

m!normous© series #1

LEE MAE
MAGELLAN©

C@t
RATtitUde

first fully personalized novel ever written by AC
for Catherine Cohen, Switzerland

'A beguiling, riveting mess, but a mess.'
J.L. - Las Vega

Written by *Lee Mae Magellan*© Unbeaten at AC (Artificial Creativity)

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Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam, ut sis longaevus super terram, quam

Dominus Deus tuus dabit tibi.

Exodus 20 :12, Biblia Sacra Vulgata

Prologue

The old man looked at her indifferently. The new-born baby girl was tiny, only a few days old. She was so frail and, yet, had been so hard to deliver. Again, he scrutinized her little fists, her angelic face, the hair so dark and thick and shiny. Everything so perfect, so absolutely beautiful. He cupped her head gently, hopeful the trembling of his left hand would be stopped by the feel of her warm softness blooming into the leathery skin of his wrinkled fingers. How wretched he felt that the overpowering strength of her youth would not be bestowed upon him. Patiently, he was waiting for something else than that barren numbness, that had spread throughout him for years, for decades, for more than half a century. In vain. There

was nothing else he could find, not within him, not with her and so he released his gentle touch and let go of her.

Mostly, she was asleep now, lying in her little cot with her eyelids closed and her fists clutched, the tiny legs crossed over her tummy, covered by a warm feathery blanket. If she woke, he carried her around for hours so she wouldn't wail, massaging her little feet in the pink socks when she was sickish. He couldn't stand it when she screamed, when she was hungry and needy. Then she opened her eyes, moaning and muttering first, pouting her little mouth at him, drooling. When the first shriek pierced the air and dribble ran down her chin, she needed the bottle, immediately and without delay. Afterwards, she would suck his rough finger for minutes on end, her toothless palate moving rhythmically with great strength and ardour until she slowed and then, not without the occasional jerk of her whole body, she'd fall asleep again.

He wasn't good with new-borns, his hands were forever trembling, his skin so rough. But he was learning. Her diapers smelled of fresh bread and brought back memories of hot burning stoves full of young, wet hazelwood smoke and loaves always too small. Memories of hunger. Memories of want. He gave her to his son. Soon it was time to part.

„Here. Take her. Sell her. Kill her if you want.“

His face contorted into a weak smile. His son smiled back at him, taking her carefully from him, wrapping her tighter into her woollen blanket.

„Have you decided on that name?“ He asked.

„Call her Aviva“, the father said.

„Aviva? Why is that?“

„Because she is like spring; pleasant, delightful and beautiful. A new beginning, a fresh start. Her mother shall not see her grow up, nor her grandmother. She is now ours, she is yours. Just take her and go. She is a Cohen.“

„I know“, the son replied, he was still smiling, holding the little girl close to his chest, patting her small back softly.

The old man sighed. He had done his duty, fulfilled his promise, his many obligations. Indeed, he had done much more. Soon his son would leave, taking her with him, taking her away. For good. Now he would find peace, now respite would follow. But instead indifference only gave way to a wave of endless pain and then; emptiness. Silence. Nothing more. It was all futile, a chasing after the wind. Everything was meaningless. He felt defiled. And used. There was no hope, no atonement. Not for him, not ever. She had gone, they had all left.

It had all gone wrong, again gone wrong, so wrong.

1

Saturday

Vienna

When Catherine Cohen turned around, her heart nearly missed a beat. Her handbag was gone. *Quelle Merde*. The precious black leather tote bag that had cost Harvey a fortune was gone. It couldn't be true. Not in addition to everything else. But while she had been searching for her daughter in the small, ever changing crowd, she got so tired of carrying it on her shoulder that she put it down. Night had set in a while ago. She should be curled up on her sofa with a warm extra-soft blanket, a good, long novel to read and a steaming hot cup of lemon-verveine tea; sugared with brown rock candy, the herbs homegrown in her red Tuscany pottery and dried in the receding heat of a late Swiss summer. *What on earth was she doing here?*

Frantically, she tried to remember the moment she had let go of her bag. She might have put it down when the waggon of the Giant Wheel rose high above

Vienna and a dazzling view unfolded onto the Wurstelprater, the city's famous Luna park whose origins dated back to 1766 when Emperor Friedrich, II declared the area to be open for public enjoyment. The dark and the height had made it impossible for Catherine to identify anyone on the ground. Nevertheless, it was providing a short break from straining her eyes to look for Eva, a short moment to forget everything that was troubling her. The view onto the many glittering city lights was indeed mesmerizing: such a blissful pause from looking for Eva for hours, leave alone from all the sleepless nights she had been crying, worrying about Eva, worrying about her only child that had gone missing months ago.

The red cabin, a mixture between an Austrian coffeehouse and a flying circus waggon, was spinning her high above the rooftops, propelling her forward and backward in its own time. All of a sudden, overcome by sheer vertigo caused by the height and, -what was more troubling-, the loss of her bag, she had difficulty standing upright. Tightly, she was clutching the windowsill, her hands as pale as her face that had gone ashen. Her handbag gone. It couldn't be true. It couldn't be. Could she bear any more? She gasped out loud. *Please, couldn't she just wake up? Go home? Couldn't it all just finally stop? Let it finally end. Please.*



The bag Harvey had bought for her on a hiking trip in Gstaad, the legendary five-star ski resort in the Swiss Alps, it was gone. Her purse, her credit cards, her passport, the key to her hotel room, her I-pad, her makeup (including Eva's Earth Rose lipstick from L'Oréal), her water bottle, her tissues, her nail file, everything was

missing. Even, her sunglasses she had been wearing day in and out to hide her red eyes, they were gone. She had taken them off to see better in the dark. If only she hadn't put them away, now they were gone too, gone with everything else. What a shock. The only thing that she had left, were her cell phone and the keys to the rental car. From an old habit, stemming from the days when she first owned a car, she always put her car keys and her phone into the pockets of her coat or her jackets, or even her jeans, skirts, whatever she wore that day. *Car keys never go in your bag.* She couldn't remember who used to say it. Her mother? Brigid? Harvey? *What the heck did it matter who said it?* She felt the adrenaline flushing her body so thoroughly that cold sweat was seeping through her clothes. Her armpits itched, her were knees weak. She had to sit. Catherine automatically reached for her water bottle that she always brought along, but it wasn't there. *Of course it wasn't there. Stupid.*

The bag was gone. All gone. What now? She gazed at the Chinese couple that was flirting and chatting animatedly, lost in a universe of their own. They hadn't taken it. Catherine didn't understand a word of what they were saying. Their happiness and excitement about their Tour d'Europe was all-consuming, they didn't even notice her. Maybe if she collapsed onto the floor? Would they look at her then? She tried to catch her breath and steady her trembling. Becoming emotional wouldn't bring the bag back, wouldn't help at all. She knew. What she had to do was think rationally and she had better do it fast. The police had said the first 48 hours were crucial when a child went missing. *Not my child, my bag. Focus. Catherine. Focus.*

Hadn't her bag just been dangling from one of the chairs in the Giant Wheel's cozy cabins whose interiors were decorated with so much flair, so much care? It must have fallen onto the floor, but when she lifted the starched table cloth to check

underneath, it wasn't there. The floor was smudged and dirty after a long day. There was a half empty Fanta bottle sitting near the table's iron legs and, when squatting down properly, she saw further back a crumpled packet of the famous *Manner Neapolitaner Schnitten*, the delicious Viennese chocolate wafers. The Original since 1889. The bag wasn't under the table, her faint hope of finding it fast, shattered. How ridiculous to think that it had simply fallen off the chair. How ridiculous to even think that she had just misplaced it.

Then she resorted to the one solution that was really the most obvious: Someone must have stolen it, grabbed it from the chair when she wasn't looking. Only, Catherine could hardly remember any of the other people in the red cabin. Not that there had been many anyhow. Who rides a Ferris wheel in winter? Only lunatics, lovers and desperate mothers. On some rides she had been completely by herself. That must have been when she had put the bag down, feeling safe when alone. And then she must have forgotten to take it back from the chair when other people got on. She could just see how it all happened. Vaguely, she remembered a young man but couldn't have described him at all. Black coat? Grey coat? Sports jacket? Cap? Warm woollen gloves? No idea. She had registered he was there, but she hadn't looked at him at all. There was a young couple, teenage lovers, whom she had found extremely irksome. The young girl reminded her so much of Eva, same hair colour, same physique. She had turned away in grief. That would have given them time to take the bag.

At one time there was an old weirdo sitting at the round table near the entrance, holding on to it fast. He was hanging onto the thick white tablecloth for his dear life and Catherine had wondered why he had even bothered to take the ride as

distressed as he was. She remembered him clearly because he was starring at her so wilfully. He gave her the look, an evil, even cursing stare. Too preoccupied looking for Eva, she didn't bother about him, trying to ignore him as best as she could. He could have taken the bag easily because she was so purposefully *not* looking at him, avoiding his continuous gaze on her, turning her back. She had kept peeping, but he would not avert his eyes from her, simply wouldn't.

Catherine remembered that she wondered what his obsession with her was. Did she remind him of some long lost love, the girl he courted decades ago? Did she remind him of the daughter he loved when she was her age? He didn't look familiar. He looked patricious. Was he a mass murderer and she his type? Yet, he was so old and frail, a laughing stock for many who were more tenacious, younger, stronger. Well, she wasn't laughing now, she was racking her brain: Was the bag still hanging on the chair when the old weirdo got off? When had that been anyway? On the ride before? Or even the ride before? She couldn't remember a thing. Her mind had blanked out. No mental photographs of anything. Nothing at all.

There must have been more people getting on and off the cabin she had been riding for at least an hour. *What was the time now? Already 7.43?* She had been caged in here for more than one and a half hours. But even when she was grilling her memory cells, she couldn't conjure up faces, nor figures much less colour, texture and styles of clothes, shoes, scarves, mittens. What else did people wear? In winter everyone and everything looked the same; dark, grey and – grey. She was so confused, so full of apprehension to finally see Eva again, Catherine simply didn't heed anything or anyone. Such joy to finally see her daughter, such joy that she was

alive. Definitely, she hadn't paid enough attention to her bag. An absolute nuisance at first; a fatal, irreversible mistake soon enough.

Stricken with confusion she tried to straighten her shoulders and shrug it off, take it lightly. Somehow she'd cope, she always did. But the older she grew, the longer it took to laugh off the inevitable. Had this happened in her twenties she would have thrived on the challenge of a lost bag in a foreign city and the adventure this was bound to bring. Flirting with some young, tall-dark-and-handsome policeman, getting all that special attention at the precinct; from him and his colleagues, his superiors. Sure, they'd get her coffee, croissants, chocolate cake with whipped cream. Anything she wanted, maybe even her bag in the end, wrested from the Mafia's gullet, stolen from Gollum's lair, restored from the depths of the ocean. It would have been fun. By all means. Even if the bag hadn't turned up in the end. But now it only made her tired and added to the enormous sadness that had been creeping onto her since Eva had gone missing. At 45 she was too old for this. *As if there wasn't enough to deal with already.*



Saturday had been endless, time had come to a complete standstill; the hours, the minutes, even the tiny, little seconds, usually so volatile and light; they didn't pass. What a drag when life was like that. Then finally, evening. Just before an early sunset, she had taken the tube to Praterstern station and then walked east along Gabor-Steiner Weg, named after the Jewish theatre director who had to leave Vienna in 1938 for the United States. It wasn't far to the great Viennese Ferris Wheel, but it

was freezing cold. "Saukalt" as the locals said. Catherine was digging her hands deep into her warm Alpaca coat to keep warm. The portier of the Hotel Sacher, a stout elderly Austrian with a strong Viennese accent, could convince her at the last minute to leave the rented car at the hotel. It was a freezing evening, cold and icy as usual in January and now, -to her utmost dismay- not only her handbag had been stolen while she was gazing upon Vienna in her lonely stupor, but also Eva had not shown up.

To Catherine's great, great disappointment, Eva wasn't where she promised she'd be: at the entrance to the Giant Wheel of the Viennese Prater at 6pm. The place looked deserted enough, a merry place from May to October, milling with tourists from all over the world, it was now altogether mutilated by the cold continental winter. The New Year had brought masses of icy airs from the Arctic Circle across Western Russia, Norway, Denmark and Northern Germany. An arctic outbreak, the meteorologists called it. Catherine had wondered all along why her daughter would choose this meeting place after disappearing for more than 7 months. If Vienna, why the Prater? If Vienna, why not the Schönbrunn castle she loved so much? To see where Sissi lived, the empress so wonderfully impersonated by Romy Schneider in 1955? Why the Ferris Wheel? How many more riddles and puzzles was she supposed to solve to get her daughter back? Catherine had taken a ride, and then another ride looking over the many sparkling lights of the city sneering at her: Making her such an object of derision and ridicule; a fool beyond belief; the epitome of trustworthiness hopelessly forsaken. Then she had taken another ride, and another ride, hoping Eva would show up, hoping she'd miraculously appear. So many trips

she took- until the bag was gone. What a terrible blow. But not as terrible as the rest of it. In fact, compared to everything else, a missing bag was a piece of Sacher cake.

Catherine had never given up hope that Eva was alive. *Missing*, she was missing, she had insisted all along, refusing to have a funeral yet, when everyone else had declared her daughter was dead. Unbelievable that she should be proven right after all these months. Catherine had checked her phone right before she had wanted to take the train from Zimmerwald to Bern, Switzerland's gorgeous capital: Unesco World Heritage Site for more than three decades. She had intended to go shopping in the old town. Vegetables. Not that she needed much now that she was alone, but she needed a change of air. Get out of the house. Also, it was the weekend and she had longed for something fresh; carrots, celery, maybe some salad. *Yes, there would be a lovely market in the morning. Yes, it was right in front of the old city library in a beautiful cobbled street, but she needed to get out now.* Then the most incredible thing had happened. Just before she had wanted to leave the house. After all these weeks and weeks of endless waiting and searching, finally, her only child and beloved daughter had contacted her, her missing child had sent word.

"Dear Mum. I know this will come as a bit of a surprise. But I am pregnant. And I need your help." Catherine had hardly dared to read on. Eva wasn't dead, wasn't missing, wasn't lost somewhere in the mountain valleys or drowned in one of the clear Swiss rivers everyone swum in when it was summer. On the contrary: Alive and kicking in the true sense of the word. The message said she was pregnant, - pregnant. A baby.

Eva would need help with an abortion that was all Catherine could think of first. Making her a grandmother, it was out of the question. Eva was not the

mothering type, not when she was young and with all these years at university before her. It was a shock, but then there was such immediate relief. And joy. Such joy that her daughter was alive, had finally gotten in touch. Everything else could be sorted out, could be taken care of. Eva, in her short message, asked her to rent a car and meet her at the Prater in Vienna the very next day. At this stage, she would do anything for Eva. Rent a limo, rent a jet. Fly to the moon, Mars, Venus, you name it. Eva was alive. Her baby alive. She would do anything. Plane. Vienna. Rental car.

Let's go. Let's do this.

Catherine literally stormed to Vienna on the very next plane available from Bern-Belp airport. It was only later that she began to wonder at the blunt choice of words. Had Eva really written this? She should have contacted the police straight away. They had been so helpful in the first weeks after Eva had gone missing. But right now, she thought there wasn't time to call the cops. Friday night, she had to book her flight. Friday night she had to pack her suitcase. Why worry about anything else? *Forget about the cops, forget about the vegetables. All's well that ends well.* She'd see her daughter. She'd finally get her back. She could tell the cops later, go shopping later. Everything later. Early Saturday morning she took a taxi to the airport. Then take-off. Catherine was dying of impatience and anticipation all the way long, looking upon the Alps, then somewhere afar in the dark: Vaduz, Salzburg, Linz. Finally, at sunrise Vienna.

The flight didn't take long, but she couldn't sit still in her narrow seat at all, let alone get some rest. Nervously, she shifted forwards and backwards in her seat, sticking her knees into the aisle, underneath her chin or into her neighbour's space by the window. The distinguished elderly lady sitting next to her was not receptive, she

kept looking at Catherine as if she was some irresponsible, naughty child. The first rays of the morning sun didn't do Catherine any good either, they made her eyes all sore and watery. *Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Vienna, Austria: The city of music and dreams. The temperature is -7 degrees Celsius.* She missed how many Fahrenheit that was. All her senses were ready for disembarking

When the machine finally stood still on the runway, Catherine jumped from her seat, knocking over her neighbour, the old lady who was tiptoeing on her Louboutin high heels to reach for her elegant small leather suitcase above their heads. And Catherine didn't even apologize, didn't care about her stare. On the contrary she starred right back, most impolitely and adamant. Who wore high heels in winter anyway and on a flight to a city full of cobble stones? Minus seven degrees. *What a madwoman.*

It was then that she looked at her own feet and realized that she had forgotten her warm winter boots. She was wearing the golden-white Nike sneakers that Eva had given her last spring. Catherine knew how dedicated her daughter was to shoes. Wearing boots was so totally out of the question. It was a teenager's credo that could not be violated: it was sneakers, sneakers, sneakers, all year long from Christmas to Easter, from Easter to Christmas and any of the nanoseconds in between. Be there sunshine or rain, snow or ice, blizzards or hurricanes, arctic outbreaks, lava outbreaks, whatever the outbreak, the weather, whatever the temperature, -sneakers it was. And Catherine didn't want to embarrass her daughter by showing up in some "old-fashioned" mum's wear. So, sneakers it was, her feet would be freezing, but at least she wasn't wearing high heels.

2

Monday

Greg

Where was Greg? Adna was exasperated after having sent him at least a dozen text and voice messages without getting a reply. Would she finally get him on the line? The last hours had been spent in endless meetings about two of the most important cases they were working on right now, - simultaneously, of course. Like always. Everything at once. Number One, and most pressing: a young girl, dead and torn up, found in a wooden cabin, an old shack, near Terezín. There were barely any results yet as it had just happened: Lots of evidence though; papers, letters, tons of old clutter from the shack: Greg and his team had packed up everything and it was now all floating around headquarters in order to be searched and classified. She didn't even have the girl's proper name yet, not confirmed anyway. Greg said she was Emily Cohen, Dimitrios said the name on the ID they had found was Eva Cohen. No idea what had happened out there. Establishing the victim's identity was crucial

and they hadn't even managed this, not yet. The mayor wanted results, the press wanted news, everybody wanted something, and they always wanted it from her: Chief Superintendent Adna Divin. She took a deep breath, then dialled Greg's number again. No response.

Then there was case number two; an ongoing scandal they all just called the Clinique case. Some internet shitstorm that was hard to handle. Even after months investigating it, there simply wasn't enough evidence to arrest anyone, besides, it still wasn't clear who should take care of the case anyway. She had talked to them all: her boss, her colleagues from the I.T. department, even the mayor via a video-link that didn't really work properly. But no, the Prague police couldn't prove anything. At least not her team of the Policie České Republiky working on crimes against children.

Alexey had mentioned that there was some link to the dead girl. That would complicate matters. Right now, nothing was clear yet. They needed time. They needed a name for the body. She needed Greg. He should have done an in-depth interview with the witness who had found the body: the poor woman was still waiting to be processed. And shivering. How much more coffee could that lady take before she had a heart-attack? The woman's nerves had already been frayed when Adna welcomed her in the morning and led her to the waiting area where she had been waiting for hours. Where was her top-of-the-line inspector, her very own Jack-of-all-trades?

„Greg. Where are you?“ Adna shouted into the receiver. „You are *so* late. Where have you been all day? Come to my office, *now*.“ Greg switched the cell phone

to his other ear. Adna had to be out of her mind. Could she not recall her own orders?

„Your office? Adna. I am on my way to Switzerland. Actually, we are landing just now. I really shouldn't be on the phone. You said - “ She cut him short.

„Switzerland. Bloody Hell. You are where?“ She sounded genuinely surprised and angry at once. A dangerous mixture. And she swore. Not a good sign either. Adna really wasn't the swearing type.

„Know what? I gotta go. I cannot be on the phone. We are landing.“

Her mind went blank. Greg not here? Impossible.

„What on earth did Anichka tell you?“ Adna was livid and still shouting at the top of her voice. Greg had to hold the phone away from his ear. He could just picture her marching up and down in her office, strutting the well-polished floor with her short fat legs on her black high heels, slamming one hand on her desk while she was speaking. He'd just heard her well-manicured, flat hand coming down real hard. Thump. Thump. And again: Thump. Now, she would run her hand through her blond dry hair, ruining her expensive haircut and glare at the white blinds at the window. He had better explain before the flight attendant discovered him.

„She called, actually woke me. I mean after that night. - and said that there is a link with Bern, the woman whose bag was found at the crime scene. Obviously she lives in Zimmerwald, a village near Bern. If her bag was at the crime site she must be involved in killing the girl. Can you hear me? Hello? Hello?“ He switched the phone to his other ear.

“Yes, Greg, I hear you, loud and clear. We assume that was the mother’s bag at the crimesite. Catherine Cohen seems to be Eva Cohen’s mother. Or Emily Cohen. The girl-.

“She is the one from the Clinique case.”

“She is?”

“I am a hundred percent sure. I had met her. But she is Emily Cohen, not Eva.”

“Ok, ok. Whatever. We are working on it. In fact, *you* are supposed to be working on it.” Adna’s voice came across crystal clear now.

“I know and I am. Anichka said I should go and interview Catherine Cohen myself. So-.”

He stopped short. *Had Anichka lied to him?* It dawned upon him instantly that he shouldn’t really be here.

„So? You just left? Without checking?“ There was another thump. How someone could stress every single word in a sentence was a total mystery to Greg, but Adna mastered it perfectly. *Maybe years of training in some sort of speech academy for the specially gifted policewomen?* The shouting continued.

„Come back. At once. Do you understand? Back. Catch the next train, plane.

Whatever.“ *Horse carriage.* Greg added silently and this made him grin again. His luck she didn’t see him; his face was painfully twisted from trying not to laugh out loud. He swallowed audibly. Adna was still roaring like a tigress, but luckily half of her sentences went under in the noise of the small plane, her scolding string of words blissfully drowned in the eternal music of air travel. Telling from the fragments that did reach him, he clearly understood, she was, indeed, furious. And she was still talking as if this brought him back faster.

„No matter what. Do you understand me? Come back here. I will talk to Anichka in the meantime. You will have to look for a new assistant.“ She said sharply. That was the end of it. Then, the line was dead. She had rung off without waiting for his reply. “Safe trip back” she could have said, “Good-Bye”, she could have said. But no. Mission failed. Appeasement declined. Assignment aborted. What a debacle. Women and communication: a disaster.



Inspector Gregorovich Miroslav Shats took his Ray Ban sunglasses from his dark well-groomed hair, put them in the pocket of his white shirt and sighed. The sun had been shining in Vienna, when they had taken off, but now it was getting darker. Skyworks Flight SX 601 had left on time and was about to land in Bern Belp Airport in about 6 minutes. He tried to relax but found it difficult as he couldn't stretch his long legs. Anichka had booked him on a window seat, economy class. For an upgrade to business class it had been too late when he had arrived at the airport earlier today. The last 24 hours had been utter chaos.

He had spent Monday morning napping on the train from Prague to Vienna, trying to get a break from Sunday night he had spent on a crime scene that had been hell. The hourly briefings were short and intense as always when Chief Superintendent Adna Divin was in charge and yet, the investigations did take up all night and weren't finished yet. Inconclusive even. He didn't get home before 4am.

Then Anichka, his secretary had woken him at 5:45 from a delightful R.E.M phase and told him to meet her and Dimitrios, his partner at the station. Only,

Dimitrios hadn't made it and he couldn't wait for him. Anichka was there and she had hurried him on. When she handed him the envelope with his papers she brushed her fingers to his hand, quite consciously.

He bit his tongue and then reached for his papers from the inside pocket of his expensive black cashmere coat. The plane was due to land in Switzerland and he wanted to make sure he had everything he might need. First things first. Where was his identity card? The document he was looking for, was safely stored away in his wallet. Was it vain to say that he looked handsome on the picture? A couple of years younger, dark eyes with the most incredible lashes and handsome, even features. Full Lips. Plenty of hair. Carefully, he put the I.D back in place and looked at the other stuff he had been given. There was a crumpled green envelope Anishka must have scribbled his name on in a hurry. Her handwriting was usually neat, this looked messy. She had taken the time though to print an extensive list with hotels in Bern. As if this was for real. What irony. He still couldn't believe it. Adna had not ordered him to go to Switzerland, Anichka had. His assistant had. And he could just begin to picture why. *What a mess.*



„Please remain seated.“ The young flight attendant sounded hoarse as if she had a sore throat or an upcoming flu. While she was speaking she looked intensely at the tall, handsome man in row 7 who had full brown hair with a couple of grey strands. He was older than her, but there was something in his eyes that was fascinating, mesmerizing. Despite the fact that he was dressed casually, he wore blue denim jeans, a white shirt and a dark pullover, he looked noble. Aristocratic. The art

of the understatement. Very even features. She couldn't take her eyes off him, hardly realising her stare was extremely unprofessional. Greg turned on his cellphone and pretended he didn't notice her gazing at him like some lunatic.

There was nothing like *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi. He turned up the volume, but could still hear her rattling off her little speech, breathlessly, as if she was casted for some porn movie: „Temperature outside is minus 5 degrees Celsius, local time is 07:43pm, Welcome to Switzerland, welcome to Bern, Swiss Capital and UNESCO World Heritage, Gateway to the Alps. Thank you for flying Skyworks.“
Gateway to the Alps. *Home of Catherine Cohen*, Greg thought.

When the plane stopped at the end of what was a very short runway, he rose slowly from his seat, double checking the locker above his head. A habit from a different life when he used to have more than enough time at his hands to contemplate any of his actions. When *Ora et labora* was his motto, Pray and Work. Now it was only *Labora*. Work, work and more work. He was prone to forget things when he was so tired and too many things were happening at the same time, as had been the case these last hours.

Right -, Sunday. He had wanted to review the night once again, for details he had missed. That was what he recalled: First, they had found the body. The call was made by an old lady at 6 pm yesterday. She had waited over 24 hours before she had contacted them because „she wasn't sure“ whether it was „an emergency“. She didn't want “to spy on others”, that was what she said. Precious time had been lost. The witness had been walking her dog, called Jiffy, on Saturday morning, when she said she had heard „a baby squeal“. It sounded like „a new-born“, was what she said first, then she corrected herself and said there was „a screaming like a banshee“.

Then „silence“. She had thought „it was nothing“. *How could one be so daft? And how could one name a dog Jiffy anyway? Jiffy? Really?*

Only when the witness got back Sunday morning, she found the courage to look through the dirty window pane. What she saw made her heart stand still. Then she was in shock all day, she used the word “traumatized” She only dialled 158 in the evening because her neighbour urged her to. When faced with human disaster people didn’t act sensibly.

Remembering the drive to the crime scene gave him a shiver running down his spine. It was indeed gruesome out there in the Czech wilderness. There had been strong winds raging harshly in the woodlands bringing masses of cold air from the North Pole. The thick icy snow was slanting vertically against the old trees of the dark forest, breaking off dozens of branches as heavy blizzards came down savagely from the skies. Greg and his team rode up the dirt road just after eight o’clock. At least the witness had given them the GPS coordinates or they would have been lost completely. Still, it took some time to find the right way. No moon above the treetops, no distinctive, recognizable features. Then the shack and next to it an enormous tree, that his partner, Dimitrios had identified as a white fir. It looked with enough with all the snow coming down so ferociously. When they climbed out of the car, they were zipping up their jackets quickly. Frozen mud and dirt, snow and ice everywhere. Some old rusty machinery, a couple of empty barrells. When they broke the door open, the room looked homely enough, but they were too late. She was dead. Dead.

He had been with the Czech police for nearly 10 years, but his intuition told him that this case was different. He knew this was one of the worst crime scenes he

had ever seen and on this they all agreed. It was so horridly tidy. The body had been covered carefully with coarse white linen. Good old-fashioned stuff, not the cheap material you buy at supermarkets nowadays, the real thing: stiff, embroidered and with initials: A.C. It said A.C. Whatever that meant. Whoever that was, it wasn't the name of the girl though. He recognized her at once. And that careful, nearly tender tucking in of the body added to the horror of the site. Who would leave a crime scene tidy like this? Who would so lovingly cover the body of a victim yet mutilate it so abominably? The puzzling contrast was striking, a turn for the worse. The Clinique case had just got a hundred times more complicated and complex.

The very centerpiece of the dreadful scenery was this beautiful young woman, innocent and dead. There was blood, a lot of blood, blood all over her legs, blood at her feet, blood on her belly. He couldn't take his eyes off her when they had lifted the white cloth. Her brown firm hair, her eyes, half-closed, the skin waxen. Naked. Large white breast. When they died so young and so beautiful it was hard to keep yourself under control. But that was what was expected. Be in control. Always. Especially him. His team started searching the crime site and found lots of papers, hand-scribbled notes, letters, books. And then Dimitrios found the usual stuff: handbag, cell phone, I-pad all of which must have belonged to the victim. Alexey, their IT specialist would take care of all the electronic equipment.

There was also another more expensive black leather handbag with a purse containing a Catherine Cohen's credit cards; Visa, Mastercard and American Express, as well as her passport, a key (to a hotel room?), her i-pad, her makeup, a water bottle, some tissues, a nail file, and her agenda, her blood group, B negative and two numbers to call in case of an Emergency: Brigid Beaulieu +41 78 409 45 88 and

Harvey Miller +79 555 23 24. The latter number was crossed out. The bag was sitting right next to the young girl's deathbed. He could, as usually, remember each single item in the bag and recall its form, weight and colour. Who was Catherine Cohen? Was she the one responsible for the girl's death? Why else would her bag end up in the shack? And Adna had said Catherine Cohen might be the mother? The mother? This was crazy. It didn't really add up at all.

Greg shook off the unpleasant thoughts and put on his jacket; he was ready to get off the plane. Switzerland was cold indeed, and too humid for his taste. Usually he didn't mind the cold, but when an icy humidity crept upon his black leather boots and up his legs, he felt emasculated and bereaved of his energy. He needed food, a shower, a power nap, an internet connection and a fresh shirt. The basics. What he didn't need was a long trip back. He hoped for a good steak and some solid well-seasoned potatoes, no cheese fondue, no chocolate, no salad, no women. Not that he cared much anyway after Louisa had gone. Also, the short episode with Anichka had not exactly turned out *so* well. On the contrary, incredible what it had got him into. He pushed these thoughts down as well and continued the list of what else he needed urgently to survive: a good bottle of red wine, Italian preferably, maybe a Mosca Cannonau di Sardegna Riserva 2014 and at the right temperature. That was all it would take to grant him a good night's rest. If he stayed here, disobeying Adna's order.



He sighed out loud when he realized that they had to wait for their luggage. Having heard of Swiss efficiency he had decided at the last moment to check his suitcase through although it would have been cabin size. But he didn't want to be burdened by all the stuff he was carrying, he literally needed room and space to think. He couldn't have a full suitcase looming over his head. The sky was the limit. Of course, now there was a delay. Greg paced up and down the arrival gate and looked out upon the few forlorn lights of a tiny airport. It was a dark winter's night. The parking lot was rather empty too and looked deserted. He hated waiting but on the other hand he wasn't really in a hurry to get back to Prague. Skyworks didn't fly to Prague anyway. Not from Bern. He would have to take the train again. If he went back right now.

Greg kept scolding himself. How stupid to trust Anichka. Stupid. Stupid and so humiliating. What a ridiculous old man he had become. A couple of years ago he would have seen through her game and challenged it. Maybe he had heard and read their motto once too often: *Pomáhat a chránit*; To Help and to Protect. One more thing he was sick of it. You cannot spend all your life helping and protecting when you kept seeing atrocities after atrocities, bodies after bodies, crime after crime. This had hardened him in the past years, steeled him in a bad way. Help and protect. All that violence. It was impossible. But then, after seeing last night's crime site their motto rang again and with fresh vigour in his ears. Help and protect it was the only way he wanted to live. Besides ridiculous, he was also becoming pathetic. Getting older was tough.



After ending the unpleasant phone call with Greg, Adna had sat down for a while. Greg might come back from Switzerland, or he might not. He really had his own ways. *No, that was a complete understatement.* He was totally uncontrollable, leading a life of his own, doing as he pleased. If he hadn't been so good, usually getting the results most needed, she would have fired him a long time ago. He couldn't really stay on one case, one team or one section. He was constantly meddling and interfering with other cases. It was a burden. There had been complaints, especially with regard to the clinique case and all the research he did on child pornography. He was simply obsessed with it. God knows why. Some mission he considered himself worthy for, chosen for. She usually didn't dare asking.

Adna sighed inaudibly and took some papers from her desk. She really would have needed him here, but she couldn't admit that too loud without compromising her own position. How often had she marvelled at his independence, his free spirit and also when she was haranguing him there was her secret admiration, he knew he could count on. He was born to be police whereas she only did a job. Of course, that was rubbish, he only did a job too. But exactly how he did it was a secret to her. Since she had been his superior, he had never let her down, not a single time, when she had let him down on many occasions. Greg always did it differently. He had always found a way, not the way she had planned or foreseen, but a way it was.

No, she couldn't work. Adna was too agitated. The Clinique case was getting on her nerves, all suspicions and no evidence. It was enough to make a saint swear. Only accusations and no facts. And Yannis really wanted it. A reason more to hold on to it dearly. She picked up the phone and dialled the mayors' number, the third

time today. She would have to explain this to him once again in person. Over the phone and not with 5 other people listening in on a conference call and commenting non-stop on everything she was trying to say. She would have to explain, explain properly. He simply would have to understand that she couldn't just go and arrest them all. They were doctors, nurses, all well-trained, well-educated. After all, the Czech Republic did adhere to the Rule of Law. If there was no evidence, there wasn't any. You couldn't make it up as you pleased. Besides, you could not win against a shitstorm on the internet, simply let it rage and pass. Surely the mayor, he of all people would understand this. Then she put the phone down. It wasn't worth the try.



Greg's good looks had always been a temptation for the girls and a source of great amusement to himself. Even during his time as a full-blooded monk, women, girls, even other men had been ogling him without shame. However, in these times, he didn't think it so funny, nor did his brethren or his abbot. But it helped when he changed his life, left the church, had to get a pension plan, and health insurance and all the dreary documents civilians had. After he had met Louisa when she was visiting the abbey, when he found something worth living and dying for. And even nowadays his good looks were an endless, wonderful resource, an amusement he usually enjoyed greatly. But not just now. The feeling was hard to place. Somehow the dead Swiss girl had crept into his mind and soul. He couldn't get her out of his system. Aimlessly he strolled back to collect his luggage.

There it was. He had at once detected his black leather suitcase on the assembly line. Quickly, he hurried for the old valise that his grandfather had already carried when escaping the fascists into the woods. It was rather out of shape and out of date too, but it gave him the final touch of a gentleman such as they were rare to find nowadays. When he touched the old leather bag he felt a pang of grief for his deceased father who had not only handed this family treasure down to him, but had also named him Gregorovich Miroslav. At his birth, he was given a Catholic name despite the fact that he was the son of a Jewish rabbi. What an odd legacy from a fervent believer, such as his beloved dad. But there had been one too many pogroms and the Christian name should save his life when all it did was complicate it. And how far he had had to go to understand it all. All these detours.

What a relief, he was police now, no longer Jewish, no longer Christian. He was a figure of authority now: authoritative and reliable, committed and true: To state, civilians and democracy. His mission was beyond Adna's imaginations and beyond her comprehension. That dead girl, she really had engrossed him. Compellingly. Fully. Totally. And he had already taken his decision. He couldn't go back to Prague. Not having come so far. This needed sorting and he was up for the job. He would stay, hire a car in the city as he had last time he came, opt for the silver Ford Kuga, if available. And then he would do what he was best at: investigate. Undercover if need be. Adna would be furious, but never mind. *Adna. She would have to wait.* He needed food first, then sleep. It seemed he had been awake for decades. He was whistling the overture of Vivaldi's four seasons as he left the arrival hall and headed for the shuttle bus that would take him to the Swiss capital: Bern. *Gateway to the Alps. Gateway to Europe. Home of Catherine Cohen.* The whistling froze when he

recalled what acts of direst cruelties women could commit. Slaying teenagers, then tucking them in. What an atrocity. Catherine Cohen's handbag was found at the site of crime. To him she was guilty already.



Adna's message reached Greg on his way to his room after checking in at the Hotel *Goldener Schlüssel* situated in the *Ratshausgasse*, in the middle of Bern's historical centre. The Hotel *Goldener Schlüssel*, was Bern's oldest hotels dating back to 1508. Where the stables boys used to groom and tend to the weary horses of adventurous wayfarers when it was still early days for tourism, a newly refurbished old town restaurant could now be found, serving "Swiss cuisine at its best". So the slogan on the website went and so the menu Greg had studied upon entering, specified: "*Bernese Rösti*", grated potatoes fried in sweet butter with green beans and Zurich-style veal stew as well as "*Suure Mocke*", a marinated pot roast with mashed potatoes and fresh vegetables were served at lunch and dinner time. After not eating properly for hours, he was looking forward to enjoying a rich, decent meal. Greg found the prices, for food and accommodation more than reasonable, especially when considering the exclusive location not only near the old town hall, the Ratshaus, but also close to many other attractions in Bern like the famous bear pit or the river Aare. On his way up to room 43, he glanced at the screen of his cell phone and scrolled down Adna's message perfunctorily:

“Name and place of residence of victim definitively confirmed: Eva Cohen (Swiss citizen), reported missing since 25th of May 2011, mother Catherine Cohen (Swiss citizen) of Zimmerwald; father Harvey Miller (American and Swiss citizen) of Bern. Catherine Cohen’s handbag found at the crime scene. Have informed Swiss authorities 15 minutes ago. Your contact in Switzerland is Chief Inspector of the *Kantonspolizei Bern*, the Bernese county police: Philip Müller, 0041 78 456 34 93.”

Greg smiled when he read the message. Adna had given in. She knew he wasn’t coming back, what a relief. He was now in Bern officially. At least the trip was now fully financed by Czech taxpayer’s money. One thing less to worry about. But what did set his nerves on edge was that Greg couldn’t figure out what Adna meant by “Eva Cohen reported missing”. *Why not Emily? It was Emily, wasn't it?* He gripped the phone tighter and scrolled through the message once again, reading each word more carefully: The dead girl’s parents were Swiss-American? She herself a Swiss resident? That was rather idiosyncratic. He was sure he had interviewed her only a couple of weeks ago when she kicked off the unfortunate Clinique case on that terrible website *change_the_world.com* or whatever it was called. Her name had then been Emily Cohen. Had he missed that she had been missing? Very unlikely. He had talked to her mum, Leah Cohen, he had seen *her* papers. But had he seen the girl’s ID? Greg was wrecking his brain. Hadn’t she misplaced her ID when he had asked for it? He remembered there was something amiss.

