

NINA GALEN
Le Rennläufer



Schnee Bericht: 93 cm base; 8 cm powder.
-20°C. Ski conditions excellent. Keep to
marked trails.

¶—Down, Flame, Stanley M commanded. —Out of my life! The fire snapped viciously at his toes like a Pekingese. —Down and back! he cried. The fire became a dancer, arms high, voluptuous. The young man sighed, laughed at his sigh, and the dancer spat a spark. He withdrew his toes by sinking a few inches deeper into his chair, thinking how he was no hero.

I am no hero, thought Stanley M. Then he began to think how he was no coward. After thinking for several minutes he began to wonder if he could be defined only in negatives, an idea which in no way disturbed him and, although he looked disgruntled, he was not so in the least. He was actually extremely happy, the disgruntled expression being just loosely slung around his features in the same spirit of modesty which would have moved him to wrap himself in a towel before trotting down the hall to take a bath.

The metamorphic fire flung itself toward his feet, reached the end of its draught, and fell choking back. Stanley M sighed deeply, laughed, and resumed his disgruntled expression. He had been sighing and laughing in this way all afternoon and by four o'clock his continued state of utter contentment impressed him so much that he sighed and laughed again. Possibly no one in the world was as happy as Stanley M.

The young man had good reason to be happy although he didn't need one, for happiness flowed through him almost constantly, like the secretion from some marvelous gland, whereas sorrow was buried deep inside him like an appendix which he couldn't quite get at all by himself. But even so, he was glad now to have an honest-to-goodness reason to feel happy, for he had always stood in wide-mouthed awe of Cause and Effect, and suddenly here he was on intimate terms with both of them.

The fact was that some months before, Stanley M had come into a cash legacy on the death of a relative of whom he had never even heard. At first the fact that he had not known this relative gave him the sobering feeling of having been cheated out of the hilarity with which he would have greeted the demise of any relative with whom he was acquainted. He knew that as far as the rest of his family was concerned his name occupied a place on their legacy lists somewhere below the cat hospitals and leper societies. It sometimes pleased him to imagine them in their final hours, hollow-cheeked and hollow-chested, crouching at midnight, quill in hand, by a single non-drip candle, when suddenly the name *Stanley M!* would press itself like some leering face at the window of their memories, causing them to start and tremble before they dismissed it as an illusion of the nerves.

After hearing of his inheritance the heir tried to summon up a mental image of his benefactor, but as his only clue was that the man's name was exactly the same as his, he

could only picture him as he imagined himself to look in another few decades – gaunt, goatish, and frighteningly recessive-gummed. The young man felt they might have liked one another, and sometimes pretended to himself that this generous relative had all along, and from afar, kept his eye on his namesake, sort of pulling strings, opening doors, and in general keeping the path of his life free of insurmountable obstacles without ever revealing his identity. But while he liked to believe this, his other nature would not allow him to shake off the feeling that his good fortune was, after all, the result of some terrible error; the poor man had probably signed his Stanley M on the wrong line of his will and then had passed away before anything could be done about it.

After receiving his inheritance Stanley M left his garage apartment and went straight off to Europe. He had been very happy and content in Los Angeles on the whole, but had had certain personal motives for wanting to see a bit of the world – subtle motives which at least to him seemed valid enough – although it might easily have been argued that this young person should have stayed in Los Angeles and that the months he had already spent traveling through foreign lands had been a waste. For not only had he not found the elusive answer, the enlightenment, he was looking for, but he had taken no photographs at all, nor formed any penetrating and unshakable conclusions about Europe and its inhabitants.

His was a problem, he knew, of communication. If he remained essentially happy in spite of it, it was partly because while there were a lot of signals that he was obviously missing, still there were many others that he was bringing in loud and clear. Added to this was the satisfaction of suffering one of the more universal problems of the day and of knowing that there was thus a great amount of human energy in the arts, humanities and sciences constantly being expended in an effort to solve it for him. He could even hope that in some small way he himself might contribute his share toward the solution. And while he had not as yet had any success, nevertheless Stanley M did feel that the answer he sought was hovering somewhere very close at hand.

His first Continental winter had overtaken him in the north of Germany and, after realizing that he was being snowed upon at sea level, an indignity he had never suffered in southern California, he headed due south until he had reached the Austrian Alps. There he found that the local inhabitants valued snow in exactly inverse proportion to the way persons had been valuing it in northern Germany. In the Austrian Alps snow was considered a godsend. And so Stanley M, whose own values were flexible to the point where they occasionally achieved a state of comfortable opportunism, settled down to enjoy the general blessing.

The room in which the young man was sitting contentedly and toasting his toes had been, in former times, a warm, fragrant cow stall. In those days the cowherd and his family had lived in the rooms above and adjacent to the stall, in order to benefit from the central animal warmth. All this had changed, however, as over the years it became increasingly apparent to the good cowherd that the profit ratio of milch cows to winter

sports enthusiasts was altering to such a degree that it would behoove him to replace his warm cows with a large stove, build on some extra rooms and remodel the old ones in an effort to accommodate the influx of skiers who in no time at all had overflowed the village at the foot of the mountain and had found their way up the slopes.

Because the Schnell Pension was slightly off the beaten track it attracted the sort of guests who leaned toward the hardy, natural life but who at the same time did not look forward to any unnecessary primitivism during their ski holidays. Grasping this nuance, the cowherd installed modern plumbing, painted his sturdy walls and door hinges green to give the illusion of antiquity without the discomfort of moldiness, and supplemented his fine tile stove with an open wood-burning fireplace.

These concessions to his guests' desire for illusion didn't mean the simple man was in any danger of becoming a sophisticate or a cynic or even a good businessman. For it must be remembered that he had for some years owned milch cows and before the war had kept sheep, experiences which had well prepared him to understand and sympathize with the psychology of human beings when the time arrived to take them into his home.

But that was as far as the shepherd had gone to create a rustic atmosphere for his guests, and the rest of the decorations were completely to his own taste and therefore quite genuinely rustic. For instance, hovering on the walls above Stanley M were large wooden angels into whose unfurled wings were set crucifixes, madonnas, and faded photographs of young men wearing military uniforms. On one wall was the framed photograph of the shepherd himself dressed in a bulky white ski suit and squinting through the sights of a rifle. Inside the same frame were several documents with signatures and seals, and at the bottom was carved the words: *FÜR DAS VATERLAND 1939-45*.

On the wall to the left of the fireplace was a large oil portrait, done the year before by a female American art student, of a handsome boy wearing a Norwegian pullover with matching wool cap and balancing a pair of skis on his shoulder. The subject of this painting, Dieter Schnell, was the youngest son of the family. He had been born less than a year after the last of his four elder brothers had been killed in action during the war. On a shelf running around the walls just under the ceiling gleamed a golden row of cups and trophies of many sizes and shapes, all engraved with the name Dieter Schnell. Indeed, the weighty contents of this shelf indicated beyond a doubt that Shepherd Schnell's only surviving son was faster on skis than anyone else in a country which could boast of having within its borders most of the fastest young men and women skiers in the world.

Shepherd Schnell's pension stood just below the tree line of a very high mountain. For almost half the year his rooftop was covered with thick layers of snow. During especially cold weather icicles would grow down from the edges of his roof, and indeed at this very moment a casual passerby could not be blamed for supposing that instead of the roof supporting the icicles, the icicles were supporting the roof. It was so cold that the condition of the snow was perfect for skiing, and everyone was delighted about this

except Stanley M.

It was not that the young man hated the entire concept of skiing. Having once watched a winter sports travelogue in Los Angeles, he had an aesthetic appreciation of the sport and had originally pictured himself making slow, graceful traverses down the slopes, rather like a leaf floating gently to earth. While still in California he had learned to traverse a slope in a faultless traverse posture right up until the moment it came to turn. At that moment it became necessary to face head-on, for a brief instant, into the great valley.

Although Stanley M had lived on warm, flat surfaces all his life, he had learned from books certain important facts about steepness and depth. He knew, for instance, that a pebble dropped from a leaning tower will descend with the remarkable acceleration of 32 feet per second squared. While this knowledge was alarming in itself, there was a particular image which bothered him even more. The image was that of his two skis, the boots bound solidly in place, racing downhill at a speed which squared every second, with Stanley M, his legs broken at the shins, fluttering out behind them like a pennant.

The young man realized from the beginning that his problem with skiing was intellectual rather than physical and that all he needed to overcome it was a real incentive. He suspected that even a sloth, given an incentive, would be able to move about with dispatch. And so, whenever he caught sight of a mountain, Stanley M would ponder the nature of laws and the laws of nature, particularly that of gravity. He finally reached the conclusion that the thrill to be found in skiing was very similar to the thrill one got in nearly running over policemen standing in traffic intersections. In both instances one was teasing with the law, only in one case it was a physical law of nature and in the other a social law designed and enforced by human beings. The fun was in coming as close to the limit of the law as possible without crashing through it.

Having thus established for himself what seemed a pleasurable incentive for skiing, he thought he might give it another try. The psychological precondition, as he saw it, was to have a certain respect for gravity, but not fear. For, as the ski instructors always pointed out, "The steeper the slope, the safer it is to fall. Falling is not dangerous, but to stop falling suddenly can cause breakage."

In other words, the laws governing descent, like the criminal code itself, were there for no other reason than to protect the individual.

Filled with enthusiasm, Stanley M climbed down to the village the first morning after his arrival in Austria and bought a complete ski costume and all the appropriate equipment. He spent the next two days in the snow attempting to reconcile psychological preconditions with physical immediacies, and eventually he succeeded – he turned. He traversed and turned and traversed and turned again. Stanley M felt like a large, ponderous leaf drifting downward. And so it was surprising that on the morning of the third day he did not so much as lace on his boots. The truth was that he had decided he did not like to ski after all. It was that simple; he did not care for the sport. He quite naturally ex-

pected that all his troubles would be over when he made the decision not to ski, a miscalculation of some magnitude and one which later on was often to fill him with guilt and rue.

For in those days Austria was not like, say, Switzerland or France, where one could buy one's way out of having to ski simply by purchasing quantities of ski clothes and equipment. In Austria skiing was still not so much a financial as a moral issue. No matter how much money one spent in Austria it was still necessary to ski, the pressure coming mainly from ski enthusiasts, corresponding in lowland society to political and religious fanatics who want everyone to live in what they consider the perfect State of Being. The rest of the pressure came, quite naturally, from the morally righteous – those persons who hated to ski but who, too weak to resist the pressure of the ski enthusiasts, expected everyone else to suffer as much as they did.

In Austria at that time there was only one person who could accept an individual's right not to want to ski, and that was the most beautiful, most gentle, and the fastest young man on skis in the Alps: Dieter Schnell, the Rennläufer.

¶ The fire in the hearth had subsided and outside, under the eaves, the icicles were holding back and refreezing their departing droplets. The only sound to be heard was the huddling together of molecules as the cold vast evening moved over the house. The sun was going down behind the mountains to the west like a great sandbag, drawing curtains of shadow up the glittering slopes. The room became darker. Stanley M was about to sigh when a sound behind him caught his attention. His skin seemed to tighten on his bones with anticipation.

—*Guten Abend.*

The sun had forgotten one of its children. Helga moved across the dim room like a great, shy sunbeam, carrying a substantial part of a tree in her arms. As she knelt in front of the hearth and offered it to the coals, one thick, golden braid touched the floor by Stanley M's toes. He knew that his feet were in her way, but was unable to move. After settling the log into the coals, the girl began to sweep the spilled ashes together with a soft brush. He could hear the brush sniffing like a puppy around his feet. —Helga, he sighed. —Helga.

—*Was wünschen's denn?* Kneeling on all fours the girl looked up at him and blushed. Her voice had the texture of very soft gold.

—Helga.

At this the cheeks of the poor girl ripened even more. Getting to her feet she ran heavily from the room. The young man stretched contentedly, stood half erect, turned, and collapsed in a chair facing the opposite direction.

He was feeling . . . how might he express it? . . . as if all the organs inside his body were balanced on thin wires like a mobile. Here hung the stomach, there the liver, here two lungs looking a little like empty wine sacks, but the heart ... ah, the heart! For sud-

denly Stanley M imagined his heart to be red and heart-shaped and pasted flat against a white lace paper doily. And there it had been dangling on thin wires in perfect balance with all the other organs until . . . until a breeze . . . no, not so much . . . no more than a Brownian movement quickened by the warm sparkle in a maiden's eye, had set all the parts spinning and the whole rotating and dancing.

—Good grief, he cried, pounding his forehead with his knuckles. —I'm the only sex maniac in history with such a heart!

And then the hopeless implications of his discovery amused him and he laughed. And sighed. And time passed.

The log had not ignited and the room became darker and darker. It is, thought he, rather like sitting on a stage waiting for the lights to go on and the curtain to go up. And indeed, hardly had this observation formed in his mind when he heard the stamping of boots and voices in the wings. New characters were arriving! Reaching over he picked up a magazine and held it in front of his face in the darkness. When the door burst open and the lights went on, there was Stanley M behind the magazine, right rear corner, silent as a prop.

Two handsome young persons, he with blond and she with raven hair, danced into the room. They were holding hands and wore expressions of keen delight. Stanley M lowered the magazine slightly. Ada Levin and some kraut! The mobile inside him spun agitatedly. Infinitely small world. Quickly he raised the magazine again.

—What a darling, rustic room, the dark-haired beauty was saying.

—*Sehr schön*. agreed her large, blond partner.

—Oh Baldur, I'm so glad we're finally here. We must write Mama tonight and describe everything to her.

They embraced. Probably they looked around. A great silence fell.

They've seen me! cried Stanley M to himself. They're waiting for me to get out from behind the magazine. He held the pages closer against his nose. It isn't enough, he thought desperately. She'll recognize my legs. I must disappear completely. Holding the magazine wide open in front of him, he began slowly drawing up his legs and gathering in his elbows until he felt completely hidden.

—Baldur, dear . . .

There was a long silence. The room seemed fraught with curiosity.

—Baldur dear, I think . . .

—We must attend to our skis, the young man replied in a steady voice.

—All right.

But as they started to leave the room her pair of footsteps pattered to a halt. Then she tossed up a gay laugh and skipped out. —It's funny, she remarked as they went through the door —but for a moment I could have sworn I recognized that magazine.

¶ For Stanley M to have been unsettled by running into a friend whom he had last seen some years and many thousands of miles ago did not imply that he did not believe eagerly in the miracle of coincidence. For, unlike those who look upon the phenomenon of coincidence as nothing more significant than the chance collision, head-on, of two trains of events, to him it not only represented the point where an arc of experience meets to form a perfect circle, but it implied a great deal more besides. For when a person, such as this young man, discovers himself incapable of subscribing to any of the numerous patterns or systems founded by centuries of philosophers and theologians, it is nevertheless very pleasant and beneficial to believe occasionally that one's life runs in a series of neat circles rather than in an erratic line. Indeed, if he were shaken by this particular coincidence it was because it demonstrated to him that there can be qualitative differences in the realm of perfection itself, just as there is a difference between, say, a perfect circle of light and a perfect circle of barbed wire.

The truth of the matter was simply that some years earlier he and Ada Levin had, together, and for the first time in both their lives, engaged in sexual intercourse. Curiously enough, this act had not been motivated by sheer physical necessity, or even by emotional compulsion. On the contrary, it had been performed in cold blood out of symbolic expediency. For there are times in life, they realized even then, when part of a person must die in order that the rest of him may live on. To these two friends, who were weighted almost to the point of immobility with the wisdom of childhood, it seemed that the only way to shake free was to throw themselves into what they imagined to be the deepest well of experience – a well filled with the same purifying waters as the river Lethe. As it turned out, this symbolic death was quite effective. Both of them arose afterwards with the definite sense of no longer having any attitude toward or preconception about anything of importance. And if they preferred to attribute this sudden ignorance to a new-found purity, instead of to the fact that for each this great symbolic performance had been actually, but secretly, quite disappointing and disillusioning, it was perhaps just as well for both of them in the long run.

¶ At dinner time that evening the dark-haired young woman entering the dining room on her husband's arm greeted the appearance of her very first lover with great dignity and self-control. Inwardly, however, she felt the same emotion as any woman who, stepping out of the door on her way to town, discovers that wild 'possums have upset the garbage pail and there before her eyes are the moldy coffee grounds and burnt soufflés of the entire week come back again. —Stanley M!

—Ada Levin! he cried as they embraced.

—But, she informed him quickly, though gently —that isn't my name any more, for as you see I'm married. My married name is Helge Volken, and this is my husband, Baldur. Baldur dear, this is a very old friend, Stanley M.

The two men shook hands.

—Ada, said Stanley M when they were seated at the table. —I can't believe it's really you.

—Helge, repeated Helge firmly. —My married name is Helge.

—*Was wünschen's denn?* asked the large blond girl who was putting the soup in front of them.

Stanley M indicated with his hands that they were not talking to her. —Her name is Helga too, he explained to Frau Volken.

—Oh? Helgeh or Helguh?

Stanley M looked puzzled. —What's the difference?

—The difference! exclaimed Helge, glancing around the room to see if there were not somewhere a map of Europe tacked to the wall. —Why, for one thing . . .

—It doesn't matter, interjected Baldur hurriedly. —You can be Erdmuthé.

Helge laughed lightly and replied —But I don't *want* to be Erdmuthé.

—Freia is also a lovely name, suggested Baldur and, when she still looked dissatisfied, added —Freia was a young and beautiful goddess.

—All right, agreed Helge after a short hesitation by which she meant to demonstrate that her decision was based purely on aesthetics and in no way reflected a desire to be firmly associated with the concepts of Youth and Beauty in her husband's mind. —If I must change my name again I might as well be Freia. And then, instead of giving the serving girl the severe glance she deserved, Freia broke into a tolerant little laugh and, trying to change the subject too quickly, accidentally blundered back into it again by remarking prettily —How time has flown, Stanley M.

Instantly the young woman regretted her words for she saw her friend's fingers twitching as he counted up the years. It was not that Freia was sensitive about having let herself be deflowered at the age of sixteen, nor was she concerned about being slightly older than her husband, but she did feel that there was something basically unfair in having one's age computed in arbitrary units such as years. And so very quickly she cried —Look, Baldur dear, he does it too!

—Does what too? asked Stanley M.

—You count things up on your fingers just like I do. Baldur always insists I'm the only person in the world who does that and never believes me when I explain that it's an American custom. But now you're doing it too.

—You must be twenty-five or twenty-six, announced Stanley M.

—Ha ha! laughed Freia brightly. —And do you also calculate the number of days in the month on your knuckles?

—No. I recite a little poem.

—You see, Baldur darling, Freia cried. —It's the way people are educated in the United States, not my individual stupidity. She turned back to her friend. —Baldur knows how many days the months have by heart.

—June, said Stanley M.

—Thirty, replied Baldur immediately.

Stanley M had to agree it was an impressive display of memory. —I can remember February, he said —which is a good thing because I can never remember the last line of the poem which tells about it.

—Yes, nodded Freia. —Metrically it breaks down in the line about February. In spite of its popularity it isn't what we consider good poetry or even good verse; it sacrifices beauty to utility.

—It's very useful.

—We, she continued —that is, in our Germany, our *modern* Germany, we don't like to make that kind of sacrifice. She lowered her eyes modestly, almost humbly.

—Oh, well, said Stanley M sympathetically.

—You do understand what I mean, Freia continued, deciding he didn't. —I mean, for instance, that Baldur designed our apartment in Munich with black linoleum floors. That's obviously not very practical.

—Oh, but very beautiful, he cried, catching on.

—Very. And as beauty relates closely to life – more closely, indeed, than most persons imagine – it actually turns out to have a utilitarian effect.

—How is that? prompted the young man.

—Stanley M, do you realize that every time the sole of a shoe touches black linoleum it leaves a little grey mark? A conscientious housewife has to buff such floors five or six times a day in order to keep them looking beautiful, and you can't imagine how all that exercise has helped keep me in excellent physical condition. The point is, with us the beauty comes first and then the practicality follows, as it often will of its own accord.

—I see, he nodded. —That's a very practical point of view.

—It has its beauty, agreed Freia modestly.

There was a lull in the conversation as all three sat back and watched the fair Helga take up the soup plates. She was one of those lovely, natural creatures; to look at her was like looking into a clear stream and seeing there one's own rather distorted features. As they did so, Freia and Stanley M began to realize how much they had both changed in the past few years. Each came to the conclusion that Freia had matured and broadened, although the young woman was thinking it in terms of Soul, while he was making a physical assessment. At the same time, while it was rather evident to both that Stanley M had, over the years, failed to launch his skyrocket of potential, Freia felt it must have been a dud after all, while Stanley M imagined he was still standing there with the fuse in one hand and smoldering punk in the other.

All this time Freia's husband, Baldur, had not been saying much, which did not mean that he had nothing to say or that he could not express it in fluent English. For after all, he had taught Freia to speak the highest German, and obviously in these democratic times one could not so much as instruct one's bride in boiling dirty linen without scalding one's own fingers. But there was a conversational etiquette in Germany which re-

quired one not to give out personal opinions or insights unless requested to do so, or at least encouraged extra-sensorily – a tradition which Baldur observed and which even his wife found to have magnificent advantages. She found that when the flow was restricted the pressure was increased, so that in Germany deep ideas seemed to shoot out of one's mouth with amazing force and accuracy. Luckily for Freia her admiration of the Germanic conversational tradition in no way interfered with her charming American spontaneity or with her need to talk about herself when her ego demanded expression, for she had found ways to unburden herself and yet stay completely within the bounds of good manners.

For instance, earlier in the conversation she had used the example of linoleum floors to illustrate a point she was making about the beauty of poetry. This example had seemed to spring out of nowhere, but actually it was a very carefully planted seed and right now Freia was patiently waiting for it to bear fruit. It finally did.

—You say your husband is in the linoleum business? asked Stanley M.

Freia saw right away that the tree needed a little grafting. —Baldur is a designer and architect, she explained kindly. —Linoleum is only one very small part of what he works with.

At this, Stanley M turned toward the blond young man sitting with them at the table. It was the first time he had really looked at Baldur, in the same way one can be a long time in a room without happening to focus one's eyes on the light bulb. And indeed, he suddenly found himself dazzled by two blue eyes looking back at him mildly out of a great, leonine head. The phrase of conversational trivia he had been about to utter died unspoken on his lips. Freia, noticing his reaction, felt he had just seen for himself exactly how far she had come in the past few years.

—My wife exaggerates, said this heroic figure with a pleasant smile. —Actually, at present I am only a student with a great deal more to learn.

—You see, explained Freia —last year Baldur won a prize for being the most promising young designer in Germany. Part of his award was being able to design a few interiors in a new apartment building in Munich. We were also allowed to live in one apartment for a year.

—I was very honored to have the opportunity to do this work, said Baldur in a way that made Stanley M rather like him. —There are many beautiful objects being made today, but as a poor student I am able to possess only a very few of them – a perfectly tapered pencil, a well-designed dinner plate. Because of this award I had the opportunity to select, and for a short time to live among, many nice objects, many beautiful colors. In your country you have so many beautiful objects that you can't even see them any more, but from our Germany we can look across the ocean through the medium of your publications and learn a great deal from you. Also we learn from other countries where the creative life was not so seriously interrupted by war.

—Baldur has exquisite taste, said Freia, wishing there were some way to demonstrate

on the spot how Baldur could, out of a whole store full of products, find the one or two items with true beauty of design. It was a pity she could not ask her husband to whip out a pencil and sketch some utterly original computing machine or transistor radio so that her friend could see for himself the creative genius of the man she had married. But suddenly Freia's excited features relaxed and she sat back patiently, for she had just recalled something which she had realized long ago: it was simply a matter of time, a few years at the most, before Stanley M and the whole world would have the opportunity to see her husband's taste and ability in action – just as soon as his formal studies were at an end and he was free to do exactly what he wanted.

—I was also fortunate, continued Baldur —that this award from my country has enabled me to get a scholarship at one of your American universities and has also supplied us with enough money to pay our expenses to go there.

—When are you planning to go? inquired Stanley M.

—We shall leave for your country in less than two weeks. My little wife and I wanted first to say goodbye to our beloved Alps one last time.

—*Your Alps?* asked Stanley M in surprise. —But this is Austria.

But Baldur only laughed pleasantly and turned his attention to the schnitzel which Helga's strong golden hands had just placed on the table in front of him.

¶ Early that same day, in a house near the top of Germany where the land narrows between the pressure of two seas like a pointed skull, Herr von S finished his tea and rolls, folded his newspaper, and buckled his long, black skis on top of his car. The sun had not yet risen before he was driving at whistling speed southward on the *Autobahn*. But in spite of his early start and the perfectly engineered highways, by the time he had swung around the corner of Lake Konstanz and had passed through Bregenz, it was getting on into evening.

He had not penetrated very far into Austria before the Prussian realized something was not quite in order inside his automobile, and he considered himself relatively fortunate that when the sleek machine ceased functioning altogether, it did so in front of a large roadside gasoline station.

It may be that as he climbed out of his car he cast a glance back over the years to another time in his life when a machine in which he had been traveling had failed not far from the same spot. But more probably he did not, for a man like von S does not normally incline toward the superstitious notion that some evil power holds more influence over the course of his affairs than he himself does. Herr von S was neither superstitious in this negative way nor in a positive way either. That is, he would not have considered himself blessed with good fortune if a *Marienkäfer*, a kind of lucky German ladybug, alighted on his sleeve. Indeed, he would most probably have dismissed the creature at once with a flick of his forefinger.

These highly realistic attitudes worked quite well for von S in most of his dealings in

life, and so it was perhaps strange that now, after peering carefully at the non-functioning engine, he could come up with no better solution than to shake his automobile very hard in an effort to jolt it back into action.

The Austrian gas station attendants, while they didn't snicker, nevertheless indicated that they had little faith in the outcome of his efforts. Something in that vast complex of gears and electrical circuits had gone *kaput* and all the shaking in the world was not going to make a bit of difference. They glanced from the car to their wrist watches and shook their heads. It wasn't a good time to have a breakdown, they pointed out, for their mechanic had gone home and wouldn't return until the next day. However, if the gentleman would not mind waiting, in an hour or so one of them would be going off duty and could drive him by motor scooter to the nearest town where he could most likely find a hotel room. At this rustic suggestion von S laughed politely, for although he was a Prussian, this didn't mean he lacked a sense of humor.

While Herr von S was examining alternatives with the station attendants, another vehicle, a small bus, pulled up to the gas pumps. The bus was carrying roughly a cord of hickory and was bristling with steel poles. Inside were four young men dressed in ski clothes. While waiting for the tank to be filled, one of the youths got out to stretch and get a lungful of fresh air, and as he was doing so happened to overhear the conversation going on nearby.

—*Wo fahren Sie denn hin?* inquired the skier. Upon hearing the name of the village the young man told Herr von S that they were going to pass directly through that village and would gladly take him along. The station attendant added that he could leave his car for as long as he wished and that they would have it fixed and ready for him when he returned. This decided the German who, although he had never cared much for informality, felt that under the circumstances it might be best to respond in kind to the spontaneity of these young southerners. Helped by the skier, he tied his skis on with the others, put his suitcase and boots on the floor in back, and off they went.

There was an atmosphere of polite restraint in the bus as they drove along, and von S suspected this was because of his presence, for it was clear that all the young men were bursting with some happy emotion. Just one word, one allusion uttered by any one of them, would send them all into an explosion of laughter which an instant later would be swallowed back. Every once in a while one of the boys would lean forward and give a blow to the shoulder of their sandy-haired comrade in the front seat who took these punches with modesty and good humor, throwing back wide, friendly grins.

At these times von S was able to catch a glimpse of this young man's face and was very much struck by what he saw. The lad was younger than the others, perhaps eighteen or nineteen years old, and seemed rather taller than his companions who nevertheless were slim and long-legged with weathered faces and narrow, arched noses. In fact, if one wished to use a simile, which Herr von S surely did not, one might say they had a look of speed about them like race horses or greyhounds. The boy in front had a fair complex-

ion, and even in the dim light von S could see a sprinkling of freckles over the delicately formed nose and cheeks. The youth's eyes had a strange, unfocused quality which might have been caused by weariness or shyness or from looking long distances. His lips, before he smiled, made the German think of Michelangelo's statue of David.

As they drove onward, the headlights revealed that the walls of plowed snow on either side of the road were growing taller and taller until they grew even higher than the bus. Now the way ahead of them seemed like a long, whitely glistening tunnel. The driver switched gears as the ascent became steeper, while the young men relaxed back against their seats, letting the gentle forces of gravity press soothingly through their tired bodies.

By this time von S had gathered from those syllables of dialect he had been able to understand that he was in a car with some skiers who were returning from a competition and carrying with them a considerable amount of victory. Leaning forward, he asked the driver about this and learned that indeed the boys were part of the Austrian team which had been racing for three days in France, and that while they had all done well, the youngster in the front seat had taken first prize in every discipline.

Herr von S looked with even greater interest at the fair head resting back on the seat in front of him and inquired who the boy might be. A look of surprise crossed his face when he heard the name. Had he not suspected the boy had fallen asleep, he might have spoken to him. But there was no hurry; there would be plenty of time for conversation in the days to come. Settling back in his seat, von S closed his own weary eyes and let himself be borne slowly but steadily upward into the night.

Dearest Mama!

How happy we are to be back again in our beautiful mountains. The pension recommended to us by Frau Schmidt is a cozy and enchanting place and everything is exactly as she described except for the price of the rooms, for apparently three years ago the prices were a little lower, and now we find that there are such wonders as off-season and high-season rates alternating about within the same winter time. It appears that Frau Schmidt was here during the less expensive winter month. But all this is not very important because if Helge and I (Helge is known here as Freia, but that is a long story) watch our schillings we will be able to afford life until we step aboard the aircraft.

For instance, as we live on the side of a mountain it is possible to take a cable car up and then walk back down a short distance as we did this afternoon because we were carrying both our full packs and skis. But it is also possible to walk up from the bottom, which we shall be doing from now on as the cable car ride is rather expensive. Naturally my little bride loves to hike as much as I do and looks forward to the daily climb with enthusiasm. Although she has never been on skis before, she shares my opinion that ski lifts are for the American tourists and so we

shall not be using them at all. For, as you know, skiing is more to us than a matter of rushing down the slopes like most of them do today, but rather a thing of tramping uphill and crosscountry, with skins on our skis and packs on our backs, the better to enjoy the sights and sounds and feel of nature. All this can best be done without mechanical aids.

Tonight for dinner we had a very lovely schnitzel. Also this small world has brought us together with an old university acquaintance of Helge's. But she will tell you about that in her part of the letter.

The weather is cold but much clearer than in Munich where it was gray these last few weeks. The mountains are covered with deep snow. We can hardly wait to get up tomorrow morning and put on our skis. It would be nice if we could afford some real ski clothes for Freia, but she has been wonderful about it and assures me that she doesn't mind. As for my ski pants, it is really like stepping into two sacks, and I find that most of the stuffing in my parka is seeking to get out. We shall really look not like the usual tourists!

So, Mama dear, it is time to think of sleeping. We wish you could be here to see our mountains. Perhaps in the spring you will be feeling better and will then be able to take a little trip. Certainly in a short time I will already be an American "big shot" and I will send an airplane to fetch you to us in Los Angeles. And now Helge has her half ready and we shall put them together in the envelope and seal it with a kiss.

Your fond son, Baldur

Dearest little Mama!!!

It is not even ten o'clock yet and this city mouse can hardly keep her eyes open. It must be the altitude as we are almost 2000 meters high. I wish you were here with us to see this darling little shepherd hut. Frau Schmidt was so right about everything. It is decorated in a very rustic way. The son of the shepherd is quite a famous young Rennläufer. (In Austria a ski racer is called a *Rennläufer* instead of a *Rennfahrer*. You know how I love learning these bits of Germanic dialect.) The boy's name is Dieter Schnell in case you look for his name in the newspapers. Baldur and I were introduced to him, but we have not been able to talk to him yet. I think we will enjoy our vacation here very much. Tomorrow morning I want to see if I can find some extremely inexpensive ski clothes in the village so that I can surprise your son. It is a good thing that life in Germany has helped me lose my extravagant American ways, and now that the plane tickets have already been paid we have nothing more to worry about until we reach Los Angeles. I still haven't heard a word from my father as to whether he will help us out for a while at least until I find a job, but if his letter didn't get lost it will be forwarded here. At any rate, we don't worry about such things. Everything always

works out all right, *nicht?* (Here they say “*Gel?*”)

It is still early, but my little lowland brain is all tired out. Good night, Mama dear.

Your son’s mouse, Helge

P.S. My name here is Freia, but that is a long story.

¶ The Volkens had retired early and Stanley M, aware of the thinness of the wall dividing his room from theirs, was waiting a decent interval before going to bed himself. To pass the time, he amused himself by recalling some of the things he had learned about Germans and Germany before traveling to that land. Not being the sort of person to blindly put confidence in the words of historians or rely heavily on the disinterestedness of tourist guidebooks, he had turned his attention first to back issues of *The Katzenjammer Kids*, and then to an illustrated volume of Teutonic myth. The former had given him a strong feeling for the syntax and participles of the German language and a foretaste of the German mentality. It was in the latter that he now remembered having come across the story of the Tree God, Baldur the Beautiful, who had been killed by an arrow tipped with mistletoe, that being the only plant in the world which had not sworn to protect him, simply because it was so weak and puny that no one had ever bothered to ask it for such an oath.

Thus do the Great Ones meet their fate, he mused, whereas we small, insignificant creatures must have mountains topple or plagues descend to wipe us out in corresponding ratios. This seemed a dignifying and heartening thought, for Stanley M, cozy by the fire, was not thinking at that moment of the great mountain of rock and snow poised more or less directly over his head.

But if the young man was killing time in this way because he imagined that heroic excesses of strength and passion still remained in the body of Freia Volken after a day which would have exhausted any ordinary mortal, he was not taking into account the soul-broadening effect that life in Germany had had upon his friend. Indeed, he could have returned to his room at any time without committing an indelicacy, for nothing was to be heard through the wall except occasional sounds of sleeping. This is not to imply that every night Baldur placed a naked sword between his body and that of his young wife, but nevertheless both of them were aware that the glory of Germany had always been associated not with excesses such as, say, carnal lust, but with traditions and regulations such as frequent sexual abstinence for purposes of moral and physical regeneration. Baldur always imagined he benefited greatly from this discipline, and Freia herself was enthusiastic. All the sexual doubts and confusions she had inherited from a complex and rootless society had suddenly been erased. She had discovered the joy of being restrained by tradition from that which she usually didn’t feel much like doing in the first place.

While Stanley M was musing in front of the fire a great deal of laughing and shout-

ing was going on just a few feet away. Most of the noise was coming from Shepherd Schnell and his fat wife who were celebrating, together with their son and a German guest, the happy circumstance of their reunion. For it seemed that the last time Herr von S had dropped in upon the Schnell family had been almost two decades ago, by parachute. So it was no wonder that the good shepherd and his wife were delighted to see this old acquaintance once again, and that they were willing to empty one bottle of *Schnapps* and open another, and give a thimbleful to Stanley M who didn't speak German.

Stanley M drank his *Schnapps* in one gulp and almost immediately felt a relaxing warmth spread through his body and limbs. He was so comfortable in fact that the only motion he desired to make was to turn his head from time to time to observe Dieter Schnell who was sitting quietly a few feet away. For he too had fallen under the spell of this lovely boy and realized, with no feelings of shame, that looking at him gave him very much the same pleasurable sensation as drinking the glass of *Schnapps*.

Dieter Schnell had not yet gotten over the first blush of learning that he had at one time been dandled and burped by the Prussian guest, von S. Nor was the Prussian himself particularly charmed to hear his past actions so vividly described in the local dialect. But still, the young skier was glad von S was there at that moment so that his mother would not notice, or at least not remark, that her son's attention was not fixed upon the conversation and that his eyes seemed unable to focus on anything within the four walls of the room.

And she would have been right enough, for sometimes it seemed to Dieter that every time he came home it was more and more like going away from something else – as if the radii of his life no longer stretched out clearly in every direction from this house, but had gradually disappeared like spoor beneath the falling snow. This last year it had even seemed to him that wherever he went the horizon shifted along with him – as if his own body were the centrum and this house just another dot, like a rock or a tree, within his ken.

Dieter could not phrase these feelings in so many words even to himself and so he knew it would be difficult for his mother to understand. But at the same time he knew they were not evil feelings, any more than it is evil when a calf turns from the udder to the hay, or when summer comes to melt the mountain snow.

As Stanley M was looking at the Rennläufer, Helga entered the room and seated herself on the tile ledge running along the front of the stove. She sat very quietly with her hands resting in her lap. Stanley M then noticed the boy's gaze, which until now had not seemed to respond to anything unless urged to do so, move very slowly across the wall just beneath the row of golden cups, descend to concentrate very briefly on one or another of the hearthstones, move on without focusing across the carved phrase *FÜR DAS VATERLAND* and, rounding the corner of the room, leap suddenly and with apparent force smack into the maiden's blue eyes, causing both young persons to blush and

look away immediately.

Stanley M sighed, pushing himself to his feet. On his way down the hall he felt the mobile lying inside him like a tangle of scrap waiting to be collected. But no one will bother, he said to himself as he entered his room, and by morning it will be resurrected. This sorry thought made him burst out in a loud laugh of amusement and on the other side of the wall he heard Freia turn restlessly over in her sleep.

Schnee Bericht: 93 cm; powdery.
Clear, cold. Some ski trails closed
owing to danger of avalanche.

¶ It was the last part of the snow report, repeated by Frau Schnell who had heard it on the radio, which turned Freia's firm though irrational decision to spend the morning in town instead of on skis, into a socially justifiable whim. Nor did her decision lack emotional appeal, for as she suggested it to her husband she was gazing out the breakfast room window and could not help noticing in the morning light how much taller the mountains had grown since the evening before and how the thermometer on the other side of the glass, just six inches from her warm little nose, registered a sobering -25°C . Both these observations added a genuine tremor to her voice.

—Naturally, darling, she added as her husband's face showed his disappointment — I'm just as anxious as you to begin skiing, but I'm not going to be compulsive about it. Don't you agree it would be better to inquire in the village exactly where the avalanche danger exists before we put on our skis and head alone into the mountains?

Baldur smiled and nodded. —*Du hast Recht*, he agreed, and his eyes filled with love for his wife whom he particularly adored in the morning when she was as serious as a small child playing house. Just to see her now with her little white feet hidden in a pair of his old, rough hiking boots, her round thighs snug in a shrunken pair of black California slacks, gave him such a lump of love in his throat that he couldn't begin to argue with her. Indeed, this young man who had spent many moments of his life wandering across some of the loneliest and most rugged regions of the earth, had some time ago realized that while the presence of his fragile American wife would make his undertakings more modest, still these days he had only joy from them when she was there at his side.

This young couple owed at least part of their marital bliss to the fact that while they had gone rather thoroughly at one time into the semantic difference between cowardice and fear, they had never really examined the frontier separating foresight from sheer terror. For oddly enough there are times when the study of the meanings of words, rather than creating or preserving an atmosphere of understanding and harmony, has quite the opposite effect. And so it was just as well that Baldur now mistook his wife's apprehension for the first sign of that quality of foresight which he had always hoped she would some day develop, and which he truly desired she would eventually be able to apply less to avalanches than to economics.

As for Freia, she considered her husband a wizard of foresight and finance compared to herself, yet realized he was hopelessly inadequate in terms of a complex, modern society. For instance, while during the first month of their marriage she had accidentally used up the bulk of her husband's monthly living allotment by smoking American ciga-

rettes and drinking coffee, she felt he too was responsible for the disaster by not having noticed what was going on. After all, she had not hidden the cigarette butts from him, but on the contrary had often allowed them to pile quite high in the ashtrays so that sometimes he had even thought to empty them himself. And too, he had quite often mentioned the fact that five or six coffee cups were sitting unwashed in the kitchen sink every evening. As for the American newspapers and other small luxuries she had allowed herself (for Freia firmly believed that while addictions and luxuries were not the most important things in life, they were nevertheless valid by special dispensation because they contributed tremendously to what philosophers called the “pleasure” of it) she had gone to no pains to hide them either. And so, while at the end of the first month Freia realized she had been amazingly lacking in economic foresight, she had had to point out to her husband that he had not quite demonstrated full competence in that respect himself.

Under the circumstances, it was fortunate that this young pair had a sort of economic safety-valve to which they always knew they could resort in times of need. This was Mama Volken in North Germany who, upon receiving an urgent appeal, would quickly don the best of her shapeless and faded dresses, affix one of her timeless hats rakishly to her grey head with two expert thrusts of the hatpins, and run on her thin legs to the bank. There she would perch on the edge of a deep leather chair and, with a great deal of every sort of non-infectious laughter, against which her eyes were like two sparrows lying stunned on the pavement, negotiate still another loan on her house. Mama Volken had always hoped that upon her death her little house and garden would pass on to her only child, but since his marriage her fondest dream was that the bank would not foreclose on her house before the day God decided to redeem her immortal soul.

The small, windowed room in which Baldur and Freia were enjoying their rolls and hot beverages served in the evening as the dining room and was prettily decorated with rusty cowbells, canes, and broken sled runners. Unlike most ski pensions, there was only one large table instead of three or four small ones. The question was open as to whether this resulted from the shepherd’s ignorance of the national and social differences between his guests, or whether it represented the effort of a single individual to do something about them.

Freia watched her husband proceed with his rolls. Baldur always cut his rolls, regardless of their configuration, exactly in half according to mass, not height. Then he buttered each half evenly to the edges and spread on the jam in the same meticulous way, careful to press out any lumpish strawberry or raspberry which happened to get onto the bread, to achieve an even, overall texture. He did this to each roll and then he ate them in small bites with precise, unhurried movements of his jaws. Freia, who tended to tear her rolls apart with her fingers and then deal with each fragment separately before gulping it down, viewed her husband’s eating habits with mixed feelings. On one hand she found them especially endearing because they reminded her that Baldur had undergone a little

starvation after the war and had been taught then by his mother to eat slowly so as to make what food or grass they had seem more satisfying. But at the same time Baldur's slowness annoyed her because it meant that she, who was helplessly speedy, was continually subjected to the embarrassment of finding herself finished with her food long before him.

The Volkens, who had been the earliest to bed, had also been the first of the guests to arise. But before Baldur had finished his first roll, the door opened and Stanley M, looking weary and grim, took his place at the table. Freia inquired politely if he had slept well.

—Terribly. He looked distractedly around for Helga. —Where's that wench with the coffee?

Just then Helga came through the kitchen door. —*Was wünchen's denn?* she beamed.

—Coffee, wench, growled Stanley M, and the girl hurried happily back to the kitchen while he gazed after her, appraising the condition of his mobile.

—What was wrong? asked Freia. —Why didn't you sleep well?

—Nightmares. Every night since I got to Austria I've had nightmares.

—What kind of nightmares? inquired Freia as lightly and disinterestedly as possible.

—Hitler nightmares, said Stanley M glumly, and then with a great laugh cried —I keep dreaming about Hitler!

—Perhaps it's the altitude, Baldur commented. —Or the schnitzel last evening.

Freia, who adored her husband's approach to psychological phenomena because it was so unspoiled by modern Freudianisms, felt, however, that she might get a little closer to the root of her friend's problem with a couple of well chosen questions. —What exactly happened in your dream? she asked.

—I can't tell you, replied Stanley M, who had also, after all, been raised not far from Beverly Hills. —It might reveal something not nice about me.

—Well then, just tell us if it concerned war, Freia prompted gently —or persecution. You must remember, Stanley M, that these matters have touched all of us very deeply. Baldur was himself an indirect victim of Hitler's megalomania and I've lived in Germany two years with these questions constantly on my mind. The only way to understand these things is by discussing them, and so believe me, I'm not going to jump to any psychological conclusions about you. These things prey on all our minds.

—You're very kind, nodded Stanley M appreciatively. —My dream did concern persecution as a matter of fact.

—You mean, Freia clarified softly —that you dreamed Hitler was persecuting you. You know, she confided encouragingly —I've had this sort of nightmare myself many times.

—That isn't quite what I meant, Stanley M said. —I dreamed . . . and here another laugh escaped him —I dreamed I was persecuting him! I dreamed he was a lizard and I was trying to step on his tail.

—But, pointed out Baldur —you know that is impossible. You cannot persecute a lizard in that way. He will simply let you have his tail and run off.

—Baldur is right, said Freia, and then, translating her husband’s naturalistic insight into a psychological one —Obviously it wasn’t a case of persecution but one of sham hostility or subtle appeasement.

As soon as these truths were out of her mouth Freia regretted having uttered them. For although they implied a sort of subconscious treachery on the part of Stanley M, still they seemed to thrust him up into that high stratum where important persons play with the politics of life, whereas she, by having admitted to dreams of being persecuted, had thrust her own self down to a level of passive insignificance.

Freia was about to change the subject when the breakfast room door opened and a tall man in a black ski suit with a scar under his eye nodded —*Guten Morgen*. He paused a moment and looked around the room. Then, seeing that there was to be only one table, he asked for permission, was immediately granted it, and sat down.

—Herr von S, said Stanley M, slouching imperceptibly —this is Mr. and Mrs. Volken.

The two men arose and there was a rather stiff exchange of handshakes. Then they sat down.

From the moment the Prussian had entered the room, Freia had felt a distinct change going on within her. It was the same sort of change as when a loose confederation of states is suddenly placed under a strong central government, although in physiological terms what was occurring was that all the muscles in her body had, without warning, been denied their right to obey motor impulses and had come under complete and direct control of her brain. With all this concentrated awareness directing her every action, it surprised Freia to find herself tearing her roll apart with a terrible suddenness and strength, buttering her thumb, and chewing and swallowing as if the bread had reverted back into dough upon entering her mouth. Indeed, this tendency of Freia’s to become almost spastically self-conscious had accounted for a trail of broken teacups and spilled crumbs several thousand miles long. Fortunately, the young woman had learned to react to these emergencies so blithely and casually that she earned wherever she went a reputation for a charming and complete unawareness of self.

After an interminable instant of adjustment to Herr von S’s presence, Freia found herself feeling protective toward the Prussian and was quite naturally filled with dread that Stanley M would continue to tell about his Hitler nightmare. For although Freia considered herself and Baldur always eager to discuss Hitler, particularly with outsiders seeking honestly to understand exactly what had happened in Germany during the 1930’s and 40’s, and although she was convinced that any German, Herr von S included, would be likewise eager to do so, still she thought it always better to allow such a subject to arise naturally in the course of the conversation rather than make it appear as a sort of insinuation or personal affront to anyone present by referring to it just as that person sat

down at the table. And so she was not a little relieved when Helga appeared just then bringing Stanley M's coffee and taking Herr von S's breakfast order. It made Freia feel even more kindly toward the Prussian when he asked for tea just as she had guessed he would.

—Have I not met you somewhere before, Herr Volken? asked von S when Helga had gone out. —You are from the north, *nicht wahr?*

—Yes, replied Baldur. —My family is originally from Kiel, although after the war my mother and I moved to the neighborhood of Lübeck.

—Perhaps you knew General Volken, my husband's father, said Freia helpfully, being at the same time careful, for Stanley M's sake, to keep any trace of pride out of her voice. Indeed, Freia made right then a mental note to explain to her friend exactly how generals in Germany differed from generals in the United States – the former having been an elite body of highly educated men and not just elderly foot soldiers to whom stars had been issued. She also decided to remind him that since the German army had not been a political or policy-making body, it obviously had had nothing whatsoever to do with the Second World War.

—It's possible I have seen your father at some time, replied von S doubtfully —but I don't recall knowing a general by that name.

—There were several fronts after all, remarked Freia sympathetically, although she didn't admit this fact often even to herself. For she could honestly say that she had never met a German who had said he had fought anywhere but on the Russian front, and she too usually preferred to believe that any fighting going on between the Germans and, say, the Americans or British had been unintentional and highly sporadic. —But anyway, continued Freia —Baldur looks almost exactly like his mother and, as his father had refused always to desert his men no matter how rough things got, and finally died of pneumonia during one terrible winter just outside of Stalingrad, Baldur never actually met him. His mother, poor woman, didn't even have a photograph of her husband to keep, for all her possessions were destroyed during the bombardment of Kiel. But perhaps you know the name Hossleben-Rentau, or von E. These are also branches of my husband's family.

At this point there ensued a highly complex discussion of family histories in which both the von and the hyphen played large parts. Stanley M listened in amazement as his childhood friend, whom he had last seen playing a guitar with a long cigarette holder between her lips, climbed through her husband's family tree, plucking at the branches and turning over the leaves with the horticultural skill of any German *Hausfrau* to see if any of Herr von S's relatives were perhaps hiding in the foliage. Stanley M realized instantly how prone many Americans are to forget even their grandmother's maiden name and to live their whole lives as superficially as a frog sunning on a lily pad on a pond of murky water. This unexpected revelation made him chuckle. And indeed, he felt it to be a complete triumph of communication when Freia, misinterpreting his chuckle of

appreciation as one of mockery, echoed his own thoughts by remarking in a low, swift aside —It is limiting to live only in the present, Stanley M.

Freia was not going to the trouble of displaying the Volken genealogy merely to bedazzle von S or Stanley M. She knew it was the responsibility of a good wife to contribute in any way possible to the advancement of her husband's career and, although she did not know exactly, or even approximately, who Herr von S was, or what he did, or in what respect he might be called upon to open a door for Baldur, for in her enthusiasm she forgot completely to ask him even the most obvious and polite questions about himself, she still felt there was no harm in presenting her husband's credentials while the opportunity was ripe. For Freia was confident from listening to his speech that the gentleman from Schleswig-Holstein was a well educated and successful man in his field, and could not help feeling sincerely disappointed when she could find no trace of cross fertilization or even of grafting between the von S and the Volken trees. She was also disappointed to observe that none of the names she had mentioned had seemed to remind von S of anyone at all, and was compelled to regard his ignorance as just another terrible effect of World War II in which so many papers, files and memories had gotten jumbled, damaged, and destroyed.

Although Freia took a thorough interest in the elite history of her husband's family, this did not mean that she had not learned to accept her own bourgeois roots. Indeed, she considered it a proof of her adult maturity that she had learned to associate persons engaged in commerce not with a tradition of hawkers and peddlers, but rather with a heritage containing Wall Street, robber barons and Christopher Columbus. Nevertheless, as thoroughly as she had resolved her childhood embarrassments, she did pale slightly upon suddenly hearing Stanley M ask —Does your father still have his delicatessen?

Freia laughed and moved her head in what was almost a nod and almost not. Stanley M turned to Herr von S. —Her father used to have the best cheesecake in town. Not too dry and not too creamy.

Noticing just then that her husband had finally finished his second roll, Freia jumped lightly to her feet, exclaiming with a laugh —Come, darling. We really must be going if we intend to get to town.

—The snow here seems excellent for skiing, remarked von S looking out the window at the thermometer.

—We are not skiing today however, said Baldur. —My wife and I plan to walk down to the village.

—But *you* are, of course, intending to ski, said the German to Stanley M who had risen to his feet.

—No, he replied smoothly. —I don't ski.

—You don't ski? cried everyone. —Not at all?

The young Californian explained briefly a few of his reasons, concluding that he had resolved his need to assert nonchalance in the face of breakage. Neither of the Germans

quite understood what he was talking about and Freia politely ignored it, so it was as if he had not spoken at all.

As the Volkens were going out the door, Freia paused and called back sweetly to Herr von S —*Ski Heil!* Then she continued happily on her way, confident that her salutation had made Stanley M's hair stand right up on end, which had once been her own reaction before learning that the word Heil had nothing whatsoever to do with National Socialism.

When the others had left the room, von S sat frowning a moment at his plate. Suddenly he started and looked quickly back in the direction they had gone. But it is not possible! said the German to himself, taking up his teacup. Can it be possible? He took a sip of tea and put the cup slowly back into the saucer. Even before he had raised the teacup again, Herr von S had decided that there could be no doubt about it at all.

¶ Going down the mountain path, Freia, in spite of Stanley M's irrelevancies at breakfast, was in the high spirits normal for a young woman whose last two meals have been taken in the company of male beings. She skipped and pranced so daintily over the icy way that Baldur could not help adoring her. Every time she slipped he would pick her up and brush her off, assuring her that she fell not because she wasn't as surefooted as a little mountain goat, but because his handed-down shoes were so large that they moved somewhat independently of her flashing feet.

Before meeting Baldur, Freia had never known what it was to take a hike in the hills, sleep in a haystack, or be sharply conscious of plant life. She knew that if she wished to hear the Latin name of any plant she had only to ask her husband, for his miraculous mind contained all the written and unwritten *Kultur* of the floral world. In the springtime, walking arm in arm through the parks of Munich, he would explain to her the secrets of the duck world and some of the very first words he had ever taught her in German were the names of the different sorts of ducks, drakes and ducklings. He even knew the answers to the most highly intimate questions she might ask about chickens — questions she could certainly never have asked her own parents — such as whether, in the production of chicks, each individual egg had to be fertilized, or whether one time would suffice for, say, a full dozen.

But most impressive of all was the casual way Baldur could go up to a cow or stroke the nose of a horse. Freia had never been able to free-associate herself out of a feeling of apprehension bordering on hysteria when in the neighborhood of a street dog or a domesticated grass eater, and she had never forgiven her mother for having encouraged this fear during her childhood. Wanting now to share every experience with her husband, it bothered her that he could walk directly across a field containing a cow while she would have to detour around on the other side of the fence. If toward *wild* beasts she felt a great affection, this was probably because whenever she saw one it was either at a great distance or making frantic efforts to attain one. But nevertheless, this very day, in spite of

the love she held for creatures of the wild, Freia, never knowing quite what the mountains had in store, occasionally threw a sharp little glance over her shoulder to make sure that something large with antlers or fangs was not plodding down the trail behind them. And it was on one of these occasions that, looking back, she happened to see a very strange sight indeed.

