked more ordinary.

They didn’t hug. They didn’t shake hands. Gabi stared at him for a long minute and then shook her head. “I feel like we’ve been fighting,” she said.

“No.”

“You do know that you rejected me?” She said that without coyness and without a smile.

“Not as you, Gabi. As a Lange.”

She stared at him. “What does that mean?”

“When you tell me what you know, I’ll tell you what that means.”

She ushered him into the big, ballroom-sized living room with its museum-sized art on the walls. They sat down across from one another, she on a leather sofa and he on a leather chair.

“What is it that I’m supposed to know?”

“Let’s begin with why Silverstein’s children are named Lange.”

She shook her head. “I told you. I don’t know.”

“Who does know?”

“I’m not sure. Martha, of course.”

“Can I see her?”

“No. That’s out of the question.”

“Who else might know?”

“If someone else knows, it would be my mother.”

“Is she here?”

"She is. My parents have been staying here."

"Ask her to come down and talk to me."

Gabi shook her head. "I don't think she would."

"Ask her."

"All right."

Gabi got right up. She crossed the expanse of room and ascended the great staircase to the second floor. Her getting up like that surprised him. He thought about that for a second, then began thumbing through one of several magazines in front of him on the coffee table, an architecture magazine with a feature on "sexy Berlin interiors."

It didn't take long. Erna Lange appeared at the top of the stairs, followed by Gabi. They descended the staircase looking glum and preoccupied.

Hill got to his feet. Erna shook hands with him. She was several inches shorter than Gabi, maybe five-eight or so, but still a tall, erect, formidable woman. She had on earrings, makeup and dressy clothes. Hill guessed that she had been out to an early dinner and had just returned home.

"You want to know some things?" Erna Lange said.

"If you don't mind."

"Let's sit down."

She sat down with Gabi on the sofa. Hill sat down in the leather chair. They were silent. Erna played with a pendant at her neck, a modern-looking fused class sort of thing that you might get at a good museum shop. She was probably sixty or a few years older. She looked tougher than her daughter, more capable of making a hard decision. Of course, she had seen more and lived through more. Hill tried to decide whether he liked her or disliked her and found himself withholding judgment. One thing—she certainly didn't talk too much.

"What do you want to know?" Erna Lange said.

"Why Silverstein's children aren't named Silverstein."

Erna nodded. "It's not that complicated. I sat down with Michael and we talked about it." She glanced at Gabi. "Gabi doesn't know about any of this. But Michael and I reached some agreements."

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She didn't continue.

"What were they, those agreements?" Hill asked.

She brushed back her hair. "My husband's side of the family has a flair for theatrics. I'm a simple person. I say things plainly and simply. I told Michael that his children should be raised German and Protestant. This isn't Manhattan. "

"This isn't Manhattan? Meaning?"

"You know."

Hill knew. And he knew that there was no point in pressing her to say it out loud, that Jews were unwelcome here—always had been and always would be.

"And he didn't tell you to go to hell?"

"No." She seemed very calm and forthright. "He thought about it. He was a smart man. Would his children be better off with a Jewish last name and Jewish habits or with a German last name and a genuine feeling for what it meant to be German? He thought about it and he agreed."

Hill tried to picture it.

"Just like that?"

"We had a few conversations. Maybe in the time period before Frederick—that's the oldest boy—was getting ready to start school. Maybe we talked about it on-and-off for a month. Then in one conversation he simply agreed. It was never acrimonious. We talked like adults."

"Why didn't Martha have this conversation with him? Why you?"

Erna Lange shrugged. "Maybe it was hard for her. She doesn't speak up well. She's always had that problem."

"What problem?"

"Of living smaller, quieter, and more fearfully than she should."

Hill thought about that. "There were no trade-offs?" he said after a moment. "Nothing Michael got in return?"

Erna shrugged. "He got well-adjusted German children."

"Nothing else?"

"Like what?"

"Like permission to sleep around?"

"No," Erna Lange said. "Absolutely not."

"Like--"

Felix Lange entered the room. Hill braced himself for a whirlwind of theatrics. But the father sat down quietly in the second leather chair, right next to Hill. He had on a suit, with the tie slightly undone and the top button of his blazingly white shirt unbuttoned. This seemed to confirm Hill's impression that the Langes had just come back from an early—and fancy—dinner and hadn't changed out of their dinner clothes yet.

"Good evening," Hill said.

Lange nodded.

"We were talking about this thing which I find so peculiar, that Michael's children don't bear his last name," Hill said.

"And I've been explaining it," Erna said to her husband.

Lange nodded. "Don't forget about communism," he said. He leaned back—where had all that fury gone? Hill watched him closely. "For someone from the West, like yourself, it's very hard to get your head around our ideology. Whatever your thoughts were living here as an adult in East Berlin, whether you were for communism or against it, or for it in principle but against it in practice, whatever your thoughts were, that was your cultural context, your idiom. It's like capitalism for you. Can you even picture what it would be like growing up in a non-capitalist environment? We all grow up in our own cultural trance, transfixed by the things that we share in common, the icons, the language. When that dissolved, at first we thought we would be so happy to be 'free.' Then we discovered that we missed something. We missed that one beautiful thing from socialism—a reason to share."

Hill nodded. "How does that relate to Michael?"

Felix Lange shrugged. "He was a self-made man. He came to Berlin with, by our standards, a small fortune. Maybe it was a small fortune by anybody's standards. Martha was young. Michael's energy was not East German energy. Michael came from a world of affluence and getting things done. That excited Martha. It excites Gabi too—she has this idea of going to Silicon Valley in California and meeting a man with a start-up company. That 'start-up' energy is sexy."

Gabi blushed a little.

"So, what I'm saying is this," Felix Lange continued. "There were maybe a lot of illusions and mistaken assumptions on all sides in the beginning. It took awhile to iron

that out. One of the results of that ironing out was Michael's reasonable decision to have his children grow up fully German."

It was a lovely speech. Hill looked at the three Langes. No, he thought suddenly. You had something on your son-in-law and you held it over his head and you made him give you German grandchildren. What was it? Not his extra-marital affairs—Hill believed Erna Lange.

"Here's something I don't understand," Hill said. "It sounds like you got on well enough, you had these reasonable conversations with your son-in-law, it all sounds very civil and adult. But the first thing the police heard when they began investigating Michael's murder—and apparently they heard it from everybody—was how much you hated your son-in-law. Not disliked. Hated. Which was it? Did you have this civil relationship—or did you hate his guts?"

Erna Lange stared into her lap. Felix Lange stared into his. Gabe stared off and away.

"I'm not the police," Hill said after awhile. "And I'm not your son-in-law's avenging angel. I think it was very foolish of him to marry into this family—but that's neither here nor there. Maybe it's just idle curiosity. But I'd love to know."

Erna Lange sighed. Gabi cast him a glance and looked away quickly. Felix Lange sat motionless. Hill gave it another minute. Then he got to his feet and left.

62.

He walked back from Mitte to Pankow. It was another lovely spring night in Berlin. He walked the back streets. As he turned a corner he came upon a car in flames—a fairly new BMW engulfed in fire. A few indifferent spectators stood off at a distance, watching and exchanging a few words. Hill joined the spectators.

"What is it?" Hill said.

The man nearest him—a round, middle-aged German dressed for bed, with a jacket thrown over his nightclothes—shrugged. "They burn the cars—the nice cars. Protesting gentrification. Hundreds of cars have burned in Berlin this year."

Hill nodded.

He walked on. In a few minutes he found himself on a deserted shopping street with closed shops and shadowy figures in the doorways. Hill passed one of the doorways and a man stepped out of the shadows.

"Hey!" the man cried.

Hill turned around. The man was fifty or so, with a bull neck and a wrestler's chest and shoulders. He wore a leather biker's jacket and heavy boots. Hill recognized him. He was a cop he'd had a run-in with a dozen years before.

"I know you," the cop said.

"You're mistaken."

The man laughed. "It's been more than ten years—but I know exactly who you are."

"You're mistaken."

"Right! What are you up to?"

Hill's pulse raced. He was that other person again, that boy of the night with real reason to be scared of a German policeman. It was as if his new identity had been peeled away in a split second. He could feel himself sweat.

"You have me confused with somebody else," Hill said slowly. "Here." He carefully extracted his cell phone. "Call Axel Grass. Maybe you know him?—Berlin police. You might be waking him but he'd want to make sure that you didn't … get in the way. Give him a call. Tell him you're talking to Thomas Hill. He'll explain."

The cop stared at Hill long and hard. Then he broke out a knowing, twisted smile.

"So you are up to something!" he said. "I knew it! Get along now." He stepped back into the shadows.

Hill walked quickly. It was no longer a lovely Berlin spring night. It was East Berlin, where cars burned and secret police worked both sides of the law. It was East Berlin, where you could get shot just for speaking English. In his youth, he'd had nothing to lose and his rage pulled him through. Now he had things to lose. That made him vulnerable.

At the hotel, the night bouncer-cum-doorman opened the door for him. He rode up the glowing purple escalator and crossed the lobby. The main bar was hopping with music and chatter. Hill took the elevator up to his suite. He'd just unbuttoned his shirt when he heard a small knock at the door. Hill opened it. Juliette Morel, the assistant manager, stood there.

"I was watching for you," she said. "I hoped you'd come back alone."

He stepped aside and let her enter.

She was smiling—trying to smile. She had on a white blouse, print skirt and high heels and looked every inch the attractive Frenchwoman. Hill walked to the suite's bar.

"I'm having a Scotch," Hill said.

"White wine?"

There was a bottle of white wine in the refrigerator. Hill opened it, poured her a glass, and poured himself a large Scotch. He brought the drinks over to the seating area—two chairs and a round table.

They clinked glasses.

"This won't get you out of the trouble you're in," Hill said, looking her in the eye.

She smoothed back her hair and took a sip of wine. "I'm not in any trouble."

"I need a shower. Enjoy your wine."

He needed a shower not because of Juliette Morel—or Gabi, or the Nazi boys—but because of the cop. Amazing how quickly you could plummet from the top of the heap to the bottom! One minute he was Thomas Hill, Parkway World Properties' hired gun. The next minute he was nobody, alone with a German cop on a dark street. He tried to scald the feeling away with hot water.

He heard a small noise. The shower door opened. A naked Juliette Morel stepped in.

"You were taking a long time," she said.

Hill nodded. "I needed it."

She soaped his back. After a minute he turned around and kissed her.

In bed, they made love in a sweet and sorrowful way. They both had a lot on their mind. But the sex was good and the release was real. They fell asleep—and found themselves awake again in a couple of hours. They lay there in the dark.