It hadn’t seemed important at the time, but it was troubling him now. The girl had been so stressed out with the whole story, not sure to which extent her own mother was involved in the scandal, that he had never even doubted her identity. But, and this was food for thought and worry, had he really seen her I.D.? In fact,

reconsidering it now, he was quite sure he had never seen any papers of identification. Who was she? Had he now come upon her dead twin? Had she changed her name and her nationality? *Very unlikely. All very strange.* He texted Dimitrios, his partner and Alexey their IT specialist to get hold of Leah Cohen and her daughter Emily immediately and report back on their status *asap*.

Instead of eating a big portion of *Bernese Rösti* in the former stable of the Hotel *Goldener Schlüssel* and enjoying a good night's sleep afterwards, things were moving fast. Greg called Chief Inspector Müller right away when he got to his room. The phone call didn't last long and there was hardly time to look properly upon the street in front of the hotel, one of the many cobblestone roads so typical of the picturesque medieval part of Bern. Despite the dark he got a feel for the centuries that had sneaked past the old city without changing its face too much. There was the occasional illuminated shop window displaying art or antiques but hardly any neon signs, hardly any graffiti. The Swiss liked it nice and clean.

Within a good half an hour, he was set up with Müller and some other gonzo who was steering the police car. All Greg had managed was a quick shower. That much for "Swiss cuisine at its best" and the bottle of red Italian wine at the right temperature. Chief Inspector Philip Müller and Officer Dardan Baris, his much younger partner, would take him straight to Catherine Cohen in Zimmerwald a ten minutes' drive away from Bern. How lucky could you be?



Zimmerwald was a sleepy village, famous for its notorious anti-war conference during World War I, after which Vladimir Lenin founded the Zimmerwald Left, advocating worldwide communism and the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Today Zimmerwald was hosting the ZEO, the *Zentrum für Elektronische Operationen*, a center for electronical operations, the Swiss secret service ran. And they ran it secretly: The listening facility under the code name Onyx was monitoring telephone and fax conversation, E-mail and IT data and was installed in the 1990ties without even the Swiss Parliament knowing about it. Zimmerwald was really a metropolis in disguise: each farmer in checkered shirts could be a highly-trained spy, each cow a potential satellite, and each rooster was bound to be transmuting into a self-steering drone any minute, soaring high above your head and reducing the speed of your cardiac pacemaker to a plodder before you realised.

Without using the sirens Greg and his colleagues from the *Berner Kantonspolizei*, were heading up the empty Kirchstrasse now. A busy street during the day, filled with commuters, city buses, farmers driving their tractors and young parents with kids in bicycle trailers, it lay nearly empty at night. They were going faster than the speed limit allowed. Greg secretly enjoyed Baris's adventurous driving style and wondered if Müller shouldn't scold him for it, at least for the record. But Müller wasn't talking a lot, Baris was. He made up for his silent boss by talking non-stop. And such nonsense. *Hopefully, verbal diarrhea wasn't contagious.*

"I cannot believe I am in the middle of such a huge case. In the morning it will be all over the news, all over Switzerland, all over Europe, the net. All over. And we are right in the middle of it. We were the first to know, well you were the first." Baris stated excitedly, turning around to look at Greg as if he was some celebrity. Baris

was waiting for someone to join in, acknowledge he was right, confirm what he had been saying. But Müller didn't, nor did Greg. Greg was cold and miserable. It had been a long day and he was sick of Baris already. As if this was an advantage when it was all over the press. And wasn't he happy about the considerable lead. The few hours, sometimes minutes, before the press was all over it were crucial. *The kid was so green it hurt your eyes and ears.*

Greg didn't want to discourage him, not when they were so young and enthusiastic. Experience would shape the youngster soon enough. This had to be his first murder case. Greg remembered his first murder case as if it had been yesterday: an old woman that had been found dead in her apartment. In fact, he was the one who had found her on the floor of her bathroom. She was killed by – God, he couldn't remember who. But he could still see her twisted body, he recalled the excitement that went along with the case, the adrenaline, the sleepless nights, the guesswork, the complicated puzzle, the exciting treasure hunt.

“Did you know her?” Greg asked, fumbling in his coat for his phone. Surely this must be Adna with some urgent news, maybe the guarantee of a warrant to arrest Catherine Cohen? *Bet they found enough evidence by now. Bet that bag alone was enough to convict her of murder.*

“God, no. But I guess I could have. She is not that much younger”, Baris said apologetically, slowing down and taking a corner into *Margheritenstrasse*. Catherine Cohen's house was on the right.

When Greg finally found the phone in his pocket, it said: Anichka Calling. His assistant. He knew he would have to take this, face her. This needed sorting first. The

phone was still vibrating when Baris parked the car carefully into the parking lot and got out.

“Go ahead, I will have to take this. I will join you in a minute.”

Catherine

It must have been around half past ten, maybe later. The shutters of Catherine Cohen's apartment were closed and the beige velvet curtains sloppily drawn. As a slip between the draperies allowed the street light in, it wasn't pitch dark in the room. The digital alarm clock gave off an eerie and continuous red glow that transcended not only the darkness of her bedroom, but reached deep into Catherine's wild dreams. She was running after sheep on a wild goose chase, she was flying high above a silver castle, above a city of lights, simultaneously looking at the rolling hills beneath. On a Ferris Wheel, on a plane, on a train. Then she was close to huge cumulus clouds, there were white candlesticks floating in the air, there was Eva, her beloved daughter, there was her bag, her bag that was stolen. Sleep had come easily and so had the dreams. She was exhausted but at least she was back home in Zimmerwald.

The events of the past days had tired her out completely. After the traumatic episode on the Giant Ferris wheel, Catherine had locked herself into her hotel room at the Hotel Sacher all Sunday. The loss of her bag was physical. As if she had lost one of her limbs. As if she needed crutches and had no armpits and no strength to use them. She went to the Austrian police first thing Monday morning where she filed charges and a form was filled in and then, she was told, like a simple-hearted, graceless schoolgirl, to look more carefully after her belongings. A missing handbag was no big deal. *Happens all the time*. She didn't have the strength to mention Eva and her text message. She should have, she knew, but Catherine needed to get home first, get some rest before anything that needed doing could be done.

When she called VISA for a new credit card to pay the hotel and the rental car she nearly cried from exhaustion. More paperwork would follow. Such hassles, only hassles and work.



It was only later when realization hit her fully; she had been lured away to Vienna by some dreadful joke, by some lunatic. A madman. Eva wasn't there, had never been. But where on earth was she? Who had sent the message? Why did they want her to go to Vienna? The pain still stung in her heart and she felt the rattling of the train in her bones. There had been no planes back and also the Euronight train was full. She had had to travel throughout the day. It was awfully long and she couldn't sleep on the train. On the way back she had time to think: Had Eva really sent the message? The bluntness of the wording began to frighten her, Eva is, -was-, so good with words. The text was so straight forward. Was she dead? Had someone

else taken her identity? How easy was it to hack somebody's phone? She wouldn't know how to do it, but assumed others would. She should have informed the Swiss police before running off to Vienna all by herself. She should have done so many things. All she did, when she finally was back home, was down some pills against that terrible restlessness, undress and collapse on her bed. She was fast asleep within minutes.



Catherine Cohen didn't hear a thing when Officer Baris pressed the button and rang her bell a few hours later. Her breathing rhythm was regular and her heart rate slower, the body temperature had dropped and once in a while she stirred with a jolt, sweat running along her spine, trickling down between her full breasts. Tranquillizers had always done a good job on her. The bell rang a second time, she didn't wake up. Catherine had fallen into a restless, coma-like sleep that owned her completely. Vienna had been too much, the Prater, too much. Her handbag stolen. All her papers gone. A nightmare. Too much, too much. Everything: Too much.

With a start Catherine finally woke up. The bell at the door was ringing and ringing and ringing. Nonstop. *What the heck?* Drowsily, she reached for her white silk nightgown which she had thrown carelessly upon her black Chaise Lounge designed by Le Corbusier, the Swiss architect born in 1887 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, the centre of Switzerland's watch valley in the Jura mountains. The vintage chair was worth a fortune these days and Catherine loved sitting in it and running her fingers along the old leather cover, feeling its many creases and its rough brittleness. But right now, she was far from relaxation. Her body was wet from cold sweat and her heart had

been racing since she was woken. She couldn't tell whether it was the situation's urgency that caused the cold pearls on her forehead or whether she was running a sudden fever.

The doorbell at this time of the day didn't exactly promise good news, not with Eva having been missing for months, not with her *not* being on the Ferris wheel.

Anichka's Call

"Anichka?" Greg said. There was silence on the other end. He could hear her breathe fast though. She was still there.

"Come on. What were you thinking?" He continued, trying to stay calm so she wouldn't put the phone down immediately. He wanted to sort this out properly. Was she crying?

"I've lost my job, Adna has just called. I've only wanted. I've just wanted, -" her voice was trailing off and he could hear her sob at the other end.

"Of course you'd lose your job. I mean you, you knew that-, you know that Adna, don't you? What were you thinking? Anichka. Christ." He usually didn't use the Lord's name in vain, but this had come out so naturally, he couldn't have helped it. Obviously, he felt more distressed than he liked to admit. Anichka didn't deserve lose her job over this.

“Greg. I simply couldn’t bear it anymore, you being so cold and. You wouldn’t even look at me anymore.”

“I thought this would make it easier for you.”

“Easier? Why would you want to make it easier for me?”

“Look. Anichka, let’s talk openly,” he fell silent. *What was he going to say now? He couldn’t talk openly, by all means.*

“Greg? Are you there?”

“Yes. It was a mistake. I’ve already told you.”

She was sobbing louder at the other end. But he had to get through to her properly this time, anything else simply wouldn’t have been fair. He would do this the old fashioned style when a conversation between two people still mattered, when talking to someone face to face was still worth something: when words brought release and pain, more pain than release in this case. He followed the lesson he had learned from Friar Matthew, one of his best friends among the brethren at the time. Listen twice as much as you speak for it is a message from your creator that you have two ears, but only one mouth. It was his turn to listen now.

“A mistake? You cannot be serious. You said yourself you have to heal. After all you had gone through. I simply wanted to help you,” she sniffed. *For Chrissake. Help, since when do I need help?* Greg was going to say, but then got himself under control and put it more politely.

“Anichka. Listen. I mean this is all very nice of you, but-” He couldn’t finish the sentence, she interrupted him.

“You said you needed someone to pull you out of this lethargy.”

Had he really said this? If he had, he hadn't meant it that way. He hadn't used that word. He wasn't lethargic. He was energetic, full of strength, full of power and zeal, such as always. *Why would women always, always draw the wrong conclusions?* "I haven't said that," he insisted. Denial of what she said seemed a feasible short term strategy at first. Unfortunately, it only lasted a couple of seconds. "No, you haven't, not exactly, but you said that it was time to find someone new again. To start all over."

Now Greg remembered. He had indeed said that, somehow he had. But, he hadn't exactly had Anichka in mind. The truth was he hadn't had anyone in mind. He had to get over Louisa. Pining away with grief for his long dead wife surely wasn't helpful. He knew that. He knew. He didn't need Anichka tell him this. "Let me remind you of the exact wording: I've said, that when the time comes there will be someone new in my life."

"But I had thought, I'd thought."

"You'd thought this was you. No Anichka. Let me put this clearly. It is not you. I said, it was a mistake. That night. And I'm sorry. I can say it again. If it helps you, I will say it again: I am really sorry. For everything." She stifled another sob.

"But you were so wonderful. And you said yourself it had been good. Didn't you?" He chose not to answer this, he couldn't lower himself so far. She was being pathetic now.

"But why did you send me to Switzerland?" The girl was clearly insane if she didn't have a reasonable explanation.

"Because I couldn't stand the sight of you anymore. Because I wanted you out of the way. I wanted Adna to be mad with you." Greg smiled, the latter she had certainly

accomplished. Only she wasn't mad with Greg but with Anichka. Bad plotting. All twisted. All backfired.

"I wanted to hurt you. Greg. I wanted her to fire you. Not me. God. I hadn't even thought of this. That this could happen. I am so sorry. I shouldn't have done this. I am so sorry. What now?" *Good question. She should have remembered that actions do have consequences before she had booked that flight.*

It was cold in the car, after Baris had turned off the engine and the heating, the hot air had been evaporating into the dark night rapidly. This phonecall would take forever. At the far end of the street Greg could see the lights of another car shine through the fog that had crept upon the village. He took a deep breath, wrapping himself tighter into his winter coat. How couples could break up with text messages was a mystery to him. Not that he and Anichka had been much of a couple but still, they had had these moments. And then last summer, there had been this one ominous night, only this one night. Some sort of weird culmination of previous events being mixed up: stolen glances, loud laughter. He shouldn't have let himself go. Losing control was always a mistake.

"Greg, I am so sorry, it was awfully stupid of me. I really, really need this job. Jasha is still so ill. Last night he was coughing until 3am. I cannot even send him to school when he's like that. It is all so expensive. The medicine, the pharmacy, the therapies at the hospital, the day care. Please help me. I want to come back on the team."

"Well." Greg said, "let's-,"

Let's what? He fell silent. There was nothing he could promise. Adna could be stubborn and strict. It was very unlikely that Adna would take her back. He was freezing. This would take forever indeed.

"Greg are you still there?"

"Yes, Anichka, I am there. I am listening."

Catherine

The bell was ringing non-stop by now. Catherine turned on the light in the hall and ran her fingers through her long brown hair. Its softness soothed her anxiety temporarily. Even as a little girl she had felt comforted and strangely strengthened by its silky touch. Slowly, she walked towards the door, grabbing her keys from a small silver bowl on a shelf next to the kitchen. Her feet still naked. There was not time to brush her teeth now. Though she guessed who the callers were, she called out for them without opening the door

“Hello? Who is there?”

Catherine heard her voice squawking unnaturally; weary from sleeping and hoarse from excitement. There was no response. However, the bell had stopped pestering her. Obviously, they had heard her. What a relief these madmen had stopped pressing the button.

"Hello?" She cleared her throat, listening at the door and simultaneously reaching with her bare toes for a pair of soft woollen slippers, the white ones with the brown ribbon. Then, this time loud and clear, she shouted at the closed door once more:

"Who is there?" This time there was a response. Promptly a male voice answered:

"Police, Ms. Cohen, is this you?"

"Of course it is," she answered, slipping her naked foot into the warm, soft cover.

That was nice. These slippers were so warm. She couldn't keep herself from wondering whom exactly they'd expect to find here at this time of the day. It said *C & E Cohen* right next to the bell. They must have seen it when they had pressed the button.

Didn't they know how to read?

Cautiously, she opened the door and stood face to face with two well-trimmed Swiss policemen, both with crew cuts. They looked serious as the situation required.

"I am Chief-Officer Müller and this is Officer Baris." The older said in a matter-of-fact voice, politely waiting for her to let them in. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson had lost their way and were stranded upon her doorstep, how weird, she thought.

"Ms. Cohen?" Doctor Watson said, Catherine nodded patiently. The older one must be Sherlock, surely he had figured out her identity before she even opened the door. There must have been clues along the way. Inconspicuous signs he could have used in his logical, deductive reasoning, such as name tags next to door knobs. Müller looked familiar. Did she know him from work? She tried to give the two gentlemen a smile.

What Catherine found amusing was that from the look on Baris's face, he had obviously expected someone much older, fatter, uglier, a typical mother of an 18-

teen-year old. But here she was in her splendid, shiny nightgown hacking into their erotic dreams in real time, feeding them fresh fodder for further fantasies. Catherine sighed inaudibly and beckoned them in.

“Please. Do come in.” She heard herself say as she swung the door open and added: “I’ll make us some coffee”. Carefully, she pulled the nightgown tighter, closing the gap between her breasts.

She turned on the dim lights in the kitchen and pointed weakly to two blue chairs. The walls, shelves and furniture were kept in azure and white giving it all a faint Greek touch. She had redecorated the place after a happy summer holiday on Crete a couple of years ago. Eva had loved the colours and the keen 13-year old she was, had insisted on helping with the painting. It didn’t quite go so well, after all, that was how they got the new kitchen table Harvey had to pay for. Long story, still made her smile.

Tonight was different. This wouldn’t be a happy memory, she knew already.

“Actually, I’d love some coffee. Thanks.”

“Me too”, Baris added.

Catherine hardly found two matching cups with saucers. All her dishes were piling up in the sink, unwashed, dirty. How she hated it when her kitchen looked like that. Hadn’t it always been the heart of her home, her very own kingdom she could retire to after a hectic day at work? Her kitchen had always been kept neat and tidy. Fresh herbs hung from the ceiling to dry, ripe fruit cooked in sugar and cinnamon stored in huge glass bowls, flowers from the garden, daisies Eva had picked. Look at the mess now. Dirty dishes, glasses and cutlery everywhere. It was appalling. The silence stung in her ears. Why didn’t they talk? Weren’t they trained

and paid for situations such as this? Maybe not anymore. Cut backs everywhere. Everything one had to do for oneself nowadays, even break the ice with the police. “Sugar and cream?” Catherine asked to get the conversation going.

It was all like a ritual though no rehearsal had ever taken place. None was needed. She had been fretting about this moment for months. On countless occasions she had been repeating to herself what she would say. Trying thus to solace herself when nothing at all could comfort her. Now these mental exercises helped, she wouldn't break down, she wouldn't start screaming or run away to throw herself off a bridge, as Thierry had. She knew her part by heart.

“Cold milk will do, if you have some,” Officer Baris replied politely. He was the more handsome one, smiling at her sheepishly. She opened the fridge and passed him the bottle of skim milk, carefully avoiding touching his fingers. He glanced at the package, but poured the milk nevertheless into his demitasse. Catherine couldn't bear it any longer, she had to broach the subject now and she had to do it immediately. Any delay was too painful and cost her too much strain and energy.



“She is dead,” Catherine blurted out. The way she had said it, it wasn't a question. And she had *desperately* wanted it to be question but it wasn't. It was a clear statement and she heard her voice leave a dirty trace on the blue kitchen wall. She could never make these words unsaid or unheard, the smudge high up there on the wall was to stay. When both her visitors nodded like puppets on the Muppet Show and lowered their eyes simultaneously, she knew her “Mene, Mene Tekel, Upharsin”

had forever been burned into her heart, her flesh, her soul. *Mene*: God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it. *Tekel*: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting and *Peres*: Thy Kingdom is divided and given away.

Given away. Taken away. A fallen queen that was who she was. All that Catherine could feel now, was the numbness of her hands and fingers, the cold in her body, the emptiness in her brain that spread and spread, taking up so much room, taking up everything, sweeping her daughter away, finally and for good.

Eva was dead. She was gone. Now, she knew. Now, she was certain. Wishing it all to be a dream, wishing it all to go away, it didn't help. And then the pictures. They kept coming, tugging at her nightgown like a toddler. Eva in her red pram, Eva on her third birthday, Eva at her first day at school. Catherine's mind was dredging up long forgotten details she hadn't known they still existed. It couldn't be helped. The memories flashed by as if someone was uploading terabytes of Eva's YouTube videos into Catherine's brain simultaneously. The clips were all playing at once creating such painful and devastating chaos and noise; it was a Tohuwabohu beyond description. Eva was really only a girl, her girl. *She couldn't be dead. No. She couldn't.* "Did she have it? Her baby? Is it alive?" Catherine was amazed at how calm her voice sounded, cutting clear and sharp through the visual imagery that was harassing her brain. Müller and Baris glanced up and she could tell that had come as a surprise. They didn't know about the baby. Müller shrugged: "We don't know, Ms. Cohen, we are still working on it. You must be patient. We, - they have only just found her -" Chief-Officer Müller hesitated, only for a second, but she realized his pattern of speech was unnatural, the pause was too long.

“Body, “ he finally added. They found her in a shack in a forest near Prague, we were informed by Czech police” She kept her gaze down and listened to how he continued:

“That is all we can say for now: Your daughter is dead, our Czech colleagues have confirmed her identity about half an hour ago. You would still have to identify her, once-.” Catherine couldn’t bear it. She buried her face in her palms and took a deep breath.

“Prague? You found her near Prague?”

“We did, well, they did.”

“She was pregnant?”

But Catherine had spaced off into some sort of self-tormenting sphere full of reproaches and self-accusations. Why hadn’t she protected her beloved Eva? Why hadn’t she kept her daughter safe, safe and snug. Mothers were supposed to protect their own.



“I have killed her, oh my God I have killed her,” she whispered, hardly audible.



A moment of silence, then she ran her fingers through her soft brown hair and stared at the two policemen. Officer Baris looked away, embarrassed. Müller lifted his black leather briefcase to his knees and reached for a pen that was fixed on the outside. He got ready to take notes.

“You have killed your daughter? Ms. Cohen, I know you are a lawyer yourself, but right now you might consider calling a colleague,” Müller said, pen in his hand, that awful matter-of-fact tone that was so police. How well she knew *matter-of-fact*. That was her: Madame *Matter-of-Fact* Attorney Cohen. His blue eyes were staring at her indifferently, Baris shuddered. Was she being serious? Was she the killer? It couldn’t be. She looked so beautiful, so innocent and the news of her daughter being dead clearly distressed her. Then Baris’ glance fell upon a picture on the window sill. It was of a pretty young girl. That must have been her, Eva Cohen, the dead girl. She was not a clubber. He had never seen her before in any of the clubs he frequented, he would have remembered. She was a looker, stunning.

“You heard me,” Catherine muttered in a hushed tone. “I am not going to repeat it again and no, I will not call a colleague. I don’t need a lawyer. I am completely innocent.”

“But, Ms. Cohen, by all due respect, you have just confessed to killing your daughter.”

“No, I haven’t. Of course, I haven’t. I have driven her away, I haven’t killed her. If I am guilty, then I’m guilty of not looking after my daughter well enough. Guilty of not keeping in touch emotionally with my child: That is not an official crime, at least not last time I checked.”

“But you said-,” Catherine interrupted him before he could finish the sentence.

“I know what I said, but I didn’t mean it that way.”

“Then which way did you mean it, Ms. Cohen?” Chief-Officer Müller insisted.

“I will say no more on the subject, Mr. Müller”, she replied curtly. The silence that ensued was awkward because Müller kept looking at her as if this was some staring contest he was determined to win. Baris was the one who got really uncomfortable, he chipped in.

“I am so sorry for your loss, Ms. Cohen, and I am sorry for waking you and with such awful news”, he glanced at his watch:

“It is late, I know. Soon, it will be early. Late. Early. After the game was before the game. Right? Right?” Müller stared him down, Catherine didn’t answer.

Was the guy trying to cheer her up? How tasteless. After Eva’s death was before her death? It didn’t work at all. So young and so stupid. Couldn’t they hire intelligent people? Couldn’t they train them properly?

What did it matter if there was no ledger in life that would order events for you into before and after or early and late? Her thoughts didn’t fall into such categories anymore. There was only after, after and too late. There was only pain, endless pain. So archaic it felt, she wanted to go outside and pour dirt over herself, tear up this rather expensive sleeping gown, the one she had bought with Harvey at Grieder les Boutiques in Zurich. She wanted to cover herself with humid, heavy humus, still moist from the nearby forest, feel the little wooden bits on her scalp and her naked skin. She couldn’t bear all this, she couldn’t react. She was falling, falling into a nightmare that would last for some time and on. She had withdrawn to a place

where she couldn't be reached. They were trying to make contact the way policemen do.

"Ms. Cohen. Do you hear me? Ms. Cohen? Are you alright?" One of them patted her shoulder. Where they allowed to touch the victims? Or didn't she count as a victim? Both tried to talk to her, but she couldn't answer burying her head in her arms, smelling her own wonderful smell, getting lost in it. There was a continuous stream of words directed at her.

"We will call a care team again as soon as we can. Unfortunately, right now we couldn't get hold of anyone yet. Shall we try again?"

Catherine shook her head silently. They sat with her for a while and waited for her to come round. When she did, they suggested many things, she didn't listen, they offered help, she didn't hear them. It didn't matter what they said, she couldn't be reached. Then silence. Finally. What a relief. Nothing more was to be said, not tonight. The care team would come soon enough, she would be looked after. It was hard to breathe, to move, to think. Catherine didn't hear them get up, didn't hear when they left the apartment and the door was closed from the outside.



The call with Anichka had taken over an hour, but Greg, though freezing like hell, was glad it was all sorted now. Things were in place again. It was late now. So when Baris and Müller came back from interviewing Catherine Cohen he was not

only frozen and totally exhausted but still starving. They agreed there would be time to interview her in the morning and so he rode back to town without having achieved anything. He really needed food. And a bed. And sleep. Also, he would be on his guard against the female. There would be an invisible shield no amazon could work through. He really needed some rest, a time-out, recharge his batteries. He had only slept a couple of hours since Sunday morning, more than 36 hours by now.



Catherine would have needed her mother: her strength, her optimism, her clear and lucid thoughts and ideas had always been such a source of blessing. But her mother was gone, she had died only a year ago. Now Eva was dead too, Catherine, all by herself. No one before her, no one to come thereafter. Just her. It couldn't be true, it must be some awful mistake. Her mind was blank as blank could be and she wondered if there was more that she could lose, lose to death and the grave, lose forever. But there was nothing she could think of, nothing at all. She had lost it all. And yet, the tears didn't come, no visible signs of grief. She was in some kind of shock, in a tunnel she couldn't get out, in a terrible reverie that turned her mute and numb. Eva was dead, mum was dead, they were both dead. Why was she not taken? What was she to do here now? Why did she have to be the one whose life went on and on and on? It was torture. *Why can't I die? Over and out.*

Catherine should have locked the front door, but couldn't. She couldn't get up. She was still waiting for the tears, but they didn't come. There was so much tension in her body it nearly broke apart. It felt as if her sinews and vessels were intertwined endlessly spinning everything round and round without stopping. As if she was hanging high up on a rock and then the rope let go. Then she'd fall. Fall deep. She sat in the kitchen: The heart of the home. Her kingdom. Destroyed. Torn and ripped apart in a total mess. A fallen queen that was who she was. Here Eva and she had spent so many happy hours, laughing and giggling. Here they used to turn back to after a good climb in the mountains, exhausted and hungry, every limb and bone hurting awfully after walking for miles and miles in the open. Here they had produced the famous Milanese Christmas cookies before Christmas and here they were colouring Easter eggs in spring.

Easter eggs. Spring. She and Eva used to collect grass and flowers in the woods. It was great to be outside when the sun at last came out again after a long and foggy Swiss winter. Then they'd cut up an old pair of nylon stockings which they used to string around the eggs with a thread, clasping thus the grass gently, but tightly to the egg's shell. It took quite some skill to do it or the egg would break. Eva only mastered it when she was eleven. Catherine remembered how extremely proud of Eva was when she could finally do it. That year she wouldn't let her mother even do one single egg, she'd string them all up herself, carefully and evenly, all 42 of them. When the eggs were all nicely wrapped up, they'd finally boil the whole package in colourful woods or cochineal, dried up lice, which gave a purple colour. After the eggs had boiled and the stockings had been removed, the flowers and grass would stain the eggs beautifully, leaving a unique pattern.

Catherine knew she would have to call Harvey, Thierry's parents would want to know, Mascha will know from Brigid. She would first call Brigid, dearest Brigid. She will see her through. Or first Harvey? After all he was the father. Had the police gone and seen him too? She couldn't remember what they had said only minutes ago. What she did remember though was that she hadn't spoken properly to Harvey for five years, five years was a long time. An eternity. She clearly remembered his once so beloved face. The few wrinkles, the large nose. When he had had a glass of wine she loved the smell of his lips and how his moustache tickled her upper lip. His arms were strong and she had loved him. She had heard that he was married again and had had another baby. A baby. The thought brought up her tears so forcefully, she broke down crying out loud, howling like some wild and hungry animal. Finally tears. Finally relief. Eva is dead. Eva was dead.

Her baby was gone.

Catherine felt as if she was losing her mind. She couldn't call anyone right now. Not Brigid, not Harvey, no one, she first had to get a grip on herself. Grief was a powerful enemy to reason and so was sleeplessness and she had to keep them both at bay to keep her wits. Not an easy task. Grief and sleeplessness could tear down everything, without leaving a single brick to rebuild a bridge to sanity. They mustn't overcome her. She leaned back and looked upon her hands. Her fingers looked old and wrinkled. Catherine knew she should learn to go back to work as a lawyer, use her power to reason again, be normal again. How much she longed for her old life. She had been on sick leave since Eva disappeared. Right after Thierry's funeral.

And now the police said they had found her body in a forest near Prague in the Czech Republic. For some reason Catherine couldn't explain that didn't amaze

her. It felt like a circle was closing as if something was finally coming to an end.

Mamma Imma, her mother and Eva's beloved grandmother had left Czechoslovakia in 1948. If she hadn't survived Terezín, Theresienstadt, Catherine wouldn't have been born and thus Eva wouldn't have been born. It didn't make sense, but somehow it did. To Catherine, it did. Prague was where it all started, Prague was where it all ended.

3

Tuesday

Zimmerwald

The time between early dawn and mid-morning stretched unfavourably slow as Swiss winters brought late greyish light instead of the bright morning sun. In this part of the northern hemisphere, the sun rose late in January, only to set early again for evenfall. Crepuscule was the most unpleasant feature of winter: days that took forever to unfold, a late start so to speak, and then ended prematurely without climaxing in any way worth remembering. When Catherine couldn't stay in bed any longer it must have been around 7 o' clock. It was still pitch-dark outside. However, continuously wrestling with her sheets had become too cumbersome and annoying. She couldn't relax, she couldn't lay still, she couldn't fall asleep again. Her body wanted to move so her thoughts would stop tormenting her. Last night's news was too hard to bear, and yet, she couldn't do anything to get the rest she would have needed so desperately. Her heart was racing, her head aching. She was exhausted.

Sleep had not refreshed her, on the contrary. Too much adrenaline was running in her blood for want of distraction. Sleep was a bitch.

Still in her pyjamas, she staggered into the kitchen and washed the cups she had used for Chief-Officer Müller and Officer Baris. She couldn't deal with the rest of the dirty dishes piling up high. They would have to wait a little longer for their redemption. She felt as if a truck had run over her, it was hard to even stand, leave alone move or stretch or do dishes. Catherine turned on the coffee machine, pressed the buttons, watched the hot water rinse the nozzle. Then the black coffee came out; it was steaming hot, but she had sat down and was so lost in her thoughts that she forgot to drink it. When she finally took the first sip, she backed away from the lukewarm broth that came upon her dry lips. The coffee was undrinkable. She poured it out: Straight into the sink. She sat down again, resting her forehead in her hands. Her eyes hurt from not washing her face. She couldn't be bothered.

She would have to make these phone calls eventually. But now that she finally knew, now that the obvious was confirmed, she was as if in trance. The idea of talking to anyone was appalling. Her voice was gone. It took too much energy to set her vocal chords into vibration or to move her tongue and string up words so they fell into the right places. There were no places for no words. She couldn't speak: Eva was dead. They had found her, found her indeed. There was no more hope, no more hope. She would have to write it down so she could believe it, grasp it, somehow come to terms with it. Writing would help, wouldn't it? In order to cope with the inevitable, she would have to write it all over the place: No more hope. If hope died last, what was left now? *Nothing, really.*

Catherine gave herself a jolt and dialled Brigid's number; she could hear the ringtone at the other end of the line, but Brigid didn't pick up. Had she already left for work? Usually she was running late. Catherine put the phone down, got up, turned off the coffee machine, turned it on again, stared at the coffee machine. It seemed to stare right back. Was she going mad now? Taking up a staring contest with your coffee machine? Not exactly a sign for good mental health. She sighed, then she pressed the right buttons, again. A total déjà vu. The coffee that ran out was steaming hot, just like before. But this time she managed to pour herself some cold milk, no sugar, no cream. Just cold, cold milk. She took a sip. It felt good. No more staring. The spell was broken. *Just coffee*. Then she tried Brigid's number again. Still, no answer. Where on earth was she so early in the morning when Catherine needed her so desperately? She dialled the number again and again. Compulsively. Then, finally she picked up. *Thank God*.



Brigid sounded sleepy.

"Hey, Catherine. What is it? I've seen you called, what? A dozen times?" She sounded surprised, then apologetic.

"I've had to run down and get the washing. I was going to call you. Sure. What's wrong?"

Catherine interrupted her:

"They found her."

But Brigid, had missed the grief, the pain in Catherine's voice.

"Thank God", she exclaimed loudly, relieved.

“Finally. Oh Catherine. I am so glad for you. Finally, she will come home. She will-,”

Then she stopped herself short and the silence that spread between the two friends was tangible. Brigid realized at once that she was wrong.

“Is she? I mean. Is she alright? Catherine. Is she?”

But Catherine couldn't say a thing, tears running down her cheeks, she listened as Brigid rattled on:

“Oh my God. I am so sorry. I only just woke up and my neighbour. She rang the door -, the bell. I mean. I had to get the washing. I wasn't supposed to leave it. There, I mean. In the laundry. The neighbour. She wanted to start. The washing. The washing machine.” She stopped. Then she continued:

“It doesn't -. Catherine. Can you hear me? Catherine?”

“Yes, I'm there.”

“It doesn't matter. Really. Forget it.”

She fell silent and Catherine couldn't say a word, pressing her fist to her lips, gnawing at her fingers. Brigid understood the extraordinary immediately:

“No sorry, sorry. The washing. The washing doesn't matter. Catherine, I am so sorry.

So sorry. I mean. Eva. Eva, it does matter. So, what now?”

Catherine was nodding, but Brigid couldn't see her.

“She is dead.” Catherine let out a stifled sob.



Grief when first shared always becomes more powerful, larger, more encompassing and overwhelming. For a while, the two women were locked up in a

universe of their own. Both were crying, clutching their cellphones to their ears where the little gadgets left a wet smudge on their cheeks, getting entangled in their hair above their temples. Then the moment passed and they were released from their shared prison cell by some invisible guard, each ushered out to face their very own loneliness, their very own abyss.

"God. Catherine. What will you do now?"

"Do? I don't know what to *do*. How can I *do* anything?" At least Catherine's capacity to speak had come back.

"I mean. Have you seen her? I mean, can you -? Where has she been found?"

"In a forest near Prague."

"Prague. Goodness me. So far. Was it? I mean. Was it? Was she -?"

"I don't know. They don't know. She is dead. I cannot say how or so. They are working on it."

"Will you have to identify her?"

"I don't know. Really. I.- They came at night and told me. I broke down completely. "

"Catherine. I can imagine. Of course, you did. You should have called me right away. I would have -. They came at night? At night? Couldn't they wait for the morning?"

She continued:

"Well. I guess they didn't want me to get it from the press. Surely, they will let me know more soon."

"I am sure. In the meantime -."

"Brigid. There is nothing I could do right now."

"The funeral. Catherine. You will have to make arrangements. I mean. Sorry. I am jumping ahead of things." Catherine started crying again.

“Brigid. I can’t. Really. I can’t. All I can do is cry.” Large tears were streaming down her face, she didn’t wipe them off.

“Oh dear. I will help you. Don’t worry. Just cry. You are simply not yourself. Right now, you aren’t. Crying is normal, it is good for you. Losing her, so young. It is terrible. Terrible. Catherine. Listen,-. I cannot skip work. I wish I could.

“No, don’t worry.”

“But I will come towards evening, as soon as I finish. You can reach me anytime on my cell phone. Be strong”.

“Yes. Just go.”

“Love ya,” she said.

They rang off and Catherine ran her fingers through her hair, composing her. No, what? Call Harvey?



Her mother. Mamma Imma. She wished she could have called her mother. But where she was gone, there were no phones. Mum would have known what to do in a situation like this. Nothing had been awkward for her nothing, nothing had been too much or too difficult. She could take it all, disease and death, disaster and dungeon and murder and lost bags, she could take it all, everything. Imagining her to be alive, it was Catherine’s way of grieving her death, her way of dealing with the loss. On the bad days, so Catherine imagined, Mamma Imma would just sit next to her bed and hold her hand, soothe her. The worst had been the beginning, just after Eva had disappeared, then Catherine felt she was going mad. But she had tried to remember how Mamma Imma always knew what was needed, what it took to survive. The

Ghetto had taught her she'd repeatedly say and though the memories that she shared with Catherine and her sister, Leah were more than scarce, the two girls had always admired her incredibly for being a survivor. Survive, that was all it took.

The veil of silence that had always engulfed their mother's past had filled their little minds with awe and endless made-up stories. Not really knowing what she had gone through before and in the war, it challenged their imaginations to the utmost and Catherine was not sure whether she would ever see through the mist that surrounded her mother's life. "The little princesses" as Mamma Imma used to call them were Catherine's sister Leah who had gone back to Prague after 1989 and Catherine herself. Frank, their elder brother who died in his early thirties could never really understand their female admiration for their mother. Somehow he was never really part of their little unit, their tightly knit together threesome. He was kind of the odd one out, always sticking out. In Catherine's memory he had always been a man, never a boy. He was born in the ghetto when mum was still so young. Frank was a child of that atrocious war whose shadow had loomed over their heads for all their childhood.



Catherine knew, she would also have to call Leah. She hadn't called when Mamma Imma died, but now she would have to. Her sister needed to know that now it was only the two of them left. Thinking of Leah made her choke. Not having spoken in more than 20 years, in fact since Leah had moved to Prague in the late 80ties, Catherine could feel again how all that guilt was welling up within her. It only added to her distress. Leah had left, cutting off all ties families were naturally bound with.

She had made it clear repeatedly that she didn't want to speak to Catherine or Mamma Imma ever again. And hadn't Catherine tried to contact her? How often had she –; it wasn't worth even thinking about. Her sister was gone, she wouldn't respond, for all Catherine knew she could have been dead. Remembering Leah meant remembering Timmy. Timmy. Such a little coffin. Another funeral. Leah too, had buried a child. It ran in the family: The end of their line. The end of everything.

Catherine was scolding herself for letting herself drift off; being fatalistic wouldn't help. Somehow the confirmation that Eva was dead had brought along relief, the painful kind though. It was time to wake up and get going. She had to take control again, the way she used to when she was young and had launched on a promising career as a young lawyer. That was well before she and Harvey had started their little family. How well she had done for herself. Before anyone else depended on her. Catherine had come second-best of her year in the final exam. She had thought that was hilariously good. And in fact: It was hilariously good.

Then she got married and was pregnant with Eva when they gave her a PhD degree at the university in St. Gallen. The story of her life: Brimming with joy, droning with success, so loud it made your head ache. Soon, thereafter, she had a cute little baby, a sweet baby girl named Eva and she and Harvey were as happy as one could be. Life had changed so incredibly since these days. Catherine found herself standing under the shower and realized she had totally forgotten how she got here. The fleeting memories of her life had exhausted her, distracted her from her daily routine: How tired she was and how weary from the strain.

She let the hot water run down her body and looked at her toes, too lazy to bend and rub the dirt off between them. She should cut her nails, trim her pubic hair,

shave her legs, and go to the hairdresser, but also today she would postpone that. Then she dried herself carefully, donned a pair of jeans and a blue jumper that was not ironed. She felt a terrible emptiness. She was worn out from the restless night and the hot water made her feel extremely weak. She hadn't eaten properly for nearly 48 hours. The fresh vegetables, the salad it had never been bought, nor processed or eaten.