A small boy, pulling a sled, was coming down the path behind them. He was apparently deep in conversation, making broad movements with his hands and decisive motions with his head. As there was no other soul around to whom he could have been speaking but themselves, Baldur and Freia, paused to let him catch up. As he approached, Freia thought at first that the strange gutturals coming from his throat were one of the quaint Germanic dialects which she so delighted to hear, but as he came still nearer it became clear that his speech was more a series of growls than a dialect and her kindly smile gave way to an expression of vague anxiety.

When the child had reached them, he summed up his discourse with a great wave of his arms so that his sled shot forward and barely missed colliding against Freia, who leaped quickly to one side. He didn't seem to notice his blunder, however, and stood looking directly into their faces, arms folded, apparently expecting a reply.

Baldur and Freia, who found they had nothing to agree with or reject in what the boy had growled, were rendered even more speechless by the strangeness of the child's appearance, for as in Germany one becomes accustomed very quickly to not seeing slums and beggars, such a grotesque creature can be something of a shock. Although the weather was bitter cold, the child's skinny legs were covered by a pair of ragged cotton trousers reaching just below his knees, while over his thin shoulders and arms he wore a pitifully undersized sweater which was made even less adequate by several large holes. On his feet was an old pair of summer sandals and his socks drooped so badly that several inches of his surprisingly hairy legs were exposed to the freezing air. He wore no cap or mittens, but over his head, as if he were a little girl, a folded square of cloth covered his ears and knotted under his chin. The boy's eyes seemed startlingly large and black, for his face, filthy as it was and discolored with cold, was extremely pale. When he wasn't talking, two thick green streamers ran undisturbed from his nose to his chin.

Freia was the first to have the presence of mind to tear herself away. — *Tschüss*, she cried in a high, bright voice, waving a little. — *Tschüss*. Plucking Baldur by the sleeve she started down the path in that quick walk used by persons who do not wish to appear to be fleeing, but who nevertheless want to get away from something as rapidly as possible. After they had gone a certain distance Freia cast a glance back over her shoulder. The child, the rope of his sled slung determinedly over his shoulder, was dogging along after them, shaking his head with exasperation.

—The poor baby, cried Freia, quickening her pace. —He's probably deaf and a little deranged into the bargain. Did you notice, darling, how he tries so hard to imitate the visual pattern of conversation which he observes in others? He does that in an effort to

be accepted.

—It is almost impossible to accept him, replied Baldur honestly.

—That's just it, said Freia, and added wisely —He simply cannot understand why, after going through all the apparent motions of friendship, he does not immediately win himself a friend. This is his great frustration.

Quite possibly Freia was correct in her surmise. In any case, its pathetic implications saddened both her and Baldur. On the child itself it was too dangerous for them to think, for they were wisely aware that their souls were not so callous as to survive for long against the barrage of painful sensations and associations leveled at them by such a calamity. For there do indeed exist souls which are so extraordinarily sensitive that they are easily soured or destroyed, and it is very fortunate when the possessors of such souls recognize this and are responsible enough not to take them walking through hospital corridors, or subject them for more than ten minutes or so to scenes of bloody automobile accidents.

Mercifully, by the time they had reached the village the boy had vanished from sight, and it was no time at all before the thoughts and feelings engendered by him had also faded away in the cheerfulness of their new surroundings. Freia, who still intended to slip away and surprise Baldur with some new, inexpensive ski clothes, was pleased when he showed interest in browsing through a book rack in one of the stores. They planned to meet again in a half hour.

As Freia hurried on down the street she was hoping Baldur would buy a few books because she had not had a chance to tell him, nor had he yet noticed, that she had forgotten to pack the little pile of reading material he had selected to take along on the trip. These books, one of which had been purchased at great financial sacrifice, had been accidentally left in the cheap Munich hotel in which they had spent one night and she doubted that they could ever be recovered. Baldur was in the habit of reading until the early morning hours, but had been so tired the evening before, that after writing to his mother he had taken her suggestion to go directly to sleep. Freia did not plan to tell him about the books until exactly the right opportunity arose, for her husband's happiness was not something she ever treated lightly.

Freia considered herself as avid a reader as Baldur and was sorry she so seldom got around to it. Like him, she rarely read fiction, inclining instead toward non-fiction, of which she managed to read yearly a chapter or two out of perhaps five or six thick volumes. For this young woman had a very quick mind and could easily detect an author's conclusions even when they were not hinted at in the title. She felt too that it was much more valid to accept or reject the author's conclusions on the basis of one's own personal experience, than fall into the trap of quibbling over small points in his reasoning.

This lightning quickness of mind had also been evident in Freia's youth, perhaps most strikingly in her high school geometry class. It was her task in those days to prove theorems by making a list of pertinent axioms. But after dispiritedly writing down a

couple of axioms, Freia's eye would happen to fall once more upon the theorem in question, which would suddenly seem to her a statement which brilliantly summed up the whole matter, thus saving her from going through all the steps. It is possible that even in ancient Greece verbal rhetoric was never put to such a test as when Freia attempted to persuade her distraught and frightfully underpaid teacher that it was possible for some persons to be content with the theorem, or at least to test it by the criteria of experience and common sense, rather than to trust blindly in axioms. As there was some truth in her argument, even though it did not seem to apply particularly to the problem of congruency, the teacher could only reply by threatening his young student with failing the course if she did not do it in his and Euclid's way on the examination. Freia's passing mark in high school geometry she looked upon forever afterward as symbolic of an inexcusable compromise of ideals.

Since the village had only one street, Freia managed to find a ski store without any difficulty. It was a pretty, modern shop with glass souvenir counters and shelves bulging with brightly colored woolens. Perhaps it was her approaching trip to the United States which encouraged her to compute the Austrian schilling into dollars instead of marks, a transition which miraculously reduced the price of everything she saw by three fourths. This clever financial maneuver, plus Freia's idealistic wish, most poignant always in the presence of blasé salesgirls, to move through the complex of life leaving an impression of generosity and sincerity trailing away behind her like an exemplary golden spoor, suddenly persuaded the young woman that she definitely ought to buy clothes which would endure for several winters rather than fall to pieces at once. As she didn't have enough money with her she promised to bring the balance the very next day and was delighted when the store manager readily accepted her word. Freia was quite sure that in the whole world only Germanic people still put complete trust in the integrity of their fellow men.

Baldur, when Freia rejoined him, was pleasantly surprised to see how his little wife had been transformed. The tight black corduroy trousers which he had never admired, the baggy sweater whose color he had always suspected to have been extracted from the pulp of something badly formed which grew on certain tall trees and which Freia occasionally referred to as monkey-pods, and his ancient leather jacket which Freia had taken for her very own on the day that Baldur had felt its unconditional surrender to the garbage collector had become even more a moral issue than one of aesthetics – all these had disappeared and now his little wife stood before him dressed in as sleek an outfit of salmon-pink as he had ever observed in all his life. And so he kissed her hand and escorted her like royalty out of the bookshop, but not until she had graciously insisted he purchase the paper volume in his hand.

Walking happily arm in arm it was not until they had gone halfway up the street that Baldur realized his little wife's transformation must have required something in the way of money as well as good taste, and so he asked her about it.

—It cost one-fourth, replied Freia, obviously pleased by his question —one-fourth of what it would have cost at home.

—At home? You mean, of course, at home in Germany, smiled Baldur. —I do not think you still consider Beverly Hills to be your home, he laughed confidently.

—It will soon be our new home, smiled Freia, squeezing his arm. —For a year anyway.

—How much exactly did the clothes cost? asked Baldur then, and when Freia told him in dollars he made a quick calculation into marks and stopped walking right in the middle of the street. —But, Freia, that is all the money we have until we reach Los Angeles. You must take them back.

—But I've given my word, said Freia very calmly. And then, even though she knew her husband's integrity matched her own, added —Besides, I've already fallen down in them. We'll have to think of some other way.

—I can perhaps find a job here, said Baldur, considering alternatives.

Freia's face broke into a wide smile and she threw her arms around her husband. —My strong, resourceful, blond lion! she cried. For it gave Freia an enormous sense of security to be married to a man who could manage so well in every emergency.

Since they had not planned to do anything definite in town that morning anyway, having to look for a job for Baldur not only gave them an excellent reason for being there, but filled them both with the excitement of rising to a challenge and embarking on an adventure. For to many Germans, even those born too early or too late to have spent, like Baldur, their formative years as a *Pimpf* in the Hitler Youth, a holiday was not a time of leisure and games but a time to seek out unusual ordeals, discomforts, and strenuous activities. A vacation from which one might return exhausted and, if possible, a little bloodied, was the sort of thing toward which Baldur himself naturally inclined. And so, although he had hoped to reach these goals by hiking in the mountains, it was not a serious adjustment if he could attain them by some sort of physical labor.

Unlike Baldur, Freia had been indoctrinated at an early age by travel posters and other mass media which described a vacation as a complete cessation of all meaningful and strenuous activity. Her parents, on the other hand, had taught her that time not devoted to learning was time irrevocably lost, and as a result Freia had never gone for so much as a walk in the park without carrying along three or four books which she naturally never read and the very sight of which were like pricks to her conscience. Needless to say, after years of this kind of personal conflict Freia adapted very quickly to the unequivocal German concept of the vacation, and so it was no great calamity to her either when her husband suddenly decided to find a job. For, as Freia was inclined to put it, a misfortune is a misfortune only when one cannot turn it into an absolute advantage — a point of view which she knew Baldur enthusiastically shared.

With their usual good luck, Baldur and Freia found him a job within minutes, for there was no unemployment in this booming village and, while no great variety of jobs

was available,

if one did not object to shoveling snow there were unlimited opportunities. Baldur's new job began at seven-thirty in the morning. At that hour he was to take a ski lift to the top of a slope and then sidestep to the bottom, packing down the snow with his skis. After that it was his duty to shovel snow onto the lift tracks and in general see to it that there was snow where skiers expected snow to be.

The heroic proportions of Baldur's job appealed to Freia who observed —The rearrangement of natural phenomena for the benefit of man is the task of a Hercules, who himself changed the course of a river to cleanse a stable.

—I am very happy to be able to work in the fresh air, added Baldur, looking up at the towering mountains which had so suddenly been put under his personal supervision. And so it was no wonder, thinking in such terms, that both Baldur and Freia forgot to inquire what Baldur's hourly wage would be, and the new employer, perhaps also concerned with lofty issues, didn't bother to inform them.

¶ After Baldur had been shown his shovel and directed to fetch his skis, Freia kissed him goodbye, waved *Tschüss*, in a high voice, and went directly to a tobacconist where she bought a pack of American cigarettes, and from there to a coffee shop where she ordered a pot of coffee and began to consider how she might most profitably spend her day. At which point Stanley M burst through the door and slid into the booth next to her, remarking that he had just had the greatest conversation.

—With whom? asked Freia, wriggling a little so that the sunlight might dance on her salmon-pink bosom.

—Oh! cried Stanley M. —Very pretty. Is it new?

Freia nodded. —With whom? she asked again, refusing to be sidetracked.

—Some little guy with a sled.

—Oh? said Freia lightly. —And did you find you had something in common?

—Everything except a pocket handkerchief, replied Stanley M. —I gave him mine.

—Is that what he wanted? cried Freia. —I thought he was being compulsive about his nose running.

—Then you know the brat.

—We met briefly, replied Freia.

The young man ordered a cup of coffee and for a few minutes they sat without speaking, feeling the fled decade return drop by drop, incident by incident, until, quite suddenly, there was an enormous green lake of memories lapping at the dam of the present moment.

Then Freia began to speak. At first the words came forth in a trickle, beginning with the time three years earlier when she had met Baldur. But when she was not interrupted by either a comment or a laugh the words came faster and faster. It was now a deluge, an inexorable surge of memories. She told of how together they had known the simple joys

of poverty, the *camaraderie* of sudden and arbitrary evictions. She spoke of the heat of the deserts and the dankness of the dark forests through which she had followed him, Baldur, the man she had had the incredibly good fortune to marry.

—In fact, she added —it's very rare in Germany for a man to marry before he's finished his formal education. Ours was an extremely exceptional case. I mention this, she continued modestly —only because it's an interesting and little known fact of life in Germany.

—What does your father think about all this? asked Stanley M, for no other reason than that this amusing question had occurred to him.

At these words Freia's lips contracted again. When she next began to speak the words came forth stiffly like little tin soldiers whose stamped-out postures are in themselves neither defensive nor offensive, but who nevertheless hold their weapons in readiness as they come out of the toy box.

—My father, Freia began —has, of course, very limited resources of understanding when it comes to certain matters. His resources are limited simply because he has never bothered to resolve the terrible hostility he has felt since childhood toward Gentiles, particularly Poles and Germans. He says he cannot resolve his hostility because he suffered too much from anti-Semitism during his youth in Poland, but as a matter of record it was my grandparents who suffered most directly, not my father, although he left Poland with them. Needless to say, my father objected to my marriage without ever even meeting Baldur and didn't even come to Germany for our wedding, although it's true he threatened to do so. You can imagine how hard it was trying to explain having a father who is just as prejudiced and full of hate as those he accuses of prejudice and hate. He's as bad as any anti-Semite.

—I always liked your father, said Stanley M.

—He can be very charming, Freia agreed. —There's a certain sly cuteness in his behavior and I'll admit that his sense of humor is quite keen at times. If he wanted to overcome his prejudice he could do so, for he's no stranger to logic and reason, although he tends invariably to twist them to his own advantage. For it's quite clear, when one looks at current statistics, that not all Germans, and indeed very few, were anti-Semites during and since the war. After all, if Baldur, whose father was a general on the Russian front, and whose mother was a member of the *Partei*, married me, then it's obvious that anti-Semitism is neither universal nor hereditary.

—Baldur's mother was a Nazi? asked Stanley M, enchanted by the idea.

—Stanley M, sighed Freia —to understand that you would first have to understand what life was like in the Third *Reich* — the fear, the formidable propaganda, and, naturally, the economic situation. It was impossible for any creative, energetic, and idealistic person *not* to have been a Nazi.

—And so what does *she* think of the marriage?

—Why, she's delighted, of course, smiled Freia warmly. —Unlike my father, Mama

Volken is able to learn and change with the times. And the most wonderful and amazing thing about it is that Mama doesn't have the vaguest notion of psychology. That is, she was able to change her whole outlook without even having to resort to self-analysis. Stanley M, you know that years ago I was almost a fanatic when it came to Freud, but while living in Germany I came to realize more and more that Freud cannot explain everything and that the psychoanalytical approach is only one tool in the smithy of Life. There's also such a thing as spontaneous enlightenment which the German people prefer to rely upon and which is responsible for much of their personal conduct and historic direction as a people. This is considered by them to be a more natural approach than the psychoanalytical one. It's a product of universal laws and mysteries rather than the arguable theories of a few men.

—What are spontaneous enlightenments?

—Why, replied Freia —they are something very much like spontaneous combustion, the thing inside physical nature itself which starts forest fires. That is, it is the sudden and unpremeditated, yet predestined and unavoidable, bursting into existence of the Flame of Truth.

Stanley M, who had long since learned from conservation posters that forest fires were started by bears playing with matches, was about to contest Freia's point when she continued —Mama Volken no longer has a trace of anti-Semitism in her. She loves me just as much as Baldur does. Look at it this way, Stanley M: How many mothers-in-law get along perfectly with their daughters-in-law in the States?

—Practically none.

—Therefore.

Freia, feeling that an important point had been made and that she had been the one to make it, sat back, but warily, like a novice cook who, having taken her first cake out of the oven, fears it might fall if she turns her back on it. But when her friend did not allow the dubious look in his eye to issue forth in a verbal challenge, she relaxed a little, lit another cigarette, and began thinking warmly about Mama Volken so that her eyes glowed prettily.

Stanley M could not help noticing how round shouldered his friend had become over the years. Indeed, he realized that Freia was beginning to look just a little like her miniscule relatives whom she herself had often decried for being so small and crooked when there was no physical reason for it. Stanley M had often heard her remark that her relatives were bent only under the cross of a self-inflicted martyrdom and, convinced that their posture resulted from an abysmally defeatist state of mind into which she herself would never sink, Freia had sworn always to keep her own back as straight as a tree. In spite of this he noticed now how mouse-like she was becoming, although at the same time he knew that if she were stood up against a wall, or laid flat on the floor, she would measure out to five and a half feet.

While the young man was examining his friend, the glow in Freia's eyes had intensi-

fied considerably. —Oh, Stanley M, she cried with a renewed burst of emotion —I wish you could meet Mama. You have to meet her to believe that there exists a mother so magnificent. Even with her husband dead and the bombs falling she managed to give Baldur a beautiful childhood. She saw to it that he grew up close to nature, with flowers and animals. She never held him back jealously, even though he was all she had. If he wanted to wander across the earth when he was sixteen, she would tell him: Fly, little wanderbird, fly from the nest, but always remember your nest will be waiting for you when you wish to return.

Actually, the latter half of this quotation was an invention by Freia who didn't want to give the false impression that Baldur's mother was hoping to get rid of her son permanently. —Isn't that wise and understanding? she cried. —And the result is that Baldur will always love and cherish his mother, in a healthy way of course, and perhaps some day, when we can afford it, Mama Volken will come and live with us.

As she spoke, Stanley M could not help noticing a funny contraction around the corners of Freia's eyes and mouth, a device sometimes employed by great stage actresses who are trying to express at the same moment both tragedy and joy, the bitter-sweet Experience of Life, without allowing their faces to burst apart under the opposing pressures. Moved by the sight, he was just about to ask Freia whether she was still planning to pursue a career in the flicks, this having been her consuming ambition when he had last known her, when Freia, glowing penetratingly at Stanley M through her pinched eyes, said very slowly and distinctly:

—To be such a mother is one of the greatest possible achievements for a woman. To be an equally wonderful wife is the other. It's toward these ends that I've decided to devote my life.

After having said all this, Freia's face relaxed into an expressionless mask and, just as a person who has just chain-smoked three packs of cigarettes sincerely believes he will never take up another cigarette in his entire life, so did Freia believe her demanding little ego would not need the narcotic of self-explication for at least a millennium.

—Those are very noble ends.

—I have changed a lot since you last knew me, haven't I? remarked Freia with a womanly smile.

—Yes, he replied after a short, thoughtful pause. —In some subtle way you have changed.

Freia laughed lightly at this use of understatement, deciding that she would enrich her friend's image of her by deeds rather than argument. She would demonstrate in the days to come exactly how much she had changed – how love and marriage had made her unselfish and maturely conscious of the needs of others.

—I suppose you're wondering what *I've* been doing these past few years, remarked Stanley M.

Freia, who had been wondering no such thing, decided it was a perfect opportunity

to demonstrate her deep interest in others by answering kindly —Yes, as a matter of fact, I have.

At this encouragement the young man smiled and his eyes began to glow so that Freia looked away with just a trace of annoyance on her face. —I've been working, he said proudly to her quarter profile. —I've been working as a stock clerk.

—A stock clerk? she echoed dully, turning back to scan his face. —You mean a *stock clerk*?

—Exactly.

—You mean the sort of stock clerk who pushes racks of dresses around department stores? asked Freia, laughing lightly to let him know she was only joking.

—Precisely! he cried, delighted that his friend understood so perfectly what he meant.

Freia's smile faded. —And then? she asked, lighting another cigarette.

—And then *what*?

—And *then* what sort of job did you have?

—Why babe, none, he replied in surprise. —I became a stock clerk and remained one for four years. I'll admit, he added quickly —it's not easy to stand for four years with one's foot resting comfortably on the lowest rung of the social ladder. Needless to say, pressure was exerted on me from all sides to rise.

—But still you didn't.

—I felt the time wasn't ripe.

—But why? cried Freia in confusion. —How did you ever get such a job in the first place? You with a college education?

—Ah, said Stanley M, understanding at last what she meant. —You want to know how I got the job. Through pull, of course; through knowing the right people. It doesn't take long to learn that in the world of commerce a university degree is a greater handicap than a prison record. He laughed delightedly. —Education is an obstacle, he pointed out simply.

—And so you found, asked Freia, deciding to take all this nonsense seriously since to do so would only involve accepting the fact that Stanley M was a less significant and decidedly less visionary person than she had once thought him to be, whereas to doubt him would make it necessary to suspect that he was making fun of her —that you were happy and fulfilled as a stock clerk?

—But, babe, cried Stanley M —don't you understand? For forty hours every week I lived in paradise. Beyond the plate-glass walls the skies could be grey and the rain falling, but inside it was always the first day of spring. In the morning, just before the store opened, I'd push the clothes racks down the aisles, hearing the soft binging of hidden bells and the gentle laughter of the girlies. Even the older saleswomen would look ready and cheerful. Excitement would be in the air; you could cut it with a knife! Every now and then I'd stop by a counter to speak an encouraging or flattering word to a girlie,

feeling just like Henry Five walking among his soldiers on the eve of battle.

—But if you were so happy in your job, asked Freia —why did you leave it and come to Europe?

At this question Stanley M's face fell. —Realism, he frowned. —Realism on my part. Happy and contented as I was I knew it was only a game. I knew I wasn't Henry Five but only somebody's bear which had gotten loose in the aisles and was *pretending* to be a warrior king. Even the girlies eyed me distrustfully.

—You could never effectively relate, cried Freia sympathetically. —You could never really communicate. Oh, poor Stanley M. Poor bear!

—I was all inside my skin, he nodded sadly —peering out at the others. I was extremely happy inside my skin because it happens to be an amusing place, but I felt that I had to be *able* to get out. I decided that if I went to Europe I might discover a magic formula or a fairy wand which would release me.

—But you haven't.

—No, not yet.

—But dear, *dear* Stanley M, don't you know that there *is* no way out? The skin exists around all of us. One simply has to adjust to that fact. Man, you know, is a lonely animal. The kind of communication you're seeking doesn't exist – not even in love. But once you've accepted this fact you're no longer bothered by it.

He shook his head. —I'm sure there's a more positive way. You'll see. One of these days it's going to come. A spontaneous enlightenment will come to Stanley M!

Freia, unable to endure seeing her friend looking disgruntled for such a length of time, signaled for the waitress, and as soon as he had paid the bill they went out.

After leaving the coffee shop they walked down the white street like two sluggish meteorites moving with very little purpose through space, remaining together not out of any imperishable affinity, but because nothing had yet come along to deflect or attract them away from each other. At this time of day the village was rather empty. Over an hour ago the skiers had been sorted on the ski school *Sammelplatz* and had been drawn up the mountain singly and in twos. There they could be seen standing about the slopes in neat lines from which, now and again, a pupil broke into a careful traverse. Watching them gave Stanley M the bright, sky-broadening *désengagement* of playing hooky, whereas Freia yearned to be up there among them.

—I'd love to surprise Baldur by learning to ski, she said —but naturally ski lessons are completely beyond our means. She laughed. —I suppose you're surprised to hear me speak like this, for I'll admit that the last time we knew each other I'd absolutely no idea at all of the value of money and spent every penny I had in the most foolish ways. But you see, when one marries a European, particularly a poor German student, and becomes a *Hausfrau*, it becomes absolutely necessary to closely budget one's affairs. It seems to me that every day, in some little way, I'm reminded of this necessity.

Impressed by Freia's words Stanley M reached into his pocket and pulled out a book-

let of ski lesson tickets and one of lift tickets. —I've used a few, he told his friend —but I won't be needing the rest.

—Oh, I couldn't possibly! Deeply moved by this display of generosity, Freia nevertheless ended by accepting the gifts with a charming reluctance. But now that the tickets were in her pocket the hitherto unbearable desire to take a lesson began quickly to desert her. For until this moment the only obstacle preventing her from being quite an adept skier was the lack of ski lesson tickets, and now that those had been acquired it seemed to Freia that she had pretty well mastered the sport.

—I'll begin my lessons tomorrow morning, she decided aloud, amazed to feel as soon as she had said these words the first uncomfortable pangs of guilt.

The young man, guessing what was going on inside his friend, generously offered to take back the tickets, but she declined, pointing out that she was no longer the sort of person to take the easy way out of a situation when a harder way was available.

As she spoke, Freia had unconsciously removed one of her gloves and was looking at her hand which, because of the cold, had begun to swell and chap. Stanley M, alarmed, suggested she use some hand cream, but Freia only laughed. —It's nothing at all, she told him. —In Germany one simply doesn't consider personal suffering a valid subject of complaint. This isn't the United States where one runs every minute to the drug store or the doctor. In Germany it's known that the body is able to take care of most ailments by itself. For instance, if I don't do anything about my hands it will force the natural oils in my skin to rush to the rescue.

—But babe, already they are long overdue!

—That's because of years of using artificial skin creams, she explained with a smile. —The natural oils have been ignored for so long that now they come only after due consideration. But come they will.

Stanley M looked dubious, but Freia laughed confidently and popped her glove back on. —You see? she said brightly. —All gone.

The young man sighed. Now that he was seeing his friend in natural light he could not help noticing, in spite of Freia's artfully applied makeup, a certain deterioration here and there in what once had been a rather nice complexion. He noticed, for instance, that there were black specks all around her nose and mouth and that the fine hairs on her upper lip had grown strangely thicker and darker. Even her teeth struck him as being less pearly than in former times. These changes made him feel a little sad, just as if, having once sold a shiny, well kept automobile, he had seen it going down the street a short time later with rusty chrome, a dented grille, and the exhaust pipe wired on with a clothes hanger. Fortunately, his despondency vanished completely a moment later when he realized he had never in his life passed off a shiny, well kept automobile but only rusty, dented ones.

—I'm looking forward to going to a dentist when we get to Los Angeles, said Freia suddenly, almost as if she had read her friend's thoughts. —Baldur has never been to a

dentist in his life and his teeth are perfect, but I think that when we start earning dollars I'll pay one a visit. Look, she said, stopping suddenly in the street —is it natural for teeth to be a little loose? She put her friend's forefinger on one of her incisors and showed him how to wiggle it back and forth.

After getting a rough idea of how far Freia's incisor would move, he compared it to his own. —No, he said —I don't think they should be quite that loose. He allowed Freia to try moving one of his long teeth which, however, held quite firm.

This disparity did not seem to disturb the young woman who only laughed and said —Well, if I must have false teeth Baldur will just have to learn to love me with false teeth. My husband and I prefer to look upon signs of age, such as wrinkles and gray hair, as endearing qualities, for in Germany there doesn't exist this absurd inclination to worship youth and to fear growing old. We welcome each wrinkle with joy as a personal achievement. You probably haven't noticed, Stanley M, that I now have a sort of mustache. I'd eventually like to have it removed by electrolysis, but Baldur won't hear of it. He simply adores my mustache, and perhaps some day he'll have a chance to adore my false teeth.

Stanley M sucked proudly at the long teeth protruding so firmly from his skull and ran his tongue possessively across their smooth, ivory surfaces. —The last time I saw my dentist he said to me: Stanley M, your teeth are perfect, but those gums will have to go!

At this both of them burst out into loud laughter, and as they continued on down the street each was thinking how, in spite of certain grim details, life was a wonderful, sunshiny day.

They had not gone more than a few meters, however, when Freia suddenly stopped again. Taking a cigarette from her purse she asked nervously for a light. But when Stanley M held out a carefully sheltered burning match, Freia, who was gazing off rather attentively into the near distance, made no effort to touch it with her cigarette and after a few seconds he was forced to drop it on the snow.

—On second thought I don't think I'll smoke after all, said Freia with an apologetic smile. Following her gaze to see what this was all about, Stanley M saw a small group standing by the bus stop. Flanked on either side by rugged young men in red parkas, with a semi-circle of brightly garmented snow bunnies in front of him, stood Dieter Schnell.

—He's shivering, observed Freia with astonishment. —He's only wearing a sweater and it's bitter this morning.

—He can't be cold, objected Stanley M, regarding the Rennläufer whose shoulders were nevertheless hunched and whose hands were tucked away under his armpits. —After all, he's a great skier. Snow is his medium, his ecological niche, his *modus vivendi*.

—Why isn't he wearing a parka like the others? wondered Freia who was quite sure she could see the Rennläufer's teeth chattering. —That's very interesting, she concluded finally.

Stanley M, who thought Freia was about to move on, took a step forward and bumped into her. —Just a moment more, said Freia. —I just want to see something.

Indeed, it had become a matter of extreme interest to Freia to determine exactly at what Dieter Schnell was finally going to look, for his gaze seemed to be focused on nothing at all, wandering off above the heads of his companions as if he could only bear to look great distances. And since his gaze was so plainly unclaimed and adrift, she thought it very possible that it might happen quite accidentally to alight upon her. She was wondering, if it should do so, whether he would recognize her after their brief introduction the evening before.

Just as Freia was wondering this, the Rennläufer's eyes did happen to turn toward her, but his sudden smile of recognition did not just stop on her face – it went on and on through, giving Freia the uncanny and paralyzing sensation she sometimes got when looking not at but into her own eyes in a mirror. Freia found herself impaled, transfixed by this warm beam. It seemed to her as if something in the mechanism of the cosmos had caught fast, and at the same time she felt her waning desire to learn to ski miraculously revived, rather as if the sun had suddenly leaped across the sky and had shone full in the face of the gibbous moon.

Stanley M noticed that Freia's complexion had firmed up enormously and was reflecting a peculiar radiance. He took a step forward down the street and she fell somnambulistically into step beside him, so shut away with her new emotion that he realized it didn't matter or even occur to Freia where she was or with whom. He was just about to suggest to his friend that she fetch her skis in time for the afternoon lesson, when Freia casually mentioned that that was exactly what she had decided to do.

¶ While Freia Volken was climbing up the mountain to fetch her skis, explaining to her companion how the air, trees, and mountains were abstract symbols of something inexpressively real and beautiful in her soul, her husband was shoveling crisp lumps of snow onto the track of one of the *Schlepplifts*, watching with satisfaction as the skiers slid smoothly by.

Baldur enjoyed physical labor because at these moments he felt himself necessary to the cosmos in the same sub-sensible way that his bones and blood were necessary to the microcosm that was Baldur. This harmless attitude marked him as one of those basically unsophisticated and naïve persons, not uncommon east of the Rhine, whose outlook differed from the unfallen Adam only insofar as he knew perfectly well that he was not the very first. Luckily, when one cannot be the first, but only one, and not the last one either, of an ancient race, there are still other superlatives available from which to mold one's outlook, derive one's self-confidence, and upon which to base one's ambitions. This is not to mean that Baldur would ever have made the statement that the Teutonic race was, say, the best, or the strongest, or even the handsomest of all the world's peoples, but on the other hand he was utterly content having been born what he was

rather than anything else. It was from this genetic contentment that he drew his stable and unselfconscious outlook on life.

In his early childhood Baldur had glimpsed the path he wished to follow throughout life and had never deviated from it. The first glimpse had occurred – he would never forget that moment – on a day in 1945 when all the guns on the Continent stopped firing. Those persons who were still able to do so arose slowly like trampled blades of grass, looked around, and noticed that in every direction almost everything was much flatter than it had ever been before. Baldur, who loved the sea, noticed with mixed feelings that there were crosstown views of the Baltic which had never existed in the past.

He remembered returning with his mother to the ruined city and climbing over the rubble in an effort to find the particular heap which had been their home. They didn't find it that day, but they did happen upon an iron cross sticking out of the debris which Baldur recognized immediately as having belonged to a church in their neighborhood. Looking at the wasteland stretching for kilometers on every side, it seemed to Baldur that thousands of years of Aryan and Protestant achievement had been utterly razed. As he stood there, his young hand resting on the bent, half-buried cross, he made a vow to devote his life to restoring Germany to its former heights of beauty and culture.

Only, he was then so very young and before many years had passed the western half of Germany had been completely rebuilt. But Baldur never looked upon these ugly, cheap constructions as having anything permanently to do with *his* Germany. His Germany was made up of the surviving beauties of the past, together with the structures which his creative brain imagined for the future. In his creations elegance, truth, and beauty would be implicit in the subtle rhythm of a line, in the nuance of a tone and in the texture of a substance.

As time went by it became obvious to those who knew and loved him that Baldur was a genius of modern design, for although his work was at the forefront of German modernity, he never designed anything which would clash offensively with the beloved Gothic. No matter how simple his forms, they still managed to remain unmistakably German. Which is not to imply that Baldur's work was in any way heavy or grotesque. It could be said, in fact, that Baldur was doing in the field of design what might be accomplished by someone going carefully over Gothic script with a strong pair of tweezers. He spurned, as did Freia, the cold, intellectual modernity of the *Bauhaus* school. He considered it a dead end where, one after another, the onrushing students of design piled up. Better, thought Baldur, and Freia quite naturally agreed, to follow the heart through the narrow, twisting by-lanes of design, or, if necessary, tread the rough forest paths, than stagnate amid this helpless multitude. —After all, he had once said to his wife as he showed her his latest design, a rough lump of clay with a hole pressed out in the center with his thumbs —of what purpose is a streamlined ashtray when an ashtray does not go anywhere fast?

And there were certain indications that Baldur was right in his approach, for as yet

he had seen no wall rising up to block him. In fact, every now and then he had a glimpse of something entirely new toward which he was moving. This glimpse, or vision, had come to him a few times during the past year while he was asleep; it was then that he saw these marvelous structures in all their magnificence. But it invariably happened that as he awoke they disappeared completely from his mind, and all he would have, as his eyelids flickered open in the morning light, was the thrill of having just witnessed something so grand and beautiful that his whole soul vibrated and echoed.

After these dreams Baldur would search his mind thoroughly, attempting to recall just what it was he had seen, but as yet had had no success. The material out of which these structures were built also remained phantasmal and illusory. And yet there were moments when he felt he could somehow still see this mysterious substance, could feel it looming up toward the surface of his consciousness – even that he could smell and taste it. But it was beyond him to identify it by name, no matter how hard he tried.

Freia was most encouraging and helpful. The thought that her husband was about to create something magnificent and new gave her tremendous joy. But still she was able to remain patient, knowing that one day his unconscious mind would send up the answers. When that happy day finally arrived they would both be there, ready to translate them into a polydimensional reality.

¶ The long climb had so winded Freia that she could only nod a mute farewell to Stanley M before setting off back down the mountain, shouldering her skis and grasping her poles. She was very excited and even a little afraid, thinking of the adventure which lay before her, and did not leap blithely down the path as she had that morning, but proceeded with so many hopes and fears, enthusiasms and calm dignities, taking now a giant stride and now a baby step, that the result was rather like a sports car driver going along a course without brakes but with about twelve gears at his disposal..

Tramping down the trail in this state of highly controlled recklessness, Freia suddenly realized this was the first time she had ever been absolutely alone with nature. No one was at her side; no one was looking on. She was hidden from all the watchtowers of civilization and in fact there was nothing to prevent her from going down this mountain and up the next and so on across the entire continent of Europe, sleeping in abandoned huts, eating roots and berries, and giving herself body and soul to Freedom, a concept which in her mind was tantamount to a complete state of disappearance. It was a rare and wonderful feeling to have Freedom only a whim away, but a feeling which she could not fully enjoy until she could tell Baldur about it. For Freia loved Freedom in the same way that many persons believe they love blizzards, when what they actually mean is that they like a dry, blazing hearth.

And so it was not surprising that Freia started to feel a tremendous amount of responsibility toward herself, especially in regard to bears. For there are moments when bears are to Freedom what minus degrees centigrade are to a gentle breeze. Nevertheless,

Freia rejected on principle the cowardly tendency to glance repeatedly over her shoulder, her principles being reinforced by the possibility of looking back and actually seeing a bear. Hibernation, she had long ago realized, was one of those fascinating natural phenomena which she could accept intellectually but not emotionally. So she kept her eyes directed in front of her, contenting herself by studying out tree climbing tactics and by computing what 120 pounds of thrust behind a sharp ski pole might be expected to accomplish.

With her mind so fully occupied it was not at all surprising that Freia failed to notice immediately that she had begun to sink up to her knees with every step. Indeed, a person not accustomed to snow tends to take it pretty much as it comes, and will not be moved to question it simply because a hard, icy surface has silently evolved into a sleek, fragile crust. It was quite normal, she assured herself when she finally became conscious of her error, to have accidentally mistaken a white ski trail for a white footpath at a point of intersection. Furthermore, she decided, it would be more rewarding, and certainly safer in case she were being followed, not to turn around and try to retrace her steps, but to follow this new trail which, while not steep, was obviously descending. Undoubtedly it would soon bring her to the village or lead her to some mountain outpost where she could perhaps get a cup of hot coffee. And so she continued along the trail until she finally found herself in the shadow of a great wooden and steel structure which she had never seen before.

As Freia stared up at the monstrous shape towering above her, she saw something detach from one end of it and soar, sail, swim out into the air. It seemed the boy would touch his ski tips to his nose, so far forward did he lean, breasting with outstretched arms through the invisible yet sustaining element, floating downward to alight gently, as if in courteous genuflection, on the snowy aisle below.

While watching this a sudden giddiness came over her and she propped her skis on a crossbeam. It was a ski jump, she realized, breathless with awe, and its materialization right there before her in the middle of the day seemed comparable to Rip van Winkle's discovery of the dwarfs and ninepins. She felt as if she too had stumbled by accident upon one of nature's hidden sources of energy – that she was witness to the secret training grounds of the *Übermenschen*, the demigods.

As Freia rested from her considerable exertions, savoring the feeling of being at the very hub of winter, another skier was silently descending the runway over her head. She saw him take flight, then falter and, like a fledgling which has tried too soon to claim its birthright, explode into a pinwheel and slither to a stop far below. Peering down the slope she saw that of course it had not been Dieter Schnell. But deciding that he was probably not far away, she sat down on a crossbeam to watch for him.

As she waited in the cold air the young woman decided to pass the time determining exactly what was behind her blossoming interest in the Rennläufer, and almost immediately discovered that hers was an irreproachably pure motive. The thing about Dieter

Schnell which attracted her was exactly that quality which would attract anyone, even Baldur himself, to the boy: his beautiful body.

For Freia had lived outside the United States long enough to have learned that the feeling of admiration and the desire to possess were far from being identical emotions. Moreover, while at one time she had tended to look upon anything but the most meager muscular development not only as an aesthetic outrage, but indicative of moral and intellectual decadence, after meeting Baldur she had quickly modified this view.

Her enlightenment in this matter forced Freia to the realization that although she and her husband might be mental twins, she would have to do something about catching up with him in terms of physique. And so she had begun doing daily physical exercises using, for lack of barbells, a copy of *Der Mann Ohne Eigenschaften* in one hand and a volume of Musil's journals in the other. Although she had not yet found time to read those remarkable books, she discovered that not only did they balance evenly so that she didn't have to worry about one side of her body developing more fully than the other, but that just lifting Musil's works several times a day added to her physical exercise that depth of intellectual sentiment which she always looked for in all her activities. Baldur, who coveted these volumes although he himself had read only several chapters, could not complain about the use to which they were being put. It seemed to him that the author himself would very likely have approved.

After pursuing physical development in this way for almost a week, Freia was disappointed to find that her calves remained as straight and formless as when she had been a little girl. Her shoulders, when she wasn't actually thinking about them, still tended to hunch. Fitting the books back into their niche on the shelf for the last time, she resigned herself cheerfully to the fact that nature had intended her strength, like that of a cat, to be cloaked modestly, generously resolving to admire, forever after, the beautiful bodies belonging to other persons. For she was one who not only avoided many of life's frustrations by accepting the inevitable, but who knew how to save a great deal of energy by an early acceptance of those things which it seemed very unlikely she could change at once.

As the afternoon passed in this pleasant sort of introspection, Freia congratulated herself on having had the foresight to purchase such warm ski clothes. Even in the sunlight the air was so cold that she could see frozen moisture molecules darting about her eyes. In fact, she would certainly have suffered frostbite in those hours had it not been for the possibility of seeing Dieter Schnell go flying through the air – a hope which kept her heart beating rapidly and her blood moving warmly through her veins. And so it was only fitting that such faith and patience were finally rewarded when, glancing up, she caught sight of the boy standing on the hill above her, talking with some friends.

The Rennläufer was standing at ease, bent forward with the handles of his ski poles braced under his armpits. To Freia there could not have been a more graceful example of human energy in its relaxed state. Just the sight of him standing there in the shining sunlight made her heart pump more violently than before. Then suddenly it seemed to

stop. For Dieter Schnell was now struggling with two of his comrades who were attempting to pull him toward the ski jump, while he dug in the edges of his skis and pulled back with all his strength.

Whatever he's trying to prove, and in spite of the fact that they're all laughing, his refusal to jump certainly gives the impression of cowardice, thought Freia to herself. Confidently she waited for him to shake them off and leap fearlessly forth down the slide. Thus, when the Rennläufer continued to struggle until his friends gave up and let him stand in peace, she knitted her brows. What was this irrational fear that possessed him? Was it related somehow to the strange aversion he had to wearing a parka? And would she, she wondered, someday, somehow, have the opportunity to help him resolve these conflicts? This possibility filled her with a happy excitement and she determined to do her very best to help the young skier if the opportunity ever presented itself. Indeed, Freia was quite sure it would present itself for, if necessary, she would personally invite it to do so.

At that moment all the bright molecules in the air thickened together and grew gray. Freia glanced up, noting that the sun had leaned down to kiss the snowy white breast of a mountain and, overcome by the experience, had set. Registering all this in the space of an instant, she quickly turned her eyes back up the hill. But the Rennläufer and his friends had already disappeared into the trees.

¶ Supper was optional in the Schnell pension, but after a hard day on the slopes the guests usually preferred to dine there than descend on foot to the village or wait huddled in the cold for the cable car. Besides, the food prepared by Frau Schnell was tasty, plentiful, and inexpensive, and the atmosphere in her cozy dining room pleasanter than in the large, crowded hotels.

Domestic help was difficult to get on the mountain, and Frau Schnell was not completely dissatisfied in having found Helga who had first come to work there only two days before. Helga was strong, could follow orders if they were repeated often enough, and had even displayed a certain ability to remember what she was doing long enough to get it done. These traits satisfied Frau Schnell who was more accustomed to dealing with cows than humans and who considered even the most primitive flicker of human understanding in her menial as an unexpected bonus. Still, there were times when she reached, half automatically, for her cane, so used was she to making her will known by blows rather than speech. Indeed, the good woman often had to remind herself that she was dealing with a human creature and not an animal, for there were times when the acrid odor arising from Helga's blond body as she moved around the house seemed to obliterate the years and make Frau Schnell feel, for one nostalgic moment, that she was back in her old cow stall.

During the winter months Frau Schnell saw little of her husband, who left the house at dawn every day and did not return until very late in the evening. He spent these hours

in the *Skiraum* of one of the large sport shops where he worked fast and steadily, waxing skis and attaching bindings. Nor did she see much of her son Dieter, who was usually away from home training for or competing in one of the numerous races held every winter in the Alpine lands. Even during the summer he was seldom at home, for then it seemed snow was falling in the lower half of the world where, fittingly enough, it was said to be warm during the winter time. It did not surprise her that things should be so topsy-turvy down there, but in spite of her tolerance she really preferred that her son go to the United States where it snowed in the winter, if he had to go somewhere. Already several of the boys from the village had gone there and had returned with a great deal of money. Frau Schnell knew these boys and knew they did not ski half so well as her son. When her son turned professional, she was confident, he would therefore earn more than twice what they did.

Frau Schnell was ambitious for her boy, but at the same time she was afraid that if he went to the United States he might not be the same when he returned. The other boys had brought back not only money and plans and excitement, but something else which was not so nice. It was something you could see in their eyes – a certain hard light – and instead of being content to stay home, all they spoke of was going back the following year. They spoke of the United States with a sourness on their lips, but they all wanted to go back. She didn't want her boy to change in this way. She was proud that his successes had not made him hard or boastful and, in fact, saw that if anything he had become even more quiet these past two years. Sometimes she would look at him and notice that his eyes were staring at the wall as if the wall were not there, or as if the wall was there but he not. At these moments a cold fear would fill her heart and she would say her son's name aloud and watch his eyes return slowly and his mouth widen gently into a smile. He would smile directly into his mother's dazzled eyes and she would feel like a dusty room, boarded up for years, which had been entered for the first time, by a prince. She would feel at those moments as if all the hunger left in her when her first four sons were killed had been satisfied by the birth of this boy. This evil feeling caused her great shame and she knew it was her punishment that she could never look back directly into the eyes of her own son. Instead, she would scold him for his dreaminess, never telling him that to see it chilled her very bones like the first cold wind of winter.

Frau Schnell was always happy to have her son at home, although even during his visits she seldom saw him. For all day he was training on the slopes and in the evening would gulp his dinner and then be off to the village to play cards with his friends until it was time to return home to bed. Even the eves of his departures were always taken up with a last minute rush to clean his dozen or more pairs of skis, pack his clothes, and get a few hours' sleep before the bus would come at the crack of dawn to take him away again. She knew that the evening before he had only sat with them out of a sense of duty because Herr von S was there. Frau Schnell was proud that at last Herr von S was having a chance to see how fine and famous her boy had become, particularly since it was he

himself who had prophesied it all those years ago.

Frau Schnell remembered very well the night, years back, when a great explosion and fire across the valley had brought all the mountain folk rushing out of their huts. She remembered how she had stood in the doorway clutching her baby to her breast when the sight of something over their heads held her spellbound with awe. At first she thought the moon had left its place in the sky and was drifting down toward them. And then she saw it was a solitary parachute, silvery in the moonlight, floating slowly, slowly down until it collapsed like a sigh on the rocks high above. An hour later the men arrived back carrying a young flier. He had sprained his ankle, so they took him in and let him stay until he was able to be on his way again.

The young man had been angry, she remembered, and when he first arrived had paid no attention to his injury but blamed himself repeatedly for having lost his airplane when each one was so badly needed by the *Führer*. The only thing that seemed to console him was the thought that he had saved his own life, for the *Führer* also needed every one of his men, although he constantly reassured the shepherd and his wife that the war was going very well and should soon be over.

After the doctor had taped his ankle and he had drunk some soup and eaten a little bread and cheese, the young man had politely insisted that he would sleep in the hayloft rather than inconvenience the family in any way. For the first few days he remained almost completely by himself, studying maps and looking impatiently from his wrist watch to his bandaged ankle to the great mountains stretching away as far as the eye could see. But before a week was up this thin, nervous young man, with his almost unintelligible northern dialect, began to relax a little. Even he was beginning to see that all his impatience wouldn't make his ankle heal any faster. Once in a while he would ask Frau Schnell to let him hold the baby. She would laugh at the way he took it gingerly between his long, fine fingers and bounced it with some trepidation on his knee. Still, he often said how he admired the child's blue eyes and blond hair. Sometimes he called him the Future of the *Reich*.

It was wonderful to hear that young man talk, and once he had begun he talked a great deal. He spoke way beyond his years and far beyond her imagination, pointing out that when her son grew up he would inherit a land reaching from the furthest tip of Scandinavia to the southernmost Cape of Africa, if not, indeed, all the way around the globe from pole to pole. Dieter, he had said, would walk the earth like a great prince, acclaimed wherever he went, because he had the Blood.

And he had been absolutely right. Her son was acclaimed wherever he went; the world was open to him wherever he wished to go. Therefore Frau Schnell had some time ago begun to look upon that young flier as a prophet who, though they hadn't had even a postcard from him over the years, had now come in person a second time.

Herr von S himself was not at all sure what had prompted him to revisit the Schnell family, for over the years he had seldom cared to think about his painful and frustrating

sojourn in the Austrian Alps, remembering the Schnell family only as a blur, and a rather unpleasant blur, of peasant faces. During the time he was forced to remain among them he had not looked upon them as persons, but only as the means for delivering himself from a highly frustrating situation. Once or twice, recently, he had come across the name Dieter Schnell on the sports page of his newspaper and had wondered whether the boy might have been related to the family he had known, but as it seemed unlikely he had never thought further of it. Then, just a few weeks ago, learning that the resort hotel in which he had hoped to stay would be fully occupied, von S had happened across the name Schnell on the list of pensions and, for better or worse, had decided to write there for a room. He could only hope that all the beasts had been removed since his last visit. Still, it was perhaps less the absence of livestock and more the chance encounter with Dieter Schnell on the bus, that finally decided him.

This is not to mean that von S was often attracted to persons he saw on buses, or that he was interested in Dieter Schnell merely because he had known him as a baby. Indeed, if he had thought his attraction to the Rennläufer was based on such sentimental considerations he would never have taken a room in the pension. The Prussian didn't like his actions to be motivated by sentimentality, and so it was fortunate for him that he classified so few emotions in this category, since otherwise he would have had to remain unmotivated and essentially immobile for long periods of time. For the truth was that he was a very sentimental man according to most definitions of the word.

He was genuinely sentimental, for instance, about animals. He would never dream of hurting an animal in any way. When he went hunting he carried no gun, only a bow and arrow which he understood to be the most humane method of killing game. The bow and arrow also gave him the feeling of being an integral part of his Teutonic heritage – *en rapport*, so to speak, with his myth. Although he was not a very accurate shot, Von S was always genuinely moved whenever an animal he had wounded raced away with an arrow protruding from its body.

He was also sentimental about plants. He loved plants and could honestly say that he had never plucked a flower in his entire adult life. Even the sight of a gay flower stall would produce in him the same disagreeable sensations that a highly principled vegetarian might feel in a butcher shop.

This sympathy for floral life – the belief in the right of every bud to blossom to maturity and then meet death quietly on its own stem – dated back to von S's childhood. However, since all of his earliest memories concerning flowers were of the blows on the ears his father gave him when he would pluck and try to eat the sweet-smelling blooms in their garden, he could never fully understand why it was he didn't loathe flowers. Perhaps if he had been given a precedent – if just one German had ever said to him even once that he couldn't stand flowers – he might have realized that that was the way he felt about them too.

Had Herr von S been able to resolve his feelings toward flowers he might today have

been a married man. For in a land where not only the physical but the verbal expression of human passion is largely restricted by social traditions, and where most men are able to overcome this difficulty only by the timely and meaningful presentation of red roses, von S was, obviously, at a great disadvantage. How often had he watched the young women of his acquaintance going off to the altar with other young men after having received from them no more than five or ten red roses? Still, this was not a sight that had disturbed von S to any great degree. He even found he possessed the most socially acceptable justification of all to explain his prolonged bachelorhood: he simply laid the blame squarely upon his love for flowers which, by the time he had reached the age of forty, he couldn't tolerate in his presence at all.

There was one area, however, in which von S might be said to have been completely without sentiment: that was in regard to human beings, particularly those classified officially as enemy beings. Had this not been so, it is obvious that his record in the *Luftwaffe* would not have been the inspiring thing it was. Even though he loathed flying for philosophical reasons, von S had nevertheless destroyed quite a few of the enemy from above. While he had never been much good with his beloved bow and arrow, in his youth he could strafe the shoulder of a road as neatly as if he had gone over it with a lawn mower; he could drop a bomb on the tiniest pinpoint of light anywhere on the dark earth. This opportunity to practice precision, plus his smart air force uniform, had compensated the Prussian to some degree for the fact that he had had to fly an airplane. Still it was truly a pity that his philosophy of Obedience and *Ordnung* had to be so split up the middle by the pressing circumstances of war. For von S felt that outside of having been ordered to do so, the only philosophically valid reason for a man to leave the earth and go about the sky was that he had been born with wings. Otherwise the entire order of nature was reduced to metaphor and chaos. And so it was no wonder that when, almost two decades earlier, Frau Schnell had told him she had thought his parachute was the moon descending from the sky, the young German could not bring himself to speak to the woman again for nearly a week.

¶ Dinner was served at seven-thirty in the Schnell Pension. So that all her guests would have the pleasure of dining while the food was still hot, Frau Schnell had been in the habit of going down the hall every evening at about seven-twenty-eight, knocking on the doors, and reminding everyone that dinner was about to be served. This custom had ended however when one evening not so long ago a sharp-eyed young lady from the United States had noticed a rusty cowbell hanging in the corner of the ceiling. Motivated perhaps by that feeling of national guilt which attacks many Americans when confronted by an example of obsolescence or waste in foreign lands, or perhaps suffering from some completely sincere cultural delusion or excess, the young woman had informed Frau Schnell that in America it was a very old but current custom to ring, at dinner time, a dinner or cowbell. Frau Schnell's look of disbelief encouraged the young woman to

insist that not only was this true throughout the United States but over much of western Europe and probably even in certain circles in Austria.

Frau Schnell, who didn't want to be thought backward, much less in advance of the times, immediately decided to make this extra concession to help her guests feel at home, since anyway she did already happen to have on hand this large cowbell. And so every evening at about seven-twenty-eight Frau Schnell would reach up and shake the bell and then stand back breathlessly, waiting for the first sound of footsteps in the hall. The response was gratifying. The good shepherdess found that within seconds of having heard the bell all her guests would be out of their rooms, prepared either for supper or to save the house from fire. After a day or two the guests would not only respond properly to the bell, but would begin to rely on it. One young man, another American, even confessed to her that his mouth would start to water as soon as he heard the bell ring. And thus it was that Frau Schnell, high on her mountain, rediscovered Pavlov's law of conditioned response, from which she drew the conclusion that, given the opportunity, human beings could learn things in the same way and just as easily as cows.

—What a quaint old Austro-Germanic custom! cried Freia to Baldur as they walked down the hall and entered the dining room where she rewarded Frau Schnell and her cowbell with a warm smile.

Freia squeezed her husband's arm, delighted to be back together with him after the day's separation, even if he was not in his usual happy frame of mind. After leaving the ski jump that afternoon, Freia had found her way down to the village where she drank hot lemonade until Baldur had finished for the day. She had greeted him, still steaming from his labors, with all the warmth and sympathy of which she was capable, discovering a moment too late that this had been the wrong approach. For Baldur, who had enjoyed his day of work, now suddenly felt himself the helpless victim of circumstances for which his little wife was entirely to blame. And so he became righteously tragic in the same agonizing manner that many men will become tragic when afflicted with, say, a sore throat or a slight temperature.