"Tell me about those art auctions on the cruise ships," Hill said.

Juliette put her hand on his stomach. "Don't make me talk about that."

"How long did you do that?"

"One very long year."

"Was it as bad a scam as I imagine it was?"

"Pretty much. Completely immoral. But not so bad in terms of the dollars involved. Those couples usually got away with wasting less than a thousand Euros or so—and they could afford it."

"Plus—I imagine you felt they deserved it."

"If you believe that dogs playing poker is art, you should feel free to buy it."

She rested her head on his chest.

"You know, it wasn't even really a scam," she said after awhile, raising back up. She put a pillow behind her back. "We were just overcharging them for schlock. Like charging a fortune for a hamburger and bad coffee at an airport. You get people on a boat, you present them with something, you overcharge them—I'm not sure that's anything but free enterprise."

"But you could only take it for a year."

"Ten months, actually," Juliette Morel said.

He glanced at her. "You don't want to tell me what's going on at the hotel?"

"Nothing's going on."

"All right. Then come here."

After making love they slept straight through until morning.

63.

Juliette Morel left first thing. Hill got in the shower and thought about the blue-eyed boy's family picnic, which, according to the boy, would be happening some time today.

He hadn't bought the blue-eyed boy's story. It was just a little too convenient. Silverstein happens upon Gerste in January and Gerste dies in February. Easy enough to believe in one sense, as Gerste was in his nineties. But it was also awfully coincidental and convenient.

It was more likely a feigned death and an insurance policy. First, you threaten Silverstein. Second, you move your great-grandfather. Third, you get a doctor to call Karl Schmidt dead—or maybe you go buy the body of an actual old geezer who's just died of pneumonia.

Grass hadn't bought the story, either. Which was why he had someone watching the blue-eyed boy's building right now—to tail him to the family picnic where, as likely as not, one bent-over old war criminal would be enjoying a quiet holiday sausage with his loving family.

Grass or the man tailing the blue-eyed boy would call Hill when the blue-eyed boy started moving. It would be easy enough to know whether the blue-eyed boy was off to a picnic or off to something else—there would be all that potato salad! So this was a waiting day. Hill called for his car to be ready in front of the hotel and told the desk that Vogel might need to sit there for hours. Then he went down to breakfast.

The hotel had that leisurely holiday feel to it. Fewer guests dressed for business; folks lined up at the concierge desk to book an excursion or hire a car-and-driver; people sitting half out of view in comfortable niches and alcoves reading the morning newspaper and drinking coffee from takeaway containers.

Singles and couples came down from their small rooms to the expanse of restaurant for a morning buffet that included a dozen good cheeses. Hill joined them. The slender women piled their plates with fruit and made themselves bowls of granola. The hefty men went for the eggs, sausages, bacon, ham and cheese. As did Hill.

He sat there a long time, drinking coffee and thinking. What had happened between the first time he'd seen the Langes and the second? The first time, Erna Lange had displayed a bottled fury and Felix Lange an overt fury. Hill had taken that to be an act of some sort—he didn't know to what end. This time they had appeared calm, measured and reasonable. He suspected that this, too, had been act—but why change the act? Had they been concerned that the furious act had made Hill more suspicious

than he might otherwise have been? If so, suspicious of what?

Grunewald found him.

"We tried that thing last night, that reenactment you wanted. I brought a boy who's good on his feet. I gather the question is, could someone have followed Ernst Morgan without Morgan noticing whether he was being followed? It looks like it depends on many things. First, how often Morgan looked back. If he never looked back, that would make it much easier. Second, how fast he walked. The faster he walked, the faster his tail would have to walk—and that could produce some sound. Third, which streets he took—if he crossed over cobblestones, that sort of thing." Grunewald cracked his knuckles. "We played it out several ways. I had Lucas—that's the boy's name—follow me first in tennis shoes and then in shoes with heels. If I looked back a lot, then he had to be very careful, and even so I caught sight of him a few times. And then he'd have to hurry to catch up—and I'm pretty sure I could hear him then, especially in the trial with heeled shoes. Once he ran into a garbage can—so there was that. But on balance—a good tail could have followed Morgan."

"So," Hill said. "If Morgan didn't glance over his shoulder a lot, and if wasn't very alert to the sounds around him, he could have been followed. I would have bet against that."

"I think that's about right."

"Thanks."

Grunewald left. Hill sipped at his coffee. He thought back to that small sitting room in the Silverstein mansion: Gabi a great feminine presence beside him, Erna Lange silent, Felix Lange glaring at him, and Martha squeezing out a few words between her tears …

A thought occurred to him. He pulled out his cell phone and called Grass at home.

"Sorry to bother you," Hill said.

"About that old Nazi?"

"No. Nothing going on there yet." Hill paused. "I have a question for you. Did you personally speak to Silverstein's wife?"

"I did. I went to his house."

"Can you tell me what the scene was like?"

"The scene?" Grass thought for a moment. "I got ushered to some sitting room upstairs. His wife was … how to put it?"

"Guarded?"

"Guarded!" Grass thought about that. "Guarded by her parents. She was crying buckets. They were pretty much telling me to go away. I don't think I got a damn thing

out of that."

"Maybe you did," Hill said.

"What did I get?" Grass said.

"A classic theater act."

64.

His cell phone rang at a quarter to eleven. It was the cop assigned by Grass to watch the blue-eyed boy's building.

"He's brought down one of the dishes of potato salad, put it on the back seat of his car, and he's going back up—probably to get another one," the man said. "So he'll probably be moving soon."

"I'm on my way."

"If you don't get here fast enough, I'll call you again when we get to where we're going."

Hill left the restaurant at the trot, hurried down to the car, gave Vogel the address, and told him to gun it. They raced through Pankow. As they raced along, he thought about his younger brother.

His younger brother went by the name of Adam. Like Hill, he couldn't tolerate going by his Korean name. Adam, emotional problems and all, had enlisted as soon as he could, gotten into a beef with an officer, and spent twelve years at Leavenworth for striking that officer. Beating the officer to a pulp, really. After that …

They arrived at the apartment building.

"Pull up behind that car," Hill told Vogel, pointing to the only car on the block with someone in it.

Hill got out. As he walked to the car the driver's window rolled down.

"He's been up there a long time. Maybe taking a crap," the cop said.

Just then the door to the Gerste apartment opened. Hill turned his back on the building.

"We'll follow you," Hill said.

The blue-eyed boy came down with the second large dish of potato salad and placed it carefully on the back seat. He got in his beat-up car and took off slowly—so as not to disturb the potato salad, Hill thought wryly.

The cop pulled out and Hill's car followed.

They drove for ten minutes through derelict neighborhoods. Half the buildings

looked vacant. Angry graffiti covered every surface. Knots of young men with nothing to do postured and smoked cigarettes. They passed a long line of parked motorcycles—a gang gathering. The landscape changed, from featureless apartment blocks to lower middle class single-family homes. Some had flower boxes and new paint jobs. Most had weeds out front and wrecked cars in the driveway. Three dogs ran in a pack, angry and hungry.

The blue-eyed boy pulled up in front of one of these homes, more like a shed than a home. It had a weedy front garden, plastic-looking windows, and a cracked tar roof. The boy got out and went inside. Time passed.

"How are you?" Hill asked Vogel.

"Good."

"How many of your poems can you recite from memory?"

"All of them."

They kept their voices lowered.

"How many is that?"

"Maybe a hundred."

Hill whistled softly. "That's a real body of work."

"Thank you."

"More than enough for a poetry reading!"

Vogel fell silent. After a moment he said, "Please stop talking about that."

"All right."

Ten minutes later the blue-eyed boy opened the front door of the house and helped out a very old man. The man wore baggy pants, a faded button-down shirt, and a heavy sweater. He walked with a cane and was so bent over that his head was perpendicular to his body. The blue-eyed boy treated him solicitously, helping him edge his way with great difficulty into the low-slung car.

Josef Gerste. No doubt about it.

Yes, this had been their insurance policy, moving the old man. Silverstein probably wouldn't have talked—the threat had silenced him. But what if he did talk or what if he died unexpectedly—exactly what had happened! Then Gerste would be at risk. So they had taken out this insurance police. They had moved poppy.

The blue-eyed boy's car drove off slowly. The unmarked cop car followed, with Hill's car in the rear. They drove for two or three minutes and arrived at a leafy park. In a corner of the park a large family picnic was already underway. There were little ones tumbling in the grass, medium-sized kids kicking soccer balls, and a pair of

grills heating up. Thirty or more people were in attendance. The women busily set out casseroles and plates and utensils; the men smoked and drank beer.

The blue-eyed boy escorted poppy across the grass and one-by-one the extended family greeted the patriarch of the clan. Karl Schmidt. Josef Gerste.

It was a heartwarming scene.

65.

Hill strolled over to the cop's parked car.

"I need to talk to the blue-eyed boy before you grab Gerste," Hill said.

"Okay."

"Give me your cell phone number."

The day was just warming up. Several of the Gerste clan huddled around the grills for warmth. The park was otherwise empty except for a man walking his dog.

Hill moved to the shade of a leafy tree about fifty yards from the picnic site. He chewed on his lip. He was pretty sure that he knew the answer to the question he was about to ask but he wanted to check one more time. He needed to know for certain if the blue-eyed boy or one of his friends had killed Silverstein.

He crossed the grassy expanse of park and headed for the picnic. No one took any notice of him. He made as if to pass the picnic by and then, making a left, came up behind the blue-eyed boy, who was standing by himself watching the kids kick around a soccer ball.

Hill put his arm around the boy's shoulder and jammed his gun into the boy's side.

"Take a walk with me," Hill said.

The blue-eyed boy gave Hill a killing look. But he walked. Hill headed him away from the picnic.

"Here's what you need to know," Hill said, whispering into the blue-eyed boy's ear. "I don't care about your poppy. I don't really care who killed the Jew. I only care about my company's interests. So if you tell me the truth—whatever the truth is—I won't call the police on your poppy. I'll walk away. But if you lie to me—you know what will happen."

They'd moved far enough away from the others that Hill could give the blue-eyed boy a little space. He retracted the gun from his side and gave him a push, as much as to say, "Walk on your own now." They walked on for another fifty feet, the blue-eyed boy in front and Hill behind him, until they came to a stand of lime trees.

"Okay," Hill said.

Hill and the blue-eyed boy stood facing one another.

"So," Hill said. "The absolute truth."

The blue-eyed boy stared at him. He wanted to tell Hill where to go—but he mustered all the self-control he could manage. He probably genuinely loved his poppy. No doubt Gerste had held him as a baby, given him presents, told him stories. Gerste was a real person to this boy—as well as a hero, a martyr, and a legend. Hill waited.