She was about to get the butter out of the fridge when the doorbell rang. Night and day someone wanted in, was she running a hostel now? It wasn't Brigid, she had said she would pass by after work and she couldn't have changed her mind. If it wasn't her, Catherine didn't care care. Instead of opening the door, she buttered her slice of bread, and spread on some strawberry jam mum had made two years ago. Then she pressed the button of the coffee machine once more. Dreadful morning. More coffee wouldn't help but it was worth the try. She took a large bite of her jam bread, when the bell went again.

All she wanted was peace and quiet and she wanted to start mourning, properly. She didn't want any visitors to call on her. Then she remembered, Müller had promised the care team would call on her in the morning. Surely it was them who were at the door. Catherine wanted them to go away immediately. She didn't need looking after. She wanted to watch these movies she had stowed away at the back of her mind: Eva running with naked feet through the grass, Eva jumping into the public swimming pool, Eva snuggling up to her and Harvey in the morning, or at night when she ran a fever or was haunted by nightmares: The wolf, the spider, the bear, a man

full of slime and phlegm trying to wet her. Then she would run for Mummy's arms, screaming and crying, hot with fever or fear or both. Catherine would be there to still her worries and give peace to a troubled little soul. It had been so rewarding, so true, so wonderfully unique. All crumbled to dust now. *The bell. Again.*

The care team meant business. She had better open that door. She put her bread down, still chewing on the dry crust, got up and went to the door. When she opened it, there were more police. No care team. Or at least she didn't see them right away. *God, they looked official, and so many of them, at least half a dozen. What the heck? What was going on now?* Officer Baris and Chief Officer Müller were off duty, she didn't recognize any of the faces.



"Mrs. Cohen?" she looked at the policeman who had addressed her. He was taller than the two they had sent at night and his hair was receding elegantly. When she looked closer, she realized, he was wearing his uniform and she could see his gun. The way he looked at her made her feel suspicious and guilty at once. Was she supposed to be intimidated now?

"We need to search your house."

She raised her eyebrows. Had he introduced himself? She had missed his name. Catherine stared back at him, very unwilling to comply.

"You have searched my house. You have searched it ten dozen times. Why do you want to search it again? Why now?"

Since had Eva disappeared months before she and the police had turned everything upside down to find any hints as to where she could have disappeared. But there was nothing, nothing at all, why look again? All they had found was painful, bringing up such strong memories of shared times, the seashell from Croatia, a little Eiffel Tour from their trip to Paris and the old teddy bear that Eva had kept since her birth. She couldn't start the search all over again. They would have to understand. They would have to leave.

"Can I kindly ask you to leave? I am not feeling very well."

The constable with the receding hairline held up a search warrant, held it right into Catherine's face and she felt how he was getting impatient. He wanted to get moving, do a job, she could tell. As a lawyer she was well acquainted with such documents and scanned them immediately for their date. Monday, 10th of January 2012. It seemed about right. The warrant was as fresh as a croissant, hot and crisp out of the oven. What was more; it looked ominously real enough, not a dream, not a fantasy, not something her subconsciousness has brought up. Real. *What on earth was happening here? Why a search warrant?* She tried to get a grip on herself and, indeed, she knew she couldn't space off like this in her memory train, when things needed to be done. *What was it again that needed to be done?*

She swallowed hard then gave the officer the papers back. There wasn't anything out of the ordinary. It seemed to be an ordinary search warrant to search her house. But, nevertheless, she couldn't help but find this extremely odd. *Why would they search the house?* All the months in which the search for Eva had been in its most agonizing phase she had been extremely cooperative. They had searched her house a dozen time without a search warrant. *Why would the produce a search warrant now?*

Catherine looked at the policemen entering the apartment, a quizzical expression on her face, which made it obvious she was more puzzled than pleased. Examining the officers' faces to find out what was going on, was hopeless. She found nothing she could make sense of.

"What is this about?"

She couldn't think of a cleverer question. Her days as a successful lawyer, mastering so splendidly the eloquence that went with the job, were lost way back in a misty and remote past, definitely gone.

"All will be explained to you, Madame, but later," one of them answered curtly. And then it dawned instinctively upon her. A search warrant. There was a cue somewhere she had missed, missed completely. Next she would be under arrest. *No. That couldn't be it. By all means. Under arrest? Unthinkable. A mother accused of – accused of what? Only the most obvious came to her mind: Accused of murdering her own child? Her beloved daughter? Catherine had been a lawyer for too long and she knew, theoretically, it could be possible. But realistically the idea was simply bullshit. She dismissed it at once.*

Nevertheless, the hormones kicked in and Catherine's heart began racing. What should she do? Was there anything at all she could do to find out what was going on? The constable without the name started organizing the search, giving out orders:

"We shall start in her office."

He was looking intensely at Catherine when saying this. She didn't flinch from his gaze, he was only doing a job. A job put bread on the table, and butter and coffee and various other things one needed: Toilet paper and lubricating cream, socks and pyjamas. Catherine looked him up and down. Wasn't it good she had practiced the

staring contest earlier on? The coffee machine had been a worthy opponent before the real game: facing a grim Swiss constable. He nodded at her while addressing his team:

“We need to take all her computers, everything you find.”

It was a piece of information, not a request. And it was directed to his team, not to her.

Why did he keep looking at her?

“You can also take the coffee machine if you want to,” Catherine volunteered.

“The coffee machine?”

Catherine shrugged and looked straight at him. What choice did she have? She didn't say anything anymore. She had nothing to hide anyway. They could open every drawer, look into every cupboard, every folder and every box. Let them. They wouldn't find a thing worth finding. At least four police officers were now searching her apartment, maybe there were more, she couldn't really tell them apart. They were pulling out every drawer, opening all the cupboards. She tried to calm herself. The Bernese police had searched the house before; it wasn't a big deal. But this time they seemed to do it more thoroughly. So what? Let them search the house. She didn't know why they kept on saying “house”, for she lived in a three-bedroom apartment, which was spacey but not exactly a house. She lived on the first floor, but had a patio and a lawn on which they used to have barbeques.

Summer, a year ago, Eva had invited Thierry, her beloved sweetheart and Mascha, her best friend. The latter had brought along a guy whose name she couldn't remember. There was *caponata*, an eggplant salad with celery and raisins, fresh peppermint leaves and lots of olive oil. They had had curry chicken wings, crisp baguettes, and cold wheat beer to wash it all down. Catherine always remembered the menu of a special occasion. She remembered food better than people. She couldn't

help it. The guy whose name she couldn't remember had brought a guitar and sung them one of his own songs. And then, before they called it a day, or rather a night, he had sung Elton John's *Candle in the Wind*. Catherine was close to tears, when he performed it so beautifully: his voice was so full of joy, laughter and a premium selection of everything that was good, beautiful and worth waiting for. He was quite some guitar player.

And then Thierry jumped off the bridge. Or was that later? Her mind was blank. She couldn't think clearly now. All she knew was that she had nothing to hide. Let them look; let them open every drawer, every cupboard, every box that was standing on a shelf. They could look at everything on her computer they wanted. She had nothing to hide. She had nothing to hide. Nothing. A hot shiver ran down her spine. *The abortion*. She had forgotten about the abortion.



After Catherine had received Eva's message on Friday she had run an extensive search on abortion in Vienna, finding out about different hospitals to take her daughter, also probing into offers that weren't so official, to say the least. She had even been on sites that taught you how to abort a baby yourself. What you needed was a metal coat hanger, cold blood and some diligence. She had read all about it, forcing herself to dig in, to remember it all. It was terrible what she had found. The mere thought of it. Appalling. And yet, an abortion was all Catherine could think of. After all, Eva hadn't mentioned how far she was advanced in her pregnancy and what exactly she needed help with. What a lousy mother she was. She still felt terribly bad

about it. If only she hadn't been on these sites, it wouldn't look good. Her lawyer training kicked in. Not good at all.

Catherine restrained herself. She would explain and as long as there was no forensic evidence at the crime site to incriminate her, she would be safe. She would explain how she had changed her mind on the way to Vienna. How repentant she had been. It was only on the plane that she realized that it might be too late for an abortion and that Eva might need help with something else: A baby. Changing nappies. Giving the bottle. Pushing a pram. That kind of stuff. She was mortified that she hadn't thought of it right away. Looking down onto the Austrian Alps she felt duly exasperated. Her. A grandmother. The mere thought had made her cry again and when so many tears ran down her cheeks her expensive make-up was smeared all over her pretty face. Catherine felt her heart getting heavier as she remembered the flight and the trip to Vienna, which had resulted in the loss of her bag, not in finding her beloved child. Her child; big with child. She; a grandmother. Hard to believe. All this was hard to believe.

While the police officers were searching her house, turning everything upside down, she would have been allowed more phone calls to inform relatives and friends of Eva's death. But there was no way she could sit down quietly while her life was torn -, ripped apart before her very eyes: Catherine hated it how they invaded her privacy and rummaged through her personal belongings, her nick-nacks, letters, papers, photos, cutlery, dishes, bathroom cupboards, bed sheets, her clean underwear. She found it quite impossible to keep track of what now had become at least six or seven officers going through her things like rats through rotten cheddar cheese. *God how fast they looked through her stuff, how carelessly they dumped everything down on the floor. They*

even looked into the freezer and checked the content of the box with the *Steinofen Pizza*. *Seriously? The freezer?* Catherine just sat there, mutely looking at the busy chaos that had been created all around her. *What on earth where they looking for?* She had no idea. And no one would care to tell her.

It had been emphasised that she was not under arrest, but it hung in the air that she was *not yet* under arrest. Catherine was waiting patiently for someone to explain all the frenzy to her. But no one cared to explain anything and although she was usually the one who did the explaining to all the others, she would have been happy to get some explanations this time. In fact, these days, she could have done with a truckload of reference manuals for her life. Volume Aa to Az would already take up more than a thousand pages.

She knew she couldn't put these phone calls off for much longer, it was time to face what had to be faced. And she might as well try and distract herself: Stricken with grief and desperation wasn't really her favourite state. She went through to the living room to sit on her sofa. No one in here. *Great*. A moment of peace and quiet. What bliss. She leaned back and took a deep breath. *Right*. With a heavy heart she decided to call Harvey next. His number was still on speed-dial. Eva had so often called him from here that she had talked her mother into saving his number onto their landline phone to save cell phone charges. Reluctantly, Catherine had given in.



Harvey's new wife, Patricia, 18 years his junior answered the phone. Catherine had never met her, but her voice sounded nice and friendly, a little tired though as it

was usual for mothers of newborns. Catherine guessed she must be happy enough with Harvey and all the money he had brought along.

“Hi Patricia, Catherine here, so sorry for troubling you. Is Harvey there?”

Her voice must have sounded as tired as Patricia’s. She didn’t even have the energy for small talk and neither did Patricia. The two women had never spoken before, and yet they knew each other well enough to proceed without protocol.

“Sure. Hang on a sec. He’s right here.” She heard the baby squeal into the receiver. Catherine couldn’t even remember the name of the little one. For a split second she wondered why her and Harvey’s happiness had only lasted a mere decade. Money should buy you everything, shouldn’t it? But in their case, it hadn’t.

“Catherine. Is that you? How are you? You must be-.”

She jumped at the sound of his voice. When she heard his broad American accent she used to love so much, she nearly lost it. His voice hadn’t aged at all and the way he said her name tore her in two. For a moment, she felt like hanging up on him, but then urged herself to speak calmly; everything else would be so childish and she desperately wanted to be past that stage. She desperately wanted to be a grown up.

“Harvey? You’re alright?”

She didn’t let him answer. She heard him breathing and knew he was there, knew the mood had changed. He was on his guard now. Something was coming. From afar. He must know already. That made her continue at once:

“Eva,” then she fell silent. She listened. Nothing. He didn’t respond at the name of his daughter, no reaction from his side whatsoever. Then she said it into the silence:

“She is dead,” then said it again: “Eva is dead.”

Had he fallen mute? It seemed to take minutes before he answered, but when he did, he spoke softly as if to a little girl.

“Catherine. I know. They were here too. I am absolutely devastated. You cannot begin to-”

That was when she hung up on him immediately. All her good intentions she had had initially: they hadn't materialized. She wasn't a grown up. No way. She was still hurting so much. And then, oblivious of all the police still turning everything upside down, she started to sob. *No, you bastard. Absolutely devastated? You don't have a clue.* Catherine was glad she had hung up. He didn't deserve all her emotions, all this hurt, all this pain and anger. All her desperation. She hadn't much left these days that was purely her own, but these strong and overpowering emotions: They were entirely hers, she didn't want to share them, not with Harvey anyway.

He still paid her exceedingly well. Not that she would ever have needed to work again, not after her divorce anyway. She could have retired in her mid-forties, no more work ever; not as an attorney, not as anything. The choice to work had been hers alone, the choice to live in a rather small apartment with Eva, her choice. And how she needed her work, how she needed her life to be normal after all that she had gone through. Paid work, the attribute of the sane and healthy, the wealthy so to speak. Why on earth would she think about money, now of all moments? She sat there while tears streamed down her face and mucus ran out of her nose. Why was she thinking of the money Harvey had to pay her? Why now? *Where were those tissues?* She just sat there and didn't dry her face. She sobbed and it was as if everything was too much: She couldn't bear the pain the loss of her daughter caused.

No money in the world could save her from her loss, no money in the world could ever buy her happiness or bring along the sunshine again.



Then, out of the blue, her mother was holding her, her arms folded around Catherine's, sheltering her from what was to come. *Was this a dream?* It felt so real. Mamma Imma. Her touch was real. Her smell was real. She could literally inhale her mum's hairspray; the artificial perfume, the strong gases it used to carry into the deepest pores of her hair soaking into every cell of her body. It often seemed her mother was evaporating the smell of the hairspray when she was sweating lightly. Her system used to absorb the gas and its perfume so completely she could never quite rid herself of it, but gave it off as a constant and never changing scent. The scent of her mother.

Catherine could feel the soft touch of her clothes, the exquisite materials she liked to wrap around herself. She could feel her long and bony fingers holding her. Mamma Imma's hands had become so frail, so weak, so soft and gentle with age. Catherine remembered holding them shortly before she died. What she couldn't remember was how Mamma Imma was ever hugging her or Leah when they were little. Never, ever. Not when they were little, not when they were older, not when they buried their elder brother Frank. However, she remembered Leah holding her, cuddling her. Leah, her elder sister had been like a little mother to her. She felt the lonelier for it.



When she opened her eyes again, the furniture of the living room was in sepia. What was yellow was grey and the red cushions had become some darkish dirty brown. She couldn't see in colour for a minute or two. All life had drained from her blood vessels and her other physiological systems. She was close to a total physical and mental collapse. *They were coming to get her.* The system was slowly gearing up to get her. She understood that much. But she had nothing to do with it. She didn't even know what charges were brought, would be brought, against her. *Quelle Merde.* She had not killed her daughter, not in that way. How could she kill her little girl, her little Eva with the rose ribbons in her blonde locks and the black patent-leather shoes?

All of a sudden there was a policewoman who must have descended from the top of the ceiling for Catherine hadn't seen her enter the room. She was right there, right in front of her. Catherine could have touched her knee had she wanted. And she spoke to her softly as if to a child. The voice was coming from far away, drifting in, drifting out, drifting over her.

"Mrs. Cohen? Mrs Cohen, are you well?" *Well? How could she ever be well again? How could anyone even ask this question?* People seemed to be coming and going, turning her apartment into a transition centre for stray dogs. Cats. Rats. Vermivores, crawling all over. She saw the woman. The woman's face didn't budge. She looked kind of human. Large blue eyes. She looked friendly. She spoke. Spoke again. She was speaking, wasn't she? *What did she say?*

"Yes, I hear you," Catherine said faintly. While trying to sit up she grabbed one of the cushions Eva had made for her for Christmas three years ago. The cushion was red,

she noticed relieved that she could see in colour again, it was red with a green forest and a brown reindeer on it. The reindeer had large black buttons as eyes. The bite of the reindeer's eyes hurt. But at least the colour processing system in her brain seemed to work again. Catherine tried to sustain her back with it but failed. She felt a sudden pain running through her spine. Was she sitting on the buttons now? *Darn.*

"Mrs. Cohen, I,"

Catherine wouldn't let her finish her sentence:

"But why? What makes you think, I have..." her voice trailed off.

"Dear me. I don't think anything at all. But I am not at liberty to discuss it with you. They say there is evidence at the crime site. I cannot tell you more." She genuinely seemed to be sorry.

"What evidence?" Catherine asked lamely.

"You will be informed later. Just bear with us a little longer. We shall tell you soon enough".

Catherine remained silent, what good did it do anyway, to speak, to rage against the machine? She had lost her fight so long ago. There had been so many nights in these last months when she was unconscious from her own mix of tranquilizers and alcohol, totally zonked out. How could she ever hope to recover and gain her lucidity, her propriety again? How could she ever become the Catherine Cohen she used to be; so full of energy, larger than life, successful lawyer, beautiful wife and doting mother? How could her life have been transformed so completely and in such a short time? Another question she couldn't answer.

The policewoman was still standing there, smiling at her, as if all this was some cruel and hideous hoax to entertain them all, however she meant well and wanted no

harm. Catherine didn't know her name, but she could sense her genuine sympathy. It was the mix that was revolting: Catherine was looked upon with such pity and outrageous curiosity as if she was some exotic animal in a zoo, recoiling up tightly in her cage. A colourful snake? Maybe a big brown sloth? A rainbow lorikeet with clipped wings? Or was she just *Equus asinus*, the ordinary donkey after all? She felt like a total idiot under the professional and enduring stare of the policewoman. This was still her living room, wasn't it? What was that woman doing in here? These were her rooms, her home, her life, her pain. *Get out. And get out now. No, she couldn't say that. What could she say? There were no more words left. Not for her.*

Catherine got up, kicked the sofa hard and disappeared to the bathroom. Her foot hurt, stupid thing to do anyway: kick your sofa. As if that helped in anyway. The policewoman was already feeling sorry for her anyway. *This would only make matters worse. How she hated it when people felt sorry for her. Who wanted pity anyway when in such a fix?* Catherine cleared her nose and washed her face. She had to come back to her senses at once. She couldn't let go. Not now. Dangerous. She tried slapping her face in front of the mirror. The pain; it stung in her cheeks, but oddly enough, the heat that ensued, revived her and she felt her batteries recharging. She would have to improve her tackling at once if she wanted to keep up with this strange game. *What on earth was going on? Who was playing her?*

In the last half an hour her situation had become more serious than anything Catherine had ever encountered in her neat and well-protected Swiss Life, her marriage included. She would find her way out. With great care, she began to put on make-up onto her swollen face. Some light liquid foundation first to soothe her blotched skin, these red, jagged spots were awful, covering half her face. Then she

applied black eyeliner to enhance the power of her eyes, added brown Mascara for her lashes and some light red lipstick to enmesh her dry lips. She pressed her lips together tightly. That was better. She was regaining her poise. She had to call Harvey again, call him on his cell phone. He must be at work by now. Why hadn't she thought of this before? He was the one she must ask for help. He would help her to manoeuvre around these cliffs and find her way out. He was bound to help her.



Harvey and Catherine had been to university together, and it had taken them a while until they stopped glancing at each other from down the hall and had finally optimized and synchronized their schedules. Once they had, they were sitting in the exact same lectures, eating at the exact same places at the exact same time and attending the exact same courses in the afternoon. It didn't take them long to become sweethearts. They had coached each other for every exam and had revised each other's papers. They were getting closer and when they confessed their love to each other, their happiness was complete. Things moved fast and soon enough the American exchange student was proud to have found himself a beautiful and intelligent Swiss wife, a true native, as he called her. Learning Swiss German easily, he was happy to stay. They had both graduated as lawyers, but Catherine had stopped working when Eva was born.

Later, after their divorce, they had grown apart exponentially, being competition on a small market. Harvey was continuing to build his empire while Catherine was hired by an important and traditional Bernese legal firm. They were

bound to run into each other at court, at the same restaurants, the same parties. Conflict was constantly not only on the horizon, but right there in their midst: Each time they met, fought and argued their cases against the coulisse of their divorce it got uglier, nastier and more personal.

And yet, Catherine knew deep in her heart that they were still close, no matter what. When she dialled his cell phone number, she trembled. It seemed to ring endlessly.



“Catherine, is this you again? So sorry about before. I didn’t mean to hurt you. It wasn’t a good moment anyway. Patricia was breastfeeding and that is when I need to run for some water. She drinks gallons.”

Breastfeeding? Her stomach revolted and she was nearly retching. Harvey sounded apologetic, but obviously her name and number were still saved on his mobile or he couldn’t have addressed her right away.

“Harvey. Sorry. I didn’t mean to hang up on you.”

What next? Her voice was toneless, trailing off into a clear void.

“It’s ok. I understand. Don’t-” Harvey said.

She cut him short, better tell him the truth right now.

“Listen, I need your help.”

“You do?”

He sounded uncertain. She of all people wasn’t exactly the person who needed help, not from him anyway.

"Yes. I do. I think I shall be under arrest soon enough. No idea- . For murdering Eva. I guess."

Nervously she was playing with a strand of her long blonde hair and biting her lips.

"You guess? Catherine. You cannot possibly be serious."

She kept silent.

"Are you coming?"

"Well?"

He hesitated, but only for a very short instant.

"Of course. I'll come immediately. No, wait, I can't. It will be just before lunch. Hang on. I'll have to check."

He was mumbling something to his secretary Catherine didn't understand.

"No. That's fine. We'll do that tomorrow then. - You're home?" She nearly missed her cue.

"Yes. I am." *And a zillion policemen, not to forget the bloody woman in uniform.*

"I'll be there, Let's say elevenish?"

"Ok," she said.

"Promise."

"Sure."



He hung up and Catherine looked at her phone. There will be help. Eva will come home, Harvey will come home and Catherine will cook homemade ravioli *per primo piatto*, as a first course. She'll put a roast with rosemary in the oven for afterwards. Life will go back to its simple rhythm. *Why would I think that when I know*

it wouldn't? It was silly, she knew, but to fantasize about life when it was still normal, kept her alive, kept her going. She snuggled up on her sofa, holding fast onto that darn Christmas cushion. By all means, it was mid-January now. Christmas decoration belonged back into the box by January, 6th. Despite her mother being Jewish she had always observed Christian Christmas celebrations and insisted on finishing the celebrations on Epiphany when Christmas officially ended. How they had laughed at their Christian neighbours who had kept their Christmas decorations until Easter. And now, Eva was dead. No more laughing at the neighbours, no more gifts, no more cushions, no more cute hand-sewn reindeers with large black eyes, glaring at you trustingly, with green lush forests in the background, no more anything.

Harvey looked better than ever when he entered Catherine's private disaster zone just after eleven: dark suit, white collar shirt, black polished shoes and an expensive haircut. His eyes however looked sore and red, there were wrinkles she didn't know. He arrived at the same time as Müller.

"Catherine. Here you are. You're ok?"

His voice was so familiar, it was torture. She was shaking her head vehemently, approaching him weakly. She couldn't help but fall into his arms and sob again. How good it felt to hug him, it seemed like no time had passed at all. She wanted to hold him, embrace him forever, get lost in his universe, his smell, but she knew she couldn't. Work had to be done. He wouldn't let her be carried away, not even for old time's sake. Only briefly he held her tight and then let go of her, pushing her away slightly. His face was so close, his eyes so understanding and caring, but she could see that all he needed and wanted was information, facts, numbers, details, names of witnesses, alibis, etc. etc. It was his way of processing his grief.

“Feeling any better?” The interviews had already started.

She nodded slightly, blowing her nose.

“Kind of. Thanks for coming.”



He looked her up and down and she felt uncomfortable. She was shaking as if she had been cold.

“You know Müller? You remember he is Patricia’s brother.” *Remember? Bloody hell, how would she remember someone she didn’t even know? Müller was Patricia’s brother? Great news. Just great.* Catherine tried to smile at Harvey. It didn’t work. She couldn’t smile, not right now.

Müller was talking to some of the officers in Eva’s bedroom.

“Philip Müller. Yes. I know him.”

Catherine nodded. Finally, she had remembered where she had seen him previously.

“Was he here before?”

“Yes, he was here last night. Informed me of Eva’s death. And I know him from work.

Remember the Wolden case?”

“Yes, sure.”

The Wolden case had been all over the news. Catherine herself had had to deal several times with Müller when defending Mrs Wolden, a woman who was supposed to have killed her husband. They said she had hired two Albanian killers to shoot the husband by the riverside and she really had. However, Mrs. Wolden deserved someone who could argue the case and that someone had been Catherine. She had done her job well, but Mrs Wolden was still in prison. Sometimes anything was better than marriage.

“You know Müller is Chief-Officer now.”

“Yes. I heard he had been promoted, but I don’t know how high up the ladder he has climbed”, Catherine answered truthfully.

“Well, Chief-Officer”, Harvey said. Catherine didn’t care to answer. *What was it with men and promotions anyway? Was he a better person now?*

Müller had taken charge at once talking to his inferiors in a gentle and most polite manner. He had assembled everyone in the kitchen and it finally became quiet in the adjacent rooms. As if time had stood still on the anthill, as if all ants were frozen in mid-action by a giant iceman and his broomstick. No more movements were discernible, no more noises heard. All Catherine could hear was Müller’s deep voice lecturing the crowd, carrying loud above the silence that had now spread all over. However, she couldn’t make out what he said or what was plotted against her. The day had been an utter nightmare so far one ambush more or less what did it matter?



Catherine and Harvey had withdrawn to her bedroom. Peace had finally returned. Catherine collapsed onto her bed.

“Catherine”, he squatted before her and held her hand. Was he smiling?

“Catherine”, he repeated, she didn’t answer. She looked up at him and looked through him. Why was he holding her hand?

“Catherine, I need to know,” he said neutrally bringing her back to her senses.

“What? What is it you need to know?”

She said it without emotions, not wanting to sense his mistrust or even respond to it. It seemed a breach of contract. She needed him to say it, spell it out for her, spit it out clearly. He got up, sat on the Chaise Longue.

"You know."

She knew what he wanted. It was a standard question lawyers asked their clients.

"I haven't done it. For Christ's sake, Harvey. How can you even begin-,"

Catherine started to sob again, "to doubt me?"

"Then why did you confess?" he said softly. She could see he was hurting too.

"Confess what? What are you talking about," she bawled at him. *How would he know of her unfortunate babbling the night before?* She was shaking her head.

"Catherine, are you aware of what you said last night?"

She hated it when people kept repeating her name like this.

"What are you talking about? Harvey."

She spat out his name in return.

"Last night, you said, and I quote from your informal talk with the two officers that informed you of Eva's death. "I have killed my daughter, oh my God, I have killed her". That was, according to Müller, what you said."

He lowered his notes and looked at her from behind his spectacles. *Had he taken notes? Outrageous. He must have run into Müller on the street and he had informed him off the record. After all, Müller was his new brother-in law. Just great.*

"Yes, I had said that but I hadn't meant it, not that way". She ran her fingers through her hair and looked at him intensely. Harvey would have to believe her. She had to explain herself.

He got up and stretched his legs, then he walked towards the window, came back. His face looked torn.

“Catherine, you look confused. You look-,” he left the sentences unfinished.

“O.k. I am confused indeed. Some weirdo sends me messages in my daughter’s name. I went to Vienna, especially. I hired a car, I went to the Ferris Wheel. She wasn’t there. My daughter’s dead. Our daughter. Dead. Do you understand? The police have been here all day and there are mysterious accusations about me killing her. And to top it all, someone stole my handbag, on the Ferris wheel, it was there, then it was gone.”

“That’s the thing. Exactly. Your handbag was in the shack where Eva died, that is what Müller said. That is why they search your place again. Catherine were you there when she died? Are you sure you haven’t left your bag there?”

“My bag? At the place where Eva died. Are you insane! I wasn’t anywhere near Prague.” Catherine was awestruck.

“I’ll ask again: Are you sure you haven’t been to that shack?”

“What shack?”

“Where she died.” He sat and Catherine noticed his eyes were filling with tears.

“I have no idea where she died”, she said more softly.

“ All, I know is that she was found in a forest near Prague. They found my bag where she died? That cannot be true. You say, they found the bag, you mean *my* bag, where she died? How come you know all this?” Harvey shrugged.

“Yes, they have. They did. Positive.”

“But how on earth? How would it end up there?”

“That is why I am asking you: Were you there when she died?”

Impatiently, he wiped away the tears running down his face.

"I cannot believe they found my bag at the shack where she died."

"Catherine. Answer my question. Have you been to the shack where she died?"

"No. Of course not. How did they know it was *my* bag?"

She had to ask the question, knowing the answer in advance.

"How did they know? Catherine, everything was in there, your purse, credit cards, your passport, the key to a hotel room, your I-pad, everything. Your name was written all over the place. No car keys. I remember you always keep them on you, don't you?"

She sat there, mute, staring at him.

"You still do that, don't you. Hang on to your car keys?"

She nodded. Müller must have told him everything they knew by now. This was all completely off the record. *How stupid, how totally unprofessional. That much for that promotion.*

"Do you know whether the bag they found is black? From Akris?"

"I guess so. The one you lost in Vienna?"

"I didn't lose it. It was stolen. Someone took it"

"Ok. You mean the black leather bag from Akris? That one? Yes, I remember buying it."

"You do?"

"Sure. St. Moritz.

"No Gstaad."

"Right, Gstaad. That was on that hike."

Catherine nodded.

"Yeah. That hike. I remember." Their eyes locked. "You are still using it? I should have thought you -."

"What else did Müller tell you?"

"Sorry, Cat, I don't know any other details". Hearing her nickname from way back then hurt like shrapnel. She took a deep breath, then she said:

"Don't you? Hasn't your brother in-law told you more?"

"He is not my brother in-law. We are not married."

"Not yet?"

"Catherine. He has told me as a friend."

"Yeah, off the record. I get it. Great. So, tell me, *off the record*", she stressed each word.

"Do they really think I have killed her?"

"Your alibi at the Hotel Sacher is not confirmed.

"I have locked myself into my hotel room when I got back. I was desperate."

"Yes, maybe. No one has seen you there. Hypothetically speaking, yes, you could have driven from Vienna to Prague, killed her there. Then you could have driven back to Vienna, given the car back, taken the night train back home to Zimmerwald. It might have worked."

"I came back during the day. When did she die? When exactly?"

"I don't know. I guess Saturday night, Sunday morning. Around then. It could have worked."



"Look," he grabbed her hand again and stroked it, "I am here as a friend. I will not defend you in court. I cannot help you with this. Sorry. Not as it stands now."

Of course, never defend friends and family. An unwritten law. And how could he possibly defend his ex-wife being accused of murdering their daughter under investigation by

his brother-in law? Impossible. And Müller would have to drop that case too, hand it over to someone else. Clearly, he couldn't do anything for her either. Catherine lowered her head.

"Why where you in Vienna anyway?"

"Eva sent me a message to meet her at the Ferris Wheel."

"But she wasn't there."

"No."

"And why hire that car? It looks bad."

"Eva asked me to. She told me to bring a car. She wanted to go to Schönbrunn, the castle. If you check with car rental you will see that I haven't driven that much. I haven't been to Prague or any forest nearby," Catherine defended herself.

"Catherine, this can all be manipulated."

"Do you -. I mean -. Are you serious? Do you really think I would know how to "manipulate" this?"

She looked at him incredulously, at a loss for words that made sense, but also distracted by the way he kept calling her by her full name. *Catherine, Catherine, Catherine. He never used to call her like that when they were married. As if the divorce had bestowed another name onto her.*

He shrugged.

"You have a PhD in law. You are clever. You are good with cars. Sure there are YouTube videos on how to do this.



“And why would she think you’d kill her? Do you know how often I had read that last entry on her facebook account in the last weeks? *Mum’s going to kill me*. That was what she wrote. Her last entry. About you. You of all people.”

“Yes, I know she wrote that. So what now? You think I have kept her hostage in a shack near Prague? Is it that what you think? That I have abducted her months ago to some forest I have never been to? And then killed her there? While being here all the time. And all this because she was pregnant? What on earth happened to you? Don’t you see? It is what teenagers say. It is their language, everything kills them and they could kill everyone in return.”

Harvey kept silent.

“I have not killed her. I am telling you the truth. Why would I leave my handbag to incriminate myself? It would be such a stupid thing to do. If I am as clever as you say. Why would I do that?

“People forget stuff all the time. After all you’re not a trained professional killer, are you?”

She couldn’t say any more. There was no use, he wouldn’t get it.



She had always been a truthful person as a lawyer she had been devoted to the highest ethical standards. It was beyond all imagining that now she would be accused of killing her daughter. She had left her bag unattended on the Ferris Wheel: that she pledged guilty for. The intimacy of the small space and the splendid view over the

nightly Vienna had been reassuring, the undulating moves of the cabin, her lullaby after many hard days that had added up to even longer and harder nights; months of torture, months of loss, and grief. But this was all it came down to: She was guilty of not keeping track of her bag. Catherine so perfectly remembered putting it down and then how, suddenly, she couldn't find it anymore. There had been other people in the cabin, yes, she was tired and scared, yes, confused and on the lookout for Eva, yes. She hadn't paid attention, yes. But handbags hadn't mattered to her at that stage. She was guilty of that. Yes. Guilty of not looking after her bag. Yes. But not of killing her daughter.

What a terrible coincidence that her beloved black leather bag would resurface at the crime site where Eva was found. What fate. What providence. What evil omen. She wouldn't believe her own story if she heard it told by someone else. It couldn't be. The probability was too low. And they would keep digging, the Swiss police would, Müller would, the Czech police would. She would be questioned. Harvey would be questioned, Brigid. All of them. They were bound to find something. All she could think of was that she'd have to stick to the truth. The truth and the truth alone. They would find out she wasn't lying, wouldn't they? She had not killed Eva. Surely, they would work that out? But then Mrs. Wolden had kept insisting that she hadn't killed her husband and no one had believed her, not even Catherine when she was defending her.

She would have to explain. And she couldn't. C-O-U-L-D N-O-T. You may as well spell this out loud and in freaking capitals. How her bag ended up hundreds and hundreds of kilometres away from where it was stolen and how it was placed right next to her dead daughter: a riddle, a mystery she couldn't solve, couldn't explain. She

couldn't even begin to fathom what had happened and why it had happened the way it had happened. It was against anything she had ever heard or dreamed of. It was against all the laws of Nature and Physics and it was against all reason and common sense Catherine could muster. It was a complete riddle. A complete riddle it was.



Chief-Inspector Müller came back from his debriefing in the kitchen. All officers were about to leave, grabbing for good all the evidence they had collected: Catherine's computer, some folders, papers and some of her favourite pictures of Eva. Why would they need them now? The task force was nodding her goodbye and left chattering intently. Their main concern was where to get the cheapest flight to Mallorca and how to pay less for a rented car than what it said on the car rental website. How rude could one be? Couldn't they wait until they had left the house before bragging about their holidays? Catherine didn't trust her ears. But finally, most of the police force had left. She took a deep breath. Müller looked at her sympathetically.

"Mrs. Cohen, I am extremely sorry for what has happened to you. We shall do anything to find your daughter's murderer." He had said murderer. So it was official. Eva had been killed. By a murderer. Did he mean her? Did he mean murderess? What exactly did he mean?

She had no idea whatsoever, but a thought had just formed at the back of her mind, and before realizing it was there, she had taken a wild and presumptuous decision. She would run. Run as far as she could and as fast as she could. Yes, she would. She would hide somewhere. There would be no trust. Not for people who were

spilling professional secrets to future in-laws, and not to officers who were discussing how to cheat car rental firms while mopping up her life in their arms and carrying away many of her dearest pieces. She would escape and she would do it well. At its best. Professional runaway; her next career move, not sure where that would take her, but a move it certainly was. Next step on the ladder, her ladder.

“Yes, I understand”, she said, looking at Müller directly, smiling nervously. *You will be so sorry you signed up for this case.*

“We shall wait and see.”

Yes, sure. You do exactly that.

Harvey, Müller and his nameless assistant nodded towards her as they all left. Harvey didn't hug her and walked out the door slightly hunched. It pained her greatly to see him like this. Whatever had remained of their friendship it had been broken today. Shattered, smashed to pieces. Him not believing her, and not believing her fully and without reservation, when she had so willingly put her trust in him, was awfully disillusioning. She felt betrayed all over again. Catherine tried to repress the disappointment and the fear that vigorously seeped through her. *They will get her. It was really only a question of time.* Prison had begun right here in her own walls and at a time when she should have been grieving the loss of her daughter. Organising a funeral, that was what Brigid had said. And she was right. But there was no time for that, not now. Let Harvey cover Eva's funeral, she had already covered her birth. You could call this a classic case of retributive justice. Catherine had to get back on her feet. The evidence all pointed towards her. She couldn't end up in prison for something she hadn't done. Who had really killed Eva? And why would they blame her for killing her?



In the evening, it still wasn't clear to her *what* she would do and how she would go about it. All she knew was that she had to act upon the impulse, if she started to address this rationally she would go mad and she wouldn't do anything at all. And that would surely get her arrested. *End up in that prison cell? Madame Matter-of-Fact Attorney Cohen? No. Sure not. Hell no.*

First, she had to get herself another purse. She found a large red zip-around purse made of leather in the top drawer of her dresser in the bedroom. It was old, but it would do the job. Then money. Money was a problem. Didn't she have that conversation with Eva? It rang a bell *No, I want my own card, not your card. Please.* A sudden inspiration took hold of her. She remembered that Eva had a Visa Card, it was hidden underneath the cupboard with her clothes. She had only really used it for her Internet shopping. How glad for it was she now. Thankfully, she pocketed it. They might still be monitoring the card. Whatever, Eva's VISA card would get her some money, she could always dump it afterwards. She knew the PIN code and she would simply fake Eva's signature if need be. She looked at it intensely and wrote Eva's name with her index finger on her thigh. She would manage. Somehow. She sighed and got up. *What next?*

Catherine looked at her small elegant suitcase that she had brought back from Vienna. It was sitting silently on the floor next to the Chaise Longue. She hadn't even had time to unpack it and so she opened it now. Quickly, she took out all the dirty washing. Then she started packing all over: three pairs of warm jeans, and two black woollen trousers, which were rather sexy as they enhanced her slim waistline

perfectly. She took the grey Alpaca jumper and three white blouses, five dark cotton T-shirts, socks and all her underwear from the time Harvey and her had still slept together.

Next, she went to the bathroom where her toiletries bag hung still fully packed. She reached for her toothbrush, which was the only thing she had really used since she got back. Everything fit nicely into her suitcase. What next? She went to the kitchen to make ham and cheese sandwiches with pickled sweet and sour gherkins. Catherine was as if in trance, her hands were trembling. She boiled water in the kettle, made some green tea with freshly grated ginger and milk (no sugar) and poured it steaming hot into a thermos, the other flask she filled with black coffee straight from the coffee machine. Then she packed everything into a big wicker basket. Not the season, not the time for picnic, but she knew she would be hungry.