Freia respected her husband's mood because she knew that not only did everyone have a right to have feelings, but even to inflict them on others as a self-protecting device. Restraining her urge to pound him with her fists and call him a self-pitying martyr, she became instead extremely gay and feminine. As they walked together up the mountain path, Freia cried out in delight at the view of the village growing smaller and smaller below, then turned her dark eyes upwards toward the magnificent peaks bathed in the evening sun. Baldur felt that his little wife's steady stream of natural description released him from any obligation to follow her pointing finger with his eyes, although he was wise enough not to tell her that. So he said nothing at all, and when Freia slipped and fell he would lift her up, baring his teeth in a stiff smile as if to assure her that she had not inflicted any serious damage on the path.

Baldur didn't often have ugly moods, but when he did Freia drew comfort from the

thought that as soon as her husband had had his supper he would be himself again. She had often observed during the year of their marriage the truth of the cliché that men gain a certain psychological stability by eating a good meal, which is not to imply that her cooking had improved qualitatively since marriage. For she had also learned that the German children of World War II judged a meal against their own particular criteria, and when, for instance, she wished to make a meal especially appealing to Baldur and his friends, she knew it was more important to concentrate on borrowing four or five large pots in which to boil an extra quantity of potatoes, than to waste time studying recipe books and menus.

Back finally in their room, Freia began to change her clothes for dinner while Baldur sponge-bathed in the sink. As always, he washed himself all over very carefully like a healthy old man who is nevertheless possessed by the fear that his skin may not last as long as his internal organs and who therefore treats it with special care and tenderness. Freia was proud that her husband was able to remain unclothed so long in the chilly air. She could hardly change her own clothes fast enough and had not even the courage to remove and change her wool underwear. Freia loved this ugly grey underwear which Baldur had insisted she buy during her first winter in Germany when life had seemed to her entirely a matter of surviving between destinations and thawing out once she had arrived. Even so, it had taken a long time for Freia to consent to wear these little shirts and panties, for it had been necessary for her to develop first a true feeling of oneness with Germany. Only then could she bear to exchange her need to be sexually irresistible for the greater satisfaction of being very *Volksdeutsch*. Now she wore her German underwear with pride, and in the spring, when warmer weather released her from these woolen encirclements, she set them aside with a sigh to don once again those expressionless nylon lace wonders which she had bought so long ago in Los Angeles.

Baldur, whose body could easily endure any temperature reading below 15°C, and very few above, now had his left foot up on the wash basin and was carefully wiping between his toes, an action which Freia recognized as his signature on the sponge-bathing process. Hanging up his towel, he stood for a moment, naked and gleaming, glancing absently about the room. She rushed to bring out his clean woolen shirt which she regretted not having had time to wash before leaving Munich. Still, it was clean in a relative way, for he had no shirt which was any cleaner. The same was true of the undershirt and shorts which she dug, neatly folded, out of her husband's knapsack. Luckily she had thought to run a warm iron over these before starting out, a process which she considered tantamount to sterilization.

Freia was sorry to see her husband putting on his clothes because she loved him so much when he stood around naked, looking helpless and innocent. To her, a man who was naked for no special reason except that he wasn't dressed was a very lovable thing. Of course, she dearly loved her husband when he was dressed too, and as she could share that experience with friends and even perfect strangers, she stopped feeling sorry

and began feeling both generous and anticipatory.

It happened that Baldur finished dressing just as Freia was putting on the last touches of makeup, and she was just about to mention that supper was served at seven-thirty, when the cowbell rang.

¶ Freia swept into the dining room on her husband's arm, nodding *Guten Abend* to Herr von S and Stanley M who were just taking their places at the table. She was pleased to see that they had both put on white shirts and ties which, along with her stockings and high heels, seemed to create exactly the right atmosphere for the mood she was in. Indeed, it was the first time in her many travels with Baldur that Freia had felt it might be appropriate to dress for dinner. Generally she and her mate supped crouching by an open fire or, more often than not, for it rained almost constantly in Germany, shared their *Aufschnitt* huddled under the large plastic sheets which served also as their nightly protection from the elements.

Baldur, on the other hand, who had not put on a tie that evening, could not help suddenly regarding ties as an appalling affectation at any point above 1500 meters. As for the soup which Helga now placed before him, he knew that bread and *Wurst* in the wilderness was just as satisfying and nutritious as any more expensive dish he might come across in the Schnell dining room. Food was fuel to him, and he proved it by nearly always taking his midday meal in the student *Mensa* where the food, at its best, had the flavor of high octane gasoline.

As they all took up their soup spoons, Freia realized with a twinge of disappointment that of course the Rennläufer wasn't going to dine with them. On second thought, while she didn't like to envision him eating in the kitchen, the prospect of seeing him quite separately and alone at another time pleased her very much. Besides, now she would have a chance to talk about him and perhaps learn more about him. Because of Stanley M's presence at the table, Freia decided to approach the subject as obliquely as possible. After biding her time for a few minutes she casually mentioned having seen the ski jump.

—Ah, yes, said von S, whose voice had gained a modest note of authority since discovering he was the only one present who had skied that day —I understand it was erected only two summers ago. It is the only competition-size jump in a radius of many kilometers, for jumping is traditionally more popular among the Scandinavians and Poles than here in Austria.

—Still, I suppose Dieter Schnell uses it from time to time, remarked Freia, spooning some soup into her mouth and reaching casually for the salt.

Herr von S's eyes were like two little blue suns as he said —The boy was practicing slalom today. I happened, quite by accident I can assure you, to see him.

This non-sequitur sent a strange heat through Freia which she fleetingly identified as jealousy before dismissing that notion as absurd. —I didn't have your good fortune, she remarked. —Does he ski well?

The German hesitated with his spoon halfway to his lips, unable for a moment to think of a word in either language to describe this miracle of motion. Then, before he knew what was happening, he felt ripped from his throat a great and fervent simile. — *Wie ein junger Gott*, he exclaimed. —Like a young god!

And although Freia had never exchanged a single word with the Rennläufer, she felt exactly as if, in sight of the whole world, someone had just pinned a great gold medal over her heart. —How evocative you are with language, she cried. —How precise in your figures of speech.

But the Prussian, still dazed by his unexpected metaphor, stared back at her as if she had just congratulated him on a rude and involuntary noise.

Stanley M attempted unsuccessfully to suppress a laugh by riveting his gaze on his empty soup bowl. He knew that to Freia his presence anywhere on earth was a mirror through which the young woman was compelled to look directly into her own soul. While she could not destroy this mirror, except possibly by destroying Stanley M himself, still he knew she preferred that the mirror would not, by sighing or chuckling, draw attention to itself unnecessarily.

After his laugh Freia decided, rather than pursue the subject of the Rennläufer, to turn the conversation directly toward Stanley M himself, in the same way that exposure to the fresh air will often make a sore heal and disappear more quickly. —I remember, she said —that I once thought you should take up writing as a method of expressing yourself both clearly and harmlessly. Did you ever attempt to write?

The young man nodded. —I did, he replied, like a man repeating his wedding vow in rueful retrospect.

—And what, if anything, came of it?

—Not much. I wrote a story called “Sitting,” though I’d started out to write something quite different.

—What was your original intention? asked Baldur, not because he was the least bit interested, but because he wanted his wife to glance his way and, if necessary, motion to him that something was the matter with the side of his head. For since coming to the table Baldur had had the impression that Herr von S was covertly staring at him in a peculiarly tangential way.

—I’d wanted to write a story of high adventure! cried Stanley M —but it turned out sitting. Its alternate title was “Breathing.”

—What could possibly have been the matter? asked von S of the Volkens, rather as if Stanley M had been a bowl of badly prepared boiled potatoes.

—Have you ever done any writing, Herr von S? asked Stanley M.

—Certainly not fiction.

—Then you may not realize how difficult it is to make a character *do* anything, or once he gets started how to stop him. Just to make someone let go of a cup of coffee would take five or six pages of physical description. I used to read through the classics

to see how great writers managed to make time pass. It's an awful responsibility; every time I created a person I was scared dust would collect on his eyeballs the moment I put down my pen.

Freia was about to change the subject before either Baldur or Herr von S made the mistake of taking Stanley M's nonsense seriously, when the Prussian said—I think your problem, Mr. M, is the same which affects many writers of this century, the only difference being that their difficulty is with mental continuity instead of physical. They feel compelled to set down every thought that enters a character's mind from the moment of his awakening in the morning until he falls asleep at night. Even then the dreams must be recorded as if they were something worthy of mention. For myself, I would rather read the results of your efforts than theirs, for the working of physical nature, as demonstrated, for instance, in the interplay of muscles and nerves when one sets down a cup of coffee, is a splendid example of the highest sort of order, whereas what passes through the minds of most individuals is not only often unfit to record, but flows along in the most complete chaos. I don't suppose, Mr. M, that you have any of your literary efforts here with you?

Stanley M, not knowing whether the Prussian was being serious or not, shook his head dumbly. Grasping his problem, Freia sent her friend a sympathetic smile. She knew that he was over his depth in this company, having no understanding at all of persons such as Herr von S. Even she had once found it strange speaking to persons who had had no meaningful contact, if indeed any contact, with the dream theories of Freud. Her heart went out too to Herr von S who struck her as being Blake's lamb all over again. How naive and innocent the whole world would still be, she thought wistfully, if it had not been for the Jewish people, particularly Freud, Einstein and Marx.

Herr von S reminded Freia very much of Baldur at the time she had first met him. Baldur too had lived in an innocent paradise. Since Freia was the very first Jew he had ever known, she had always considered it her particular responsibility to enlighten her husband about certain of the facts of life without in any way corrupting his flower of a soul. A strong believer in give-and-take between marriage partners, it had pleased Freia to discover that environment could not only corrupt but purify; she soon began to notice how her own soul grew healthier and more innocent through contact with Baldur. Indeed, she sometimes pictured their future as a sort of pair of scales, with Baldur in one pan and she in the other, neither one less innocent nor more aware than the other.

Freia was not genuinely sorry that Stanley M had had no success in his writing, for this was a field she liked to think was waiting in reserve for herself when she had time to get to it. This harmless illusion added quite a bit of depth and purpose to her life. Specifically, what she wanted to do was write a book in which she would explore the subtle psychological differences between the Jewish and Gentile peoples, arriving in this manner at the great unifying principles. For Freia felt moved by her own marital happiness to demonstrate to the rest of the world the glorious completeness, the wholeness of a thing,

when it is made up of tightly inseparable opposites.

Freia considered herself well qualified to write this treatise. First, she was herself a Jew, though an emancipated one, and it was because she felt absolutely no obsessive relationship with her subject matter that she was confident she could attain the objectivity which the best writing demands. Second, she knew that one must write out of a basic fondness, not antagonism, or again objectivity is threatened and, while she disbelieved in Judaism to the point where she found any discussion of it unendurable, still she had a fondness for Hebraic music and many of the folk dances. And finally, while Freia knew nothing whatsoever about Judaism, except as a force, symbolized by her father, against which she had fought most of her life, she felt that for this very reason her word on the subject would carry exactly the same weight as that of a general writing his memoirs of a battle.

Freia knew that her book, when she got time to write it, would burst like a new star on the horizon of human understanding. She suspected that if such a book had only been written, say, three decades earlier, the terrible misunderstanding which had occurred between the Jews and Germans under Hitler might well have been avoided. Indeed, sometimes she wondered if she had not been born altogether too late to make a really important historical contribution; all over the world, particularly in Germany, she felt a new, decidedly better relationship forming between the Jewish and non-Jewish peoples. She herself had never met a single avowed anti-Semite in Germany, and had often sensed, in fact, a healthy boredom about the whole Jewish question. This encouraged her to believe that anti-Semitism, both virulent and latent, was a thing of the past, but at the same time gave her the uncomfortable feeling that obsolescence was overtaking the very subject on which her life's work was going to be based. If this ethnic conflict ceased altogether to exist, an entire segment of her personality would have nothing to push against. And so, in her optimistic way, Freia sometimes consoled herself with the thought that since the Jewish people had been cruelly persecuted over thousands of years, with several million of them having been put to death as recently as her own lifetime, there was certainly no reason to fear that the same thing would not happen again in the future.

By the time Helga had cleared away the soup plates, von S had recovered from the shock that his metaphor and Freia's response to it had given him, for to say that von S was a Prussian is not to imply he was without sensibilities. So delicate, in fact, were his sensibilities, and so easily were they bruised by the mere vibration of his nerves, that he decided, after examining the goulash with his fork, to give his table partners a short lesson on the subject of metaphor so that he might in future be spared a certain amount of displeasure during his meals. The others readily gave him their permission and, after clearing his throat and taking stock of the three pairs of eyes opened guilelessly upon his face, von S decided he had better begin from the beginning.

—Since most persons today tend to take metaphor very much for granted, he began

—I think it is best to begin by defining this word. But before I do I will only mention that I consider a simile or comparison to be every bit a metaphor, as did Aristotle and other classical analysts of rhetoric. A metaphor is formed by placing together two essentially unrelated objects to produce a hybrid – a moon made out of green cheese if you will – which is neither moon nor cheese and toward which one cannot react as if it were a moon or a cheese. Only imagine a man looking hungrily up at the moon and you will see the basic absurdity of the transfer of reaction which a metaphor produces. Thus, little by little, is the entire language made impure and disorderly when distinctly different objects, each represented by the particular word which has been designated to it, and sharing perhaps no more than one characteristic in common, are forced together in metaphor. As you can plainly see, the pure meanings of the two words will never be quite the same again, for you will think of the moon whenever you see green cheese, and vice versa.

—Still, continued von S —while this explains *one* danger of metaphor, to fully comprehend the real horror one must go deeper into its structure where one arrives finally at something with which I am sure you all, particularly you, Herr Volken, are familiar: the Mendelian law of genetics. I certainly need not remind you what occurs when a red sweet pea and a white sweet pea are allowed to miscegenate.

—Pink sweet peas! exclaimed Stanley M who suddenly realized that he had not seen a single sweet pea of any color since leaving Los Angeles.

—Exactly, nodded von S grimly. —Pink sweet peas. A mongrel strain. The damage has already been done – damage which can never be reliably overcome in future generations.

Stanley M, momentarily distracted by the pleasing thought of pink sweet peas, was nevertheless listening closely to the Prussian and was about to ask him to return for a moment to the statement he had made about each object being represented in the language by its own particular word, an idea which had bothered him for no reason that he could imagine, when a sharp glance from Freia, who had seen a question forming on his face, made him decide to keep silent.

—It is fortunate that at least in nature there exist certain controls – controls which are unfortunately lacking in language – so that we do not find dogs breeding with cats simply because they share the characteristics of four paws and a tail. Nevertheless, it is a fact that miscegenation is allowed to occur in nature within a species, although nature does not encourage it. Nor should we, as responsible human beings, encourage or permit it either in our language or in our species itself. Otherwise, of course, purity and order are reduced to what some have described as a mud brown.

As Herr von S spoke Freia began to feel an uncomfortable sensation of wariness. From time to time she glanced at her husband, who was eating slowly and methodically, apparently unaffected by the drift of the Prussian's words. This sight reassured Freia and she looked severely at Stanley M whose poker-straight expression she was certain

masked a chuckle.

—In former times, continued von S nostalgically, as if he could remember well those happy days —metaphor was used only as an ornament to rhetoric. But you see how powerful it has grown? Today this former ornament has been turned into the actual substance of persuasion. That is a mistake of roughly the same magnitude an officer in the army would be making were he to remove the gold braid from his uniform and rush off to strangle the enemy with it!

Stanley M was about to applaud von S's amusing metaphor, when he saw that the Prussian was completely unaware of having made a joke, or, indeed, a metaphor.

—Your Madison Avenue advertising men, for instance, von S was saying —know well the metaphorical technique of placing a beautiful young lady in the same photograph with a new car in order to persuade the potential buyer by causing a pleasant association of appetites.

Freia, always happy to hear a German criticize Madison Avenue, was about to profess herself in complete agreement, when his next words stopped her short.

—Of course, he said —the very worst example of this, and more insidious than anything Madison Avenue could ever devise, are the methods employed in psychoanalysis. Here the psychologists proceed in their work under the delusion that they can cure — that is, restore order and balance to — the human mind through the method of “transference.” This transference, one can plainly see, is the same old moon metaphor. We find the psychologist presenting himself to the patient as his father or mother, directing the emotions one would normally direct toward one's parent toward himself. What a crime this is against the innocent patient, for it is certainly not going to be possible to restore order to his poor, unbalanced mind by confusing it further. It is quite clear, and always has been, that there is nothing that will restore order to a person's behavior patterns and emotions more effectively than a strict external discipline, preferably military in nature. Once the psychologists begin to understand that it was Order which was missing from their patients' childhoods, not parental affection, and convert their comfortable offices into grim barracks, then they will begin making the great strides forward in their work which until now even they admit they are unable to make.

—Sir, what *is* order? asked Stanley M, not looking in Freia's direction. —Would you mind defining this word?

—Not at all, Mr. M, replied Herr von S graciously. —I can well understand your curiosity. Order, Mr. M, is best summed up by the well known old saying: “Everything in its place.” When everything is in its place, Mr. M — when the moon is in the sky and the cheese on the table — then order prevails. Ask any sailor what is the most important rule on his ship, and he will reply smartly “Everything in its place!” And what soldier has not learned that it's just as important for every button to be polished and sewn properly on his uniform as that he shoot straight.

Freia, who imagined Stanley M's perfectly expressionless face was about to split

wide open with laughter at this last example, dug her heel very deliberately into his ankle. She knew that her friend could not possibly understand how important uniforms were to Germans. Indeed, it had taken some months to accustom herself to this fact, and now that she had accepted uniforms as part of the strength of the German character, she didn't like to see them ridiculed.

—I quite agree, Herr von S, said Freia as quickly as possible, fearing that he might have sensed Stanley M's amusement —and it has always amazed me how those slouchy, undernourished British soldiers and our own gum-chewing wonders managed to win the war.

At these words something between a sigh and a growl, rather like the atonal gasp of an accordion catching its breath, issued from Baldur's lungs. Freia, realizing that her earnest attempt to reassure von S had perhaps sounded like rude sarcasm, and not being able to withdraw her statement, continued hastily —I'm completely serious. Our armies were a disorderly mess. The only possible explanation for their victory was that God was on their side. And, of course, the Russians.

Freia paused in confusion. She and Herr von S stared blankly at each other. Then she continued in as deep and dignified a voice as she could summon —Of course, I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I don't even believe in God, you know. It was just a sort of metaphor to . . . Breaking off, Freia stared at her salad, which suddenly struck her as having incredibly large, unwieldy leaves. She decided not to attempt to cope with the salad as long as everyone continued to look at her.

It is at times like these that a husband will often feel like leveling a really good blow at his wife, the only thing holding him back being the fear that he might somehow miss and cover himself with embarrassment. And so Baldur contented himself with looking powerfully at her, though obliquely, rather like a caged lion eyeing a zoo visitor and wondering, if he were suddenly free to do so, which part of the anatomy he would aim for. It was quite by accident that Baldur's oblique gaze happened to fall on his wife's hands. —*Was ist los mit denen?* he growled.

—Oh, nothing's wrong with them, laughed Freia, withdrawing her hands casually into her lap and wrapping them out of sight in her napkin. —Nothing but the sub-zero temperature today.

—Why in God's name don't you use hand cream?

Freia mumbled something about natural oils rushing to the rescue.

—*Mein Gott!* exclaimed Baldur, leaping up from the table. He left the room and returned a moment later with a tube of hand cream which he explained was identical to that used during the war by the German Alpine troops and which, when rubbed in thoroughly, gave the same protection as three pairs of wool mittens. Freia laughed gaily, holding out her little hands so that Baldur could rub in the cream. She loved the way her husband was always coming up with unexpected wonders. On hiking trips he carried along a foot salve which he said had allowed the German infantry to advance thousands

of kilometers without getting blisters. And sometimes hidden away in his rucksack were other treasures like little energy wafers and tiny round pills which tremendously encouraged the passage of body wastes. In fact, the wealth of items inherited from the *Wehrmacht* which kept the body oiled and functioning inside and out was so considerable that, quite honestly, Freia often had to make a conscious effort to recall that Germany had indeed lost the war.

Stanley M. who looked into marital gullies like a mountain climber peering down a bottomless crevasse into which he had miraculously avoided stumbling the night before, sighed deeply and chuckled. This is not to imply that displays of marital bliss aroused in him any warm, credulous sympathies, for except in his moments of extreme idealism and conscious self-delusion Stanley M regarded anything but honest hostility between marriage partners as hilarious social farce. Seeing that the discussion had degenerated into a rather dull domestic crisis, he picked up his coffee cup and carried it into the living room where through the open doorway the others could see his long legs stretched out comfortably toward the fire.

When the representative from the United States had gone out there was a pleasant if imperceptible adjustment at the table, rather like that which accompanies the passing of an uncomfortable colonic pressure. Everyone began thinking in German again and it was this atmosphere of ethno-cultural togetherness which softly descended around the table that gave to Freia the exciting, privileged feeling of belonging.

—I wonder, Herr Volken, said von S, turning suddenly toward Baldur —if what I've said until now is perfectly clear to you. I'm not asking you to tell me whether or not you agree with me, for we are not all so quick-witted as your lovely wife who comes from a country where persons tend to judge even the deepest and most complicated matters at the same moment that they are confronted with them.

—It was quite clear, replied Baldur.

—Good. It pleases me that I have been both precise and communicative.

Freia, who had been deeply wounded by von S's compliment, was about to use the ensuing silence to justify her method of arriving at opinions when the German said suddenly —You know, Herr Volken, I'm a great admirer of the Hebrew mentality.

At these words Freia felt acentric ripples of pride and wariness go through her as when two pebbles have been tossed into a little pond.

—You take for instance that gentleman over there.

Baldur looked in the direction von S was indicating, but saw only Stanley M whom he had not known was Jewish. —Yes?

—But, blurted Freia —Stanley M isn't Jewish.

Baldur looked from one to the other in mild surprise. —My wife has known Mr. M for some years, he said to von S.

The Prussian laughed. —But it is too obvious that Mr. M is a Jew. All the characteristics of the Hebrew mentality are there. I can only conclude that Frau Volken has some-

how forgotten. If they are good friends I would suggest she ask him some time when the opportunity presents itself.

—I'll ask him right now, said Freia, getting up from the table. As she walked into the next room her mind was racing into the past, and before she had reached Stanley M she had already skimmed over their entire relationship without, however, discovering any evidence one way or the other. It was possible the subject had just never come up between them. As for the question of circumcision, that was like trying to recall a particular tree in a forest, especially as at that time Freia had had no means of comparison and had accepted Stanley M as being physically identical to every other man on earth. And anyway, even if this were the sort of proof which one could present to one's husband and Herr von S, it would still mean nothing for, by some freak of luck, Baldur himself had been circumcised.

—Stanley M, said Freia, looking down at the long figure slouched in the chair before her —what religion are you?

Stanley M sighed deeply. When there was no air at all left in his lungs he said in a low voice —I'm a Jew. He laughed sadly.

Freia stared down at him. —But you *can't* be, she exclaimed. —You weren't when I first knew you. I'm sure of that. How is it you never told me?

—You never asked me.

—I don't believe you, said Freia. —You must have been listening.

—To what?

—Stanley M, do you swear you don't understand any German?

He swore with two raised fingers.

—*Ganz sicher?* asked Freia, and when he glanced up at her blankly she turned and went back to the table, looking stunned.

—You see? smiled Herr von S kindly. —Looks are often deceiving. Mr. M is rather blond, his neck is long, and his nose is almost aristocratic. But the mentality of the Jew is unmistakable. A Jew can never doubt enough. He must always go deeply and thoroughly into a matter.

—Rather like earthworms, commented Baldur who was by no means attempting to be derogatory, but on the contrary trying to point out how such minds will plow up the soil of intellect and make it fertile, thus making possible the growth of great ideas.

Freia, who luckily was familiar with the *raison d'être* of earthworms, understood her husband's naturalistic shorthand, but was a little concerned as to whether Herr von S would.

—Yes, agreed the German with surprising tolerance —but it is perhaps less important to apply a metaphor to this race than to understand that the Jewish race is itself a metaphor, with all the distinctive implications of metaphor which I have described to you.

As von S spoke, Freia began to have the same uncomfortable feeling that a fugitive

in a tree might experience when in the near distance he begins to hear the baying of hounds. It was not a sensation of fear exactly, but one of both sorrow and disillusion that, in going about the business of life, human beings will often resort to unprincipled methods. It was only Freia's basic faith in mankind which prompted her to ask Herr von S to explain himself more fully, for she was more than willing to believe, at the slightest encouragement, that the hounds she heard in the distance had nothing more on their minds than foxes.

—Gladly, *gnädige Frau*, replied von S. —As I have already said, I am a great admirer of the Jewish mentality and had always quite openly supported the creation of the State of Israel, which is the only place on earth where the Jew can fully develop and participate freely in his very rich culture. For it is only in Israel that the Jew ceases to be the metaphor that he is in all the other countries of the world. When he is not where he belongs, the Jew is, quite obviously, a sort of fungus.

—Didn't you just make a metaphor yourself? asked Freia rather bravely.

—*Aber meine liebe gnädige Frau*, laughed the Prussian —when one puts together those two words – Jew and fungus – one can only improve the meaning of the one and hardly do any damage to the other.

After making this observation, von S paused to sip his coffee. It was almost as if he were offering his young table partners the opportunity to make up their minds as to whether or not they would like him to continue. Baldur sent his wife an inquiring glance, leaving it up to her whether he should quickly and definitely put a stop to the direction the conversation was now heading. Freia, however, was not quite sure von S was actually the anti-Semite he appeared to be. As long as he professed to admire the Hebrew mind she was more than willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. On the other hand, if he were a genuine anti-Semite, he badly needed help. Afraid that her husband meant to inform him that she was Jewish, she felt it would not help at all to embarrass him by exposing his terrible *faux pas*. Freia felt instinctively that the only way to help the Prussian overcome his racial intolerance was to remain silent now, and in the days to come provide for him an attractive and charming example of what a Jew could be. Then, when he was utterly won over, one could say to him, “You see, such and such is the case.” For Freia felt quite strongly that if a person could generalize from one bad example, which was, she believed, how a person became intolerant in the first place, then he could do so from one good example with exactly the reverse effect. Therefore she quickly signaled Baldur not to say anything.

Almost as if surprised by the silent permission granted him, von S continued to explain his points of view. From time to time Baldur glanced at his little wife, waiting for the moment when she would indicate that she could stand no more. But Freia, no matter what Herr von S said, still could not make up her mind to label this gentleman, who spoke such perfect *Hochdeutsch* and who undoubtedly possessed an excellent family background and connections, with the coarse term anti-Semite. And so, as his wife

continued to hang breathlessly on every word, Baldur shrugged to himself, sat back, and began to listen also. It was not something he had not heard many times before. He could remember hearing the same words and arguments years ago while sitting on his mother's knee. And really, hearing them repeated now with just the same amount of sincerity and fervor gave to the young man a not unpleasant sensation of nostalgia.

—Another example, von S was saying —occurs in the matter of the Latin language. We have all studied Latin in school and can be forgiven for admiring the beauty of its conception and structure. The only time that we do not love and admire Latin is when it tries to usurp its way into our own language – when it begins to mongrelize our pure Germanic tongue. We study Latin not only for its beauties, but so that we can instantly recognize a word with a Latinic root and carefully avoid using it. This is not because we love Latin less, *gnädige Frau*, but because we love order and purity more. When everything is not in its place – when the Hebrew people are not in Israel – when, for instance, Desdemona's handkerchief is discovered in the bed-chamber of Cassio – then the result can be only disorder and tragedy.

Just as von S had given this last, rather odd example, Baldur noticed a soft glow appear on his wife's little face, a non sequitur which caused both him and the Prussian to turn and follow her gaze.

—*Guten Abend*, smiled the Rennläufer from the doorway. —*Haben Sie gut gespeist?*

—Very well, replied Freia, and the others concurred.

Dearest Mama!

And so the first day of our vacation is already over. It is truly going to be difficult leaving our beautiful mountains when the time comes. Tonight we had an interesting discussion with another guest, one Herr von S, a Schleswig-Holsteiner. Do you know him perhaps? He says my face is familiar but not our name. He has a very fine appearance but may be a little cock-eyed, for his gaze seems to slip off the side of my face very often like a radio tuner that cannot manage to hold onto a particular kilocycle. He spoke tonight about the dangers of metaphor. He would like to purge them not only out of the language, but out of everything else as well. This is a very ambitious project to be sure, especially as he seems to be unaware that he occasionally makes a metaphor himself.

Freia is fine as usual.

But now I must write of a matter which is not so fine. My wife and I have made what might be called a slight monetary miscalculation. The truth is that I do not think we are going to have enough after all. It pains me to ask you to borrow again from the bank, but I see no other possible answer. If you could send us about 200 DM in the next few days it would be a very great help, for otherwise I don't think they will let us depart from here as free citizens and we shall certainly miss our plane. I know that 200 is a great many DM, but if you look at it as only 50

dollars, as Freia always does, then it doesn't seem so bad.

As I don't want to worry Freia about all this yet, would you kindly send the money to me care of *Postlagernd* so that I can collect it without bothering her to know. To save time I am sending this letter Express. Perhaps you could reply by cable.

Enough for now. I still have a lot of reading to do tonight. Please forgive me for asking this sacrifice of you, but there seems to be no other way. Good night, dear mother.

Your son, Baldur

While Baldur wrote his letter, Freia lay sprawled out on the bed, her little limbs askew, implying a state of utter physical exhaustion and helplessness. The reason she had collapsed so prettily was that in the event Baldur happened within the next few minutes to fail to find his books in his rucksack he would not have the heart to slay her outright. But when he continued to write without even glancing in her direction, Freia's arms and legs began to feel stiff for lack of motion. This feeling recalled to her mind evenings many years earlier when, wanting to make an impression of sweetness and goodness on her parents when they came in to kiss her good night, she would lie in bed with her hand placed over her heart, feigning sleep in a posture of patriotic sublimity which would harden and become desperately uncomfortable before the door finally opened and she felt the soft reward planted just above her closed eyes.

The young woman would, of course, have preferred to spend this evening in a more comfortable way. She had hoped, in fact, to spend it chatting with Dieter Schnell and was now passing the time wondering how exactly it had happened that von S had managed to get the Rennläufer all to himself. He had swept him off into a corner so adeptly the moment dinner was over that it was almost as if he had planned to do so beforehand and had intended to allow no interference. As far as Freia knew they were still together in the living room, the Prussian bent forward speaking in low, earnest tones, the young boy in front of him sitting quietly on his hands as he gazed off through the wall of the house.

Trying to imagine what von S could possibly be saying to the racer at such length, she recalled something that had disturbed her during the discussion that evening: while von S was assuring her and Baldur that Stanley M had a penetrating Hebrew mentality, he had quite overlooked this quality in Freia herself. It had pleased her, of course, that he had not taken her to be Jewish, for everyone enjoys going about incognito to the extent at least of not having his ethnic category printed clearly across his features. Nevertheless, while she had long ago realized that mental acumen was not an attractive wifely trait and had taught herself to hide it, she could only regret that von S had not been perceptive enough to notice this rare quality shining just beneath the surface of her feminine reserve.

Indeed, Stanley M wasn't a Jew – she was sure of that beyond a doubt – but on the other hand she had no idea why he had said he was. Freia had never in her life heard anyone admit to being Jewish if he were not. In the first place, he had used the term Jew. This was an ugly word with debilitating nuances and one which Jewish persons tended to avoid, particularly when referring to themselves. It helped greatly, she knew, to soften this word by making an adjective out of it, especially since *ish* was a suffix which implied that the object in question only *tends* in the direction of its adjective, just as a thing which one describes as reddish may actually be quite a different color altogether.

Freia had long ago noticed how many Germans went out of their ways to use the even more euphemistic term “Hebrew” in place of Jew, just as von S himself had done once or twice. And in the vocabularies of the most polite Germans she had ever met, the term “Israeli” had completely replaced *Jude* and Hebrew. In fact, in Germany the term “Israeli” was even more than a euphemism; it was a quite socially acceptable designation, being equated in the German imagination with strength, determination and universal military training. Yet with all these synonyms available to him, Stanley M had chosen the poor word Jew. Not only that, he had not even bothered to remark on her sudden and long overdue curiosity, almost as if he had been expecting the question.

While these things gnawed at her mind, the real reason that Freia was sprawled on the bed like a kitten so that no one, particularly her husband, could feel anything but tenderness toward her, was so that she might have a quiet moment to examine a few things pertaining to that very husband. She knew that if he were to reprimand her about the books before she had had a chance to resolve certain disagreeable doubts she had about his own behavior this evening, it might provoke her into countering accusation with accusation and the whole thing would degenerate into one of those screaming feuds which to both of them symbolized Jewish and Italian marriages and which she, in marrying Baldur, had sworn never to allow to happen between them.

The truth was that Freia knew Baldur to have a flaw. Furthermore, it wasn't a unique and interesting flaw, nor an exotic one. The most one could say about Baldur's flaw was that it had tragic overtones and potentials without, however, being very sympathetic. Indeed, in Germany Baldur's flaw was common enough to be considered an ordinary, everyday virtue. But Freia sensed that it was no virtue and, as she was powerless to do anything about it, could only look forward to going with Baldur to the United States where not only her husband's real virtues, but his flaw too, would appear interesting and exotic.

As Freia saw it, Baldur's failing was that he believed age deserved respect and therefore did not tend to question thoroughly everything told him by older persons. She herself had gently helped him overcome his habit of clicking his heels and bowing when shaking the hands of his elders, but her efforts to educate him away from the basic fallacy had so far proven fruitless. She particularly disliked this flaw because it was related to such characteristics as credulity, gullibility, and blind faith, which are indeed intoler-

able weaknesses in a husband whose wife has been raised in a country where Frederick Jackson Turner is to be found on the optional reading lists of many compulsory undergraduate university courses. Freia preferred to lump all these unfortunate characteristics together in the convenient phrase “a socially conditioned tendency toward the willing suspension of disbelief.” This phrase was particularly apt, she felt, because it implied that his failing was both compulsive and voluntary at the same time, a combination which not only left Baldur morally blameless, but which hinted that in time he might very well overcome it altogether if he but tried. Indeed, the only thing standing in the way of this was Baldur’s contention that his sort of suggestibility was not an undesirable trait since it facilitated Obedience. And here it was that Freia found herself up against the classic *Schwierigkeit* itself.

This re-examination of Baldur’s flaw had been occasioned, of course, by his immediate willingness to take for granted Herr von S’s statement that Stanley M was Jewish. But on the other hand it was possible that she herself had become overly sensitive to this question and that it was not such a frightening example of the German tendency to blindly follow the woolly quadruped in front. Therefore, perhaps the first step in resolving it should not be to put the blame on him, but to use the tools of analysis to desensitize herself a little. As for Baldur, although in the past year or so he too had become a wizard of self-analysis, there was, she knew, a subtle difference between their methods of approach. For while she never questioned but that she must uncover and destroy every socially conditioned value or conformist tendency stowed away inside her, or at least test them mightily on the anvil of personal experience, Baldur not only did not often think to question the values of his society, but tended to test his own conduct and points of view on the anvil of conformity.

Now that she had re-examined Baldur’s conduct that evening and had found it to stem from nothing more serious than an unresolved fault within herself, Freia was able to relax and turn her attention to all the wonderful things about her husband, whom she knew to be, in all the ways that really mattered, a leader and not a follower of men. For a man who could choose just the right shade of blue out of three hundred samples, and who knew intuitively and confidently which soup spoon in any given group had the most inviting oval, possessed a range of values and sensibilities out of reach of just about anyone in the world.

Freia, who reserved the word talent for children doing well in piano recitals, and who considered the word brilliant to be showy without being precise, had finally settled on genius as the term best qualified to sum up her husband’s artistic values, which she regarded with the humble adoration of a brute for its master and the respect of a horse for a whip. Baldur, in his innocence, did not use his genius as a weapon because he was not aware of its power, just as a man taking a stroll through the countryside does not realize that the walking stick in his hand is inspiring fear and respect in the horses he casually passes by. Set upon by highwaymen, however, his instinct would teach him

exactly what potential it possessed. So it was only on those occasions when he was feeling a little at the mercy of his wife that Baldur would turn suddenly and ask her a question like: What do you think of this fork?

Freia quite naturally quailed in her soul when called upon to display her inability to distinguish between sets of Danish modern cutlery, all of which looked rather similar to her, whereas her ability to judge more classic pieces was so obviously negligible that she could not help feeling bitterly resentful at being asked. Baldur never even allowed her to take a clue from his face. Often he would appear to look most excited when the fork or spoon in question was one he heartily detested, while at other times he would grimly hold out to her the one which he considered perfection.

Freia knew that the ability to judge at a glance whether an object was beautiful was a talent that transcended the changes of time and fashion. A thing of beauty, someone had once written, was a joy forever. However, her idea of beauty not only changed from year to year but had been known to alter radically in a very few seconds in order to coincide with the opinion of someone she greatly respected. Therefore she often wondered if a really feminine woman, who was so utterly a creature of emotions and glands, could ever hope to achieve the eternal sort of objectivity with which certain extremely masculine men, like her husband, seemed to be born. Fortunately it was not too difficult for Freia to accept the highly feminine nature which had been given to her, and she hoped that someday her husband would learn to respect the very few limitations it imposed upon her.

Still, as much as Freia dreaded having to exhibit her judgment in matters of pure form, a much more disturbing thought was that Baldur himself might somehow err or miss. In Germany, to be sure, he was widely regarded as the very best of his generation – the award had demonstrated that – but Germany was only one country and was not, for instance, the United States. She held a sentimental hope that her husband's genius was not so advanced and refined that it would be beyond the comprehension of persons making decisions in, say, Hollywood. But while the love of fine cars, homes and swimming pools was unavoidably part of her national heritage, Freia looked with no disdain upon completely abstract rewards such as immortality, as long as this immortality had its roots deep in life itself; she didn't want her husband's worth to go unappreciated until long after they were dead. Such ironies of fate were quite naturally repellent to a person who was unable to believe that one day she would look down from the clouds and chuckle over the human comedy of errors.

Just as Freia's mind had turned toward this last image, she heard her husband arise from the writing table and begin to undress for bed. She lay perfectly motionless while he brushed his teeth, but could not resist peeking when she heard him cross the room in the direction of his rucksack. She watched him reach deep into the pack and rummage around. A moment later he withdrew his arm; in his hand were the three volumes she had forgotten to pack! Immediately the little figure on the bed smiled and stretched out her arms and legs sensuously. She waited until Baldur was comfortably settled in bed with his books, then

undressed and climbed under her own soft feather covers. After a time she asked —*Liebling*, what do you think of Herr von S?

Baldur looked up from his book. —Well, of course he has a completely Nazi mentality.

—Do you really think so?

—Of course. It is quite clear, *nicht?*

—Naturally, replied Freia. —But I was trying to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Baldur laughed sharply and turned back to his book.

Freia, who didn't doubt her husband's impression at all, began to think about von S in quite a different light. She was in no way disappointed at Baldur's words, for the thought of having a real Nazi mentality in the house quite made up for the fact that she had misjudged it. If anything, she felt an even greater sympathy for the Prussian than before, and determined that somehow, sometime, she was going to get through to his deepest soul and change all his unfortunate opinions.

Lying in bed Freia smiled to herself, feeling very meaningful indeed. The role of women was not at all negligible or nebulous in the astronomy of life. This thought gave her such a good feeling that she climbed out of her warm bed and darted across the room to kiss her husband good night. —Sing me just one little song, she begged. When he consented to do so she leaped lightly back into her bed and curled up happily, waiting for him to begin.

The room was very still and the world under her eyelids dark and wonderful as Baldur's deep voice reached her ears.

—"*Der Mond ist aufgegangen. . . .*"

Freia smiled and snuggled deeper into her feather nest. Her heart was bursting with love.

—"*Die güldenen Sternlein prongen. . . .*"

She made a little snoring sound to indicate that the lullaby was having its effect.

—"*Am Himmel hell und klar. . . .*"

This was all of life, thought Freia happily. Her husband's voice slowly singing the old German *Lied* seemed to hold quivering in every note her past, her future, and all her soul. By the time the last line of the song, describing the wonderful white mist arising from the meadow, came from his throat, Freia was lying perfectly motionless and relaxed, her eyes closed, her breast rising and falling, softly and evenly, in a perfect imitation of deepest slumber.

Schnee Bericht: Chance of snow this afternoon and tonight. Continued avalanche danger at all elevations. Skiers warned to keep to marked trails.

¶ As usual, Stanley M decided to have his third cup of coffee in the village. This morning he attended to the business of getting down the mountain with great dispatch, nodding curtly at the trees in passing and glancing furtively at the sky as if the sun were the clock on the city hall. But as the sun was concealed behind a layer of cloud, it was as if the city hall clock had stopped, giving him the exhilarating sensation of floating through a buoyant void between too early and too late.

Then all at once, like the great moral voice of punctuality booming through the air, came the sound of the church tower clock tolling the hour. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five, it boomed. Five? Stanley M, who knew it was almost ten o'clock, was delighted by the error. For although he had been born in a machine age, he had never learned to accept any sort of machine and could only tolerate them when they malfunctioned or stopped altogether, as long as their inability to perform had not been caused by, and did not result in, some living creature, particularly Stanley M himself, getting caught in the mechanism.

When he reached the village he found the street full of persons carrying skis and heading in the direction of the *Sammelplatz* and lifts. Dodging past them into a shop he bought an American newspaper which was only three days old. Then, entering a coffee shop, he ordered a cup of coffee and sat back to involve himself for a short time with matters of worldly importance. At the tables around him were a dozen or so persons making subtle efforts to appear like disaster victims or refugees from a blizzard. These kept glancing hopefully out the window at the overcast sky which refused, however, to yield a single snowflake to help justify their decision not to ski that day.

A fat, middle-aged German, sitting alone one table away, was staring in the young man's direction and finally caught his eye by drumming rapidly on his table with his fingertips. Although Stanley M looked away immediately, the German was even quicker. —You are American? he asked.

Stanley M nodded and then, feeling that politeness demanded that he also ask a question, said —What are you?

—I am German, replied the German, coming over in a friendly way and sitting down at the table. —I am originally from Berlin, but I live now in Düsseldorf. I have not been back to my home since the war and I do not wish to go back. I understand it has changed very much. The German laughed.

—Oh?

—The Russians, explained the man, making a face and waving his hand as if annoyed by an odoriferous insect.

—And the Americans too, sympathized Stanley M, trying to show that he was not too small to accept part of the blame for what had happened to Berlin.

The German laughed, mopping at his round face which seemed to be constantly lubricated from some miraculous well beneath his skin. —No, no, he objected. —The Americans are our friends, *nicht?* I have been to the States many times. I...

—The United States?

—Yes, you see, I am a doctor. I lecture in San Francisco, New York and Beverly Hills to large medical congresses. That is why I must speak very good English. He laughed modestly. —Most people think I am American when they hear me speak.

—Oh, no, cried Stanley M reassuringly. —I'd never think you were American and I have very average perceptions.

The German laughed again, dramatizing for Stanley M what he could easily have learned from Freia, that the Berliners are much more *lustig* than, say, the Schleswig-Holsteiners. —I think that in the States the people there ...

—The United States?

—Yes, the people there have not much time to think about the problems that are now in Germany. They are very industrial, the American people —*fleissig*, you know?—and they do not have time to think much about what is happening far from them as in Germany. But it is easy to understand your countrymen and I like very much Americans.

—Thank you.

—You have Democracy there, *nicht?* continued the German as if remarking on an infection of hoof-and-mouth disease. —We have it now too in Germany. It's a very good system, but I think it can make mistakes. For instance, I think President Roosevelt was a mistake of your voters. He was not very farsighted, your President Roosevelt. In fact, he was very nearsighted.

—Shortsighted, corrected the young man automatically.

—Then you agree, said the German, and before Stanley M could set him straight continued in a loud whisper —If it wasn't for F.D.R. the Russians wouldn't be in Germany today. You know, several times already the German government had asked the Americans to join with them in order to fight the Russians, but your President Roosevelt couldn't see far enough and now Germany is split in half.

—That's the price of starting wars.

—Starting wars? The German stared blankly at him for a moment, then threw back his head and roared with laughter. —You think that Germany started the war of 1939? You want I tell you who started this war? Your President Wilson started it way back in 1918.

Stanley M sighed, put some schillings on the table, excused himself politely, and left the coffee shop. It had begun to snow lightly. On the street he caught sight of Freia, who was looking in a shop window. He crossed over to her and said —Freia, who started World War II?

Freia looked at him a moment thoughtfully, pursed her lips at the corners, blinked twice and replied —I don't know whether you are aware that after the First World War the participating nations got together and signed a treaty called the Treaty of Versailles. Now this treaty was . . . But Freia broke off in surprise, for Stanley M had turned away very suddenly and was walking off down the street.

¶ Freia, who had been looking in a shop window when Stanley M accosted her with his odd question, had not, however, been window shopping. She had come down the mountain that morning with the firm intention of taking a ski lesson, only to find that the class she wished to join, the Intermediates, had already left the *Sammelplatz*. She could easily have joined the Beginners who were tramping about only a few yards away on a modest incline, but felt that to do this would be to slight her physical dignity. She already possessed a keen sense of balance and had proved this once years ago in grammar school when she had danced the role of the leading sprite in a sprites' recital on Parents' Day.

While plunged in indecision about what to do next, she happened to catch sight of Dieter Schnell standing by the bus stop with a few of his comrades. The Rennläufer was hardly shivering at all this morning in his Norwegian pullover and matching cap. Freia had already come up with several excellent psychological reasons why a young man might not wear a parka in sub-zero weather, but as she still knew Dieter Schnell only very slightly, she was not sure which of these reasons applied to him. The young woman decided she owed it to both of them to watch him ski, not only so that she might get to know him better, but so that by watching him she could compensate for having missed her morning lesson. For Freia was as adept at copying graceful body movements as at imitating foreign speech sounds and knew that if she once saw a really top skier in action it would so acquaint her with the movement and rhythm of the sport that when the time came for her to put on her own skis she would know exactly what to do.

Freia therefore lingered in front of a well-stocked ski shop window, determining to follow the Rennläufer if she could. When at last all the comrades had come together and set off down the street, she followed along at a discreet distance. Fortunately for her they chose to go up on the chair lift, for it was the only lift which could be ridden without skis. Still, she found that she was the only person taking this liberty, for it was certainly no day to go to the top of the mountain to lie in the sun or look at the view. Refusing to let this alter her plans, Freia set her face in a purposeful yet enigmatic expression which she hoped would dumbfound the curious, and soared like a feeble link in the long chain up the mountainside.

To her disappointment the Rennläufer, who had not had to wait in line at the bottom of the lift, was nowhere in sight when she reached the top and she had to ask where the slalom practice was taking place. She made her inquiry sound at once nonchalant and official, as if she personally had to deliver a message to one of the participants – a mes-

sage which, while important, was not, however, a matter of life and death. She was surprised at first to find that no one seemed to know or even greatly care where the slalom course was located. Finally one of the ski instructors was able to tell her and she set off across the snow, making graceful little leaps which very quickly turned into a sort of slow plodding which, as lightly as she attempted to tread, put huge, noticeable holes in the powdery crust.

It took Freia almost half an hour to find the place where flags marked the slalom course, whereupon she immediately caught sight of Dieter Schnell standing near the start. The boy was leaning on his ski poles, watching one of his friends finishing down below. The racer knocked down the last three flags and as he climbed back up the course he replaced them carefully. Freia moved closer to the brink of the hill so that she could see the entire run which dropped away at a frightening angle from the top.

Then Dieter Schnell skated over and took his place at the starting point. As his supple body concentrated into readiness, he seemed to gather together not only all his own energy but all the energy in the immediate area, for not a person spoke or moved, and Freia herself felt utterly drained and weak.

Suddenly he was not there – he was halfway down the slope – and then, before Freia's startled eyes could focus on him again he was through the final gate where he came to a flashing stop. It was all over, but the slalom poles seemed to vibrate, as if some invisible wind had just played an arpeggio upon them.

Those watching from the top now began to move again, rubbing their limbs as if released from a spell. The boy with the stopwatch did not reset it immediately, reluctant to let this moment slide back into the river of time. Everyone came over and looked at the stopwatch, laughing and shaking their heads, but no one said anything, as their thoughts were all identical. They were all thinking of Austria in great, optimistic terms.

For Austria, they knew, was bigger than all of them together. It was bigger than Dieter Schnell, bigger even than what was implied on the travel posters. These young men knew that Austria was not just an assemblage of snowy slopes and grassy meadows, but a real country with frontiers which were not only respected but disputed, customs officials, and passport regulations. There was even, somewhere beyond the mountains, a government which kept the days moving pleasantly along. Indeed, they held in their hearts the same love and loyalty toward their country that some persons feel toward their high schools and universities – a noble love which produced, among other things, a sentiment of healthy rivalry toward other countries, such as France, Italy and Switzerland, whose mountains were also tall and covered with snow in the winter season. This love was noble because it was unselfish. They knew they must ski as fast as possible not only for personal glory but for a much higher glory – that of Austria herself – in order to keep her ski business thriving and thus promote the general welfare. This, they realized, was their solemn duty and destiny.

Oddly enough, the only one of them who did not ski for patriotic reasons was the

fastest of them all, Dieter Schnell. Nor could it be said that he raced for personal glory either. To some of his colleagues he appeared sadly lacking in motivation altogether, although this in no way interfered with the love and admiration they felt for him. For after all, motive or not, he worked as hard or harder than any of them and could do more for Austria than all of them together. They were depending on him now more than ever before – counting on him to lead their country in a clean sweep of the world championship races the weekend after next. Most particularly, they were waiting to see their young colleague win the championship over the foreign lad who had made such a name for himself during the last Olympics. At that time Dieter Schnell, having suffered a fractured arm, had not been able to compete. And so it was not surprising that they looked this day at the stopwatch and felt very happy and optimistic indeed.

Freia, who did not know the Rennläufer was about to promote the welfare of his country in a great race, was nevertheless aglow with emotion and admiration when he appeared back at the top of the slope and came skiing toward her. Indeed, for one breathless moment she thought she was going to have the honor of being run down by him, but at the last second he made a slight movement with his knees and stopped so suddenly that a tiny spray of snow shot out over her feet. Not wanting to show that she took this snow seriously, Freia brushed it casually from her boots.

—Where are your skis? inquired the Rennläufer.

—You made very good time, replied Freia. —Go look at the stopwatch.

The Rennläufer laughed. He didn't need to look at a stopwatch to know how he had done any more than Toscanini would have had to consult a metronome to find out how he had conducted a Beethoven symphony. —Perhaps you have hurt your leg? he suggested sympathetically.

—I'm hiking, Freia told him. And then she mentioned very briefly the opinion she held that going downhill fast was only one part of winter, and that there were great pleasures to be found in tramping cross-country and uphill. She paused to give the skier time to agree, but he only gazed silently down at his bindings. —The rugged beauties of nature, prompted Freia. But when there was still no reply she asked —You do enjoy cross-country skiing, don't you?

The Rennläufer smiled and glanced briefly at her, then away. But in that glance he had told her with his eyes that for him the greatest thing in life was to descend like a black meteor in the white night – to fly with the force of a thousand gravities mastered in his legs – to be not a tourist in the trees but as integral a part of nature as Energy and Time from which are born the trees, the mountains, the glaciers of the earth. He smiled and told her with his voice that personally he preferred downhill skiing.

And suddenly it seemed to Freia that there was nothing so pure in the entire world as descending like a god on two boards of hickory, and that Baldur had been wrong, or at least incomplete, not to have grasped this ultimate experience of all. In that moment of dawning truth, all the long, strenuous wanderings they had shared seemed to her to have

been dull, meaningless, unfulfilling hardships which had evoked nothing more than feigned ecstasies. —I'm taking a ski lesson this afternoon, she told him.

Someone shouted then and the skier, nodding with a gracious smile at Freia, but with a look of masculine duty in his eyes like a prince called away from his supper companions to run a sword through some pretender waiting, armed, in the courtyard, leaped high in the air between his poles, whirled about, and dropped gracefully down to the starting point.

—He is remarkable, *nicht?* said a voice behind Freia. Turning, she saw Herr von S standing next to her.

—He skis very well, she replied with control.

—That too, of course, but . . . The Prussian broke off as both of them moved forward to the brow of the hill.

The emotion which welled up in Freia's soul as she watched Dieter Schnell run the slalom a second time was even more overpowering than that which she had experienced the first time, though perhaps less spontaneous. When the Rennläufer had reached the bottom and had started sidestepping briskly back up the hill, the young woman, nearly limp with awe, turned toward Herr von S and noted with satisfaction that his Prussian features had been altered by emotion in the same way as when a bowl of stiffly beaten egg whites is passed under a hot flame.

Indeed, standing there with him at that moment, both glowing with the same emotion, she had the urge to stand on her toes, throw wide her arms to the valley, and cry out, Behold! It is possible for you to share an exquisite feeling with one who is Jewish, for, in truth, I am that one!

If anything prevented Freia from giving way to this generous impulse it was that uncomfortable word "Jewish" which she could not, out of consideration for Herr von S's sensibilities, bring herself to use. Standing on the mountainside with the crisp snow underfoot, even the term "Israeli" seemed sadly out of place. Thus did Freia find herself in the same dilemma of communication as King John trying to explain to Hubert that the young prince must die, and unable to say "murder him." There are some things, thought Freia, which, if they could be spoken without the voice and heard without the ears; if they could waft like some invisible pollen from one mind into another, could then fertilize the birth of a new idea or viewpoint by means of blessed spontaneity, without the indelicate cataclysm of a fuller or more conscious intercourse.