"We didn't kill the Jew," the blue-eyed boy said.

"Prove it."

"How do you prove a negative?" the blue-eyed boy whined.

It was exactly the whine Hill had wanted to hear. It was the way you sounded when you were telling the truth but couldn't prove it. Hill believed him.

Hill pulled out his cell phone with his left hand, flipped it open, and dialed the waiting cop.

"He's all yours," Hill said.

"Okay. We'll be getting lots of company."

The boy stared at Hill uncomprehendingly. Then he understood. He bared his teeth. He made to come at Hill—then remembered the gun pointing at his chest. He glanced at the clan—Hill could see him thinking of warning them. But you couldn't just whisk the old man away, he was far too old, slow and infirm for that.

"Just stay put," Hill said. "There's nothing you can do about it now."

"Liar!" the blue-eyed boy cried.

"Don't be a baby," Hill said. "Your poppy massacred people. I'm sure he was lovely to you—but he wasn't lovely to everybody."

Ten minutes later six patrol cars and two police vans arrived at the park. As Grass had predicted, it was a scene—babies crying, police rushing, a grill overturning—luscious sausages hitting the dirt. The men of the clan defended their patriarch—several had to be wrestled to the ground and arrested. It was lucky that they hadn't brought weapons to the picnic or else there would have been a bloodbath. As it was, the picnic—and the family—was in shambles.

Hill shook his head. "You may want to take your revenge on someone for this," he whispered. "Don't. I have a long memory and a long arm. Say that something happens to one of Silverstein's kids. I will kill the youngest members of your family. I will walk them right out of their school and blow their brains out. Your poppy had this coming and that's that. Do you understand me?"

The blue-eyed boy said nothing. Hill hoped that it was the right kind of nothing.

66.

He was shaking a little. It had to do with telling that lie about killing the children.

"The hotel," Hill told Vogel.

"Are you okay?"

Hill shut his eyes. The police cars arriving at the park provoked a memory, the same memory that had come to him once already on this trip. Blaring sirens went off in his brain, the sirens signaling that "the exercise" was commencing, the exercise that sent every soldier for miles around to bunkers on high ground on the south side of the Injin River, where they waited, sometimes for days, until the simulated North Korean invasion ended.

When those sirens went off, every infantry company below the river loaded into their armored personnel carriers and mile-long convoys snaked out of the camps and clogged the roads. It was pure spectacle and Hill, like all the boys his age, loved to watch those convoys roll down the dusty road. He would even wave at the GIs … he clearly remembered waving. The GIs always waved back.

The car rumbled over cobblestoned streets.

At the hotel, he went directly to the Library Bar and ordered himself a Scotch. He took his glass to a table between a pair of floor-to-ceiling bookcases. There was a window looking out onto a lovely inner courtyard and sculpture garden. The sculptures were interesting—one reminded Hill of that exploding earth sculpture he'd communed with in that small, triangular park somewhere near the wine bar.

He glanced from the courtyard to the wall opposite him. A large painting hung in the space between two floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

Adorable children romping in an alpine meadow.

Of course!

He drained his Scotch, got to his feet, and strode to the painting. There, in the bottom right-hand corner, was a bold signature in bright red: Clemens Richter.

I should have known, Hill thought, as soon as Grunewald said that he liked the art!

He strode out to the lobby and looked at one painting after another. On one wall a happy family at dinner. On another wall a cottage with smoke curling out of the chimney. On a third wall the sun rising over the Alps. Each painted in a syrupy, over-

the-top way: the perfect cat and the perfect dog under the dinner table; icing on the cottage, turning it into pure schlock gingerbread; a glorious Heavenly radiance suffusing the Alps, making it God's own Alps.

Damn!

An edgy hotel and schlock art. That was what had felt all wrong from the moment he'd entered the lobby.

The scam was crystal clear.

It was too early to call Cohen—only six in the morning, New York time. Hill hurried to his suite, changed his clothes, and worked out for an hour at the gym. Then he showered for a good twenty minutes. Finally it was late enough to call Cohen.

"The renovation of the Pankow Grand," Hill said after they'd exchanged greetings. "How much did that cost?"

Cohen took a few minutes.

"Sixty million dollars," he said.

"And there was a budget for art?"

"For art? You mean the stuff you hang on the walls in the rooms?"

"Art for the lobby and the corridors."

"Let me look." It took him awhile. "As far as I can tell, there was a budget for 'decorative art' for the rooms—framed prints, I think—and 'original art' for the main spaces."

"How much was allocated for the 'original art'?"

"Two million dollars."

"For how many pieces?"

"Let me see if it says." After a moment he came back on the line. "For forty paintings."

Hill nodded to himself.

"So," Cohen said. "What's up?"

"Here's what I think is up. The fellow who got killed the other night, Ernst Morgan, was a scam artist. One of his scams was 'representing' a schlock artist by the name of Clemens Richter. I'm guessing that Morgan approached folks here at the Pankow Grand during the renovation, knowing that they'd be looking for art. He made them a deal—buy forty of Richter's paintings for $2,000,000 and give us—I don't know—a million and a half and split the other five hundred thousand between you."

"Who's the 'you'?"

“The manager and the assistant manager. Helmut Kirsch and Juliette Morel.”

“So they’ll need replacing?”

“They will.”

“I’ll get an interim manager on a plane today.”

“Right.”

“So—just an old-fashioned kickback?”

Hill grunted. “With this wrinkle. It was a very sweet deal for Richter. It wasn’t just that he made all that money. He also got to say that his paintings fetched $50,000 each—he had the invoice to prove it. It let him set a nice, high phony price for his work. I’ll bet you that when you look it up, you’ll discover that his paintings weren’t going for a fraction of that before the Pankow Grand deal.”

“I’m to look that up?”

“Please. And let’s make sure that the manager and the assistant manager had to the power to buy the art.”

“I’ll call you back in an hour.”

67.

He waited in his suite. Cohen called him back an hour later.

"This Richter guy," Cohen said, "looked to be getting maybe $20,000 a painting before we bought all those paintings from him. Then he quoted $50,000 after that—and apparently got it most of the time."

"Cute," Hill said.

"And the manager and the Frenchwoman, they made the decision to buy all those paintings. Can't tell which one for sure, but it was within their overall responsibility during the renovation."

"Okay," Hill said.

"I'll have an interim manager on a plane some time today."

"I'll get back to you. Maybe—just maybe—I'm wrong about this."

"Do you think you're wrong?"

"No."

"The new manager will be on the way, unless I hear differently."

He took the elevator down to the lobby and passed through a door to left of the front desk that led to the corridor of offices. He passed security—Grunewald's office—and housekeeping—now vacant since the firing of the Serbian. Juliette Morel's office was to the left and Helmut Kirsch's to the right. Hill knocked on Juliette's door.

"Come in!"

Hill opened the door. "Time to talk," he said.

Juliette got to her feet. Hill was already knocking on Kirsch's door.

Another "Come in!"

Hill opened the door. Kirsch eyed him speculatively. The Frenchwoman followed Hill in. She took one of the two chairs facing Kirsch's desk, smoothing the skirt of her business suit as she sat down. Hill took the other.

"Okay," Hill said. "I know all about Richter."

He watched them. Their reactions couldn't have been plainer. Juliette Morel burst into tears. Helmut Kirsch turned ashen.

"Thank you for not posturing," Hill said. "Tell me how it happened."

Neither of them spoke. Hill waited.

"Then I'll tell you," Hill said. "Ernst Morgan approached you with a deal. You were to buy a great many of Richter's paintings for the hotel and get a handsome kickback. About as straightforward as a scam can get."

Neither of them protested. Juliette Morel watched him, tears streaming down her face, a plaintive look in her eyes. Helmut Kirsch's upper lip and forehead beaded in sweat.

"I see no reason to get the police involved," Hill said. "Make restitution and resign. Parkway doesn't need ink on this. We can keep this in-house. But you'll have to pay the money back and pack up."

Helmut Kirsch expression changed. He looked grateful and relieved. "We can pay it back!" Helmut exclaimed. "Juliette? Juliette! Do you still have the money?"

Juliette Morel looked up and wiped her eyes.

"I can get my half together," she said.

"So can I!" Helmut cried. "Good! Good," he said more calmly. "Good."

"The worst part is that the art has to stay up," Hill said. "There's no budget to replace it."

Neither the manager nor the assistant manager laughed.

Hill leaned forward. "That's not all of it," he said. "There's still the matter of the murder."

He watched their reaction. Kirsch looked perplexed. Juliette Morel didn't.

"Silverstein knew about the scam and you killed him." Hill said. "Which one of you did it?"

Kirsch threw up a hand. "Silverstein? He had nothing to do with the Richter business. I have no idea what you're talking about!"

"But you do," Hill said to the Frenchwoman. "You have to tell me."

Juliette nodded. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Silverstein came in one day," she began. "He was angry—angry with Richter. They'd had some kind of fight. He told me that one of his acquaintances—Ernst Morgan—let slip about the job he was doing for Richter. Just hearing the name Richter got me sick. Then hearing him mention Ernst, I knew the game was lost. He told me that he was going to take it to the press--"

"But he never did," Hill said.

"No." Juliette stared him. "I lived in anguish. I didn't know what to think. There

wasn't anything to do. But it never crossed my mind to kill him!"

"No," Hill said. "I'm sure it didn't."

"Then when he came in for lunch on Friday—God, was it only Friday?—I thought that he was … I don't know … toying with me. Rubbing my nose in it. He was very jovial. All smiles. I went up to him in the restaurant and didn't dare say anything—I think I said, 'How are you?' I didn't know what to say—or what he would say! But all he said was, 'I couldn't be better!' Nothing about Richter. But I wasn't convinced—I could hardly breathe all day. Then, when he was murdered--"

"What do you know about the murder?" Hill said quietly.

"Nothing!"

Hill nodded. He got to his feet.

"An interim manager will be arriving tomorrow," he said. "Don't destroy anything. Don't take things away. Don't up the ante on this—right now, there's no police involvement. Don't push your luck!"

Hill left them sitting there.

He stopped at the security office. Grunewald hopped to his feet when he entered.

"The manager and the assistant manager are leaving under a cloud," Hill said. "They can stay in their offices for now—but tomorrow they'll be gone. Take charge of getting them out of there—they can take their personal items but that's it. Get the locks changed—all the usual things. There'll be an interim manager arriving tomorrow—I don't know if it's a him or a her. But he or she will tell you what else to do."

Grunewald stared at him. Finally he said, "Should I have known?"

"No," Hill said, "it's from before your time. But you did help bring it to light!" He smiled at the Bavarian policeman. "By liking the hotel art."