And then, at last, as if to bid her final farewell she went into Eva's bedroom and looked around, soaking it all in, breathing deeply, inhaling, the air that no longer smelled of her. Catherine was absorbing every detail, every magazine, every piece of clothing and jewellery that lay scattered on the floor, on Eva's bed, on her wooden desk. Her stuff was everywhere, arranged listlessly and at random in a lifeless empty tableau that spoke of desertion, desolation and such waste. Her Eva dead. Her life wasted. It couldn't be. The room was a complete mess after the police had gone through it, worse than it had ever been when Eva was still -. They had upturned everything. It was so disturbing and so distracting. Then Catherine's eyes fell onto a small rose stone they had found on a hike in the Alps and she took it into her hand. Slowly, savouring the moment, she let it slide into her pocket. It felt like stealing from her own daughter. The very thought made her smile. Eva was, well-, Eva had forever

been pinching things from her; pens, brushes, mascara, lipsticks. Surely, she wouldn't mind if she took that little rose stone. She clenched the stone tightly in her pocket. Surely, she wouldn't mind. It was such comfort.

Greg

After Baris and Müller had dropped him off at the *Goldener Schlüssel* in the wee hours of the morning, Inspector Gregorovich Miroslav Shats had slept for hours. It was afternoon when he was woken by the loud sirens of a fire truck. Upon hearing the screeching sounds of the tires, he jumped out of bed and reached out for his imaginary CZ 2075 RAMI, a semi-automatic pistol made in the Czech Republic. Then he realized, he had left his weapon at home. So far his hormones had taken him, now his brain functions kicked in. He realized he was in Switzerland, not exactly the most dangerous country in the world if you weren't a broker or in charge of the Swiss National Bank. He grabbed his watch and checked the time. 4 pm. *So late?* He must have been exhausted after being awake for more than 36 hours previously. And yet, he couldn't

remember when he had slept for so long. Today, he would have wanted to interview Catherine Cohen. Missed that again. Surely his Swiss colleagues had been on it all day. *Damn.*

He reached for his phone and saw that Alexey had texted him: "No records for an Emily Cohen, Leah Cohen's only registered offspring: Timothy Cohen, died on 19th April 1989 in Bern, Switzerland. Victim confirmed to be Eva Cohen, daughter of Catherine Cohen. Couldn't reach Leah Cohen by phone. Dimitrios on it. Hopefully."

Hopefully? Just great. He knew it. He should have insisted on seeing Emily's identity papers right away when he interviewed her weeks ago about the havoc she created on www.change_the_world.com. He clearly remembered the name of the website. Why hadn't he done his job properly? The girl had looked so distressed, so upset. He had felt sorry for her and there had been no reason to doubt her story. Had she really fooled him? That seemed highly unlikely, he wasn't easily misled and yet: it was too late now to have second thoughts. Most likely she was dead, the dead girl they had found looked just like her also if the name didn't fit. He would have to sort it all out in retrospective and that always proved more difficult and time consuming. He took a deep breath. *Hopefully*, Dimitrios was on it. Well he hadn't heard back from him yet. *Hopefully*, he would get in touch any time soon.

When Greg tried to call Müller, his number was busy, so he ordered some food instead. Outside it was nearly dark again. The days in January were just as short as in Prague. As he was waiting for his dinner, he started reading the files, once again. He reread his own report trying to see between the lines, but nothing was revealed to him that was new or unexpected. There was a girl, she was dead. There was blood, an

enormous amount between her legs. He guessed, she was murdered but only the coroner's report would clear it all up. *Hopefully*, that would come out any time soon. And what was probably more important: *hopefully*, someone would e-mail him a copy.

What else? There was the handbag with Catherine Cohen's purse, her fingerprints were all over the bag, but not otherwise on the crime site. Fullstop. Why were there none of her fingerprints in the shack? Maybe his team had found some by now when there had been more time to do a more thorough sweep of the scene. Maybe she was wearing gloves, after all it was winter. But so far it was, the bag and the body. They would have to wait for the lab reports to get more details. And again, that would take forever. He got out of bed, threw the files back into his suitcase and took out a fresh, clean shirt. He liked travelling, but this case was so awfully intricate and he wished for his own bed to relax properly and his study with his own desk.



He dialled Müller's number again. This time he got right through.

„Hey Philip. Sorry, I haven't called before“.

“Not a problem. What have you been up to? We've been trying to reach you on your phone. I thought you wanted to interview Cohen?”

„I've slept all day. Can you believe it?“ Müller was laughing at the other end.

„Yeah, sure. So have I.“

„Where are you now?“

„Still at the hotel, having breakfast,“

„Listen up Greg. We have searched her house all morning and are analysing data from her computer now. She wouldn't really talk to us. However, her ex-husband, friend of mine, questioned her, off the record. She denies everything, says she wasn't at the crime scene, that her bag was stolen in Vienna.“

„Any minutes of the interview?“

„Sorry, no. It was completely off the record. We shall question her more thoroughly when we know more.“

„Do you want to come in and join us?“

„Sure. But where is she now? Arrested yet?“

„We are preparing her arrest, but she's a lawyer and all the evidence has to come through from Prague first. It has to be watertight. We heard you found her bag? Well, we haven't seen any pictures yet, or scans of the documents. Have you brought them?“

„No.“ Greg said, „Listen, these days we upload them onto the intranet. We don't carry them around.“

„Oh, you do? Then you may as well have stayed home and sent me an access code. “

„Yeah, right.“ Both men laughed.

So where is she now?“

„At home. I guess.“

„At home? You guess?“

„Yes. I see no reason why she would want to escape. She is one of us. A lawyer. It'll be fine. Don't worry.“

„You're still at Cohen's place?“

„No, we're back at headquarters. You remember where we are? In the old town. Same place like last time. You could actually walk here.“

„ Yeah. Right. “

„ Coming in now? “

„ Yeah. I'll just need to sort out something first“

„ Sure, I'll see you.“

„ Ok, see you.“

„ Don't fall asleep again.“



Greg smiled at the timely advice. No more sleep, that was for sure. *Carpe noctem*. The night was waiting for him, but he had a feeling that Catherine Cohen wouldn't wait up. He had to go and hire that car now. *Hopefully*, they would still be open.

Catherine

“What do you want to do with this? Catherine you’re nuts. Really. Totally nuts.”

Brigid was shaking the blonde wig into Catherine’s pale face. She didn’t know whether she should cry or laugh or scream or tear off her own hair. *This was hysterical.*

Catherine took it and touched its silky hair.

“Thanks”, she whispered, “Thanks for bringing it. And you did wear it on the way in, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did.” Brigid laughed out loud.

“Are you hallucinating now? Do you really think someone is sitting out there, watching you? They could have arrested you straight away, if they had wanted to, couldn’t they?”

“Well, you never know”, Catherine mumbled.

“They had to go for lunch and then they never came back,” both women laughed out loud, “this is Switzerland after all. Lunch is sacred.”

“If they had wanted to arrest you, they would have come back. Right? Right?”

Catherine had fallen silent.



“Well, they never did come back.”

“What exactly are you going to do with our old wig? After all, mum used to wear it -, I haven’t got much left from that time.”

“Don’t worry, I will bring it back.”

“In one piece?”

“In one piece, promise.”

“And Pumpkin?”

“Sure, Pumpkin, too.”

Catherine’s lame smile, the absenteeism she had displayed since Brigid’s arrival, made Brigid even more emotional and edgy. *She should be organising that funeral. Catherine should not be asking for wigs, money and Pumpkin, her beloved old car that she had had forever. What was wrong with her?* Catherine of all people: her perfect, loyal, law-abiding friend who couldn’t harm anyone nor do anything wrong ever. What was she up to? What a mess she had gotten herself into.

“God, what were you thinking? Confessing a crime like that. How can you even -.”

“I haven’t confessed it.”

“Then why all the worry? I mean seriously how could you even say that? You killed her. No, you didn’t. And you know that you didn’t.”

She looked Catherine up and down as if she wanted to smack her. She had run out of words, but only for a split second, then the letters tumbled back into place, forming more words.

“And this,” Brigid held up the wig and threw it down again, “is ridiculous, Catherine, absolutely ridiculous. You are not a hooker.”

“We weren’t then.”

Brigid took a deep breath and then laughed it off. How much fun they used to have with that wig, how confusing it was, for others, when they both wore it alternately. *Screw them all.*

The two women had been friends for years and it pained Brigid to see her best mate suffer so terribly.

“Catherine, you cannot look at me like some innocent puppy that doesn’t know-.”

“Doesn’t know what? Where to pee?”

Brigid laughed out loud, laughing out helped release the tension. The worse it got, the more Catherine and Brigid usually laughed, laughter had got them through Brigid’s mother’s death after no more chemotherapies could help her, it got them through two divorces (one each) and now it would get them through Eva’s death. It was a very distinguished way of handling strong feelings and a rare form of genuine grief and despair many people would frown at and refrain from, for its obvious coarseness. But Catherine and Brigid had always so perfectly mastered it.

“What is it with Harvey? As soon as you’ve seen that man again you’re acting strange.”

“*That* man had been my husband.”

"Yes, *had* been. And you were acting strange then. And shouldn't you be thankful for -."

"What? That he walked out?" Brigid nodded. Harvey was not really the issue here, not really what she wanted to discuss.

"I didn't confess."

"But why did you say it in the first place?"

"Well you know, how I felt I was driving her away. You know. I've told you."

"Yes, you told me. But why on earth would you tell *them*? They wouldn't understand. It was the police. Catherine. The police. You must have been confused.

"My daughter is dead. My bag ended up on the crime site. Yes, I am confused. How on earth-."

"And now, what are you going to do? Catherine?"

Catherine looked out the window. There might be snow during the night.

"I cannot tell you. The less you know the better for you. I've packed my bags. I shall leave tonight."

"The less I know? Don't be a silly cow. You're not in the Mafia, are you? Just tell me one thing. You leave tonight? Where are you going?"

Catherine smiled again.

"Yes", she said.

"Yes? Oh, my God. You don't have a clue of what you are going to do. Right? I can tell by just looking at you. Stop grinning. You haven't killed her. We both know that."

"Yes, I know, but if it wasn't me: Who then?"

"Ok. I wasn't going to say this now. But there is something I need to tell you. I talked to Mascha this morning. She totally broke down when I told her. You know. Eva dead.

The news were a total blow for her. It was as if she hadn't expected Eva to be dead, on the contrary-." she paused.

"She was pregnant," Catherine said tonelessly.

"Pregnant? Oh my God. That makes sense. Then Mascha knew all along. Oh my God, she knew all the time where she was, running away from you to keep the baby." She clasped her mouth and Catherine got up and walked up and down. Silent and mute.

"Now, you say that too. Why would she run from me if she was pregnant?"

"Did she have the baby? Catherine? Do you know? Before she died?"

"I wish I knew. I don't even know who the father is? Thierry? She disappeared right after he jumped off that awful bridge, and now the baby. I don't know."

She began crying and Brigid hugged her, trying to calm her down.

"Catherine, everything will be alright. It will be. Hush. Oh dear. I am so sorry."

Catherine was still sobbing and reached for a tissue. Then Brigid let her go, grabbed her bag again and rustled through it.

"Listen, Catherine. I've got something else for you". She pulled out Eva's mobile phone. Then she fell silent and let the news sink in. Catherine recognized the phone at once and gasped.

"Mascha gave me Eva's cell phone".

"Yes, I can see."



Stunned, Catherine took the phone. She and the police had been looking for it for so long, hoping to find it, hoping it would yield some clues, something new,

something fresh to go after. Some number in the address book they hadn't seen on the phone company's records. Now it turned out that Mascha, Brigid's daughter and Eva's friend from early childhood on, had had it all along, hiding it from them on purpose.

"She said we must look at the last call she got."

"I don't understand. Did Eva then have Mascha's phone?"

"I guess so. She told me she had lost it. Catherine, you must believe me I didn't know they had swapped phones. I had told her to cancel her number because she said she had lost her phone. It turned out she never had. And I have never checked. She just kept paying these bills."

Catherine took Eva's phone into her hands, trembling. Was it true? Was this Eva's phone? And it did contain a clue they had missed? This had been Eva's treasure for so long. It was her Holy Grail, giver of life and death, joy and comfort. She had gone to fry hamburgers at McDonald's to get it though it had only been months before that she had converted to be a vegetarian. For weeks she had declared she couldn't stand the stench of burning meat. But no other vacancies had been available and so she had taken what she could get: A job at the enemy's and that got her the cell phone at last. And a new boyfriend. Then for some strange reason she also started to eat meat again, even hamburgers, it was quite a change she underwent. It wasn't Thierry, the boyfriend, it was before. Catherine stroked the phone tenderly, she was awed. How on earth had it resurfaced?

"So she really wasn't abducted. She left on her own", Catherine stated disillusioned. It was hard to admit. The police had always considered it as a viable option, but Catherine wanted to believe she was taken, abducted by some monster. Obviously, Eva had planned to leave and she had had Mascha's cell phone to pave her

way. If only she hadn't been killed on her escapade. If only she had come back, even with a little one. It wouldn't have mattered."

"Sorry, I am so sorry, Catherine, this must be such a shock.

"Let's see. What was the last call?"

"The one Mascha said we should look at?"

Catherine nodded.

"You must enter Thierry's death date as a code", Brigid said.

"23rd of May.", Catherine said typing in, 23052011.

"Do you think he is the father? Do you think this is why he -? But why would he -? There are so many questions I cannot answer." Catherine had stopped typing midway and looked at Brigid inquiringly. Was there more to come? Her friend's resourcefulness was usually without end.

"It's +420 220 639 728." Both women were staring at the digits. Catherine could tell at once that this was a number in or near Prague. All these years she had always remembered Leah's phone number: +420 220 513 911. Her sister's number was forever burned into her skin, just in case she was going to call. But of course she never would; never did, never had. And if Catherine occasionally tried, Leah wouldn't pick up. The first digits were the same numerals: +420 220. Country code and area code were absolutely identical with Leah's number. Who did she know there? Had she somehow written to Leah and left her number so her aunt would call. Leah her sister who she hadn't talked to in decades.

And here Catherine's plan was unfolding rapidly. It all seemed absolutely logic and reasonable. She would follow her daughter. Come what may: Hell or high water, Prague was where she would go. The decision was spontaneous and irreversible.

“You recognize the number?”

“Not really, but it is Prague”, she answered, “That must be somewhere in Prague.”

“Goodness. Prague? I doubt Pumpkin will take you all the way out there. Catherine. She will not make it. Why don’t you take your car?”

“No way. I can’t. They would stop me immediately. It ‘ll be ok. Pumpkin is strong.”

Their eyes locked.

“No, she isn’t, but you try. You can try.”

“Thanks Brigid, Thanks for everything,” Catherine whispered holding her friend’s hands, then she let go.



For the journey that lay ahead Catherine wore the golden-white Nike sneakers again (for luck), a pair of black jeans with a crème shirt and a warm elegant coat. She carried the small suitcase in her left hand, car keys in her right and the wicker basket with all her food on her arm. When she approached the door she tried hard not to cry. She had put her new purse and 500 Swiss Francs Brigid had brought, into another black leather handbag, not as nice as the one Harvey had bought her, but still useful and not as eye-catching. She had also taken Eva’s cell phone. Presently, it was switched off, but when worst came to the worst, she could use it. What luck she had kept paying the bills, hoping that the phone would be activated. The police had recommended to do so. Hopefully, they were no longer monitoring it.

If everything got out of hand she’d call the cops to come and pick her up, arrest her. That would be fun. A ridiculous plan, she knew, *but hey, what do you want?* At least it was some sort of plan, bearing all the insignia of her total desperation: turn yourself

in for a crime not committed. Simply mad. When Catherine was ready, she and Brigid hugged firmly and stopped talking. There was nothing left to say. Then, with great determination, she put the blonde wig on her head and the two women laughed at each other hysterically. They hugged again and Catherine was on her way out.

She was ready to go



It was early evening, but dark already and freezing cold. An unpleasant drizzle had set in as was quite common in these European regions in January. The roads ahead would be wet, covered in a dangerous mix of water, snow and salt, maybe even gloated with ice. It was the kind of weather Catherine usually avoided to drive in, especially in an old timer. Well, it couldn't be helped, not this time. Diffidently, she was making for Brigid's old, orange BMW that was parked right in front of the house. Her own car, a white Mercedes she left in the underground garage. Surely, her number plates would soon be run by the police, they would be entered into the system first. Such luck to have a friend like Brigid who would give her last shirt to keep her going. There she was: Pumpkin. Brigid's beloved car, faithfully awaiting her in the street.

They had always called her Pumpkin, a name that the previous owner had handed down to Brigid when she had bought it. The name was kind of obvious with the car being so orange and all. They had laughed at the lack of subtlety by whoever "down the road", and they had laughed at this too, had named it so. But then it didn't matter for the name truly fit and how they had all loved the car. Brigid loved it and she did and Eva and Mascha, and Thierry. They all thought it was great. The real stuff

from the old time, not some rolling software bundled up in the shape of a box that slightly paid tribute to what had once been called an automobile. It was the real thing. Catherine put the key in the ignition and turned it. First, Pumpkin stalled, but then, luckily, it started and there was no reason to push the engine.

Catherine reversed carefully and drove off into the cold night. The engine was humming peacefully. Pumpkin was a 2002 BMW 1974. Had Brigid joked when she had said it wouldn't make it to Prague, was she insinuating that there was a problem with Pumpkin? It was an old car. Alright? What had first been a token of true and unconditional love and friendship took on a bitter ring. Would the car even take her all the way to Zürich, then Prague? Most likely it wouldn't and Brigid had been serious about her warning. She couldn't remember Brigid had ever driven thus far. What should she do when Pumpkin took her last breath and indeed did break down? Why hadn't she taken her own car? She regretted it already. She could simply have exchanged the number plates. Why hadn't she? That would have been a great idea. Should she turn back? She decided against it. It seemed too risky to turn back. She could always steal a new car on the freeway. *How on earth did one steal a car? On the freeway?*

It shouldn't be a problem at all, she thought. Harvey had said she was clever, she had a PhD in law, she was good with cars. Surely, she would manage to grab a car somehow on the freeway. *Maybe one of those passing her by with 140km/h when she was sitting on the emergency lane?* More likely, she would have to walk kilometres and kilometres to the next petrol station, abandoning Pumpkin altogether. Being so upset with the very likely possibility of becoming a real thief in the near future, in addition to being the prime suspect in the murder case of her very own daughter, she didn't

heed the silver Ford Kuga that pulled out from two parking lots before her. It was too dark and she was crying again. *Who had killed Eva? And who blamed her for it? And why would they do that?*

The downfall of her life was nearly complete. In order to stop total deterioration, she would have to think of something fast and think of it as she went along. Her prospects weren't very bright, not right now. Pumpkin lurched forward, her journey had begun. After having driven a car with automated switching for years it felt uncomfortable to shift gears. But she had no choice: There was no turning back, not now and definitely not later. She pressed down the accelerator hard and sped towards the entry to the freeway. The silver Ford followed without difficulty.

Dimitrios

Coming home from work wasn't a pleasure. In fact, it was a nightmare. Dimitrios had heard enough these last few days. Each time he came back it was the same nightmare, only it was bloody reality. He wouldn't let his wife buy Benetton trousers for Lenka, even if they both wailed her eyes out. No one who lived in Prague could afford Benetton, no one *he* knew, no one on a normal salary, on a decreasing normal salary. It was simply too expensive. The shops had been set up to increase the companies' reputation. Imagine Paris Hilton came to Prague and there was no Benetton store? It would be a disaster and worth reporting all over the world and that would be a disaster of an even greater category; for Benetton, for Prague, for business, for the world. A disaster.

Dior, Hèrmes and Louis Vuitton on *Parizska*, Benetton on *Železná*. The shops were a fraud, deceiving the young ones, dividing families and ruining the locals. They were there for publicity, to promote the city's fake wealth. Their striking goods and gadgets and beautiful attires shone in all their splendour, -matchless. But they weren't for real, not for real people, not for him or his family anyway. Such luxuries were unaffordable. If only he could make his wife and daughter understand. But they were blind and deaf to all his warnings. Like mules. And how he hated farming. A disaster. Tending to mules was worse than growing tomatoes in your backyard.



Ema must have lost her marbles, encouraging Lenka to think she would get such an exquisite piece of clothing. What should he pay the car with? The apartment? The heating? And then the shopping for groceries, milk, coffee and chocolate, not to forget the nail polish and body lotion? That needs paying for too. There was so much, his daughter thought they lacked. It was ridiculous. He simply couldn't cater for all the dainties their hearts desired, he didn't want to. Benetton trousers for an eleven year old who would grow out of it faster than you could say: Happy Birthday? It was not ridiculous, it was scary.

When he had turned the key in the latch and entered their apartment Ema was in the kitchen making supper. The fan was on and she hadn't heard the door, Lenka was playing loud music. Lady Gaga again. He took a while to put away his shoes and hung up his coat neatly. Then he put his car keys on the shelf, making sure they wouldn't jingle. They hadn't heard him come in yet. Gently, he placed his briefcase on

the floor, next to Ema's high heels. What bliss when he was home and they didn't know he was in yet. No shouting, no whining. A moment of peace. Short, but precious. He disappeared into this study and leafed through his mail. There were two bills and an ad for a Jazz concert in town. The smell of Moussaka hung in the air. Ema had received the recipe years ago from Uncle Linos when they had visited him for summer: it was a hot Greek summer with wonderful food, and music, there was Sirtaki and Ouzo every night and lots of lovemaking.

For a moment he remembered Ema's brown skin and the smell of the room in Uncle Linus' house. But now here in Prague it never tasted the same, not the food, nor her skin, nor the lovemaking. He couldn't tell why. She used the same ingredients for the moussaka, but something was different. The eggplants weren't ripe, and the sauce: it simply wasn't right. It looked like home, but it wasn't. His whole life here in Prague: It looked like home, but it wasn't. Sometimes he felt so alienated from his wife, his daughter, his job. He wondered if following the dream of his youth had been worth it. All that had remained were endless nightmares and internal strifes. At home, at work.

And yet, since his childhood so much time had passed, so much had changed. Uncle Linos had grown old and he was so far away from him now. Too far to ever turn back. He sighed out loud, studying the ad for the concert. Should he make an effort and take Ema? She wouldn't want to go anyway. Too tired, too busy, not in the mood, not for that kind of music. He heard her shouting at Lenka. Obviously Ema wanted her to set the table, but the girl as usually didn't budge. She was mesmerized by the television, maybe a video featuring that famous Lady Gaga of hers. Above the music he could hear Ema's voice clearly now.

"Lenka, set the table. Now. "

There was no answer or at least not anything he could make out.

“Did you hear me?”

Ema’s voice reached an unnatural peak and it was hard to understand what followed. Was she speaking Czech again? They had agreed to only speak English with Lenka, both of them not only fluent but very proficient in the language of the *Amerikanski*. That’s how Lenka once called a tourist she saw on Wenceslas square who was so tall the little girl thought him a giant. She asked them where he was from and then repeated after her mother: *Amerikanski*. A name that would stick with the family for years: All these *Amerikanskis*, Look more *Amerikanskis*, *Amerikanskis* all over. How happy were these times and so careless, nothing like the continuous war he had to endure these days.



He got up and went into the living room. Ema had walked over to the Television set and was just unplugging it when Dimitrios walked into the room. At once the screen went dark and Lenka screamed uncontrollably.

“*Piča*. I want to watch this. *Hovno*. *Hovno*. *Shit*.”

She was swearing in broad Czech and he was wondering where she had picked up these words. Had she just said *Piča*? *Cunt*? To Ema? He didn’t trust his ears. His beloved wife looked furious, as if she was to throw around the TV set next. Her eyes were bulging out dangerously. When had she become so ugly? He had missed the transformation completely. Had these two women realised he had come home? Had they seen him at all? Probably not.

He chose not to interfere and, for distraction, picked up his favourite newspaper, the *Právo*, being so tired of always having to read the Metro on his way to work. He could never resist *not* to pick up his Metro copy, but the truth was that news for free was not for him. He couldn't stand the short and simple articles drowned between loud, colourful pictures, often reporting about police work incorrectly. But the worst was the endless lifestyle chit-chat he was simply spell-bound to read. The Queen, Madonna, Tiger Woods, Katy Pery, to his great dismay he knew them all and their fate was fascinating him, but painfully insulting his intelligence. The *Právo* was different. At once he was drawn to an article about the Clinique case. Another disaster. Adna was close to despair about it. Still no witnesses had come forward and no suspect had been found. But with the girl being dead it had become more complicated. Yeah, he knew all that already.

"Set the table," he heard Ema say now, completely calm as if their daughter hadn't just freaked out and insulted both her parents terribly. Dimitrios feared what would come next. This was getting worse before it would get better. It always did. He had been living with Ema and Lenka long enough to know what would ensue: a period of relaxation in which the tempest could gain new strength, then thunder and lightning again. Sooner or later it would get real ugly, and when the tempest was raging at its worst, he would have to run for cover, sheltering from the acid fallout. Lenka had stopped screaming. There was a determined cold look in her eyes that scared him. Mutely, as if he had lost his very own voice, he watched her jump up, storm across the room and grab the plug. She had indeed been watching one of Lady Gaga's dreadful videos when Ema had cut off the show.

"Don't." Dimitrios said rather lamely "do as your mother tells you."

Where had the sweet toddler gone, the little girl with the pink stockings and the smile that could move mountains? His daughter shouted at him: "*Zkurvysyn*". You Son of bitch. He had heard that before from her lips, so he was kind of prepared for that. Kind of. She plugged the wire into the socket and took the remote control to switch the TV back on again. Dimitrios returned his attention to the paper, but Ema simply freaked out.

"Watch your language. Lenka. Enough. I said, set the table. Listen. If you don't help there will be no supper. Who do you think I am? A servant? Your slave? Do you think I am your slave? Is that what you think?"

She rushed back to the kitchen to get the moussaka dish from the oven. Dimitrios was alarmed now, but as usually in such situations he felt like watching a play, he was the silent spectator who would applaud at the end of each act and remain seated for whatever was next. The actresses outdid themselves each time, but there was nothing he could do, his part was to watch in silence, maybe give a meaningless cue no one would heed. He would have wanted to interfere, he would have wanted to calm them down, to bring peace to his family. But he couldn't reach Ema nor Lenka, there was nothing to say. Nothing they expected of him he knew how to give. And nothing he was able or willing to give, they expected. It was a dead end: on both sides, on all sides.

Ema had come in again, she looked like an old woman, a complete stranger. The moussaka dish was in her hands, its heat must be evaporating through the thick gloves she was wearing to protect her hands. Her hands must be burning. Lenka wasn't paying attention to her mother, Lady Gaga was on again. Lenka was singing out loud. What an impertinent presumptuous lady. Then the unexpected happened.



“Here, take this.” Ema threw the moussaka dish onto the floor in the living room, the whole lot. Hot cream, fried minced meat mixed with finely cut onions and garlic, thinly sliced eggplant, rich spices, everything splattered everywhere. And on the carpet. The carpet. Dimitrios howled inwardly, but it was Ema’s turn to speak. Was she addressing him?

“I cannot take this anymore. Do it on your own, I really cannot do this anymore.” She was still screaming at the top of her voice when she turned around, when she stormed out to the hallway, and only shut up when she had put on her shoes and rushed out. A little later he could hear her sombre voice trailing down the stairways viciously, the neighbours must be listening in now if they hadn’t done so long ago. Lenka had started crying terribly the second the moussaka shell hit the floor, then she rushed after her mother.

“Mummy, don’t go. Mummy, stay, here. Please. I am so sorry.” She ran after her mother, slammed the door and all of a sudden the silence rang vigorously in his ears. It was deafening. They were both gone. Dimitrios looked at the mess on the floor. The carpet had been a priceless wedding present from Uncle Linos. It had been passed down in his family for generations. He doubted Lenka did ever care to have it though. But now it looked as if what she called “The old, dirty and ugly rug” would end its life right here in the 21st century under a thick layer of steaming hot moussaka. He winced and went to the kitchen to get a spoon, soap, a cloth and hot water. Then he went down on his knees, shoved the moussaka back into its dish and started to scrub the carpet.

There would be a stain he wouldn't get out. What a shame to destroy the carpet after so many families had cared for it during decades and decades, even centuries. It hit him hard. *He* was a complete failure.

When had Ema become so unhappy? So hard? She had been such a lovely young woman, so full of joy and great ideas. How could she waste all that food? All that rich cream, now it was full of fine yucky hairs from the carpet, inedible. It would have to be thrown out, everything down the drain. That was not how he had been brought up. One cared for one's family. To serve and to protect. He was still on his knees when his cell phone beeped. Quickly, he got up, washed his hands and dried them carefully before he reached for his expensive I-phone. Greg had texted him: "Sitting in front of Catherine Cohen's house in Zimmerwald, 2002 BMW 1974 has just arrived." As he scrolled down he found an older message to him and Alexey: "Find Leah and Emily Cohen asap."

Had Greg lost his mind? Which Leah and Emily Cohen was he talking of? The man was nuts, everyone knew, but that topped it all. What did he do in Zimmerwald? Arrest the mother? Of the dead beauty? Where was Zimmerwald anyway? Germany? Austria? He had better call Adna. More and more disaster.

Gunzgen Sued

Catherine Cohen thought she would have about 12 hours before they discovered she was gone, maybe less. Less was likely. They might check on her during the night. But if she had the 12 hours before sunrise then that would be more than enough to make it across the Swiss border to Germany or Austria, maybe even to Prague. Not that she was safe there, but at least she wasn't as easy to find as if she stayed home. She couldn't be arrested for something she hadn't done. How could she be thought responsible for such a crime? Killing her own pregnant daughter? It was outrageous. Unthinkable. To even consider the likelihood of such an accusation made her feel nauseous and sick. When she pressed down the accelerator and sped away, the engine howled out loud. Pumpkin suffered badly from her present driving style. She would have to calm down. But right now she couldn't. How did her daughter end

up in that shack? How did the bag Harvey had bought, end up there with her? Unbelievable. Her heart was yelling out loud at the top of its lungs and Pumpkin's engine was tottering along as fast as it could. Complete breakdown was just around the corner.



Her agitation increased when she realized she had forgotten an essential detail. She had absolutely no idea which way to go. She was used to her state-of-the-art navigating system in her Mercedes, but Pumpkin didn't have an inbuilt navigator, Pumpkin was Pumpkin and Pumpkin didn't know where to go. You had to tell her, she didn't tell you. She needed guidance, steering. Catherine knew she was heading kind of east but she didn't know whether she had to go through Germany or Austria and which route was the safest and fastest. Why hadn't she printed out a detailed route from one of the many websites that offered such services? Did Ema have maps on her cell phone? She had been clever enough to leave her own smart phone at home so she couldn't be tracked, but she had totally forgotten to look up the way. Real smart. Catherine dug for Eva's phone and tried to connect to the internet while steering the car straight ahead. Hopefully, the police weren't monitoring Eva's cell phone anymore. But the service didn't work. She couldn't get a connection. Unnerved she switched off Eva's phone and threw it onto the passenger's seat.

It had been so long since she last was in Prague and the last times, she had always taken the night train from Zurich. The train went through Austria. Which way was Austria? Faintly, she seemed to remember that her mum had sometimes taken that way when they had been driving. Catherine wished she had been with her right

now. Mamma Imma keeping her calm so exquisitely used to drive Catherine mad when she was still alive. Mamma Imma would have known the way by heart. She longed for her mother's brutally efficient and quiet ways. Keeping your wits together helped extremely in situations like this, keeping your wits together like Mamma Imma had taught her.

She had thought of the sandwiches, tea and the coffee, but she had taken no map. It simply hadn't crossed her mind that finding your way could be difficult. She couldn't even remember when she had last used a map. She would just keep going. Not that she was afraid of detours, not anymore, hadn't she taken so many in the last years? She knew Zurich had to be on the way and then maybe St. Gallen later on or was it Schaffhausen, or Basel? It didn't really matter. Any way was good for her, any way as long as it took her to Prague somehow. Catherine took off the wig and threw it on the seat next to her. There would be signs showing her which way to go. All of a sudden she had to laugh hysterically. What on earth was she doing? If someone had told her only a couple of days ago that she would flee from the Swiss police in Pumpkin wearing a blonde wig and, to top it all, without a map and a GPS, -she would have declared them nuts. Seriously nuts.

It wasn't less worrying that Switzerland was going to extend its cooperation with Europol the European Police throughout this very year. So far Switzerland and Europol had only cooperated when serious crimes had been committed such as terrorist attacks, heavy drug trafficking and trading in women and children. To her amazement they were all on the same level. She remembered the three incidents really well because she felt they couldn't be compared at all. If she hadn't been a lawyer she might not have remembered the details of the article. But somehow they had stuck

with her despite turning the page and focusing more on the TV programme. Fact was, the police, however far away now, were out there looking for her. It was not a pleasant and reassuring thought. Running made her more of a suspect than ever, but it also made her drive more carefully. Catherine forced herself to stick to the speed limits for the last thing she wanted was a ticket and Pumpkin too was thankful for the slower pace. Catherine knew that soon, if not now already, she was in serious trouble anywhere in Europe.

Traffic got heavier towards the intersection *Härkingen*. It was incredible how many people were up and about on a night like this. No wonder this society suffered from constant insomnia. The Swiss economy lost millions from problems, accidents and inefficiency caused by sleeplessness. She turned on the radio and was still tuned into the Bernese local radio station. The station played Shanya Twayne and Catherine couldn't help but think of her mother again. She had been such a wonderful person that made you feel good and self-secure but could devastate you with one single sentence. Catherine sang along with the radio for a while but then became sad. She wouldn't be listening to the station for a long time as the airwaves didn't reach very far from the capital. Soon they'd be gone, and so would she. Leaving home.

Home. Catherine felt tears welling up within her and impatiently swallowed them down. But the meaning of these four letters, "h", "o", "m", "e" had changed so drastically throughout this past year, these past hours, it was scary. She was overtaking a huge truck when her eye caught the petrol lamp. It was orange. She had to get some gas somewhere. Filling up the tank on the freeway was more expensive but if she went out of her way to one of these sleepy villages she'd lose precious minutes and she hadn't made it very far from Bern yet. Catherine decided quickly as

she used to in the old times. She'd use Eva's credit card. They would be able to trace her to here but that wouldn't help them much. Hopefully, she could use Brigid's cash thereafter.



Next exit *Service Station Gunzgen Sued*. She turned right to get off the freeway, slowed down and finally stopped at the service station where she locked up Pumpkin. She had to use the restroom first. Then on an impulse she went back, grabbed the wig and put it on. She thought it'd look suspicious if someone saw a blonde wig on a passenger seat in an old BMW. People were prone to stare at Pumpkin and peer through her windows. The wig might be discovered. When she approached the motorway service station, she was sure her worries had been totally unsubstantial. There was also an Erotic Market right next to the small shopping centre. People didn't only shop for groceries here. When Catherine entered the station to use the restroom, she found to her great joy that there was even a bank teller. She opened her purse even though her fingers were stiff from anxiety. She wasn't sure how much money she could take at once. She'd use the restroom first.

Catherine went to the Ladies' room and found it empty and desolate. It was good to be unobserved and safe for just a moment. On her way out she stopped again in front of the teller and decided to try her luck. The machine might simply retract Eva's card or it might not. If it did it would be a disaster. The camera guarding the machine caught Catherine's eye then. It looked like the evil eye of a Greek Cyclops and starred at her silently. Reproachfully. As if a terrible warning was due. Catherine grinned and looked directly at the camera. When she realized that she was alone, she

blew the camera a kiss, smiled and entered the card again, then she punched in her Personal Identification Number.

She withdrew without any problems 500 Swiss Francs. That had gone well. She tried again, and once more. The machine kept vomiting freshly printed bank notes. She withdrew all the money she could until the sign appeared: Invalid transaction. While putting the money into her purse, she kept smiling into the camera. Catherine knew she acted strange, out of her mind really, but it couldn't be helped. Let them see her on her reversed spending spree.

Standing there, withdrawing money from the machine as if she were winning the jackpot from a slot machine in Las Vegas didn't feel like being Catherine Cohen anyway. This weird woman with the wig on her head had nothing to do with the serious affectionate, responsible Catherine Cohen she used to be for so long when she was a lawyer and a doting mother. This was some other wondrous wild animal, which had come out of its cage when she was looking the other way. Would she get the wildebeest back in its cage? *That wig was itching terribly.* Would the spell be broken and a normal person called Catherine Cohen resurface? She doubted it strongly. Life was no fairy tale. And the wizard that had bewitched her thus would yet have to be found. There was no magic, no spell. This was her: The new Catherine Cohen. Like it or not.



When Catherine turned around she saw him. He must have been staring at her for some time. The man was about her age, tall, dark and really handsome. His features were even and reminded her of a statue Michelangelo could have come up with. There

was something calm and soothing about him, but also an air of danger. She couldn't help registering his black leather shoes, which looked extremely expensive. She wondered how he'd look naked and felt bad at once for she should be mourning Eva not lusting after strange men. Had he just come out of the Erotic Market? He was the kind of guy she would easily fall for. Is that what the presence of Erotic Markets did to your thoughts? Lust after strangers? Catherine tried to rein in her thoughts and focus. Had he bought anything? Maybe not. He wasn't carrying anything.



Composedly, she put away her purse into her coat, tossed her long fake blonde hair back and walked right past him. The automatic doors opened by themselves and Catherine swanned out, head held high, shoulders back. She carried herself like a prima donna getting out of an expensive limousine when all she really did was plunge headlong into the cold Swiss winter's night. It had started to snow lightly but she didn't care. She had to move on. All that money in her purse. Would she be safe? *All that cash. Goodness.* There was Pumpkin, waiting faithfully. It would be a while until she would heat up again but it didn't matter as long as she kept going. Catherine opened the door, got inside and turned the key. But Pumpkin didn't start. The engine was dead, the battery flat. Whatever was wrong, the car wouldn't move. Like some stubborn goat it refused to budge. Catherine was stuck. She really hadn't gotten very far. The police would simply stop her, arrest her, confiscate all that money in her bag. *What a shame.*

Dimitrios

Adna didn't answer, neither did Greg. Dimitrios had also tried to call Ema and Lenka. But no one answered his text messages or cared to pick up the phone. Just what he expected. The phone remained silent, like a dead fish: Mute and lifeless but not quite as cold, slippery and wet. After all it was a phone and not a phish. *What crazy things was he thinking.* Phish. Phone. *Phunny*, ha-ha. He was staring at it listlessly: The promise of friendship and communion ever so often broken by the noise of going digital. No one ever got in touch when things were really bad: it had taken him a full hour to scratch up all the moussaka. His knees hurt. He felt sick, he felt alone and not in a good way; he felt lonely. The carpet would forever be stained and so was his marriage. Down the drain, drown the drain. Drown it. Down it. He couldn't take much more, coming to think of it, he couldn't take anymore.

Dimitrios decided to go to that Jazz concert all by himself. Out, out, he just wanted out. Out of everything. Carefully, he locked the door, making sure he turned the key twice when he left. *La Traviata* where he was headed was his favourite club in the city. It had been founded long ago. In the late 40ties an African American drummer that went by the name of Doorom had inherited enough money to buy the place and do it up himself. That was long before Dimitrios's time. His father had discovered the club when he was 16, when he came to Prague in 1950 towards the end of the Greek civil war. He was fleeing the US troops helping the Greek Royal Army against the *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas*, the Democratic army of Greece. Big mess, awful war. Villages and cities bombed and napalmed. Playground of the beginning cold war. Not a fun place for children.