Nevertheless, at the same time it was a comfortable thought that the important politic of human communication was not at the mercy of every fickle breeze; that there did exist certain measures an individual could take against the dissemination of information — measures which could even, if necessary, put a stop to it altogether. In other words, Freia knew that there were tremendous advantages in being able to keep one's mouth tightly shut. For while it might do Herr von S a great deal of good to know that his charming companion was a Semite, still, his knowing this would do no particular good to her

husband's career.

Freia had no real proof, but was sensitive enough to suspect, that even in modern, postwar Germany a Jewish wife was not the most useful tool in carving an important niche in public life. Luckily this cruel suspicion did not in any way affect Freia's feelings for Germany; it only made her love and admire her husband more for having married her in the first place. She hoped that she would be strong enough to accept it if, some day, in order to advance his career, Baldur were obliged to disown her. This, she knew, was the risk any woman took in marrying a man with a dream in his heart – a dream more important to him than anything else in his life. Their unhappy parting, which she usually pictured as taking place in the presence of blond strangers wearing high black boots, but whose blue eyes were nevertheless misted with emotion, was a scene she had gone over in her mind many times during sleepless nights. Indeed, she was not at all sure that some day, separated from her husband and forced to return in exile to Hollywood, she would not write a television play based on this poignant conflict of love and duty.

All this is not to imply that Freia had as yet any idea of Herr von S's function and status in the world, or whether he could in fact be of any help to Baldur's career; she had not yet remembered to ask the Prussian meaningful questions about himself. Forgetfulness, the ability to let something constantly slip one's mind, was, Freia knew, one of the qualities Baldur found most endearing in his little wife. It was only at the moment when forgetfulness came to an abrupt end and she suddenly remembered what she had forgotten, that he tended to become furious with her.

But if certain particulars were lacking, Freia was still able to guide herself to the proper conclusions about von S because of her well-rounded knowledge of Germany. For instance, she had instantly recognized in his speech that flawless grammar used by persons who mattered. Although she adored the gruff Bayrisch and the Platt accents as well, she was the first to admit their social limitations. Indeed, Freia's knowledge of German regionalisms was so accurate that she was able not only to draw the geographical line between *Guten Tag* and *Grüss Gott*, but could even point to a particular gas station on the *Autobahn*, not far from Nuremberg, where she and Baldur had once stopped to use the toilet facilities, through which this line passed. Furthermore, Freia was personally acquainted with the social frontier between *Ich liebe Dich* and *I' hab' Di' gern*, a subtle but highly important difference which had played no small part in her acceptance of Baldur's marriage proposal.

It was by such little things that Freia was able to build an accurate picture of Herr von S. The von in his name and the modest dueling scar under his eye, were no less important signposts than those stars in the Dipper are to those who hope to locate the Polar Star itself. For Freia knew that the Polar Star, be it ever so second magnitude in a cloudless sky, is no help at all to navigation when it is simply not to be found.

As the Rennläufer approached the top of the hill, the hearts of both Freia and Herr von S were beating faster. Glancing down, she noticed, not without a touch of envy, that

the Prussian was wearing skis, though at the same time she sensed that he was not about to go skiing off on them, in the same way that a jockey does not expect the horse running nose to nose with his to veer politely aside and jump the fence. As this analogy held no promising results for Freia, who knew that a metaphor is only meaningful when it helps and in no way hinders a cause, and as she anyway had to meet Baldur for lunch in the village, she decided it would be more accurate to regard herself less as a participant in a race and more in terms of, say, a ballerina whose forte is not speed but grace and technique. Therefore, just as Dieter Schnell arrived at the top of the hill, and greatly to Herr von S's surprise, Freia suddenly bid him adieu and floated away over the snow, leaving the Prussian with the uncomfortable sensation that someone was racing like mad behind him without knowing exactly how fast she was coming on.

¶ Baldur Volken was liked and admired by his fellow workers in the same way, but to a less drastic degree, that a group of moths will admire a large, frosted light bulb. Baldur liked his co-workers because they were simple, natural lads, although he wondered greatly at how they could do such cruelly fatiguing work from morning to night with no more incentive than their wages. He knew very well that he himself would be unable to continue if he were not continually re-inspired and re-invigorated by the idea that his labors were part of an ancient heroic tradition to which he was heir. Their simple outlook and apparent detachment from anything resembling a heritage impressed Baldur very much. There were even moments when he saw these lads quite clearly as being little more than basketfuls of oddly assorted genes which, over several generations of careless handling, had broken off what must once have been long, pure chromosomal strands. He saw this, for instance, in their teeth which were strung across their gums in gaudy, ill-matched rows, in their eyes which, in depth and sensitivity, might have been two buttons dredged from the bottom of a sewing basket, and in their bodies which were hard and firm without being symmetrical. Their faces were not faces that lied, but at the same time had little to do with the truth. They were not classic mountain faces, not city faces, but the kind of faces Baldur sometimes noticed from a train window as he chugged through the area outside the suburbs of a large city on his way home from a holiday mountain-climbing expedition.

But while Baldur was not unaware of the differences between himself and his fellow workers, this did not mean that he was not democratic. For the best democrats, that is, the strongest believers in the equality of men, are those very persons who are best able to recognize, accept, and thereafter ignore the inequalities; those persons who, not hamstrung by inferiority, are quite ready to admit that they hold a position above the national average in all ways that matter. They are also the first to volunteer that in all of the ways that do not matter they are far, far below the national average, a point of view which allows them to feel equal with everyone else, yet which doesn't interfere with their own valuable self-esteem.

Baldur was well aware of the weighty responsibility conferred upon a man who is descended from an unbroken Teutonic strain and who has arrived in life possessing pearly strands of matched genes. For this reason he sometimes wondered what sort of progeny his marriage to Freia might produce, although this was a question that both he and his wife preferred to relegate to the far future, speaking of it only now and then in a negative way, as when they discussed the pros and cons of some particular method of contraception.

Still, both Baldur and Freia did have their opinions and attitudes on this important question as on everything else. And since they both lived not only ordinary, well-rounded lives like everyone else, but enjoyed the still fuller experience of possessing, as it were, a dual citizenship with the world of allegory, they not only held everyday sorts of reasonable attitudes toward things, but at the same time could allow themselves an innocent fascination with the geometric purity of the Extreme. But since all lines, scales, curves, and gradations of every sort have only one extreme at each end, this greatly limits the choice open to extremists in any particular matter. In the matter of, say, the miscegenation of races, Baldur and Freia could come up with only two points of view. One was that it would produce weak mongrels containing all the recessive qualities of both races, and the other that it would produce a wonderbeing who would tower above the human species by combining in itself only the best qualities inherent in each line. In general Baldur upheld the latter point of view during discussions with fanatic racists and foreign observers, and tended toward the former only when reflecting in solitude on what had already been given birth to throughout the history of civilization. Baldur was, of course, quite unaware of the contradiction in his points of view; no slave of inductive and deductive reasoning, he relied to a large extent on spontaneous enlightenments, which tend to brighten only whatever happens to be lying directly underneath when the beam flashes on, and to obscure the rest.

But if Baldur had, like any young married man, conflicting attitudes about the child he might some day father, there was one area in which he had no conflicts at all: Baldur loved his little wife. His premarital love for Freia had perhaps even doubled on the day of their wedding, for once the words had been spoken and the papers signed, that moot indecision which almost invariably precedes the concluding of a permanent contract was miraculously erased. From that moment on his love had grown steadily every day. Even after months of marriage there were times when, in the middle of the afternoon, he would have to leave his desk and wander for an hour or more on his wooden therapeutic sandals through the streets of Munich, feeling his love expanding in his breast like a balloon until it had so squeezed up against his lungs and throat that he would be forced to stop, breathless, rigid, like a great exclamation point, in the middle of the flowing sidewalk throng. Loving Freia was like being addicted to a narcotic – when she was missing or delayed he was almost driven to despair. Indeed, Freia was one of those rare creatures whom one could desire even more utterly when she was not around, a quality

which added an extra dimension to their relationship, placing it in the category of spiritual and metaphysical phenomena rather than that of ordinary married life.

In spite of the love he bore his wife, Baldur was not a jealous person. He was not even a suspicious person. He possessed the same tranquil, trusting nature as a bird whose family had, generations before, migrated to an island uninhabited by men and cats. When work detained him, as it occasionally did late into the night, he might ask himself what his little wife was doing, but that was only in order to conjure up the delightful image of Freia sitting in a circle of lamplight with a cigarette between her lips or stretched out like a kitten on the bed, having fallen asleep waiting for him.

There were, to be sure, certain ancient, inherited doubts which occasionally pierced his conscious mind like unearthly wailings out of some dark cavern of his soul. These generally concerned such matters as what had Freia been doing during, say, the first twenty-odd years of her life in Los Angeles, and with whom had she done it. For Baldur, who had been a virgin until the day he had met Freia, could not help entertaining, now and then, the suspicion that she had not.

They had first met, Baldur and Freia, in an art museum in southern France. The problem of communication had been such, since they had had only intermediate French in common, that the most basic soundings, such as *Aimez-vous van Gogh?* had lasted nearly two hours. Evening was coming on when Freia suddenly realized that she had missed the train which was to have taken her and her traveling companions on to Rome. She quickly assumed that her companions had not waited for her, arguing that she would not have voluntarily missed a train for any one of them, and was thrown into a helpless quandary about what to do next.

Baldur had finally agreed to let her accompany him, hitchhiking and tramping, as far as Stuttgart, impressed by the sentimental desire she displayed to visit Germany, which, she had explained, was only just across the border from the country containing her own ancestral roots. Unfortunately the weather had proved unkind; the very first evening they had been forced to seek shelter from a thunderstorm in a barn. Freia had been afraid of the lightning, and Baldur, hoping to reassure her by putting his arm around her shoulders, had suddenly found her soft throat against his lips. He had kissed her throat, and Freia, under the impression that he was trying to seduce her, had succumbed.

It had been a terrible night for Baldur. He had not known whether to marry the girl immediately or disappear mysteriously under cover of darkness. Luckily Freia had been able to grasp the significance of her *faux pas* and took the situation quickly in hand. She explained with the help of sign language that unless they resolved it, this experience would remain a harmful, recurring phantom in both their unconsciousnesses, whereas if they did not run away from their responsibilities, this relationship could prove an excellent opportunity to learn one another's language.

And so they decided to stick together until the day arrived when they could discuss, and more fully understand, exactly what had occurred between them in the barn. By the

time that day came they were so used to living together that they had quite forgotten the reason for it.

Mama Volken, who had survived so many hardships during the war, was able to adapt to the irreversible fact of her son's strange new alliance with the courage of a seasoned fatalist. It was also fortunate that Mama Volken's anti-Semitism was a creature of spontaneous enlightenment rather than of reason, for this allowed her to hang onto her prejudice and at the same time make one very necessary exception. Indeed, as soon as Frau Volken saw Baldur's heart was set on having Freia for his wife, she too began to love this dark little woman and welcomed them both warmly into her house whenever they came north for a visit. Mama Volken was particularly enchanted by Freia's sincere desire to learn everything possible about the German way of life. She spent hours showing her her garden, tremendously pleased by Freia's cries of delight when she gave the young woman the very first or the very last strawberries of the season. Freia was genuinely touched by this sort of gift and blamed her inability to eat the gray, wormy little fruits on her ultra-sterile upbringing in the United States. So careful was she of her mother-in-law's feelings, however, that she always waited until her back was turned before throwing the strawberries into the bushes.

Freia truly admired everything about Baldur's mother and, wishing to emulate her in every way, was always overjoyed when Mama Volken gave her some typical German chore to do. Nor was anyone more genuinely heartbroken than she when the bulbs she personally put into the earth simply rotted away without sending up a single bloom, or more chagrined when the precious cream she was given to whip turned into butter between her warm little knees.

Baldur, whose relationship with Freia had inspired him to devote all of his creative energy and most of his waking moments to his work, had no real opportunity to imagine that the two women he loved would get along any way but nicely. He therefore looked upon their outstanding compatibility, outlined for him almost daily by Freia, as completely in the order of things and not as a triumph of personal adjustment on the part of either of them. In fact, his inability to see the miracle in progress provoked both Freia and his mother to even greater excesses of harmony in a situation which, if left completely to raw female nature, might well have resulted in bloodshed. Thus, the two women, working together as if by mutual consent, wove a sort of cocoon of love around their man which allowed him to live and work in a comfortable, secure world of his own, insulated by cottony walls of innocence, suspended, as it were, just above the threshold of awareness.

As Mama Volken began to accept Freia's presence in her family, her opinion of the Russians, which had heretofore been one of hate, turned gradually into utter loathing. She even startled the iron-jawed, steel-eyed, war-widowed cronies who joined her for tea and cakes on Sunday afternoons with the way she lashed out against these usurpers of German soil. When she had sounded Freia and had learned that, although Jewish, she

was no Marxist, Mama Volken undertook to educate the young woman on exactly how the German folk felt about the division of their country. She showed her photographs of the city of Dresden before and after the bombardments, sad documents which were enough to move a heart much less profoundly mobile than Freia's. She gave Freia her first authoritative, eye-witness account of the entire Second World War, supporting what Baldur had already told her about the unprecedented cruelty of the Allies who had bombed German cities, killing innocent women and children. It was she who pointed out that while six million persons had been gassed, shot, and tortured to death in Europe, only about fifty thousand of these had actually met their deaths on German soil.

Soon Freia, who was so good at copying the pronunciation of foreign words and imitating graceful body movements, was able to give little cries of exactly the same tonal pitch and emotional value as Mama Volken when confronted with an example of Russian cupidity, Allied barbarism, or statistical exaggeration. Mama Volken was not at all dissatisfied with the results of her educational efforts. But she sometimes sighed to herself, remembering a day not so long ago when she, standing together with thousands of other young mothers, had fervently dedicated her newborn male infant to the *Führer*. Little had she then suspected that the spirit of the times would change to such a degree that one June day she would give her son away a second time – this time to the Jews.

¶ Freia joined her husband in the village at noon and they lunched together on *Käsebrot*, yogurt with preserves, and fresh buttermilk at the local *Molkerei*. This tremendous intake of proteins gave them the feeling of being unusually well nourished, while a passing cow served to remind them of the integral and important part they were playing in the Cycle of Life itself. Although Baldur spoke not a word during the meal, Freia was positive that this silence indicated the crisis of his bad mood – the decisive battle between his naturally cheerful spirit and his virile German self-pity – and that the next time she saw him he would be in the very best humor.

At exactly a quarter to two Freia stood on tiptoe, kissed her husband's mute lips, waved *Tschüss*, and headed resolutely in the direction of the Schnell ski shop where she had left her skis the day before. But just as she was approaching the shop something caused her to come slowly to a halt and stand for a long, silent moment by the side of the street. To a casual passerby it would have seemed as if the young woman had paused to listen intently to some far-off sound. And indeed, it was very much like a sound – like the distant tattoo of drums approaching the frontier of perception. And, too, it was very much like listening, except that it involved not just one of the senses but all five, or perhaps none of these. Perhaps what she seemed to hear was the soft tapping of an instinct against an imperception, rather like that percussive silence which will awaken a sleeper seconds before an alarm clock goes off.

Thus, while it might have seemed that Freia was listening to something far away, the truth was that this something was immediate but very indistinct. In fact, if she had had

even the most elementary knowledge of anatomy she could have laid her little hand over the precise part of her body where it was located.

There was, to be sure, very little going on in or around Freia that escaped her. She knew, for instance, that the tremendous relief she experienced at this faint, long overdue augury was only in her mind – that her body itself was plunged into frustration and despair. For, whereas Freia had once tended to believe wholeheartedly in the human brain as sole arbiter of emotion, she had recently become convinced that the human body, particularly its female parts, exerts a strong influence not only upon emotion, but upon reason and action too. The more feminine the body, the greater the influence, and in the case of, say, Freia herself, there were times when she found her brain almost no help at all in the guiding of her destiny.

Logic, she had come to realize, was no protection against the monthly fury of the scorned female body. For the body has, after all, gone to great pains to manufacture its bright wares, has set them up discreetly but reasonably within reach, has advertised and encouraged in every possible way, and has even grappled with the prospective customer, only to see him finally withdraw without making a commitment. And so it was no wonder, Freia knew, that the body reacts to this rejection by sending chemical furies into the blood which so torture the brain that there are days when a woman is not entirely in possession of her reason and therefore in no way responsible for her actions.

Indeed, as she paused there on the street, sounding the depths of her body with the radar of her senses, it came suddenly into her mind that the best thing she could do would be to go and hide in the woods for the next three or four days. Certainly the last thing she ought to do was take a strenuous ski lesson. With a sigh of resignation at being once more victimized by the irresistible force of her own womanliness, Freia entered a pharmacy where she made the purchase appropriate at such times, then turned her steps slowly and carefully back up the mountain.

Perhaps the only thing of which Freia was unaware in all of this was that she was completely mistaken in her interpretation of the signals being reflected back to her brain by her female parts, in the same way that even an expert radar engineer can easily confuse, say, a whale with a submarine. Furthermore, her mind, while keen, was essentially optimistic. And so it was not at all surprising that she failed to grasp the rather grim truth which her body now held, in secrecy and triumph, deep inside itself.

Stanley M was reading a book in front of the cold hearth as Freia passed by on the way to her room. There she found the floor had been swept and the beds straightened and plumped up during her absence. She was about to hurl herself with weary abandon into the soft, feathery tension, when an envelope perched on top caught her eye. Freia recognized the handwriting – most of which had been crossed out by the post office in Munich – at once, and paused a moment in both pride and irritation to look at it. For the words, though boldly done and clearly legible, appeared to have been set down in some past age when the written language had not yet separated entirely from the illustrative

arts. Each word seemed to have been composed not of prescribed groupings of lines and circles, but of an eloquent fluttering of wings, as if hundreds of tiny swallows were soaring and looping across the paper.

Freia hated her father's graphic irony but was proud in spite of herself of the perfection of his technique. She had never known him to spend less than an entire evening in the composition of any one letter. Even sincere messages of condolence were written with sly chuckles as one by one he formed the humorless Latin characters upon the paper with the aid of his ancient accomplice, an incredibly sensitive pen, which responded not only to the slightest pressure of his hand, but to every nuance of his meaning. She knew he wrote down his words and ideas as if he expected the pages to be rolled up and buried away in urns. His amusement grew from the fact that he knew perfectly well they would be wadded up and tossed into waste receptacles. My father, thought Freia as she ripped open the envelope, is a well adjusted, smoothly functioning anachronism.

My dearest *gnädige Frau* Ada Volken!

Please forgive me that I am answering so late your last letter. All this time I have been studying it very carefully, like the Foreign Secretary of the United States Government studies a note from the Russians. I had to even use a dictionary from time to time so that I should not mistake any of your meanings. I have a very poor brain for English words, and I have already forgotten many since you departed because I have no more the chance to hear them repeated over and over again every day.

For example, your sentence about "the responsibility of the parent toward the child who did not ask to be born but who was created out of a purely egoistic union between two persons to whom he had never even been introduced"! I think in all my life I have never heard your Aunt Rohel or your Uncle Moishe say the words "egoistic union." Seeing these words again was like a visit from two old friends who have not changed at all through the years. Only the eyes that see them again are changed – older and I hope a little wiser by now. To this sentence I can only reply that even God has mercy! I have been responsible toward you for many years already, ever since my egoistic union with your mother (may she rest in peace!) but I think now that you are grown up and married it is time I deserved a little time off for good behavior. If I was a rich man it could be another matter. But business is terrible right now. A shipment of sour milk has nearly destroyed the patience of even my regular customers, and I have not yet been reimbursed from the place I buy.

But I do not like to talk about capital when my daughter is talking about labor –egoistic unions! My adventure into real estate is going better, you might be happy. I have four new duplex units. Together I have now eight units. Thank God they are all rented, but this means I cannot give to you and your husband an apart-

ment when you come. I know, I know, you don't want to live in my apartments. You just want I should give you one for a wedding present so you can use the rent money to live somewhere else. You say you don't want me to own your lives. Well, I don't see how living in my units I will be owning you. I don't own my other tenants. Often I never see them except when they want me to fix something. But I looked anyway in my books to see if I can give you such a wedding present so that I should not be a worse father than Frau Volken who you say gives you the shirt off her poor old back. But I found that anyway I cannot give you such a present. You know, in a business you must not always be taking out. Sometimes you must put back in. The units were not built yesterday and they sometimes need repairs. The furniture comes apart and it must be put back together. In the dictionary I looked up your word *Mammon*. I ask you now to look up the word *mortgage*. Then maybe we will understand each other better.

You also said in your letter that I do not want to help you "start your new life" because I am angry you have married with a German. You say that I am "unjustly judging your husband sight unseen" for things he never did because he was too young. You think maybe I cannot count? So dumb I am not. I know your husband was small during the pogroms. You were small too and I know that you cannot understand those years like your mother and I could. What they did I can understand very well. *Why* they did it I can understand too because I know something about the German character. Still, I do not want to make myself higher than God. I do not want to judge this young man unfairly. But I think Ada that they did enough to us already. It is time now they stopped. You can see what would happen if every German now wanted to marry a Jew.

Perhaps Ada you think that the Jewish people is not an amazing thing. Let me tell you something. Do you know that the Jewish people has existed longer than any other people, save one? 4000 years we have been Jews, and half of this time we were even without a country. You do not think it is an amazing thing that Jews have lived in every country of the world for 2000 years and have still remained Jews? Have you ever asked yourself why this is? Or don't you care. I'll tell you why. Because we have very strict laws about food and cleanliness and marriage. God has helped us and now has returned to us our country. But even having our nation is not enough. It is perhaps the greatest test of all for our people because it will make many of the weaker ones relax. I am almost sorry, my daughter, that your life has been so easy and without pain. I thank God that you have never known suffering from being a Jew, but also I think that maybe a little suffering might have been a good thing. You would have known better that you are a Jew and then maybe you would have thought twice before you chose a husband. You would not think then that having children is an "egoistic union." For a Jew it is a great responsibility and a duty to our people.

But I suppose you don't care about all this because you never went anyway to temple without screaming a little. I am sure you never eat now Kosher food. I am almost glad your mother (may she rest in peace!) did not live to see you marry a German fellow. It would have killed her. But I don't hate the Germans like you think. I only want they should stay in Germany and don't do any more harm to our people. Already they have done enough.

When you come to Los Angeles I should be happy to meet your husband. It is at least something that he is circumcised. You wonder how I know this? Your cousin Samuel in Haifa wrote it to me. You wonder how your cousin Samuel knows? Maybe you remember when you were in Haifa a year ago Samuel happened to show your husband to the public toilets and stood next to him in the row. Good news travels far!

Maybe when you are both here we can talk again about the apartment. It is possible business will be terrific when you come.

Your humb. & obed. serv. etc.

After rapidly scanning her father's letter, Freia stood a moment deep in thought. It was clear that the uplifting modern influence she had once had upon her parent had diminished in direct proportion to the miles and months of their separation; already he was dropping back down upon the four paws of primitive tribalism. He had, of course, allowed himself a way out, and she had no doubt but that he would discover that his business was making a sharp ascent after an hour or two of quiet give and take. But in the meantime he had succeeded in manufacturing more unnecessary complications. She would have to admit to Baldur once again that her father was an insecure old miser with vindictive tendencies – a description which, to a genetically oriented intelligence like her husband's, would in no way thrust glory upon herself.

Realizing suddenly that she was frowning, an expression which implied profound irritation rather than the slight annoyance she desired to feel, Freia quickly relaxed the muscles of her face until she felt her hairline shift gently back into place. Then, with a straight back, she walked into the living room where a pretty scene met her eyes. Helga was kneeling by the hearth brushing around Stanley M's feet, her long blond braids only half concealing the delicate blush on her cheeks. Stepping forward, Freia approached the hearth where, before tossing the letter upon the cold ashes, she wadded it into a tight ball. Helga, almost overcome by the sense of her own inferiority on seeing this young woman so casually dispose of a letter which she had only just received, edged away like a large dog which has been too long and too often at the mercy of vicious cats. Freia, who had not acknowledged the girl's presence in any way, seemed completely oblivious of her departure.

Stanley M wriggled his toes happily. It had just occurred to him that his life was like a luxurious feast where, after barely sampling one dish, it was removed by invisible

hands and a different delicacy was set before him in its place.

—Stanley, said Freia suddenly in a deep, remote voice which was too serious to trifle with extraneous initials —have you ever again, over the years, thought of the Great Synthesis?

These last were words which even Stanley M realized deserved a certain solemnity of utterance. They seemed to flutter out of his past like two little messenger pigeons to peck at the window of that mental chamber where his memories were dozing. Suddenly he recalled an afternoon years before when he and Freia, then Ada Levin, had dredged through an entire language to find those two words – first *synthesis* and then *great* – to describe the enormous concept they had suddenly bumped up against. It seemed then to be the most important moment of their lives. The Great Synthesis was the first meaningful answer they had found to the problem of the Great Chaos which they had only recently discovered to be the very thing which kept life from running as smoothly as it ideally should. The young man recalled how, after grasping the significance of the moment, Freia had taken the soda pop bottle from her soft mouth and had said wisely: You see, Stanley M. how important language is. For without vocabulary our knowledge of the world would be restricted to vague feelings and impressions, uncommunicating and uncommunicable. Now all that remains for us to do is to find out exactly what the Great Synthesis *is*.

Indeed, it seemed to them then that their having isolated and named the great problem of the universe presupposed the existence between them of the amount of genius necessary for solving it. Nor did it in any way discourage them when they discovered in the weeks to come that they were not the first to come up against this problem. Philosophers such as Plato and Descartes, astronomers such as Galileo, and even such physicists as, say, Einstein, had apparently been aware of it. Upon realizing in what distinguished circles they were moving, the concept of the Great Synthesis gained in their minds an even greater validity and respectability. At the same time it lost a certain urgency. For it was clear that since this problem had been around for perhaps thousands of years it wasn't necessary to solve it before the beginning of the semester.

And so Freia and Stanley M had decided not to rush headlong into their research, but to look upon it as the work of a lifetime. Through the years there were moments, particularly just before falling asleep at night or just before waking in the morning, when the Great Synthesis seemed definitely to be right on the brink of consciousness.

The actual thing they wished to discover was not, after all, immodest. They tended to picture it as an extremely short equation – similar to $E=mc^2$ only much more comprehensive –which would relate everything in the universe to everything else for the purpose of making human life clearer, more meaningful, and happier. Freia sometimes imagined this equation stitched in petit-point on a square of unbleached linen, framed, and hanging over a hearth to provide the soul-stabilizing effect no longer afforded by that worn-out reminder: GOD BLESS OUR HOME. Stanley M felt that tattooed on the forearm it

would give as much self-confidence as a naked girlie in two colors.

Fired with enthusiasm by their project, and in order to learn as much as possible about the structure of the universe, Freia began her first semester in college with three units devoted to elementary chemistry. In this class she learned that the universe had not only a molecular structure which laid it open to fragmentation and thence to chaos, but underlying that an atomic structure which, while tightly held together by magnetic attractions, could nevertheless be pried apart with the help of modern atom smashers.

Thus it was that in her very first semester at college Freia was moved to sign petitions and join picket lines in an effort to ban that weapon of destructive energy, the atomic bomb. These extra-curricular activities took up a great deal of her time with the result that she received a mark of Incomplete in her chemistry course. Rather than allow this Incomplete to hang over her head, she instructed her professor to fail her outright, and then threw herself wholeheartedly into her major, Psychology. For in those days Freia believed completely in Psychology and suspected that the Chaos of the universe, as well as the Synthesis itself, might reside, at least in microcosm, in the brain.

At the very same time Stanley M was discovering, to his horror, that he was neither specialized enough to proceed in a special way nor well rounded enough to overwhelm the problem from all sides. He had even entered college without having selected a major. Later on, of course, he was to enter the field of Business Administration, but in the days of the Great Synthesis he did not yet suspect the excesses of irony of which he was capable.

Moved by a desire to help mankind in a way that mattered, Freia and Stanley M, neither of whom could get up enough courage to cut themselves and exchange blood, each burnt a scrap of linear note paper with Freia's cigarette and gave these mementos to each other to hold forever in the plastic windows of their wallets. If Freia was at all comforted by the thought that her friend had no definite plans on how to proceed on his quest, this feeling was offset by the knowledge that much is achieved in life through blind accident; that while Stanley M was stumbling independently about in the woods he might happen to trip over the answer they were both seeking.

Stanley M laughed glumly at Freia's question and gave no reply, sensing that his young friend was in a state of Truth at this moment, which meant that everyone else, particularly he himself, was in a state of Error, and that whatever reply he might make would be received with polite disregard.

In fact he was quite right, for Freia had asked her question only to preface her remarks, knowing that whether he had thought about the Great Synthesis or not, he had obviously not come any closer to finding it, whereas she felt she had a certain amount of progress to report.

—You know, Stanley, continued Freia —when one is driving at night and is blinded by strong headlights from an oncoming car, the best way to proceed is not by looking straight ahead into the glare, but slightly off to one side. It is the same with love. You

take for instance Baldur's mama. Why do we love her so much? Because she doesn't demand our love – she doesn't try to hold us, blinded, by the glaring beam of her affection. My father, on the other hand, is just the opposite. He ...

Freia broke off, for Stanley M had made a slight gesture with his hand indicating she might skip the part about her father as he was already acquainted with her opinion of that worthy gentleman. Freia nodded a gracious assent and skipped the part about her father, which took her in one jump to the edge of the Great Synthesis itself.

—Stanley, Freia said with a wistful smile —you probably remember our discussions of the Great Synthesis as the naïve babblings of children. How sad. What a great price one pays to grow up. No matter, she added kindly —whether one actually attains maturity or not. Luckily, I myself never dismissed those grand awakenings of my youth, although I decided not to devote my entire life to them. I decided instead to allow them to run parallel to my consciousness, prepared at any moment to receive an insight. And then one day, obliquely, I was rewarded with a discovery – a flash of insight – a revelation. It came to me one night soon after Baldur and I were married. The next morning I examined it and found it still valid, though somewhat abbreviated. That is, the poetry of drowsiness had gone out of it, leaving only the stripped, hard philosophic core. It went like this.

Freia paused a moment to relight her cigarette, which had gone out, feeling Stanley M waiting breathlessly for her to continue. —It went like this, she repeated when the cigarette was once again burning brightly. —I realized that night that what made Baldur and me very happy was when he came home in the evening and found the house straightened up and cleaned. You don't know the pride and self-satisfaction a woman feels when she has done her work properly and well. I realized then that self-satisfaction is necessary to happiness and the way to achieve self-satisfaction is by neatness in one's life. Even Herr von S was saying this the other night, except that he used the word Order instead of neatness. He said it was the most important thing a child could learn. I was not, of course, lucky enough to learn neatness or orderliness as a child. I'm one of those persons who must constantly strive to achieve it. But Herr von S regards Order as the end, whereas I find it is only a gateway to something even higher. To be really happy, I discovered, one must live Synthesis, just as I, for instance, am living it.

—How are you living it? volunteered Stanley M who thus far was a little disappointed by Freia's rather domestic recitation of discoveries.

—Why, our marriage itself is a perfect example of Synthesis. Look at Baldur. Look at me. Our marriage was a joining together of great opposites through love. Love made us one, inseparably. And our love itself was created out of thousands of tiny and great things of every sort, all of which happened to click together in the same way that bits and pieces of matter, light and energy, plus some unknown, hidden spark, created the very first little protein molecules of life on this planet –molecules from which we are all descended. The creation of life and love are two of the greatest syntheses known to man.

It is no secret that they are accidental, spontaneous occurrences, and at the same time perfect examples of order and syntheses.

—I guess you really do love Baldur, he sighed.

—As much as Life, replied Freia easily and simply, meaning, of course, life in its highest, protein-molecule sense and not a particular life belonging, say, to Stanley M.

The young man realized this and smiled. He suddenly had an urge to hug Freia, or perhaps make the sign of the Cross over her.

The sudden warmth of her friend's smile sent a peculiar but not unpleasant warmth through Freia's body. She was about to sit down in the armchair next to him when there was a stomping of boots on the front porch. A tall figure in a black ski suit passed the window. Suddenly a thought seemed to flash into Freia's mind. With a quick glance at Stanley M's almost aristocratic profile she turned, waved goodbye and had already disappeared by the time Herr von S had brushed the last particles of snow from his boots and had entered the house.

¶ As Baldur and Freia got ready for supper, the silence which had marked their lunch together was still upon them. For Baldur, trying to help his wife locate a pair of earrings she had misplaced, had happened to open the plastic bag in which she kept her cosmetics and had found it full of loose strands of long black hair mixed in with a great deal of face powder which had escaped out of Freia's compact little by little over what appeared to have been a long period of time.

Freia, who quickly explained that she had not had time to clean out the bag, decided now was the time to do it. All it really required was untangling the jars, tubes, nets and hairpins which had become involved with the hairbrush, and dusting each of them off with a piece of facial tissue. The earrings, which Baldur had bought for her during one of his solitary love-rambles through the streets of Munich, were not, however, to be found. Freia, who was quite positive she had brought them, nevertheless told Baldur she must have put them in the luggage they had packed for the voyage, so that he would not worry that they were lost.

While Freia was going systematically through her cosmetic kit, Baldur, whose mood had improved after his high-protein lunch and who had enjoyed his hike back up the mountain, pausing now and then to look about at the mountain peaks, had accidentally stepped into a pile of cow droppings and was now cleaning his boots with a length of sturdy Austrian toilet paper and a hairpin borrowed from Freia.

As they labored against these encroachments of filth, it occurred to Freia that their married life was nothing at all like the breezy, sweet-scented marriages depicted in soap and washing machine commercials. When she looked back over their years together, it seemed to her that they had consisted of groups or chains of filthy messes, one following the other with almost no relief. Even the long hitch-hiking trips they had made together to escape the boggy rut of daily life had been invariably marred by incredible bouts of

mud, dust, diarrhea and vomiting. While she had known that marriage would involve adjustments, she had always thought of these as existing on a somewhat higher level than having to cope with her husband's little gas surprises in the night.

Of course, Freia took these things in stride, regarding them as some of the normal, rigorous aspects of life in postwar Europe. She could even feel proud looking back upon her adjustments during their first year together. They had lived in one tiny room, thankful then to have running water, although running water in a single room makes it necessary to have an audience, as disinterested as it may try to appear, looking on during the little formalities of personal hygiene. For as gracefully as one may balance on one's toes in order to elevate one's posterior into position over the wash basin, it is never, she knew, an aesthetic miracle comparable to the New York City Ballet.

After cleaning his boots and sponge-bathing over the sink, Baldur, naked, found himself seized with the urge to take advantage of his prerogatives as a husband, even though his wife was already dressed for supper and just putting the last touches on her makeup. Freia, who knew that even the most psychologically aware and considerate man will revert into a raging beast upon being told his woman is not in the mood, submitted without a murmur. Indeed, she was able to bring forth signs of great desire and passion, even of coy delight, until it became obvious to both that Baldur had been mistaken or premature in the interpretation of his needs and that nothing was going to come of their most diligent efforts. Freia then became both understanding and gentle, showing great optimism about what they would surely accomplish together after supper. At the clang of the dinner bell they parted with the same feelings of reluctance and relief as two sparrers in the ring who, at the bell, have the sensation of being rudely interrupted at a crucial moment, but who nevertheless welcome the chance to get away from each other.

As Freia walked down the hall on her husband's arm she felt the satisfaction of having behaved in every way the perfect wife, while Baldur, although he could not put his finger on the reason for it, felt that in spite of his having been the aggressor, somehow Freia had managed to win on points.

Stanley M watched Freia enter, flushed and shining, and suspected that his friend was savoring the special pleasure of coming in contact with outsiders directly after having made love. This, he knew, was a particularly female delight, similar to that which some persons take in hinting that they are in on a secret of utmost importance although hot needles applied under their fingernails would not force them to divulge it. The years had apparently not altered her basic needs, Stanley M decided, for he could clearly remember how, after a night together, she would spirit him off to a hearty breakfast of pancakes and eggs in some Sunset Strip eatery where he would find himself surrounded by other flushed and shining couples who also ate their breakfasts with unusual appetite. As the Volkens took their places at the table the young man greeted them with a smile so bland and uncensorious that Freia was unable to look in his direction for several minutes without a feeling of annoyance.

During the soup course Stanley M, who kept abreast of snow conditions by eavesdropping on conversations between British tourists, listened to Herr von S's slope-by-slope analysis with nods of agreement. —But rather icy at the bottom of Kriegerkopf, wouldn't you say? he contributed.

—Yes, nodded the Prussian coldly.

—What color lenses did you wear?

—Yellow, of course, replied von S —but today it made no difference because the light was too flat to produce a shadow. Downhill and uphill could be determined only through the legs. Still, I found it not very difficult.

Herr von S could tell from the lack of reaction to this remark that no one else at the table was aware that only the very best skiers could ski without difficulty through a white, shadowless world. He added casually that he had skied down the mountain at noon with Dieter Schnell. Strangely enough, no one reacted openly or eagerly to this information either. Freia even managed to look a little bored. The most she allowed herself to say in order to encourage the Prussian to continue talking about the Rennläufer was —Oh? Is that a fact?

—Of course, he is a far better skier than I, added von S modestly. —Once he had to pause a few seconds until I caught up.

Freia shook some salt into her soup. —Have you ever seen him jump?

—Jump?

—*Springen*, explained Freia —from the large *Sprungsschanze*.

—No, replied von S almost sharply. —I find him unwilling even to discuss it. But you must understand that he is in training and for that he may be reluctant. You know perhaps that it was a jumping accident which kept him out of the last winter Olympics.

—And now he's afraid? asked Stanley M.

—Dieter Schnell does not know the word "fear," replied the Prussian stiffly. —He was the first to test the jump after it was built. It is a highly dangerous deed to make such a test, for a structure like that has a very critical relationship to the hill, and often there are errors in the design. However, while the others were arguing about who should be the first, the Schnell boy simply went ahead and made the jump. He was hurt because an error had been made in the design, not because he was incapable of jumping correctly.

—Do you think this fall gave him a psychological block against jumping? asked Freia with great interest.

—That, *gnädige Frau*, is hardly a better explanation than to say he is afraid. I'm sure that the lad has no psychological blocks. I'm quite certain in fact that as soon as the *Weltmeisterschaft* races are over he will risk to jump again.

—The world championship races? cried Freia. —*When?*

—They are to be held next weekend. I do not think that even the Russians, whether they send a team or not, can prevent an official decision being made.

—And you think our own Dieter Schnell will win the championship of the world?

asked Freia excitedly.

—We shall know very soon, replied the German with a confident smile.

—It is like a story in a book, said Baldur.

—*Wie im Märchen*, elucidated Freia.

—But it's only natural, pointed out Stanley M —that someone we believe to be a fictional character would lead a storybook life.

There was a brief moment of silence at the table during which von S was felt to shudder. Then, slowly, like a foot testing boggy ground, came Freia's voice saying — What do you mean, Stanley M? Are you saying that we consider Dieter Schnell to be something less than real?

—Nothing more than a symbol, he laughed grimly.

Freia glared at him. —I, for one, am absolutely sure that Dieter Schnell is perfectly real.

—No, no.

—I think you must demonstrate that, said von S, showing that he was either very brave or very provoked, since he so detested metaphors.

—Yes, said Freia. —Prove it.

Stanley M, who as a small child could point quite confidently to the exact spot above the trees where the air ended and the Great Weightlessness began, felt that proving things was not exactly what he had been cut out to do in life. Still, he agreed to try. —I suppose we'll have to define him first, he said, trying to recall the procedure of proving things. —How would you define him?

—Blue eyes, said Freia. —Sandy hair.

—Go on.

—Young, athletic, daring, fast on skis, she continued, trying to keep any emotion out of her voice. —And you mustn't forget, she added —that Dieter Schnell may have an unresolved mental block about jumping; plus he refuses to wear a parka even though he sometimes shivers with cold. As she spoke Freia's face, in spite of her efforts to control it, had turned a bright pink, and so she was relieved when her husband interrupted.

—I think, Mr. M. that you have moved away from the point. You should have begun, perhaps, not by defining the Rennläufer, but by defining what you mean by "fictional character."

—You're right, agreed Stanley M. —I have digressed. But now that you mention it I don't think I can make up a reasonable definition. I've always taken them rather for granted.

—Stanley M, cried Freia, filled with embarrassment at her friend's behavior. —How can you presume to discuss something when you don't even have a faint idea what you're talking about? And then she added with infinite patience —We could say, perhaps, that a fictional character is made up of traits supplied from the imagination of a second person.

—By that you're saying that everyone is fictional, replied Stanley M. —I wouldn't go that far unless I were trying to obliterate the existence of reality altogether.

—This is the stupidest discussion I've ever heard, said Freia, wishing she had not contributed so much as a word to it.

—I suggest we change the subject, agreed Baldur.

Everyone seconded Baldur's suggestion. There was a long conversational lull. Stanley M, who felt a little responsible for the silence, was about to propose they discuss the influence of toilet training on the German character, having reached a decision at one time that, judging by their facial expressions, a surprising percentage of North Germans suffered from anal retention, when Freia, who had begun to look around at the wall decorations for distraction, commented —Shepherd Schnell's faith in God must be very strong since he continues to worship Him even after having lost four sons in the war.

Although Freia was a complete atheist, since falling in love with Baldur who was not a reliable non-believer she had been trying to give faith in God its just due. After a great deal of thought she had come to regard religion not as an opiate or crutch, but as a valid entity containing its own esoteric beauties. Realizing that it served both as an inspiration and a vital necessity in the lives of millions of the world's peoples, she was finally able to place religion in the same exotic but respectable category as Chinese music and whale blubber. And therefore Freia's comment seemed to her to imply no criticism whatsoever of Shepherd Schnell. It demonstrated rather that she could appreciate and even relate to the strength and purity of his aberration. Expecting everyone to nod agreement at her words, the hollow silence which followed gave Freia the embarrassing sensation of having blundered, such as one might feel upon noticing one has just sat down in an elderly cripple's favorite chair.

Stanley M, who was the only other complete atheist present, and who also tended to regard persons afflicted with religion with the respect due semi-invalids, divined Freia's predicament and hurried to her rescue. He pointed out that, just as in finance, when one has invested all one has in a belief it's no time to back off and let the belief collapse for want of capital. Then, trying to shift the conversation away from such a delicate subject, he crashed backwards into one even more fragile by adding with a nod toward some of the other wall decorations —It's the same with a political belief. Four sons is about as big an investment as you can make without throwing your own life into the bargain.

—I'm sure you're wrong there, said Freia quickly, wishing her friend had not rushed to her defense with a metaphor, particularly such a horrible Jewish one. —I'm sure Shepherd Schnell doesn't even realize he still has those old war relics hanging on his wall.

Stanley M laughed. Freia glanced toward the others, hoping one of these genuine Germans would support her by explaining that the concept of the *Vaterland* had softened during the past decade and a half to nothing more than a harmless sentimentalism. But both Baldur and von S continued eating their dinners with their eyes fastened on their plates. She resented their silence. This was, she knew, no ordinary silence, but the desir-

able German trait of aloofness, a self-discipline which she had not yet been able to master, owing to her conflicting and even more compelling desire to spread enlightenment.

—It seems to me, she continued, in a clever effort to draw them into the conversation—that even if Shepherd Schnell still entertains the ugly, old-fashioned notions so typical of his generation, it's quite certain his son doesn't. The young persons of today, like Baldur and Dieter Schnell, will never repeat the mistakes of their parents.

—I would say, said von S—that you are in error when you put the Schnell boy in the same generation as your husband. It is true that they are both sons of men who served, but Herr Volken has seen and heard the bombs falling, whereas for Dieter Schnell the conflict has the quality of a myth. Some day this boy will be a brave soldier, for he did not have to live through a war helplessly, without a weapon in his hands.

—But let's hope that Dieter will never have to be a soldier, *nicht?* said Freia fervently. —We all know that war is abhorrent. It solves nothing.

—Of course, agreed von S—it's quite meaningless if you regard it as a solution, as a means to an end. But if you look upon war as an end in itself it becomes quite a different matter. I'm not, of course, talking about nuclear destruction. There is no moment of truth comprehensible to automatic weapons systems. Furthermore, tests have already demonstrated that nuclear fission puts nature out of order, laying permanent waste to the earth, returning nothing to the soil.

—Then you, a German, are against nuclear weapons, said Freia with relief and pride in her voice, glancing at Stanley M.

—Certainly. As I said, that is not war.

—Sir, what *is* war? asked Stanley M, not wishing to let Freia off the book that easily.

—I think, replied von S—that to best understand the meaning of war it is necessary to go back into the language where you will discover that your American word war is derived, like the French word *guerre*, from the Old German word *werra*, meaning confusion. Obviously this has nothing to do with the way the German people regard warfare, and you will find that the modern High German word for war, *Krieg*, finds its root in the Old German word *kriegen*, which means in your language to achieve or obtain. I believe, he continued, glancing at Freia who had been nodding knowingly as he spoke, as if she herself were directly responsible for these meaningful evolutions of the German language—that Frau Volken can tell you that the word *kriegen* still exists in dialect throughout much of Germany.

—Dialect for *bekommen*, explained Freia. —To get or obtain. *Ich habe einen Brief gekriegt*. She smiled sweetly.

—Ah, said Stanley M.

—In other words, continued von S—while in your language the concept of war is associated with the idea of confusion and chaos, in German it is related to the idea of achievement. In point of fact, it is its own achievement, and that is why to die in battle, honorably of course, is the perfect consummation.

—But no! cried Freia at this. —*Love* is the perfect consummation.

—But surely you know, *gnädige Frau*, that the final proof of love is the willing sacrifice of life in its name.

—Of course I know that, yet ...

—And therefore true love is a contract ratified by blood. You must remember, after all, that it's not possible to love without hating, and hate is often a prime factor in the spilling of blood.

—I think I understand what you mean, said Baldur —but perhaps this is because I didn't learn about war from the motion pictures and radio like my wife and Herr M.

—Baldur, said Freia gently —you know, dear, that although I never did experience the horror of having my home destroyed and my father killed, I was nevertheless fully aware of what was going on across the sea. A sensitive, imaginative person doesn't have to have a bomb drop on his head to have a reasonable idea of what it must be like. Besides, I understand perfectly what Herr von S means. Whether I agree with him completely is another matter. I would have to think his words over very carefully.

—I myself agree with them, said Baldur firmly. —Hate is quite clearly part of love. Half of it perhaps. It's impossible to love someone without hating her at the same time.

—But, my dear man, laughed von S delightedly —you must not confuse my meaning with those neurotic dualities which are so popular today. When I say that hate is a part of love, I don't mean that one must hate the same object which one loves. I mean that one must hate that which *interferes* with one's love. For instance, if a man truly loves his blood, soil, and culture, he must hate and rid his country of . . . But here, after breaking off and glancing absently across the table at Stanley M, von S concluded simply —of imperfections.

—Do you agree with that also, Baldur dear? Freia asked. But Baldur had already turned his undivided attention toward his dessert.

Stanley M, noticing that still another friendly conversation was degenerating into a dull domestic squabble, quickly drew Herr von S into a discussion of *Vorfahrt*, that curious traffic law which incites Germans arriving from the right to go crashing into Germans approaching unsuspectingly from the left. Stanley M loved to discuss *Vorfahrt* in the same way that a child loves to hear the same fairy tale recited over and over in exactly the same way. The words “But the law permits it; it is the law, after all,” were as emotionally reassuring to him as “And they lived happily ever after.”

Freia, who was by now sophisticated enough to prefer the more realistic German ending “And if they haven't died in the meantime, they're still alive today,” listened to the discussion in a state of studied aloofness. She had already accepted the fact that, given a car, Baldur might very well insist in all situations upon his lawful right of way. Her acceptance of the Law as a valid motivational force in human behavior was further proof, she felt, of her maturing Germanic outlook.

But while Freia was readily and easily Germanized, this did not mean that she

wished to disassociate herself entirely from her original identity. Indeed, she looked upon her Semitism not as a skeleton in a closet, but as a beautifully made dress, too fine to wear to market, but too out of fashion to parade before persons who mattered. Nevertheless, she felt she was always ready to don it in a flash if and when the occasion demanded exactly that sort of thing, which, so far, it had not.

The possibility that in growing into her new German identity she might become too large for her old Jewish one was a danger Freia was able to face with stoicism; no snake had ever shed its skin with more philosophical resolve than had Freia shed her maiden name. Her new name gave her a feeling of self-confidence, especially when she noticed how frontier officials and *Anmelde* clerks no longer squinted up at her curiously. These days she was able to hand over her passport with the same feeling of quiet satisfaction that one experiences in swatting a bothersome mosquito, even while aware that the red smudge left on the wall is a tiny drop of one's own blood.

Although Freia had been in Germany so long that she could wish anyone a good *Fahrt* without wanting to double up with laughter, there were still some questions about that country which she had not completely resolved. Or, rather, she had mastered the questions, but was still wrestling conscientiously with the answers, attempting to squeeze the contradictions out of them and force them to agree with one another. For instance, the answer that the vast majority of Germans had known nothing whatsoever, and had suspected even less, about the Jewish slaughter, did not agree in every particular with the answer that the vast majority of Germans had been too terrified of the Gestapo to have done anything meaningful about the greasy smoke arising from the Jewish detention areas.

Not wishing to appear overly righteous, Freia was willing to compromise on her own preconceptions. She could readily agree that European Jewry had acted with execrable taste in Viennese and Leopoldstrasse cafes before the pogroms began, flashing giant gems in those stark years when the young Schicklgruber was prowling the gutters to glean the bits and pieces of his philosophy. She was even eager to acknowledge that the *Führer*, his racist qualities aside, had initially done a lot of positive good for the declining German economy and system of roads.

But in spite of her willingness to go more than halfway, to turn the other cheek and to suspend both her conclusions and her disbelief, she had not yet been rewarded with a flash of insight explaining how, in a highly civilized country like Germany, things had gotten so utterly out of hand. Finally, rather than poison her married life with doubts and misgivings, she had decided that it would be best to put the entire matter aside and devote herself to becoming a happy, healthy *Hausfrau*, confident that should the day of understanding ever dawn it would probably be seen that no one, or everyone, was to blame, just as in the case of original sin which, fortunately, she didn't believe in at all.

By the end of the dessert Stanley M and Herr von S had found themselves at that comfortable point of utter stalemate toward which most conversations direct themselves.

For Stanley M suspected that it would not be very satisfying, and might even be rather terrifying, to go through life convincing persons that they were wrong. Old, stubborn dogmas, he felt, gave a certain sturdiness to the profusion of new ideas in the same way that stems kept flowers from flying about everywhere in the air. Smiling contentedly, he was about to suggest coffee when the kitchen door opened and a figure wearing a Norwegian pullover entered the dining room.

The Rennläufer didn't pause to say good evening, but strode quickly across the room. Though his clothes radiated the chill of the night outside, the white powder on his head and shoulders rapidly turned into clear beads of water in the warm air. Taking an electric lantern off the wall, he clicked it on and off once, then, with a nod and a *Verzeihung*, walked quickly out the door opposite that which he had entered and closed it softly behind him.

—Something must be wrong! exclaimed Freia when he had gone.

—His expression was earnest, agreed Baldur.

Concerned and curious, they called Frau Schnell out of the kitchen to ask her what was the matter. —*Ach, ja*, said the good woman, and then explained that a child had been reported missing and a search party had formed to look for it.

—A missing child! cried Freia, leaping to her feet. —We must help them. Come, come.

Rallied by the urgency in Freia's voice, the others rose rather reluctantly from the table and crowded without touching one another into the living room where they stood glancing about as if they expected to discover the child crouching under one of the chairs. And indeed, with the night pressing as thick and dark as blood against the window panes, it seemed that the whole world was contained within these walls and that surely the lost child must be there also.

—He's out there, said Freia, pointing at one of the walls.

—But it's snowing, commented Stanley M.

—All the more reason to find him quickly. Ah, the poor baby.

Everyone went to get their parkas and change their shoes. Freia reappeared wearing a black scarf which made her look very much like an Italian peasant about to enter a cathedral and added the proper spirit of humility to the adventure.

As they were pulling on their gloves and mittens, Frau Schnell, greatly impressed by the selfless energy of these tourists, wiped her hands on her apron and nodded approval. —He has been missing nearly two days, she told them.

—Two days? Everyone was shocked.

—His father only reported his disappearance this evening, Frau Schnell added. And then, when her guests did not seem able to absorb this, explained —*Ach*, these people are animals, you know? *Tiere*. They live not far from here, but we do not talk with them. Only my son talks to them sometimes.

—But two days, moaned Freia. —It might already be too late. He could have frozen

to death by this time.

—*Gel?* shrugged Frau Schnell.

As disturbing as they were, the woman's words had nevertheless taken some of the urgency and fire out of the expedition. What made them hesitate was not so much the idea that the child might already be dead, as that no one really likes to rush selflessly to find something which the owners themselves appear not to have valued greatly.

—There have been times, said Baldur, seating himself on the arm of a chair —when they have dug beings out of the snow after a week and found them still living. Of course, he added honestly —the fingers and toes and most of the skin are never in the best condition of health after such an experience.

—Such wonders, said Herr von S —can occur only in the late spring season when it's not too cold. If the child were buried in an avalanche two days ago it's extremely doubtful he would survive until now.

—But perhaps it wasn't an avalanche, objected Freia who had, from the very first, formed a mental image of the child asleep somewhere in the hollow trunk of a tree. Beginning to feel a little warm in her quilted parka, and wanting to get out into the cool air, she added impatiently —and why are we standing around when we should be out there helping to find him?