Grunewald grunted. "Which means?"

"One day we'll have a beer and I'll tell you."

68.

He was crossing the lobby when his cell phone rang.

"Dad!"

"Paul! How are you?"

"I'm loving Brazil!"

"Great. But I meant, about your fever?"

"Oh, that's gone! Can I tell you about the Amazon Jungle?"

"Of course."

Paul excitedly threw facts at his father. Hill smiled and let Paul play encyclopedia. Finally Paul wound down. After a moment's silence he said, "But you'll still tell me about Korea, right?"

"I will." Hill thought for a second. "Can I start with a folktale?"

"Sure!"

In school he'd learned Korean folktales. There was one called 'The Tiger and the Rabbit.' It had to do with a tiger falling down a pit, a man helping the tiger out, and the tiger, ravenous from being in the pit so long, deciding to eat the man who had saved him. The man begs that the tiger ask some other creatures if that's the fair thing to do, to eat your rescuer. The tiger asks one plant and animal after another—a pine tree, an ox, and so on—all of whom, having a grudge against men, assure the tiger that eating the man is an excellent idea. Then a rabbit comes by, who slyly suggests that he can't give his answer unless the parties return to their original position, the tiger in the pit and the man walking by. The tiger agrees and jumps back in the pit—and this time, naturally enough, the man walks by, leaving the tiger in the pit.

Hill told Paul the story.

"What's the--" Paul couldn't find the word.

"The moral? What do you think?"

"I don't think it's that you shouldn't help other creatures. But it sure sounds like that."

"It does, doesn't it? What else?"

Paul thought. “I suppose it’s really about not being ungrateful. The tiger should have been grateful.”

“That’s probably what you’re supposed to take away. Anything else?”

“I know!” Paul exclaimed. “That if you write the fairy tale you get to save yourself!”

Hill laughed out loud.

Paul was silent for a moment. “Thanks, dad.”

“You’re welcome. Now … back to Brazil!”

He hung up. He suddenly remembered leaving Korea after he’d killed that Turk. He was eighteen years old. His father had put him on a bus, what the GIs called a kimchi bus, one of the buses that plied the dusty roads from Seoul almost to the DMZ, ferrying Korean farmers and their animals, whores visiting home or working two villages, and all the peasants and tradesmen forever invisible to the GI eye.

Hill headed south toward Seoul. It was a monsoon day and the roads were barely passable. The bus had to maneuver slowly down the muddy road. On a good day it took two hours to get from his village to Seoul. That day it took five. Could any five hours have felt longer? For an eighteen-year-old, leaving home wasn’t the worst thing. In fact, he’d been making his escape plans for years. It was only the fact that his younger brother still needed him—his younger brother, who hadn’t learned to survive as well as Hill had—that had delayed his escape. Now he was leaving …

Hill pictured that pounding rain. If you hadn’t lived through a monsoon, you couldn’t understand the extent to which rain could completely obliterate the world …

Hill’s cell phone rang again.

“The Gerste thing is heating up,” Grass said. “It may be worldwide already. The Italian press is full of it. But it’s all about the past … not about Silverstein or the Pankow Grand. We’ll be hearing an awful lot about those Roman caves.”

“And those five extra Italians.”

Grass grunted. “Funny how the mind works. If Gerste had killed one extra Italian, or maybe even two, it would have seemed like a simple mistake, maybe a counting error, something clerical. But five extra … that sounds sadistic.”

“It does. Maybe it wasn’t … but it sounds that way.”

“By the way, it turns out that there’s a reward on Gerste,” Grass said. “It’s a lot—fifty thousand Euros. Offspring of the massacred Italians have been after him ever since he was convicted in absentia. The reward’s yours.”

“Probably it’s Silverstein’s,” Hill replied. “It should probably go to his estate.”

“No.” Grass sounded adamant. “He didn’t turn him in. And he wasn’t going to turn

him in. Then his sister-in-law had a shot at turning him in—and she didn't turn him in. She gave you the information. You were the one who turned him in. The reward's yours."

Hill thought for a long moment. "I owe you," he finally said. "And Parkway owes you. You use the reward for some good cause."

"We could. The police support all sorts of charities."

"That works for me."

"That doesn't mean that I wouldn't mind some more information about this and that."

"The connection just got bad," Hill said. "Talk to you."

69.

If the blue-eyed boys and his friends hadn't murdered Silverstein and if neither Helmut Kirsch or Juliette Morel had murdered Silverstein …

Afternoon was fading. He walked from Pankow toward Mitte, south toward the center of Berlin. The city was gearing up for evening. The trams were full; couples looking for an early dinner read the menus posted outside restaurants. Hill followed the tramline and turned right at the river, in the direction of Silverstein's mansion.

A housekeeper in an apron answered the door.

"Is Hagen Lange staying here?"

She didn't quite understand. "He lives here," she said.

"Ah! I wonder if you'd mind telling him that Thomas Hill is here. I sent him a bottle of schnapps the other day … "

"Come in. I'll see."

He stood in the vestibule facing the great living room. He glanced at the art on the walls. No Richter here! He spotted Rafi Moghadam's triptych, three panels of distorted red and yellow faces against a green background. "I think I prefer the blue one at the studio," Hill said to himself.

The housekeeper returned.

"He's in the study. He'd love to have you join him."

She led the way to the room where Hill had met the elderly Lange the last time. Hagen Lange sat on the sofa, a rug on his lap, a glass of schnapps in front of him.

"I've just been dreaming," Lange said. "I see people who've died and they come into the room and we chat."

Hill nodded. He sat down next to the old man.

"Thank you for the schnapps," Lange said.

"My pleasure. Did they send over a good bottle?"

"Excellent. Will you have one?"

Hill poured himself a glass. They drank without speaking. Hagen Lange seemed

less animated and more pensive than the last time—or maybe he was just feeling his age this evening.

"Why did you go to Hollywood?" Hill asked.

"To act."

Hill nodded. "Agreed. But your country was at war with America. You left Berlin when?"

"December, 1938."

"You say that with a certain emphasis."

"It was three weeks after Crystal Night, when we went after the Jews. My wife and I didn't want to stay in Germany."

"Not because--"

"No. We aren't Jewish."

"You just had scruples?"

The old man inclined his head. "It wasn't so much that Jews had been attacked. We would have felt the same way if it had been Poles or Romanians or anybody. It was the blood lust you could feel building. You could feel the bestiality. That glass shattering throughout Austria and Germany was the sound of civil society shattering. People started to look like animals. You know those George Grosz watercolors where his ordinary bourgeois German couples look like feral pigs? We started seeing that. People looked like animals. We hated it—plus, I'd always wanted to go to Hollywood."

Hill nodded. "And so you came to Hollywood and acted in movies meant to support our war effort. Movies meant to make us feel good. Didn't you feel like a traitor to Germany?"

"A lot," Hagen Lange said. "My wife and I would exchange glances. We were both just twenty-one. One day we'd be at a Hollywood party thinking, 'This is the life.' That very evening we'd find our stomachs in knots thinking about what we were doing. But 'traitor' isn't exactly the right word. We felt like refugees. No, that isn't it either." He shook his head. "It's a feeling that's hard to describe. You absolutely know that your country is wrong. But it is still your country. Your mind is certain but your gut is queasy. We felt both right and wrong."

"And feeling wrong—you came back."

Hagen Lange nodded. "Yes. We could have stayed in America. Easily. But we thought something like, 'Let's be part of the rebuilding.' Only it was a more complicated thought than that. It was almost like joining a kind of 'peace corps,' deciding to come back. To be part of the peace … I'm not sure what we were thinking." He shook his head. "It would have been very different if we had come back to West Berlin. That would have been much easier."

"Why didn't you?"

The old man shrugged. "We knew Pankow. It was our former neighborhood. We'd grown up there. Plus, maybe we wanted it to be hard. After how easy we'd had it during the war." He fell silent. "Yes, we probably needed it to be hard—we were probably feeling guilty. So many millions of people had died and we'd been going to Hollywood parties. I think we wanted to suffer." He glanced at Hill. "And we did."

Hagen Lange's relationship to East Berlin was not Hill's relationship to the Korean village of his youth. Hagen Lange's hatred in 1938, a hatred rooted in the injustice he was witnessing, was not Hill's hatred, a hatred rooted in the injustice he himself had experienced. Hagen had come back to help, to rebuild Berlin, to restore civil society, to make it a better place. What would Hill's motive be if he ever returned to that God-forsaken village?

Probably revenge.

"You regret coming back?" Hill said.

"On balance? Yes."

"So you had some sympathy for Silverstein?"

Hagen Lange's expression changed. "Some," he said sadly. "But he did some very bad things."

Hill waited. It seemed as if Hagen Lange had only recently received information about Silverstein's transgressions and was still processing the news. Was it news about the affairs or news about his business dealings? But 'very bad things' sounded like something else.

"Things that the Holocaust can't excuse," Lange said after awhile.

"But you won't tell me?"

The old man shook his head. Hill saw that he was crying. Hill patted the old man on the shoulder, got up, and left the Silverstein mansion.

70.

He returned to the hotel and picked up a car. He drove himself—he wanted solitude. He aimlessly roamed the streets of Berlin, moving back and forth between east and west. Twice he stopped to drink. Late in the day his cell phone rang.

"You remember Noise," Jumper said. "The one with the loud radio?"

"I remember."

"That was your evil twin, goading him on like that. You didn't have to."

"Only species evolve. Human beings don't."

"I thought you said we'd both changed!"

Hill laughed. "Can't both be true?"

Jumper grunted. "Anyway. Noise can't get over the insult. He's coming after you."

"Is that right?"

"Pretty much right now."

"Thanks."

"He can't be reasoned with."

"Does he want a fair fight? Or will he jump me?"

"He'll jump you."

"Where is he now?"

"In the next room, getting fueled."

"Okay." Hill paused. "Give me his home address."

Jumper hesitated. "I can't do that."

"Maybe you won't take it quite this way, but I saved your life."

"Spared it," Jumper said. "There's a difference."

"All right. Agreed. But you tell me—what were you really doing minding the door at that Jewish dance?"

Jumper said nothing. Hill waited.

"I'm seeing a Jewish girl," Jumper said. "I do her that favor, protecting their dance."

"There you go!" Hill exclaimed. "You have changed. You don't have to be loyal to Noise. You know what he is."

Jumper said nothing. Hill waited.

"You called me, Jumper. You picked a side."

"I believe I did," Jumper said. He gave Hill the address. "It's an apartment house. One of those old-fashioned ones with a dark well under the stairs."

"Thank you."