The refugee transfer was made possible by the Greek Communist party, the KKE coming to an agreement with the Sovjet Union. It was a deal made with hammer and sickle between comrades and comrades: over 100'000 Greek citizens, many of them under age, were shipped to Eastern Bloc countries; among them Dimitrios' father who was taken to a temporary sanitary camp that he fled instantly. When he finally arrived in Prague after many mishaps and terrible adventures *La Traviata* became his home. Home. A story that little Dimitri was repeatedly told. A story he'd always remember also after his father had been dead for decades. Dimitrios was walking faster now. It was freezing cold.



Prague was never asleep. The old town buzzed all year long with locals, tourists, taxis, buses, cars, trams, clubs and fancy restaurants. The more the merrier.

The closer to the city center, the more expensive and the unfriendlier the staff. All the tacky clichés came true when in Prague city center. And that went for everything. Luckily, *La Traviata* was not situated in the center, but was not less well known if it had been. The club was kind of notorious, at least among the locals and hard to find for the tourists. When Dimitrios had finally reached it, and saw the long queue before the main entrance he changed his mind and just continued walking. He walked right past the queue. Were these tourists? The Trip Advisor Ratings must have gone up lately. Where did all these people come from? They were crawling all over the place, as if Mother Concrete had spit them out right there from underneath the womb of her collected streets and alleys. Dimitrios felt disgusted.

By all means, he didn't need hordes of tourists invading his space like a swarm of hungry crickets on a shopping tour. He needed the open space, he needed some peace and quiet, some time to himself. He continued to walk east, faster and faster until he was basically running. He was breathing hard now and the cold air stung in his lungs. He felt alive, strangely invigorated. It took him a while to get to the city center, but when he finally did, he crossed the Charles Bridge, then jogged across the squares of the city he knew so well. Then, he walked further out and out and out. He kept on heading east following Orion for direction. Would the sun rise upon him eventually? The sun rose in the east didn't it? Those three stars up there, they were Orion weren't they? Nothing mattered, not Ema, not Lenka nor the concert at *La Traviata*. Not even the stars. Screw the stars.

There were so many hidden staircases, little streets and sideways he didn't know. Those were the ones he turned to. And how he welcomed the dark and how he welcomed losing all orienteering. He wanted to get lost, literally lose his way, lose

himself. And how he needed time to think. Think about where home really was. Home. Think about where he belonged. Think about how he had got here, so far off the beaten track. What had he gotten himself in to? Being a traitor. Keeping the lid on. And being paid for it. Not good. Not good at all. He had to put a stop to it. For the sake of his family. Even if they needed the extra money, even then. If it all came out that would be the end of it. The end of him. The end of everything. He missed the careless days of his childhood. The thought pressed tears into his eyes or was it the cold? The cold, the goddamn cold in this godforsaken country. Why did he have to leave Greece? Why was his whole country on the gambling table investment bankers kept gravitating towards? Why was he even part of this when others determined the rule of the game? A game he had never learned. He game he didn't wish to play. The hungry vultures, the hungry wolves, the hungry whatchallacallthems. They were playing, and they were winning, and winning big they were when the Greek population would lose, lose even bigger. All Dimitrios wanted was peace and quiet. And Benetton jeans for Lenka. He sighed.

He remembered the golden, sunny days of his youth. The warmth of the sea. The waves. The hot sand burning between his naked brown toes. Uncle Linus, how good he had been, what wisdom he had shared with him, a little boy, a bereaved orphan whose mother had died when he was born. And then Dimitrios' father dropped him off in Koroni, deserting him so cruelly, when he was five and went back to Prague. He went back to die. Pancreas cancer. And Dimitrios was not worthy of filling the shoes for the son Uncle Linus had never had. He was not worthy finding, in turn, the father Dimitrios had never known, the father that had forsaken him. Without Uncle Linus he wouldn't, he couldn't have survived. How gentle and welcoming the

uncle had been, giving away all his time and money, all his secrets, his complete dedication including all the family recipes. The moussaka. The moussaka. The Carpet.

Walking was good, he was breathing fast, his heart, steady, but beating at a fast and healthy rhythm. He felt the cold air in his face, felt the wind's touch on his lips. They were quite sore, not from kissing though. They were sore from the cold, the carelessness with which he treated himself. He had reached the river again. Where was he? The river. Drown. Drown it. The beautiful Vltava. Should he end it, right here, right now? He was a coward. He shuddered. He hesitated. He couldn't. No, he couldn't. Walking so far had tired him out and he turned back, wondered how fast he would find the way back home again. All of a sudden it was clear where home was: where he'd find a bed. Here, there was nothing he recognized, nothing he wanted, nothing that looked familiar. It was indeed cold and his hands were numb. When the phone rang, he could hardly hold it.

"Ema?" He asked without looking at the screen. Had she called to apologize? Would everything be alright?

"This is Adna. You called earlier on? "

"Yes. Adna. Sure. Yes I did".

"What did you want?" He fell silent. Then he asked:

"Where is Greg?" There was silence on the other side of the line. *Yes, where was Greg?*

Catherine

This was incredible. The Swiss Touring Club that functioned as the Swiss Highway Patrol arrived within 15 minutes. Catherine had found the insurance card with all the relevant numbers safely stored in the locker for the passenger seat and she hadn't hesitated to call the Help Desk. Eva's phone still worked. Another miracle. Just like the young guy in the pristine orange jump suit who arrived promptly, out of nowhere seemingly. He fixed the battery even more easily and before Catherine really understood what happened, Pumpkin started with ease, purring like a well fed pussycat. Soon enough she pressed down the accelerator, relieved and exhilarated at once. Becoming a professional criminal seemed fun enough, even if it made her jumpy. She tried to calm herself. She was not actually a criminal, she just acted like one: running from the police. What a silly, silly thing to do. *She should turn back right now, when the car was still working.* Catherine grabbed the blonde wig she had put on

especially for the mechanic and threw it onto the seat next to her as she was filtering in the ongoing traffic on the freeway. No turning back on the freeway so she might as well keep going.

Had she lost too much time? The Highway Patrol hadn't known yet. He hadn't arrested her, not that this was their line of work anyway. But the mechanic could have called the police and turned her in. What luck he hadn't. All of a sudden it all felt so terribly wrong, as if she had known for a long time that all this wasn't for real. But then: What choice did Catherine really have? In fact, there was a decision to be made right in front of her and the signs kept coming at her quickly, at 100km/h. Zürich or Basel? Which way should she take? She took the road to Zürich, then she swerved left towards Basel at the last second. So Basel it was. She had better stick with it or there would be more detours.

How far was the border? Catherine started to sweat when she thought of crossing it. *Never mind*. She would just cross it, just like that, like everybody else did. The *Shengen Area* of over 4 Million square kilometres would protect her and keep her safe. Nevertheless, being Swiss was suspicious. Were they or weren't they part of Europe? The customs officers might still keep a check on her, just because she had Swiss number plates. She had her Swiss ID with her but guessed it was useless if they really did stop the car and ran her name in the computer. Brigid had wanted to give Catherine her own ID but she had declined. What was enough was enough. It had seemed too risky in her cosy and warm apartment. All by herself, heading for Germany she wished all of a sudden she had taken Brigid's papers. Would she ever get to Prague?

Would she ever find her way out of this? Without an accurate satellite navigation system? Without a car that worked properly? She couldn't help but start crying again. It is no good if you drive and sob. It is even more dangerous than to drive and drink and so she swallowed the tears. They were raging against her throat and she felt her larynx ache. *Harvey*. Harvey had been so relaxed. In fact, he was more concerned about her than about Eva being dead. Maybe he had already come to terms with the fact that she was dead? The inevitable. He had stopped believing in miracles so long ago. It wasn't wise to want to believe that Eva was still there, in Prague, when she was dead. Or that her baby was alive when most likely it was dead as well. But, against all odds she was hoping. She wanted her and the little one so much to be alive. She knew she was being so stupid: one of the many reasons for the divorce.

Harvey had never taken her point of view. That was what Catherine had hated about him most: how he didn't take her seriously but rather felt responsible for his ex-wife as if she was some little girl. Why couldn't he be shocked, sad or at least sorry for how it had all ended so terribly? Why couldn't he mourn with her for the breakup of their little family? That was the way he had always made Catherine feel, even in the years before, so little, so far beneath him, so full of waste. He had always wanted to emphasise how she and the work she did wasn't worth a dime. He was the one who would anticipate everything, the one who always got it right. Harvey could predict everything: the rise and fall of the stock market, the economic crisis and its turns out, he knew the exact time the bus arrived, the moon rose, the neighbour's cat shat. He knew it all.



Catherine sighed and pushed the memories behind her: the good ones and the bad ones. Before her was the long and silent road, spread out like a sparkling, slippery serpent in a warm, cloudless night when in fact the temperature must have dropped well below zero a while ago. The bitumen gleamed silvery, enlightened by the bright winter moon behind the foggy clouds. The whole scenery was strangely enlivened by the frenzy of the many cars rushing by, alienating the still life completely from Nature's awesome beauty. The lights of the Swiss villages were flickering past. After exiting a long tunnel the weather had changed again. It had stopped snowing and the sky was clearing up. Time passed. Large clouds were hanging low in the dark black sky. The freeway was bending over backwards with cars racing past Catherine, their lights exposing her to a lonely night. Pumpkin was stuttering along slowly but faithfully.

She couldn't do more than about a 100 kilometres an hour. How far would she get before Pumpkin broke down? Broke down for good? The engine sounded as if the poor old lady was about to collapse although the road was winding downwards now. Catherine expected the fumes to evaporate from the motor any minute now. She shivered though the heating was on when she drew up closer to the border town. Pumpkin had just passed *Liestal* and she was now getting closer to the city of *Basel*.

How far to the border? Catherine checked her face in the rear mirror and worried about its paleness. She pushed the wig under her own seat and prayed to God that they wouldn't search the car and find it. Her mind was totally blank. What would she say? Preparing for carnival? It was only January. There were 9 kilometres left to the border and as she drew closer, she could feel the uprising despair. It was at this exact moment that she realized she might not have much fuel left either. The orange

light went back on. Of course, she had completely forgotten to get gas in *Gunzen Süd*. The light hadn't been on after the car was started by the mechanic and so she had forgotten all about it last time she had stopped. But she knew Pumpkin simply devoured gas, guzzled it down by the gallons. *Too bad. No time for petrol.* She wanted to get across the border first. First things first. Besides, she had seen enough of Swiss Petrol Stops. They were boring and dreary and she might run into good-looking strangers again. She felt it was safer to wait. Pumpkin would be alright. And the fuel gauge might not be reliable either. She'd rather not think about its unreliability right now.

The last two and a half kilometers were the worst. Her heart was pounding, her hands freezing and so were her feet, her whole body itching quite badly. From the cold, from a feverish nervousness and from more profane reasons: she desperately needed a toilet, - again. She didn't want to stop at the border to use the restroom. It seemed too presumptuous, too brave or mere folly. But she simply had to go, she couldn't wait any longer and she'd have to let the engine cool off or it would overheat again. Or should she do the opposite, leave the engine on? What if the battery was flat again when she came back? What had the guy from highway patrol said to her was wrong with the car? She couldn't remember a word of all the technical jabbering he had buried her in. She'd just switch off the engine, it was the sensible thing to do. A running car without a driver seemed conspicuous.

The toilet houses were about 300 meters away from customs. She could see the police in uniforms waving a silver Ford and two minivans through. Should she just follow? How unfortunate that her bladder had taken over from her brain and she knew she couldn't go any further even if she had wanted to. Reluctantly, she parked the car.

It was cold. She switched it off, hoping to God it would start again. Her thighs froze even more when she cumbersomely climbed out of Pumpkin. She could hardly walk. It was hard to believe but she had reached the end of Switzerland, had come to the very end of it so quickly. There were less travellers on the road as the night kept its dark grip upon the Swiss turnpikes giving way to its huge neighbour: The German *Autobahn*, a wilderness with no speed limits where Darwin's principles were still valid: The fittest survived, Pumpkin surely wasn't one of them. She was not adapted to her environment and she couldn't learn fast enough or be genetically modified to keep up. Too bad she was still a real car and not some real-time auto-bot.

Pumpkin was among the last of her kind: a distant relative descending from a rare herbivorous species that was dying out while the carnivorous predators, the ruling overlords of the grey concrete maze, were still sleeping: Their riders comfortably settled in their little houses, turning in their little beds, next to their little wives while their colossal fully automated vehicles rested in their garages, - kennels not made for the huge beasts they held-, breathing in the clean air of the icy night, gearing up for tomorrow's commute. Updating and updating their everything until the only thing left was another update, and another one, and another one. Pumpkin didn't need updates. Pumpkin was for real. Now and always. Catherine tried to get rid of the cynicism in her thoughts but she couldn't.

When she finally entered the restrooms, she felt relieved. When Catherine washed her hands, she smiled at herself in the mirror. It was a sad smile though. But to Catherine it was a token of being alive and she appreciated it for that. She rubbed her cheeks, ran her fingers through her hair. Yes, she was alive.

It got even better: Pumpkin started again all by herself. And Catherine wasn't stopped either. Lucky her. All her fears seemed to have been in vain. No one checked her out, on the contrary. All guards lay low. No one took notice. On the contrary, she could hardly see their uniforms as she drove past. When she turned her head towards the checkpoint she could just about make out two officers of border security behind a heavy glass door. They were crouched in front of a dimly shining blue computer screen, content they were inside where it was warm watching God-knows-what. But Catherine didn't look into their direction long enough to even tell whether they were male or female or whatever they were doing or whether they really did appreciate the warmth. Were they running her name in the computer? If they were, they were too late: She had just entered Germany. Little did she realize that they were not the real threat: The silver Ford had been waiting for her on the other side of the border.

Greg

Inspector Gregorovich Miroslav Shats liked Bern a lot. The city dating back to 1191 had its name from either the first animal that was shot after its foundation, a bear, or just as likely, from the ancient and venerable Italian city of Verona whose Middle High German name had been Bern. No one remembered the second explanation, when the first one seemed so much more obvious, given the bear pit at the far Eastern side of the old town and the bear in Bern's flag: it was bear, it was Bern, it was obvious. Either way, the medieval city with its famous arcades and pergolas that were so typical

for Bern had always charmed Greg. If it had been up to him, he would have liked to stay longer at the Hotel *Goldener Schlüssel*, to explore the city, to walk by the riverside, to eat *Röschti and veal*. But that was not how things had worked out.

Instead he was now, in the middle of the night, sitting in his rental car on the Swiss German border wondering how he could explain any of this to Chief Superintendent Adna Divin or Dimitrios, his partner. Besides he would have to talk to Hertz Car Rental about taking one of their vehicles abroad. He was in trouble for not having followed protocol and he had violated the rules of the car rental firm. He had explicitly signed that he wouldn't take the car abroad. Why did they even make you sign such forms? Screw the rules. There simply had been no time to follow protocol. They would have to accept this as a valid excuse, there was no other explanation. Adna, Dimitrios, Hertz. *Sorry, couldn't be helped.*

The crux of the matter, the ultimate goal from the beginning, was however, to convict Catherine Cohen. In short, he had to get results and get them soon. If she was guilty. *If*. While he had been sitting before Catherine Cohen's house Greg had called Chief-Officer Müller again to tell him he couldn't make it. Müller had told him to go back home, not officially, but it was clear to Greg that the Swiss police didn't need him anymore to meddle in what they thought were their own internal affairs. Obviously, Catherine Cohen, was under arrest soon. The Swiss had it all covered. But then the Swiss officers hadn't seen the crime site. If they had, they wouldn't have closed the case so easily. The white linen sheet spread all over the dead girl's bloody body, her legs askew. A picture burnt in his mind. A murderer he desperately wanted to find. A mission he had signed on without the blinking of an eye.

They were still waiting for the lab results from Prague and he personally felt responsible and embarrassed that all this took so long. He should have had the results hours ago, but as usual they were late. What should have been routine seemed to take forever. But he remembered clearly what he had seen with his very own eyes, he remembered clearly even without the lab reports. There had been an enormous amount of blood on her legs and cuts and bruises between them. Instantly, he had only had one explanation for that and he wanted it confirmed. How a mother could do this to her daughter was beyond his imagination. If Catherine Cohen had committed the crime on her very own daughter, she must be an animal, a brutish and violent woman, capable of bringing on such deep hatred that she would prove guilty of mutilating her own child to such extremes. What atrocious cruelty. How irreconcilable to being a mother.

He had worked other cases where fathers had erased their whole family, but this was altogether different. A woman mutilating her child, and mutilating her so badly? It seemed extremely odd and highly unlikely. When Müller confirmed once more he hadn't arrested Catherine Cohen yet, Greg realized that also his Swiss counterpart wasn't convinced of her guilt. Not convinced altogether. Catherine Cohen's handbag at the crime scene was the riddle that was the hardest to resolve. How would the bag end up there if Catherine Cohen hadn't been anywhere near there? Had her daughter taken it when she left? Stolen her mother's bag? But then why would Catherine Cohen only report the bag missing when she had been in Vienna? It didn't make sense. There were still too many questions, and not enough answers. That was when, the BMW arrived.

He saw the gorgeous beauty the moment she could be seen. A small blonde woman got out of it and hurried into the multiple dwelling where Catherine Cohen lived. The car, a beautiful old timer, looked suspicious and so did the woman. Then, more lights went on. What was happening? All this took a while but then the one and only Catherine Cohen came out. How he knew he couldn't explain, he simply knew. It was her. She was amazing. Amazing. She was wearing a blonde wig, but he could tell at once that it was her, recognizing her from the pictures in the files he had seen. He was well trained in facial recognition, especially for females. That was a field he had specialized in on his own account.

There was something that gave her away at once. Greg couldn't tell whether it was her gait that was too straight or the way she held her head, just an inch too high. The way she carried herself. Awesome. Was it how she held the car keys a little too relaxed? She was so proud, so self-secure, and for a moment it felt like watching himself in a mirror. She moved like a female version of himself, and his heart skipped a beat. How she got into that beautiful orange BMW from the 70ties, it was more than perfect. That was the moment he should have called Müller or Adna, or both of them; but he couldn't, wouldn't, he didn't. He failed completely. All systems shutting down. *All eyes on her*, he simply wanted to keep watching. He followed the car at once and would have handed in his licence if this hadn't been Catherine Cohen walking out suavely on the Swiss police, right under his nose, well under their nose. He simply couldn't stop her. Let her run. *First never follows*, but in this case, he would gladly make an exception. Had he completely lost his mind?

His assumptions were confirmed when he had a closer look at her at the bank teller at *Gunzgen Sued*: all that money that she withdrew. She was on the run indeed.

But was she a killer? When she looked straight into his face he shivered. Was she dangerous? Was she the monster that had carved up her daughter? Her own flesh and blood? In fact, she was stunning. Her look was determined and she was strong-willed, but also vulnerable and so elegant. Catherine Cohen was different. He had better keep an eye on her. He continued watching her from afar, saw how the car didn't start and how she called the Patrol Highway. The woman had some nerves. He made a mental note to get hold of this cell phone number. Just in case he'd lose her. The motor mechanic who pulled up next to her, had a big grin on his face when he fixed her car. She was such a beauty, she and the car. No wonder that grin on his face wouldn't disappear. Had his abbot once told him that he would care so deeply for such earthly and ephemeral beauty he would not only have grinned, -no, he would have laughed out loud.

And when he realized that he felt attracted to her, he knew he was in for even more trouble. Never fancy a suspect. Never. The Golden Rule. And he never had. So far. But he had to admit, Catherine Cohen left him mesmerized and shattered and just for a second he thought that she felt the way Louisa had felt, when he first saw her. He was overwhelmed by a powerful, intoxicating memory that left him totally befuddled. A feeling he hadn't had in years. Years. Decades.

Suddenly, she was there in the orchard and he was watching her from afar, just like now. Only then he was wearing his monk's cowl. Oh God, why must it come back now? Why now? The memory. His *felix culpa*. So strong. So painful. So unspeakably misleading. A fateful mistake with a surprisingly good outcome. Then he had been in for a huge shit load of trouble, but looking back it had been worth every shovel. Every

shovel indeed. When Catherine Cohen got back into the car and drove off, he followed until she stopped again at the border to Germany.

He wouldn't call anyone: not Prague nor Hertz Car Rental Services in Bern. He needed more, more of everything: time to spare, vital and meaningful clues, patience to see it through. What he really needed most was rock solid evidence to prove that Catherine Cohen had indeed murdered her very own daughter. They'd have to wait, all of them. What he did instead was watch the orange BMW pass the border, Catherine Cohen looked straight ahead when she passed him. Quickly he lowered his head, so she wouldn't see him. Then he checked his smartphone again: Underdog had called 6 times and Adna had tried to reach him just as often. Soon enough he would have to be back online; then he would be reading all the documents they had sent, then he would listen carefully to their messages and concerns. He might even call them back. But right now, he wanted to follow his own leads, nothing and nobody was to distract him from his own course of events. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Nothing comes from nothing. He turned on the engine, ready to follow. Let her run.

Catherine

Catherine stopped for petrol near *Freiburg im Breisgau*, paid cash and drove on. Then it was Stuttgart or Konstanz, she took the direction to Konstanz, without really knowing whether that was a terrible detour or not. She drove for another hour or two, praying Pumpkin wouldn't break down, ignoring the strange noises she kept making. Finally, Catherine had passed Munich. There she got petrol again and bought herself some coke to stay awake. When she turned to get back on the freeway, she saw Udo's garage. A bright sign said: Open 24/7. But what really caught her attention was a loud purple sign which said: *Gebrauchtwagen*. Second hand cars. And the little shed, adjacent to the garage was still brightly lit despite it being late. She could see a guy moving behind the counter. This was her chance. She had to get a better and more

reliable vehicle, Pumpkin might break down any time. If only she could be a better friend to Brigid.

Catherine had always made fun of her for being so fond of Pumpkin. Most of the time Pumpkin had been sitting in her garage safely stored away from rain and hail. How one could love a car like a child was a mystery to Catherine. *Letting Pumkin go. So, so sorry.* But the orange BMW oldtimer wasn't safe, and would be even more flamboyant when daylight hit again. Catherine knew Brigid would want her to be safe. Safety was all that counted. A friend's life was worth more than even Pumpkin's life. When she entered the car dealer's garage, coming in from the cold, she brought in the chilly air of a freezing winter's night. The man who sat behind the counter looked lousy; dirty clothes, hair unkempt, long beard and he needed sleep more than Catherine did. He seemed to wake from his drowsiness and got up slowly. She wondered whether he worked all the shifts there were and was amazed that he got up at all. She must have made an impression on him and took this as promising token. He really did look like something the cat had just dragged in.

Catherine felt the stiffness of her pale hands when she had let the open door go. The handle was broken and the whole place looked pretty run down. It had surely seen better times. The guy stood there looking at her gloomily. Catherine could tell straight away he wasn't used to female clientele.

"I am not fixing cars, lady." The way he said "lady" felt as if Catherine was a hooker here on business. She felt how he eyed her suspiciously, lecherously. His nose was too large and full of acne.

“My car hasn’t broken down”, Catherine said politely, wondering how she could retreat in peace and dignity for all of a sudden she was very loath to part with Pumpkin. No, she wouldn’t hand her over to that guy.

“It hasn’t?” he stared at Catherine indifferently, waiting for her to continue. Obviously, he was better with cars than with words.

“No, it hasn’t. Are you Udo?” Catherine knew that establishing a personal relationship would give her a better price if she really wanted to go through with her plan. She forced herself to smile. Usually, at this point in her “Getting-a-better price-script” she’d ask whether he had children. But today Catherine couldn’t, not with Eva having being dead for such a short time. Besides she was pretty sure he didn’t have any children. He didn’t look like an affectionate father. He could barely take responsibility for himself.

“Yeah, I’m Udo.” He answered, obviously appeased and pleased she had asked for him personally. Catherine chuckled inwardly, holding her breath. It always worked.

“So, what can I do for you, lady”.

“You do buy cars, don’t you?” Catherine asked.

“Sure, I do.”

He nodded and couldn’t stop his head from bouncing up and down. Catherine waited for him to say “lady”, but this time he missed it. Maybe he realised she was indeed trying to do business with him and had switched back to normal. Catherine continued, carefully choosing her words:

“I have a BMW here, a 2002, from 1974”.

He gasped, Catherine could tell he knew all about cars and BMW’s plan to rebuild the car from the seventies completely for the new millennium.

"What colour?" Catherine could see him dribble. She savoured the answer:

"Orange" She said.

"Inka," he replied awed, "the most wanted colour, not fusion blue, not Verona, not silver or amazon". That was going well. It was the sensible thing to do: part with it. It would be safer. Then he looked downcast.

"I don't have enough cash, not tonight. Can you come back tomorrow?" he said, looking hopeful, but Catherine shook her head:

"But you have cars, don't you?" She smiled at him full of confidence.

"Have you got the car here? You want to sell it now?" He asked incredulously. Catherine nodded again. *How had he expected her to come here? On a camel?* She tried to restrain herself and kept the friendly tone:

"Yes, it sits right in front of your shop."

"It does? And you really want to sell it? Now?" *Yes, now of all times, couldn't this go a little faster? Please.* Catherine tried not to lose her nerve, but the guy obviously couldn't believe his luck.

She nodded patiently:

" Now, yes, yes."

"What do you want for it?"

"As I said, I want to exchange it."

"You want another car for it? Sure?" Catherine didn't know how he defined the word "exchange", maybe she should have brought a dictionary. All she did was smile and wait for him to let it all sink in. God, the guy was slow.

"I don't have any cars here that would be a match for it."

“Oh, that doesn’t matter. I don’t care what you give me for it, as long as it’s got four wheels and doesn’t break down the next 2000 kilometres.” Catherine realised that this had been the wrong answer. She could feel, he got suspicious now, his body all tightening up and suddenly very taut. She had better come up with a reasonable story. “Listen, *he* let me down” Catherine fantasized.

“That’s my revenge”, Catherine paused to let the meaning of her words reveal itself. Revenge, truly, was never a good motive to do anything. She knew that. But right now, she didn’t care.

“He might actually come by tomorrow and buy it back from you. Make sure you’ll charge him a good price”.

Udo looked at her, not quite sure what to make of the story. It sounded as fake as it was. Catherine pulled a very sad face and tried to force some tears into her eyes. It did the job. All of a sudden Udo nodded. He might have concluded that it really wasn’t any of his business. Catherine gave him the papers, which were all in Brigid’s name. She hoped he didn’t ask for her ID. He moved from behind the counter and they both went outside to look at the car. It was freezing. But she could see he was genuinely impressed.

“Amazing, that it still runs.”

“Yes, isn’t it?”

“How many kilometres?”

Catherine shrugged as she had no idea and he smiled.

“Mileage unknown. A True 2002 BMW 1974.”

He began inspecting Pumpkin and mumbled sotto voce:

"Inka/black, 4-speed, rebuilt engine, Recaro seats, original paint, new tires, Weber carb, 320i alloy wheels."

She had absolutely no idea what he was talking about and waited patiently until he finished his inspection and his muttering. The chant was complete and it had worked its magic: His eyes were shining now.

"Do you want a convertible?" He asked. Catherine laughed out loud.

"No, God, not a convertible. Something decent."

"But a convertible is decent. It is very decent." He shook his head still fascinated by Pumpkin, he could hardly take her eyes off her.

"I cannot spend any extra money".

"No, of course not. Come with me. I've got more. I'll show you. Come."

For a moment Catherine felt scared. What would she do, if he tried to attack her? Scream? No one would hear her back here.

But he only showed her the oldest Mercedes she had ever seen and her blood rushed back to her feet. This place was a dump. In the dark she could hardly tell the colour of the car but she was sure she wanted something else:

"That's too big. It is just me now"

"Too big? Ok, let's see. A Mercedes is never too big."

He moved on and it felt as if they were checking out every nook and cranny in this freezing scrapyard. He finally found her a red Peugeot with leather seats and Catherine agreed to take it for the BMW, carefully faking Brigid's signature when signing the contract. Udo didn't have the right forms to fill in to change the licence plate and told her that she would have to contact her car insurance company first to get the right form with the Swiss *Motorfahrzeugkontrolle* which would then register the

car. A thing, Catherine was sure, she'd never do. Obediently, she nodded, trying to hide how little she cared about any of these formalities. Then he took the old licence plates off Pumpkin and screwed them tightly onto her newly purchased Peugeot. She was good to go.

"Her name is Pumpkin", she said as she parted with Pumpkin's keys. Somehow she felt she had to pass on the legendary name just as it was then passed on to Brigid when she bought Pumpkin."

"Pumken?"

"The car, it's a she. Her name is Pumpkin."

"Ok. A *she* you say?" He couldn't think of anything else. *Weren't women such mad creatures?* He said once again, "Ok." That was it. Transaction complete.

"Bye", Catherine answered, turning on her heel and getting into the new car gingerly. She tried to calm herself. She was really upset to leave Pumpkin in this nerd's care, but by now she was probably wanted by Europol, so it was only reasonable to take precautions. Udo had given her two keys on one keyring for the Peugeot. *How handy was that?* It was cumbersome to undo one key from the keyring with her cold hands but somehow she managed and even without breaking her nails. Relieved she let one of the keys glide deeply into her coat's pocket. There it was snug and safe in case she lost the other key that was still in the ignition. She had to be prepared. Time would show if she really could outwit the whole European police force. She took a deep sigh. She had a different car, but still the same number plates. *Very, very clever.* It would be a long way to become a professional criminal. When she switched on the engine, Udo managed a weak and unconvincing: "Good-Bye." He must have thought her a lunatic too.

Catherine forced herself to cast him a last smile, then she left the garage. The new gear lever felt good between her fingers and she cherished the feeling of having achieved something. With one hand, she was steering the car, with the other she was patting her pocket. The spare key Udo had given her was still there. She would beat them. She would find whoever had killed her child.

4

Wednesday

Catherine

Oh my God. She drove like a madwoman. Would someone stop her, please? The Peugeot was much faster than Pumpkin and responded instantly to any movement of her right foot. Handling it wasn't easy at all. Catherine realized it would take her a while to drive smoothly. Right now it was: slow, fast, slow fast, fast, slow. She was continuously pressing down the accelerator either too hard or not hard enough. The Peugeot lurched forward and immediately, she was forced to break again. Then the scenario was reversed: the Peugeot was too slow and she was forced to speed up again, shifting gears frantically. It felt like riding a broken roller coaster: She was supposed to be in control of the ride and clearly she wasn't.

What was she in control of these days? Not much really. She was so tired and exhausted and everything was slipping away from her. It was getting late, past midnight already and the darkness swallowed her strength and concentration by the

minute. But the worst was the fear that her idiosyncratic driving was conspicuous. Would they stop her? She did attract attention. *Quelle Merde*. A white Mercedes was passing her and the driver was fixing his eyes on her. Surely that wasn't for her good looks. Staring back at him she swerved to the right and missed the crash barrier by a hair's breadth. She was sweating, her heart was racing: this journey was fraught with danger. She had better get the Peugeot under control, but, being a bundle of nerves, she simply couldn't. After having driven a couple of kilometres, Catherine's hands and arms were shaking uncontrollably. She was in urgent need of a break.

Catherine hadn't even bothered to read the name of the town ahead of her, - she couldn't care. Everything was a blur. She simply couldn't go any further and took the next exit. Coming off the freeway quite fast, she had to break hard for a sharp bend. A little further down the road she found a dark alley where she parked. There she stopped in the middle of nowhere, a God-forsaken-place-in-some-God-forsaken-countryside like it can only be found near freeways. There wasn't much to see. Trees. Bushes. Darkness. And then she just sobbed. And sobbed. She couldn't get a grip on herself being stripped of all her powers in her intense crying. She felt such emptiness in the place where her daughter used to be. A hole, a gap, a rift. Large, large cave. Eva wasn't there anymore and her heart longed for her lost child so desperately, it hurt physically. It made her sick, retching. She felt like breaking apart, as if something would tear her up from within; an overwhelming force, devouring her innards. It was a total void threatening the very self, an enormous emptiness, an overpowering loss that destroyed her completely. The feelings firing at her inmost being were dreadful and dangerous, evil and all-consuming, they were overriding all other emotions, holding them hostage, holding her hostage.

Catherine whispered it to herself, reiterating the unchanging truth again and again.

“She is dead.” And then again.

“She is dead.” And once again.

“She is dead. She is dead.” The faint sound of her own three-word-chant seemed to help her find a way back to reality. But then, bewitched by her own muttering, her voice grew louder and louder and developed a life of its own until Catherine was shouting.

“She is dead, dead, deaaaaaaaad.” She was roaring by now, her mouth was dripping with saliva and dry at once. Mucus ran from her nose and she let it run. She didn’t care at all. Catherine banged her head on the steering wheel, but the pain didn’t go away, it increased and the car made strange honking noises.

This was torture, only far worse for she had brought this upon herself. If she hadn’t driven her daughter away, Eva would still be alive: safe and snug. Catherine would have confessed anything, anything at all to bring Eva back to life, but no confessions were to be made. It was too late. Eva was dead indeed. There was no return, not from the dead, not from death. Final. It was final. The ordeal took no end and her demons could not be soothed. Catherine’s tongue sagged and finally she fell quiet with nothing more to say. Words were lost and so was she, -lost - for she really didn’t know where she was. *Indeed.* Where was she? Her face was swollen, her eyes hurt, and there was an uncomfortable itching in her throat from all the crying and screaming.

Catherine was so thirsty. The terrible train of thoughts that had been racing her mind and soul had suddenly stopped and she felt numb and shaken. It was a state of total shock. Inertness and lethargy were spreading over her like a shroud, taking its last toll on the lively woman she once used to be. That was the end of it. The plug was pulled, all charges dropped, the golden pennies spent. *Not true, she had so much money in her pocket.* Yet, she couldn't go on. Catherine couldn't remember for how long she had been sitting there. She had fallen speechless and mute, empty and barren, completely frozen. The cold had started to nag at her bones, bringing her body temperature down. And it was the cold that finally brought her back to her senses, to real life. Reality. Indeed.



The hunt would have started. They'd be searching for her right now. They had her computer, all these websites. *Had she really looked into possibilities to give Eva an abortion? Had she really done this?* Wanted to kill her very own grandchild? Get rid of her very own blood and flesh? She shuddered at the thought. What was wrong with her? They had found her handbag at the crime site. The one that had been stolen in Vienna. The one that Harvey had bought for her. Remember. On the Ferris Wheel. *Harvey. No, not now. Couldn't think of him now. Later.* How come the bag had turned up next to the body of Eva? How on earth?

The riddle couldn't be solved. But it woke her up from her stupor. She couldn't just break down and sob, not anymore. Someone was setting her up. Someone had killed Eva and she would swear to God: It wasn't her.

Then, she opened the car door to get some fresh air. The cold breeze stung in her lungs and hurt in a real way. When she took a look around, all she could see was gruesome, it felt like looking at herself. The dark had eaten up the landscape totally and the only thing she could make out clearly, were some roadblocks for a street that was obviously closed. It had started to snow. She had better get moving. She needed to keep going. With a howl the motor sprang back to life, stalled and was dead. She tried again, not pressing down the accelerator so hard. The engine stalled. Dead. The motor was dead. Not again. This couldn't be true. She took a deep breath and tried to remember what Harvey had used to tell her. Patience, slow, gentle. Then she closed her eyes and tried again and this time she managed to start the car. *Thank God, it was still working.*

Catherine tried to manoeuvre the Peugeot out of the alley, avoiding the roadblocks, and finally she found a spot where she could turn to get back to the freeway. Which way was she supposed to be heading? Austria seemed about right. That was where they had always passed on their way to Prague. Salzburg. Vienna. Should she go back to the Prater before going to Prague? Should she go straight to Prague? Catherine felt totally disoriented. It wasn't one of her most lucid moments.

Dimitrios

Dimitrios Xantopolous was home shortly after midnight where he found Ema and Lenka asleep in their beds. He sighed and sat down in the living room. They always came back and calmed down. They always did, but why did they have to freak out so totally in between? Why did they have to extirpate everything so radically, bringing it all so close to complete annihilation? A kvetching wife was one thing, but a kvetching daughter mirroring her perfectly, doubling all the moaning and nagging exponentially was more than any man could bear. Dimitrios thought it felt like fighting

Hydra herself. He wasn't Hercules. He wasn't a hero. He had never done anything out of the ordinary. Becoming a policeman was as much as he could take.

The carpet had nearly dried off and looked much better than when he had left for his nightly *Tour de Prague*. Maybe it would be alright, maybe everything would be alright. They looked so peacefully in their sleep, the women in his life, the loves of his heart. The thought made him smile, feeling reconciled with them for a brief and passing moment. Everything was passing. He loved them so much, if only he could mollify them, tame them somehow, yank out their poisonous fangs to dulcify their tempers. But he couldn't. Dimitrios knew there would be more strife, more squabble and bickering, more sorrow to come. There would be more Benetton, more Lady Gaga, more moussaka, more work. But what was enough for today was enough. They were at peace now. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, there would be more; it was all for another day.

How tired he was. He should go to sleep, but he also knew sleep wouldn't come. Not now, not with all these thoughts in his brain. He took his phone and looked at the black glass casing. A dead fish, he thought. It was a good gadget and could do many things, more than he would ever need. Absentmindedly, he turned it on and began typing a message for Greg: "Seen that shrink today? I bet you haven't. Adna furious, better come back. Meeting in the morning." Then he looked up, looked at the cheaply furnished living room and deleted the last two sentences. Greg knew that he should come back, didn't he? Greg knew, Adna had texted him, he knew he was way out of line. And Dimitrios knew too. How it vexed him that Adna always protected Greg for reasons he didn't understand. It wasn't his problem if Greg didn't show up for that meeting. He would surely be there.

Greg

He couldn't believe he had lost her. She had been at that petrol station just after Munich when he really had to use the bathroom. They had parked the car on opposite sides and then he sneaked in behind her back. She might have seen him at the service station in Switzerland standing at the entrance of that ridiculous Erotic Market. Why had he looked at her, when the most important rule of observation was not to look at the face of the person you followed? Well, she had seen him, looked at him, but had she registered his face? Would she remember him? Most likely not. She was on the run, under stress and not a pro, surely she wouldn't remember him.

When she looked him in the eye, she didn't flinch, as if she hadn't expected anything else; him coming out of an Erotic Market. Her look was so sincere, searching

and true. It had hurt him and touched him. He still felt shaken. There was something she had triggered within him. A chain reaction had followed, his hands were still sweaty despite the cold, his heart racing unnaturally. Catherine Cohen had reached out towards him without even saying one single word. Her eyes, the way she moved. Her fragility, her strength and courage. Was she guilty? It seemed so obvious. Why else would her handbag be found at the crime site? But Greg couldn't imagine, couldn't even begin to believe she had so brutally murdered her daughter.