The others followed her through the front door to the porch where they found the night air smelled deliciously fresh and damp. Snowflakes, illuminated by the light from the windows behind them, fell with soft, smothering insistence. The beauty of this scene seemed to add an inexpressible poignancy to the moment. Freia darted down the wooden steps into the darkness. Not knowing in which direction to go, she bent forward and, rotating from the hips, began calling in a high, sweet voice —*Hallo? Hallo? Wo bist du, Kind?*

—There can't be any tracks left by now, remarked Stanley M, following the swift, steadily-descending snowflakes with his eyes until he could no longer raise them and began to feel dizzy.

—His spoor is certainly covered, agreed Baldur.

—But why are you all just standing there? came Freia's voice from behind the bright curtain of snowflakes. —Come help me.

The three men went down the steps and while Stanley M was noticing how his black *après-ski* boots sank into the white powder, Baldur discovered a recent spoor leading away from the house which, he pointed out, had undoubtedly been left by the *Rennläufer*. There was just enough light to allow them to follow it.

—We should leave some sort of trail in case we get lost ourselves, remarked Freia, casting a glance over her shoulder at the house which was already no more than a faint smear of light behind them.

—Breadcrumbs, suggested Stanley M abstractedly, for actually he was busy considering how one might cut blaze marks into some of the trees by means of the front inci-

sors.

Proud to see how her husband had taken the lead, Freia hurried to overtake him. Her sharp eyes were the first to detect a faint gleam of light up ahead. Indeed, the light was closer than they had thought, for only a few seconds later Baldur almost bumped into the Rennläufer who was standing with his back toward them, holding the lantern high above his head. The four then stopped and peered forward. The strong beam from the lantern was directed at a slope of snow which was fairly steep but which did not seem very high. Halfway up the slope five or six enormous black shapes were moving slowly in place. Baldur was the first to suspect that their unusual size had something to do with their being much nearer than it seemed.

—The falling snow is destroying the perspective, he pointed out.

—What are they doing? asked Freia.

—They are digging, replied the young man with the lantern.

—But why here?

—There's been a small avalanche and it's possible the child is under it.

Freia, who could not quite make out the circumference of the avalanche, took a step forward and felt the Rennläufer's hand on her arm, restraining her. —But it's such a tiny slope, she objected. —That much snow could only bury an infant.

—He's thirteen years old, replied the skier.

—Oh, no, said Freia, greatly moved. —Thirteen isn't a child; he's already a person. How horrible, she thought, to be thirteen years old and buried in an avalanche. So distressing was this image that she put it immediately out of her mind, saying firmly —But there must be hundreds of persons passing by here every day. They'd have noticed something. No, she concluded —it's not possible. And she began glancing about as if she hoped the child would suddenly step out of the trees and prove her point.

—To die in an avalanche is very much like drowning, said von S behind her. —You know, they breathe the water in through their noses, while at the same time the terrific weight of the snow holds them motionless. There is a great deal we know today about the effects of water and extreme cold upon the human body, knowledge which we owe in great part to scientific experiments carried out during the years of the *Reich*.

Shivering involuntarily at the German's words, Freia cried to Dieter Schnell —If you really think he's buried there, why don't you help them dig?

—They are six, replied the Rennläufer, shifting the lantern to his other hand. —They are specialists in avalanche rescue. What they are doing might look very simple, but actually it's difficult and very dangerous. Together they'll do all that can be done. Someone must hold the light.

—Well, I'm sure he isn't there, said Freia, half to herself, and was about to turn away and begin calling to the child among the trees, when she noticed a tiny light waving back and forth upon the slope.

—They've found him, said the Rennläufer simply.

The figures on the hill moved together, blending into one large black spot, then separated after a moment to begin the slow, careful descent. One of the men was carrying a small sled and on the shoulder of another lightly rested something that looked to Stanley M like a pair of skis. —But where’s the kid? he asked in surprise, and then, as the only possible answer exploded in his brain, he fell into a stunned silence.

Carrying their grim burdens the six figures moved in single file down the slope in the direction of the watching group. When they had reached the bottom the Rennläufer switched off the lantern.

—Give them light! cried Freia, straining to see.

—Now they do not need it, replied the boy. Turning, he silently led the way back to the house.

¶ Upon their return they found a fire blazing in the hearth, a cozy touch which only accentuated the sudden strangeness of the room they had so hastily abandoned. Their physical presence seemed to people the void without negating it. Frau Schnell had coffee ready on the stove and served each a steaming cup, revealing by this simple act the irony of a universe in which violent death and a hot cup of coffee could occur side by side. There was a great deal of sighing and rustling of sugar wrappers.

—The poor child was not quite right in the head, Frau Schnell assured them as she passed out clean ashtrays. —No more than the father and mother. The whole family is very common, *gel?* Two days, *gel?*

—Baldur, said Freia suddenly —you don’t suppose it was that ragged child we saw yesterday morning?

—*Ja*, nodded the shepherdess when Freia had described the child to her. —That sounds like the one. Summer and winter he was dressed the same. They were Dieter’s clothes, but my son already grew out of them when he was six. Without those clothes the child would be running naked all these years, *gel?*

While Frau Schnell was speaking, Stanley M, sitting in a rigid slouch which described more eloquently than words his state of utter shock, unwrapped a sugar cube and absentmindedly ate it whole. —He was like a pair of skis, said the young man in a terrible, tense voice, staring at von S who happened to be sitting opposite him.

—Who was? asked the Prussian, startled and greatly annoyed. —About what are you speaking, *um Gottes Willen?*

—I think I know what Stanley M means, Freia assured von S hastily, knowing that if she were to give the simile a moment’s thought its meaning would be perfectly clear. At that moment, however, her own thoughts were focused on quite a different matter; she was busy analyzing her own emotional reaction to the discovery that she had actually known the dead child. Indeed, her sensation of *engagement* was so painfully sharp that she felt exactly as if she were sitting not in a cushiony armchair, but right on the razor’s edge between Life and Death. For almost a full minute she forced herself to savor this

bitter-sweet sensation, to draw from it all the creative nutriment that it offered. She realized that what she had experienced this night was as nourishing to the growth of her awareness and understanding of life as the time she had stood with Baldur on the edge of the Red Sea and had fainted of sunstroke.

Fortunately Freia was able to draw the full significance out of an experience very quickly, for no sooner had she begun when her restless, inquiring mind presented her with a paralyzing new thought. She realized that the child must have died very shortly after she and Baldur had seen it, that they could easily have been the last persons ever to see it alive, and that if they had just tried a little harder to understand it, plus the time factor – those few seconds gained or lost which allow or prevent a tragedy . . . But just as she was about to confess her and Baldur's guilt to the others, Freia recalled that actually Stanley M had spoken to the child after they had. This discovery so dampened her emotion that she changed her mind and instead said softly —Perhaps, after all, it's better this way, since the poor creature was surely a moron or imbecile.

—I share your opinion, said von S, stifling a yawn. —Tell me, *gnädige Frau*, as an American are you a believer in euthanasia?

Freia, who had been a strong supporter of mercy killings during debates in the university cafeteria years ago, nevertheless felt moved to answer the Prussian warily. —In very special cases, she replied, and looked at her husband.

Baldur shook his head back and forth violently. —Never! he cried. —Under no circumstances.

—But darling, Freia said quickly —emotionally, of course, it's a terrible thing, an impossible thing to accept. But really, don't you agree that in certain circumstances it's impossible to produce a convincing argument against it? You saw the child. You saw how cold and miserable he was and how unable he was to help himself. Don't you think that he's better off dead? Wouldn't you prefer death to such a miserable existence? Darling?

Freia couldn't help being a little upset by Baldur's attitude. She knew perfectly well, having often discussed it with him, that their opinions on euthanasia were identical. Still, she was too good a wife to dream of pointing this out to him in so many words, and contented herself with the thought that his sudden inconsistency was attributable to his emotion over the death of the child.

—I agree completely with your wife, said von S when Baldur remained stubbornly silent. —For it is clear that there exist many cases when death is a blessing not only for the individual but for the community as a whole. Imbecility and certain hereditary diseases are not only burdens on society, but when not dealt with properly and realistically can show harmful effects during future generations. Of course, he added with a slight smile at Freia —I myself didn't see this child, but I am perfectly willing to accept your decision that he's better off dead.

These highly rational opinions were, quite naturally, being expressed in English

solely for Stanley M's benefit. Nor would any one of the guests have dreamed of suggesting, even to himself, that they were not speaking in German so that the young man sitting behind them on the edge of the tile stove, his elbows on his knees and his forehead resting on white knuckles, would be unable to understand. And yet, while they didn't look at him or appeal directly to him, each suspected in his heart that the whole issue of the child's death really depended upon what the Rennläufer might think about it. This feeling was so strong in fact that when they noticed that Dieter Schnell had risen to his feet and was about to leave the room, they all turned around and Freia called out sharply —Dieter!

The boy paused in the doorway. He must have understood what they wanted of him, for his eyes, which seemed to be looking right through them and on through the wall and out into the invisible distances of the night, attempted, and failed, to focus on them. So he laughed, hanging his head to hide his embarrassment, and when he raised it again the others in the room felt the boy's gaze pour like molten gold through the sockets of their eyes.

—I was making him a pair of skis, said the Rennläufer. Then he excused himself, saying that he had to get up early the next morning, and left the room.

When the Rennläufer had gone out the only sound to be heard in the room was the snapping of the fire. After a few minutes Stanley M too announced his decision to retire early and went out. Frau Schnell, not liking to see her guests plunged in gloom during their holidays, sat down among them and cheerfully began describing far worse disasters which had occurred in the Alps. Some dated back to her grandmother's day, and some came forth dressed in the patchwork symbolism of folk myth. Indeed, so well could Frau Schnell describe a catastrophe, that soon Baldur and Herr von S were encouraged to recount a few unpleasant incidents they had seen recently in weekly pictorial magazines. Even Freia was able to contribute to the discussion by telling of two or three cases where skin divers had been devoured by sharks off the California coast.

After a while the small group was joined by Shepherd Schnell who was only just returning from work. A few minutes later Helga, who had finished cleaning up the kitchen, and who was not insensitive to the democratic spirit engendered by the tragedy, quietly took a seat at the back of the room where Dieter Schnell had been sitting.

Shepherd Schnell, it turned out, could tell about a disaster even better than his wife, and as each story told reminded everyone else of a better one, it soon reached the point where, in order for everyone to have a chance to express himself, they had to stop taking turns and instead formed little groups so that two or more tragedies could be related simultaneously. Thus, in a very short time this formerly gloomy gathering had undergone a true metamorphosis and had created for itself an animated, noisy atmosphere, very much as if nothing resembling a real death had occurred within the last twenty or thirty years.

Schnee Bericht: 18 cm fresh powder on
93 cm base. Clear. Temp. -12°C.
Skiing conditions excellent.
Extreme avalanche danger.

¶ Freia walked down the mountain the next morning carrying the memory of the child's death like a tiny lead nail in her heart. So thoroughly had she experienced the tragedy, and so emotionally drained did she feel, that when she read the snow report on a village bulletin board she was surprised to learn that the danger of avalanche continued. It had seemed to her that the avalanche warnings of the past few days had been leading up to that one particular disaster and had automatically expected all danger to cease now that it had taken place.

How influenced my view of the universe still is by my years in Hollywood, she thought. Even today I tend to forget that the chain of real events isn't forged in a story conference. Nature may carefully preserve her unities, but she doesn't concern herself with plot structure or anticlimax.

Freia sighed, glancing up at the clear blue sky and the pure white snow. Dazzled by the sight, it was only with a conscious effort that she reminded herself that this was not really beautiful; that while the scene before her might serve to enhance the back side of a postcard, or liven up a wall calendar, it could not be regarded as True Beauty, which was to be found only in less obvious places. On hikes with her husband, for instance, she was often amazed how unerringly he would detect true beauties in such things as a cracked wall, an oily swamp, or a gray fungus growing on the root of a dying tree. For, as Baldur often pointed out, just because a thing is ugly does not mean it is not beautiful. Freia had been quick to see the truth in this and, growing ever more sensitive and discriminating herself, would often be the first to exclaim joyfully at the scorched faces and rheumatic fingers of elderly peasants. Indeed, on their last hike she had been thrilled to receive her husband's highest praise by pointing out to him a truly exquisite beetle which she had had the good fortune to shake out of her shoe one morning.

As she walked down the street, Freia, who had refused a third cup of coffee at breakfast that morning just as if Baldur had been present, wondered if she ought to spend the money for a cup now. Pausing to weigh the matter, she discovered herself to be in one of those moods that often follow great emotional upheaval when money, particularly the Austrian schilling, is realistically seen as nothing more than a highly imperfect means, though admittedly the best found so far, to effect the exchange of goods and services in a complex society, having no intrinsic worth but only an arbitrary value determined by a few specialists and validated by the blind consent of the world's peoples.

It's only money after all, decided Freia, whereupon she entered a coffee shop, ordered a *Kännchen* of coffee, and then, so that her hands would not be idle, lit a cigarette.

There were few persons in the coffee shop that morning. Even the inveterate non-skiers were taking advantage of the good weather up on the mountaintop terraces. Freia, who worshipped the sun, nevertheless knew she could best appreciate it from a vantage point of shade. For, ironically, the sun was cruel to her, turning her nose into a little red cherry and leaving her skin a speckly crimson. But even if the sun had been willing to perform its ordinary bronze miracle, Freia would still have kept in the shade, for she preferred to remain pale and interesting even during the summer season.

—I love the sun, she would assure her husband at the beach, her voice muffled by the great pile of newspapers and sweaters under which she had hidden herself—but at the same time I heed the lesson of Icarus.

As Freia sipped her coffee, trying not to think about the dead child, she could not help noticing that she was being stared at by a man sitting a few tables away. Every time she glanced in his direction he would smile broadly and nod. Freia, who always held herself prepared in case a perfect stranger, overcome with curiosity, should rush up to her and demand whether she were Eurasian or Castilian, was not surprised when this man, whom she had guessed to be a German, arose and approached her table. Bowing slightly he excused himself for intruding, but he had to know, he said, whether he was correct in assuming that the young woman was an American.

—An American? she repeated blankly. —If you mean was I born in the United States, yes.

Although Freia felt she had cleverly left some room for doubt, the man did not take advantage of it. —I thought so! he cried. —I always know an American when I see one. He then asked if he might sit down at her table and Freia, feeling like a rare butterfly which some blundering fool has pinned to a sheet of house moths, motioned him to take a seat with a gesture she hoped he would interpret as a dismissal.

—I'm very fond of the American people, the German told her, sitting down and signaling to the waitress with one short fat finger. —I have been many times to the States, he continued, turning his round, rather greasy face back to Freia. —I am a doctor, a specialist in gynecology. You know what is gynecology? I have lectured to many large audiences of doctors in New York, Chicago and Beverly Hills.

Freia was about to mention that she had lived most of her life in Beverly Hills, which was technically true, for that glamorous zone did swing across Robertson Boulevard just far enough to embrace the row of grey stucco duplexes in one of which she had lived with her parents, when the German continued —You are probably surprised that I speak so well the English language. That is because when I travel I like to speak to the people of the country with their own idiom.

—*Ich auch ...*

—I know, I know, you Americans are all alike. You don't like to learn other languages. You expect everyone to understand English, he laughed. —But why not? You see? I agree with you. After all, everybody in the States speaks English too, so why

bother?

—*Ich, aber ...*

—Americans don't know how to travel, but anyway, I confess it, I think they are wonderful, the Americans. I have many friends from the States. Most of them are already colonels and generals. Fine men. They always say what they mean in a few words, not like we Germans. Many people are saying that Americans are not very smart, but those people who are saying it are not smart, *nicht?*

As the German spoke, strange, bright images started to flood through Freia's mind and she found herself thinking of such irrelevancies as New York skyscrapers, the geography of the State of California, and certain historical documents. Realizing suddenly that she was slouching, she straightened her spine and from this new height looked over the shoulder of the German and caught sight of a familiar figure crouched behind a newspaper. Stanley M, deciding to disregard the mute appeal for help in his friend's eyes, disappeared completely except for the tips of his fingers.

—Oh, there my friend is, cried Freia, interrupting the German in the middle of a sentence which might have been about Roosevelt. —I did promise to meet him here.

—Go, go, waved the German, too insulted to raise his eyes from his beer.

—Please, do excuse me. I know it's terribly rude of me.

—I don't mind. Go if you want to go. And he turned his back, crossed his knees, and began staring out the window, humming a little tune.

Freia hurried across the room and slipped into the booth next to Stanley M. —That man gives me a strange feeling, she told him.

—I think he's working for the State Department. Did he start you thinking about the Golden Gate Bridge?

—No. New York skyscrapers.

—"Fourscore and seven years ago"?

—I think it was the Preamble, laughed Freia.

Then they fell silent, as if both sensed that the further sound of their voices might frighten off this moment of togetherness which had wandered up to them like a fawn. Their sudden nearness, soul against soul, was so tenuous indeed that its most immediate danger was not the spoken word, but the disturbing fear that a word would be spoken.

How is it, wondered Freia, that this sensation of oneness has occurred in my life only between me and Stanley M? It's as if I were able to achieve an orgasm only with someone who didn't matter at all, for this feeling closely parallels, on the spiritual level, that physical sensation of total merging so often described in literature. I must admit that in some strange way we are merged, Stanley M and I – two Americans (Americans!) standing hushed and alone in the shadowy depths of a great forest, overwhelmed by that revelation of pure Being which so often precedes the discovery that one has no very definite idea of where he is at. Or perhaps, she reflected, it's even more like that moment when one suddenly rediscovers the path and, looking back into the shadows, realizes too late

the beauty of having been, for a time, lost.

—Stanley M, began Freia, having remained silent a decent interval —I think I can now tell you something that I never told you before. Indeed, the very fact that I can tell you now proves that it's over and done with and has lost its original meaning, in the same way that a stone axe will, after a certain number of millenniums, have more validity as a curiosity than as a tool to cut down trees.

—Go on, he urged.

—The fact is, said Freia —that you've always been, up until recently, my conscience.

—Really? cried Stanley M who knew that when someone is trying to confess, the most helpful attitude to assume is one of complete surprise.

—Yes, affirmed Freia, glancing at him sharply. —In fact, I've never been able to light a cigarette or drink a cup of coffee without the feeling that if I turned my head I'd see your mocking smile.

—But I myself have been smoking and drinking coffee for five years now, remarked Stanley M.

—Yes, but when we were in college together you didn't, and this abstinence on your part seemed to me so pure and noble that I couldn't help feeling guilty whenever I indulged. Of course, now it's completely different. Now I can accept the fact that there's nothing morally insincere about drinking coffee and smoking. It's only, after all, a question of cancer and heart disease.

—Quite right.

—It may be, my friend, that we met at a moment in our lives when I was particularly susceptible – when you were able to walk into my narrow little heart and fill it completely. Until I met Baldur you were the only person that I had ever . . . felt strongly about. Even when I was making up my mind whether or not to marry him I . . . She broke off and after a few seconds cried —Stanley M! Even when we were repeating the marriage vows the thought crossed my mind that if I turned my head I'd see you in the corner laughing.

—Of course, she continued after another short pause —all that's over now. You were my conscience once, I admit, but now it's inside me again. I don't know exactly when it happened, but it came back quietly one night like a dog which has been gone a long, long time and then one morning appears in its usual place as if it had never been away. Do you know, Stanley M, that until that day came I could never completely love my own husband?

—But now you do.

—Yes, said Freia quickly, as if grabbing a pet bird that was about to fly out the window. —Yes, she repeated, snapping the wire door shut on it.

A little laugh escaped Stanley M. He had always been aware of the function he performed in Freia's life – that of a conscience or, more exactly, a handy pocket-size reflecting device, but he had never been able to figure out exactly what she meant to him. He

did not feel for her that high emotion which princes in fairy tales have for princesses, the only sort of love in which he firmly believed. Nor did he feel kindly toward her as one might feel toward a sister or a pet. All he knew was that he was joined to Freia in the same mysterious way that one side of a road is joined to the other side, even though they lead in opposite directions.

Freia, who had stiffened perceptibly at her friend's chuckle, now said —That, Stanley, is one of your main faults: you don't take anything seriously.

—But, babe, I do! he protested with a great laugh.

—Quite the contrary. And perhaps that's one reason why having you for a conscience was so disagreeable.

He sighed. Already, so soon after their moment of closeness, they were beginning to use words like crowbars to pry themselves apart.

—The main trouble with you, continued Freia, brandishing her crowbar just a little recklessly —is that you have no focus. No focus at all. You haven't really the slightest idea who you are or where you're going. You don't even know where you came from, except biologically.

—I came trailing clouds of glory! cried Stanley M.

—That's what I mean, replied Freia. —You're just like Wordsworth. You lack sensibility.

Stanley M looked at Freia in surprise, for he could not have known how seriously she had taken the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*.

—I mean, explained Freia —that while obviously Wordsworth had sensibilities when he was young, he admitted to losing them as he got older. He lost, for instance, most of his appreciation of nature. Stanley M, the older I get, the more I love nature. I simply can't describe to you the emotion I feel when I look at some beautiful natural object. And that's because I've not taken my sensibilities for granted, but have worked diligently to develop them.

—Get back to *me*, interrupted the young man, who had always imagined that if he were to look around he would find his clouds of glory still more or less intact. He wondered if Freia was about to tell him that what nebula remained more closely resembled the exhaust from an old Buick.

—Stanley M, said Freia suddenly —are you really Jewish? Staring at him intently she waited for his reply.

—Does it matter?

—In some ways, of course not. In other ways, very definitely.

—In what ways does it matter? He was intrigued.

—It matters if one wishes to make a psychological analysis of an individual, just as it's also helpful to know the individual's age, or whether he's fat or thin.

—Are you going to analyze me? asked Stanley M, feeling both flattered and apprehensive, as if a small child had undertaken to do a crayon portrait of him.

—It's for your own good, nodded Freia. —If you continue on the way you're going you'll only get more and more off the track and eventually come to nothing. As it is, I think you still have a great deal of potential left and it's time you were helped to find yourself.

—But I *have* found myself, cried Stanley M with a great laugh. —The problem now is to lose myself again! Please, babe, he pleaded as she regarded him with one eyebrow raised. —At least not on an empty stomach. Let me order first.

—All right, nodded Freia, whereupon the young man ordered a cheese sandwich and she an omelette.

—Now you can begin, he said, waving his hand.

—But whom am I analyzing? asked Freia pointedly.

—Let's say a thin, young Jew.

—All right. —But if you're not Jewish it will be a waste of time. Remember, ethnic backgrounds do have psychological significance.

—I'll remember, promised Stanley M. —Begin.

—You won't mind if I ask you a few personal questions, will you? After all, it's been a long time since we last saw one another.

—Not a bit.

For a long moment Freia was silent, gazing out the window. Then, without turning her eyes from the snowy peaks, she said —What do you think of Baldur?

—Baldur? Stanley M felt his mind switch from forward into reverse with a terrible grinding sensation. —Is that the first personal question?

—Uh huh.

—Baldur seems all right. Very nice, in fact, he added generously. And then, sensing this still did not constitute a full answer —Handsome fellow. Huge potential.

—If you were a woman, do you think you'd want to marry Baldur?

Stanley M, who was beginning to wonder whether Freia might cleverly be using Baldur as a sort of ink blot device, decided to give the most socially acceptable and normal response. —If I loved him and if he loved me.

—But do you think you could love a person like Baldur? Really and truly love him with all your heart?

—Why not? he cried, and was rewarded by seeing a little flicker of satisfaction cross his friend's face. He sighed with relief.

—What, Freia asked then —do you think of Germany?

—I like Germany very much, he replied in an effortless singsong.

—And would you consider living the rest of your life there if you were to fall in love with and marry a German?

—The rest of my life?

—Oh, of course not every moment of it. You'd be able to make occasional trips out of the country and perhaps spend a year here and there on the outside. But eventually, of

course, it would mean more or less settling there because of work and so forth. Children and so forth.

Stanley M smiled at Freia's serious profile, wanting suddenly to take her little face in both hands and press it to his breast. Not knowing how to answer her question, he took a bite out of his sandwich, swallowing with difficulty. Finally he gave a strangled laugh and cried —This analysis has to stop. My affections are transferring!

At this, Freia, who had only just realized herself the significance of her last question and who wanted to change the subject as quickly as possible, said —Which reminds me. What do you think of Herr von S and his concept of metaphor?

It took Stanley M a moment to follow Freia's chain of association back to the Prussian's statement that psychological transference was a form of metaphor. Before he could conjure up a good reply she interrupted by saying —No, don't speak. I withdraw the question because I know what you're going to answer and I don't want you to say it. For in order to judge the validity of an idea it's necessary to know a little more than you yet know about the social context out of which that idea has arisen.

—In other words, you agree with him.

—To a large extent we do, yes. But please remember, she added hurriedly —that the validity of an idea is in no way affected by the nature of the person who advances it. An idea must be judged, in other words, solely on its own merits.

Impressed by Freia's ability to contradict herself so effortlessly, Stanley M wondered vaguely whether it was because Truth really had many facets, or because language itself was too clumsy a tool with which to grasp it firmly. He began thinking how really few ideas there were in the world and how they stood about like islands in a choppy sea —vulnerable little platforms for anyone to use for any purpose. The more beautiful or strategic the idea, the more quickly it was exploited. An idea, thought Stanley M, which is littered with soda pop bottles, has nothing more to do with that first breathless glimpse of an uncharted dot on the horizon.

—If you really want to know what my problem is, he then said to Freia —it's that I'm a snob. I'm a snob and I'm decadent, but I feel these qualities were forced upon me, because by nature I'm as fresh and unspoiled as a babe awakening at the dawn of life!

These words annoyed Freia. —The mere recognition of a contradiction in oneself, Stanley M, doesn't necessarily justify its existence. It may only indicate the presence of a conflict which, if carefully analyzed, might easily become resolved.

Freia had good reason to be annoyed. The fact was that while she too contained contradictions, even that very one he had mentioned, she knew that these contradictions had been reduced by long and careful self-analysis to their lowest common denominator. In Stanley M she suspected they had been allowed to remain exactly as he had found them. The existence in one's soul of a truly irreducible contradiction was, she felt, fair proof of the complexity and magnitude of that soul.

This particular contradiction was, furthermore, Freia's favorite. For it was Germany

which had encouraged in her those delicate feelings of snobbism for which she had never found a meaningful outlet in the United States and of which she had always felt rather ashamed. And, too, it was her beloved Germany which had helped her discover in herself those bright pastoral qualities of innocence and creature delight, making her as democratic as a herd of goats in a meadow. Naturally it was disturbing for Freia to hear her friend announce that his soul contained exactly this contradiction, for it obliged her either to admit that she shared this highly distinguishing contradiction with another being, or to demonstrate to him that no matter how basically fresh, unspoiled and snobbish he imagined himself to be, there did exist at least one person who surpassed him in the matter of degree.

—You know, Stanley M, said Freia, who had decided almost immediately to take the second alternative —it isn't easy for some of us to live in a world where individuality is constantly under attack. It's becoming more and more difficult to be different; nonconformity was never easy, but it was never so generally unaccepted as today, particularly in the United States. I learned this painful truth at a more tender age than most. I was only a small child when I first decided that I wasn't going to conform. I refused from that moment on to wear the dresses my mother bought in the department stores and persuaded my grandmother to make my clothes as I wished them to be. In other words, at an age when most little girls desire to dress and act exactly like their friends, I was already attempting to assert my individuality.

—The result of this was preordained: I suffered in popularity. Perhaps the most painful moments of my life took place during gym. We used to play softball. At the beginning of each week the teacher would select two girls to be the captains, leaving it up to them to choose their teams from the rest of the class. The selections were made with great speed and enthusiasm right up until the end when three little girls remained. One was a little Negro girl, another had a terrible birthmark on her face and was slightly spastic, and the third little girl was I. Can you imagine the shame we three suffered hearing the captains argue about our fate? Usually it was decided that one captain would take the Negro girl and the other would take the spastic and me. Needless to say, Freia laughed lightly —we were assigned positions so far out in the field that we sometimes feared arrest by the truant officer.

—And so it went as I grew older. Still, in spite of the mental suffering I had to endure, by the time you met me I'd become a true nonconformist. You probably remember my black toreador slacks, long earrings and cigarette holder. I played the guitar quite well, sang Hebrew folk songs and labor ballads, and engaged in hundreds of discussions with my nonconformist friends in an attempt to redefine the meaning of life in terms suitable to our modern needs. You were never a part of that group, of course, but still I think that you of all people knew best how I've always despised conformity and have striven to be a unique individual.

Stanley M had listened to this recital in amazement, and when Freia had finished

speaking exclaimed —But I'm just the opposite! How strange I never realized it before.

—How are you opposite? asked Freia, happy that Stanley M had discovered a substantial difference between them, yet wary as to what it might be.

—Why, I've spent my life trying to *conform*, but without success. I always tried to dress and talk the same as the other kids, but every time I'd open my mouth everyone would turn and stare at me distrustfully. Shirts and trousers never looked the same on me as on them. I was perfectly meek and harmless, yet I knew they regarded me uneasily, like a stuffed grizzly bear.

Freia lit a cigarette. It was not immediately clear to her which of them had been conducting his life by the purest motives, but after several seconds of pondering she was able to decide that conformist motives, no matter what the result, were less pure than nonconformist ones.

—I'm really surprised by your confession, she said. —I never would have guessed.

Her friend's candid self-portrait rather pleased Freia and set her at ease. The comforting thought crossed her mind that there was no doubt at all but that she had married the right man. It was a coincidence that just as the image of her husband flashed into her mind she should happen to glance up and see him walking through the door.

—Oh, Stanley M! she cried. —What time is it? I completely forgot to meet Baldur for lunch.

¶ When Baldur awoke that morning the mountain was a great grey dove, and he, nestled under his feather coverlet, smiled to himself in the middle of many thoughts. The bad mood which had weighed upon his spirits for the past few days had dropped off — perhaps death had brushed it aside — and every thought that crossed his mind this morning pleased him very much.

There was, for instance, the vivid impression of having had a dream. Once again in the night he had seen those magnificent structures and now recalled that he had had the presence of mind to take a drawing pad out of his pocket and make rough sketches. Then he had walked up to one wall and had rubbed his hand against it. He had even gone so far as to press his nose and tongue against it, so determined was he to remember, upon waking, the material out of which it was constructed.

Nevertheless, in spite of all his pains, when he awoke both the form and substance of these marvelous buildings still eluded him, though he could draw satisfaction from the thought that if so much consciousness had entered the dream, certainly the day was not far off when the dream would more fully enter his consciousness. On that day, he knew, his significant work would begin.

Baldur smiled across the room toward his little wife who had so often demonstrated her faith and patience in his creative efforts. All he could see of her now, however, was one finger of dark hair that had escaped the warm cave in which she was curled and had crept out onto the pillow. Without that little sign it would have been impossible for him

to tell whether she was in her bed or not, so slightly did her body displace that which covered it. Indeed, there were even times during his life with Freia when Baldur, awakening in the night, would look with alarm for those risings and fallings of the bedclothes which indicate that some form of animal life is beneath them. For Freia slept so silently, so motionlessly, so like a little mouse, that it was often impossible to determine, even when lying next to her, whether in fact she were alive or dead.

Looking over at this lock of hair Baldur suddenly felt such a surge of love for his little wife that if he had not been so in command of his physical being he might have leaped up, climbed under the covers with her, and taken her in his arms. But as he did not have the heart to awaken her at this dark hour, he contented himself instead with regarding his organ of sex which had risen like a thermometer. There were, he suspected, many men who found such morning phenomena impossible to tolerate for many seconds without calling upon their wives. Not so Baldur. For he was one to whom this moment of desire was like the moment of sunrise: beautiful when shared, but holy when experienced alone.

Arising and dressing without waking Freia, Baldur ate his rolls and tea alone in the breakfast room, laced on his boots, and headed down the mountain to fetch his shovel and skis. Outside, he found the air exquisitely cold and the pale foreskin of day so tightly stretched across the heavens that it seemed to him as if the arrival of the sun might split the whole cosmos wide open. Under this taut sky the atmosphere itself was percussive, magnifying every sound, and the squeak squeak of Baldur's footsteps in the fresh snow filled the morning with his presence.

It was an unusual hour for a guest of the mountain to be out upon it and Baldur's soul rejoiced in seeing nature at her most natural. The pines were heavy with snow, the great slopes still unmarked by human spoor. It was quite clear to Baldur that a person walking down a mountain early in the morning is able to receive a purer set of impressions, and to draw from them much loftier meanings and conclusions, knowing or suspecting he is the first, than one who suspects he is, say, the third or fourth person to descend, excluding, of course, shepherds. For Baldur knew that while a shepherd counts in many respects as a person, he counts even more as an integral part of the scenery itself. Thus, if one were to come across only a shepherd as one made his way down a mountain, one could still say with complete justification upon reaching the bottom that while coming down the mountain that day he had seen no one at all.

This morning Baldur did not even see a shepherd as he climbed down the steep trail, but upon reaching the valley floor the first sound he heard was a long, unintelligible mountain curse punctuated by the whacking of a wooden stick against animal hide. This unusual hullabaloo led him around the side of a wooden barn where a charming rural scene met his eyes. Four brown cows with pink noses were leaping daintily around and around a cement water trough, their great eyes turned mischievously toward the farmer who, driven to fury by their impertinence, lashed out at their quick flanks with his cane.

After several turns about the trough the cows stopped suddenly and dipped their steaming nostrils into the icy water, drinking slowly and deliberately, while the farmer brandished his cane and swore with enthusiasm. From the trough it was only a skip and a jump back to the stable door, but after exchanging a glance among themselves the cows broke all at once into a wild dash around the barn, leaping into the air and mounting each other playfully, their empty udders flapping and dancing. The farmer ran close beside them, his busy cane striking now a shoulder, now a haunch, until the beasts, taking one last lungful of cold, fresh air, and one last glimpse of the mountains where snow still hid their grass, crowded docilely back into their warm stalls.

Baldur smiled at this performance, realizing that what he had just witnessed was probably the oldest comedy drama in civilized history, dating back to the domestication of animals by man which was, surely enough, the beginning of civilization itself. His thoughts returned nostalgically to the history lessons of his youth. He recalled that major theme which had run through them: that the Aryan race was alone responsible for the invention of civilization as well as for all the constructive advances made since then. What nonsense! And yet, standing there in the morning air with the sun like golden pennants on the mountain peaks, he did have the good feeling that right from this very spot time reached all the way back to the beginning. And who was to say, truly, if this farmer, just now bringing out another four of his cows, were not descended from the very first man ever to put a fence around a wild beast and call it his own.

Baldur continued on his way, his great shaggy head turning from side to side as he absorbed the beauties around him. It is really beautiful, he thought, and was suddenly reminded of the strange remark his wife had made upon their arrival: that all this did not, of course, constitute real beauty. What could she have meant? He knew Freia held some unique ideas and often suspected that she arrived at them while attempting to follow his own intricate system of aesthetics. For Baldur's taste, while unusually well developed and rigid for his age, was nevertheless an extremely complicated thing. Although some might have accused him of contradictions and inconsistencies, upon closer investigation they would have found that actually he was moving about his great aesthetic labyrinth without violating a single value. Thus he could not help but admire the diligence with which Freia attempted to follow along after him. He knew too how happy she always was upon arriving at one of his conclusions, just as a laboratory animal, a rat for instance, will take a certain joy in a labyrinth, knowing that it will be rewarded if it gets through properly.

Baldur's complex taste, which allowed him to appreciate a whole spectrum of phenomena ranging from modern Danish cutlery to old leather suitcases with straps, he owed, at least in part, to the war years. His early exposure to privation and suffering had done a lot to soften what might otherwise have become an extremely meticulous and finicky character. For a man who has had to wear, right up until his wedding night, pajamas with P O W stamped across the rear, is not going to insist that his next pair be cut

from the finest blue silk. Thus does a great catastrophe, such as a war, disrupt the character of an individual, making him tolerant in certain small ways and even appear to be a compromiser in others.

Baldur took up a handful of snow, squeezed it and examined it, noticing that the snow particles had not stuck together. It was fine, dry powder, excellent for skiing, but he knew it would not stick to the frozen pack and would greatly increase the danger of avalanche. What was needed now was warmer weather and wetter snow, but perhaps it was still too early in the year to expect that.

Filing this snow information into the neat catalog of his brain, he continued on down the empty white street. High above his head the mountain peaks burned under the expanding heavens. All morning long Baldur stamped down the slopes with great energy and will, for he was a strong young man better equipped than most to rejoice in the fresh air and sunshine. Naturally it was a crushing disappointment when, at noon, just as he was looking forward to embracing his lovely young wife, she failed to appear and he had to go searching for her.

¶ It is not very *angenehm* having a wife who, when one is seething with anger, looks one steadily and patiently in the eye. Not that Baldur was in the habit of making a really grand *Theater* of his emotions, for a person who makes it a point of honor to sneeze and even to hiccup noiselessly will tend by nature toward other wonders of self-control. But even so, the young man often felt it would be more satisfying if he were not obliged to look, during moments of emotional stress, into eyes which had the calm, unblinking gaze of twin dials on an electronic computing machine.

On her part, Freia could remain unalarmed in such situations because she knew that anger is actually motivated by inner insecurities and guilts and never by anything a second party, particularly Freia herself, could possibly have done. Besides, she was always fascinated by the ugliness of her husband's face when he was angry, as well as by the beauty of his speech. His voice sounded as if he were raking dry leaves out of his throat – cold, crisp syllables from the plains of northern Germany – each one as perfect as a brooch. Often Freia would find herself studying her husband's pronunciation instead of meekly taking in the sense of his words, which perhaps accounted in part for the slightly abstracted regard which she would turn upon him.

Stanley M, who could not understand or appreciate any of the words, but who was not insensitive to their gist, realized that he was guilty by association and sat glumly next to Freia, letting the harsh syllables cartwheel down about his ears. He could well imagine the chagrin of his little friend at this scolding, and did not fail to admire her tact when Freia agreed readily and graciously with all her husband had said, offering only one or two minor observations in the spirit of general enlightenment. For, as she pointed out in English, her entire mental equilibrium had been thrown off balance by what had happened the evening before; besides which she owned no wrist watch; and then, just as she

was about to point out that there was no clock in the coffee shop, noticed that there was one and that it had obligingly stuck at eleven o'clock. She added this item to her defense with all the humility at her command, then quickly lit a cigarette.

Baldur stared at the clock, feeling his emotion seethe uselessly through him.

—Have an omelette, suggested Freia kindly. —Or a sandwich.

Sitting down like a trapped animal upon the soil of his despair, Baldur picked up the snack list and scanned the column at the right. Freia simply did not look at him. Instead she glanced around the coffee shop which had suddenly filled up with customers. Herr von S and Dieter Schnell were sitting together in one corner. The Prussian was leaning forward, speaking rapidly and intensely. The boy seemed to be listening.

—What could Herr von S be saying to him at such length and with such fervor? wondered Freia aloud.

—No doubt spreading his message of love! laughed Stanley M.

Baldur turned his great head and regarded the young American through slightly narrowed eyes. Although Baldur was in no way a jealous person, this laugh had nevertheless reminded him that Stanley M had known his wife several years longer than he himself had. It also brought to mind the fact that Stanley M and Freia shared a certain bond which was even more uniting than love. They had a heritage in common; they had the same blood. Indeed, Baldur had often had the feeling that their very minds operated parallel to each other and that more communication took place between them than was ever actually voiced. It had even crossed his mind once or twice that their occasional mealtime conflicts grew less out of a basic opposition than a basic agreement, and he had no doubt that at this moment they were both entertaining the same suspicions and conclusions about von S. This displeased Baldur who was democratic enough to feel that all persons, Nazis included, deserved to be judged fairly, not emotionally; that the only one who could make fair and meaningful evaluations about a man like von S was another man like von S – that is, a German – and certainly not an American tourist like M or even an *angemeldete* foreigner like Freia herself.

Stanley M's laugh had had its effect on Freia too. She began thinking that now would be a perfect time to redirect the conversation into an enlightened discussion of postwar German sentiments and thereby demonstrate to Stanley M how young Germans like her husband were always ready and eager to explore and explain exactly what had caused their fathers and mothers to metamorphose, for a few years anyway, into unconscionable monsters. She said first, by way of gently reproaching her friend for the attitude he had displayed in his laugh and to make him receptive to what Baldur was going to say —You know, Stanley M, that irony is a dangerous *Dummheit*. To hold such an attitude is like willfully misplacing a decimal point in the bridge we're attempting to build between ignorance and understanding. Having said this, Freia turned to her husband. —Baldur, darling, she said —do explain to him about the great load of national guilt which the world has dumped upon the shoulders of your generation and which you are willing to

bear even though it's undeserved.

Baldur received his wife's suggestion with the same disagreeable sensation as if she'd offered him a cigarette while he was ingesting a thick steak. And so he said simply —*Bitte, jetzt nicht*, a refusal which, although exquisitely expressed in the highest German, fell upon Freia's ears like a rude blow. She did not look at Stanley M, but sat in silence while her husband continued the meticulous process of eating his cheese sandwich with a knife and fork. When he had finished he arose and bowed stiffly first to his wife and then to Stanley M. —*Ski Heil*, he said, feeling as if red ants instead of corpuscles were crawling through his veins.

—I'm leaving too, said Freia, leaping lightly to her feet and throwing a warm, cheerful smile at Stanley M. —I want to have my hair washed. Waving *Tschüss*, she left the coffee shop with her little hand hooked onto her husband's arm.

¶ Some minutes later Freia's dark hair was curled like a wild nest in the portable steel wash basin of the village beauty salon. The room was small and crowded, the air hot and humid, and yet the strong fingers massaging her scalp evoked in Freia sensations of the purest luxury, encouraging her usually dormant concubine image. Such rare moments of luxury always reminded Freia that the proper maintenance of a highly female being is not only a full time job, but requires skilled outside help as well — when possible from slaves, preferably Greek. Freia saw no harm and even certain moral advantages in this image, feeling that to be a concubine with slaves is to know that an irresistible masculine interest, expressed only in part by a large cash outlay, is being directed like a powerful spotlight at the very essence of one's character, one's femininity, and that one's role in society is clearly defined to the extent that if one desires to lie about in bed until noon one need expect no unkind social criticism.

And so Freia did not consider it necessary to fight against her voluptuous tendencies, sensing too that it was modern to be a bit antique. While she would never have championed slavery in a public debate, she nevertheless felt it was perfectly all right to hold a few old-fashioned notions as long as one did nothing active, by word or deed, to endanger the development of human rights or the progress of civilization.

As Freia's hair was being wound smoothly onto rollers she smiled, thinking how beautiful her coiffure would be. This evening after dinner might be a perfect time to have a little fireside chat with her husband and delve for a while into the unconscious motivations underlying his bad humor. For Freia had learned over the years that unconscious motivations, like groundhogs, will reveal themselves only when the external atmosphere is particularly conducive, and that even this late in the century firelight on a woman's well-groomed hair could still do as much as any other single thing to encourage their willing surrender.

A few minutes later, as Freia was flipping through a weekly pictorial magazine waiting her turn to sit under a dryer, a powerful odor made her senses reel. Her skin turned

hot, then cold with fear, for she instinctively recognized this odor as pertaining to creatures existing on the level of unwashed animal life. And so she was surprised, on glancing up, to see that not only had no bear entered the salon, but that the only creature newly upwind from her was the golden-haired Helga who was leaning back over the portable basin having her tresses washed.

Freia regarded her with some interest, noticing that the girl had not sunk dreamily back into a comfortable concubine image. Rather, her fingers were splayed out stiffly and her face wore the wide-eyed, tragic expression of a dog being shampooed under a cold water tap. Freia noted further that Helga's hair did not turn soft and limp in the water, but remained as stiff as the tail of some beast. When it had been rinsed and the shampoo girl sought to twist it into a loose knot on top of Helga's head to await setting, the hair did not lie quietly but straightened itself out as if it did indeed conceal a supple length of bone.

—*Schau mal!* cried the shampoo girl, and her colleagues crowded around to see this remarkable hair. Soon all the operators were convulsed with laughter, and even the row of heads under the roaring dryers wore wide, mute smiles. Helga, grinning with all her teeth like an animal in terror, sat unprotesting as curious hands lifted and twisted her wet hair, splashing her face with droplets, while the glands of her outraged femininity wept odors from her armpits and thighs.

Freia felt herself leap to her feet, step forward, and touch her hand like a protective wand on Helga's trembling shoulder. The laughter stopped abruptly, the beauty operators, abashed, subsided to their duties, and Helga looked up at Freia gratefully, her tongue hanging out and her tail wagging.

And so naturally it came as a surprise to Freia to find that actually she had not moved a muscle except absently to flip a page or two of the magazine. But what good would it do to intervene? she asked herself realistically. Who, after all, tells the lion not to leap upon the fawn? These issues are too deep, the natural forces at work behind them too real, to be erased with one act of storybook heroism. These *Mädel* would only stare at me without comprehension – perhaps even with hostility – for they do not know that they are being cruel. Even Helga doesn't know it. This moment is, for all directly concerned, within the natural order of things.

Then she began thinking of the shadowy concept of the human *Tiere*, the harmless *Unmenschen*, creatures very much like Helga which were both the nutriment and the disease of the Teutonic race. They lived in the wooded hills which border all civilizations, and perhaps because their world was no larger than the periphery of their eyesight, or because their roofs were never higher than the natural limit of a tree, there was no place for them in either philosophy or sentiment. Freia had only very vague ideas about this demi-race and quite naturally felt that this was the best and perhaps only way to regard them, just as one ought never look directly at one's slave, for then it would no longer appear to be a slave but something quite different altogether.

Freia climbed up the mountain with stately, measured tread, balancing her coiffure like a fragile urn on top of her head. The Schnell house seemed to be eyeing her as she approached, and she frowned slightly to think how cartoonists had, with their clever little personifications, done so much to influence the perceptions of human beings. She felt – or rather Baldur felt and she agreed wholeheartedly – that rather than enlarge the experience of life they had really limited it. It was thus no wonder that Freia was annoyed with herself for having noticed, and for continuing to feel, that the two front windows of the house were large, suspicious eyes watching her draw near.

She opened the front door, stepped inside and paused, sensing that something was amiss. There were interstices in the air where noises should have been. No one is home, she decided, and immediately her own presence seemed superfluous and ghostlike. She floated across the dim room and sat in an armchair opposite the cold hearth where, herself stiller than the silence, she felt the moments flowing past. It was the same dizzying sensation as if she were seated on the deck of Time, moving out to sea, imagining that the land was withdrawing and not the ship and she.

And then she heard a sound. It was the ordinary sour sound of a chair being pushed back, but it seemed to her full of auguries. She sat as still as a portrait while the footsteps came slowly through the empty husk of the house, rising, it seemed, from beneath, closer, until she knew without turning her head – just as a portrait which has hung one day or one century on the same wall of the same room can be surprised by no human action – that someone was standing only a few feet behind her.

—*Grüss Gott*, said the Rennläufer.

—*Grüss Gott*. For a moment Freia's heart seemed to stand still so that the entire universe of her soul was swept away by its own momentum into cyclonic confusion. The skier came over and sat down in the chair next to her. —*Wie geht es dir?* she asked.

—*Danke, gut. Und Ihnen?*

It was not until he used the polite pronoun that Freia realized she had used the familiar. She was so impressed by her own spontaneity that, although she did not like to smoke in front of this healthy young boy, she nevertheless took a cigarette out of her pocket without even knowing she had done so. As she lighted it she could feel the Rennläufer's gaze burning into her, but after slowly turning her own beautiful eyes in his direction she discovered that actually his head was resting back and his eyes were closed. For a moment she regarded him in silence, noticing that without his wool cap his ears stuck out from his head. Why, she wondered, did this remind her immediately of a mouse? Ah, those cartoonists again! She pushed the mouse image out of her mind with a shudder.

On the other hand, she said to herself, dropping the cigarette lightly into the ashtray upon realizing that she had lighted the filter end, the disparity in pronouns does, unfortunately, remind us of the difference in our ages. No, she reconsidered, not our ages exactly, for I'm still quite a young woman after all and he's far older than his years. It

refers uniquely to the fact that I'm married and he's not. Having redefined the gap separating her from her handsome young contemporary, Freia took another cigarette out of her pocket and lit it carefully on the right end.

—Your hair is very beautiful, remarked the Rennläufer, again with the polite pronoun.

—How kind of you. Freia was suddenly grateful that Germany had taught her to accept compliments without the embarrassed giggling typical of so many American women. And yet, unable to treat this compliment altogether lightly, she felt compelled to change the subject quickly by asking —Did you ski today?

—Yes. Did you?

—No, she replied. —I couldn't bring myself to do so after what happened last night. I found the child's death terribly depressing.

—You're very sentimental, laughed the boy, looking at her curiously. —You didn't even know him.

—I did meet him once, of course, but whether I knew him well or not isn't the point. The point is that ... well, you see, no man is an island. That is, no man, boy of course, or woman, is completely isolated from the rest of his human brothers. And so when one person dies, the bell tolls for the rest of us also. It's a complicated concept, I know, Freia apologized hastily —but I think you can understand what I mean.

—I'm sorry he died, nodded the Rennläufer. —He was a nice little fellow. But I don't think his life would have been too happy. It might even have been less painful so.

Freia stared at the young man. —Do you really think that?

—It may be hard for you to understand, he apologized. —It isn't a very sentimental point of view.

—Oh, but I understand perfectly, replied Freia. —The fact is, I share your opinion.

—But then why, asked the Rennläufer, greatly puzzled —didn't you ski today?

—Just lazy, I suppose, laughed Freia. He laughed too, looking curiously into her eyes.

After this, the conversation stopped abruptly and Freia, afraid that the boy might get up and leave, searched her mind for an important question she had intended to ask him, but in vain. It seemed as if his mere proximity was confusing her.

—It would be nice, she said finally —if there were a fire in the hearth, or if we could have a glass of wine together.

—Both are possible, said the Rennläufer. Taking a match he ignited the pile of boughs which Helga had arranged in the grate that morning. Then he left the room and reappeared a moment later with a bottle of white wine and two glasses.

—This won't interfere with your training, I hope, remarked Freia with concern. —You're quite sure it's all right?

He laughed as he poured out the golden liquid, but didn't reply. Handing her a glass he raised his own. —*Prosit*.

—*Prost.*

His lips, which might have been carved out of soft stone, touched the wine. Watching him, Freia realized that the simple biological act of drinking could be, in certain circumstances, a beautiful thing. She tasted the wine in her glass and found it heavy and sweet, as if it had been crushed from clusters of bright bees. Generally she preferred a lighter wine, but this tasted surprisingly good. She found it somehow fitting that a young god like Dieter Schnell should be drinking something so closely resembling her idea of ambrosia. She wondered if the rest of her life she would have a special place in her affections for sweet white wine.

The wine ran through their bodies as if it were indeed some potent Olympian nectar, transforming their limbs into the heavy trunks of trees and filling their brains with branches. They turned their attention then to the fireplace. Freia had always tended to look upon the miracle of oxidation as a struggle between fire and wood. Fire was, of course, the aggressor, for it was quicker and more powerful. Still, there were times when wood had the advantage. It depended on the circumstances. And so she was surprised to find that what was happening in the grate did not appear to be a fight at all; the fire seemed to rub against the wood like a warm hand, gentle and caressing. The wood opened to the fire, consuming the fire.

—It's a love story, not a war story, laughed Freia, her words and laughter coming forth a little disheveled, as if they had passed through tangled foliage.

—*Bitte?*

—*Ach, Entschuldigung!* cried Freia, realizing she had spoken in English. But when she tried to remember what she had said, she could not. —Tell me, she said instead — what is it like to ski in flat light? I had another question to ask you, but I can't remember it.

—When the light is flat it's because there's no direct sunlight and therefore no shadow, replied the skier leaning back his head and closing his eyes.

—Yes, I know. But what is it like to ski in it?

—Sometimes it's difficult, and sometimes ...

But he could not express exactly how it sometimes was, even to himself. It was moving swiftly through a white, shadowless void so that no matter how hard you strained your eyes there was nothing written in the snow or colorless sky to tell you what the next second of your life would be – whether it would be powder or *Piste*, fine spring snow or *Bruchharsh* – except that when you sped over it you felt it through your legs. All you knew then was inside your body; the hills and valleys were inside you, the invisible horizon was clear as pain inside you, and the thing that kept you in balance did not depend on external relationships and perspectives, but on an instinct, an understanding, which was also inside you. It was just at that moment when you could feel all this gathered up inside your body that suddenly you ceased to exist as something separate, and became instead an unseeing and unseen part of the whole universe.

—And sometimes ... ? prompted Freia.

—And sometimes, replied the boy —it isn't difficult.

—But what is it *like*?

—I don't know, cried the Rennläufer. Then he laughed, replying simply —It's like skiing.

Under other circumstances Freia might have stopped to ponder this curious reply, but now she chose to ignore it. —More wine? she asked, taking up the bottle.

—*Danke, nein.*

Freia poured a few drops into her own glass, but didn't drink. Already her limbs had grown so heavy that she felt like part of her chair. What was that question she had wanted to ask the boy? —*Ach, ja*, she exclaimed suddenly. —I wanted to ask you something about jumping. You can jump, can't you? I mean, you do jump occasionally, don't you?

Anxious questions concerning jumping were often put to the skier since the time two years earlier when newspapers all over the world had given so much publicity to his unfortunate accident. Ever since then he had looked forward to the day when the entire matter would fade from people's minds and hoped that his performance this winter would serve to ease the general concern. He didn't answer immediately, but after a short moment replied —No time.