"Someday--"

"What?"

"Someday we should ride together. Maybe from Berlin to Amsterdam. Have a few beers along the way."

"Give him a reason to go home," Hill said.

"I'll think of something."

In the car he checked his .38. He drove with the window open. A cold wind blew across his face. He parked around the corner from Noise's apartment building. He closed his eyes—he had no worry of missing the Gypsy Joy. The roar of his motorcycle would wake Hill right up. Half-asleep, he pictured walking with his children in Central Park. They passed a mime and Hill mistook him for a statue. "That's a person!" his daughter cried. Hill took a second look. It was Ernst Morgan. The mime winked at Hill. "He winked!" his daughter cried. She made a face. "He shouldn't do that," she said soberly. "That ruins everything."

A motorcycle roared. Hill got right out, made his way to Noise's building, and tried the front door. It opened and he stepped inside. The narrow hallway, with its old-fashioned tile floor and roughly plastered walls, ran straight back to a set of stairs. The stairs ran up a few steps and then turned right, creating a stairwell. It was indeed dark under the stairs, as Jumper had said. But Hill hurried up to the first floor landing. He didn't want to surprise Noise by appearing out of the darkness. He wanted Noise to see him.

He waited at the top of the stairs. Noise entered the building and banged the door shut behind him. It was a rude noise, a notice to everyone in the building that Noise had returned. Hill smiled. Noise appeared at the foot of the stairs and tramped up the first few steps. Hill backed down the hallway. He measured out ten paces from the landing. Noise arrived at the top of the stairs, turned in Hill's direction, and stopped in his tracks.

"Hello," Hill said.

Noise stared at him.

“Looking for me?” Hill said.

Noise took a small step forward.

“Feeling humiliated, were you? Over that little radio thing?”

Noise slowly unbuttoned his biker jacket.

“Have I given you enough time to gather your wits?” Hill said. “I wouldn’t want you to feel like I’m taking advantage of you.”

Noise opened his jacket.

“Take your time,” Hill said. “No rush.”

Noise fumbled his pistol from out of his waistband. Hill waited a moment more, drew his .38, and fired three times, planting three bullets in Noise’s chest. The Gypsy Joy groaned, slumped to his knees, and toppled forward.

A little old lady in a housedress opened her door a crack.

“Trash,” Hill said.

She spotted Noise on the floor, opened her door wider, and stepped out into the hall. “Can you maybe take him to the trash can?”

Hill laughed. “Certainly. Where is it?”

“You go out back and down the steps. Be careful—it’s dark.”

“My pleasure,” Hill said.

“Thank you, young man. He’s bullied us from the moment he moved in.”

She moved right past Hill to the body. Blood pooled on the tile floor.

“Don’t worry about the blood,” she said. “I’ll clean it up.”

She returned to her apartment. Hill heard her bustling about inside. Pots clanged. Pipes gurgled and the faucet came on. A moment later she returned with a pot of steaming water and a big yellow sponge.

“Go, go,” she said. “I’ll take care of the blood.”

“We make a good team.”

“Come back any time.”

He dragged Noise away. At the back door he turned round and glanced down the long corridor. The little old lady was on her hands and knees busily sponging up blood.

71.

Friday morning Bella called.

"I'm missing my daughter," she said.

"Let's take a walk."

"Okay!"

"Do you mind if we walk through a cemetery?"

"No, love, I don't mind." Bella said, pausing. "You think that'll cheer me up?"

"You'll be with me."

After they hung up Ari Cushman called.

"I have some small news," the reporter said. "I ran into this old-timer in Tel Aviv who knew Silverstein's father. They went to temple together back in Brooklyn. I wondered if it was the same Silverstein and he said, 'Did he run a pharmacy in Brownsville?' Does that sound right?"

"It does."

"I thought so! I said, 'A pharmacy in Brownsville?' He said, 'It paid well. Plus he liked black women.'"

Hill grunted. "Did he know Michael?"

"He's sure he met him but he couldn't remember him. Michael made no impression."

"What little boy does?"

"Except that he wet his bed. The father liked to complain about that—enjoyed complaining about it."

"Charming."

"He also met the wife once or twice. 'Dumpy and critical,' he called her. She wore formless clothes—'lived in sacks,' he put it."

"That's interesting," Hill said.

"Good," Ari said. "I'm off to bed."

"What time is it?"

“Who cares what time it is when you don’t go to bed alone?”

Hill called for his car.

“It’ll be twenty minutes,” the desk clerk said. “The driver went off to run an errand. Do you want another car?”

“No. I’ll wait.”

He sat down on the side of the bed and thought about Michael Silverstein’s father. Had the father and the son carried on a single real conversation in their life?

Hill felt his breath catch. After his mother died, his father became human. That lasted about two weeks. For those two weeks the angry fire that always burned in his father’s eyes dimmed. He moved mechanically, sat down abruptly, and every so often acknowledged the children. He even let Hill approach him.

Hill had never had a real talk with his father. His father’s authoritarian way silenced all conversation. One day Hill found his father sitting alone in the bar, doing nothing. Hill came closer. His father looked up and invited him to sit down. Hill sat down warily.

“You’ll have more chores now,” his father said.

Hill nodded.

“And your brother and sister. You--”

“I’ll take care of them.”

His father glanced at him speculatively.

“You’re getting big,” he said.

They sat there.

“Beer?” his father said.

Hill’s eyes opened wide. He was only thirteen.

“Okay.”

His father finished one beer after another. Hill nursed his. The taste did nothing for him.

“Not a beer man?” his father said.

“I don’t know.”

His father laughed. It wasn’t a friendly laugh but for once it wasn’t cruel. Hill wished that he could get away.

“You’d like to get back to America?” his father said.

Hill nodded.

"Maybe some day. You do a lot of shooting, don't you?"

Hill nodded.

"What's the point?" his father said.

"I--" Hill hesitated.

"Spit it out."

"I just like it."

His father nodded. "Hitting something is a good feeling," he said. "Taking aim and hitting it."

That was their warmest conversation ever.

The room phone rang.

"Your car's ready, sir!"

On the street, Vogel rushed up to him. "I'm sorry!" Altman cried. "But I wanted you to meet my friends. Two more poets."

Hill glanced in the car and laughed. A middle-aged man in tweeds sat in the back. A bearded man in a heavy sweater occupied the passenger seat. Hill got in and Altman made the introductions. Hill shook hands around.

The poet in front said, "For you!" He handed Hill a slim volume of poetry.

"Please!" the man beside him said. "I have one, too!"

Hill took the second offering.

The three men stared at Hill expectantly. Hill laughed.

"I'm honored," he said. "I'll take a look as soon as I can."

How much these men needed an audience! It popped into his head to suggest to the new manager of the Pankow Grand that the hotel begin to feature poets.

The three men continued staring expectantly. Hill laughed again.

"Can we go?" he said.

"Of course! Of course!" Altman cried.

He gave Vogel Bella's address.

"We'll get out," the poet to his left said.

"We can walk," the poet in front said.

"Come along!" Hill said. "I'm picking up a friend and we're going to a cemetery."

The men exchanged glances.

“It would be very nice to walk through a cemetery,” the poet to his left said.

“Very nice of you,” seconded the poet in the passenger seat.

Altman drove slowly. Hill guessed that he wanted the poets to have a chance to chat with Hill. But neither they nor Hill knew what to say.

“Were you--?” Hill began.

Altman understood Hill’s unasked question.

“Yes! The Stasi held all three of us.”

That fact didn’t make conversation any easier.

“All right!” Hill said finally, laughing. “There’s only one thing for this ride. You’ll take turns reciting your poems.”

The poets didn’t need to be asked twice.

“I’ll begin,” said the poet in the front seat.

The impromptu poetry reading began. Hill leaned forward. The bearded poet’s voice filled the car. It was amazing, really, the difference between ordinary conversation and art. The poet described an affair between a Valkyrie and a soldier, an affair upon which the gods frowned and looked inclined to take their vengeance. Hill sat transfixed, rooting for the couple although certain of the outcome.

72.

They picked up Bella and sandwiched her between Hill and the backseat poet. Hill gave Altman the address of the Jewish cemetery.

Hill and Bella lead the way. The three poets brought up the rear and chatted among themselves.

"Is there a cemetery you visit?" Hill asked.

Bella nodded. "In Trinidad. That's where my family comes from. A lot of them are still there. My father lives there and so do two of my brothers. I visit them every year and there's a cemetery I go to a lot when I'm there. It's like a jungle."

"You go for the solitude?"

"For sanctuary," Bella said. "I don't get on with my father or my brothers. I never know when one of them is going to lash out."

Hill took her hand.

"Tell me about your daughter," Hill said.

"Ah, I miss her!" Bella exclaimed. "But she's a teenager—so I don't miss that!"

"My oldest is nine."

"Nine!" Bella squeezed his hand. "Kids are still sweet then. Unless you take them on long trips!"

Hill laughed.

"Have you met Gabi's sister? And the rest of the Langes?"

Bella nodded. "I went to a party at their house about a month ago. It was a lovely affair in honor of an Austrian painter. Silverstein collected him. It was a very arty crowd and it convinced me all over again that Berlin was the place to be."

"And the Langes?"

"I talked to Martha for quite a while. She seemed super-tense. She didn't care for Stiller's art—that was his name—or for the arty crowd. She talked about the kids and then somehow we got on the subject of religion. I'm spiritual but not religious and she's pretty fervent Lutheran. That surprised me, that a church-going Lutheran would marry someone Jewish. I asked her which Sabbath they observed. She made a funny face like it wasn't even a question. 'Sunday!' she said. 'We go to church on Sunday.' I

couldn't quite make myself ask, 'Does Michael go too?' It was all just a little weird."

"Did you talk about Michael?"

"Some. A Little She kind of blasted him."

"Did she love him?"

Bella thought about that. "No." She shook her head. "No, I don't think so."

They'd arrived at Abraham Cohen's grave. A surprising number of weeds had returned.

"Give me a minute," he said.

He weeded. Bella joined him. The three poets watched in silence. Hill finished, got back to his feet, and helped Bella up.

"I have a poem," the bearded poet said. "I don't know--"

"No, that would be lovely," Hill said. "Please."

The poet began. A passing tour group stopped and listened. Several bowed their heads. A woman began sobbing. The poet finished. No one seemed inclined to move on. The poet in tweeds stepped forward.

"I have one," he said.

It was about trench warfare. It couldn't have been more appropriate. The poet likened the trenches to gashes in humanity's fabric. He took the listener from dusk to dawn through a long night of war.