He had been watching her from afar. He ducked his head behind a shelf with fresh bread and relished her sight. She was so beautiful and stunning, it interrupted his efficient and, usually, clear way of thinking in many ways. Catherine Cohen was looking at some of the magazines close to the check-out. She would have to pay for the gas and the bottle of Coca Cola she was holding on to. Surely there was time to go to the men's room. There were still a couple of people before her in the queue. Then, he literally ran. That was the crucial moment when he lost her. He was really quick, but took a while to wash his hands and face. When he got back outside, her car was gone. The smell of petrol hung in the air, but the beautiful orange BMW he had been following for hours had gone. She was gone. He brought his fist down on the hub of the silver Ford and swore silently. But this was so fucking, fucking stupid. *Stultus est sicut stultus facit. Stupid is as stupid does.* It was time to text Alexej.

Catherine

Crossing the border into Austria was incredibly easy. The border post was deserted, there were no guards, all the barriers were open. Catherine had decided to follow the signs to Salzburg not aware of the gigantic detour she was making, adding at least two hours to her trip. It was a random whim to follow a remote memory and so she drove past the places she remembered faintly from her childhood when she used to drive to Prague with her mother, usually taking a different way each time so they could see all the beautiful cities on the way: Basel, St. Gallen, Konstanz, Salzburg, Munich, Vienna. It was all so hazy she really couldn't remember properly. Catherine headed for Salzburg, Vienna. Maybe this wasn't the fastest way, but she wasn't in a state of mind where anything mattered at all. All she could care about was what she should do if the police stopped her. *Yes, right, what should she do then?* But she had no answer to that and couldn't bring herself to focus on a solution. Next exit was

Rosenheim, located on the west bank of the Inn in the Bavarian Alpine Foreland. She could sense the high mountains looming, lording over her in the darkness.

Over and over again, Catherine thought of Brigid and how unconditionally she had surrendered Pumpkin to her. Their friendship and mutual respect had lasted and survived the ups and downs of their careers as students, mothers, workers, wives, lovers and all the other roles they were expected to play and never lived up to. When what they struggled most with where the roles they were not expected to play. Those were the hardest: The roles they had assigned to themselves at no one else's bid and asking. Catherine's birthday came up next month and usually –when life was back to normal-, she'd have found it worth celebrating. Having friends and family was reason enough for throwing a party, for seeing everyone once more. But now her family had disappeared, simply vanished into the remote past, plummeting into some black, dark memory hole she couldn't get to.

And she had forsaken her best friend, had abandoned Pumpkin. She had left the cute old timer in the care of a total nerd; not something she would ever forgive herself. Catherine pushed down the accelerator of the Peugeot and made the engine howl. *Make him suffer, make him wince.* Who wants a Peugeot anyway when he could have had Pumpkin? Then an idea emerged from her right half of the brain and stopped her in her dark reveries. She grabbed Eva's phone from her handbag. Only one message. Surely, they couldn't find her so fast, surely they had given up surveying this number. She simply couldn't betray Brigid like this. Only an itsy-bitsy-teeny-weeny message to Brigid. She owed her, God how she owed her.

Catherine was steering with one hand and finding the right keys with her other hand, she would always remember Brigid's number by heart. "Left her at Udo's

Garage, past Munich." Then she pressed *Send*. Hopefully, Brigid would find Pumpkin again and buy her back. Hopefully. She could just put the phone down on the passenger seat when she had to hit the brakes real hard. There were the red rear lights of a truck in front of her. And they came closer at great speed. In addition, the truck's flashlights were on. All of a sudden the freeway before her was cornelian, a sea of red-brownish and saffron-yellowish lights in the haze of the night: so many indicators were on. Maybe an accident?

She hated traffic jams, but what she hated even more were traffic jams at night. She checked the watch, it was nearly half past four in the morning, but it was as dark as any night could ever be. The snowfall had increased and on the bitumen a mix of snow, oil and dirt made driving dangerous. She didn't want to have an accident. She wanted to live. Catherine could feel that much. After all, she wasn't suicidal, that she was sure of. She wanted to fight, she wanted Eva. She wanted her murderer. The car before her started moving again. Gently, she pressed down the accelerator, let the clutch go. She wanted Harvey's handbag. And for a second an idea flickered past: She wanted Eva's baby. If there was a baby at all. She pushed the thought away, concentrating harder on the road and her driving. It had taken her longer to get a handle on the Peugeot than she had thought it would.

Then, just after *Rosenheim* everyone stopped going. The road was totally blocked. More and more red lights. She soaked up the symbolism of the visual image before her. Not just one red light, not just two or three, no – there must be hundreds, thousands of red lights beaming at her gleefully, rubbing it all in. *Give her the red light. What a low light.* And it had started to snow again. She switched off the engine, reached for Eva's phone and put it into her handbag. All she could do was wait. Her mind

began to wander. Brilliant she had been. Doting. Successful and more. She was of priestly descent. Her mother had fought long and hard to get her initial name back and pass it on to her children though Catherine father's name was so utterly Swiss it hurt. He was Walter Müller and so Mamma Imma became Mrs. Walter Müller, deprived of all her roots when she married him. But after Walter Müller died of pneumonia in 1967, shortly before Catherine's birth, she changed her name from Müller back to Cohen. That had been her first husband's name who had also died on her, but in Terezín, *Theresienstadt*, the artists' ghetto just outside of Prague during World War II. Having survived a war, two marriages and given birth to three rascals in three different decades; Frank born 1945 when she was only 19, Leah born 1953 in her late 20ties and Catherine who was born just after she had turned forty, she was again Mrs. Abraham Cohen.

Cohen, the name, Mamma Imma insisted, would forever grant you an Israeli passport and that might always prove useful. Catherine personally could not see why an Israeli passport would "always prove useful". For all she remembered after visiting the Holy Land aged 9 in 1975 was the beginning civil war in Lebanon which was to devastate the country for the next 15 years. There was an imminent uncertainty among all their relatives whether the attacks of the Yom Kippur war two years before would be renewed. She remembered violence and shots at night, talk of young men being carried on stretchers with blood-drips hanging about their heads. Most of the time, Catherine was confined to a clay house which belonged to one of the countless aunts and was bored to death. No one really cared for them, no one really remembered her mother or knew about her and Leah, but still they were welcomed warmly, they were family. Her mother carried Abraham Cohen's picture from before the war. It was proof

enough. They were Cohens. The curfew prevented her from going anywhere interesting at all. Israel to her was a Non-Place she wouldn't want to go to or visit again. Never ever. Not if she could help it. Not even if she got the passport for free. What a nightmare that trip to Israel had been.

But there were happy memories too and sitting in her new Peugeot looking out onto a cold and dark morning Catherine dreamed on. Good dreams. She remembered how happy her mother was, then. How ready she had been for a new adventure. And the sixties were ready for her. Being Mrs. Cohen again, Mamma Imma took herself and the two girls to the United States, to Los Angeles, California. She was following a street musician who had played the saxophone in the streets of Lucerne at the carneval. But Catherine thought it only ever a pretext Mamma Imma used to break free from her well too orderly Swiss life. The street musician, whose name must have been Rob or Fynn, Catherine really couldn't remember, didn't last long.

Her older brother Frank stayed in Zürich, feeling his mother had utterly betrayed him, once again forsaken. But there was nothing Mamma Imma said she could do about it. He was of age now, and that was it. Of course, Frank was more than welcome to come along to the States, but he didn't want to.

"Bad Luck." Mamma Imma used to say.

"Bad luck for him". She occasionally wrote to him, sending him pot to make up for leaving him behind. But he was so mad with her for violating postal authority that he started to throw away her letters unopened. Mamma Imma, Catherine and Leah only learned of this much later, when it was too late. They had had so much fun, living with painters and poets, peace and peace and pot. Those were the days. They thought they'd never end. But they did.

As sudden as Mamma Imma's departure to the United States in the late sixties was, so was her return to Switzerland a decade later, exposing mainly Catherine aged 12 now, to enormous turmoil. In January 1978 Frank was killed in an awful car accident that made Mamma Imma come back to Switzerland, at once. Burying your children. It ran in the family, indeed. Mamma Imma organised his funeral and threw a big party in memory of him with all his friends, neighbours and workmates. There was a terrible row with Frank's girlfriend, Josie, who claimed they had wanted to get married. Therefore, so her argumentation ran, she was entitled to the money Frank had left. She also claimed she was the reason why Frank had saved quite a lot, being the responsible Swiss accountant. They had wanted to start a family.

Catherine couldn't remember the exact words Josie said, but she was screaming at them when she last saw her. He must have been saving a lot. No exact figures were mentioned. Besides Mamma Imma would hear nothing of it. She denied the "stranger", as she called Josie every cent and penny and made sure she, Catherine and Leah got all Frank had worked for. That included the apartment Josie and Frank had lived in. After all, being a true hippie Mamma Imma had no money left, and staying in Switzerland was expensive. Terrible rows. The mere thought of that time made Catherine wince. Did she love her mother for her stubbornness? For being a survivor? Not only in the ghetto, but then also later? They never went back to California, but simply took over Frank's apartment. It didn't seem wrong then, thinking of it now, sitting in a blizzard, running away from everything she used to have, own and cherish, it seemed, for the first time ever, awfully wrong. It was wrong, had always been. No wonder Josie had been so mad. No wonder the shouting.

But after all, Mamma had pulled through. Somehow. She had given a difficult time to everybody else, but then she had found a totally new way for herself. Reinvented herself. Again. What had really worked the change Catherine could never even begin to fathom. No more pot after Frank's death. No more hippies, no more painters, poets and peace. Mamma Imma had found a new life. The death of your child changes you forever, so she had said. It changes the face of the earth, the colour of the sky, the waves of the sea. It would bring unknown opportunities and friendships so you could carry on, so you would move on.

And so would Catherine. Yes, she would, now that Eva was dead. The car before her moved a meter, two, then stopped again. She couldn't bother to switch on the engine. What a nuisance all this was. The road before her was white. Where did all that snow come from? *Wait. Drive. Slow. Stop. Wait. Drive. Slow. It had all come to an end.* She locked herself in and tried to relax.

Blizzard

He got back into his car and waited. Nothing happened. What the f--k. Alexey didn't respond. What the -, Greg checked himself. No more swearing. It wouldn't help. No way Alexey would be sleeping. People like him never slept. They were cyborgs, glued with their eyes to their screens their fingers fixed to their keyboards. The music they played resounded all over the globe, making a terrible noise keeping everyone else awake, plugging them all into an endless stream of consciousness and trivia. Data ran in their veins, terabytes in their arteries. They weren't for real, but a mere shadow of men, a hollow form devoid of flesh and blood,- even a heart, but full of

programming language, software platforms and other total nonsense, digital silverware so to speak, which was keeping their body functions and locked-up brains alive and kicking, really: *klicking*. The mode of their life was *real virtual* and the distinction between the virtual and the real a total blur. But they did get things done. So. Greg was willing to wait.

Alexey would answer, he was tethered to his phone, to his computer. There was no escape. It had only been minutes since he first texted him. Patience. Greg consoled himself that even computer wizards might need a moment to find the location of that phone. Indeed, there was no escape if Alexey was on it, he would for sure find her. Then Greg started the engine and went back on the freeway. He was accelerating fast while trying to relax and think clearly. Let the speed awaken him. Minutes passed. He was going too fast when the phone rang. And then Alexej's text message beeped simultaneously. He would have to take the call first, then look at the message later. It was now or never. He was swerving dangerously, when he held the phone to his ear. It was her.

"Gregoriovich?", she asked in a neutral voice. Obviously Adna had calmed down. Still, her calling at this time of the day was not very promising.

"Adna. How?" She interrupted him.

"Where are you?" Without waiting for his answer she continued,

"What on earth is going on? The Swiss can't find you."

"Have you, -" he shouted at her as the line was getting worse, not worried about interrupting her:

"Adna. I am really sorry. Have you talked to Anichka?"

"Yes, Greg, for Heaven's sake. I have. I have fired her. Why must all the women around you fall for you?"

He kept silent; was Adna including herself? That would be most confusing, disturbing really. She continued breathlessly:

"You know. The Swiss let her escape."

"How do you know?" Greg asked, faking surprise.

"Did you help her?"

"What?" He didn't trust his ears. "Help Catherine Cohen? Escape?"

Has Adna gone mad now?

"Greg can you hear me? You're there?"

"I am."

"The Swiss say they cannot find you either. They checked your hotel room. It looked deserted, apart from the shaving cream. Where are you?" *Had he really forgotten the shaving cream? Crap.*

"Somewhere on a freeway in Germany."

"Germany." She exclaimed. "Bern. Germany. Will I have to call Mars next? I had said come back. Do you copy? Back to Prague. No more detours."

He took a deep breath.

"I am coming back. Adna. In fact, I am on my way. But I have -," he hesitated

This wasn't going to be easy. How could he explain?

"For God's Sake, Greg, why are you -." The connection was getting really bad now.

The snow storm must be interfering with the frequencies. He couldn't hear the rest of the sentence. Then he heard her voice again.

"Greg. Can you hear me? Greg? Listen up. You." He interrupted her.

“Adna. Trust me. We shall sort it all out when I’m back. What about the lab? The battery of this phone will not last much longer and I am in a terrible snow storm. This is getting worse by the minute.”

He heard her sigh at the other end. Maybe she didn’t believe the story about the battery nor the snowstorm, but it was true indeed. This time it was. Adna complied.

“Ok. The girl obviously died Saturday night. And the witness was right about the newborn. Shortly before dying she gave birth. And yes, she is Eva Cohen, the girl you’ve interviewed in summer. Her name is not, I repeat, not Emily. Do you copy? How come you never realised she was missing in Switzerland?”

Her voice grew fainter and fainter. Greg was stunned by the novelty. He shouted as loud as he could.

“She gave birth?”

Then the line was dead. So many questions raced through his mind. He had briefly looked at the dead girl’s vagina and her anus and he had seen all the blood and the cuts. At the time, it wasn’t really his job to examine her closely and so he decided to wait for the coroner’s report. But somehow he had thought of a man who had done this to her. All torn, all open and cut up. He had envisioned a monster, a barbarian beast with monstrous limbs and much strength. This was *lusus naturae*; Nature’s deviations impersonated in the male form: all wrong, all reversed. But a baby? A baby? That would explain a lot. *But what exactly would it explain?*

The news, -and how unwelcome they were-, really meant Catherine Cohen was back in play. Had she killed her daughter when she gave birth? Because she gave birth? Mothers do strange things when their daughters were whelping. He had seen it happen before. Maybe, after all, Catherine Cohen was guilty of killing her daughter or

of letting her die in childbirth. The thought was confusing. He looked at his phone, there was enough power yet to glance at Alexey's text, it said something to do with Exit *Rosenheim*, then the phone was dead. No more cellular radio system, no more power. He should have recharged it last night. What the -. Hopefully he had packed the adapter to recharge the phone in the car. Exit *Rosenheim*. He remembered the sign. He had just passed it. *Rosenheim*. Exit. Should he have followed it? Was this where she left the freeway? What did Alexey mean? Why was there all that snow? He couldn't remember last time it had snowed like that. And then, as if the drapes were pulled for a final curtain call, the freeway was totally blocked. He nearly hit the car before him. What the -.

Catherine and Greg

If it had been summer, morning would have been about to dawn gloriously upon the rolling hills and the green valleys close by. But Catherine knew that with this weather it could be dark till 9 o'clock, even later. She yawned, yearning desperately for another hot cup of coffee and some fresh bread. Her flask was empty, her sandwiches all gone. She had been sitting here for hours, all night really. Croissants would be awesome too. But nothing worked anymore. All cars and trucks had stopped and all traffic had come to an end so long ago. There was too much snow. She ran her fingers through her unkempt hair, trying to smooth it. But more she wished mankind was a species that hibernated. Unfortunately, evolution must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, for all she could see was that half of Austrian's citizens was sitting on the freeway instead of lying in a warm cave, covered with thick fur blankets. What were

all these people doing here anyway? Shouldn't they simply be home, asleep, eating breakfast, getting their kids ready for school?

Now would be the time to come up with a water-tight plan on what to do next. By now, the Peugeot was covered under masses of snow. *That much for water-tight.* The precipitation had turned into a nasty blizzard, intensifying in the last half an hour she had been sitting here. It was getting cold again and she switched the engine on to let the heating run. Then she waited for something to happen. At least the police couldn't move too in that kind of weather. What consolation was that supposed to be? What if she needed to be rescued? Then the police would have to move in or she would freeze to death. The car was completely stuck now.



She only saw the figure when he nearly hit her windscreen for the snowfall was so dense. There was a man coming for her. Instinctively, Catherine reached for the central locking system, only to find out, she had already locked herself in. When the stranger rapped at her window with his thick mittens, she opened it just a tiny bit.

"Hey", he said.

"Hey", she answered cautiously. What did he want? She glared at him, trying to make out his eyes and read his face. He looked familiar.

"Your car still working?" He asked in English and Catherine could see by the way he hunched his shoulders that he was freezing.

"I guess so." She didn't want to be rude, but then what *exactly* do you say to a stranger early in the morning sitting in a blizzard on a freeway near Exit *Rosenheim*? She shrugged and felt she had to, -for politeness's sake, keep the conversation going:

"What about yours? Still working?"

"Dead, I had to recharge my phone. Plus the heater. And the light. You know."

She nodded, pulling her coat closer around her waist.

"They should send somebody in to clear the mess up. I don't think we can ever move out of here." The snow reached nearly up to his knees, she hardly trusted her eyes. She must have been too absorbed in her own world to see what was really going on out here. Why hadn't she exchanged Pumpkin with a Four Wheel Drive Snow Patrol? She looked at the freezing stranger who was shifting uncomfortably from one leg to another and felt pity for him. Also there was something in his eyes that touched her. Just a normal guy who was freezing his butt off and had taken a walk to look for shelter and safety. That was what he was. He didn't look like a criminal. Besides she could use some company before she went mad completely. She really needed someone to talk to.

"Would you care to come in and have a seat? I still have some petrol and I've been turning on the heating every 10 minutes for a minute or two in the last half hour I cannot offer you coffee though. All gone." She ventured and tried to smile at him.

Had she just said that? She had to be out of her mind. How, on earth, could she? He smiled back at her.

"That was clever", he remarked. There was something vibrant in his voice. But honestly that morning, she would have trusted anyone, for ought she knew where the man in the snowstorm came from and what intentions he had. It just didn't matter to

her. Eva was dead, nothing mattered anymore. She reached over to open the door for him.

“You don’t want to get in?”

“You might think I was to trying to hit on you.”

“And, are you?” She lifted her eyebrows.

“No, no, no. Of course not. I was just trying to find a warm and cozy place to stretch my legs. I can try the next car. Really, I don’t want to inconvenience you.” He smiled his warmest smile and she could feel herself chuckle. *Inconvenience?* After what that trip had brought so far? After all that crying? Were her eyes still red?

“No, come on. Don’t worry, just get in the car before you freeze out here.”

He had to shovel the snow away to get into the car, it was incredible. When he finally sat next to her, she was glad she had hidden the wig well under the seat. His legs were white from all the snow that stuck to his pants and the melting snowflakes quickly began to soak the material of his jeans. She reached for the blanket which Brigid always kept in her car. Luckily, Catherine hadn’t forgotten to transfer it to the Peugeot. He gladly buried his legs in it and Catherine turned the heating on again. It was still snowing. Unbelievable. And there she sat, next to a total stranger in the middle of a fierce blizzard. It was all in line with the previous experiences of these last couple of days. She couldn’t have helped it. It just happened. She had been flung on a course that took her way outside her stationary orbit. *Way Out.*



"I'm Gregorovich, call me Greg," he introduced himself and smiled his broadest smile holding out his hand. It felt warm despite the cold he had just conquered. But then she remembered he had been wearing mittens to protect himself from the biting snowfall.

"Catherine Cohen," she said, a little too loud, checking herself at once. Automatically she had given her real name. She had to think of an alias.



Greg started coughing out loud, immediately recognizing her after she had volunteered her name. His outstanding abilities at facial recognition had been so extremely dimmed by the blow his ego had taken when he had lost her, that he had not recognized her at all, not at the first glance, not at the second, not at the third. After all she wasn't wearing her wig now. And she was sitting in a different car. Catherine patted his back and *she* was hitting on him quite hard.

"You're hitting on me."

"I am?" She was chuckling, and he groaned.

"Are you alright?"

"Gregorovich, what a strange name."

"It is Belorussian," he was managing to just about keep the coughing under control.

"Belorussian? What country is that?" she asked, not being able to place the language.

"You speak German right? In German it is *Weissrussland*," he translated for her and she smiled.

"I think in English, I spent my childhood in the United States. My mother took me there when I was still a baby. I just cannot place it on the map. And no, I am not German."

"Yes, I know. You've got Swiss number plates." Catherine froze at once, realizing again the danger she was in. Hopefully he wasn't one of these nerds that memorized number plates. Obviously, he had been looking at hers. If she was caught, maybe at his testimony, it didn't look very good for her, not with that handbag at the crime site, not with him remembering her licence plates.

"Ok. I understand. Belarus, as the name says in German, used to be part of the Soviet Union. It is in the north of the Ukraine."

"I see. To me it sounded so foreign, like the name of some saint." She smiled again. He was good-looking, his eyes were extra-ordinary, mesmerizing. His even features made him look regal. She relaxed. He looked familiar. Where had she seen him before?

"In fact there have been 16 popes that went by that name", He answered playfully.

"So what do you do out here in this weather, so early in the morning?" he asked, turning his head towards her. She noticed once again the liveliness of his eyes. He was a keen observer.

"I escape from the police", she said resignedly, acting on her instinct to always tell the truth.

"You do?" He frowned. Catherine nodded, waiting for his verdict.

"Well, you should have chosen another route this one is closed."

It was incredible what the skies sent down that very minute; they were both looking at the white windscreen before them, enjoying each other's company in silence. She hadn't bothered to turn on the windscreen wipers and all was white, white

and dark and wasn't that a total contradiction? Then, at once, he broke the silence and his voice was hoarse.

"And also, you shouldn't have let me in. I am police. I'll arrest you as soon as we get out of here."

"No, you aren't. Come on." she looked at him teasingly, wanting to laugh. She tried to hide that her heart was racing. What if he really was police? She couldn't believe her journey would end thus abruptly. It would have been too stupid. They had her handbag, they had her computer with all these horrid, horrid websites on abortion: coat hangers would do the job. What could she say to defend herself? Who would believe her? She had not killed Eva. She hadn't even been there. He could see she was worried.

"No, relax. Whatever your secret is, it is safe with me. I work as a hairdresser with my nephew."

"You do? That's wonderful. I would really need a haircut."

"Come to Prague with me. I'll give you a haircut." Catherine cracked out laughing, she even snorted.

"I am actually on the way to see my sister in Prague." The words tumbled out of her as she was speaking. Right. Leah. Leah could help her, given she wanted to, given she would even agree to see her.



Greg was rubbing his hands to get warm. He was charming and easy to talk to and all of a sudden she felt even more at ease. She must have undergone an enormous hormonal reaction in the last two minutes, from fear to ease to total tiredness, inertness

and exhaustion to a flirtatious vigour she hadn't known in years and she hadn't remembered she was still capable of. Greg had worked all this in her, with only the touch of his voice and the look of his eyes. *How cheesy.*

"You are? On your way to Prague? That is great. Then you really must come and get that haircut. I work very close to the famous Charles Bridge."

"It's a deal then." Had she just betrayed her destination to a complete stranger? And given him the name of her sister?

"But you know what?

"No. What?"

"After telling you where I am headed, I will now have to let you die in the snow." *Oh my God, she was making things even worse. Where had that come from?*

"Ok, ok. I'll die right here." He leaned back and closed his eyes.

"No, don't," she grabbed him playfully by the arm. He opened his eyes again and looked straight at her as if to test her.

"Why not? Your handbag anywhere close?"

"My handbag? What do you mean?" Her heart had stopped beating and she stared at him in disbelief. *How would he know?*

"So they could trace the murder back to you when you leave your handbag at the crime scene."

Her brain had stopped working now. That was it. She had been found out.

"What's wrong? Catherine. Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Oh, come on. Cheer up. I was only joking."

She just stared at him. This wasn't funny. *Who was this guy?*

Their eyes locked.



"Let's change the subject", he volunteered.

"Have you been to Prague before?" Catherine was still hypnotized. It had been a joke. The handbag at the crime site. A joke. Joke. There was no way he could know. It was just an unlucky coincidence. She must compose herself, play along.

"Yes, I have, years ago when I was a girl. I haven't been there since Czechoslovakia split. When was that again?"

"In 1993."

"It feels like that was 5 years ago, not much longer. Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am. Pretty sure. I was there." He smiled again.

"You were? That must have been quite something."

"Yes, it was. But I think compared to other countries the transition was rather peaceful. There was more violence in 2000 when there were massive protests against the world bank summit. That was bad."

"Yes, I'd believe that straight away."

Somewhat totally out of the blue she said.

"Are you married?"

"I was. She is dead. Don't - ", he said.

"Don't be sorry", she finished the sentence for him, "yes, I know."

"You do?"

"Believe me, I do."

"Husband?"

"No."

"So?" Catherine felt the tears well up within her.

"So?" She repeated after him.

"Louisa, my wife, she died a long time ago. In February it will be 14 years."

"What happened?" He didn't answer.



"Prague, I heard it is a wonderful city", she said lightly.

He laughed and she could tell his voice had gone deeper and there was a certain sparkle in his eyes which was clearly directed at her. All of a sudden it wasn't such a nuisance anymore to look good in her mid-forties. She had just forgotten how to play the keys. They both sat in silence for a moment and then she turned the car on and let the heating run for some time. Petrol was inevitably declining.

He must have been about Catherine's age, maybe a few years older. In his eyes she could recognize warmth and passion but when she glanced at him in between their awkward dialogues he also looked dangerous, obstinate. She wasn't sure she really liked him. He aroused her but that was a different feeling. It was located more between her legs than in her heart.

She glanced at him from the side and could see he was smiling.

"If you haven't been to Prague for some years you won't recognize it." Catherine nodded.

"Prague. I heard it is now a wonderful city."

"You've said that before."

"Have I?"

"Yes."

He couldn't wipe that grin from his face.

"It has always been," he said.



"Are you cold?" He asked.

"Well. A bit."

She smiled sheepishly. Her emotions were all upside down. She had lost the ability to control herself. Grief. Joy. Lust. All of them had their way with her and played funny games. She had to get a grip on herself. Now.

Then the engine of the Peugeot stopped. The car had run out of petrol, but it was still snowing. Where the freeway was supposed to be only a knee-deep snowfield could be seen with the cars and trucks sticking out. Some lights were still flashing, but nothing else was moving and the silence would have been soothing, hadn't it been for the sheer panic Catherine began to feel in her guts.

"That was it." She said

"Guess so," he answered. They both fell silent for a moment. She felt like screaming, but didn't. After all this was not some cheap horror movie. Whoever wrote the screenplay for her life, hadn't given much thought to her solving the riddles that came along her way.



“You know. I used to be a monk,”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I was a with the Benedictines. *Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*. May God be glorified in all we do.”

Her smile had worn off and was lopsided now. He? A monk?

„Do you want to know more? Our motto was *ora et labora et lege*. Pray and work and read. The rule of St. Benedict required stability, *conversatio morum* and obedience.“

She interrupted him.

„Please. Stop. That’s enough. I believe you. A Benedictine. What happened?“

„I met this girl, and then. You know. She got pregnant. I left the order.“

„And became a hairdresser?“ Catherine asked incredulously.

„No. A father, but yep. That’s the whole story.“

„Come on. What happened?“ Catherine had forgotten the Eurofeds, the cold and the blizzard. A real monk. A hairdresser monk. Some other people had crazy careers too.

“I’ve told you. She died.”

“And your child? Was it a boy? A girl?”

“Died too.”

“Oh no,” Catherine exclaimed.

“Don’t.” He said and for a moment she got a glimpse of the broken man within him.

“I know. But that’s really bad.”

“Yeah, it was. Bad”

“I guess.”



"Let's move," Catherine said. They couldn't just sit here, talk and wait and freeze to death. She reached for the handle.

"Don't you have a cell phone," he asked.

"No." Catherine lied.

"I don't. I've left it at home. Do you have one?" There was Eva's cell phone but it was switched off and there was no way she would pull it out now.

"Yes", he replied, "but no power left." He took it out and showed it to her.

"You are the only woman without a cell phone I know."

"Let's turn on the radio, maybe that still works." She tried to get it started, but it wouldn't start. Frantically, she pressed different buttons, but had no idea how to work the stereo. Then she gave up.

"You don't know how to turn on the radio?" he wondered.

"Is the car stolen? Is this why you are running from the police?" She laughed it off.

"No, it isn't. I have just bought it."

"Oh, is this how they call this today? Buy?"

"Let's go. I cannot just sit here," Catherine said impatiently, ignoring his last remark.

"Where exactly do you want to go?" He replied laconically.

"Just go." She tried to open the door, but he kept her back, grabbing her arm.

"You can't. You'll freeze."

"You think?" She couldn't finish the sentence. Of course he was right. Catherine had no idea where they were. They must have been somewhere near Salzburg because the road signs had been saying so before they got totally stuck in the blizzard. But of

course the man coming through the snowstorm was right: Getting out was too dangerous. They both had no idea where to go or how far it was to the next village. He let go of her arm. She couldn't tell what it was, but his touch had lessened the tension that had been haunting her for so long. When he laughed her heart jumped and she was sure little serotonin hormones were jumping all over her nervous system finding their way through her vessels.

Catherine glanced at the display that measured the temperature and realized that it was just below zero. She wasn't sure how long they'd last here without petrol and heating.

"I wish I had some food left." Eating always calmed her.

"Actually, I am more in for a good Austrian roast with Spätzle and red cabbage."

"I hate red cabbage."



"We shall freeze either way. We are doomed."

He was waving both his hands into her face as if to scare her.

"On an Austrian freeway? Congested with cars. You think so?"

"Yes, why not? It is possible." He responded, pretending to be dead serious.

"This is not the Canadian Tundra. They'll evacuate us. We had better stay here, and wait. Someone will come."

"Do they say Tundra in Canada? Isn't it the prairie?"



Time passed slowly. They were both snowed in and really tired. Not really worried. They enjoyed each other's presence, enormously. Then Catherine felt how her perception started changing. The white windows blacked her view out and came into focus and blurred again, they came into focus and blurred again. Anything Greg said was extremely funny when really she felt like weeping all the time. What if the police found her? What if she really was found guilty for a crime she hadn't committed. They would put her away. For how long? She was so tired. No matter what the verdict would be, her career as a lawyer would be over. Was there a lack of oxygen in the car? The tiredness worked its toxic on her blood and she felt like being high on some drug she had never tried. It was an encounter of a different kind; with herself, with Nature's elements and with a total stranger.

And it was addictive. Greg had the most fascinating eyes, she couldn't get over it. They were dark islands behind long eyelashes. She also loved watching his hands when he talked, for they had a life of their own. He said he was a hairdresser but the way he talked was far too learned. He was interested in politics, opera, fashion, cooking, travelling, dogs, geography: All of which seemed an interesting mix for a man who had been a monk and was now a hairdresser in Prague.

Dimitrios

When Dimitrios awoke it was still dark. How peaceful the world could be in the early morning hours. Lenka was breathing regularly. He still loved his wife, even more when she slept so peacefully. Her features were so relaxed, her mouth twitching occasionally. He was watching her for a while in the dim light of their bedroom. Then he remembered last night. The shouting, Ema's swear words. Where on earth had she picked them up? At school? Or from these awful YouTube videos? Surely, not from school. They were watching over them there, weren't they? In any case, they should be. That was what teachers were paid for. He was awake now.

Then with a jolt, he remembered the moussaka, the carpet, the wandering around the streets. The cold. And Adna had called. He got up and dressed. Then he went to the bathroom and shaved carefully. It was still too early to get up. But he had better be ready for that meeting at 9. Greg was gone, and he felt strangely relieved. Disappeared into thin air. Switzerland. He would fill in for him, competently taking his place. At least he would try. Silently, he tiptoed to his study in his socks and switched on the computer. Where were Greg's reports? He had interviewed the girl,

hadn't he? And he hadn't realized she was Eva Cohen when she gave him a false name: Emily. Greg making mistakes. Bad for him, Good for Dimitrios.

He looked at the folders on his screen. Where were these reports? Must have been a couple of months ago. Right after Eva aka Emily had made the claim public on www.change_the_world.com. If it hadn't been for that dead girl, the Clinique case would never have been made public. Maybe that was what got her killed? Exposing the Clinique. Hadn't Adna said that straight away? But then, there was the mother's handbag. Had she had her hands in it too? Obviously the girl had been pregnant. Given birth. If only the coroner worked faster, these lab results took forever. Such sloppiness. If it hadn't been such a tragic incident, he could have laughed about it. His thoughts were jumping forwards and backwards, he found it hard to focus on any of the leads.

The easiest would have been if Eva aka Emily had simply shut up. Then she would still be alive. Then Adna wouldn't be in such a mess, nor would the mayor or some of these other topshots at the Clinique: Dr. Schnurmacher and the beautiful Dr. Linder. But, of course Eva aka Emily had to blurt it all out onto www.change_the_world.com. Organ Trafficking was a serious crime when he was already trying to protect the Clinique from exposure. And what if it was true? What if Eva aka Emily's charges were true? Sooner or later Greg would find out and then heads would roll, and Dimitrios would make sure it wasn't his head that was rolling. There was only that much he was willing to do for money. Covering up for organ trafficking was a totally different story. Not sure he would go there. And for children. No way. He took a deep sigh. At least this could wait. No one had approached him so

far. Susan thought it was outrageous too. He bit his lips, he mustn't call her Susan, it was Dr. Linder. To him it was, Dr. Linder. *God, she was beautiful.*

The Clinique case was way above their heads, he was really out of his depth here and so was Adna. If she were honest. If what Eva aka Emily claimed was true, the implications were far reaching. He had better read these reports, but he couldn't find the one he was looking for. He bore it with patience. Half the time, he couldn't find the stuff he needed. Greg's filing system was obscure to say the least. What he could do was take a piece of paper and a pen and sit down and think. Use his brain. God, was he tired. Remember. Sit down. Draw. The girl in the middle. Now she was dead. The Clinique. Dr. Linder, the beautiful Dr. Susan Linder. Was she in on this? What did she not tell? What a mess. What a mess. He couldn't focus, his eyelids were drooping.

If that had been Lenka, his daughter. Dead like this. In a shack. So awful. Dimitrios began to feel that headache. Headache. Too early. Why had he got up anyway? There was nothing he could do at this time of the day. He checked his watch. He had barely slept an hour or two. It was only 4.45. He had to get more rest. More sleep. He staggered back to their bedroom and lay down again. Lenka was breathing so peacefully. So peacefully when there was such havoc wrought upon him. There were a couple of hours left before the alarm clock would wake him. He had wanted to work more, but he couldn't for the sheer tiredness that had overwhelmed him. Groggily, he pulled his blanket over him. Lenka would freak out when she saw him in the morning. In bed, with his clothes on. Fully dressed and even shaved. Let her. Let her freak out. Right now, he couldn't think. He was too tired. Not ready. Not now. He fell asleep at once.

Catherine and Greg

They must have talked for hours when the dark morning finally ended and the day's first light dawned upon them. In the dim rays of the rising winter sun they fell asleep, their heads resting against each other. When Catherine woke up from a short and an uneasy sleep, it had stopped snowing and the sun was out. The glass of the Peugeot's window panes was covered in tiny water drops that had escaped their breath letting the sunshine create the most amazing fractal patterns. She cleaned the window with her thick mittens and through a hole she could see the light blue sky spread over them beautifully, reflecting the white of the snowy landscape into space and back unto her. Exhausted she leaned back into the driver's seat: The blazing clear pallidity of the still, brumal scenery hurt her eyes. Should they venture out? Now that all the world was frore?

She could hardly feel her algid feet and hands anymore. The numbness had crept all over her limbs and joints. Carefully, she tried to move her stiff fingers. It hurt. She could hardly move at all. So far she hadn't been worried about the cold as their

heated discussions, not to forget the temperature of their bodies, had kept her warm. But now she started to feel how vulnerable they were; and there was no apparent sign of anyone coming to help; nothing was moving yet. Catherine longed for that cappuccino with hot milk foam and chocolate powder. But all this was so very far away now, in some distant, remote past she hardly remembered.

Greg was still snoring next to her, his head lolling strangely about the place. Not a very handsome sight, but somehow his innate elegance managed to keep him attractive even in this rather awkward position. Was he awake? The snow had walled itself against the car and she felt her heart sink. All Catherine wanted was get out of this doomed Peugeot, brush her hair, clean her teeth and put on some fresh underwear. But nothing happened. It was too humiliating.



Then she felt her heart stop. Such a fright. Someone was clearing the windscreen from the snow. It was a young guy in an orange vest with fluorescent stripes, beaming his nicest smile at them.

“Wow, they’ve made it.” Greg said.

“You’re awake?”

“Yep.”

“How anyone can smile like this is a pure mystery”, Catherine said.

“Maybe he likes his job. I mean, he is on a mission. And he spent the night in a cozy bed. That would make me smile too.”

“Yeah, right. Me too.” Catherine glanced at Greg sideways.

The rescue team had finally arrived. They were moving slowly, but seeing the yellow and orange figures running up and down busily gave her strength to hold on despite her laughing fit. Her bladder was nearly bursting. They could get out at last.

They were told to leave their cars in the snow with the key in the ignition which Catherine was very loath to do. At least they could take one bag each.



He smiled at her, then he started to laugh out loud and so did she. They could hardly stop laughing.

“It’s the shock.” One of the men from the rescue team said, “it does funny things to people.”

“Hey, we’re under snow shock, honey.”.

“Stop calling me honey.”

“Why? Don’t you like it?” He asked teasingly.

She couldn’t remember the last time Harvey had called her honey. It must have been a while ago, in fact it must have been years ago. And when Greg said it, it sounded wonderful, it made her heart jump, her head dizzy.

“No,” Catherine said, “I don’t like it.”

“Liar,” Greg answered. Catherine didn’t respond, she was busy getting onto a snow machine which would get them outside the disaster zone. The rescue team had woollen blankets and energy bars which Catherine and Greg gladly devoured. Then buses took everyone to an unused army shelter close by where Catherine and Greg lay

down to get some rest. Nicely wrapped into a warm sleeping bag, she felt thankful and comfortable for being alive, for being free, for sharing it all with Greg.

Greg

Greg couldn't believe his luck. He had found her again. It was incredible. When he had lost her just before Munich, he was devastated and had stopped again at the next roadhouse. He had sat in his car for quite a while, thinking about his options.

Just when he was ready to move, Alexeji had texted him and he had followed the lead. Rosenheim. It was around the corner anyway. But when the snowstorm had hit him, nothing worked anymore. He was sitting in his car for hours, then he ran out of petrol and his battery was flat because he had been recharging his cell phone. A catastrophe. Frustratedly, he got out to stretch his legs and look for help. But the first two drivers wouldn't open their windows and simply ignored him. Greg was rather down when he knocked at the window of the third car, not even sure someone would care to notice him: The man, that came through the snowstorm. And there she was: Catherine Cohen, right before his nose, without him realizing a thing. It was incredible.