It was the interval of hesitation between her question and his answer that convinced Freia the answer was evasive. This saddened her briefly, until she realized that perhaps he was attempting to evade not her but himself. Certainly he was avoiding coming to terms with his fear. She mentioned casually that she had seen him at the ski jump only the day before yesterday when, although he had had plenty of time to jump, and was heavily prevailed upon by his friends, he had quite definitely refused to do so.

The Rennläufer frowned, trying to imagine to what the young woman could possibly be referring. He had indeed been at the jump to meet some friends, but as he had not been wearing his jumping skis, certainly no one could seriously have expected him to jump. —It must have been someone else, he said at last.

This obvious evasion was such a blow to Freia that she couldn't help wondering why suddenly she wanted very much to put her arms around the boy and rock him gently against her breast. How he must be suffering deep down inside, she thought sadly.

Armes Kind!

—Yes, she smiled gently —perhaps I was mistaken. These ski costumes are often deceptive. Then, noticing that once more he had rested his head back and had closed his eyes, she asked —Are you tired?

—A little, he replied. —I didn't sleep much last night and we've been training hard all morning. He rotated his shoulders as if attempting to shake loose from the grip of a virulent exhaustion.

—What you need is a shoulder massage, said Freia. This spontaneous suggestion

almost made her heart stop beating. —Shall I give you one?

—Oh, yes, said the Rennläufer. —That would be beautiful.

His answer seemed to plunge them into a relationship so poignant that for several long seconds the young woman was unable to move. She hoped that this immobility would indicate to the Rennläufer a certain nonchalance or even a genuine reluctance on her part. In truth, however, her heart was hammering eagerly in her breast, and a pulse which she had not felt for a very long time, and which she had forgotten about altogether, was suddenly pounding away in her throat.

Concentrating on moving gracefully, Freia arose awkwardly and sat down rather heavily on the arm of the Rennläufer's chair. He leaned forward and she placed her tiny hands on his shoulders at the base of his neck, applying a strong, rhythmic pressure.

—Does it feel good? she asked after a half minute or so.

—I don't really feel it, admitted Dieter Schnell.

—Well, I think that's because your pullover is so heavy.

Obediently he pulled the Norwegian sweater over his head, revealing a soft woolen shirt through which radiated the great heat of his body. For a moment her hands hesitated like two birds hovering over a freshly planted field, overwhelmed by the thought of what they were about. And then, seeing no reason not to, her palms alit on his warm shoulders like doves.

It was, she decided after a minute, rather like trying to knead iron. Indeed, the only thing that seemed to yield in any degree to the pressure of her fingers was the woolen shirt which slid easily back and forth over his smooth muscles. —It must be the leverage, she remarked finally. —You ought to be lying down.

But there was no sofa in the room. At her suggestion he led the way down a narrow flight of stairs into the cellar off which his own room was located. Following him, Freia was filled with curiosity as to what his room would be like. She was rather surprised to find upon entering it that there were no books at all along his walls. Instead, there were several autographed photographs of skiers, a magazine print of an oil snowscape which, she was confident, would yield all sorts of subtle beauties if one had more time to examine it, and several articles of clothing lying about which the Rennläufer hastily wadded together and tossed out of sight in a cupboard. At the head of the bed hung a simple wooden cross.

Removing his furry *après-ski* boots, the skier lay down on the bed with his face toward the wall. Freia took off her own shoes and mounted his hips, slipping her hands under his shirt and running them up the smooth, hot skin until she reached his neck. There her fingers discovered a small chain and she paused to examine the objects on it, smiling to find a cross, a tiny pair of skis, and something else she thought was a golden apple until she realized it was only a football.

Then she peeked briefly under his shirt to look upon his skin which was not, like Baldur's, a wonderful marble white, but was still dyed in the faded gold of last summer's

tan. This amazing skin covered a truly remarkable body; the pelvis and thighs between her knees were strong, while the boy's upper body, perhaps from his having lived so long at high altitudes, was surprisingly massive. Indeed, the only imperfection she had so far discovered was his slightly protruding ears, but the young woman was quite sure that if his ears were more ordinary it would only detract from the miracle of his body.

Having made this brief inspection, Freia bore down with all her weight upon his shoulders, realizing immediately that it was useless. —You'll have to relax, she told him, but while she thought she detected an adjustment in the form under her, she noticed no new softness steal through it.

Then quite suddenly she felt annoyed. Why did he lie there so silently with his face to the wall? It seemed like a rude abandonment, an evasion of responsibility, even a reproach. The thought struck her with terrible force that perhaps he was afraid of her. Was it possible? Was she frightening him, this innocent lad? Her hand went to her hair in an unconscious gesture and she realized that she had wanted to pull out a pin and let her long hair fall loosely and girlishly around her shoulders. Her hand dropped as she remembered that not only was her coiffure held together by forty or fifty pins, but that when her hair was not carefully arranged about her ears she looked curiously like a monkey.

It seemed then to Freia that if she had given up the attempt to massage him, she ought to at least get off him. But just as she was about to leap lightly from his back the room started to rotate. Faster and faster it spun until she felt herself disappearing into a dark vortex. Only by holding tightly to the shoulders of the Rennläufer was she able to save herself from being swept away altogether.

After this unusual fainting spell had passed, Freia staggered to her feet and stood unsteadily by the bed. The Rennläufer had neither moved nor spoken. The thought crossed her mind that perhaps he had in fact fallen asleep some time before. —Has the wine made you sleepy? she asked softly. When there was no reply, Freia gathered herself together and went slowly back up the stairs.

¶ At the dinner table that evening the saber scar on Herr von S's cheek glowed like a pale comet against the *Abendrot* of his complexion. —*Herrlich!* was all he could say when he thought of the skiing that day. —Splendid. The weather had turned out exactly as he had predicted that morning – clear and cold – a prediction he had arrived at after carefully consulting the sky and the thermometer. The Prussian had, moreover, so trusted his own calculation that he had worn dark goggles and had had no trouble at all seeing where he was going throughout the entire day. Nor was his self-satisfaction decreased upon noticing in the mirror that evening the pale mask, emblem of a serious skier, clearly delineated across his face from ear to ear.

—You're a negative of the Masked Rider, observed Stanley M gaily, after which von S's mood seemed to congeal around his eyes and mouth.

Freia, who had received compliments on her appearance when she first entered the room, was sitting very straight in front of her soup. Too well-mannered to point out to Stanley M that it was not too much to expect that he withhold figures of speech in general and metaphors in particular when in the presence of others who detested them, she nevertheless sent him a single sharp glance to indicate that he was not to repeat that which he'd just done. This was a process of communication which the young man immediately recognized as containing the same mechanism as rubbing a dog's nose in its own excrement within split seconds after the fact. It pleased him to be reminded not only that effective forms of communication did exist, but that they did so luxuriantly – on more than one level of consciousness – and he breathed a happy sigh which reaped him more sharp glances from every side of the table.

Having by now recovered from her afternoon excesses of sensation, and once again strongly in possession of all her faculties, Freia remarked in a prim voice that it was Saturday evening and that the next day would be Sunday. Having stated the problem concisely, she waited for suggestions as to what should be done about it.

Stanley M, whose internal mobile had been suspended for days in a breathless void, mentioned that he planned to go dancing in the village. Feeling vaguely offended by this defection, Freia turned to her husband and cried with shining eyes —Oh, let's go dancing too!

Not wishing to mention the probable cost of such an adventure, Baldur replied simply that she might go if she wished, but that if they were both to be full of energy for the exertions of the following day, it might be better to retire early.

—Are we taking a hike tomorrow? exclaimed Freia joyfully.

—*Klar*: Do you think I work every day in the week? And then he added quite unnecessarily —After all, this is, theoretically at least, a vacation time for me as well as for everyone else.

—Of course, of course, Freia hastened to agree.

—On the other hand, if dancing means so much to you that you would care to sacrifice. . .

—Not at all! I'd much rather hike than dance. You know that, darling. She flashed a bright smile at Stanley M as if to highlight how, in spite of occasional moments when the unavoidable stresses of married life between two strong individuals could be detected by the sharp eye of a perceptive friend, she and her husband were in fact strongly united in all ways that mattered. For Freia felt, and naturally assumed Stanley M understood also, that to be invited on a hike was the highest compliment a woman could receive from a man, implying not only spiritual respect, but physical compatibility.

—I'll ask Frau Schnell to pack a lunch for us, she said foresightedly. —Better still, I'll pack it myself, she added thriftily.

—I'm surprised that you enjoy walking so much, *gnädige Frau*, commented Herr von S, sitting back to allow Helga to set a steaming plate of kidneys and rice in front of

him. He noticed with some satisfaction as she did so that she too had been to the beauty parlor that day; her long clean braid was twined around her head and her freshly laundered body for once smelled pleasantly of soap. —The average American, I have read, seldom sets his feet outside his car door.

—That is, of course, the *average* American, smiled Freia prettily, not feeling it necessary to add that until coming to Germany she had indeed been unaware that worn down shoes could be resoled and reheelled and made to last another few years. —But then, misunderstandings of this sort between peoples of different nations are common enough. It would be a good thing if all persons traveling abroad would try to act as goodwill ambassadors, in order to correct misconceptions before they turn into blind hatreds.

—Americans dislike very much to be hated, don't they, *gnädige Frau*? remarked von S, forking a kidney into his mouth. —It's unusual to find, historically speaking, a great nation with powerful leaders coveting and even advertising such a weakness. There is, after all, no room for sentiment in business or politics. Any government which attempts to conduct its affairs ethically or morally deserves and receives nothing but contempt from the very people with whom it deals.

—But, protested Freia, greatly shocked by these words —certainly ethical and moral sentiments have their place in international affairs. Look at our attempts to help developing nations. We. . .

—Ha! laughed Baldur bitterly. —Do you think your government is helping them from emotions of kindness? Nonsense. The only reason for it or any government to help underdeveloped lands is to build up a market for its own produce. If they confuse this purpose with moral considerations they deserve, as Herr von S pointed out, nothing but contempt.

Freia stared at her husband in amazement, hardly able to believe that these words were coming from his mouth. Glancing at Stanley M she saw that he too looked a little stunned. Encouraged by this, she cried —But Baldur, darling. When the United States acts purely out of profit motives it's criticized for that, and when it acts out of a sincere desire to help unfortunate peoples it's held in even greater contempt. What can it do?

—Nothing, said Baldur. —There is nothing it can do. It should just take its hands off and let other countries alone.

—But even then it will be hated and criticized, objected Freia.

—*Gnädige Frau*, smiled von S at this. —Do you see how we have now returned to the original point? Americans do not like to be hated or criticized. Here is your weakness. The thing to do is accept the fact that you are going to be hated no matter what you do or don't do, and then act in your own best interests. A nation cannot conduct its affairs in a confusion of business and sentiment, attempting to justify every action on moral grounds. Might, as Nietzsche pointed out, is right. The mighty are respected, the mighty are feared. Throughout history the most admired nations have always been the

ones which have behaved in the mightiest and most ruthless fashion.

After Herr von S had said this a silence descended upon the table. Freia, who might have been expected to continue her protestations throughout the main course and into the dessert as well, suddenly stopped speaking and began re-examining her opinions. For von S had, all unwittingly, reminded the young woman of the two persons who were Freia. One was the Freia who believed utterly in the Christian precepts of love and unselfishness, whereas the other Freia, the, sophisticated Continental, adored the unsentimental opinions of Nietzsche and was only too ready to agree that the true nature of man had really very little to do with meekness and goodness. Therefore, while on the one hand Freia could imagine the glory that men could attain if they allowed themselves to be guided by the precepts of Christ, on the other she could see quite clearly that human nature could hope to achieve something beyond a dreary bestiality only by practicing strict genetic hygiene.

Freia's unexpected silence encouraged von S to go into a long discourse on right and wrong, good and evil, order and chaos, and all the other pairs of opposites to be found in the universe, in the middle of which (although it was Stanley M who pictured it this way and not the German) mankind sat shackled hand and foot. As von S spoke, Stanley M realized that if only all these pairs of opposites could be made to disappear, mankind would achieve a state of being very similar to what is often described as Adam's state of being before the Fall.

Suddenly the young man found himself somewhat in agreement with Herr von S. If the German was correct in saying that love could not exist without hate, then perhaps the thing to do, Stanley M decided, was to get rid of both of them. If good could only exist in a world which contained evil, in the same way that there could be no such thing as hot if cold didn't exist, then the world might be a lot better off sacrificing the one in order to get rid of the other.

But how? wondered Stanley M, handing his empty plate to Helga and making sure to keep a firm hold on it until he felt she had grasped it tightly. It occurred to him that it was much easier to persuade oneself of the untruth of the apple story than to deal with the great body of moral and philosophical teachings which had grown out of it.

—I think, he heard Freia say —that human beings must simply adjust to and accept the fact that ...

Stanley M sighed and turned his complete attention to the delicious-looking custard which Helga had just set in front of him. He was quite willing to accept the fact of baked custard. Dipping his spoon into its smooth golden surface, he was about to put it to his mouth when a question directed at him by the Prussian made him pause and look up.

—Mr. M, what, if anything, do you believe in? he had asked. —If I am not being too personal.

Before replying to this question, Stanley M paused to watch von S taste his dessert from the tip of his spoon. Then he said in a tone of voice remarkable for its solemnity —

I believe in Super Mouse.

—Super Mouse? repeated von S, genuinely surprised. —What exactly is that?

—A bullet-proof mouse with a red cape who comes down out of the sky at critical moments.

At this von S, who had begun to enjoy his dessert, put down his spoon and pushed his practically untouched plate away from him. He was thinking that perhaps if he didn't ask Mr. M any more questions the entire unfortunate subject might disappear from the conversation. And so the next moment he was very sorry to hear Baldur ask innocently —But do you actually pray to such a creature?

—Pray? repeated Stanley M, as if this clever idea had never occurred to him. Admitting that he had never actually prayed to Super Mouse, he added that were he to be subjected to the classic foxhole test, with bullets whizzing past his head and bombs falling all about, he could not honestly predict his actions. He did have the feeling that in his hour of extreme need something with a red cape and large ears would swoop out of the sky to save him.

Although he didn't mention it to the others, Stanley M was firmly of the opinion that any deity worth believing in ought to perform at least one of two functions. First, he should be a lifesaving device; second, though less importantly, a moral force. The young man considered God's justice just a little too emotional to rely upon for the former, and felt that as a moral force His power had been largely superseded in the current century. The most meaningful moral force in any given society in any given period could be determined, he felt, by answering this question: Who is it one feels he is locking out when he goes into the bathroom to masturbate? The answer had at one time been God; today it was almost always Freud.

After Stanley M had answered Baldur's question the young German was too wise to ask another and the whole subject, to von S's great relief, died. —*Tja*, he sighed, folding his napkin and placing it carefully in its plastic envelope.

—*Naja*, sighed Baldur, folding his napkin which, like his countryman's, would emerge from its envelope the next morning as clean as the day it had been issued to him. With extreme irritation he watched his wife and Stanley M fold their napkins ashamedly in their laps, wondering how either of them would be able to face his napkin another day, so smeared were they with grease and lipstick.

Stanley M sighed too. Obviously, he was thinking, the secret of communication lay much deeper than words. Nor did it, he realized suddenly, have anything to do with actions. Words and actions could only rearrange the universe – pushing the pieces around as in a jigsaw puzzle. Even if all the pieces were made to fit in an orderly way and the picture came out, so what? Something would still be lacking – call it communication. Or call it Synthesis.

—I think, said von S then, needing something to settle his stomach and nerves for the evening ahead but too polite to drink without making a general invitation —it would

be pleasant now to take a glass of cognac. Will you all be my guests?

Everyone was delighted to accept the gentleman's generous invitation.

¶ They carried their drinks into the living room and sat down by the fire. Stanley M, in an unconsciously pragmatic gesture, drank his brandy down in one quick gulp, under the impression that, since he was about to go out of doors, the brandy was there for the purpose of warming his hands, not that his hands were there to warm the brandy. After he had excused himself and gone to fetch his parka, Freia, whose face wore an oddly distracted expression as if she were listening for some far-off sound, said she was feeling a little tired and would go to her room and lie down for a while.

—Are you not feeling well? inquired Baldur.

—Oh, no. I'm fine, she replied quickly, sending him a brave and reassuring smile.

Baldur disappointed her by appearing to be completely reassured. When he made no movement to accompany her she lingered just long enough to make a graceful remark about the tradition of wives withdrawing after dinner and leaving the gentlemen alone to smoke and discuss. As this was not one of the traditions which she and her husband considered valid in the current century, she had intended her remark as a sort of little code which he was to interpret as indicating that something was wrong. Unfortunately this hint eluded him, but as she passed Stanley M in the hall and said good night, her friend guessed immediately.

—You're sick! he cried.

—No, no.

—You're dying!

She chuckled wanly. —It's nothing at all, and please don't say anything to Baldur. German wives are never supposed to mention their indispositions.

—But you have to imply them, cried Stanley M with a great laugh.

—I did, but I'm afraid I was too subtle.

Their laughter filled the hall and spilled over into the living room. Baldur glanced at Herr von S, then turned his eyes quickly away when he saw the Prussian had been looking intently at him. After that inadvertent exchange, von S relaxed more deeply into his chair. Smiling at his cognac, he held it on a level with his eyes, rotating it slowly with a slight movement of his hand. Baldur, sitting forward with his elbows on his knees, looked down into his glass where the liquor spun in a golden maelstrom.

—You have a very charming and interesting wife, remarked von S when Stanley M had left the house and they were alone. —Such dark hair and eyes could even be called exotic. Her mind too is unusually well developed for a woman, and yet. . . He frowned more closely at his glass. —And yet, he smiled disarmingly at Baldur —I find it always more satisfactory to communicate on the level of ideas with men, particularly with men like yourself to whom everything does not have to be explained in so many words. This sort of understanding, which allows persons to communicate by silence and by mere

suggestion, is, of course, a phenomenon not only of gender but of blood. It doesn't exist between persons of different blood. I feel that only an Aryan can really understand another Aryan, just as only a Jew can really understand another Jew. Do you agree?

As Baldur had been thinking exactly the same thing during lunch that day he could easily have nodded yes, but he chose instead to make a qualifying movement of his head and shoulders, indicating that while in general he agreed, nevertheless there were many exceptions which he could list if the other wished him to do so.

—Oh, of course there are exceptions, smiled von S —but I think you understand what I mean. Indeed, I think we two understand each other rather well on the level of which I am speaking. I do not, you see, have to say much to make myself clear to you, or you to me, whereas I could speak for hours to Mr. M, for instance, without ever feeling a moment of true communication.

—But if two persons of different genders and blood were to live closely together over a long period of time. . .

—The Jew, of course, interrupted von S —is a highly sensual being. If they were not so they would certainly have become extinct a long time ago, for the history of their persecution is as long as the history of their race. Their main appeal is to one another, for they are not a physically attractive people. Still, they are a danger to the purity of other races because they are amazingly seductive in another way: psychologically.

Baldur, who felt no great desire to warn the Prussian that his wife was Jewish, was nevertheless about to say something to alter the direction of the discussion when von S continued —Yes, it is by means of psychological persuasion that the prurient Jew seduces blond innocence. And who can but weep for the horrors which are produced? Ah, those poor children, miscegenated mongrels in which a dark and light purity have polluted each other. They are the innocent, though horrible, victims of Jewish sensuality.

Baldur noticed how, as von S spoke, his voice became higher. Very often he would run his tongue over his lips and cross and recross his legs. Thus, while he could not agree with all of the elder man's words, Baldur could not help being impressed by the earnestness of his sentiments.

—Well, said von S suddenly —if you want a good example, I can give you one. Did you know that Mr. M has been entertaining a woman in his room?

Baldur looked surprised, but not incredulous.

—Yes, I mean he has entertained her intimately. Can you imagine it? Anyone could have found out about it because, as you may have noticed, the walls here are very thin. Still, I don't think we owe it to a sense of modesty on M's part that we have remained so long in ignorance, but rather because, since he prefers to do this thing in broad daylight instead of in darkness, we happen never to be in the house. I myself found out about it quite by accident, for I was looking yesterday for some matches and happened to knock on his door. It seems that he had left the door unlatched and at my touch it swung open. I took the liberty to step inside and can you imagine my surprise and horror when I saw

that the bed clothes were in a terrible turmoil and there were personal articles lying about even in the middle of the room? The odor was sickening! I was just turning to go when I felt something crush under my foot. I reached down to see what it was, and this is what I found.

Reaching into his pocket, von S withdrew a rather squashed lump of silver which Baldur recognized immediately as one of the earrings for which he and Freia had searched in vain only the evening before.

Baldur took the small object into his hand and regarded it curiously, like a child holding in his palm the corpse of his parakeet whose life had somehow unwound during the night. Then he handed the earring back to von S who dropped it into an ashtray.

—*Tja*, sighed the Prussian. —Thus do they live. It's no wonder that since earliest times decent men have risen in anger and disgust to drive them away.

Baldur got up and walked to the window where he stood staring ahead of him as if his eyes could pierce the black rectangle of night. —I think I'll take a walk, he said. —I've eaten too much and it lies heavy on my stomach.

—Then you'd better get your parka, cautioned Herr von S. —It's very cold tonight.

—No, I don't want to disturb my wife, replied Baldur, who was noticing how the corners of the night were losing their shape. He blinked his eyes carefully and the corners squared briefly and then melted again. For a moment he was unable to move, balancing over his feet like a balloon filled to bursting with emptiness. Then he turned on his heel and headed toward the door. A moment later he was outside, striding rapidly over the frozen ground, the stars and moon running down his cheeks.

¶ After her exchange of words with Stanley M in the hall, Freia had not gone immediately to her room. Instead, she had gone directly to the bathroom and there had quietly disgorged her supper into the toilet. This in no way alarmed a young woman for whom occasional vomiting and violent spasms of diarrhea had become a sort of way of life. She considered these exotic symptoms to be, in themselves, a very small price to pay for the privilege of following her man across the bogs and deserts of the earth and of sleeping in his arms, their noses hidden in each other's necks, to protect these sensitive organs from the bacterial stench in which they had so often found repose.

The only aspect of her illness that mildly disturbed Freia was the one which, in view of other symptoms occurring just then, more or less confirmed that which she had already begun consciously to ignore: the suspicion that she was pregnant.

This discovery did imply certain effects, but not the most obvious one. Indeed, while she might have admitted to herself, I am pregnant, it would never have crossed her mind to phrase it instead, I am going to have a baby. For Freia came from a society in which being pregnant had less to do than one might expect with actually giving birth to a child. It followed naturally that her greatest concern at this moment was how she might break the news to her husband that she was going to have to have an abortion.

Fortunately this unpleasant prospect did not keep Freia tossing and turning for hours in her bed, for, just as an athlete knows how to relax a cramped muscle, so did Freia know how to prevent a painful thought from immobilizing her brain. Wisely she let the relaxing image of Dieter Schnell appear in her mind – not the young lad who had fallen asleep between her knees earlier that day as mysteriously as sweet cream turns into sweet butter, but the Rennläufer of the slopes, virile and fast on skis. How tender she felt toward him; how she longed to help him overcome his subconscious aversions to jumping and wearing his red parka in cold weather. While trying to decide just how she might go about these tasks with as much wisdom and tact as possible, she fell into a calm and peaceful slumber.

* * *

How fitting, she thought to herself as she awoke the next morning feeling quite well indeed, that instead of morning sickness I should have evening sickness. This oddity seemed to confirm Freia's contention that she had a feline night metabolism. At the same time it offered further proof that she was biologically related to that artistic and highly productive segment of humanity which really starts ticking around peaceful, lonely midnight, whose members work with feverish creativity until dawn in the tradition of, say, Dostoevski.

Focusing her eyes on the dim ceiling, she turned them fondly toward her husband's bed. What she saw there – or rather, what she did not see – brought her eyes into much sharper focus. For Baldur was not in his bed, nor, apparently, had the bed been slept in that night.

Her first thought seemed to express itself through her pores like sweat: He has left me! For a moment her mind gripped this thought so tightly that no rationalization could pry it loose. She stared at the bed, blinking her eyes, hoping to find she had been deceived by the poor light. But no, the great feather spread was exactly as it had been the evening before. Perhaps, she thought, glancing wildly about, I accidentally went to sleep in the wrong room. But no, all their possessions were there. All that was not in its place was her husband.

Closing her eyes Freia fell limply back on the pillow. Of course he hasn't left me, she told herself. Why would he possibly want to leave me? As she could not answer that question, it helped to ease her fears. He'd certainly never leave me without a reason, she decided, and began to feel better. Perhaps he's been caught in an avalanche. This explanation had at least a little logic in it and was therefore not too disquieting. Glancing across the room she saw her husband's parka was still on its hook. He must, she decided happily, still be in the house. Probably he's fallen asleep by the fire. This seemed the most reasonable supposition of all, and to prove to herself that she accepted it without reservation, Freia got up out of her warm bed and tiptoed in bare feet down the icy hall to the living room.

Sure enough, there he was, curled up in the great armchair in front of the cold hearth.

He had curled up intricately, ingeniously really, like a bear in winter sleep, managing to leave the least sensitive parts of his surface area exposed to the cold air. The sight brought a tender smile to Freia's face. She was just turning to run back to her bed, when the dining room door opened softly. Helga entered the room like a grey ghost, a woolen blanket in her hands. Seeing Freia, the girl hesitated, coloring with embarrassment, but at the same time her eyes seemed to show a strange mixture of amusement and pity.

For a long moment the two young women, both in nightdress, their long hair loose upon their shoulders, stood looking at each other across the dim room. Then Freia stepped forward quickly and took the blanket into her own hands. —Many thanks, she whispered. —Ah, these funny men, she added with a conspiratorial wink. The maid stared at her with tremendous curiosity.

Very gently Freia laid the blanket over her husband, kissed his hair and, laying a finger upon her lips, waved a little goodbye to Helga who backed awkwardly into the dining room, shutting the door. Then Freia pattered quickly back down the hall, made a graceful leap, and found herself once again in her warm bed.

¶ In many respects Baldur Volken was a wizard of peace, but in other ways he was unashamedly descended from shaggy, fanged ancestors who achieved, maintained, and sharpened their ferocity by passing cold, uncomfortable nights in trees or on the floors of caves. And so it was fortunate that someone had thought to cover him with a warm blanket before dawn, for this kind act had served to draw the young man's unconscious out of the primeval forest into which it had slunk and restore it safely to Christian contemporaneity by means of a dream – the sort of dream which could only have come to a person living a very long time after Christ.

In Baldur's dream he was a child again with a soft, round head and eyebrows less like golden wires than like feathers plucked from the breast of some small yellow bird. Hand in hand with his mother he had entered the great buildings, and the child, looking up, saw them at once as dark, towering vaults of dynamic space.

It was in some small, dark corner of all this that he found another child – found it so suddenly and completely that already they were entwined one with the other so that it was impossible to tell which of these convolutions of pale flesh belonged to him and which to the other child. Pale, naked, amorphous flesh lay along and around and within the folds of his own naked body, and in this breathless mass beat a pulse which seemed to pulse too in his own little round genitals which grew, with every impulse, hotter and more swollen until both children were one fleshy extension of the same consuming desire.

All this while his mother was there, talking, and he, burning with shame, hoped she would not notice what was going on before her eyes – hoped she would not see it was another child there with him, but only he, alone, stuck fast with himself, although it seemed highly improbable. But she continued to talk about the buildings, pointing with

thin fingers at the geometry of the walls, and every once in a while reaching out to give Baldur a little push which made his flesh contract a little more until the other child had silently suffocated and Baldur sensed through every nerve ending that it was dead.

How he wanted then to flee, but could not, not only because he was so completely entwined in the dead child's heavy flesh, but even more because of his fear that if he left it his mother would surely see what he had done. He was forced to lie there exactly as before, holding on to this dead white flesh, while a teeming sweat covered his body at the horror of his predicament, and he awoke, sweating and cold and considerably aged.

Baldur got to his feet and with the blanket still wrapped around him shuffled across the living room, feeling with every motion the stiffness in his muscles and joints. The last few seconds of the dream were still in his mind as he started down the hall, and each step he took ticked off a new link in a chain of associations reaching back into his past until, upon reaching his room, the dream itself and even the associations had dimmed and grown cold, and all that remained to Baldur was one single moment, which had occurred a long time ago, fettered like a lead weight to his consciousness.

As he entered the bedroom, Freia, who had fallen asleep again, awoke. —Is it time to get dressed? she smiled sleepily.

—Yes.

The odd chemistry of his voice reacted in her. —We're going hiking, *nicht?* she asked quickly, seeking the eyes in his dim face which moved back and forth, up and down, as he attended to tightening up his clothes.

—I think first we must go for a while to church.

Freia received Baldur's words with wondrous serenity after the first fleeting shock, just as a young mother, alarmed by a rash on her child's body, identifies it the next moment as measles, something neither fatal nor, if properly handled, crippling.

Although his wife had exhibited no dismay and had asked no questions, Baldur knew she knew that something was not exactly status quo, for he was not one to suggest going to church every Sunday of the year. But even if she had asked he could not have told her why it was absolutely necessary that he go to church that morning and that she accompany him. All he knew was that within the last twelve hours or so his world had come very close to crumbling about him and action had to be taken immediately. He did not attribute his chaotic state of mind entirely to Freia's unfaithfulness. Indeed, he had decided before falling asleep that there was room for reasonable doubt about the conclusion von S had drawn from the highly circumstantial earring. Oddly enough, his wife's faithfulness was not the real issue here. Baldur even realized that he didn't know what the real issue was, but this didn't make him feel any better. All he knew and all he felt was that the same little wife whom he had loved for so many happy months inspired in him now only feelings of anger and disgust. This morning he could almost not bear to glance in her direction until she had pinned up her long black hair and put a wool cap over it, something she did very quickly this day, almost as if she had guessed what he

was feeling. She even found herself on the verge of plucking out some of the darker hairs growing above her upper lip, but stopped herself, deciding that the hairs should not be made to suffer for something which was not their fault. The problem, she knew, went much deeper than these hairs. Freia sensed that their presence on her lip might even help provoke Baldur's peculiar anxiety to the point at which something could be done about it.

A day or two earlier Baldur had happened to notice on one of the village posters that Protestant church services, conducted in English, were held in one of the hotels early Sunday mornings. —If we make some effort at speed, he pointed out —we may get there on time.

With this warning in mind Freia hastily gulped down her rolls and coffee while Baldur, buttering and chewing with care and precision, kept pace with her bite for bite. As she laced on her boots, tugging at the frayed laces and poking the split leather tips through the eyes with her little fingers, she wished suddenly that she could bring this fearful rush to a halt by bursting into tears and throwing herself on her husband's chest. But this feminine form of behavior was, alas, denied Freia, for the truth was that she had never cried. In her early youth she had wondered whether this meant she was lacking in some important quality, but in later years decided that her well was filled to overflowing only with joyful emotions. She even began looking upon her inability to cry as a rather special gift, one which indicated that she was as much in control of herself as cats who, as the poets said, walked by themselves and to whom all things seemed alike.

Baldur led the way rapidly down the mountain. Freia, following him, felt no indignation, only an apprehensive desire to please. She couldn't help wondering what her father would think if he could see her now. This reminded her that she hadn't told Baldur about her father's letter. It didn't seem the best moment to inform her husband that they wouldn't be able to depend upon her parent for financial assistance and would have to ask his mother to borrow on her house once again. Nevertheless, Freia did have the feeling that such information, properly handled, could be used in this situation in the same beneficial way that dynamite is sometimes used to stop the spread of a mighty conflagration.

If Freia's father had, in fact, been able to see his daughter that morning, he would have noticed nothing extraordinary, for she and her husband did not go to church. Or, rather, they did get to the front steps of the hotel where the services were to be held, when Baldur stopped. Turning, he looked at his wife with such an intense searching stare, holding her out at arm's length, that Freia's mind faltered and dimmed and some unidentifiable emotion arose out of her innermost soul and filled her cheeks with blushes.

Then Baldur turned away and, to Freia's infinite relief, did not enter the hotel but began striding down the road. Knowing better than to say anything, and not knowing what there was to say, she hurried silently after him.

¶ Although Herr von S considered himself a Protestant, this was not because he was a zealous believer, but because of all the available forms of organized worship, only Protestantism did not repel him, in the same way that certain persons born and raised in the Midwestern part of the United States will tend, even when in Paris, to buy and eat packaged, homogenized cheese and white toast. In spite of this negative religiosity, and in spite of his proclivity toward those things in life which least challenged his senses and least subverted his asceticism, Herr von S did make it a point to celebrate Sunday by having a soft boiled egg with his breakfast.

It was perhaps a pity that neither Stanley M nor Freia were at the breakfast table with him this morning, for under normal circumstances either one of them would have enjoyed watching the Prussian with his egg. Indeed, to see von S slice neatly through shell and white with one sharp tap of his knife and plunge his spoon into the molten golden yolk, was to know that Swift had understood what he was about when he had made the breaking of an egg the bone of contention among the Lilliputians.

Stanley M entered the breakfast room about an hour after the German had left. Having thoroughly celebrated the miracle of his masculinity the night before, he now slouched in his chair and stared dully at the comings and goings of Helga like a battle-weary trooper wondering at his own disinclination to flirt with the Red Cross helper. Black coffee was all he wanted this morning; he could not even stand to be reminded of the possibility of butter and rolls. And so it was fortunate that he was able to sit alone at the table, for although the young Californian had been in Europe so long that he no longer confused egg cups with eye washing devices, still just the sight of one of these between von S's long fingers would have done his stomach no good at all.

The black coffee did help Stanley M face another day of life. After gulping down two cups he went peacefully into the living room to have his morning smoke in the armchair by the cold hearth. As soon as he entered the room he saw he was not to be alone.

—Good morning, said Herr von S, rising from the writing table and folding what seemed to be an unfinished letter into his pocket. —May I? he inquired, indicating the chair next to that into which Stanley M had lowered himself.

—Please, replied Stanley M with a cordial gesture. The German sat down.

—What luck I had time enough to warn you the other evening, smiled von S. —For it was only as we met at the table in that moment before the Volkens joined us that I thought of the idea in the first place. And who would have imagined that Frau Volken would go directly from the table to ask you. American spontaneity and bluntness are legendary, but still, who can foresee to what extremes they can be pushed. Indeed, it is only because I sensed in you this same quality of spontaneity that I could hope you would agree immediately to my plan.

—And if I had refused?

—Oh, that wouldn't have mattered at all. The power of suggestion is always stronger

in the long run than the power of denial. You didn't hear our conversation, but I assure you that Herr Volken was ready to accept my words from the very first moment, and as it is his reaction I am interested in, not that of his wife, my purpose was satisfied.

—What *is* your purpose? asked the other, trying not to yawn as he spoke.

—What do you think it is? Why do you suppose I've asked you to pretend for a few days that you are Jewish?

—At first I thought you were attempting to prove some of your racial theories and that you needed a Jew for demonstration purposes, replied Stanley M. —But after thinking it over I couldn't see why . . .

—You couldn't see why I would employ a false example by means of which I could only contradict my own biological argument. Quite right. But before I explain to you what I am about, I think it would be best to review our conversation of the other day. Do you mind?

—Go right ahead.

—If you recall, the other morning we sat down together to have a cup of coffee. Almost immediately after passing me the sugar you asked me that incredible question: How did it happen in a highly civilized country like Germany. I tried to answer you as honestly and clearly as I could, but I could see that you still believed in your own preconceived notions and would never perhaps understand that it was biological necessity which caused the spectacular impasse between the Germans and the Jews. You told me bluntly that my biological facts were wrong and my entire philosophy warped. Mr. M, I'm a fair man and quite admittedly I did most of the talking that day. In the short time we were together you didn't have a good opportunity to present your own point of view, although I can tell you frankly that I have a very good idea of what your arguments would have been. Furthermore, I did not, as you have already realized, ask you to say you were Jewish to demonstrate my point of view. I know we already have a Jew among us, for Frau Volken herself is one.

Stanley M did look surprised. —Did she tell you that?

Herr von S laughed. —*Mein lieber Mann*. What have I been telling you? This is something one does not have to be told. One *feels* it simply, just as I could feel instinctively that you yourself are not Jewish.

—But *I* don't feel these things, objected Stanley M.

—This is not surprising. You come from a society, after all, where human instinct has been nearly effaced by the corrosive properties of your official Christian morality. Your cultural inheritance did not, *could* not, have included a Nietzsche.

Herr von S lit a cigarette and shifted to a more comfortable position in his chair. — But to get back to the question of why I asked you to take on a role for a few days. I think that in order to explain this in a clear manner I shall have to go back many years to the time when I was quite a bit younger, and the German Reich was in its infancy. Ah, Mr. M, I cannot describe to you the glory of those years before the war. Any German

who lived at that time will tell you they were the most exciting and beautiful years of his life. Never before had a nation arisen so quickly from the depths of economic and emotional depression to take its place on such heights of joy and optimism. Never had a country rallied so enthusiastically to its own true spiritual and physical nature.

—You might suppose, Mr. M, from knowing me now as a skier, that also in my youth I was an eager *Sportler*. My successes were so great, in fact, that I took my place in the team of athletes representing Germany in the Olympic Games of 1936 at Berlin. Never in my life have I experienced such glory as when I stood in that stadium, I and my comrades, with the eyes of the entire world upon us; with the eyes of our then beloved *Führer* upon us! I am sure, Mr. M. that you can imagine only a small part of the emotion we felt.

Herr von S paused and Stanley M watched the glow in the German's eyes bend and darken and withdraw. —In any case, he continued, clearing his throat —the story I want to tell you began on the evening of the last day of the games. The following afternoon I and my comrades were to leave Berlin and return to our homes. It was for all of us a very special evening. For one thing, we were finally finished with our rigid training schedules and felt a boyish desire to plunge recklessly back into the lives of free citizens once again. We joined the crowds of Germans and foreigners who in those days filled the great boulevards of Berlin, the cafés, and the restaurants. In spite of the crowds we walked eight abreast down the sidewalks, our arms on each other's shoulders, singing and laughing. Our way took us to one of the more well-known *Kellers* where we . . .

Herr von S broke off suddenly and seemed to be considering his words. Finally he continued —I will tell you, Mr. M, that in those days I had had very little to do with women. In fact, I might say that I had had nothing at all *to do* with women in the sense most persons understand that expression. I had never been in a woman's arms, except, of course, my mother's, for I was happy enough in the company of my male comrades. But on the night before we were to leave Berlin for our homes, in that *Keller*, we happened to meet some young women who were a few years older than we and who, although rather plain, were very healthy. If I recall correctly they were in Berlin at that time as leaders representing one of the youth groups, the *Jungmädels*, I believe. In any case, we all began drinking in quantity and, as we were not used to such excesses, we all became very quickly intoxicated. Late in the evening I went out for a moment and when I returned I discovered that my comrades had left and I was alone with one of the girls. She was not the most beautiful of the group but certainly the most athletic. Together we discovered that our lungs needed some fresh air and so we left the *Keller*. I have no memory of what happened after that. All I know is that the next morning I awoke to find myself in the same bed with that young woman whom I had met for the first time only the evening before!

—Fortunately, continued von S —she was still asleep. I was able to dress myself and leave without awakening her. After that I walked the streets for hours until it was time to

fetch my pack and join my comrades at the train station. During those hours and in the following days and weeks I tried desperately to recall what had happened between the time I went off with the girl and the next morning when I awoke in her bed. I could not remember a thing, but naturally I suspected the ultimate. Not that I had ever in my life done such a thing with a woman before, but I knew that she was a strong believer in the new idea which was beginning to be so popular with many of the healthy young women of the day – that of giving a child to the *Führer*. I, too, of course, wanted very much in those days to demonstrate in some tangible way my own love for our leader. So it was no wonder that I suspected the ultimate.

Herr von S stopped speaking and stared into the ashes. —I don't want to occupy you, Mr. M, with a long recitation of what I have suffered in my soul since that night, wondering if perhaps I did not have, somewhere in the world, a son or daughter born without a name. Not to know was the worst part, for it meant that I was doomed during my life to have in one corner of my soul a disorderly area of doubt. But I am happy to say, Mr. M, he continued, looking up with a smile —that this doubt and disorder are now things of the past. For on the morning after my arrival here I met Herr Volken. There is no doubt about it at all, Mr. M. that Baldur Volken is my son!

Stanley M's mind, registering the German's revelation like a sleepy eye hit without warning by noonday sunlight, opened slowly into focus. —Why that's great! he exclaimed. —That's magnificent. He laughed gaily as more and more illuminating rays of meaning and implication flooded into his brain. —What makes you think so? he cried.

—Ah, he looks just like his mother, poor woman. She too had a large head and the same mouth and chin. I have looked carefully for evidence of myself in him and have found it in his height and in his ears. His ears are, I believe, identical to mine. Of course it's difficult to determine this exactly since there is no way for me to compare them closely without giving myself away. For while I can observe his ears easily enough by direct observation, I find it impossible to consult my own ears visually without a reflecting device.

—True. True enough. But his name. What about his name?

—*Tja*, sighed von S. —I'm ashamed to admit that I could never recall the name of his mother, but even so it's very probable she did not give him her maiden name, but invented another later on, along with the story about his father. The *Führer* didn't care whether a child was born in wedlock, as long as it was born blond and healthy, but I think that many persons who supported this modern and naturalistic point of view reverted, particularly toward the end of the war, to more traditional social values. The name Baldur Volken is worthy of such a woman as his mother. As for the family tree described to me by Frau Volken, that is pure invention. I am knowledgeable about these matters, I can assure you.

Herr von S's words had delighted Stanley M who was able to respond as wholeheartedly to illusion as to reality. —Are you going to tell your son the good news?

—Not until I have sufficient proof, replied the German quickly. —This is not the first time I have thought to have discovered my son, but this time I wish to be in a position to prove my contention at the very moment I present it to him. Otherwise, think of the emotion that would result.

—I suppose you'd first have to compare ears with a reflecting device and then visit his mother.

—That would be the only way, yes.

—Still, you must be a very proud and happy father.

—Of course I'm quite pleased with the physical development and character of my son, but there are some things which disturb me greatly. If I had been able to raise him from childhood I assure you he would not have grown up with some of his present notions. I cannot begin to imagine how his mother allowed him to marry a Jewess, although I'm sure she did nothing to encourage it. I think one must blame the chaos following the overthrow of the *Reich*. And of course a mother does not have the same authority as a father. Furthermore, it is clear that this young Jewess possesses to an incredible degree that sort of psychological seductiveness of her race which will often play so successfully on the innocent virtues of a young Teuton.

—Biologically, though, they ought to be antagonistic, remarked Stanley M agreeably.

—That, of course, is one of the most terrible side effects of warfare by bombing, sighed von S. —The bombing, the starvation, and a great deal of postwar propaganda from foreign sources has turned many persons, young and old, away from their true natures. Still, I'm sure that in time nature will prevail. My main concern is that this should happen before Frau Volken conceives a child by my son. The thought that my own grandson should be one of those mongrel creatures repels me more than anything in life. In order to make sure that natural instincts prevail, and that the separation occurs as quickly as possible, I am using a little ... shall we say ... counter propaganda, as you may already have noticed.

—I thought I noticed something, nodded Stanley M. —But you still haven't explained my part in all this.

Herr von S was silent a moment. Then he laughed. —Mr.M, I must ask you to be a little patient after all. I can only say that I have decided to create here, for my own purposes, a sort of living metaphor. This must be done to produce a state of chaos and misunderstanding, for as I have already indicated to you my purpose here is partly destructive. But you don't have to worry. There is no danger. It is what may be called a controlled demonstration, not an experiment, for I know exactly the results beforehand. You can help me tremendously by continuing to assert that you are Jewish.

It had been very surprising to Stanley M, who didn't know Prussians have the same need for self-expression as anybody else, that von S had not only poured out to him a long personal confession, but so much of his purpose. It came as a relief, therefore, to hear the German indicate he would keep a few of his tactics to himself. But the thing

which most surprised the young man was that von S seemed to have no fear that he would rush off and warn Freia about their conversation. True, he didn't think that von S's rather moldy propaganda would have any effect whatsoever on the Volken marriage, but the German seemed to believe it would. The German didn't even talk as if he expected to be criticized. This, Stanley M decided, was a striking form of naïveté, and the idea that perhaps the whole German population had been able to conduct itself during the war out of naïveté, a quality which, in maidens, made them soft, yielding little bunnies, amused him very much.

—Naïve, Herr von S was saying—is all that you can call them. They are really surprisingly naïve because one would imagine that after all these centuries they would have begun to understand their true place in the world. I believe, he continued—that their naïveté is the result of their belief that they are the chosen people and that they cannot be wrong in anything they do. They believe themselves to be a sort of super race.

—I don't quite follow, interjected Stanley M. —You are now speaking of ... ?

—Of the Jewish race, of course, replied the German. —I tell you, Mr. M, I'm as humane as the next fellow and felt very badly about the brutalities, but I must say there were times when I myself would have really enjoyed beating one of those persons for entertaining such conceits.

The feeling of surprise which Stanley M had experienced earlier now changed into a sublime sort of understanding such as he might have felt if he had heard a bell actually come out and say "ding dong," or if a pig had said, literally, "oink." To hear von S saying exactly what one might have expected a German to say was such an excruciatingly sweet experience that it seemed to him as if all the jigsaw pieces of the universe were suddenly, not rearranging themselves exactly, but were, right where they lay, sort of melting together. Added to this was the budding realization that there existed between von S and Freia a kind of relationship, a kinship, which neither of them would ever suspect, or, suspecting, admit to. It made his mind fly to the Great Synthesis, but there was no time to study out the relationship between his vision and that concept, except to wonder vaguely if the answer to the Synthesis lay not in terms of order and parallels, but in terms of Fusion. What a magnificent thing life is, Stanley M was thinking as von S continued.

—Still, Mr. M, I must admit that I have not yet begun to feel as if Baldur Volken is really my son. While I can see my blood in him, at the same time I feel no paternal tenderness toward the young man. This may seem strange and unnatural, but I blame it on the fact that he has lived so long with a Jewess. On the other hand, I do feel extremely close to the Schnell boy whom I've known since he was a baby. He is, quite literally, a young god, and it amazes me that he can be the child of these stupid peasants. I cannot help but feel there was a very definite reason which brought me to these mountains at this time. Only a part of it was so that I might meet my son. The other part was that I might once again meet Dieter Schnell at precisely that point in his life when I can be of help to him. Do you know, it seems to me that he is incapable of anything but a simple

love for everything around him? He does not seem to have learned the meaning of the word hate, or even of distrust. This, combined with his boyish fearlessness, leaves him extremely vulnerable. I fear for him greatly. That he's a healthy lad there is no doubt, although I admit there are times, even when I am speaking to him, that his eyes look quite vacant, as if nothing at all existed behind them. But I'm beginning to feel I'm making some progress, for now as I talk to him his eyes appear to focus occasionally on my words and there is a gleam of understanding, a gleam, if I may dare to hope so, of hate in his face.

—You're actually teaching him to hate?

—I believe so, yes, replied von S modestly.

—To hate Jews?

—That isn't my primary aim, Mr. M. What I'm trying first is to lay the broad foundation of a philosophy in his mind. I have not yet turned to specifics. I did however mention to him that Frau Volken is a Jewess, more by way of a casual warning than anything else.

—You feel her to be competition.

—Competition? The Prussian's eyebrows went up in surprise. —I'm sure I don't understand what you mean. The reason I felt I ought to warn him is that Frau Volken is an intellectually seductive young woman whose ideas are nevertheless very confused. I feel she has taken some interest in this child. I don't think it would be good for him to be very much in her company at this time. Her relationship with my son is, of course, much more advanced and there is need for rather more haste and less subtlety.

A peculiar idea was now beginning to occur to Stanley M. —Then as I see it, he said —this "living metaphor" you're trying to build here is really a microcosm of the situation that existed in Germany during the Third *Reich*.

Herr von S laughed. —But Mr. M, if indeed a microcosm does exist, it is not I who is constructing it, but rather Frau Volken herself. I am only reacting as I must. It is obvious that Frau Volken is behaving exactly as Jews have always behaved before their neighbors arose to cast them out of decent society. I know little about the state of the Volken pocketbook, but I have observed that while her husband shovels snow onto the *Pisten*, Frau Volken sits in the cafés. And while Frau Volken has managed to dress herself rather well, her husband is showing us in many places the stuffing inside his parka. As he is a student who has not had the support of a father, it's quite obvious they're living well beyond their means, completely to the advantage of the wife. So you see, if any sort of microcosm is being constructed here, the person responsible for it is Frau Volken herself.

Herr von S stopped speaking and for a long moment the two sat looking thoughtfully into the cold grate toward which they had unconsciously extended their toes. After a time the German yawned, lightly touching his fingers to his lips. —One begins to be lazy on Sunday mornings. What a pity there is no phonograph here. Do you know, I have always enjoyed Mozart more on Sunday mornings than at any other time. It is perhaps

for this reason that I go so seldom to church.

Stanley M, who could not in any case imagine the German getting willingly to his knees in a public place, nodded and yawned sympathetically. He remembered that von S had been writing a letter when he had first entered the room. Now he wondered vaguely to whom it could have been addressed. The only answer which seemed likely was that he had been writing to his mother.

—I'm wondering, said Stanley M after a few moments —whether you aren't worried I might mention our conversation to Mrs. Volken.

—But why, Mr. M, should I worry about that? asked von S in some surprise. —You are an old friend of hers, *nicht*?

—Yes.

—Then quite naturally her best interests are your concern.

—Naturally.

—Therefore. Herr von S waved his hand, dismissing Stanley M's remark.

—Therefore what? pursued Stanley M.

—Therefore why in the name of heaven should you want to mention our conversation to her?

—Why, because.... He broke off and a wide grin spread over his face. For an instant it seemed to him as if the Great Fusion had bent toward the earth with a chorus of angels' voices. If von S had been born a woman, Stanley M was thinking, he would have been an extraordinarily cuddly little bunny.

¶ Baldur and Freia paused just long enough to pick up their skis before striding out of town. Freia, breathing in through her nose and exhaling through her mouth, was silent as a martyr, never once complaining of the terrible weight of the skis on her shoulder nor of the sharp pain, brought on by the unaccustomed pace, piercing her side. Indeed, as it became harder and harder to inhale properly through her nose, she pursed her lips more tightly together, determined that if her husband should happen to glance behind him he would see not a soul in torment, but a courageous young woman. Nevertheless, this shutting off of a major oxygen inlet put a great strain on her nose, and Freia could only hope that her flaring nostrils added spirit and beauty to her face, knowing how irritated Baldur always became at the sight of ugly suffering.

After a few minutes of tramping they had left the village far behind, but Freia was startled every now and then to see a skier shoot out of the woods onto the road. Some arrived doubled over with determination, while others, surprised at finding themselves on the familiar road, glanced about like startled deer before skating off toward the village.

Watching them slip easily along Freia noted with satisfaction how much more strenuous tramping was than skiing and wondered if the Rennläufer's massive legs were really as well developed as her husband's would be if Baldur were able to do a great deal of

hiking. She reminded herself that skiing was, after all, a recently contrived and relatively frivolous sport, whereas Germans had been hiking in these same Alps for centuries. The tortoise and the hare, she told herself wisely, but sensed that even this allegory was too simple.

While Freia searched for a better way to analogize the superiority of hiking over all other forms of human recreation, Baldur's sharp eyes were searching the sides of the road for a likely place to begin the assault of the mountain. Soon he spied a narrow footpath leading off into the trees and without a word turned onto it and began to climb. Freia scrambled after him, noticing that it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep her mouth closed while inhaling and finally giving up the attempt altogether.

The hike had begun. They had entered a world where snow hung from the trees like mossy white beards and the profound silence had the beauty of a bird's song. Only the squeak of their boots on the snowy path broke the silence, for Freia, in order not to pant aloud, had managed to contort her mouth in such a way that even her teeth did not interfere with the silent passage of air to and from her lungs.

Baldur was not trying to punish his wife by setting this quick pace. Actually, his mind was so filled with other matters that he had completely forgotten she was behind him. It wasn't until he had climbed a good distance into the white forest that his ear caught one brave little gasp which had fought its way out of Freia's lungs, through her vocal cords, and past her soft lips to arrive like a vaporous surprise in the crisp air. Baldur stopped immediately. —Are you tired? Shall I carry your skis?

—Why, replied Freia, managing to twist her stiff features into what she hoped was a normal human expression of amazement —of course not. We've only begun to hike.

—If you want to stop and rest you must say so. We are after all at a very high altitude.

Freia was afraid that if they didn't move on at once she wouldn't be able to convince either leg to move out ahead of the other. It had never been more clearly demonstrated to her that walking was nothing more than interrupted falling. —No, no, she said. —Let's go on.

Baldur nodded and continued along the path, but his pace was slower. This gave Freia a chance to catch her second wind. She smiled at the broad shoulders ahead of her with such love that if she could have overtaken her husband, a matter really of only two or three quick steps forward, she would have thrown herself upon his neck and kissed it. My husband, she thought gratefully. *Mein Mann!*

The path they were following twisted, looped about a small hut, and tied back onto itself. While Baldur walked around the hut, searching for the most likely way to get on, Freia leaned upon her skis and looked curiously at the tiny house. It was clear from the condition of the snow that people were living there. It surprised and disappointed her that they, upon seeing strangers who, like themselves, sought to remove themselves from the press of civilization, did not immediately throw open their door and invite them in

for a hot cup of coffee. For it had not yet occurred to her that some people who chose to live in isolation genuinely coveted their privacy.

And so this silent hut gave Freia the same uncomfortable feeling curly seashells did after she discovered that spidery creatures lived inside them. She didn't mention that the window of the hut looked like an eye, for she wanted Baldur to believe she had been weaned away from such childish associations. Still, it was painfully clear to her that the mute little house was returning her gaze. She had just begun to feel somewhat hypnotized by it when Baldur signaled that he had found the path. Casting one last hopeful glance over her shoulder, Freia turned and followed her man on into the wilderness.