Hill pictured tracer bullets. It was an anachronism, as tracer bullets arrived decades later, but it was a powerful memory from childhood. Every so often the companies would play war games and white flares and red tracer bullets filled the sky. It moved you differently from fireworks. The sky filled with flares and bullets so mesmerized you that it was hard not to root for war.

The poem arrived at morning. No birds sang; nothing softened or redeemed the carnage. The poet refused to relent. It was a new morning—but not a better one. The war continued and would continue for years.

The poem ended. In the silence that followed a woman from the tour group said, "We have a picnic lunch. Will you join us?"

They were from Brooklyn. Hill, Bella and the three poets sat under the shade of a tree and shared the herring sandwiches and potato salad of these elderly Jews from Sheepshead Bay and Flatbush.

The tour guide was a Berlin Jew.

"Who was that Abraham Cohen to you?" he asked.

"My boss's grandfather."

The tour guide nodded.

Bella held his hand. She smiled at him, thanking him.

"I do feel better," she said. "I've been worrying that my running to Berlin was a bit of cowardice. Not sticking it out in England, not being there for my daughter. But look at all of us. We may be odd and motley, but we are something!"

There were cookies for dessert. The afternoon got chillier. Some in the group began to complain—they were getting stiff, they were getting cold. The tour guide roused the group. They said their goodbyes. Hill, Bella, and the three poets watched them move slowly away, down the winding path and out of sight around a mausoleum.

Bella laughed. "Nobody else is spending a day like this!" she said. She turned to the poets. "Anyone have a poem about that?"

One of them did. As they proceeded toward the gate, Altman began reciting.

73.

They took Bella home. Then Hill dismissed Vogel, giving Altman the chance to visit with his friends.

Hill aimlessly wandered the back streets of Berlin. He loved city walking. Growing up in his dirt village there was nowhere to go. On one side a barbed wire fence separated the village from the Army compound. On the other side nothing but rice paddies. At the foot of the village a road and the looming mountain Easy Queen. At the top of the village, up the hill along a rutted path, a hut different from all the others, decorated in front with a dozen deactivated landmines. A crazy man lived there and children stayed away.

It was a claustrophobic place. The smell of ox dung never completely left. Some months it overwhelmed you. In the winter the smell improved but the temperature reached thirty degrees below zero. He remembered lighting a whole book of matches in his hands for warmth. He hadn't realized he was burning his hands until he smelled the singed flesh.

That bottled up little dirt village with its brothels and bars made you want to lash out. Hadn't Silverstein wanted to lash out too? What else was that boxing ring all about? He'd let the Langes rename his children. He presented himself as a Jew eager to forgive and forget, he gave off a self-deprecating air, but wasn't he also a coiled figure wound up as tightly as the teenaged Hill, who sometimes defiantly ran headlong into that barbed wire fence?

Hill walked. Then he made a decision. He turned in the direction of the wine bar. Halfway there he stopped at a kebab joint and ate dinner while half-watching a football game. The joint was packed and there was a lot of rooting going on. Apparently both teams had their followers among the patrons, causing an undercurrent of tension. When one of the teams finally scored, half the place erupted.

Josef Gerste was now in custody. The Pankow Grand art scam was exposed—"exposed" felt like too lofty a word for such an ordinary kickback story. Hill contemplated the figure of Michael Silverstein, entrepreneur, art collector, womanizer, boxer, and someone the likes of a Clemens Richter felt comfortable spitting on. He pictured Martha, crying all those crocodile tears, and Gabi, theatrical, beautiful … and ugly. That snatch of song returned.

When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore …

He wiped his lips, got up, and headed straight for the wine bar. He hoped the Turk

would be there. He found the Turk all the way in the back.

The Turk nodded and called out to the German proprietor, "Another glass and another bottle!"

They drank. The Turk understood that Hill knew more this evening than he'd known previously. There was a quiet agreement between them to chat about other things. They talked for a while about Budapest, where both men had spent time. They talked about the psychology of cops. They talked about being a minority—a Turk in Germany, an American in Korea. Hill revealed a bit of his background. The Turk nodded. They understood each other very well.

Hill brought up Gabi.

The Turk shrugged. "She's unfulfilled and at loose ends," he said. "Like so many people nowadays—they've completely lost their taste for work. So they learn all sorts of 'skills' but then don't do a thing with them. You'd think the whole world was on some kind of trust fund, with so many people choosing to do things that don't pay and can't pay! Massage therapist. Herbalist. Psychic. Coach." He paused. "It isn't that she's just waiting for a man and kids. She is waiting for that—but this other thing is also going on, this restless hunt for some way to be, some way to be 'spiritual,' some way to be arty and God knows what."

Hill nodded. "And all the flirting and theatrics. And the bad temper."

The Turk glanced at him. "You saw that temper?"

"The tip of the iceberg. At a restaurant—the way she talked to a waiter."

The Turk nodded. "She can go from angel to devil in the blink of an eye."

"But you probably loved her well enough."

"Well enough."

"Well enough to kill for her," Hill said mildly.

"I've certainly killed for less."

It wasn't exactly an admission—but it certainly wasn't a denial. The wine bar filled up. People who'd eaten elsewhere were coming here to drink. Young Germans, Turks, Arabs … that cozy, homey feeling … at nine o'clock Bella from Birmingham arrived. She waved at Hill and joined them at their table.

"Hello, love!" she cried. "How much longer, do you think?

"Will I be in Berlin? Another day or two."

The Turk glanced at him.

They settled in and continued drinking. Bella smiled at Hill and punctuated her stories by touching him on the wrist. She told the story of a client of hers with

mysterious fatigue who'd been turned around by rubbing herself with lemon peel …

Hill and the Turk sat back and listened. Bella finished a story and said, "My German's getting better, isn't it?"

Hill smiled. "Definitely!" He had a sudden thought. "Remember what you told me, that because your German was weak you were using a translator with your clients? Who did you get?"

"Different people," Bella replied. "It wasn't like a real job for anybody. So it was just catch as catch can. Gabi helped out! I think that she really enjoyed it. She was thinking that maybe she wanted to become an herbalist …"

The Turk touched Hill on the arm. "Where are you going with this?" he said under his breath.

"Nowhere, I think," Hill said, meeting the Turk's stare. "If I've got the picture right, I think nowhere."

"And how will I know which way you're leaning?"

"I'll tell you," Hill said.

The Turk stared at him for a moment longer, then relaxed. "Then let's have another bottle!"

"My turn," Hill said, getting up and heading for the counter.

74.

Bella was telling a story when Hill's cell phone rang. It was Grunewald, head of hotel security.

"Somebody called the desk looking for you," Grunewald said. "The clerk on duty had no idea where you might be but he remembered that you'd asked for directions to a wine bar the other night. That was only place he could think of—so he passed along the name of the wine bar. Then, as soon as he hung up, he got a bad feeling about what he'd done and found me."

"That's where I am," Hill said.

"Should I do something?"

"No." Hill laughed. "That clerk has a good memory!"

"People at the hotel like to know where you are—so they can be somewhere else."

Hill put his cell phone away. The Turk looked at him.

"Something up?"

"Could be." He stared at the Turk. "Care to take a walk?"

"Why?"

"Might be someone out there. Don't want them to get cold."

"What kind of someone?"

"Maybe a pack of skinheads."

The Turk's eyes narrowed. "There's an alley about two blocks from here. If they follow us in there …"

Hill nodded.

"No reason for you to come," Hill said after a moment.

"I have the feeling that you'll be doing me a favor," the Turk said. "Pretty soon."

Hill squeezed Bella's arm.

"Would you like to see me tonight?" he said.

"I'd love to see you!"

“I’ll meet you at your place later.”

“If you’re tired when you get there—I’ve got lemons. We can try that lemon peel thing.”

“We can try that lemon peel thing whether or not I’m tired,” Hill said.

It was closing in on eleven o’clock. Hill stepped out first, moved quickly to his left, and studied the night. In a moment the Turk was at his side.

“See anything?” Hill said.

“Other side of the street,” the Turk said. “Between those apartment buildings.”

Hill nodded. “Give them a chance to see that it’s me. Which way do we go?”

“Left for two blocks.”

“Okay.”

They waited another moment and then leaded left. Hill glanced back over his shoulder. Several figures emerged from the shadows between the apartment buildings.

“How many?” Hill said.

“Four or five, I think.”

“I saw one gun at least. Pretty sure.”

“Let’s presume,” the Turk said.

They moved quickly but not so quickly as to cause the blue-eyed boy and his friends to run.

“They’re making quite a racket,” Hill said.

“Because they’re klutzes.”

Hill laughed. He knew that his laugh would be heard across the street—and that the youths would be a little unnerved by it.

Hill and the Turk hurried straight ahead.

“Pretty soon,” the Turk said. “Maybe a hundred yards on the left.

They picked up their pace. They needed to get in position …

They could hear the youths start running.

“There!” the Turk said.

It was an alley between two buildings. Where they entered was pitch dark but Hill saw light up ahead. It was so narrow that they could just pass two abreast. The blue-eyed boys and his friends would probably come down the alley single file …

“There’s a place up here on the left,” The Turk said under his breath. “A place for

garbage cans. Good cover. There's a pillar. I'll keep walking and make a racket …"

Hill nodded. They hurried on several yards, rapidly approaching a patch of light. Hill saw that it was perfect. There was a single dim bulb over the alcove that illuminated the path but not the recess where the garbage cans were lined up. He'd be in darkness and the boys would be lit up.

He ducked into the alcove and the Turk walked on, pounding his feet …

Hill waited. He figured that the blue-eyed boy and his friends were probably twenty seconds behind. He could hear them running …

Closer. Five seconds. Four seconds. Three seconds.

The blue-eyed boy appeared. Then a second youth, then a third …

"Hey!" Hill cried.

They all turned. Five youths faced him. They were lined up against the brick wall like men about to be executed. Hill fired from his position of cover and dropped the blue-eyed boy with a bullet to the heart. Firing came from up the alley—the Turk's gun. The Turk dropped two more of the youths as Hill put rounds in the last two. It was over in less than five seconds. The blue-eyed boy and his friends hadn't fired a round.

The Turk came back up the alley, his gun raised. The silence was immense after the explosion of shots. The blood from the bodies was already beginning to mingle. Soon there would be a pool large enough to wade in.

The Turk kicked at the guns on the ground. "All armed," he said.

Hill nodded. "Five Germans for five Italians," he said.

The Turk didn't get the reference. He kicked one of the dead youths in the side.

"Idiots," the Turk said.

Hill nodded. "Time to go."

75.

He spent the night with Bella and got back to the hotel just after ten a.m. The lobby had that desultory weekend feel to it. Hill watched the two desk clerks tense up as he passed.