When she said her name, he at last recognized her, feeling like such a total fool. After giving up all hope his brain had gone into a standby mode.

But here she was. Catherine Cohen. She was fascinating, beautiful, intelligent and very sexy, very witty and very funny too. He knew it was cruel to tease her with that handbag, but he couldn't resist it. They had laughed so much. He hadn't met anyone like her for so long, he couldn't even remember what it was like to share such moments. In fact, he had only ever met one woman she could compare with. Louisa. But Louisa was dead whereas Catherine's eyes sparkled incessantly. She brought up the folly of youth within him and this he gloriously enjoyed. She had pulled the trigger.

He knew it would be the most disastrous thing to do: fall for a suspect, as the policeman investigating her case. And even more disastrous: she not knowing he was police, investigating her case. Besides he couldn't really eliminate her anymore as the prime suspect. If the dead Swiss girl wasn't raped but had given birth, the mother might be guilty of murder again. He couldn't make sense of it, not yet. And how the Clinique case fitted in, that was a mystery altogether. All in all, he had gotten himself into a complete mess. *Amare et sapere vix deo conceditur*. Even Gods find it hard to love and be wise at the same time.

And hadn't he done it before? When he was a monk he had fallen in love with a beautiful tourist, why not fall in love with a murderess now that he was a policeman? Was he ending a career he would have wanted to end anyway? And did he really have a choice? He would have to call Adna eventually, but for now he couldn't. He really couldn't face her. He was simply too tired when they were taken to the army shelter for food and recreation. Someone told him that the silver Ford had seriously broken down and the damage needed fixing. He then called Hertz Car Rental for it couldn't

be forestalled any longer. They were very professional and even said he could leave the car with the Austrian police. They would send someone to pick it up. Unbelievably, the girl on the phone even apologized their rental car had broken. That much for customer service. So, all in all, there had been no time to call Adna.

By now they would have found Catherine's fingerprints all over the place or her DNA if she had really been there. And he wasn't sure he wanted to know. Not quite yet. He was stalling for time. So, towards evening when they had slept all day and eaten extensively at the cost of the Austrian government, potatoes and chicken with green beans, Catherine ended up taking Greg in her car. It was the natural thing to do.

On the Road Again

“What is so funny?” Greg’s grinning had turned into a real fit of laughter. She glanced sideways, not wanting to take her eyes off the road for long.

“You are aware there would have been a much shorter way?”

“What do you mean?”

“From Bern to Prague. You don’t have to go all the way to Salzburg.”

Determinedly, she was accelerating to overtake a large truck carrying Spanish vegetables. It said Vegespania on the truck’s dirty tarpaulin. The Peugeot was now easier to handle. More practice and emotional balance did the trick. She tried not to look at Greg again. The truck was wavering dangerously and she had to grip the steering wheel tight.

“Yeah. Sure. There is always a shorter way,” she countered. She shouldn’t have told him where she had passed through. What did he know about her anyway? Considering the circumstances she had left under, she felt she had gotten rather far. But he needn’t know all this, not quite now. Ignorance could be such a bliss she thought, biting her lips. And he was great company and an excellent guide. Gently, she said:

“If you had wanted to get married you wouldn’t have had to become a Benedictine monk first. You are aware there would have been a much shorter way”, she challenged him. He kept silent for a moment and so did she. Then he started speaking.

“Yes you are right. But somehow I had to atone for all the money my father left me.”

“What did your father do that he could leave you so much money.”

“That’s the funny part. He was a rabbi.”

“And they earn that much?” Catherine looked at him, amazed.

“No, they don’t. He had inherited it from his family, a long line of businessmen with the Hansa Teutonica, the Hanseatic League. You know what that is?”

“Kind of.”

“Well, it was an economic alliance against the Vikings. The German traders wanted to keep the trading routes in the North Sea and the Baltic safe. The alliance was started in the city of Lübeck in the 12th century. The German Lufthansa got its name from it. What is funny is that the Hanseatic League was never a nation, but they had their own army and waged war against Denmark in the 15th century forcing them to yield to their economic monopoly”.

“Ok. I didn’t know that. Imagine. Huawei having its own army and fighting against Burundi to gain access.”

“Anyway, three years after the Hanse had won against the Danish they tried the same trick against the Dutch.”

“Really? When was that?”

“Around 1437 or 1438. Want me to check? I do remember a lot of details, but not quite everything.” He pulled out his cell phone. Catherine laughed.

“No, that’s ok. It is a nice story anyway.”

“Well, I looked it up on Wikipedia while you were sleeping. All I want is impress you.”

“Yes. Sure. You do. I am impressed. Wikipedia. I mean great. Did they win?”

“Well, they lost against the Dutch. And later on, Queen Elizabeth I banned them from London and Ivan III of Russia closed their base in Novgorod. After the 15th and the 16th century it was really going downwards.”

“Oh, too bad. You are making all this up, aren’t you?”

“Not really. Well, we still got filthy rich”.

“So what happened?”

“It was my grandfather’s idea to put all that money into a trust fund for the next heir.”

“How much was it?”

“I am not going to tell you. A lot.”

“Come on.”

“No, you can imagine yourself. When my father came of age, he had to decide whether to renounce the money or inherit it.”

“And he renounced it?”

"No, he didn't. He left it in the trust fund and never even touched it. He would leave the choice to me."

"And he became a rabbi?"

"Yes, that's right."

"So, how come you became a Benedictine?"

"Long story. To cut it short. It was kind of dangerous to be Jewish in the 20th century."

"I am Jewish," Catherine said.

"You are? Seriously?"

"Well. Sometimes I don't know what I really am. My father's name was Swiss, he was a Catholic, but my mother was married to a Cohen and she passed on the name to me. But we were never really very religious. My mum always said we were Jewish, but we never really belonged. It is hard to explain. I never really understood why she wanted Abraham Cohen's name anyway. Maybe because Abraham Cohen was my half-brother Frank's father? He had had a difficult life with two younger sisters and by giving us all his name -. I don't know. Maybe she thought it would knit us together closer. But let's talk about you. So, you are super-rich?"

"Not anymore."

"You lost it all?"

"Yeah. Kind of."

"That's crazy."

"I know."

"I would have hated taking the money. It was blood money. I left Belarus."

"You did?"

“Belarus isn’t the place you’d want to live in or grow old. Inflation rate is high, the economy is still monopolized by the state and therefore I decided to leave the sinking ship, everything was deteriorating” .

“But you would have been rich.”

“I know. But I couldn’t.”

“So the money is still in that account?” He shrugged.

“I gave it away. I wanted to end that curse. It was too much to decide.”

“You gave it to the Benedictines? You gave them all your money.”

“Yes, I did. And Nope-. I am not joking.”

“Seriously? The Church?”

“Father Greg it was. Yes. In Italy,” he sighed, it had been so long since he had told anyone about this. Surely, he had never told Adna, his superior nor Dimitrios, his partner. It was a part of his life he kept under lock and key.

Catherine tried hard to concentrate on her driving. Some other people did have crazy lives too. No doubt about that.

“I went to Pariah, about 80 miles east from Rome.”

It was hard to believe. She starred at him sideways. Was this why he looked so appealing? *Holy innocence?*

“And I gave them my life, not only my money. Why is that so hard to believe?”

“It is just,” she paused, “Ok, It just is hard to believe. I mean look at you. A monk.”

She was shaking her head.

“I cannot believe it.”

“I can prove it.

“How?” Greg folded his hands devoutly and began reciting in Latin.

„Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo, et in terra. Panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis hodie. Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. You want me to go on?“

„Alright, alright I believe you. What on earth was that?“

Catherine wasn't sure what to make of this. Obviously, he really had been a monk.

Who else would learn such stuff?

„The Lord's Prayer. Couldn't you recognize that?“

„No, first I am Jewish, and no, I don't speak Latin.“

„No one does. You might still have recognized it.“

„No, sorry.“ She shook her head and laughed, “sorry to disappoint you. And what was life like? As a monk?“ Catherine was genuinely curious.

„I was a subprior and in charge of the beer brewing project.“

Catherine nearly let go of the steering wheel. She snorted out loud.

„In charge of what? Beer brewing?“

„Well. I was only there during the research phase. Why is that so hard to believe? You look incredulous.“

„I am. Did you get drunk a lot?“

„No, not get drunk. It was a creative process. We were trying to find the best beer and we were studying hard how we make it.“ Catherine was giggling:

„Yeah, right. Sure you were.“

„Seriously, we went to see breweries in Belgium. We wanted to reach out to people who were turned off by religion.“

„By giving them beer? Alcohol? What a great idea. Do you know how many people die each year from alcohol abuse? So you needed more people dead? To do what? Have more funerals? Stay in the business.“

„I know it’s hard to understand. But, people no longer come to church, but they come to buy a product they’re familiar with.

„You are making fun of me now? Aren’t you?“ Catherine really wasn’t sure what to make of it. “



„And your wife? Tell me what happened?“

„She died. Car accident. 18 months after we had met. And the baby. Both dead. It was an awful accident. Then, to cut a long story short, I went to Prague and became a policeman,“ Greg bit his tongue. *Had he just said that?*

Catherine was concentrating hard as an oversized bus was overtaking her. She didn’t know what to say. It sounded so fantastic it might after all be true. *Wait a minute. Policeman? Had he just said policeman?*

„Didn’t you say you were a hairdresser?“

She asked trying to sound as nonchalantly as possible. Greg flinched slightly, but Catherine used to lead client-attorney interviews noticed the minute movement of his shoulder and neck. He was leading her up and down the garden path of his wonderful green orchard. The man could not be trusted.

„Hairdresser. Of course, but I’ve always dreamed of becoming a policeman.“ he corrected himself. She fell silent. He must be lying. Or maybe not. She couldn’t tell.

Parts of it might be true. But a monk? A policeman? A hairdresser? Whatever. She had better concentrate on the traffic.



„So in the last 6 months I haven't had any sex.“ He said, totally out of the blue, adding not without irony.

„That really has been the worst.“

She gasped, feigning shock.

„Greg.“

„Come on, Catherine. I thought you might want to know. We are both adults.“

„Greg, honestly. I don't wanna know. No.“

„I haven't-“

„ No, absolutely, No. .“

„Honestly. I haven't slept with anyone for more than six months. I would have had several opportunities, though. And then, six months ago. Well, it was just a one-night stand. And it was a mistake. It doesn't really count.“

Catherine found it hard to keep the steering wheel straight.

„You know there is that one customer at work who comes every fortnight. She wants me to do her curls and then when she pays she always says: Greg, You know I would pay you much more if -. “ He fell silent.

„She must be joking.“ Catherine screamed out a little too loud.

„You wouldn't pay me for sex ? “

„Pay? You? For sex? Why should I?“

Instantly, she slowed down and let her foot hang loose. She glanced at him from the side, he didn't look at her.

„Yes, why should you? You wouldn't want to get into bed with me anyway.“

„I said I wouldn't want to pay you.“

She was still laughing. *Had she really just said that?*

„Oh, of course not.“

„No, no, no. You misunderstand me“ m Catherine was trying to defend herself.

„So, you would pay me? The Swiss have all that money, don't they?“ His tone was becoming more and more sarcastical.

„Yes, but no money can buy you love.“

She didn't want to mirror his tone, somehow this was getting ugly.

„Love. O.k. that is deep.“

„Don't be silly. I wouldn't sleep with you unless -,“ she said.

„Unless? I had a shower?“ He asked curiously sniffing his armpits.

„No. Stupid. You know.“ she answered

„I do?“ he asked.

„Yes, unless I loved you.“

„And do you?“

„What?“

„Love me? “



„See. There is that sign. What did it say? Prague? I couldn't really read it. Could you? All that talking, I simply cannot concentrate. Can we stop it? Please. Left or right? Left or right? Quick. Too late.“

She was trembling. Greg brushed against her arm as if to soothe her.

„You're on the right track, don't worry, love.“

She glanced at him sideways and he smiled.

5

Thursday

Arrival

Greg was so much fun to be with. Catherine's shattered soul had found shelter in the womb of her new Peugeot, a male twin incubating alongside. They couldn't stop talking and laughing and rolling their eyes at each other, their umbilical cords continuously tangling, tickling, tethered to whatever radio station was bubbling loudest within their newly found universe. So, when they finally, it was just after midnight, got to Praha Centrum Exit, it was much too soon. Premature delivery. For a while she had forgotten what she was: a mourning, divorced mother, -she had outgrown her fetal stage, her infancy and her adolescence long ago, she was even past motherhood-, and she was wanted for murdering her own daughter: On the run, from the police, from her own grief, from the riddle of a handbag lost and found. She was past everything.

Being with Greg had been like taking a break from her very self, like getting away from it all. It was such wonderful bliss to forget about everything as the kilometres rolled by endlessly beneath their feet. Well -, if only they did roll along endlessly. Now, so it seemed, they had arrived. Prague was looming out there in a dark and icy night. Not that she could see a lot just yet, but its compelling urban presence forced itself upon them brutally. She stared out the window, aware that there was indeed an exterior world and yet she was blind and fully closed towards it, reaching in vain for the walls of her cocoon for safe keeping. If only they did contain her just a little longer, if only they did keep her safe. She was aware that she was about to arrive, embark on that journey properly; her point of no return was just around the corner. What destination would that be? Certainly not the climax she had hoped for. Had she hoped for that: a climax?

Hours before they had stopped at a cheap fast food place on the freeway, wolfed down some stale hamburgers. Catherine had complained about the meat (too dry), the salad (too limp) and the ketchup (too sour), but Greg couldn't be bothered. There was nothing really that was bothering him, when, in return, there were numerous and important things that were bothering *her*; the horrible fast food being only one she shared. There was the stuff she kept from Greg, the real worries, the sorrows of a more essential nature: when the police would pull her over (too soon), when she would end up in prison. But what Catherine dreaded most was when they'd have to part. When it all came to an end.

As they left the freeway Catherine felt she couldn't go on, she couldn't outwit them all, not the Swiss police, not the Eurofeds, not all these cameras on her way, observing her, seeking her out, relentlessly streaming her image into the net and onto

the lap of the mighty and capable forces looking for her, tracking her continuously, hunting her down. What she had mistaken for fearlessness and strength was really only folly and such stupidity. Carelessness in its worst form, bordering dangerously onto indifference and a special form of madness only she was capable of. Challenging the all-powerful, the omniscient: She could as well have gone diving with the sharks, the killer whale, the deep sea leeches that craved her warm blood while pulling her down into the freezing depths of the ocean, onto the darkest sea floor; The Mariana Trench. Yes, she was exaggerating. Yes. She was being silly, the silliest. If only time came to a halt right now. Forever be in this car, forever laugh it all away and forget: All of it. *Impossible*. She shivered.

Greg headed straight for the city centre and then he asked the question she had feared all the way long.

“So. Where does your sister live? You are staying with her, right?”

She fell silent. Catherine had no idea where Leah lived, nor did she really want to stay with her.

“Let’s drop you off first. I will find my way ‘round. Don’t worry.”

“Come on. I know Prague so well. It’s my city. Where does she live?” Catherine didn’t answer.

“Really, I can take you and then take the metro or a taxi. It’s your car after all,” he insisted.

“No, don’t worry. Let’s go to your place first.”

“Ok,” then rather abruptly he added,

“If that is what you want.”

“No Latin quote?”

He shook his head. They both fell silent.

"How far away is your place?"

"Not far. We are nearly there." Again, they fell silent and then, out of the blue, he said,

"I would like to see you again. Would you -? I mean -." He broke off, hesitating for a moment, not sure how to continue. But the confusion was mutual.

A date? The two of them? Impossible. Of course, she would like to see him again, but she *couldn't* see him again. She had to find her daughter's murderer. She had to clear her name. That was what she was here for. How could she even begin to -.

"Maybe we could go out for dinner? Tomorrow? There's that one place near the Charles Bridge on Krizovnickà. It is really nice. I'd love to take you there. I've known the owner for years and he makes the best gyros you've ever eaten anywhere.

"I thought gyros was a Greek disk." Catherine responded lamely. She wasn't keen at all on going out.

"That's exactly why. Prague is such an international city, you won't believe it if you haven't seen it for so long. Greek, Mexican, Hungarian, anything you want. Come on".

"Sorry, Greg. I can't."

"Can't or don't want to?"

"Both," she said.

"Liar".

"I am not lying."

"No?" She didn't respond.

"I don't believe you. A posse ad esse."

"Oh now more Latin. I still don't speak it." She groaned.

"From possibility to actuality. Maybe you'll change your mind."

"Look, I really can't. I won't change my mind."

"Because of your sister? Is she so possessive?"

"No, of course not."

"So, there is someone else? You said there wasn't," he glanced at her surreptitiously.

"Greg, let's not make this harder than it is."

"See you're finding this hard too. It doesn't have to be. It could be so easy."

"Come on. You know it can't," Catherine was playing with a strand of her hair.

"Why not?" He smiled at her.

"Well."

"If you really think -"

"No. Don't say anything. I think we should leave it at this. Really. There must be an end -"

"Before it even started?"

"Come on. You know we can't -"

"Ok, I am capitulating. Let's change the subject. So -. This sister of yours. What is she like?"

They were proceeding towards the city centre and traffic became more intense. Catherine wanted to lie, lie about Leah, about the long sad story; but somehow she couldn't. She had run out of ideas, so instead and to her great exasperation, she found herself telling him the truth.

"Well, Greg, I wish I knew where I was staying. My sister and I don't get on very well, she doesn't even know I am coming".

"She doesn't? But you said -." Greg lifted an eyebrow.

"We are not really on speaking terms."

“You are not?”

She shook her head, and then fell silent.

“It’s been so long since we last spoke. I can’t even remember when it was.”



“That bad?”

He glanced at her, Catherine sighed and looked down. Nervously, she began playing with her fingers, scratching at her nails as if to remove some imaginary nail polish. She was glad he was doing the driving in that maze of Prague’s suburbs: There was a red light and he had to stop. He looked at Catherine intensely while he was shifting the gears to come to a halt. She tried to focus on the pedestrians, there were few at this time of the day. A man in a black coat was crossing the street, half running. Her attention was drawn to a young woman pushing her bike. She looked cold and sleepy. The way her bags were slung around her shoulders made Catherine think of Eva. All of a sudden, the memories came back, sweeping over her like a whirlwind, her eyes at once watery. *Break was over*. It would catch up with her, it already was, it already had. There was no escape, she had to leave Greg out of this. It wasn’t fair. He deserved better.

“Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine.” She said, nearly choking on her own tears.

“Sure”, he answered, raising his eyebrows. The car accelerated.

She could tell, he didn’t believe a single word of what she was saying. On the contrary, she had awakened, aroused his innate instincts to help and protect the weak and the feeble, women in particular. Look at her: exemplary in being weak, feeble, in

need of help. She did depend on the kindness of a stranger indeed. When she and Harvey had separated, she had sworn to herself that she would never again depend on a man, and now this: At the infinite mercy of a male predator. Warily, she was shaking her body as if she could get rid of the strong feelings that were overwhelming her. Shake it all out before it began to stick on her. There was no way she would yield to him. She didn't need protection.

"Really, it's gonna be ok. I've been here before."

"Where? In Prague. Or on this planet?"

"In Prague. Come on."

"When? Twenty years ago? Thirty?"

"No, seriously, Why don't you just drive yourself home and then I'll find my way round," If only she had thought of googling some hostels instead of googling abortion clinics. If only she had googled Leah's address. Anything that would be of use now.

"Come on, Catherine. Don't be so stubborn. Let me help you," he repeated.

"No, I don't need your help. If we hadn't met I'd also be on my own." She protested, wiping her itching eyes again.

"But we have met," he insisted, "and I'm sure you're tired now. See, you can hardly keep your eyes open. And obviously, you are upset too. Catherine, why don't you stay with me for a night or two? Then you can go and find your hostel in the morning when you are feeling better. I have a three-bedroom apartment and you'll have your own private bathroom. Come on. Don't worry so much." It took her a moment to respond.

"That is really very nice of you, Greg, but I -,"

"But? You were saying?"

She smiled at him, not sure what to say or make of his generosity. The offer was indeed tempting. They'd never find her in a private apartment, not if she kept a low profile. Maybe she would get away. Maybe she could indeed find Eva's murderer from a safe base such as Greg's apartment. It was worth a try.

"Come on. You drove me all the way from Vienna to Prague, let me return the favour."

"Well, Greg, you did most of the driving yourself",

"In *your* car."

"So?"

"And paid for the petrol. And the hamburgers. And the coke."

"Some of the petrol"

"Ok, *some* of it and yet -", she countered with her last strength.

"I can't. I really don't want your pity."

"Come on. Catherine, don't be silly, all I am offering you is a bed and some food".

"A bed?"

"Your own bed. To sleep in. Alone. That is it. I promise. Nothing more. I insist." She sighed out loud.

"Although," he looked at her cheekily.

"Although what?"

"I am not sure there is any food left. I remember the fridge was quite empty when I left." That made her laugh out loud.

"No Greg, really -, but thanks. I can't."

It was her last try, her last attempt at resisting, before she'd give in. And he knew it, he sensed the walls coming down between them, revealing her vulnerability, revealing her defence so poorly outlaid; how it was all crumbling to fine dust, mere

specks dispersed within, without - everywhere. From up high he could see: She wouldn't hold out much longer, Catherine, Queen of the Cathocoheanian Empire, last and first of her kind was obtusely oscillating. Her army of good intentions was fleeing the battlefield at great speed, the many strapping soldiers defecting faster to the other side than the enemy could receive and rearm them.

"Come on Catherine. Why, why not? Give me one good reason. You keep repeating yourself". *What the heck*. She couldn't really think of any good reasons why she shouldn't stay with Greg. His laughter made her tremble with anticipation; its ring was precious and captivating, -fetching in its own way-; genuine and warm, luscious and dreamy. Endless pairs of adjectives came to her mind shooting past her visual cortex at such speed that she didn't even have time to take them all in. How much longer could she dream on? How much longer could she shut out reality? *Quelle Merde*.

"No, really Greg. You know. It could lead to things."

She was half teasing him, half revealing her fear or her desire, she could hardly tell which. With Eva dead for such a short time it was all so totally confusing. Libido and Thanatos in such a close embrace, it was revolting. She was fighting them off both, empty-handed, like a beggar, like a refugee, like someone really, really desperate.

"What exactly do you mean? Lead to what things?"

He stretched the last word and she felt her cheeks blush as he looked at her inquiringly. She couldn't even remember the last time she had blushed. When had that happened? Primary school? And there was no apparent reason now to feel ashamed; he had been such a gentleman, such a man of honour. Was he trying to find out whether she fantasized about him? If he did, then yes, she was, she did, she had -. Fantasized. Coveted him. It had to stop right here. She wouldn't allow it - would not.

He gave her that fantastic, out of a trashy novel, smile and she herself reacted strictly out-of-a-trashy-novel heroine like.

"No, I mean," she stammered, making no sense at all.

"It won't, I promise," he whispered gently and she could but stare at the slight parting of his lips. *What would it be like -. No. Focus.*

"It won't what?" She challenged him, trying to appear innocent.

"Whatever it is you fear it may lead to: It won't. Won't happen. I promise that is the truth. *Veritas omnia vincit.*" He looked straight ahead at the traffic in front of him. Deadpan and very sober. Very handsome. She sighed. Exasperated.

"I still don't speak Latin, Monk."

"The Truth conquers it all. And don't call me Monk. It sounds rude."

"Ok. As you wish your Highness."

"And don't call me your Highness either"

"Father?" She teased him, trying to lighten it all up and gain the upper hand again.

"Your Royal Father?"

He scowled at her.

"Your Heavenly Father?"

"Shut up."

She giggled.



It was indeed best to shut up. What should else should she say? *Veritas omnia vincit.* Of course. The truth: Grand concept, a worthy and desirable notion beyond doubt. And yet, the truth was the last she wanted or needed or sought. The truth

involved her being accused of murdering Eva. The truth was her handbag was found at her daughter's deathbed. The truth involved a trial, a sentence, her destruction and downfall. Anything, but the truth was welcome.

"We're basically here."

"We are?"

"Giving you a Heads up."

"Ok. Thanks."

"Come in and have some coffee, come on."

"Ok. I'll come."

"For coffee?"

"Coffee. And?"

She shrugged.

"See, I told you. Don't worry. It'll be fine. Promise. You'll like it here."

It wasn't much later that he stopped the Peugeot in front of his place on Jaromirova. Competently and with great ease, he squeezed her car in an extremely small parking space. He was confident that there was enough room to muscle in the Peugeot and - what a miracle: there was. How would she ever get out again? The street itself was rather wide and there were several shops that were not open at this time of the day. The carelessly slurred graffiti on the closed metal blinds gave the place a cosmopolitan touch, or was it just poverty and desperation reaching out through the verge of the dark? The scribbling wasn't very sophisticated. The same boring letters anyone could do anywhere on this planet until the very last Take-Away-Stop at the deadest end of the universe. Globalized Bullshit. F and U and C and -. Catherine got out and stretched her legs. *You might need some more words to take on the smart assess of*

the world than a four letter word. You dicks. At least that was a five letter word. D, I, C, K, S: One, two, three, four, five.

Her knees hurt when she walked around the car to get to the pavement. But the air was wonderfully crisp; fresh and cold. She took a deep breath. Arriving wasn't too bad. When he withdrew the car keys and handed them over to her, their fingers touched. Quickly, she let the keyring glide into the pocket of her coat, lowering her gaze to hide her confusion. She knew she was going to stay the night, and he knew too. It was indeed the safest option Catherine could think of, now that it was getting really late, or early. Early or late. Who had said it again? Her mind travelled back the many miles she had come and she had to smile, remembering the two awkward police officers from last night. She remembered how their voices reverberated in the sleepy hollow of her kitchen when they had delivered their final blow: *Eva dead. Eva gone, murdered.* Had they really said she was murdered or had Catherine just assumed the worst in the course of action that followed? Would she ever be able to think of something else than that awful, awful sentence? *Eva dead.* It was sentence enough for all her peccability, all her shortcomings. And yet, it might only be the beginning. What else was coming?

The bloody handbag. How on earth had her handbag got to the crime scene? If only she had paid more attention to the other passengers on the Giant Ferris Wheel. If only she had kept an eye on them. If only Eva was still alive and they could have gone to see *Schönbrunn Castle*. And, what was more, and most important: If only she wasn't here. No- that was wrong. She really wanted to be here. This was exactly where she wanted to be. Greg took her bags from the Peugeot and hung them over his shoulder. Time to get moving.

“It is not safe to leave anything in the car,” he said as if to apologize for the gesture. She nodded absently and followed him like a wilful lamb to the slaughterer. Catherine had given in. Come what may, she would master it. With a forceful jolt, he opened the large wooden front door to the house where he lived and they entered a yard, which was dark and ice cold. High moist walls were enclosing an open space, -some sort of a patio underneath the house- and they had to enter through another outside door *inside* the yard to get to the staircase. All looked very shabby and run down. Catherine felt an enormous weight upon her shoulders. She could smell death, she could smell decay and she felt mourning creep all over her. The dirty walls stared at her with a hundred empty eyes, jagged blotches where the water had been soaking through.

He had lied to her. He had never been a monk. He had never inherited any money and given it away. Hairdresser? Police? All of a sudden she doubted everything he had ever told her. After all, he was a total stranger. What if he turned, pushed her down the stairs? What on earth was she doing here? Why didn't she turn back? Right now. Why on earth was she following him? What if he raped her? What if he killed her? What if she ended up dead as well?

She began to sweat, her hands icy and cold. Should she turn and run into the night, take the Peugeot and simply drive? If she got out of the narrow parking lot, where could she go? Where would she go? This wouldn't end well. The police were bound to find her. She would get completely lost. Completely, but then: What did it matter? What did anything matter? Her feet were cold and she listened to the sound her soles made on the staircase: flapping light sounds, when she should have worn warm boots for her adventure. Why hadn't she taken them? Why the golden white Nike sneakers? Ridiculous. What tribute could she pay to Eva now that she was dead?

Eva was dead. She could as well have taken her own warm lamb wool boots, in fact she should have worn moon boots. That would have been the sensible thing to do. DShe would have to buy new boots as soon as she could. Catherine continued walking, focusing on her breathing. How much further up was that apartment? She was nearly suffocating from the arduous exercise.

When they finally reached the floor where he lived, she began to loosen up. Walking up the many stairs had cleared her mind. Physical exercise always helped her get a clearer picture of what was at stake. Everything would be alright, she kept repeating it to herself. Greg found the key in the pocket of his black elegant cashmere coat and opened the door. He switched on the light and she saw the immaculate white woollen carpet first where he put her bags down. It was spotless. Did murderers keep their apartment that clean? That pristine? To put their victims suitcases on spotless, holy grounds? She had to stop this line of thinking, it was ridiculous. She had to stop right now. *Silly.*

Greg and Catherine

Greg lived alone, she could tell intuitively by the clothes that hang in the wardrobe. Catherine immediately took off her shoes and felt the warmth of the wool on her toes. When they entered his place Catherine smelled something that reminded her of incense. Was he still performing religious rituals? She was amazed at how orderly he was and how tastefully everything was chosen. The pictures, the furniture, the carpets, - all very modern-, matched perfectly with some well-chosen antiques. The place looked extremely expensive. After all, he had to have *some* money.

When he entered the living room, she could see from the hall that it was kept in olive green with a black leather sofa and two slender glass tables. She surmised there was expensive art on the wall but there wasn't enough light to see the canvasses properly. From afar, she could hardly see the colours (green or grey or brownish?) even less recognize the artist. She didn't want to ask where they were from. He'd tell

her those were Picassos given to his grandmother in Spain because she had breastfed little Pablo as his wet nurse when he was a baby. Catherine couldn't give him unlimited credit for all his wondrous stories. She wasn't that naive. The curtains in light moss green were open and looked extremely fragile and translucent. The dim light of the December moon fell in the room, and she could see that the curtains matched the emerald carpet perfectly. It was only after closing the them that he came back towards her and switched on the light. He looked at her directly. She evaded his gaze and looked around, soaking it all in. There was a huge stereo in the corner and a beamer. No doilies, no pictures of any saints, no crucifixes, no more traces of religious rituals or affiliations. She was relieved. Everything looked neat and clean in the green light of two large beautifully crafted Tiffany floor lamps. She hardly dared step on the carpet, but he made her sit down:

“Shall I make us some tea or would you rather be shown to your room.” He said with an air of extravagance. All of a sudden she felt how extremely tired she was after travelling so many hours without proper rest.

“You sound like the receptionist at the Plaza.” Catherine pulled one of the cushions onto her lap and leaned back.

“But I am, Madame. Not the Plaza though, but the *Gran Hotel*”, he joked and made her feel at ease again. She had really been impressed by his place, especially as there was such a stunning contrast to the outside of the house and the staircase leading to his door. However, the lightness of their many conversations in the car had suddenly vanished into the warm air of the living room.

They were two total strangers, but the familiarity that had grown between them in the last couple of hours wasn't enough to last a whole night. Ending up in Greg's

apartment was suddenly awkward. It felt strange, at this time of the day, to be alone with a man. That man. And he must have thought the same for as far as Catherine could see, he too was assessing her. She still found him so very attractive. Now that Greg was home, he blended in formidably with his expensive surroundings. It was a pleasure to watch him move. When he talked, there was so much energy about him and she couldn't help but look repeatedly at his strong hands, the thick hair, his muscular body.

When she used to work as a lawyer, she had never admired men for their good looks. At work, men were usually opponents, an obstacle, the well-groomed, well-trained enemy. They were not paying up, not behaving themselves, beating their wives, their lovers their children, their best friends, abducting their toddlers, shaking their babies until they were dead, all sorts of things they were guilty of. If they weren't opponents, but her clients instead they were usually violent, drunk or drugged, or violent, drunk *and* drugged. They endangered themselves or their loved ones. They were a nuisance. A pain in her ass. Harvey had been different, plus he hadn't been a client, but she didn't want to think of him now. And yet, she did.

"I'd love a cup of tea, Greg," Catherine said.

"Black or fruit?" He asked, standing next to the door.

She was going to say, *green, given the colour of the room*, but then switched to "Fruit," not wanting to appear choosy. Greg disappeared into the kitchen. Catherine sat up and took a deep breath. She had to relax. Running her fingers through her hair, she realized briefly she needed to wash it. But there were so many things she needed to do these days: She needed first and foremost to find Eva's murderer before she was arrested on the evidence pointing towards her. And she had to tell Greg about it. About

Eva. About the bag. The whole story. She couldn't keep it all behind the bush forever, she was too honest and down to earth a person. No one wanted authenticity these days, but to her it was life, it was who she was. - Thing was, she didn't really know how to broach it all. Thing was, she had kind of lost that part of herself too.

Greg came back with a tray carrying a white china teapot and two cups, white sugar, lemon slices and some berry cake that looked incredibly dry. He smiled at her then he put the tray down and sat next to her. When he began pouring her some tea, she couldn't hold back any longer. This was the moment. She had to tell him about Eva. She had to get back to being herself.

"Greg, there is something I haven't told you," Catherine started feebly.

"I am sure there is so much I don't know yet. Don't you worry," he put the china cup in front of her, still smiling.

"Sugar?" He asked. Catherine shook her head.

"Shoot. I am all ears," he looked at her, keenly.

Catherine gazed back, but the words wouldn't come up, they were stuck in her throat, her guts, her intestines. She really needed to speak now or she would postpone it again.

"There is something you must know," she tried again, getting a better grip on herself. Her voice was wavering. He sat still, pouring his own tea, listening attentively to what was to come. Some sort of a confession? Catherine looked at the glass table, looked through the glass avoiding his eyes.

"I have a daughter," Catherine nearly started crying for she should have said, "I had a daughter."



"Are you alright?"

She shook her head, biting her lips. He was just as confused. If she was going to talk about Eva he better show a natural reaction, make sure she didn't suspect he knew anything about Eva. He had seen Eva, in the shack, in that blood. It had been awful. *Quick. More questions. Questions were always good, questions brought disruption.*

"Catherine, where is she? You are not running away from home, are you? Is she all by herself? Is someone looking after her? How old is she?" *What a hypocrite he was. "Is she all by herself?" Of course she was. In her damn coffin.*

"No, no," that's not it", Catherine couldn't speak though she would have wanted to but there was such a knot in her throat and then the tears came up again. Another sleepless night nearly over, made her sorrow increase exponentially and she could hardly stop sobbing. He didn't move over to touch her, no hug, no stroking of the hair, no touch. He wouldn't exploit her predicament. She respected him for this as much as she longed for his closeness. When she came round again, from her emotional fit, he sat opposite her, still stirring his tea. The sugar must have dissolved long ago. He looked quiet and complacent, completely trustworthy, monastic. Then he spoke. She could hear him clearly his voice was carried across to her as if from within her own brain, it was comforting; it helped soothe the pain.

"Catherine, what happened? Do you want to tell me? You don't have to. You can -. You know -."

"I know," she said," but I want to."

"So?" He asked. She sobbed again and shivered:

"She is dead."

“Catherine, I am so sorry. I really am.” He stopped right there. How could he ever tell her he was the detective investigating the case? How could he ever tell her he had seen her beloved Eva in all this blood? How could he ever tell her he had been the one who had found Catherine’s handbag hidden away under the bed? With all her credentials in it. Passport. ID. Train Pass. All her clutter. All her stuff. How could he ever tell her that he still suspected her of murdering her own daughter at the back of his mind? It was possible. The handbag was so clearly pointing towards her, placing her at Eva’s deathbed at the time of her death. The timing was bad. The handbag. Bad. Really, really bad.

“I am really so sorry.” He said in a simulated matter-of-fact tone, glad she was too overwhelmed by her own emotions to notice his sudden commotion. Catherine was pressing her fist upon her lips. Her lower lip had become thin, drained of blood and life, the edges of her fine labellum lifeless and frozen. He looked at her, trying to appear genuinely shocked and alarmed by her unforeseen revelations. She couldn’t continue, as if muteness had struck her and neither did he make a move; lying low, under cover.

They found themselves in a conversational deadlock, neither of them had the key to. It felt uncomfortable, as if hanging over a hot fire that was building up fast. He was the first to discover a way out.

“Catherine, I am so sorry. When...” She interrupted him:

“They say, I’ve killed her.” She burst out.

“Who says that?” He looked at her tenderly. She shrugged.

“Police, Press, all of them.”

“Haven’t you seen the articles?” He shook his head silently. Then he said:

"And have you done it?" He couldn't continue. *God, this was getting him into such a shitload of shit.* Falling in love with Louisa seemed like a piece of cake in comparison. At least Louisa and him had been in on this together. But now. Was he interviewing her? Without informing her of her rights? What was he doing? He had to end it right here.

"What? Have I what -?"

"Killed her?"

He was trying to keep his calm, his balance. His mind was racing. This wasn't really the interview setting he should have established. All this was most unprofessional, it was a private moment and it wasn't. As if the camera in your laptop was switched on unintentionally while you were -. He was *so* caught in between his professional and his private world. Unbearable. This might cost him his job and it might cost him Catherine's trust.

"No, my God, no, Greg, how can you think that?" She looked ever so formidable. What a woman. What strength. What determination. But he had to focus on what she was saying. Yes, right, how could he even begin to think that she had killed her?

He was going to shout back at the top of his lungs: *"Because I found your handbag. Why did you dump it there? You stupid, stupid beautiful woman. Why did you forget your handbag on the crime site? Your daughter in all this blood. Why for God's Sake? Couldn't you have taken the bloody bag with you? Before you ran. Before you got to me.* But he checked himself, Catherine was so upset and still -, she looked like a million dollars in her grief, her desperation, her wretchedness and genuine agony. She was larger than life, larger than anything he knew. He didn't dare think of her when she was happy and well. She

would outshine everyone and everything. *Would that be when he came to visit when she was locked behind the big bars? The church had been relatively easy to break free from, but prison? Prison?*

Catherine couldn't bear his eyes on her any longer. She got up, stumbled over the glass table and lost her balance. His cup of tea, which was still full, spilled over. Why hadn't he drunk it after having stirred it so passionately? She ran out to the hallway.

"Catherine, don't go." He shouted after her then thinking the better of it he added loudly so that she could still hear him:

"It's the third door on the right." She was gone.



Catherine staggered into the room and threw herself upon the French bed in Greg's guestroom, she cried. Again. She couldn't stop until she finally fell asleep fully dressed. She was exhausted. Weird dreams haunted her. Once she sat in a cable car when it really was a flying circus waggon. She was in the Austrian Alps only in a bikini, while a snow storm was raging outside. They had to stop the cable car and Catherine sat there all by herself, when all of a sudden Eva and Brigid appeared. They stayed with her for a while, Brigid holding a coat she should have taken. But she couldn't reach for it, her limbs were frozen. Brigid was too far away and so was Eva and all of a sudden they were both gone again and she sat in a car speeding upon an icy highway. Greg was sitting next to her, laughing loud at some triviality. Then, the

police stopped her and when she looked at the policeman closely, she could see it was Harvey looking at her severely from behind his beret. *Harvey.*

She woke up panting, her throat was dry. Catherine was so overwhelmed by the adventures of her trip to Prague that in fact she woke several times, but always went back to sleep immediately thereafter. Once she was awake enough to take off her jeans and crawl under the sheets. If they'd find her here, there was nothing she could do about it now. She was too tired to run, too tired to hide. Covered in cold sweat and her hair clinging nastily to her scalp she woke in the morning.