They had not gone very far when the forest gave way suddenly to a great meadow of unbroken snow. Baldur swung his skis from his shoulder and began to clamp them onto his boots while Freia watched. —Aren't you going to put on your skis? asked Baldur.

—I can't, replied Freia very calmly, feeling in her pockets for a cigarette.

Baldur didn't have to ask why. His wife had forgotten to do what he had warned her about in Munich – to have her boots adjusted so that the skis would go on them. —Then why have you carried them all this way if you can't wear them? asked Baldur with polite curiosity.

—I forgot until just now. I knew there was something I had to remember, but I couldn't remember what it was. She found a cigarette and lighted it. —But it doesn't matter, she added with a bright little laugh —because anyway I forgot to bring my ski poles. Coughing, she offered a cigarette to Baldur, who refused it, staring at her blankly.

—Why don't we sit down, suggested Freia, brushing the snow off a convenient log with hands as stiff as little whisk brooms. Baldur, who already had one ski on, sank down upon one end of the log. Both of them knew that the time had come for a little talk.

—How high do you suppose we are? asked Freia.

—At least two thousand meters.

—”There is no sin above two thousand meters,” quoted Freia, laughing. —just in case you feel like resorting to drastic action because I forgot about the boots and poles.

Baldur kept his teeth tightly clenched. He knew he had no right to resort to any sort of action against his wife until he had first confessed one thing to her. After a long moment he said, with painful self-control —I must confess something to you.

Waves of cold fear swept over Freia's skin. There was no doubt in her mind. He was going to confess to having been unfaithful, although she could not for the life of her imagine with whom. Turning her eyes toward the innocent little meadow she said as lightly as possible —Oh? What is it?

—I once killed a child.

Freia's limbs seemed to melt with relief. Was that all! She almost laughed aloud with joy. —When? she asked. —Why?

—It was shortly after the war, began Baldur, determined to tell the whole story now that he had begun. —There were three of us; I was not the only one, you see. It was a

complete accident. We had not intended to kill him at all. You see, we were playing one day in a bombed house where it was forbidden to play. We found him with a little girl in one of the rooms. It seemed to us that he was doing something that wasn't very nice and we decided to punish him by taking his clothes. We didn't expect him to put up so much resistance; it was his own fault that we had to sit on him. While we were doing so, he accidentally suffocated to death. You understand, don't you? No one was really to blame. No one was punished.

—But of course I understand, darling, cried Freia, greatly moved by the fact that Baldur had made this confession to her. —You were only children after all. Obviously you didn't mean to kill him. Accidents will happen.

—No one was punished. They never even tried to find out who had done it, although all of us swore to confess if anybody ever asked. As you say, it was only an accident.

—Such things often happen among children, Freia assured him gently.

—We felt perfectly justified in wanting to punish him, continued Baldur. —You see, there was a lot of talk among our parents that this child, who was very dark and rather strange, had some Jewish blood in him, although both his parents were very blond. We children had heard so much propaganda about Jewish lechery; here was such an obvious example of it. We all reacted together against it.

—I don't blame you at all, darling, cried Freia. Indeed, she clearly recognized the awful fact that next to certain Dutchmen and certain Germans, there was no one quite as lecherous as certain Jews.

—We were just small children after all.

Freia smiled into her husband's eyes, her own eyes glowing with gentle understanding. —I think it's wonderful that you've confessed this to me, she said. —That's the most important thing of all. Now one more subtle ghost from the past is gone forever from between us. What you did might seem like cruelty, but of course it wasn't cruel because you were only acting according to nature. Freia suddenly remembered the girls in the beauty parlor. —If one doesn't know or feel that one is doing wrong, then one isn't doing wrong. It is like that in nature, the survival of the fittest, nature's own law.

—The whole thing just got out of hand.

—*Du armer Kerl!* Freia could no longer resist wildly embracing her husband and kissing his cheek. But Baldur did not yield his body or even his cheek to her and so it was like kissing a cold, marble statue. For while Baldur had gained a certain amount of moral reassurance from Freia's words, he nevertheless could not help wondering if her quick absolution was not given in order to ensure his ready forgiveness of her own trespasses.

—I think now, said Baldur —that it's time for you to confess something to me.

—Me confess something? She stared at him. —Confess what? I've nothing to confess.

—What do you mean! cried Baldur, turning at her in rage. —I have confessed to you

and now you must confess to me.

—Gladly, cried Freia —but what? Tell me what to confess. I can't think of anything at all.

Her obviously genuine reaction almost convinced Baldur of her faithfulness, but something inside him made him insist. —I don't care what. Confess something. Anything.

—All right, said Freia thoughtfully. —I'll confess that I got a letter from my father in which he ...

—I don't want to hear about your father, interrupted Baldur impatiently.

—But he isn't going to help us. We'll have to ask your mother for . . .

—Don't tell me about your father! shouted Baldur, stamping his ski. —Tell me something about you. Something about human relations between a husband and wife.

—Gladly. I'll *tell* you anything at all, but I can't *confess*. I have nothing to *confess*.

—Then tell me.

—This isn't really the time or place, said Freia, looking about them doubtfully.

—Tell me!

She took a deep breath. —I'm pregnant, she said simply. —I suppose you guessed that already.

But in the next instant it was clear that this was not the information Baldur had expected, for his face, after he had registered her words, wore an expression of total incredulity. For a moment he seemed unable to speak. Slowly he rose to his feet and stood staring down at her while innumerable emotions ran wildly over his face. His chest heaved, and then the words came.

—Blocks of concrete!

Relief flooded through Freia. He was able to joke! —You mean, she laughed — shades of glory.

—Blocks of concrete, he repeated. She saw that he was not joking. Turning sharply, he limped through the snow and began buckling his other ski onto his foot.

—Of course, said Freia quickly —I'll have an abortion. I know we can't afford to have ...

He turned, straightening, and stared at her. But his eyes seemed focused not on her but on some interposing vision. Freia's words had, for no apparent reason, suddenly brought the image of Baldur's dream buildings so near to his consciousness that, although he could not determine their shape, it was perfectly clear to him that they were made of blocks of concrete, a species of matter which he had always particularly detested.

—Concrete blocks! he cried hoarsely, then turned away abruptly and started trudging off across the meadow, his skis hidden in the deep powder, his poles exploding in and out of the snow.

Quickly Freia hoisted her skis to her shoulder and started after him, sinking past her

knees with every step. —Baldur, she called after him. —I *want* to have an abortion. I never thought for a minute that ... But then she had to save her breath because of the effort involved in following.

Before reaching the middle of the meadow Freia lost sight of her husband over a little rise. Upon clambering up the slope she saw that down below, at the end of a long parallel spoor, Baldur was struggling about, up to his neck in snow. Fearing that he had broken his leg, Freia threw herself forward, realizing when she was halfway to him that he was not hurt. All that had broken was one of his ancient skis; the dry and brittle ashwood had given before the living bone.

The time it took Baldur to dig both his skis out of the deep snow allowed Freia to catch up with him, but just as she reached his side he shouldered the broken ski and set off on only one ski which, in a matter of only a few seconds, broke when he fell again. Freia didn't like to see her husband buried up to his neck in snow, his angry face made even redder by his exertions. If only he would laugh, she thought wistfully.

But Baldur didn't laugh. Covered from head to toe with clinging white powder, he put the broken pieces of ski under his arm and disappeared back into the forest. Freia hurried after him, watching the distance between them increase steadily. She came to a fallen tree which he had leapt over, but she could hardly squeeze through the stiff branches, and, finding herself horizontal, could not force herself to go on. For a moment she lay with her eyes closed, feeling the stiff spikes press into her body. She didn't care. She was so exhausted that she would gladly have come to permanent rest there in the great forest, impaled but relaxed, like an eagle fallen in a widening ring of silence for future travelers to discover and wonder over.

When she opened her eyes again she saw that her husband was standing not far off, not looking at her, but obviously waiting for her. Feeling ashamed at her display of feminine weakness, she pushed herself to her feet, emotion almost choking her. My blond lion, rhapsodized her heart. My blond lion!

—You may rest, said Baldur without looking at her although she stood at his elbow.

—May I smoke too, master? asked Freia with a little laugh, not expecting a reply. She was sure he was allowing her to rest because of her pregnancy, but she felt he could have no strong objections to her smoking as long as she had professed eagerness for an abortion. Squatting with her back against a tree, Freia lit a cigarette, but although she put it several times to her lips, each time her exhausted lungs violently rejected the smoke.

Sitting there uncomfortably in what she hoped appeared to be an easy, relaxed position, Freia could not help smiling fondly at the back of her husband's head. After all, how could he have helped being stunned by the fact of her pregnancy, knowing what hardships it implied. Blocks of concrete! She couldn't help chuckling silently. What powers of poetry dwelled in his unconscious. What a wealth of imagery. What woman, in all the history of mankind, upon divulging her most intimate secret to her mate, had heard such words as these!

Still, her husband's imagery was too subtle for Freia to fathom immediately. She sighed, thinking how all things, relationships included, progressed inevitably from the simple to the complex. Her thoughts turned back to the day, years ago, when she had walked hand in hand with her lover along the edge of the North Sea, watching the marvelous thick foam travel over their feet and swirl softly up about their knees and slide away over the sand. "It is called, in German, *Schaum*," Baldur had said, squeezing her hand. "*Auf English*," smiled Freia, "foam." Then she had waved her hand at the great flat continent of water stretching off to their right and had asked, "*Der Meer* or *die Meer*?" At which he, laughing fondly, had replied, "*Das Meer, der Schaum*." For in those days the lines between things were always very simple to explain and understand.

—I think you are now done with your cigarette? Freia heard Baldur say. And glancing down she saw that indeed her mitten had started to burn.

They started onward. The short pause had allowed Freia to catch her breath and she was relieved of a great burden when Baldur took her skis, bound them together with the broken ends of his own and lifted them to his shoulder. She followed after him, almost dizzy with buoyancy, and couldn't help smiling fondly whenever she glanced at the great bundle balanced on her husband's shoulder. How German not to throw away the broken skis! Germans, she had learned, never throw anything away, for their inventive brains were always able to see the possibilities in even semi-continuous matter. Freia had come to adore this value: the green crusts and moldy ends of *Wurst* on her kitchen shelves had testified to that. But in the beginning she had often wondered if part of the German tendency toward warfare was not an unconscious desire to purge their land of all the bits and pieces of waste which they had stored up over the years, and to provide themselves with an entirely new set of broken objects which would occupy them for another decade or two until war might come again.

Free of the weight of her skis as well as of the secrets she had been keeping from her husband, Freia decided that now she could really begin to enjoy the hike. Wanting to merge herself body and soul with nature, every now and then she would reach out to caress lightly the furry tip of a young pine buried almost to its golden star in the snow, or pat the firm trunk of a towering tree. Occasionally, in passing, she would scoop a bit of snow off a low branch and press it between her mittens. Once she tossed such a ball of packed snow gently after the figure in front of her, feeling her heart stop beating until it had fallen short. Had Freia been born under a different sign she might have occupied herself watching for a perfectly symmetrical Christmas tree, but, as she had not been, she utilized the fringes of her awareness by keeping an eye out for avalanches and insomniac bears. It seemed to her that the fact of her own fecundity not only gave her special license in the wilderness, but sharpened all her senses and perceptions as well. Nor did she forget to turn these senses now and then toward her inner self in the hope that amid all this external exposure and strain she might detect the early rumblings of miscarriage, that happy avalanche which would sweep away the very last of her burdens.

It was well after noon when they stopped to have their lunch. Baldur unbuckled the pack from his back and Freia opened it and passed out the sandwiches which Frau Schnell had made on her instructions. Freia had wanted to bring along hot coffee, but there had been no thermos. To help the sandwiches down she licked a little snow from the palm of her hand. For some reason which she could not remember, she had put a few books into the rucksack for both Baldur and herself. When her husband's eyes fell on these with horror at the thought that he had been carrying them all this while, she merely laughed without trying to justify herself. —We can use them as little tables, was all she said.

They ate their sandwiches in silence, but as he was committing the paper wrappings to the flame of a match, Baldur said very casually —You have known M for many years. I wonder what you think of him.

Freia, who had been alert for the past few days to some clue which would help her fathom Baldur's persistent hostility, suddenly felt she had discovered what it was all about. He was jealous about her interest in the Rennläufer! The question about Stanley M was an obvious decoy. In order to go directly to the point and allay her husband's fears as quickly as possible, Freia replied —Oh, I think Dieter Schnell is very nice. A very nice child.

—But I have not asked you about Dieter Schnell, shouted Baldur. —I asked you about Stanley M!

—Of course, you're quite right, replied Freia calmly. —I'm sorry. She searched her mind for something she might say about her friend but all she could think of was the conversation she had had with him the day before. It seemed quite fitting, since Baldur had wanted a confession in return for his, to confess that for some years Stanley M had been her conscience. Furthermore, that she was able to tell her husband about it proved beyond a doubt that the issue was completely resolved and done with. And so she told him, chuckling in retrospect.

—Your conscience? repeated Baldur without a smile. —Your *conscience*?

—Oh, you know, laughed Freia. —It's possible to have an external conscience from time to time. Lots of people have them.

—I don't, said Baldur.

—Well, I don't either now, Freia assured him. —It's all finished now. Absolutely finished and done with. It was hardly worth mentioning, so why don't we change the subject?

Freia wished her husband would say something about her pregnancy. Was he going to ignore that issue completely? Why must he concentrate on something silly like Stanley M when there were much more important matters to discuss between them? Still, Freia was determined not to mention her pregnancy again until Baldur himself had referred to it, knowing that the word had to come from his own lips before she could be sure that he had accepted the situation emotionally.

—But how was he your conscience? Baldur persisted. —I don't believe I understand.

Freia felt her husband did understand perfectly, although on the other hand perhaps he really didn't. She searched her mind for a way she might explain this phenomenon to him, but all she could find to say was that, as absurd and useless as Stanley M might really be in fact, he had a strange way of making some persons feel that they were behaving, somehow, dishonestly.

—But, frowned Baldur —is M a being of perfect honesty?

—No, of course not, replied Freia hastily. —But on the other hand, I've never know him to be *dishonest*. He's not at all phony.

—Phony? repeated Baldur, squinting a little as if he could no longer trust his ears and had decided to look for the definition on his eyelashes.

—*Falsch*, translated Freia hurriedly. —*Untreu* to himself and others.

—And that is why he is your conscience? Simply because he is not false?

—*Was* my conscience, yes, replied Freia, wondering how she had ever let herself become so deeply involved in this discussion in the first place. Suddenly she was inspired. —But Baldur, darling, she cried —it's very much the same between you and me. You know, you're sort of my artistic conscience when it comes to matters like Danish forks. I mean, a large part of my artistic taste and integrity is external, residing in you. Your taste is so perfect, so honest and pure, that sometimes I'm even insecure about my own opinion of objects.

Although they had never discussed the question of Freia's taste, she knew Baldur had always been aware of the things she was saying now, so she could not help feeling annoyed when he showed great surprise at her words.

—You are insecure about objects? He marveled. —You are afraid of your own opinions? But they are only objects, after all. Some objects are beautiful and some are not. There is no reason to be afraid of them.

—I'm not afraid of the *objects*, explained Freia with incredible patience. —I'm merely insecure, very occasionally, in my own taste, simply because yours is so much more perfect.

—But, cried Baldur helplessly —you make me feel like a monster! Have I ever said that you must have my taste?

—No, but ...

—And Stanley M, you feel, has perfect honesty?

—No, not perfect, but. . .

—But you are afraid of him too. Of him for his honesty and of me for my taste. Ah, I understand now. Now I understand.

—Baldur, darling! cried Freia in despair. She glanced around wildly in the hope that somehow, by some means, she might see a way to demonstrate to Baldur that he must not be angry with her because she truly loved him more than any living thing. She was just wishing that a great bear would suddenly come upon them so that she might throw her-

self between it and the man she loved, when a loud crackling-crunching sound in the trees behind them so gripped her with terror that the skin at the back of her neck seemed to lift her into the air like a kitten and deposit her safely on the other side of her husband. A second later Baldur found himself in the bearlike embrace of first one and then another young man.

—Karlheinz! Bernd! he cried with the greatest joy.

—Baldur! cried they, and they embraced again with such energy that in a moment they had tumbled one another into the snow and wrestled each other back to their feet.

It was then that they caught sight of Freia. —*Um Gottes Willen*, exclaimed the one called Karlheinz. —What have you got there?

—My wife, replied Baldur dimly, as Freia stepped forward, extending her little hand.

—*Gnädige Frau*, said the young man, whipping off his glove and shaking hands with a stiff bow.

—*Gnädige Frau*, intoned the other, bowing even lower under the vaulted pines.

Then they looked reproachfully back at Baldur. —And what did *Baldur* swear to us many years ago? That he was never going to marry until he was at least forty years old.

—And that in any case he would always consult us first!

They turned then for a quick appraisal of Freia, concluding that their friend had not chosen at all badly acting on his own. In spite of his treachery to their friendship, they were happy now to sanction the union.

Freia curtsied prettily, holding out imaginary skirts. —Many thanks, gentlemen, for making an honest woman of me.

—But you are not German born! exclaimed Karlheinz.

—I am American, replied Freia modestly.

—*Ach, so!* What did I tell you? cried the young man, turning toward his companion. —Didn't I tell you Frau Schmidt was mistaken? Our Baldur would never have ...

—But what have you been doing all this time? interrupted Baldur. —We have not seen each other for more than ten years.

—We'll talk about all that on the way to our cabin, where you and your lovely wife are invited for a cup of tea, said Karlheinz.

—Your cabin? repeated Baldur, deeply impressed.

—*Klein, aber fein*. You will see.

They started off after the young men had persuaded Baldur to let them take Freia's skis on their own shoulders. They themselves wore no skis because, they explained, this part of the country had proved unfit for long ski excursions. —One has to go up the Otztal for that.

Karlheinz took the lead and, Freia was happy to note, seemed to head back in the direction she and Baldur had come. She was touched by the way they paid attention, in spite of their lively discussion, to the path they were blazing for her, often making sev-

eral extra steps to flatten out the snow around a treacherous root, stopping now and then to help her over a log or to hold back branches until she had slipped past. Both were tall young men with bright blue eyes, thin noses, and flawless accents. Both displayed the perfect manners she had learned to expect in German youth. It seemed to her she could remember their faces from the photographs taken in her husband's school days. Nor did it surprise her that they had recognized Baldur after all those years, for he looked now exactly as he had as a small child. Freia had often laughed at these pictures which seemed as if her husband had simply stepped behind a carnival cutout and had had his great head photographed above the painted figure of a little boy in *Lederhosen*.

—I was speaking of you this very morning, Freia heard Baldur exclaim, although she never for a moment connected these two young men with anything her husband might have said to her.

The cabin, when they finally reached it, turned out to be the very hut they had passed earlier that day. Although Freia was very tired, she cheerfully volunteered to perform the feminine duty of making the tea. This proposal was greeted by such a look of disappointment on the faces of the young men that she hastily withdrew it. Pleading utter exhaustion she subsided gracefully into a corner from which she watched them busy themselves with the wood stove with the greatest pleasure and energy.

It was not the first time Freia had been inside a shepherd's hut and so she was not at all surprised by the two tiny beds, which looked more like mangers than beds, or by the fact that the iron stove took up nearly every other square inch of space in the tiny room. Only Germans, she knew, would have the endurance and strength of character to survive their winter holidays sleeping in such cramped, cold quarters. She wished now that she and Baldur had found a hut like this instead of a room in a pension. For everything in the hut – although admittedly there was hardly anything at all aside from the stove, the beds, and the inside surfaces of the walls themselves – contributed to a genuine *Gemütlichkeit* which more than made up for modern comforts. A few minutes later when the stove refused to draw and the smoke sent them running out into the snow, it seemed to Freia wonderful, creative living.

But finally the stovepipe was persuaded to do its duty, the water boiled, and they made the tea. In spite of the fact that there was no teapot to brew it in, and no cups to drink it from, it tasted marvelous. They drank the tea out of the saucepan in which it had been steeped, passing it around from one to the other. Both Freia and Baldur burned their lips, though Freia, being the first to drink, was the only one to receive baleful and pitying looks for her incaution, whereas Baldur, who drank next, got hearty slaps and cheers for compounding his wife's error.

—*Hart ist das Leben in den Bergen*, remarked Karlheinz happily. Everyone else seemed to find comfort in the thought too.

As the gray shadows in the valley huddled into darkness, Freia, in spite of the nicely burning stove, began to shiver, looking first pale and then slightly green. Although he

made no move to depart, Baldur glanced apprehensively at her now and then. After a while it became obvious that Freia had begun to stare calculatingly at the door. He saw that to reach it quickly in case of emergency she would have to leap over the stove. It was then that Baldur said he would take his wife home and return immediately.

—We'll come with you as far as the village, said Bernd —for we must try to find some beer and bread.

When they had reached the village Freia volunteered to climb up the mountain alone. —I'm fine, she assured Baldur through chattering teeth. —The fresh air was all I needed.

—If you're quite sure.

Freia was positive. She even laughed lightly and mentioned how happy she was that Baldur was going to spend a little time with his comrades. —Fly, my little bird, she quoted sweetly as she waved goodbye and started bravely up the mountain path. After a few steps she turned to wave *Tschüss*, but already the three young men, their arms on one another's shoulders, had turned away and were striding vigorously down the street.

Freia stood looking after them tenderly. What a brave, beautiful lion of a man she had married. Turning, she continued slowly and wearily up the path. Somehow the day had not turned out quite as she had expected. She had not, for one thing, had a chance to talk meaningfully with Baldur. He had simply been too angry. How could she tell him all the things in her heart if he wouldn't stop and listen? How could she convince him that there was no need at all for his anger – that it didn't arise from anything she had done, but from his own insecurities and fears and guilts?

I'll simply have to *order* him to stop and listen to me, she sighed to herself. Once he listens, she added perceptively, he'll be convinced.

¶ Although there was no bread to be found in the village at this late hour, Baldur and his friends purchased biscuits wrapped in cellophane, *Aufschnitt*, and beer. Like all young men who make their way through life with almost no money at all, among their comrades each became so generous that the only way they could determine who was to have the honor of paying for their food was by wrestling to a fall. Baldur, no less virile than his friends despite more than a year of marriage, asserted by this means his right to pay, which he did with a reckless joy, a sort of defiance directed against not only the whole bourgeois system of human barter, but against that state of feudal thralldom which men refer to as the Future.

—And so, now *Baldur* must tell us about married life, said Karlheinz after they had filled their stomachs with *Leberwurst* and had settled back with a second bottle of beer.

At this reminder Baldur drew back his lips and showed his teeth in what he hoped resembled a smile of pleasure. —What would you like to know?

—Is marriage a beautiful thing?

—*Naja*, sighed Baldur pensively, and was relieved when the others burst out in

laughter.

—It doesn't matter, cried Karlheinz, leaning over and gripping Baldur's shoulder. — They say the first year is always the hardest. But I think you must instruct Frau Schmidt on your bride's nationality. She told my mother you were engaged to an Israeli, not an American.

—Did she really? asked Baldur, trying to look amazed.

—Of course we didn't believe it for a moment. But you know how Frau Schmidt is. She always gets everything wrong.

—I know, said Baldur. And then, less in order to make idle gossip than to lead the conversation off in a different direction —She recommended the pension we're staying at, but the prices of the rooms are twice what she told us.

—That sounds like Frau Schmidt all right, nodded Bernd.

As a discussion of this lady could go no further than the listing of a few of her inaccuracies, a silence came over the young men. Each continued thinking his own thoughts. Actually, all three were thinking the very same thing, and each was wondering how he might possibly either broach or entirely avoid the painful subject. Yet in their hearts each knew that now was the time to speak. Before would have been too early; later might be too late. Finally Baldur said in a quiet, flat voice —I think there's something we ought to talk about.

—Yes, agreed the others immediately without looking away from the stove.

—It has been many years, continued Baldur slowly —and now that we're grown men

...

—You're right, agreed Bernd. and fell silent again.

—I think, began Baldur and Karlheinz at the same moment.

—No, go ahead, Baldur, insisted Karlheinz politely.

—You were about to say ... ?

—No, no. It was nothing important. I was just going to say I think I'll get some more wood for the fire. But it can wait. What were you starting to say?

Baldur searched his mind for the rather ingenious way he had only just discovered for presenting his thoughts on the matter. —I forgot, he admitted finally.

The others laughed nervously and fell silent again. After a few minutes Karlheinz got up and brought in some pine chips which he started feeding one by one to the stove.

—I was wondering, said Baldur suddenly —whether you two have resolved it by now in your own minds, or if there's still some doubt. Baldur looked from one friend to the other, but both shrugged and said nothing. —I think then, he continued —that we three should discuss this now and try to determine, once and for all, whether we really are guilty of having committed a crime. If we find ourselves guilty then we must, somehow, find a way to atone for it.

—We've already discussed it, said Karlheinz, nodding toward Bernd. —We came to the conclusion that people can't be held responsible for what they did as children. Be-

sides which, children are always innocent.

—But we knew what we were doing, objected Baldur. —We were old enough and bright enough to understand that killing somebody was a crime. The first question is one of motive. Did we do it because we thought he was Jewish or because we really thought he'd done an ugly deed?

—For God's sake, it was an accident!

—Was it? Was it really? asked Baldur, looking intently at his friend.

Karlheinz shrugged, tossing another pine chip on the fire. —We were children, he replied simply.

—It's a question, Bernd said, pushing at the label on his beer bottle with one surprisingly well manicured thumbnail —not of motive but of whether a person is justified in taking the law into his own hands. During the *Reich* this was encouraged, particularly in cases concerning Jews. What we did we felt perfectly justified in doing.

—But the war was already over. There *was* no more *Reich*.

—That didn't mean anything to us then. Nobody had told us that anything really basic had changed. Besides, he added —even today there are many occasions when an individual is justified in taking the law into his own hands.

—For instance? asked Baldur, looking intently at his friend.

—Well, the classic example, of course, is in a case of marital infidelity. As far as most societies are concerned, if a husband shoots his wife's lover, he's perfectly justified. Morality isn't a question for the law to decide. Even as children we sensed this when confronted with an example of immorality on the part of the child. Look Baldur, continued Bernd, suddenly inspired —we can't be expected to judge ourselves on any of these things in the light of herd morality. Can you picture what Nietzsche would have done if he'd had an unfaithful wife? I assure you, he'd have acted according to his true human nature. He'd have acted like a man.

—Do you really think so? said Baldur thoughtfully, leaning back and sipping at his beer. It didn't seem to Baldur that imagining what Nietzsche would have done in any given situation was an easy method of rationalizing one's own behavior, because few Germans, Baldur not excepted, were able to regard anything as essentially easy or simple, particularly when it concerned one's relationship to this great philosopher. —And if she had been unfaithful with a Jew?

As soon as these words had slipped out of his mouth Baldur regretted them. Quickly he looked from one friend to the other to see if they had noticed the non sequitur.

Karlheinz laughed bitterly. —I don't know about Nietzsche, he replied. —but if my wife had been unfaithful with a Jew I'd feel perfectly justified in shooting both of them.

Bernd, who had happened to be watching Baldur's face during this last exchange and had received for one flashing instant Baldur's eyes into his own, studied his friend's profile closely. Something was troubling him and Bernd could not help wondering if this abstraction they were discussing was no abstraction at all to his friend. But as Bernd

could not come out and ask in so many words whether Baldur's wife had been unfaithful, with or without a Jew, he said instead —Do you remember the pact we made years ago, just before you and your mother moved away from Kiel?

Baldur remembered. They had made the pact in the very room where the child had died, sealing it with blood, wrist against wrist. This act had made them brothers. —We agreed that if one of us was in trouble all he had to do was send his ring to the others and they would come and help him.

Bernd nodded. —Obviously, since we never agreed to put an end to the pact, and indeed cannot since it was sealed in blood, it's still in effect. Baldur, if there's any way you might need help, all you have to do is let us know.

Baldur, touched by his friend's generosity, said, with as much conviction as he could achieve, that his life was running perfectly smoothly at the moment.

—All right, laughed Karlheinz —but if you want to get rid of any of your wife's lovers, just bring them around. He broke off as Bernd sent him a warning glance. —That is to say . . . , he continued awkwardly. —*Naja*, he sighed, falling silent.

—We mean it, Baldur, added Bernd. —No matter where you may be, no matter when or why you may need us, just send us your ring and we'll come immediately.

Baldur looked at his hands. —The only ring I have now is this one, he said, indicating his wedding band.

—Well then, we can select some other sort of object, said Karlheinz quickly. —In fact, just a postcard bearing your address....

—*Nein, nein*, smiled Baldur, taking off his ring and turning it curiously between his fingers. Suddenly he tossed it to Bernd who, startled, caught it lightly as if it had been a burning coal and tossed it back immediately. Baldur slipped it onto his finger again and held out his hands to look at it. —It is, after all, only a ring like any other, he said.

¶ When Freia told Frau Schnell that neither she nor her husband would be dining that evening, the good woman found it in her heart to charge them for only one and a half meals, explaining that unless she were notified a day in advance she usually charged the full price. Nevertheless, her words saddened Freia who interpreted them not as an example of simple peasant thrift, but as an indication that soulless materialism had already crept to this outpost of humanity.

Freia's lack of optimism this evening had not been brought about by her weariness. If she felt herself under the thumb of a cruel pessimism, it was, she decided, caused by certain glandular changes inside her body and aggravated by Baldur's absence. So spiritually depressed was she, that as she spent the dinner hour alternating between feeling ill in her bedroom and vomiting in the hall toilet, she could not help finding life as stale and flat as when she had lived in Los Angeles, before ever peering into the empyrean of the Germanic Soul.

Freia sighed, rinsing her mouth in the sink, to think how glands, which were nothing

more than pieces of matter, had the power to interfere with the spiritual progress of individuals. She decided that if she ever found that the subject of anti-Semitism had become completely passé, she might profitably turn her attention to a treatise on the meaning and effect of glands in and on human civilization.

Herr von S and Stanley M ate their suppers in complete ignorance of the mental and physical discomforts racking Freia's little body. The dinner hour was marked by a minimum of words, for much conversation had passed between them that morning and, not unaware that any bond between them was based on discord and mild loathing rather than friendship, neither wished to be responsible for adding that extra verbal straw which might collapse their already heavily burdened civility.

As he ate his *Aufschnitt*, Stanley M, who had not thought about glands since puberty, except perhaps to picture them dangling like bright glass ornaments from his internal mobile, was not thinking of them now. Nor was his mind occupied with the discussion he had had that morning with the gentleman from Schleswig-Holstein. Had there been even the least little ghost of concern lingering in the corners of his mind about the intentions outlined to him by Herr von S, it would easily have been exorcised by the young man's faith in Freia; should it ever come so far as a showdown between von S and his friend, he had utter faith in her ability to take care of herself.

It seemed to him, in fact, that Freia was showing a new strength of character in attempting, so far obviously in vain, to take her conscience out of his keeping and restore it to herself. Nor did it even occur to the young man that the main reason she might want to be in possession of her conscience was that she could then, when and if she so desired, get rid of it altogether. For while Stanley M had taken a three-unit undergraduate course in philosophy during his college days, and had then learned invaluable things about Locke and Hobbes, he had never been introduced to those realistic German philosophies which had had such a powerful if indirect influence on the mind of his young friend.

Thus he could not have known, for instance, that there were times when Freia tended to look upon the phenomenon of Conscience not as an indispensable moral quality in the individual and his civilization, but as a fairly modern concept dating back no more than a couple of thousand years which had evolved, along with other debilitating notions of humility and altruism in a suppressed and helpless community of Jews. In other words, not only had Freia learned to associate conscience with Jewishness in the manner of Nietzsche, but she more and more often found herself contrasting it unfavorably with the classical Roman moral tradition which prized above all the virtues of strength, courage, and enterprise. Had Stanley M realized all this he might then have deduced that this jewel of Freia's conscience, which he was keeping safely for her in his bosom, might make him a prime target on whatever day his little friend decided she must absolutely have it back.

As for the danger of von S's influence upon the young skier, Stanley M considered

Dieter Schnell to be rather beyond his unornamented powers of persuasion. Even if that were not so, the Prussian would have little opportunity to work on him further, for the boy was leaving in two days' time to finish his training in another part of the Alps before the world championship races that weekend.

Feeling confident, therefore, that he could safely leave all persons concerned to their various devices for one evening anyway, Stanley M finished his supper, bid good night to Herr von S, and made his way by moonlight down the mountain to the village.

At about nine o'clock, confident that there was nothing left in her stomach to disgorge, and hoping to find some distracting conversation, Freia made up her face and walked down the hall to the living room. Herr von S and the Rennläufer, who were talking by the fire as she entered, paused and looked around just in time to see the young woman fall forward in a faint.

—Frau Volken!

The cry boomed through her head like the roar of a subterranean cataract. Freia felt she could leap reassuringly to her feet if it were not for the extraordinary sensation that she had turned into some ponderous element whose sole function was to examine some particles of dust on the floor beneath her eye. An instant later she felt herself jerked aloft by strong arms and borne off, away, along a corridor and through two dizzying turns as her lolling head brushed lightly against a door jamb, concluding in a sudden drop in altitude as she was deposited gently on a feather bedspread into which she continued to sink like a stone in tepid water. For one wonderful moment she lay motionless, in perfect rest at the bottom, while all the forsaken universe and its parts scrambled to catch up with her again. Then her feet were jerked up and something bulky set under them so that the blood began to stream audibly back along her veins into her head.

—*Danke schön*, she murmured. —*Schon gut*. She felt she must assure the young boy that nothing serious was wrong. In fact, Freia had greatly enjoyed her experience, for it was the first time in her life that she had fainted all the way down to the floor. Usually Baldur was there to catch her, hang her by her feet, and slap her face.

—Where is your husband? the Rennläufer was asking her. —I will fetch him.

—Oh, no, cried Freia softly. —I'll be all right in a moment.

—There's nothing Herr Volken can do for her that we have not already done, agreed the Prussian.

Herr von S's words annoyed Freia, who felt that it was not for him to agree on what was best for her, particularly since her own decision had been based on selfless bravery and not on actual need.

—But can I bring you something? persisted the boy. —A doctor? A glass of *Schnapps*?

—A cup of tea would be wonderful, smiled Freia, who had just noticed in von S's distastefully screwed-up features a reflection of the sorry state in which she had left her room. Not only was personal clothing strewn about everywhere, but it was possible he

had detected the sour odor of her illness in the air.

Some minutes later, when von S and Dieter Schnell returned with a tray of tea, the room was aired and tidy. Freia was reclining prettily against two pillows, dressed in a pair of silk lounging pajamas embroidered with butterflies. It was an outfit which Baldur hated but which she secretly loved and continued to wear on the excuse that she had bought it to last a decade and that it would take at least that time before she would have enough money to replace it. Upon seeing this costume Herr von S turned his eyes immediately toward the ceiling, while Dieter Schnell, reddening, riveted his gaze upon the floor.

—Are you feeling better now, Frau Volken? asked the young man.

—Thank you, yes, replied Freia, lighting a cigarette and exhaling the smoke in two sultry streams through her nostrils. —You know, she explained gently, feeling that she must somehow transcend the fact of her lounging pajamas —to be ill is really a sign of health, a sign of bodily struggle. Then she added with a spontaneous lucidity which surprised even herself —Even the body of a perfectly healthy person like you is constantly struggling in a sort of cold war against all sorts of minor aggressions and rebellions from within and without. Only death signifies utter defeat of the body.

—I never looked at it in that way, said the Rennläufer admiringly, lifting his gaze from the floor and looking into Freia's beautiful eyes without even touching upon the lounging pajamas. —You express it very well.

Herr von S, who had been shocked to hear Freia address the Rennläufer with the familiar pronoun, could not control his irritation. —*Gnädige Frau*, to find similarities and make metaphors out of everything is to do nothing more than repeat the same problem over and over again in a different way. You will never discover four if you content yourself with saying that two plus two equals one plus three.

Actually, von S had good reason to be annoyed just then with anything Freia might have said, for he had been in the middle of a very important conversation with the Rennläufer at the very moment the young woman had interrupted them by coming into the room and fainting. Indeed, the moment before she had entered, von S, who had been deep in the subject of Aryan qualities, had been about to run his hand, in a fatherly way, through the boy's sandy hair and thus draw his attention to a splendid example of one of the very qualities he was describing. His arm had, in fact, been halfway extended when he had heard Frau Volken enter behind them; as he snatched his hand back he had had, for one peculiar moment, the impression that she had fainted precisely because she had seen what he was about to do. Although he had rejected this absurd notion immediately, the shock it had given him had upset his stomach and ruined his digestion for the rest of the evening.

It was perhaps because of all this that von S had not thought to inquire into the reason behind the young woman's fainting spell. He was about to suggest that he and Dieter Schnell go out and allow Frau Volken to get some sleep, when he was transfixed by the

Rennläufer's innocent question —Are you going to have a baby, Frau Volken?

Perhaps it was because he smiled directly into her eyes when he asked this that Freia felt a delightful heat rush through her body, while her brain dissolved briefly into a vortex of stars and rainbows. She identified this sensation at once as what she had felt many years ago when her very first beau had given her her very first kiss on the cheek.

—Yes, she smiled, wishing she could reach out and embrace the boy for having asked.

But there was no need, for suddenly the Rennläufer himself jumped up and crushed her powerfully to his chest. —Frau Volken, he cried. —I'm so happy for you.

The German arose also and said with a stiff bow —I too congratulate you, *gnädige Frau*. Then, placing his hand firmly on Dieter Schnell's shoulder, he added —And now we must definitely go out and let the young woman sleep.

—Oh, please don't go yet, said Freia to the Rennläufer. —Do stay a few more minutes.

The skier sat down on the bed next to her, covering her little hands in his great ones. After hesitating a moment von S sat down again on his chair. —Remember, he cautioned —if you don't get some rest yourself you'll be in poor condition tomorrow.

—It isn't even nine thirty yet. Turning back to Freia, the Rennläufer asked —When will your baby be born?

Freia laughed. —Why, I don't know. And then her own answer saddened her, reminding her that everything she said to the boy was a lie; the baby would never be born. But she couldn't tell him that, for surely he would not understand.

—But your husband is so blond, continued Dieter Schnell enthusiastically —and you are so dark. What color hair do you suppose your child will have?

Herr von S ground his teeth audibly. —What have I taught you about Mendel's law? he asked through stiff jaws.

The Rennläufer laughed. —But we're not talking about flowers and peas, he cried. —We're talking about a real baby. Frau Volken, will it be a boy or a girl?

—A boy, replied Freia immediately. —A boy with mud brown hair.

—You must teach him to ski very early. Four isn't too young. I had my first skis when I was three. Children learn very quickly. They have no fear of anything.

—I know, smiled Freia softly, looking at the boy's radiant face.

When Herr von S and the Rennläufer had gone out, Freia changed into her nightgown, climbed under the covers and switched off the light. Her overtired body twitched, first here and then there, as if the moonlight shining upon the house had somehow entered within her, to glint and sparkle before fading out. She lay in the darkness thinking of nothing at all, not even of Baldur, just letting the dark silence penetrate and soothe her senses. Then suddenly something slipped from the corner of her eye and fell with a little plop onto the pillow. Almost at the same moment something ran out of her other eye, down her cheek and into her hair.

What's this? Freia asked herself in amazement, for she had never cried in her life. But even as she puzzled, other drops were sliding out of her eyes, faster and faster, hitting the pillow with little plops and wetting her ears and hair disagreeably.

They can't possibly be tears, she told herself. I have nothing to cry about. Then she noticed a strange pressure building up in her chest so that she sat upright in bed and opened her mouth. The pressure broke forth with a sound which was like a hiccup and like the sound of a wounded animal, very loud in the darkness. Then another sob ripped out of her chest, and another. Turning on her stomach Freia hid the awful sounds and her streaming face in the pillow. What's the matter with me? I'm not in pain. I wasn't even sad. I wasn't thinking of anything at all.

Nevertheless, with a reason or without one, Freia sobbed and wept into her pillow until at last, drained and utterly exhausted, she fell into a deep sleep.

Schnee Bericht: Clear, continued cold.
–10°C. Skiing excellent on all runs.
Danger of avalanche.

Dearest Children!

How are you, my dear little son and daughter? I am well and enjoying our fine winter weather. We have had rain and sleet for three weeks now, and there is always a grand concert entertaining us by the foghorns offshore. I hope that Frau Schmidt's recommendation turned out well and that you are having such fun that you never think of your old mother, although I am sure that a letter will arrive soon to tell me all about your joys. Unfortunately, I am writing now with not such happy information, and I hope this letter reaches you before long. I have tried to telephone you, but it seems there is no telephone at the Schnell Pension. After spending many hours today in the draughty post office, against the doctor's orders, I finally had to give up. He believes I am too ill to go about the streets in this weather, but you see, he is wrong. I am still alive after all!

The fact is that this morning an official envelope arrived for you, my son, and I was sure that it was your visa. But upon opening it I found it was a letter saying that there has been a delay about the visa, for the X-rays taken during your physical examination have shown the doctors some small shadows in your lungs. It seems there is an American regulation prohibiting Germans with tuberculosis to travel to the United States, so your petition was automatically refused. On the other hand, the letter explained, there is another regulation that if you are married to an American citizen you cannot be kept out of the United States simply because of an infectious disease, but it is necessary to agree to put yourself under a doctor's care when you arrive there. And so you must now return to Munich for further physical tests and to apply for another visa. However I don't think there will be time to do all that before your plane leaves for New York. After all the trouble you had getting tickets on a chartered plane it will be terrible if you are not able to use them, particularly as you cannot get your money back. But of course the most important thing is your health. I'm happy that you've had at least a few days in the fresh mountain air. Surely by the time you get this letter the dark shadows will have flown away.

Since there is still a little time before I must run out into the sleet and put this letter into the mailbox, I can write a bit more. I'm hoping that this year will not be like the last or certainly there will be no more mosquitoes left and therefore no more birds. Every day I had to put out extra amounts of food for the starving titmice and thrushes, but I couldn't hope to feed the entire bird population, and I'm sure many more died than lived. Competition over every mosquito must have

been very keen. As you know, I never kill a mosquito, and last summer when they bit me, I felt I was contributing my blood to a worthy cause.

I don't mind playing my small part in the battle of species for we humans learn a great deal from our little friends in nature. It is obvious in watching them that there is no morality beyond the power to survive. Might is right – that is clearer this year than it has ever been since the war. A weak titmouse is a dead titmouse. A meek thrush is a dead thrush.

I'm not feeling so badly these days for an old woman and I even think I may escape the pneumonia that I catch every winter. I don't like to write to you about every detail of my health, because these things are of little interest to young persons on their way to the United States. Those funny pains which were bothering me this autumn continued and I finally went to the doctor (!) who told me I have gall stones. He said I must have an operation, but I told him I am no namby-pamby and that I will just keep my gall stones as long as they do not kill me. As long as I was talking to him in his office, I mentioned my recent difficulty in walking upright and grasping objects and he told me it was due to a very bad case of arthritis. He wanted me to have some treatments, but I laughed and told him that after all, arthritis is not very unusual in an old woman. How lucky you are, my children, that you do not have an awful old mother who is always making a *Theater* over every one of her miseries.

Well, my darling ones, that is all I have to write about until I hear from you. I will send that letter from the consulate on to you if I find it, but I think I dropped it out of my purse while searching for a coin for carfare while on the way home from the post office. I found I didn't have a coin with me, but the walk did me some good. Now, however, it is becoming difficult to hold the pen, and so I hope you will not blame me too much for my brevity. At least I was able to put my garden to bed for the winter before turning into a complete cripple.

With hearty kisses, Mama

Baldur stared at the letter in his hand, feeling very much like a sailor who, after tacking madly with the wind for several days, has suddenly lost his rudder. The elements no longer thrust him forward, his spirit hung limp as in a dead calm, and in the midst of a dynamic universe he alone was deprived of momentum through his inability to offer further resistance.

Slowly Baldur ran his hand over the golden stubble of his unshaven cheeks, thinking how only two minutes ago he had actually considered himself fortunate when Helga, who had come down to the village to fetch the mail, had seen him and handed him his letter. This irony of relativity caused him to consult his watch, but after peering carefully through the steamy crystal he saw that, fittingly enough, the hands had stopped some time ago.

It doesn't matter, he told himself. I am done with watches. Glancing up at the sky Baldur saw that the sun stood in such a position relative to the earth's axis that he was left in the shadow of a hotel.

Crossing the street he sat down on a bench in the sunshine, closing his eyes against the strong light like a mindless lizard. There was no reason for him to think; the matter was already perfectly clear. This incredible chaotic *Flaute* in which he found himself drifting helplessly was caused by one thing, one person. If Freia had not put everything off to the last moment when they were in Munich he would have known about his visa in time to have done something about it. Now it was too late. They would both have to miss the plane and forfeit the fares; he because of the visa, she because of her incredible carelessness in the matter of contraception. Freia would, he decided rationally and almost gently, have to tell him where to find the money that all this was going to cost; their affairs had evolved far beyond Baldur's own grasp of economics.

For how could he ask his poor mother for any more money? *Arme Mutti!* So brave and uncomplaining. Even in her misery she had not once asked Baldur to postpone his trip abroad and come to her aid. Indeed, her heroic selflessness might well have moved Baldur to drop his plans and fly to her side, were it not for the fact that throughout his entire life he had never been able to look with any pleasure or sympathy upon illness and suffering.

Baldur coughed, wiped his mouth on his pocket handkerchief, and glanced quickly into it before putting it back into his pocket. It was only a shadow on the X-ray plate, after all. Probably ninety percent of all Germans who had survived the war would fail such an examination. But what price would that shadow demand to go away? For Baldur, although he was a firm believer in State medical aid for the German masses, would never have considered accepting such Socialistic help himself. Rudderless before the tides of circumstance, he could at least tie fast to the buoy of personal principles.

Sitting in the warm sunlight Baldur slowly rotated his shoulders to work out the cramp which had gripped them during the night. He had passed the night in the tiny hut with his comrades, curled up front to back with Karlheinz to fit together like two teaspoons in the latter's narrow sleeping bag. Exhausted in both body and spirit, Baldur had slept soundly all night, to awaken suddenly that morning out of a dream. He had dreamed once again about the buildings, and upon waking still held the breathtaking vision of these huge structures in the eye of his mind.

At last he knew not only their concrete substance, but their shape as well. Lying there this morning, squeezed together with Karlheinz and unable to move a limb or exclaim aloud, Baldur had realized that these structures were not the futuristic wonders he had imagined they would be, but something which had already been designed, built, used and abandoned. And unless they had been destroyed in the meantime, they were undoubtedly still standing at Nuremberg where he had visited them many years ago with his mother.

He remembered struggling up the steps which must have been at least one hundred

meters wide, moving between great columns which towered with awful majesty above his golden head, pausing in wonder before mysterious portals tall enough to allow the passage of such colossi as the human world had never known.

It was an incredible achievement, a perfectly forthright expression. The buildings were essentially windowless, monastic in their simplicity, without a single curved surface anywhere to indicate humility or compassion. They were not modern, they were quite apart from time. They were the monument which the Third *Reich* had built to itself, and they had been built to last one thousand, perhaps ten thousand years. Indeed, one could say of them as of the pyramids: that they were not afraid of time; time was terrified of them.

What irony, Baldur thought, to have made this discovery, to have experienced this moment of utter disillusion, while staring into the back of his friend's neck, too imprisoned by feathers and soft cotton to leap away and pull the forest out by the roots and shower dirt upon his head. Instead, he had been forced to lie there, entombed with his dead hopes.

While having breakfast with his friends, between spreading margarine on the toast and sipping carefully at the tea, Baldur had casually mentioned these buildings, perhaps just to draw some small, painful solace from hearing them spoken of by another.

—Oh, yes, the *Reichsparteitag* buildings. I saw them myself last year, said Bernd. — They've let grass and weeds grow up between the steps. No more burning torches, he laughed ruefully. —All that remains are some ceiling decorations done in a sort of flowing swastika motif. The whole place is quite dead and abandoned, although it's become quite a popular mecca for tourists.

As he sat on the bench, the warm sunlight worked its way slowly through the layers of Baldur's clothing, penetrating pleasantly into his flesh. He was absolutely still – motionless and unthinking as the earth just before the first rays of spring sunlight pierce through to where the seeds, buried and dormant for months, begin to struggle into new life.

Why is it, Baldur asked himself suddenly, that something so monstrous as these buildings, so grotesque, is at the same time thrilling down to the bottom of the soul? How is it that something as hideously incongruous to contemporaneity as the scream of an animal to the peaceful night has the power to make the blood course more swiftly through the veins, rally the whole body to a total life-awareness, a greater strength, a nobler courage? It has nothing to do with the size, certainly, for there are much larger structures than these which only dwarf the soul. I've heard it said that the tallest skyscrapers produce in men the self-image of ants.

It must then be the proportion, the implied ratio between what man is and what he could become. The skyscraper dwarfs because it's really very compact in every way; it is scaled down to the size of men, consisting of tiny cubes piled one on top of another. It's as ingenious as an anthill, but it doesn't encourage men to feel or be more than ants.

On the other hand, the ancient temples and statuary of Egypt, the great structures of ancient Greece and Rome, celebrate the natural grandeur of man, encouraging him to even greater sublimities and ambitions. Fifty centuries later we still marvel at them, for we've never equaled them. It's obvious that if the *Reich* had not fallen, the entire face of Germany would be different today and for millenniums to come. There would be palaces everywhere instead of small, cheap dwellings. Hideous palaces, it's true, but palaces nonetheless. The German soul would not be cramped and stifled by its physical environment.

Today, what if today someone were bold enough to design structures of like grandeur to cover the entire land? Not ugly buildings like those at Nuremberg, but structures of great beauty which would exalt all men entering them to think and behave like gods. Such a State would need no laws beyond the natural laws which apply to all things in the universe; it would need no further ethic than physical form, texture, and proportion. The physical conditions and dimensions of life would put an end to greed and crime. True, they did not in ancient Egypt, but we are, after all, more evolved than the ancient Egyptians in certain important ways.

That Baldur Volken was so enthusiastic and receptive toward a vision of this revolutionary and remarkable kind did not mean that he was naïve. No one was more aware than he of the problems involved in building this or any utopia. On the other hand, to what worthier pursuit could a man devote his life? Baldur wasn't worried about the aesthetics involved, knowing that beauty lies not in the thing itself, but in the effect it produces in the soul. Therefore, could one truly say that the buildings at Nuremberg were, for all their obvious ugliness, not beautiful? Indeed, they seemed now to Baldur to fall in a special way into the same category of beauty as gray fungus and rheumatic fingers.

Perhaps then this was the discovery he had been waiting for – not a finished and complete design as he had thought his dream would convey, but a starting point for his own genius to build upon. This was the real beginning of his life's work. He would devote his life to turning Germany into the country he had imagined it as a child, before he had absorbed the stultifying propaganda of shame, guilt, and defeat.

Being an utter realist, Baldur knew that this beginning implied years of hard work and study in many fields. Perhaps it would be much better if they didn't go to the United States, that land of anthills. A lengthy stay in such an environment might turn his mind away from this new project. No, he would continue to live in Germany with his wife and child. Better still, Freia and the child could live in the north with his sick mother, while he, in the south, turned his full attention to his work. This too would be the perfect solution for all his financial woes.

How lucky it was that he had passed this night away from Freia and had had his vision in the *Schlafsack* with Karlheinz. Had he awakened in the Schnell Pension he would certainly have gone straight off to work, plunged in a disillusionment out of

which he might never have arisen. As it was, he had been forced to lie motionless until long past the hour at which he was supposed to report for work. This didn't bother him, for Balder was a punctual and highly responsible being who knew it was better not to go to work at all than to get there late.

Opening his eyes he stared bravely into the bright sun. Now was the time to begin to act. Somehow they must get off this mountain. To do so they would have to have help from his mother, help for which he had already written and which might by now be waiting for him in the form of a cable at the post office.

Baldur got off his bench and started down the street. The village had filled with tired, hungry, ski enthusiasts, a seething forest of skis and poles. But Baldur hardly saw them. He strode along briskly with a hard joy, like a concrete chip, balanced boldly upon his heart.

¶ The village post office was a red brick building neither too small nor too large for this booming little ski resort. Heavy glass doors leading into the foyer kept out the cold and helped retain that mass of warm air which the post office offered its customers along with stamps, printed forms, and services. The persons lined up between Baldur Volken and the General Delivery counter seemed perfectly content to wait their turns in this balmy atmosphere.

Baldur himself stood at the end of the line in a state of highly nervous creativity, amazed to observe how his fertile mind formed one association after another, discovered relationship after relationship, to produce, without any sort of conscious effort on his part, ever brighter, clearer flashes of understanding. The basic ideas, the raw materials of this creative process, were not, he realized, new. All of them had, at one time or another in the past, appeared in Baldur's mind, only to have been dismissed as meaningless, absurd, or even decadent. Today, in the presence of some hitherto absent catalyst, all these formerly discarded notions seemed perfectly fresh and valid, hooked up as they were in long processions of new and vital relationships.

So far and fast did Baldur's understanding and imagination expand in these minutes that in no time at all his creative soul seemed to have broken free from the heavy pull of earthly realism. Soon it arrived at such uninhibited heights that the young man could not help trembling inside. Might not these magnificent visions be like those pretty mirages which linger on the border between sleep and waking and which burn out and vanish even as one tries to clutch them? he asked himself. Can anything which has grown so fast and effortlessly not be highly perishable? And then he answered himself firmly: Trust thyself, Baldur. Trust thyself!