Over the course of his stay at the Pankow Grand he'd had four people fired, including the assistant manager and the manager. If, when he first arrived, the hotel staff had been afraid of him based on his reputation, now they knew exactly how much they had to fear.

Grass called him at eleven.

"Five bodies," the German cop said.

"Berlin is an edgy place."

"Two different guns."

"Not really."

"And one of the guns matches the Ernst Morgan thing."

"Nevertheless," Hill said after a long moment.

"You have nothing to tell me about who was with you in that alley?"

"What alley?"

Grass grunted and hung up.

Hill wasn't sure what Grass would do next. He showered quickly, dressed, and made his way through the restaurant to the hotel's garbage bins out back. They were full—pick-up would be soon. He buried the .38 below the remains of last night's dinner and this morning's breakfast.

He found Grunewald in his office.

"I need a new weapon," Hill said. "Lost the .38. Clumsy of me."

Grunewald gave him a look. "Another .38?"

"That would be good."

"By one or two this afternoon?"

"That would be fine."

Hill took a few steps toward the door and turned back.

"Do you have a beer here?" he said.

"I do."

"Let me tell you about a scam—the art scam," Hill said.

"Thanks. I appreciate it."

Hill laid out the scam over a beer. Then he returned to his suite and started pacing restlessly. Finally he lay down on the bed, without taking off his shoes, and switched on the television.

He hadn't turned on the television since he'd come to Berlin. He flipped through the channels. His mind was racing—and so was his heart. He could feel the adrenaline pumping.

The boys in the alley …

Better they had come after him than after the Silverstein children! Or after anyone else …

He discovered that he was watching the weather channel. The current temperature in Berlin was a balmy 67 degrees …

He dozed off. He dreamed about his mother. She had tried to shield him from what she could—but it was hopeless. She couldn't come to school with him. She couldn't keep the brothel out of his life. She couldn't prevent him from hearing the fights or the screams—or, later, from fighting. But she loved him and she tried.

She told him things. She told him that life wasn't really like this—that there was another life, a life he might have had. And he would ask her, "Why?" Why did his dad come to Korea? Why a brothel? Why was his dad such a bastard? Why didn't she leave him? Why? She had no answers. Her stomach hurt, she had no answers, and she died young.

He pictured her in a certain yellow dress. It was her favorite. She had no occasion to wear it but sometimes she would put it on and look at herself in the mirror …

He thought he was crying. He wasn't sure if he, the boy in the dream, was crying, or if Hill the adult was crying, or whether it was someone else entirely. That crying got mixed up with the screams of prisoners tortured by the Stasi. Suddenly the scene shifted to a cave that was also a narrow alley where people were dropping in a hail of bullets—Italians, Germans, Koreans …

A knock at the door awoke him. Hill rolled off the bed and opened the door to Grunewald.

"Here," Grunewald said, handing him a .38 and ammunition.

It took Hill a moment to focus. "I'll probably be leaving tomorrow," he said slowly.

“You’ll get it back then.”

Grunewald glanced at him. He waited for Hill to say more.

“All right, then,” Grunewald said after a moment. “Do you want to know when the new manager gets here?”

“No. I don’t need to be part of that.”

“Helmut and Juliette are gone,” Grunewald continued.

“It’s too bad,” Hill said after a moment. “They pretty much got entrapped. They didn’t dream up the scam—the scam came looking for them. It’s like cops putting an unlocked bicycle by some ghetto lamppost in the middle of the night and then arresting the kid who takes it.”

“Still, they took the bait.”

Hill shrugged. “They did. But I feel for them.”

After Grunewald left, Hill sat down on the edge of the bed. It was time to talk to Gabi. He pulled out his cell phone and dialed. She answered on the first ring, as if she’d been waiting for his call.

76.

They met on Museum Island. The product of a billion-Euro renovation, Museum Island's restored museums attracted hundreds of thousands of tourists annually to Mitte. Midday on this balmy Sunday in spring, hundreds of them strolled the paths among the museums, nursing sore feet and arguing about what they needed to see. Did they really need more Egyptian artifacts? More Byzantine art? Children complained and parents squabbled in a dozen languages.

Hill and Gabi walked by the Spree River.

Gabi masked her nervousness by flirting. She had on a girly dress with a frilly bodice and turned heads as she walked. Hill smiled and played along. They came to a bench between two sausage stands and sat down facing the river.

"So," Gabi. "You really don't want to see me naked?"

Hill took that as his opportunity to begin. "I'd rather see your sister naked."

Gabi stared at him. "That's not very flattering."

"You know what I mean."

"No, I don't."

Hill shrugged. "Then I'll explain myself. Just listen for a bit. Anything you say … well, may incriminate you." He gathered his thoughts. "Your grandfather told me that you were a theatrical family. Certainly I've seen that in you. But I've seen it in your parents, too, the way they can be one thing one day and another the next. Martha's trained too—and one of the things you learn as an actor is how to cry when needed." A sightseeing boat passed from left to right. Tourists on the boat waved at them. "Martha's crying made no sense—all that crying. This song kept going through my head, about the moon hitting your eye—and then I remembered. Martha's swollen eyes were not swollen to the same degree. Her left eye was more swollen than her right. Where Mike hit her." He watched her reaction. "All that crying was to disguise the fact that Mike had hit her in the face. Your father's rage, too—it was a similar act, to distract attention away from Martha's appearance. There was a lot of acting going on in that house."

Gabi played with the hem of her dress.

"The shapeless, long-sleeved dress that I saw her in, the seclusion, the way she was at parties, ashamed of something—your sister was ashamed that she was living with

a batterer. She was ashamed that she was letting herself get hit. Your parents knew about it and couldn't stop it. But they threatened Mike with exposure—if he didn't give them the grandchildren to be raised German. That was what they were holding over his head—the threat of a German jail."

A vendor with souvenirs approached them. Hill waved him away.

"I don't think your grandfather knew about the battering or the arrangement until very recently, until the last few days. He was happier the first time I met him and sadder yesterday. He'd learned the secret—and it upset him." He thought about Hagen Lange, who might have played a Hollywood German soldier for decades if guilt hadn't prompted his return to Berlin.

"What I think happened is this," Hill said. "I think the battering recently escalated. I think that previously Mike hit Martha in places that couldn't be seen. But then he went the next step and hit her in the face. That's when you decided to poison him."

She inhaled a little but didn't change expression.

"You told him you'd finally sleep with him. I'm sure he'd been pestering you for sex since the moment he saw you. You told him to get a nice room at a nice hotel and then you set up that lunch with him, to celebrate the sex that was supposed to come that evening."

"I wanted him to die away from home," Gabi said. "So that suspicion would never fall on Martha."

"Quiet," Hill said softly. "I didn't hear that." They stared out at the river. "That was actually pretty stupid, the lunch. Maybe your face wouldn't be recognized, because of that get-up you wore, but your height would be remembered. I think that's the best piece of evidence against you—someone is going to remember just how tall Mike's date was. When you walked in you must have towered over him!"

"He was there already," Gabi whispered. "And he left first."

"Quiet," Hill said. "You got the idea of using an herb because you'd been spending time with Bella, working as her translator. I bet you picked that herb because of the Harry Potter books—I bet Frederick has all of them and you read them, too. I can picture you reading them and enjoying them. I think that you may even have asked Bella where you could get some Wolfsbane—I don't think it was idle that Bella told me that a meat-eater had killed Mike. You do like your meat! I think she knew."

Gabi said nothing. She kept her hands folded quietly in her lap.

"Did you know that it would be a pretty horrible death?" Hill said.

Gabi met his eyes. "No," she said. "That never occurred to me."

Hill nodded. "Did you even know that you were actually killing him? That it wasn't a piece of theater?"

Gabi's face began to crumble. "I don't know that I did," she said.

Hill stared out at the river. He had nothing more to say. Gabi watched him and waited.

"What are you going to do?" Gabi said.

Hill shrugged. "I'm going to tell the police my hypothesis. Maybe they'll agree and maybe they won't. What they won't have is evidence. If you say nothing and keep saying nothing, what can they prove? Plus, you can always bring up Josef Gerste as a likely alternate suspect … that's why I told you to keep Mike's diary. The police won't want any part of that. They don't want Gerste and Silverstein connected. That would not be good for Berlin or for Germany.

"I … confessed to you."

"I don't believe I heard that."

She took his hand. "You wouldn't sleep with me because you knew?"

"No," Hill said. He shook his head. "Berlin is a dream and you are its poster girl. You are one of the Valkyrie—do you remember their special power? They had the power to decide who would live and who would die in battle. I needed to get home in a week—and not get stuck here kissing you."

Gabi smiled. "So you didn't sleep with me because you found me too powerful?"

Hill stared at her. "Maybe. Or maybe I liked your brother-in-law well enough not to sleep with his killer."

77.

"There's a part of this that I don't understand yet," Hill said after awhile. "But you don't have the answer to that part." He stared at her for a long time. "Give me Cabbar's number."

Gabi gave it to him from memory. Hill pulled out his cell phone and called the Turk.

"Let's meet," Hill said. The Turk agreed and they set up the meeting. Hill got up and left Gabi sitting there.

He met the Turk at the small triangular park with the exploding earth sculpture, halfway between the wine bar and the hotel. Hill and the Turk sat together on a bench. On the other side of the sculpture a young, hard-looking mother smoked a cigarette and read a fashion magazine while her baby slept in a stroller. Hill and the Turk kept their voices low.

"I know who killed Silverstein," Hill said. "Gabi did."

"Is that right?"

"Yes. Mike was hitting Martha. Gabi stopped it—permanently. I don't know if it was that simple, but that will do as shorthand."

The Turk nodded slightly.

"And I know why you killed Ernst. To protect Gabi. But the thing is, Ernst didn't think that Gabi was the killer. That's what he meant when he said that it wasn't a family thing. He thought it had to do with the hotel and that art scam business. Somehow he got it all wrong."

The Turk remained silent.

"Hypothetically," the Turk said after awhile. "It might have been that Ernst's killer thought that Ernst was about to turn in Gabi, but in fact Ernst was about to turn in that Frenchwoman."

"A misunderstanding," Hill said.

The Turk looked sad. "A misunderstanding."

"How did it happen?" Hill said quietly.

The Turk blinked several times. Then he sighed.

"I thought that Ernst had overhead a conversation that Friday night between me and Gabi. Gabi was very upset. Well, very dramatic—hard to say if that's the same thing as upset. Ernst was at some distance from us but I had the feeling that he understood what was going on." He glanced at the sculpture for a moment, thinking. "Then, when he pigeonholed me the next day and told me that he was going to make some money off the hotel by naming Silverstein's killer, I just presumed that Ernst knew that it was Gabi. I told him that was a very bad idea—a very dangerous idea. He laughed. I really couldn't understand that laugh." He shook his head. "Only later, after it was all over—after I'd shot him—did I learn from Gabi what Ernst had told her—that he was sure that it was the assistant manager at the Pankow Grand who'd poisoned Silverstein, to cover up the art scam. I only learned that too late. Ernst had gotten it completely wrong."

Hill nodded.

"Which explains the thing that you found mysterious," the Turk went on, "why I didn't take Ernst out sooner, before we got to the meeting place. The reason is that I was still trying to convince him not to say anything. We were having a conversation—an argument—all the way to the meeting. I couldn't get Ernst to change his mind. Then, suddenly, we were there."

"That seems so strange," Hill said. "That you couldn't convince him."

The Turk shook his head. "It was because of that stupid misunderstanding! Ernst thought he was selling out some hotel person. So he had no idea why I was so adamant about him keeping his mouth shut. He wasn't taking my threats seriously. I, for my part, couldn't fathom why Ernst would want to turn Gabi in. It made no sense—which put me off my game. If I had ever mentioned Gabi by name or if Ernst had ever mentioned the hotel business, it would have come clear in an instant. But he kept saying things like, 'She's nothing to you!' and I thought he meant that since Gabi and I weren't sleeping together any longer, I didn't give a damn about her. That got me angry." The Turk looked away. "He died because we weren't explicit. It was always 'her' and 'she' in that whole conversation. A stupid reason to have to die—a stupid reason to have to kill a person."

Hill nodded.

"So?" the Turk said.

Hill took a moment.

"I'm going to tell the police about Gabi," he said. "But if she keeps her mouth shut they won't be able to do a thing. Plus, the whole war criminal thing is going to muddy the case up beyond recognition. As for you--"

"Yes?" The Turk wasn't smiling.

"I'm going to keep my mouth shut."

The Turk stared off. “That seems fair,” he said after awhile. “That whole thing, wearing that ridiculous outfit to lunch, laughing and drinking, then poisoning him – maybe she was enjoying herself just a little too much.”

“Agreed,” Hill said. “A little too much theater and a little too much fun.” He rubbed his hands together. “A little too childish.”

The Turk got to his feet. Hill rose too. The two men shook hands.

“Be well,” the Turk said, switching from German to Turkish.

“The same to you,” Hill replied in Turkish.

The Turk left the park. Hill sat back down on the bench. The mother wheeled her baby away. Hill stared at the sculpture of the exploding earth and wondered if he could tease out a single answer to the question, “What had brought Michael Silverstein to Berlin?” He sat there for fifteen minutes, staring at the earth in tatters. Finally he rose and left.

78.

He called Altman Vogel on his cell phone. He hadn't done that before and his call surprised the driver.

"Altman," Hill said. "You know the wine bar where you've dropped me?"

"Yes."

"Be there at eight. It's your coming out party."

"My what?"

"Your first poetry reading."

"I couldn't!"

"You can."

Hill called Rafi Moghadam, the Arab painter.

"Can you gather a crowd on short notice?" Hill said.

"Of course!"

"Tonight at eight at the wine bar. Someone I know will be reciting his poetry. He was a prisoner of the Stasi and lost his voice."

"And tonight he regains it!"

"Yes."

"I will make you a crowd."

Hill arrived at the wine bar at 7:30. It was jammed already. It was less than an ideal space for a poetry reading—tables were packed together tighter than usual to make a space at the back for a stool. There was no microphone. People in the front room would be able to hear Vogel but not see him. People in the back room would sit practically in each other's laps. Yet it was perfect.

Gabi and Martha came. Hill rather expected that. Except for her bruised left eye, which she no longer disguised with floods of tears, Martha looked healthy, free, and even radiant. Her shameful secret was a thing of the past, that she'd married a man who beat her. She said nothing to Hill and he said nothing to her. Gabi hugged him and kissed him once—and then smiled a devilish smile, as much as to say, "You missed something!"

The Arab painter arrived with a beautiful woman on either arm.

"I consider myself an anthropologist as well as a painter," Rafi said. "I find no species strange. My own family is also interesting." He nodded at the woman on his right arm. "This is Afareen, my wife." He nodded at the woman on his left arm. "This is Naghmeh, her sister, my mistress."

Afareen had green eyes and long chestnut-colored hair and wore a short green dress. Naghmeh had slate gray eyes, full lips, and eyebrows that reminded Hill of the curves of a violin. He suddenly smiled—her name meant "melody" in Arabic. She wore jeans and a t-shirt. They were two gorgeous women.

"Loves," Rafi said, "this American devil speaks fluent Arabic. So only say what you don't mind him hearing!"

They smiled and Hill smiled.

The Turk arrived. Hill and the Turk exchanged nods.

Bella from Birmingham arrived. She gave Hill a serious kiss.

Rafi was true to his word. He filled the wine bar for the event. The only person missing was Altman Vogel. Eight o'clock passed—no one noticed, as everyone was talking, laughing, and drinking. At eight fifteen the glances at the door began. At eight thirty the room had acquired the beginnings of an anxious edge. At eight thirty-five Altman Vogel entered.

People broke into spontaneous applause. Who could say why? Yet it didn't seem strange in the slightest. Maybe it was Altman's petrified look. Maybe Rafi had spread the word about Altman surviving the Stasi. The applause continued. Altman bowed his head and made his way slowly to the stool, as if heading to an electrocution.

People were primed to be kind and to like him no matter what. No one expected what happened next. Altman Vogel took a deep breath, raised himself out of his perpetual slump, and sat erect. He made eye contact with the audience and took complete control of the space. The silence deepened into something impossibly pregnant. When the first words came out of his mouth people actually gasped.

He recited one poem after another. Each poem hit you like a hammer blow. Even his terse introductions carried a wallop. Some women were crying—some men, too. When he was done, people were too stunned to applaud. Hill came up and joined him. "Thank you," he said, putting a hand on Vogel's shoulder. "Thank you." He began clapping and the audience followed, breaking out of their spell and filling the wine bar with their noisy appreciation.

The party went on until two in the morning.

Hill went home with Bella from Birmingham.

His time in Berlin was over.

79.

In the morning he called Grass.

"It was Gabi Lange," Hill said. "She had what might be considered good reasons for killing Silverstein, that Silverstein was using her sister for a punching bag and that the battery had recently escalated. He'd started hitting her in the face." Hill paused. "I don't think you can make a case."

"You know a lot," Grass said. "You would make an excellent witness."

"I actually don't know anything more than what I just told you," Hill said. "And it's speculation. And I'm on the way to the airport."

"Well," Grass said after a long moment, "the Langes will keep their mouths shut. I don't see that we have a case."

"Especially not when they can start throwing in Nazi war criminals to muddy the picture."

"Indeed. And do we need a trial where it comes up that a Jew who was good for Berlin's economy was maybe killed by some skinhead sympathizers of a Nazi war criminal who is maybe the most hated man in Italy? Does that sound good for business?"

"Not to my ear."

They fell silent.

"About Ernst Morgan," Grass said.

"I don't know a thing about that." Hill paused. "Except that it was a misunderstanding and that you will never be able to prosecute the killer. Not in a million years."

"Care to tell me who it was?"

"No."

Grass grunted. "Our exchange of information has been a trifle one-sided."

"Not really. I gave you a war criminal. I gave you the Silverstein key—the battering. I gave you Gabi—if you really want her. Best of all, I gave you the chance to put all this in the round file."

"Along with five dead skinheads."

“That one’s a mystery to me.”

Grass thought it over.

“Doesn’t exactly sound like justice for Silverstein,” Axel Grass said.

“What does justice sound like?” Hill said, and hung up.

It was the best possible outcome for Parkway World Properties—and for Grass, too—and for Germany, for that matter. The Gerste thing was the monkey wrench. You didn’t want to tie Gerste and Silverstein together and turn it into that international story. And that’s what it would have become. “Did a Nazi with one foot in the grave kill a Berlin Jew?!” Why bring all the old ghosts out for a howling?

Gerste was Gabi’s ace in the hole. Maybe they’d made a pact together in a past life, with Gerste pledging that one day he would save the Valkyrie.

Hill called Cohen next.

“Done,” Hill said.

“We’re in good shape?”

“Excellent.”

“Met the interim manager?”

“Nope.”

“See you soon.”

He had a third call to make. He called Rafi Moghadam, the Arab painter.

“Thomas!” the gnome exclaimed. “This is not strange! I expected your call.”

“Did you?”

“I did.”

“Your painting, ‘The History of Humiliation’?”

“Yes?”

“What are you asking for it?”

The Arab named his price.

Hill laughed. “Does that include shipping?”

“Right to your door. I do a beautiful job of shipping.”

“I would like to buy it.”

“Good!” Rafi cried. “You are now one of my collectors!”

“And proud to be one,” Hill replied.

Hill put away his phone and laughed. How could he not own a painting called 'The History of Humiliation,' one painted at former Stasi headquarters? Especially when it was beautiful?

Who would he see when he looked at it? The gnome? The Turk? Gabi? Mike Silverstein? Hill's own father?

Or Hill when he was a boy …

He went downstairs and searched out the interim manager. He was a short, muscular man with a shaved bullet head who returned Hill's handshake vigorously.

"Nice to meet you!" the interim manager said.

"Parkway folks don't usually have that reaction."

"Well, it's just my first day. I probably haven't screwed up much yet."

Hill smiled. "You'll like it here. And Grunewald, your chief of security, is a good man. Even though he likes the art."

"What old Bavarian cop wouldn't?"

A hotel car took Hill to the airport. It was a different driver. Hill watched the graffiti-covered apartment blocks pass. Some of East Berlin was on the way back—and a lot of it wasn't. New ghettos had formed and were forming. He passed through the new Jewish section made up of refugee Jews from the former Soviet Union. There probably wasn't another Jew in Berlin quite like Michael Silverstein, a prosperous Jew from New York who had come to Berlin … why?

Had Silverstein really come to Berlin to get even for the Holocaust by marrying a German woman and beating her up? That couldn't have been his plan. But that was the outcome.

It would be the same with Hill. He might find a dozen reasons to return to Korea—he could name several of them. But they wouldn't be the real reasons. The real reason would be to hit his father in the face.

He passed through security and boarded the executive jet. Even after all these years of flying in this privileged manner, it was still strange to be the only passenger.

"Scotch?" the smiling flight attendant said.

Hill nodded.

The wait to take off was short. Suddenly they were airborne. Hill didn't bother to glance out the window. Berlin was in his system. He could sense it perfectly without needing to see it.