Although Baldur's whole mind was absorbed in this miracle of creativity, he could not help noticing when a fat German on the line ahead of him said to the young girl standing further on —You are American, *nicht*?

The girl's blond curls bobbed in affirmation while she stared uncomfortably down

her yellow stretch pants to the toes of her white ski boots.

—I knew it. You see, I can always spot an American from a mile away. The German smiled proudly around the room, coughed loudly, and propelled himself a few inches forward so that the foremost tip of his bulging ski suit pressed against one slim, golden hip, remaining there as if glued.

Baldur's fists clenched. There was nothing he wanted more than to punch that fat stomach as hard as he was able. Was it possible that that horrible fat object was a German? It seemed suddenly to Baldur that the very fact of this German's existence dangerously threatened his new vision. For this sort of stupid *Schwein* had no place at all in Baldur's new Germany; he could never be allowed to share the same dome as a person like, say, Baldur himself. Indeed, it suddenly became quite clear to Baldur that human rights and equalities – the gem democracy itself – could best be enjoyed and protected if they were not handed about to just everyone but were reserved for a small, educated and refined elite.

—What state you come from? continued the German. —No, don't tell me. I'll guess. He paused a moment, rubbing his chin. —Florida.

—Well, said the girl in a high nasal voice —you're almost right. I'm from Salt Lake City.

—You see? I came pretty close, *nicht*?

—You were on the right continent anyway, laughed the girl sympathetically, pushing her blond curls back behind her ears.

As she gave her name to the clerk behind the mail counter, the German, staring absently at the ceiling, took a flatfooted step forward so that his large stomach pinned her lightly against the counter.

—Ahem, coughed the girl, hoping he would glance down and notice this fact. But when he didn't she said politely —Pardon me, sir, but would you mind moving back a little? Your stomach is sort of pushing me.

—What are you saying? cried the German, pushing her still harder in his confusion.

—It's not your fault, sir. You've just grown a little tubby, that's all. I guess you don't realize how far it really sticks out. Oh, *danke*, she said, taking a letter from the clerk and springing lightly away. —It's from my boy friend back home, she explained to the German so as to avoid hurting his feelings in any way. And then, in order to absolve herself from any further responsibility which standing in line next to this man might possibly have conferred upon her, she added gently —We're practically engaged.

—Oh, sure, replied the German, staring up at the ceiling and snapping his fingers five or six times in an offhand way.

Baldur watched the girl walk quickly across the room and push through the first pair of glass doors before pausing in the foyer to rip open her letter. She read it eagerly, smiling, motionless, suspended in the sunlit glass chamber like a yellow and white butterfly in an illuminated display case.

As she stood there, suddenly the beams of sunlight slanting in upon her splintered into a thousand particles and went dancing all over the walls, over her clothes and face and the letter in her hand. Without looking up she moved a few inches to the side to make way for the tall man who had just entered and who now paused to scrape and stamp the snow from his boots on the metal floor grill. The heavy glass door swung shut as he released it, the splashed light cascading backwards over the walls to come to rest in their original oblique beams.

If you would just glance up now, *Fräulein*, thought Baldur, you would see a *real* German, not a stupid goose. Indeed, although von S was dressed as usual in his black parka and pants, framed and illuminated as he was at this moment in the glass cube of the foyer he seemed to come to Baldur's attention for the first time.

Er sieht sehr schnell aus, thought Baldur admiringly. And in fact, with his high black ski boots and gloves, and with a pair of black rubber goggles pushed high up on his forehead, Herr von S looked not only very fast, but also very strong and brave and even a little military.

If she would only look up from that letter, thought Baldur impatiently, she would know she is looking at a real German!

Stepping through the glass door, Herr von S smiled to see Baldur. —*Guten Tag*, they greeted each other in northern accents, gripping each other's hands warmly.

—*Nichts*, said the clerk behind the counter, shaking her head at Baldur.

—Von S. said the Prussian. The clerk turned obediently back to her pigeonholes. — Have you been skiing today, Herr Volken? I have not seen you on the slopes.

—No, replied Baldur. —I think my wife and I will be leaving sooner than we expected. I'm waiting for a cable which may arrive sometime today.

—You're leaving so soon? cried von S. —Why, that's a terrible shame. I suppose it is due to your wife's condition.

Baldur stared at him incredulously. —Do you know about that?

—Ah, yes. She has already told everyone this interesting news. She says she is looking forward to having a son.

—Having a son? repeated Baldur dully.

—I see you would prefer a little golden-haired Mädel, smiled the Prussian understandingly. —Yes, I would too in your position, but when you selected such a dark woman to be your wife, the chances of your having a blond child were ...

—*Nichts*, interrupted the clerk.

—Exactly, said von S, placing his arm around Baldur's shoulders in an awkward attempt at fatherliness. Together they walked out of the post office, and if Herr von S had not been there to push open the two pairs of glass doors, it is likely that Baldur would have bumped into them blindly, so dazed was he by the way Freia had told everyone about their most private affairs.

—My skis are here, said von S when they were outside, indicating a nearby rack. —

But I was going to have a bite of lunch just up the road. Won't you join me?

—I've just had breakfast, replied Baldur.

—Then something to drink. Let me invite you. I must say, I have some strange things to tell you concerning our friend M. His behavior has become quite a scandal.

—I think I would like a glass of beer, Baldur decided, and followed von S across the road into a café where the Prussian ordered two *Schnapps* and two glasses of beer. Although Baldur seldom smoked, he accepted a cigarette.

—I'm afraid, began Herr von S after they had been served —that I don't think very highly of the way houses are built these days. Everywhere one goes it's a matter of thin walls; there is no longer such a thing as privacy. But after all, whether an individual enjoys this or not, he does learn to condition himself to it. He simply takes extra pains to keep his affairs from interfering in the lives of others. Not so the Jew. He doesn't seem to have the least concern how far his indiscretions are broadcast. I had to hide my ears under my pillow last night not to hear the sighs and groans coming through the wall from his room into mine. Indeed, if I had not already suspected what was going on, I would have thought it was a torture chamber on the other side of the wall, instead of an orgy of pleasure.

—Did you see the woman? asked Baldur, gray as frostbite.

—No. of course not. Mr. M is too clever for that. But I'm surprised that you heard nothing, for he shares a wall with you also, if I'm not mistaken.

—I was out very late last night, replied Baldur without looking up.

—And your wife said nothing about the noise?

—My wife is a very sound sleeper, he said smoothly.

Herr von S chuckled. —Well, although I didn't see the woman, I do have a theory about her. You see, at first I thought it might be the servant girl, Helga. Certainly that would have been a convenient choice for such a lazy fellow, for she's already there to hand. But then last night, although I could not make out a word of what they were saying, I realized that whoever the woman was she must speak English, for M. as you know, speaks no German. And yet they seemed to converse quite freely with one another throughout the night. —*Tja*, sighed von S, washing down a sip of *Schnapps* with a swallow of beer —I must say that when I try to picture to myself the kind of young woman this must be, my imagination fails. The times are producing monsters of sexuality. I think this is the fault of today's men who no longer know how to keep women in their place. Perhaps the most unnatural creature in all nature is the married woman who is unfaithful to her husband, for then how does a man ever know if the *Junge* or *Mädel* he takes to his heart is his own and not the offspring of some loathsome, seductive Jew? You are most fortunate, Herr Volken, to know that your child will be ... But what is wrong? cried the Prussian, for Baldur had suddenly leaped to his feet and stood swaying next to the table, his great, shaggy head shaking from side to side as if harassed by a stinging insect. —Have I upset you with this story? You are so pale.

—It is not the sort of thing a man can listen to and remain calm, cried Baldur, crushing out his cigarette. —One is moved to action.

—But not against the Jew, laughed von S. —Surely it's his nature to behave so, and we are not in Germany after all. It's the woman who is entirely at fault. I must say that if I were cursed with a wife or daughter like that I would cast her out of my house. But where are you going, Herr Volken? exclaimed the Prussian.

—I think I shall go now for a hike, replied Baldur, tossing off the rest of his drink. —There are times when it is necessary for a man to climb a mountain alone. Will you please excuse me? It will be perhaps my last hike in some years. Without waiting for a reply Baldur started toward the door.

—Herr Volken, said the Prussian, leaping up and catching hold of Baldur's sleeve —doubtless you have studied Nietzsche.

—Of course.

—Then you are not bound. Your will is free. Only listen, whispered von S, drawing him nearer —listen, Herr Volken, he hissed into Baldur's ear —in the Beginning there was Nietzsche!

—I shall remember, promised Baldur, and a moment later was out the door and running through the snow.

¶ Shepherd Schnell's ski repair, waxing and rental shop was a small room under one of the very largest village sporting goods stores. It was here that the good shepherd worked from early morning until late at night all winter long. Early risers could find Shepherd Schnell, known to all as Ski Otto, with one ski clamped to his rough work table, laying on wax with the aid of an ancient electric clothes iron upon which he bore down with great speed and energy, spreading the wax thickly and evenly from one end of the ski to the other. After ironing a pair of skis he would set them outside, steaming, to dry in the cold air. When all the skis had been waxed, Shepherd Schnell would turn to attaching bindings to those skis which had been bought the day before in the store over his head. His rough mountain face and simple wit inspired confidence in even the most timid beginners, and he laughed and joked with everyone, giving encouragement and advice without pausing in his labors. Indeed, the only time he would turn away from his work was to take into his strong, gentle hands a freshly shattered ski which he would examine first sympathetically and then philosophically. For skis too had their place in the cycle of life, and the destruction of a ski, like the death of a cow, was more than an individual tragedy; it was a necessity and a spur to both nature and the economy. So real were skis to Ski Otto that he could recognize, within the space of a week, any ski that he had seen once. He never waxed or handed anyone the wrong pair out of all the hundreds of pairs which passed through his hands every day. When Freia Volken entered his shop that Monday morning and asked for her skis, which she had left there the evening before, he was able to dig them out of the hickory and ash forest of his shop without any difficulty.

Freia had awakened that morning feeling very well and extremely optimistic despite the one undisturbed bed in the room. Examining her complexion in the mirror she noticed the crusty white spoor left on her cheeks the evening before and had almost decided not to wash her face at all that day when she remembered that tears were, after all, a rather ordinary female achievement. They did not even indicate sorrow, for she was not unhappy. She knew that the marital difficulties between her husband and herself could be brought under control at any time she wished. As for the unutterable confusion toward which their finances tended, Freia had never inclined toward strong emotion over that sort of thing. Worry doesn't help at all, she reminded herself wisely, and thus dispensed with that barrier to good spirits. Even the fact that Baldur had not returned home the evening before filled Freia with joy this morning, for she was always happy when Baldur was happy. If he was having such a good time with his friends that he didn't want to come home one night, so much the better for their relationship in the long run.

Freia breakfasted late, learning from Helga that both Herr von S and Stanley M had already left the house. Feeling she ought to leave the house too, Freia returned to her room and carefully arranged her makeup while trying to imagine how she could possibly spend her day. Then an idea struck her. As long as she was in the Alps, why not take full advantage of this fact and really learn to ski once and for all? Realizing that she had already wasted a lot of valuable time, she resolved to make up for this by a great new burst of energy.

As Shepherd Schnell handed Freia her skis his eyes twinkled humorously. —You are very light on your feet, *gel?* he said —This is the same wax I put on a week ago and it's still like new. I think your skis must never touch the snow at all.

Freia examined the wax. —I think it's already a little chipped, she remarked ruefully. —But nice and dry. Your skis will not stick together on your shoulder, *gel?*

Freia laughed, confessing that while both her spirit and flesh were ready and willing to ski, her memory was weak. Taking off a boot she handed it to the shepherd who examined it with some wonder. —You have quite large feet for such a little woman, *gel?*

—The boots used to be my husband's hiking boots, admitted Freia. —Can you adjust them to the skis?

The good man nodded sadly. —I can adjust the skis to the boots, he replied —but I would advise that instead of using these boots you have a new pair made. Also I think you should have some different bindings. This old-fashioned kind will not release if you should fall badly. I think it is very important. More important than pretty ski pants.

Freia laughed to see how Herr Schnell had mistaken her for a rich foreigner. She did not expect the simple man to understand that it was far, far more satisfying to her to struggle along on these lusterless boards of ash in these rough, oversized boots than to have the most beautiful and up-to-date equipment. —Perhaps next winter when we can better afford it, she replied reassuringly.

Despite his misgivings, the man worked vigorously and before Freia had smoked two

cigarettes her boots fitted together perfectly with her bindings. Tying the skis together with strong rubber straps, he set them on her shoulder and put her poles in her hand. — Now you are ready, *gel*?

—*Vielen, vielen Dank*, replied Freia earnestly, sure that the simple man expected no other recompense for his efforts than this genuine expression of gratitude.

—*Bitte, bitte*, smiled Herr Schnell. Opening the door with a flourish he bowed her cordially out into the snow where she felt at once every inch a skier.

It was no great disappointment to Freia, as she strode briskly down the street, to observe that it was already too late to join a morning ski class; she had no strong desire to plunge immediately into formal instruction, whereas she did have a decided urge to seek out Dieter Schnell and see how his training was progressing. This did not mean that Freia had already deserted her purpose, for there did exist in her mind, as in the minds of all beautiful women, the innocent knowledge that she could more or less expect, in a world of two sexes, that if there was anything she wanted or needed to know or learn there was always some highly qualified and not unattractive personage ready to spare a certain amount of his precious time teaching it to her.

Full of this self-confidence, Freia was able to commit, blithely, what in Austria was an unheard-of ostentation – that of riding the lift to the top of the mountain with herself in one chair and her skis, like two silent and discreet servants, following in the chair behind.

All the way up the mountainside the sun sparkled on the snow below with exactly the same effect created artificially on the kinds of Christmas cards that Freia never bought. Can it be, she wondered, that there is after all some truth in those gaudy representations? Or rather, she reflected, does it only demonstrate a lack of true Beauty in those parts of nature which can be so easily imitated? It was an interesting aesthetic problem. Freia decided to try and remember it so that she could discuss it later with Baldur. In the meantime she felt quite confident that her little gray shadow whisking across the snow far below contained more mystery and lyricism than the great snowy mountains spreading out on every side and off into the distance.

Arriving at the top of the lift, Freia located the slalom area without any trouble, but was disappointed to find that the Rennläufer was not there. She decided to put on her skis and make some practice sorties in the snow so that if and when he arrived she would at least have had that much experience behind her.

How unfortunate that I didn't pay more attention when Shepherd Schnell showed me how to manipulate these bindings, thought Freia after several vain attempts to attach her skis to her boots. But she was too proud to ask for assistance, aware that her plight was not unobserved by several able young men and even a few children who, instead of offering to help, only stared at her curiously before leaping forward and disappearing smoothly over the brow of the hill. Freia sighed as her cold little fingers struggled with the icy clasps, consoling herself with the thought that whatever the sacrifice now, it

would all be worth it the next time she and her husband went tramping off together in the snow.

—*Da. Da kommt er!* cried someone suddenly. Freia felt a shiver run through her body, for she knew instinctively that this cry announced the arrival of Dieter Schnell. But upon turning her eyes in the direction everyone was gazing, she could make out nothing at all.

—*Schau mal!* breathed someone. Freia strained her eyes to discover the marvelous source of his awe, but all she could see was a dot moving high on the white side of the mountain. Then, as she watched, the dot became a line, a line drawing a white line down the white mountain.

—*Schau!*

If a god were to descend into the mortal sphere, thought Freia, this is how he might arrive. He would alight on the tallest mountain peak in sight. When his foot had touched it he would not step, he would not stop, he would fly down the earthly element, turning matter into space, treating gravity like support, and breaking every natural law without even being conscious of it, so little did such laws apply to him.

In seconds he was halfway down the mountain, larger now and faster, schussing down the frozen mountain in terrible defiance and control of his mortality, boy and god in one incarnation. Then Freia saw that he was plunging past, below, out of sight down the side of the mountain, but the cry of disappointment had hardly escaped her lips when suddenly he appeared in the air above her and she threw her arms across her eyes as if blinded by light, falling heavily backwards in the snow.

—Frau Volken! Did I frighten you?

She felt his strong arms lift her effortlessly out of the snow and set her upon her feet. —Not at all, she replied as soon as she was able to speak.

—But what are you doing here?

—Skiing, replied Freia simply, nodding toward her skis which still lay side by side in the snow.

—You aren't afraid?

—Of what? Bears?

—For the child, said the Rennläufer softly.

His words puzzled Freia, but almost immediately she realized what he meant. —Oh, no. Not at all, she assured him. —Quite the contrary.

—You're a very brave woman, smiled the boy proudly. —Especially for an American.

Freia laughed modestly and picked up one ski, happy to see Dieter Schnell move gallantly to help her. Brushing the caked snow from the bottom of her boots, he fitted them into the bindings and snapped them shut. —We can ski down together if you like, he said, for it would never have entered the Rennläufer's mind that anyone who did not know how to ski rather well would be found at that altitude pregnant and with a pair of

skis. As far as he was concerned, anyone who had the courage to place his feet into the steel traps which Freia had on her skis must be highly competent in at least his own estimation.

How strange, thought Freia, recalling the story of the girl who, putting on her new red shoes, began suddenly to dance, that the moment the skis are attached to my feet I begin to ski. Indeed, as soon as the Rennläufer had snapped shut the bindings, Freia began to move forward. At first she moved forward slowly, poking casually at the snow with her poles in an effort to stop herself, but then she began to slide faster and there seemed to be absolutely no way in the world to slow up or stop once she had gotten going.

It's fortunate I possess such excellent balance, thought Freia as she whizzed along, wisely keeping her skis far apart to provide a stable base, and waving her poles in the air. So deft was she that she managed to keep herself upright for several seconds until she came to a slight bump which caused her to lose her balance so suddenly and completely that she didn't know she had lost it until she felt her face buried in the snow.

—Frau Volken! cried the Rennläufer. Having seen Freia move down the slope away from him less like a skier than a windmill, he had darted after her and was beside her when she fell.

—*Pass auf*, she said as he reached down to help her. —My leg is broken.

In a moment the Rennläufer had undone the cruel bindings and had turned her rightside up. —Are you sure? Did you feel it snap?

—Yes. There was no doubt at all in Freia's mind that her leg was broken, although she did not feel any great pain.

Very carefully the Rennläufer felt her leg. —I think you are right. Turning to the curious group which had begun to gather, he asked for parkas. Two of these he wrapped around Freia.

—*Passen Sie auf*, he said to her then —I can send for the stretcher, but it could take an hour to arrive and I'm afraid you'll soon feel the shock. Shock could be very harmful in your condition. If I carry you down myself I can have you in the doctor's office inside ten minutes.

Touched by the manly behavior of the boy, Freia didn't know which alternative was more appealing: the joy of suffering a miscarriage or the pleasure of being carried down the entire mountain in the arms of Dieter Schnell.

—It will hurt more if I carry you, added the skier —but I shall try to be as careful as possible.

These words decided Freia who knew that the extra pain she would have to bear would more than atone for her self-indulgence. Nor did she want to disappoint the Rennläufer's faith in her courage. —All right, she nodded, and was rewarded with a quick smile.

The Rennläufer lifted Freia carefully in his arms while another boy supported her

leg. —That's right, said Dieter Schnell as he felt her arms go around his neck. —Place as much weight as possible on my shoulders. Then he directed the other skier to secure her leg in a sling made out of a parka. To prevent herself from crying out in pain, Freia buried her little face bravely in the Rennläufer's strong, warm neck.

They started to move very slowly down the slope among the shooting skiers, flanked by a protective guard of sturdy young men. The Rennläufer kept his legs braced against the descent, the tips of his skis almost touching and the ends far apart in the stance of a beginner. Yet, anyone seeing Dieter Schnell move down the mountain with Freia in his arms could not have helped being impressed by the beauty of the boy's movements, by the way his strong, supple body, hardly bending to its burden, moved so slowly and securely, turning, winding its downhill course, stopping now, motionless, waiting for the sudden pain, which had made Freia gasp, to relent, letting her let him move, with incredible slowness and control, onward.

Stanley M, still heavy with last night's conquest and three cups of black coffee, saw them when they reached the village and followed them into the doctor's office. Freia and the Rennläufer disappeared immediately into the X-ray room.

—I must leave, Dieter Schnell indicated to him with sign language when he reappeared some minutes later. —Can you stay with her and see that she gets home?

—Yes, nodded Stanley M. He was very amused by Freia's latest adventure but didn't want to roar with laughter in front of the skier, less from worry that the boy might find this laughter in poor taste than that he might be moved to laugh also. We must guard the purity of our symbols! he thought gaily.

And then because Stanley M admired this young skier and enjoyed being in his presence as much as everyone else did, he delayed his departure for a moment by asking him, using a passing nurse as translator, whether Freia had suffered a bad fracture. But when the nurse repeated this query in German, Stanley M was surprised to see a puzzled expression come over the boy's face, as if the words still made no sense to him.

—Ask him again, he said, suddenly very anxious to hear what the Rennläufer would reply. —Is it a bad break? he repeated, pointing from his own leg to the next room.

Shrugging, as though he could not really understand the question, but would answer it the best he could, the boy replied simply —Not bad, not good. Broken.

The Rennläufer's words did not strike like a great flash of light, but rather Stanley M felt as if he had been walking through the residential part of a large town in the early summer dusk, when suddenly the street lamps, still mechanically synchronized for the shorter days of spring, came on so silently and softly that although he cried out "Ah!" the very next moment he was not at all sure that the street lamps had not been on for some time already and that he had only just now noticed them.

He had no time to ponder this, for as the racer disappeared into the street the other door opened and the doctor informed him that he might go in and keep Frau Volken company.

The sight of Freia lying on the X-ray table brought a great cry of amusement from Stanley M who immediately experienced that lucky feeling that whatever breakage has happened has happened to the other fellow and that no matter how hard one might wish it had happened to oneself instead, it hadn't.

—Babe! he cried.

—Observe, replied Freia coolly, nodding toward the X-ray plate which lay nearby.

Stanley M examined the plate and saw that one bone was broken neatly through. —A clean break! he cried in admiration.

—Stanley M, wailed Freia. —Don't joke. This is extremely serious. Be sympathetic at least, even if you can't be genuinely depressed.

Upon hearing this plea Stanley M grew serious. —Babe, he said earnestly —you know that way down inside me is buried a great lump of sorrow and sympathy. But, he explained, breaking into a wide grin —I just can't get at it! And a happy laugh escaped him.

—Please don't, cried Freia, beginning to laugh in spite of herself. —It hurts when I laugh.

But they were both still shaking with mirth when the doctor reentered. The sight of this man in white sobered them suddenly and an uncomfortable feeling of panic toward what was to come seized both of them.

—Your wife is a very brave woman, smiled the doctor. —I think the chances are very slight that this will interfere in any way with her pregnancy. Please be patient one more minute and we can begin.

When the doctor had gone out again, Stanley M turned to Freia. —You're pregnant? he asked her glumly.

—Yes, she sighed. —But . . . She paused meaningfully.

—Ah. He could almost see von S's arm materialize in the air and pat his friend gently on the shoulder. —I wonder what color hair it would have had.

—Probably mouse brown, smiled Freia. —I'll be sparing it that anyway. Although, she added —I don't think I'll have to take any action myself. I believe nature will take its course. Remember Nefertiti?

Thinking back, the young man recalled that Freia had once owned a part Siamese cat called Nefertiti which, after a highly expensive studding, had ruined all Freia's cat-breeding plans by suffering a miscarriage. Still, he was not quite sure what she had meant by her allusion, for he could not have known just how strongly his little friend identified with the feline species, nor that she was perhaps the one person in the world who firmly associated cats with miscarriages.

The doctor entered. —We can take you now, he said, and began to wheel Freia toward the door.

—I'll wait for you outside, Stanley M assured her, starting toward the waiting room.

—No, said the doctor. —You'll have to help me.

—I'm not a relation, said Stanley M hastily.

—That doesn't matter. We're a little pressed for time today.

Together they shifted Freia onto the operating table where the doctor removed her sock and cut her ski pants very carefully up the seam. —That was the most critical moment, he smiled. Then he strapped a little rubber object with a hose attachment to Freia's palm and told her to put it over her nose and inhale deeply. He directed the young man to take hold of Freia's leg above the knee.

Stanley M took Freia's leg between his hands, thinking how it had been years since he had last seen that leg. Until this very minute he had forgotten that it was not a voluptuous, shapely member, but a surprisingly childish little limb with no pronounced muscular development. It was surprising too to see how white it was, whiter than it had ever looked, since Freia had allowed the heavy black hairs to grow long in what she considered the tradition of German naturalism.

Freia had been inhaling deeply according to the doctor's instructions, but suddenly she threw wide her arms and muttered something. Stanley M noticed uneasily that her eyes were open and that the pupils were rolled up into her head.

—Do you feel any pain, Frau Volken? asked the doctor, easing the fractured bone into place with gentle fingers.

—I feel something, replied Freia in a terrible, disconnected voice —but I'm not going to complain. Slowly her eyeballs started to come back down.

—Put the mask to your nose and breathe deeply, the doctor directed. Freia obeyed.

The doctor had begun to wind gooey strips of cloth smoothly around Freia's leg. Stanley M watched, absorbing this new experience fascinatedly. Far away a dog barked.

—Where's that dog? shouted Freia, throwing open her arms.

—He's far away, the doctor assured her, then explained —Everything seems extremely loud to her. The dog sounded as if he were in the room.

—Put your mask back and breathe deeply, commanded Stanley M, who had noticed that Freia's eyes had rolled back into place and were threatening to focus. He saw with satisfaction that she obeyed immediately. A car horn sounded in the distance.

—Stop honking! cried Freia, throwing wide her arms again.

Stanley M sighed. It had occurred to him that Freia might be experiencing the ultimate form of universal Synthesis. If she were to remember this experience later it would be impossible for them ever again to discuss the subject on equal terms.

The doctor worked quickly and surely. In a very few minutes he had smoothed the last strip of plaster into place. What had started out as a fascinating departure from experience and expectation had developed under Stanley M's eyes into a shockingly ordinary plaster cast. Before he could deduce anything from this phenomenon, Freia, nearly completely conscious, said —I didn't cry, did I?

—No, replied the doctor, pulling her wool sock on over her toes with some difficulty. —You were very brave.

—I hope you'll tell my husband that. I *could* have cried, you know. Indeed, I had to fight it.

As they were preparing to place Freia in a little sled, by means of which Stanley M was to take her home on the cable car, the young man remarked —I suppose someone owes someone something.

—Oh, yes! cried Freia. —What do we owe you?

—We can speak of that another time, replied the doctor. —Certainly you are insured.

—Oh, no, replied Freia with such unmistakable pride in her voice that the others stared at her blankly. —My husband and I don't believe in the welfare state, she explained. —He believes that people should take the responsibility of their lives and actions upon themselves and not ask for charity. You can easily see how high this principle is, she continued, just in case they did not immediately grasp it. —It's in the tradition of those brave pioneers who carved a nation out of the vast North American wilderness.

—Ah, yes, said the doctor, understanding at last. He quoted his price.

—Fine, said Freia quickly, trying not to turn pale. —My husband and I will work something out, she smiled, torn between the Germanic urge to display her poverty and the American inclination to hint at huge hidden assets.

—We'll speak of it another time, said the doctor kindly. —In the meantime, keep your foot higher than your body and if your toes turn blue return immediately and I'll cut off the cast.

This sober warning made its impression on Freia and as she slithered along in the sled behind Stanley M just a few inches above the icy road like a milk can returning full from the dairy, she had to fight consciously against the despair of feeling trapped by external circumstances.

It was not until Freia had been comfortably settled into a couch by the fire, her leg propped high on pillows, that she was able to breathe a sigh of relief. —*Vielen Dank*, she said to Helga and watched the girl edge clumsily out of the room. Stanley M had gone to send the sled back down the mountain on the cable car. As she awaited his return, Freia watched the crackling flames mount the dry logs, feeling stir within her those gentle awakenings of creative insight which always heralded another glimpse into the empyrean, an experience resembling that mysterious and physically outlawed act of peering through the opening of an inflated red rubber balloon and seeing not just the reverse side of a gay toy, but a weird, stifling universe of translucent, curved and unevenly stretched surfaces through which the hideous red light, glinting in beads of sweaty condensation, seems to illuminate the twin phenomena of birth and dying —very like, in fact, what Freia imagined she had experienced that day under the anesthetic.

Freia rested her head back on the pillows. Many times in her life she had wondered what she would do if she were crippled. She had almost invariably decided it would not be such a terrible thing, for then she would be forced to give up the distractions of the body and could devote herself completely to strengthening her mind and soul. In fact,

she had occasionally imagined herself lying like this on a great meadow of soft pillows, while one or two good friends, in the easy postures of disciples, gazed up at her from her feet.

—Come sit with me, she said to Stanley M when the young man had returned from his errand. He crossed the dim room and sat down by her feet, careful not to jiggle the cast.

—Stanley, said Freia after she had lit a cigarette and had sunk back into the pillows —I've been thinking again today of the Great Synthesis. And do you know, I've become more than ever convinced that this great synthesis is very closely related to love. Oh, I don't mean love in its narrow, selfish expression, but in its more universal, metaphysical sense.

The young man sighed but did not try to interrupt. After a moment Freia continued —Stanley, you have absolutely no idea how much I love my husband. But you couldn't possibly understand this yet, for to understand love one must be capable of it. I don't mean to imply, she added hastily —that I'm more emotionally mature than you. After all, what I'm saying is common knowledge and no great discovery of my own. Indeed, the same rule applies to murder. No one can truly understand murder who has not committed it. I'm the very first to admit that I don't understand murder, she admitted modestly — but I do understand love because I am in love. But even many persons actually in love have difficulty understanding it because love is not utter happiness or security as we are taught, but a great complex. You may be surprised by this, but for a very long time, in fact ever since I met Baldur, I knew that if a day were to come when, in order to advance his career and realize his full artistic potential, it became necessary for him to leave me by the wayside, to divorce or disown me, that he would do it. Can you imagine that? Furthermore, he would do this in spite of the fact that he loves me dearly. What's more, I wouldn't say a word to try and stop him. I would just tell him to fly, to fly away, but if he ever wished to return I would be there waiting for him. Can you understand that, Stanley M? she asked, sitting up suddenly and gripping his arm. —Can you tell me why it is?

Stanley M, who had very few answers and who could seldom apply those few he had to any of the questions confronting him in life, shook his head sadly.

Freia smiled sweetly at her friend. —But you will some day, she promised him. — Some day you'll be capable of understanding love and its sacrifices.

Freia lay softly back on the pillows and drew pensively on her cigarette. —You know, she continued after a moment —my married life couldn't be more beautiful. I used to hear of women complaining that after marriage certain excitements fade, but Baldur and I discover that as we get to know one another more and more our love becomes better and better.

—Has he managed then to satisfy you? cried Stanley M in genuine delight.

Freia, not pleased by the question, but anxious to answer it affirmatively, nodded.

—How wonderful! Congratulations, he exclaimed with a great laugh, although he

didn't believe her for a moment. Then, seeing that Freia looked a little offended, he patted her cast and said —Freia, we are all products of our experience. Therefore we must see to it that we have only wonderful, positive experiences!

Freia regarded her friend without the flicker of a smile. —I'm being serious, Stanley, she said. —But obviously seriousness is too much to expect from you. I keep forgetting that. In fact, over the years there are other things I've forgotten about you, but occasionally you remind me of them. You know, there's something I've wanted to discuss with you for some time. It concerns our past relationship. I have a feeling that your memory too may have played some tricks with you over the years, and I just want to remind you that actually nothing ever really happened between us.

Stanley M looked at her in some astonishment.

—I'll admit, she added hastily —that I let you go rather far. Quite a long way, in fact. But really, actually, I never allowed you to go all the way. Do you know what I mean?

—No, he replied with complete honesty.

—I mean, said Freia, taking a deep breath —that you and I never had sexual intercourse – that I was a virgin when I met Baldur. Baldur was the first and only man I ever allowed to make love to me, although I will admit that I did let you go rather far. Quite far.

The young man stared at Freia as her words slowly sank into his mind. Suddenly his face broke into a wide grin. —Do you mean that? he exclaimed.

—I do.

At this unblinking affirmation Stanley M, who might in other circumstances have felt the icy chill of betrayal from Freia's words, instead found himself plunged by them into delight. For he saw that Freia had, somehow, by a mere exercise of will, managed to deny out of existence an entire moment in their past – to pluck away an entire domino, as it were, in the continuously toppling cause-and-effect pattern of their lives. And now, when Stanley M glanced apprehensively back into his past to see what sort of hole had been left, he saw, standing by the stream of his experience, a pretty, deserted mosque.

No, he realized suddenly. Not deserted. For what was that he saw shining there as softly as lamplight in the early dusk? Was it not the answer? Had Freia not just demonstrated that she could, by a simple act of will, deny cause and effect, implying thereby that this could be done with all the other pairs of opposites? Could not anyone, even Stanley M himself, simply take one giant step beyond good and evil, love and hate, order and chaos? Why not indeed? For these were merely words after all, abstractions having no more to do with physical reality than the moon had to do with green cheese.

—Babe! he cried, kneeling down next to Freia and grasping her arm. —Quick, give me another pair of opposites!

Freia, who had no idea what he was talking about, but who couldn't help feeling annoyed by his manner, replied immediately and rather dryly —You and me.

The look of surprise, of warm, joyful discovery on Stanley M's face as she said this,

puzzled Freia, but at the same time she felt the satisfaction of having obviously said the right thing at the right time. And so when pressed for more pairs of opposites she replied with a certain cool confidence —Here and there, then and now, beautiful and ugly.

As Stanley M kneeled by the couch gazing wordlessly at Freia, it seemed to him as if a magic wand had touched him on the shoulder, causing pairs of shackles to melt away from the wrists and ankles of his soul. And then, with a start, he sensed that his internal mobile, which had always dangled so precariously inside him, had fused into a great mass of flesh and blood interconnected not with wires but with veins and arteries to fill up his entire body. Once full, his body seemed to expand, as though his very skin had disappeared and he had become fused with everything surrounding him. For the first time in his life Stanley M felt himself a solid, integral part of the entire universe.

Freia, he said excitedly, rising to his feet. —Don't you see? *That* is the Great Synthesis, he cried, glancing wildly about. —And that, and that, he added, kicking over two chairs. Excitedly he walked about the room, stirring the air with his hands and pointing at objects while Freia watched him in amazement. —There *is* no Great Synthesis, he cried then. —Those are only words. There is only all of this!

His wildly pointing finger suddenly paused in the direction of the oil painting of the Rennläufer. He went up to the canvas and peered at it in the dim light. At this close distance the features of the face were nothing but dark and light patches of paint. He backed up until the patches had fused back into a resemblance. —That one knows, he laughed, turning to Freia. —And that's why he'd never be able to explain it.

Freia, who was ready to accept as valid any spontaneous enlightenment described to her by any German, especially if she had already experienced that particular enlightenment herself, was nevertheless completely unprepared to accept what was now happening to her friend. She could not help looking upon his strange antics and exclamations as highly disagreeable.

—Stanley M, she smiled sweetly —I feel I would like to be alone. As I cannot easily leave here, perhaps it would be possible for you to go out of the room for just a little while.

—Alone? he echoed wonderingly. —Alone? For at this moment it did not seem that a state of aloneness could possibly exist. How could one be alone in a dense continuum like the universe?

—Alone, repeated Freia, as if, for her at least, this word were still highly charged with meaning.

—Ah, *alone*, he exclaimed, glimpsing what she meant in the same abstract way that one glimpses a part of last night's dream flash through one's awakened consciousness. Indeed, his own reaction to this rather ordinary word reminded him suddenly of the Rennläufer's confusion over the word "bad," and this similarity brought a wide grin to his face.

—All right, he said. —I'll be in my room in case you need anything. Stanley M

walked down the hall toward his room feeling as if it made no difference at all whether he were in this room or that room. Freia heard his delighted laugh floating out as the door snapped shut behind him.

The young woman lay back on the pillows with a deep sigh of relief, but after only a few minutes of lying alone in the dim room and watching the fire, she was not unhappy to hear the sound of stomping feet on the front porch. Raising herself on her elbows she caught a glimpse of a large blond head going past the front window.

My man, she sighed happily, flicking the end of the blanket discreetly over the cast and sinking back. My blond lion, she smiled tenderly, looking expectantly toward the door.

¶ Herr von S had had an excellent day on the slopes. In spite of not having had the good luck to find Dieter Schnell on the slalom course, he climbed the mountain path that afternoon experiencing not only the quiet joy of a man who has spent the day in physically recreative activity, but the moral satisfaction of one who has done a good deed.

As he made his way up the mountain, von S paused now and then to look back down upon the village. It was already sunken in the cold shadow of afternoon, although the mountains were still bathed in golden sunlight. But he did not pause longer than to catch his breath, for he was eager to reach the Schnell Pension and observe the results of his efforts. If everything had proceeded in an orderly way – and he had no reason to suspect it had not – he would be free to leave the mountain the next day. The Prussian had still another week of vacation before him, and now, having skied on all the slopes in the area, saw no reason not to fetch his car from the garage and finish his holidays in the place where the world championship races were to be held. Indeed he looked forward eagerly to watching the triumph of his young friend the following weekend.

As von S walked up the path the sound of singing floated to him on the cold air. He could not see the young men whose throats swelled in song, but he imagined them to be a group of young Germans tramping along together not far off in the trees. It was an old song, evoking pleasant memories. He was just wondering why he had not heard this admirable melody in many years, when he realized this was because the song had been banned in Germany for well over a decade. Nevertheless, hearing it now filled von S with a sweet nostalgia and a pleasant feeling of anticipation.

As he entered the Schnell Pension he saw Freia Volken reclining on a couch by the fire, thumbing through a magazine. —Good evening, *gnädige Frau*.

—*Guten Abend*, smiled Freia cheerfully, turning a page.

—Have you had an enjoyable day, *gnädige Frau*? The German seated himself in an armchair and bent down to unlace his boots. It was already obvious to him from the young woman's attitude that her husband had not yet returned to the house and he could not help wondering if he intended to return at all. If he did, it would be an interesting evening to be sure.

—I had a pleasant enough day. Her tone of voice made von S turn and regard her more closely. Was she not paler than usual? Were those dark circles around her eyes merely shadows cast by the fire, or were they the ravages of emotion?

Suddenly, hardly able to get his question out as fast as he wished to hear the answer, he said —Have you seen your husband today?

—Of course.

—At what time? When did you see him?

—He left just a few minutes ago, answered Freia calmly. —Why do you ask? Did you want him for anything? Then she glanced up in surprise, for at her words the German had leaped to his feet and was staring at her incredulously.

—He was here and left again? exclaimed von S.

—That's correct.

—But was there nothing wrong? He said nothing extraordinary to you? I only ask, he continued, forcing himself back down into the armchair —because when I last saw your husband he seemed very upset about something. Terribly upset.

—Have you any idea why?

—No, replied von S sharply. —I only know that he was disturbed and that he wished to take a hike.

—Yes, he did go hiking, I believe, said Freia, turning another page. And indeed, when her husband had entered the house after this hike she had never seen him in such a state. His face, red and unshaven, was the face of a stranger. His clothes were ripped in several places as if he had returned from a week of hard tramping. So unnerved had she been by his expression of anger and despair that she had looked for reassurance at his right hand, only to find that for the first time since their marriage Baldur was not wearing his wedding ring. Strangely, the sight had calmed her. As for Baldur, whatever he had come to say, he was, for the moment at least, too exhausted to speak. He had sat in the armchair von S was now sitting in and had simply stared at her. Nor did he interrupt once Freia had started to talk. In fact, from the moment Baldur entered the house until he left again, he addressed not a single word to his wife. Freia had recognized this right away as the very silence she had been waiting for and decided then and there to use it as fully to her advantage as possible.

—Do you know why he was disturbed? asked von S as disinterestedly as possible, although his voice trembled with impatience.

—Herr von S, replied Freia —it isn't necessary to know the external, obvious circumstances motivating the anger of an individual, for these have nothing to do with the real issue. There are great gaps between the facets of reality, and therein lie the shadows.

—You will excuse me, *gnädige Frau*, if I say that I have no idea what you are talking about. Perhaps if you would lay metaphor aside for a moment and speak clearly ...

—I mean it's less important to know *what* bothers a person than *why* he is bothered. But, she continued, flipping through several pages at once —I don't think you can un-

derstand that since you're not able to accept emotionally that two plus two equals one plus three.

While Freia was speaking von S had again risen to his feet and was now pacing up and down the room. —But if a man is disturbed, greatly disturbed, he persisted —it is impossible that a moment later he is no longer disturbed. Something must have happened.

—We had a little chat.

—A chat? He *chatted*? I don't believe it. *Mein Gott!* If you didn't even know what was bothering him, what did you find to chat about?

Freia gazed modestly at her fingernails, feeling no desire to antagonize the Prussian by demanding why he was so curious about her private affairs. Indeed, she could hardly blame him for becoming concerned with something so vitally interesting. Then, since she had never renounced her decision to help von S to a deeper understanding and fuller appreciation of the soul of Freia Volken, she decided it might be a good idea to tell him something of what had passed between her husband and herself that afternoon, for it really seemed a shame that such an instructive conversation, or, rather, monologue, should happen only once in the history of human relations.

—We spoke, she said after a moment of deep thought —of psychological generalities: the whys of human behavior, not the whats. And then, because the German was staring at her with no apparent sign of having understood yet a word, she plunged on into some specifics.

—You have no doubt studied Nietzsche, began Freia, patiently ignoring the shudder that ran through von S as this name fell from her lips. She was used to the fact that Germans, particularly her own husband, did not enjoy hearing anyone, particularly Americans, speak of Nietzsche who had not studied the philosopher for at least three years. How could von S know what her own husband had only lately learned: that merely browsing through *Zarathustra* filled her with the same lofty emotions and enthusiasms which might arise in the soul of any German who had studied Nietzsche for a decade.

—Well, you see, she continued —I have always known my husband to be a sort of ... a sort of *Übermensch*, a superman, himself. Oh, she added hastily —I don't mean, of course, that he is *the* superman whom Nietzsche described, but rather a sort of personified augury implying that such a person could some day actually exist, genetically speaking.

—You spoke to your husband then of Nietzsche, affirmed von S, his voice cracking slightly.

—Only a bit, admitted Freia, who knew as well as he that just the mere mention of this philosopher, presented at just the right moment and in just the right manner, had on the constricted emotions of many Germans a remarkably cathartic effect. —Living as we do in a Christian era, where Pride is considered the deadliest sin and Meekness the greatest virtue, one has to be reminded from time to time that, after all, man is first and fore-

most a glorious animal whose glory is derived from his strength and pride.

—But only this afternoon I myself reminded your husband of that very ...

—A proud man is not necessarily a cruel man, continued Freia. —Quite the contrary. A lion, for instance, is not cruel because he doesn't comprehend pity; he has no conscience. Pity, as Nietzsche pointed out, is a vulgar waste of feeling; conscience is Jewish.

Herr von S could not help looking at Freia in astonishment. —But this is incredible, he exclaimed. —You have attempted to use, for your own ends, exactly the same tactic as I when ...

—And then, she continued —I spoke to him of the Soul. You see, Herr von S, my soul is basically of a different sort from my husband's. I must admit that my soul is not northern and punctual and orderly, but rather southern, exotic and forgetful. I'm always forgetting unimportant things, and naturally this irritates a man who, like my husband, has a firm grasp of objects, place and time. These differences, however, are not the weakness but the strength of our relationship, for they cause us to work much more strongly together than most couples in order to keep our marriage functioning.

The German, who had been pacing fitfully up and down the room, now paused. The muscles of his face twitched and his pale eyes flashed angrily as he stared down at Freia. —I have given you credit, Frau Volken, but apparently not enough. The way you have used a great philosophy for your own ends, reducing it to no more than a form of base flattery, is . . . *um Gottes Willen!* For just then von S had caught sight of the cast protruding from beneath Freia's blankets. —*Ach so!* he cried. —That is the reason. You were helpless. What did he say when he saw you had broken your leg?

—What did who say? asked Freia confusedly, for she was still trying to sort out this uneven mountain of praise which had just been heaped upon her.

—Your husband.

—He didn't say anything because he didn't see it. I assure you, we had enough to chat about without adding that.

—But you are beyond belief, cried Herr von S. —You don't even bother to use your frailties as a defense. You rely completely upon psychological cunning.

Freia flipped another page of the magazine. Although she had no very clear idea of what they were talking about, the discussion seemed to impel her mind along at great speed. This must be, she decided, the mental equivalent of skiing in flat light.

In spite of the strong opinions they had been exchanging, both Freia and von S had kept their voices down, and now a sound outside made them start and look around like two children surprised in a forbidden act.

—The Rennläufer? said Freia.

—Perhaps Mr. M.

—No, said Freia. —It can't be Stanley M because he left here only a short while ago with my husband.

At these words a look of total incredulity came over von S's face. —You let him take

M? he asked hoarsely. —You betrayed your own friend to save yourself? My God! I begin to understand.

—I don't know what you mean by that, Herr von S, cried Freia blushing furiously for no apparent reason and holding up the magazine to hide her hot cheeks. —And I don't know why you're so interested in things which concern only my husband and myself. If you must know, my husband received a visit from some old comrades and he invited Stanley M to go along with them. What could possibly be wrong with that?

—And M went with them? He went without a word? Without a suspicion? My God, cried von S to himself. Why didn't I tell him more fully what I was about?

—A suspicion of what? He seemed quite pleased to be asked, and I too felt it to be a beautiful, friendly gesture on Baldur's part.

—You sent him as a substitute, knowing full well what your husband felt toward him.

—Herr von S, replied Freia, again feeling her cheeks turn hot —I really haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. Remember, my husband doesn't happen to share your opinion of Jews.

—But M is not Jewish, snapped von S. —You know that as well as I do.

—But of course he is, replied Freia in surprise. —You were perfectly right the other evening. True, I denied it then, but I hadn't seen Stanley M in many years and had quite forgotten. Indeed, it's fortunate that while passing time robs us of many of life's details, it leaves in their place a great perspective.

Herr von S stared speechlessly at Freia. Then he said very slowly and in the best possible German —*Gnädige Frau*, there are certain facts about this situation which it is clear you do not know. Obviously no one has mentioned them to you and in spite of your uncanny intuition you could not possibly have guessed. And yet you knew perfectly well what you were doing when you handed Mr. M over to your husband, for Herr Volken's face and manner could not have hidden from you, of all persons, his true feelings, no matter what his words. You have given your consent to a terrible crime, and although you can defend yourself forever, and quite righteously, on the grounds that in fact you knew nothing of the true situation, nevertheless the guilt for whatever happens is entirely yours.

So awful was the accusation leveled at Freia by the German that if it had not been constructed of the finest, heaviest syntax and propelled by the slowest, most excellent pronunciation, it might have done a great deal of damage to the young woman's soul. Unwilling to let this ingenious and perfectly expressed indictment go to waste, Freia's first reaction was to fling it right back at von S. And indeed, as she did so, Freia saw exactly the mark to aim for.

—Have you not, she replied, in equally flawless English —just described your own guilt and that of your generation during the pogroms?

For a moment Freia and the German stared at each other accusingly, neither one

hearing above the roar of his own blood the frantic chorus of the Great Synthesis which had leaned down out of the cosmos to proclaim that now was the moment! – that now if they would only pay attention they would see that they had gone as far as their frail barks of language could carry them, which was right back to where they had started. That they, who called themselves German and Jew, man and woman, guilty and innocent, had, thousands of years ago, forgotten that words, like coins, are only an imperfect and arbitrary means of exchange between men. That it is language, not the Universe, which contains differences and opposites; language, not Reality, which contains inconsistencies and contradictions. And that now, if these two human beings would only put aside their labels and philosophies, they would not doom the history of man to still another cycle of error, but cast it loose toward the stars.

Indeed, had anyone else, even Stanley M, been there at that moment to laugh a great laugh or sigh a great sigh, their attention might have been diverted from themselves long enough to hear at least one significant chord. But no one was there, and in this moment their souls neared and journeyed on as mysteriously as one stick of wood passing another in the middle of an ocean.

—*Grüß Gott.*

The Rennläufer was standing in the room although neither one had heard him enter.

—*Du!* cried Freia when she saw who it was. —Thank you so much for helping me today. Turning to von S she explained —Dieter carried me all the way down the mountain when I broke my leg. And then she added sweetly —He did it to save my child.

The Rennläufer tapped the cast lightly. —How goes it?

—Not bad. So much has been happening lately that I haven't had a quiet moment to suffer.

—Tonight you won't be very comfortable, said the boy —but after that it won't be so bad.

Herr von S, who had watched this pleasant exchange with growing impatience, now said sharply —This is no time for idle chatter. Order has given way to chaos. The time has come to act!

—But what has happened? cried the boy.

—Mr. M is in grave danger.

—Where?

Herr von S turned toward Freia. —Where have they taken him? he demanded.

Freia laughed, blushing lightly. —Stanley M is with my husband, she explained to Dieter Schnell. —Nothing will happen to him.

—Where are they? shouted von S. —You must tell us. He will insult him cruelly. I know.

—They've gone to have a little beer party at the cabin of my husband's friends, replied Freia. —That's all.

—Where is the cabin?

Shrugging, Freia described the location of the cabin as best she could.

—I know the place, said Dieter Schnell. —But it isn't a cabin, only a shepherds' hut. Two young men are living there.

—That's right. That's the place, but ...

—We must hurry, said von S to the Rennläufer. —There's no time to lose.

—But it isn't necessary, cried Freia. —Stanley M is in no danger at all. You don't know my husband.

—I know him better than you, Frau Volken, replied von S icily. —He is of my blood and I know of what he is capable. Indeed, you may be interested to know, *gnädige Frau*, that you are married to my son!

Freia stared at von S who saw with satisfaction that her expression, while amazed, was not one of utter incredulity. The instant in which she might convincingly have rejected his statement flashed silently past.

—I'll go, said the Rennläufer, turning.

—Wait for me. I'll lace up my boots.

—But it will take too long by way of the trails, replied the boy. —It would be necessary to tramp a long way on foot through the woods. I'll get there much more quickly by using the jump. It will take me very close to the hut.

—The jump? cried von S. —But that is impossible. It is already evening. You will kill yourself.

The Rennläufer laughed. —There are still several minutes of daylight left. There is little danger.

For a moment neither von S nor Freia could speak. They stared at the boy, their faces filled with wild, unutterable excitement. At last he was going to jump. He was willing, without a second thought, to risk life and limb, the championship of the world, in one selfless, heroic act.

—Then hurry, boy, said von S, choked with emotion.

—Dieter! called Freia, and when the boy had turned she said to him softly, her eyes misty —Don't forget your parka, *gel*?

When the Rennläufer had gone out, both von S and Freia looked after him with throbbing hearts. Then the Prussian turned on his heel and hurried outside.

—You must be careful, he said as he watched the boy snap the bindings shut and wind the long leather straps around his boots. —You must be careful, but you must do your duty. Ah, how I would love to see you jump. How I would love to watch you.

—I'll have to carry my jumping skis and put them on later, said the Rennläufer, pulling on his gloves. For a moment he stood there, smiling, looking not at von S but beyond him toward the great sky which had turned so red with evening that not only the thin clouds but the snow and trees and all the world seemed caught up in one glorious conflagration. —Winter is almost gone, he remarked to the air. —It is almost spring.

Then, shouldering his burden, the Rennläufer leaped about, his skis thundering on

the snow. An instant later he had slipped across the clearing and had disappeared into the trees. All that remained in front of von S were two steel poles standing side by side in the snow where the boy had left them.

The German stood staring at the place in the trees where the Rennläufer had entered, and it was to him as if the trees had suddenly melted away, so clearly did he follow the boy in the eye of his imagination.

He is shooting through the forest, thought von S, down the fast, narrow trail, twisting, bending around the trees and rocks. Now he is flying along the edges of cliffs, bending far out over the valley, laughing at the forces reaching up to drag him below. Soon he will be at the top of the jump. He will lean down to attach his skis, then pause a moment to smile down the great slide. He will test the steadiness of the air, will crouch, drawing to him all his powers, and then he will start forward, downward, downward, until the moment comes to push against the sustaining element and fly forward into empty space, sailing, flying, swimming down the air. And perhaps he will not falter, will not crumple, will not fall like a pierced eagle, but will fly onward through the wide air so that Stanley M, in his moment of extreme need, will look toward the sky and see someone in a red . . . a red cape ... with large ... ears ... swinging low out of the sky to save him.

—My God! cried Herr von S. For suddenly this deluge, this flood, this tidal wave of hideous metaphor which he himself had created, slammed down so hard upon him that he reeled. Then it withdrew, leaving him standing, as it were, naked and alone on the shore of an empty sea.

—What have I done? he asked himself in wonder. —Have I allowed this miracle of a boy to go to possible destruction for no reason at all? For a Jew? For suddenly there was no doubt at all in his mind that Stanley M was, indeed, a Jew. Had not Frau Volken said it? Was it not she who had urged the skier to make this dangerous jump? She wanted to destroy him. It was her revenge!

—Dieter, my child, come back! shouted von S, his voice breaking with anguish. With a great sorrowful cry he started running through the snow toward the forest where the Rennläufer had disappeared. But the same snow which had borne the boy so swiftly away was now a nightmare of resistance. It dragged at von S's legs; it mocked his strength with its passivity, forcing him to his knees with every step. Until finally it stopped him altogether, so that only his gaze continued on into the forest and only his heart reached out silently to stop the boy.

It was only a short time later that Freia, tired of sitting alone, and hopeful that someone, anyone, but particularly her blond lion, might be returning home, peered out into the gathering darkness and casually mistook the Prussian for a rotten tree stump.

THE END