What time was it? The next thoughts that came to her mind were about Greg: Will he really help her? Who is he anyway? What if the Swiss knew she was in Prague? What if Brigid had told them? Of course, she would have told them. Brigid would have told them everything by now. Not good. Not good at all. She closed her eyes again.



Greg was in a state of total shock and disorientation. Catherine had evoked some feelings in him he didn't remember they still existed. On the drive to Prague his pulse had been racing constantly and his heart was pounding like mad. It was hard to concentrate, even close to insanely dangerous. Something had broken up within him, something that had been stowed away for so long and was now pouring out. He was dripping, he was leaking, bursting. The dam had given way and there was a river where there had been a desert. She was like a wild lioness: shy and fierce and he wasn't sure he could ever tame her. And tame her he didn't want to. On the contrary. He wanted her to go free, roam the wilderness they had created in unison, the unique

world they shared. Guilty or not. He didn't want her to go to prison. No custody. No jail. And this would, of course and foreseeably, cause a myriad of problems. And a million headaches. To him, to Adna, to Catherine. It was going to be headachmania with the occasional brain splatter when it all spilt out and ran over. And it would, it will. Spill over.

If the Prague Police caught her, she was going to be in serious trouble. That handbag was really pointing against her. And then she would be handed over to the Swiss, extradited. And then? Prison? Death Row? They didn't have the death penalty in Switzerland? Did they? Not with the Red Cross and so? They wouldn't kill people for murdering their daughters? But then, you never knew. The Swiss were crazy. All that cleanliness. He couldn't think in full sentences anymore. He was confused indeed, tired, agitated and so awfully overwhelmed by a strange feeling he couldn't really name. Or place. Or Hell. Others would say he had fallen in love, again, they would say: "Finally. It was about time". He'd say: *No way. How could it be?* Louisa was the love of his life. There was no one to take Louisa's place.

He cleaned the table after Catherine had spilled his cup of tea and then didn't know what to do. Sleeping was out of the question. He leafed through some of his American Sailing magazines, fully aware that he would never own his own sailing boat. He had made his decision and given away that money his family had handed down to him before he could fritter it all away. A move that usually he did not regret, but sometimes, such as now, he felt a certain sadness creep over him. All that money. As if it could make up for everything that had gone wrong, as if it could have made him happy. It couldn't, he knew, he couldn't have enjoyed it. Taking it all, wouldn't

have been in line with who he was. Not turning in a suspect now, same thing; not in line with who he was. He didn't know what to do.

What if she was guilty? It couldn't be. It simply couldn't be. He was so convinced of her innocence, but then -. He *wanted* to be convinced of it, not matter the circumstances, no matter the evidence. He was blinded by her spectacular appearance, her good-natured charm, her splendid, eloquent way with words. A lawyer. Usually, the obvious was the obvious. And she was obviously - the handbag. He couldn't think clearly and he knew it. What a mess. He had to try and get some sleep. It had been quite a day. He lay on his bed with his clothes still on and fell asleep immediately.



Later, after he had woken and showered, Greg washed the cups and looked, again, into the fridge. It was only to realize *again*, that there was nothing inside besides the meagre leftovers of the dry cake he had already served the night before. What could he provide for breakfast? There was coffee. That was it.

He should have slept longer, his brain still didn't function properly. Somehow it was on automatic return, in an endless loop that involved coffee and coffee, when all he really thought was Catherine and Catherine. He needed - yeah, right. Coffee. He had to get into his daily routine. By all means. How could he pretend nothing had happened within the last 24 hours? He really needed that coffee now. Slowly, he pressed the button of the mirror-polished machine.

There was no way, he could go back to headquarters to see Adna. Not just now. He couldn't face his boss when the prime suspect of their current and most pressing murder case investigation was safe and snug, asleep in his apartment in one of his

beds, not his bed exactly, but hey, who would care for the subtle difference? Surely, he could take the day off from policing? He hadn't lied when he had said that he was a hairdresser. Tousling somebody else's hair and fiddling around with the scissors was a profession he had learned when young. His dear mother had shown him, taught him all there was to know about the trade when he grew up in Minsk.

When he left the monastery Július, his nephew, had taken him in, helping him and Louisa to set up a life, to get started when they had nothing to get started with. Július, even changed the name of his saloon from Culus Jaesar, a glorious name, to *JULIO&MONK* which seemed more befitting to Július at the time. Ever since Greg had worked in Július's saloon, first full time, later, when he had graduated with honours from the Police Academy of the Czech Republic, on his days off or at weekends. The illustrious clientele of Július's saloon, made Greg forget what else seemed important: doing someone else's hair, it always distracted him from his non existing love life, his demanding work, Louisa's painful death and the other demons that kept haunting him. He couldn't go to work. He couldn't face all the evidence. A peaceful day at *JULIO&MONK* was exactly what he needed to clear his head. Distraction helped. Policing was for another day.

Before he left, he knocked at Catherine's door.

"Catherine", he said cautiously.

It was still dark when he left the apartment but Prague's streets were already busy. The New Year had brought such cold from the North and some snow. Polar winds howled through the wide streets, freezing your fresh breath in the pristine morning air, hurting your teeth when you gasped. What the tourists found romantic, gave him the creeps. He would take a cab to *JULIO&MONK*. Let Adna wait, let her

think he had had an accident or, what came closer to the truth, lost his mind and lost it completely. Most likely he even had. How could he even begin to explain all this? It was all so very unlike Strazmistr Gregorovich Miroslav Shats. This was madness. This was crazy. He put his hands deep into his pockets and savoured that smile that began spreading all over his face.



Her feet felt swollen, heavy and sore and so did her back; stiff from all the sitting and her throat; itchy from all the talking. Catherine was thirsty. Still exhausted despite the rest. The knock at her door was a welcome sound beckoning her from her claustrophobic realm of weird fantasies and extravagant wild dreams.

“Catherine?” she heard Greg’s sonorous voice behind the closed white door. He couldn’t possibly come in. Quickly Catherine hid her feet under the white, heavy feather blanket.

“Yes? I’m good,” she answered hesitatingly, trying to sound awake.

“Ok, listen. I am on my way out. I’ll see you in the evening”.

“Ok.” she shouted and relaxed, then she lifted the blanket and looked musingly upon her toes. Where was he going?

“There’s coffee, but no bread, no croissants. Sorry”, he added: “and I left a key for you on the kitchen table.” Catherine couldn’t remember the last time a man had left her a key for his flat or made her some coffee.

“Ok, thanks,” she answered.

“It is all on the table. In the kitchen. I must run now. Sorry. You’ll be alright?” He continued.

"Sure. Don't worry about me."

"Ok."

She looked at the door and wished he'd open it. Why didn't he just stick his head in?

She would have loved to see his eyes, then she hid her toes again.

" I will be back around five," he added.

"Sure, no problem. Just go". Her voice croaked and she wondered whether she should ask him where he went, but then decided against it and shouted:

"You'll be there? Right? You are not going to find accommodation, are you?"

"We shall see."

"Oh come on."

"Bye. Have a good day," Catherine made sure her voice sounded firm as it had in court. A lawyer's voice, professional and calm, reassuring when the worst was about to strike.

"Bye, you too", he answered then he thought the better of it.

"You should come and see me."

"See you where?"

"At *JULIO&MONK*, Michalska. It is in the old town".

"Sorry, I'll never be able to remember all that", she laughed.

" I got the monk part, Monk." She stretched the last word.

"It's called *JULIO&MONK*. *JULIO&MONK*."

"Yes, I get it. And what is this *JULIO&MONK* place? - Monk." He was talking in riddles.

"Don't call me Monk. Lawyer woman. It is -

“Lawyer woman?” She stared at the closed door, her head tilted. She was Lawyer Woman, at best, without the w.

“See. It isn’t nice to call people names. So stop it. It’s this place where I work. I’ll leave the address on the kitchen table, just in case.” She heard him laugh.

“I could do your hair.”

“Sure.” She didn’t really know what else to say.

Catherine heard him walk down the aisle. He was whistling. It sounded like a tune that came out if you strangled the Queen of the Night with your belt and made her gag when she wanted to do her bit of the famous *Zauberflöte Aria*. The door went and then he turned the key in the latch. Silence. She was on her own. She took a deep breath, leaned back, then lay down, only to hole herself up cosily in her soft feather blanket. Here she was safe, here no one would find her, a transient moment of peace and relaxation engulfed her. Surely, it would bring more sleep and more weird dreams. She smiled. Let the pictures come and rest her weary mind. Any distraction was welcome.



When Catherine woke up a couple of hours later, peace had gone. Instead there was such emptiness in her head and blood vessels that she could barely sit up. Her blood pressure had collapsed completely. To her great distress a lazy numbness had spread languidly all over her, making her feel dizzy and disorientated, worsening the racing of her heart and adding momentum to the feeling of hunger that was increasingly predominant. She tried to remember what had happened last night. Greg.

Had she been crying? She had told him of Eva. That much she remembered. She had told him she was wanted. A wave of regret rushed over her. What on earth made her share her secret with a total stranger? That secret was sacred: It mustn't be shared. She must have been out of her mind. What if the police were waiting outside the door? He had locked her in. Was there a key? What if she couldn't get out? Her heart was racing.

From afar, she could hear the busy streets of Prague. There were trucks and cars and screeching trams rushing past with no end and in between one could hear the wailing sirens of police, fire brigade or ambulance. She couldn't tell them apart but they didn't all sound the same. When she finally found her watch, which she had placed on an elegant wooden dresser before the window, she realized that it was already past 10am. How totally exhausted she must have been to sleep so long and so deep? All these strange and disturbing dreams. The trip and its excitement had worked its mephitic drug into her blood and she still wasn't quite herself yet. The adventures of the previous days had tired and stirred her at once. Eva dead. She still couldn't believe it. It couldn't be. Would denial help?

The mix of emotions that had overcome her was too unaccustomed to grasp and left her utterly confused. She turned and stared at the ceiling, feeling completely empty and alone. The key. Where had he left it? Was she a prisoner yet? Her eyes fell on the spare set of the Peugeot's car keys that had fallen onto the chair. Absent-mindedly, she picked them up and walked to the kitchen. The key to the front door was indeed there, on the kitchen table. Only after she had made sure that it fit the front door, she showered. There was a way out, at least out of the apartment. One thing less to worry about.

After a hot shower Catherine put on a fresh pair of jeans and a grey woollen jumper. It felt awkward to have something that reminded her of home. When she smelt the sleeve she could detect a faint smell of her own apartment back home. A place that no longer seemed to exist. It had evaporated into some remote past she could only remember under great distress and with enormous difficulty. It seemed so far away, it was so long ago that she had been home. Home for good. Really home.

She touched her bag and felt its texture. Her second best handbag. How she missed her Akris bag that had ended up at Eva's side. She physically missed it; there was an ache in her body that she couldn't shake off, couldn't get rid of as if the bag was a limb that now was missing and still sending electric impulses along those nerves to hurt the brain deeply. The bag Harvey had bought her. Harvey. Why couldn't they have worked it out? Their marriage? Their problems? Why had he left her? Her and Eva. Harvey had gone, long ago. And now Eva was gone too. No, she wouldn't cry again, she wouldn't permit it, - wouldn't have it.

She rummaged frantically through the bag's contents and found Eva's phone at the bottom; the phone which Brigid had recovered from Mascha. Catherine looked again at the last number Eva had called before she had left: +420 251 639 728. No one had answered, so the number never showed up on the phone company records. No one had had to pay for that call.

Brigid had also sent a message.

"On my way to Munich to get P. Love. B." Catherine clicked the message away and looked at the ceiling. Brigid was on her way to get Pumpkin. What a relief. Imagine that she had really left Pumpkin the care of that jerk. How desperate could one get?

To leave your best friend's car with such a nerd. Not only a lousy mother, but also a lousy friend. A lousy lover too, she added silently. Lousy everything.

Guiltily, she switched off the phone. She shouldn't have switched it on in the first place. Were they still monitoring the phone? Of course, they were. Brigid must have told them about the phone. What if they were tracing her right now? What if they had already traced her right here? She stared at the phone that was now the embodiment of all evil, the greatly feared enemy, trying to remember how to remove the SIM-card, but she didn't find the slot. Then, not before checking again that she had really switched it off, she put the phone back into her bag. +420 220 639 728, she knew the number by heart now too. Just in case.

Catherine walked into the homely kitchen. Everything was neat and clean and looked welcoming. Greg had left his number and address on a piece of paper. He had drawn a little man next to his name that remotely looked like him. It made her snort out loud and brought back more memories how Eva and her had always written and drawn messages to each other. Ordinary stuff like:

"Brigid called *me*. Recharge *your* cellphone." "We went out for pizza and brought you the leftovers. They are in the fridge. Don't know when we're back. Have eaten all the olives, so sorry" "Sorry, couldn't tidy my room. Will do it tomorrow. (or some other time, BIG question mark)" How she had loved Eva's messages.

She took the note that was sitting on the kitchen table and looked at it more carefully. It said: *JULIO&MONK*, Michalska 13, Center town. A rough sketch underneath Greg's calligraphic handwriting showed how to get there. Before she would change her mind, she had put on her shoes and taken her coat. It was carefully hung in Greg's wardrobe as if it belonged there. Had she put it there last night? She

couldn't remember. She also found a black scarf and a pair of sunglasses that lay on a Louis XV chair in the entrée and wondered whether he had put them there on purpose. They looked unisex and plain enough and so she went out wearing them. When she opened the old gate that went out onto the street, Catherine realized that she had no idea where she was or where Greg lived. Trying to remember a map of Prague before her inner eyes was utterly useless and brought no results: It had been decades since she had last looked at one. *Wencelas Square*? Prague Castle? *Staré Město*? Barely, did she remember the names of any of the famous squares and sites.

She would get terribly lost, but had the presence of mind to walk up and down to find a street sign before she ventured into new territory. It said *Jaromirova* and by the look of it, Greg lived on a busy street with a huge bridge looming over it that carried a freeway. The houses were painted in all sorts of colours, red, light green, yellowish and some were utterly run down and looked rather neglected. At night time they had all looked the same, but now in daylight one could see who had made money and who hadn't. She stood still and felt the wintry breath of the wind pressing hard against her body. It was cold in Prague. Time to move. Which way to go? Where to find what she was looking for?



First, Catherine walked West onto *Svatoplukova*. The name of the street sounded like "Swat Team is coming" and gave her the shivers. From there she took tram 24 that run parallel to the *Vlatana* river and was in the heart of the city within a good quarter of an hour. The note Greg had written was useless to her, she got so totally lost in the maze of the little streets and alleys that she couldn't recognize anything. But after a

good hour of random straying and searching and what was more important; the help of four passing strangers, -all very different in age, looks and command of the English language-, she finally managed to find the place Greg was working in. It was impressive.

JULIO&MONK was situated in a narrow alley, in the historic centre of Prague. This was where tourists were walking on ancient cobblestones to learn about Kafka and the Golem, the Astronomical Clock, The Carolinum and the Tyl Theatre. The saloon was settled on the ground floor of a beautiful house that must have dated back to the 16th century and the splendid Habsburg era. Presumably the walls' cores were even older, built skilfully by master masons in the early middle ages, when the Czech Přemyslid dynasty rulers had most of Bohemia under their control. However, the façade had been redecorated recently. Large cuboids in grey marble stone had been carefully fit between huge glass displays framing the interior of *JULIO&MONK* elegantly and turning them into large transparent screens that allowed the by-passers a real-time glance into the saloon's entrails.

The house was in an excellent condition beaming its glorious history upon the spectator. The upper storeys were all painted sandy yellow with a touch of brown, its fresh coat underlining the wealth of its owners. Catherine could see Greg through the window and when he discovered her, he waved at her to come in.

"Hi, Catherine, I see you've found me." He walked over and kissed her on her cheek. Instantly, she pushed him away. He felt warm underneath her palm and she loved touching his white T-shirt spanning firmly over his muscular chest. She held on to him a moment longer than was necessary to shove him away. How did he dare? Kiss her? And in public? She felt her pulse beating faster.

"Hi, I got completely lost" Catherine stammered.

"It's good you're here now, beautiful"; he ventured.

"Wanna have a haircut?"

"No thanks," Catherine laughed, "not if you turn me into a dragon as the one that has just left your premises, Dragonslayer."

"No, no, we'll turn you into a princess, my dear." He guided her to a seat.

"I am too old for princess, maybe you can do queen? Wash, cut and dragon dry, but queenlike."

"Ok, queen you shall be, just relax." He lifted her hair and gently let it fall back onto her shoulders. She felt each single one of her split hair-ends caressing the bare skin of her slender neck. It made her quiver.

He continued stroking her hair tenderly. What on earth was he doing? What on earth was she doing here? She was only losing time. Sitting at a hairdresser, flirting with a man that she hardly knew. Now of all times. Ridiculous and irresponsible. Catherine Cohen, pull yourself together. *Get things moving. Get it done. Get out of here.* It was only a matter of time until she was found and taken, only a matter of time, - less and less time in fact. The trashy novel she had stepped into was as hard to bear and shape as the reality that had taken her off her trajectory.

"We just take the edges, your hair is beautiful." Greg began washing Catherine's hair and she felt a slight tremor running down her spine to her clitoris when he started massaging her scalp with his fingertips. It felt so good. Never mind that she needed all that energy to keep still as her whole body was beginning to resonate at his touch.

"So, is that what you do?"

She asked. She couldn't help but look at the golden ceiling. Red chandeliers hang above their heads and the symbol of the hairdresser, five black hairs were beautifully intertwined on a golden metal plate above the mirror. The room looked classy and expensive. It was all very refined and polished, very *distingué*.

"Yes, that is what I do, most of the time", he added carefully", and it pays off," he answered.

"Well, right now you are working for free. I don't have any Czech money," Catherine said, thinking of her scarce budget, wondering how much he'd charge.

"Don't worry, we'll take credit cards. Euro, Dollars, Yen. But we pay with Czech Koruna here, you know that?"

"Koruna, sure. And cents?"

"No, Haléru" he answered.

„Hale-what?"

„Haléru, like cents, -Haléru. "

"Ok," Catherine was trying to nod, which is hard when your hair is being washed and you worry about the traces your credit card leaves. She was determined not to use it. No matter what. *Let's see how that'd go.*



He worked silently for a while, concentrating on what he was doing.

"So you're meeting your sister today? Now that you look so smart you should actually come out with me." He looked at her as if Catherine was a piece of art he had just created.

“Well, I don’t know. I haven’t seen her for years” .

“So, she can wait a bit longer. What is her name again?”

“Leah.”

“Right. That is a Jewish name.”

“Yes, I am Jewish. Remember. The name is Cohen.”

“And does it mean anything to you?”

“Being Jewish?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know. I’ve never really had a choice.”

“Choice?”

“Not to be Jewish.”

“You didn’t? There is always a choice. Only to cowards there is no choice.”

Catherine frowned.

“It is who I am, Jewish. You cannot change it and not be Jewish. And yet, my mum wasn’t really into it. There was quite a big part we skipped. I cannot really explain it.

Mamma Imma always said-

“Who’s that? Your mum?”

“Yes, that was how we called her- I had accepted it. I mean, you simply have to. There is no way out.”

“That bad?”

“Worse. There were no other Jewish girls in my class, only Protestants, Roman Catholics and one was Greek Orthodox. But, then it didn’t really matter as long as you had Puma Trainers.

“Yes, that makes sense.”



"Can you remember when you saw Leah last?"

"No." Catherine answered truthfully.

"That must be sad."

"I guess."

"We are done," he looked at her admiringly.

"Beautiful," Catherine admitted, shaking her freshly coiffed hair.

"What happened?" He was curious, but in a polite way.

He was smiling at her.

"What happened?"

"Come on Catherine. With your sister."

"She left." Catherine finally said.

"Just like that?" He asked, reaching for the broom and sweeping up Catherine's hair from the floor. The magic was lost. From the look of it he had cut quite a bit.

"No, not just like that."

"So?"

He paused and she didn't answer him.

"You don't want to tell me, do you?" He seemed to understand.

"Greg, my sister's leaving Switzerland, doesn't have anything to do with it."

"Really?" He asked, but Catherine shook her head.

"Don't." She was getting tired of this.

"But, she does live here? You haven't made this up?" He persisted.

"Yes, I didn't lie to you, if that is what you think."

"No, of course not, I would never think that."

He was now busy cleaning a pair of scissor.

"Only, what *is* this all about? Catherine. Why are you really here?"

Catherine gave in. She would tell him about Eva, that was easier

"My daughter. Someone called her from here." She looked at him to evaluate his reaction.

"Maybe she talked to your sister," he guessed.

"No, I checked that before I left. It isn't her number."

"So, whose number is it?" He asked expectantly.

"I don't know." Catherine admitted.

"What do you mean, you don't know." He wondered.

"I couldn't find out. How should I?" She stopped without finishing the sentence. He looked at her in amazement.

"Why has the police not found out about the call? What about the records?"

"The phone company doesn't keep the logs for prepaid phones. We couldn't find out who she was in touch with last without actually looking at the phone".

"Really? That is hard to believe. You should have asked the NSA."

"The NSA? Why would they know?"

"Oh, forget it. Just a guess. But you've got the number? Haven't you?"

"Yes, it's +420 220 639 728"

"You remember it by heart? Great. Let's call," Greg walked toward the phone.

"I cannot. No, don't- I mean-"

"We do this the old way. +420 220 6?" He wouldn't take no for an answer.

"39 728," she answered.



He went to the phone behind the counter and picked up its golden receiver. He dialled the number and Catherine froze as she watched him listening intently. He continuously looked her in the eyes as if he wanted to hypnotize her. Then he was connected with someone at the other end. She could tell by the look in his eyes that things were moving. His pupils dilated, sparkled. Someone had answered. Someone Eva had tried to contact when she was still alive. Maybe she then called from Mascha's phone. Maybe it was the last person she had spoken to? Her murderer?

"Mr. Kafka, is that you?" He paused. "I beg your pardon, who is speaking?" He still looked at Catherine.

"Jacob's Ladder Guest house? No, I was calling a private number. I am looking for Mr. Kafka." There was a pause.

"No, thank you. Sorry, I must have dialled the wrong number. Yes, I am sure. Sorry to trouble you. "No. Thanks. Yes, you too." He put the receiver down slowly.

"It is a guest house, Jacob's Ladder. That could have been where she had stayed last."

"Why would she stay in a guest house?"

"How would I know? This is *your* daughter we are talking about."

Catherine shrugged.

"It is only a ten minutes walk. Actually, I know where it is."

"You can just give me the address", Catherine answered cautiously.

I don't know the address, but I can show you where it is, if you wish." He checked his watch.

“And be back in time for my next customer.” Catherine nodded again. Her hands were white, so tight had she pressed her fists together.

“Ok. Let’s go.”

He grabbed a free fashion magazine from the counter and tear out the map of the old town at the back. Then he shoved it into her hands.

“Here, take this so you won’t get lost again.”



Jacob’s Ladder Guest house was in the Jewish quarter of Prague, a 10 minutes walk from JULIO&MONK. Greg grabbed a jacked and locked the saloon behind him. The street was busy with tourists and locals heading out for lunch. She was walking close to him, his hand or his shoulder casually touching hers once in a while. It felt good to be walking next to him. And Prague was beautiful too; handsome, dashing, a lordly power emanating from each narrow street, each church, each building they passed. The Dientzenhofer Haus, the Minute House, the Old Town Hall opposite the House of the Golden Unicorn. After having spent so many hours in her apartment in Zimmerwald, Catherine felt like being born again.

There was so much life here. Hordes of tourists mingled in the old streets shopping for souvenirs for themselves or their loved ones and Catherine couldn’t resist but think of Eva, again. Would she have seen the same golden necklaces and earrings, the same puppets? Princesses, witches and sorcerers, kings and queens and innocent maidens glared at you from behind the window panes, all for sale, if you were willing to pay for them. Were these the streets she had walked last: The streets

paved with grey cobblestones, glossy and shiny from the many feet that had trodden here, the many hooves of stout horses that occasionally had chipped the old stone? The old city looked like it had for centuries, if it hadn't been for the occasional cars passing by and- right, the tourists, hordes of them.

They went along *Michalska* and passed some of the buildings of the old Town Hall when all of a sudden the narrow streets widened and Catherine found herself on the great *Staromestske Namestei*, the main square of Prague. The beauty of the place took her breath away. There were many people, comfortably seated in the heated cafés, snug and tucked up cozily, miles and light years away from their daily lives. She could see them clearly through the translucent glass of immaculately clean windows. They were laughing and joking. Not a care in the world. Why couldn't she just sit down, enjoy some sparkly white wine and then hang on to Greg's arm for the way home? Why couldn't she be the one?

That brunette woman over there in the ivory trousers with the navy leather belt and the dark shirt: She was flirting with the waiter while taking care of the cheque. Her partner had already stood up and was busy getting the camera out. A wonderful couple, happy enough. For a moment Catherine was tempted to give up her quest, why not sit in the warmth instead? Relax, enjoy the beauty of the moment. Laugh away the hours with Greg and wait for the police. Would they come? When would they come? Would they find her here? Would they keep insisting her bag had been found at the crime site? At her daughter's deathbed? Maybe it was all just a bad dream? Maybe it would all go away in due time?

Catherine was so tempted to see what would happen if she simply didn't do anything. Why not wait till the clouds in her life had blown off? Gone away.

Disappeared for good. But she had a feeling that they wouldn't evaporate without her utmost effort and dedication to clear the sky herself. To win back her old life was not going to be easy. After all, it might even be impossible. Greg nudged her and smiled. She sighed out loud. Being here, with him, was wonderful, all the rest of it blended out, simply faded away and she wondered how that could have happened so fast. If you met someone you could trust, someone you could fall for and love dearly all was different, different instantly: Another priceless piece of precious truth, taken straight from the trashy novel's most valued treasury. *What complete bullshit that was. Had she completely lost her mind?*

And yet to intensify the kitschy picture the winter sun had now come out for a split second and she enjoyed it with every fibre of her body: She soaked it up with the skin of her face, her lips, her mouth; letting the warm molecules tickle her labial frenulum, her teeth, her larynx so they'd dance down her trachea to waltz her lungs, ready to ride on the oxygen speed boats that embarked from there, ready to jump the birch bark canoes that hurtled down the bloody jungle system that was her body. Right now her happiness was flawless and pure, white as freshly fallen snow, crystalline as frazil formed in swift streams, glassy as polar ice dating back to the Ioanian age when the middle pleistocene was in full swing and the woolly mammoths, the last of their kind, were rocking away the glaciers, burying notorious archaeopterix and its predecessors in its wake, burying themselves under mud, water and scree in an eternal sepulchre that was the earth.

For a fleeting moment, serenity had come near, then it was passing her by as swiftly as the major winds generated by supermassive black holes on the rims of our galaxy. Hypergiants, red dwarfs, brown dwarfs, white dwarfs flying past her ears by

the dozen while she was breathing slow and regularly in close proximity to the eerie storm of all things perfect. And as always -as usually- she couldn't hold on to what was good, precious and pure. It melted away, dehumidified from within before she could harvest, store and contain it. When she blinked her eyes the drops of her very essence were gone, repelled from the silky way that had once been the habitat of her life. She felt naked. Stripped down to the skeleton. She shuddered, trying to shake it all off. Where was she? Yes, Prague. She remembered, in a split second, remembered it all.

The buildings looked upon them with such grandeur and splendour that she found it hard to move on. All the houses were in great shape, painted in beautiful bright colours and nothing reminded the spectators of pre-capitalistic Prague and its grey and black poverty and dullness. Nothing was as she had seen it last. So much money must have flown into the city and the city had become a huge dam; a stronghold, a bulwark, a bastion holding onto the new riches, not giving way, not yielding a single drop, a single Haléru but filling up and up and up until everything in its midst had disappeared, drowned, and only money was left (and what you could do with it).

Catherine had stopped walking and stood still and in awe, trying to take it all in, trying to catch her breath. Staromestske Namestei didn't compare to anything she had ever seen, not in Vienna or Rome or Zurich or Sidney and yet it evoked all the memories of these places laying them bare in her consciousness, revealing her fragile self to her consciousness as if she had been on her very own Tour d'Europe, being away from home for the first time. Prague had a quality and beauty of its own that left her speechless.

“Catherine, is everything alright?”

“Perfect”, she was still trying to process her intense reaction, rationalize it in some way.

“Why aren’t you walking?”

“I can’t, it’s so beautiful”.

“Really?” She nodded, he gave her a warm smile.

“Listen, we can come back later, let me show you where to go before I must head back”.

When she started to move again, Greg hurried her on. Across the square and past the great hotels and expensive shops located there. Greg left the square towards the north, entering a much smaller area, which was named after Kafka, the real Kafka, not the one he had made up on the phone. He was literally dragging her behind him. All of a sudden Catherine felt altogether lost. Did she indeed want to speak to the person Eva had called. Did she? The virtuous moment of the brave heroine had passed, leaving her high and dry.

She looked up at the beautifully redecorated houses and instantly couldn’t bear their beauty, their continuity, their history. All she felt, all that was left to her was the present and it stung badly in her stomach and elsewhere. There was nothing left for her, not in the future, nor in the past, nothing but a terrible void, an emptiness that was hard to bear. It felt like the houses were grinning at her for being so naive and stupid, endlessly forlorn. Their windows looked like reproaching eyes, their eyebrows rising with contempt. She couldn’t move onwards.

“Come on,” he urged. She didn’t reply, couldn’t.

“What’s wrong?” He asked, but there was no answer. She was getting slower and slower, very disinclined to move on.

“Catherine, come on,” he urged, checking his watch.

Catherine just stood still and gasped, she had troubles breathing. He reached for her, but she wouldn't move forward.

“Come. We are nearly there.”

Would she break down now? Now that she had managed to get so far? Conquered the borders of a united Europe, conquered a fierce and icy blizzard with the help of the Austrian army, most likely conquered a stranger's heart if she was not mistaken. The latter was the greatest feat and what she was afraid of most, terrified even: To think of loving, again, of trusting, of letting herself go, of being naked, naked. Building up a new life, a new past, present and future, it was scaring the shit out of her. She couldn't phrase it differently: it scared the shit out of her. When he looked at her, Catherine could tell he liked her, he was falling for her, wanted her. She could sense it with all her strength and might. She couldn't tell what it was she feared more: her audacity to come here; not only to pay Eva's last tributes, but mainly to find Eva murderer and clear her own name. Or the strange feelings of attraction she sensed in her guts each time she felt Greg's eyes linger on her body. Such an unwholesome mix. This had to be about Eva first, it had better be. Everything else would have to wait. It had better!



Jacob's Ladder couldn't have been more than one kilometre from JULIO&MONK, but it seemed to take forever to get there. When they had nearly made it, Greg turned around:

"One more block. You'll be right there. Come on." They were standing next to the Franz Kafka Hostel and he was pointing along Kaprova to show her the way.

"Greg, I want to do this by myself." Catherine hesitated.

"No, I am coming with you," he insisted.

"Honestly, it is not necessary," she tried not to offend him.

"Look, it makes me feel better. You don't speak any Czech."

"Don't be daft. They must have guests from all over the world. I've been all over the globe all by myself. I can really look after myself. You have to go back to work, don't you?"

Her voice was quite firm now. She really wanted to do this on her own.

"Don't you think it will be dangerous? After all your daughter has disappeared."

"She is dead, she hasn't disappeared." Catherine said laconically.

"Yes, that's of course much better."

She only stared at him. He shrugged, revising his statement:

"Right. much worse. Ok. Ok. You win."

She lowered her gaze, looking at her sneakers. Her feet were freezing.

"Ok. She is dead. Catherine, please, let me come with you".

"No. That is why *I* am here, to find out. I haven't murdered her."

"Is this what they say? I mean really? Murdered her? I cannot believe this."

He paused. She shrugged.

"I haven't exactly waited for the verdict"

"No?"

"No. I just left."

"And they let you?"

"Well they sent you to look after me," she chuckled.

He nearly choked, coughing out loud. Quickly, he tried to recover, trying to sound normal.

"So you are really wanted by the police, are you? That was no joke?"

She nodded, her eyes focusing across the endless beyond.

He knew so well she was wanted. The lie had slipped out so naturally it did amaze him. He knew all about it. To be precise: She was wanted by him. *Inspector Gregorovich Miroslav Shats, Prague Police. And how much she was wanted.* It wouldn't be long now before he would have to introduce himself properly. What a disaster.

"Greg, you must let me go now. I will see you at the apartment."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, pretty sure."

"Really?"

"I am going, alone. I will be back."

"Sure, you'll find your way back?"

"Oh yes, please don't worry."

"And you are coming back to my place tonight?"

"I left all my stuff there, so I guess.-"

"Ok." That was all he could muster: Ok. Clearly, he wasn't keen to part with her. When she was a couple of meters away, he called after Catherine.

"No more bodies."

What?" Catherine called back, on the run.

"No more dead bodies. Don't leave any more corpses behind you, - or your handbag," he shouted out loud, then he bit his tongue, realizing he shouldn't have said that. A

young woman looked at them curiously, but Catherine hastened on without looking back to him. He must be completely mad to shout something like this out loud. And in public. What a great couple they would make. *Just Awesome*. Then she froze. Had she told him about the handbag? Had she told him? She couldn't remember. She must have told him. *How else would he know about the handbag?*

Catherine's focus was shifting as she quickened her pace. She was forcing herself to forget about Greg, his splendid apartment, the tiring and exciting trip to Prague, the snowstorm, his touch, the handbag, everything; the whole goddamn *Weltschmerz* that kept overpowering her checks and balances so awesomely. The memories all had to be stowed away safely into some spare room her cognitive skills couldn't access. Complete memory shutdown. Lockdown. A memory hole they could all fall into and keep falling and falling and falling. It took quite some energy. Walking helped. Feeling the hard, cold cobblestones underneath the thin soles of her shoes helped. Beloved Eva. Will the pain ever go away? Will it? She stopped. Could she really go through with it? Somewhere in the building, coming into view on the corner of the street was the last person Eva had tried to reach on her cell phone. That was all that mattered. Will she find out who it was? Will she understand what happened? Will she find Eva's murderer and clear her own name?

Catherine only moved on because she had nowhere else to go. Turning back wasn't an option. Not now, not when she had come so far, all the way from-. *And down the memory hole*. She didn't want to think of how she got here. She had to look ahead, forwards, not backwards. And then she saw it, right in front of her, the sign which said: Jacob's Ladder guest house. It was a three-storey house, smaller than the building in its vicinity and, compared to the glamorously redecorated house in the city centre,

this building looked old and plain and colourless. As if it had been forgotten, as if someone had wanted to punish it for being here, for raising its head so boldly when it was so ugly and utterly neglected. She stood there and looked at the sign, it looked kind of handwritten and very unprofessional: Jacob's Ladder guest house. The "g" in guest and the "h" in house weren't capitalized. *Eva what were you doing here? If only you had stayed home.*

How long could she stand here without drawing attention to herself? Seconds? Minutes? Days? Years? She might just camp out here until she was transfigured into a tree; until she grew roots, twigs, leaves, a trunk as big as the oaks in Bern dating back to Napoléon times, *un arbre éternel*, a *Sequoiadendron giganteum* a mighty sequoia pushing its roots through the hard and dry concrete. What's with the tree metaphor? She had always thought tree huggers were pathetic and weird, lacking in stamina and character. Tree huggers and tree thinkers (people who thought about turning into trees when standing at a busy junction while trying to find their daughter's murder) were ridiculous beyond description. She was ridiculous beyond description and she had to stop thinking of trees and start thinking of Eva. After all she was a lawyer.

Lawyers were upright and rational, coherent and concise, lawyers were above trees and all that verdant, unfledged nonsense. Especially when the police were looking for them: Then their super-brains worked like super-machines steered and coordinated by a super-algorithm on a quantum computer. Much better metaphor than the tree-snail-twigs-stuff. *Imagine: Quantum-Super-Seper-Saper Computer. Whoa! Worship. Worship Supercomputer. (And all of this correctly capitalized!)* Was she going mad now? She was mad, she was going mad now. At least that was settled.

Catherine couldn't see anything move behind the small windows of Jacob's Guest House. If it hadn't been for the chandelier that she could see burning on the second floor she would have assumed the house was deserted. It didn't really look as if anyone was inside. But then she might have been mistaken. Most windows were covered by dark wine-red drapes that were drawn all along the window ledge. The heavy material in the window frame looked nearly black from where Catherine was standing. Had Eva really come here? What had her business been? The house with the beautiful buccaneer's black sails as curtains would have tickled her fantasy. *Bateau insondable*, infathomable bark. (What's with the French interferences?) Eva would have loved it and would immediately have woven intriguing stories about its residents and guests. The way she used to do. The way she always had.

The captain and the crew; sweeping and scrubbing the deck, weighing anchor, even a mutiny, a romance, a stowaway. And reconciliation. A kiss. A wonderful story. Such fantasy. Such mingling and mixing of truths, semi-truths, semi-fiction, fiction and lies. *You had to tell reality or reality told you*. That was the way Eva put it. If you really wanted something and you turned it into a story it became real, it became tangible. And was that automatically a lie? It wasn't. It was a story, the story, the story of your life. Or if you were a buccaneer, it was the story of your death caused by scurvy, infection, diarrhoea. Tough luck, Eva would have said, if you shat yourself to death. Catherine looked at the house. It was a house indeed, not a clipper, not a dreadnought, not a quinquere or a schooner. If only Eva were here to help, help create such wonderful, such wonderful stories. All these crazy tales she used to tell, making them up as she went along. Most *formidable*.



Of course! The French Truancy story. (That's maybe why the French interferences) *Quelle histoire! Quelle Merde*. Eva would always say that. *Quelle Merde. Quelle Merde*. One of her stories had become legendary, it topped all the others, unchallenged so far and now with Eva dead, undisputed and unreached forever. It stood single-handedly and alone on a cliff, a throne, a skyscraper. It stood up there. And here is what happened: When Eva was 13 she had secretly started reading old-fashioned detective stories. Catherine had thought her too young for Mr. Ripley the Orient Express and Death on the Nile or the like; but Eva had been so fascinated by these stories that she had been reading them secretly all night, under her covers in the light of an old torch. And what was worse; she had started being a detective herself. And here the legend was about to start: One afternoon she returned home 20 minutes after setting out for school after lunch. Eva was in a total state of shock, when she was telling Catherine that on her way to school she had seen this blue BMW with an elderly man and a young woman in it. The woman's nose was heavily bandaged and she had this weird and absent look, drugged, Eva said, definitely drugged. Really, really high.

According to Eva the man looked "armed and dangerous" as if he belonged to the Russian mafia, a most unpleasant mob. She was so sure that he had kidnapped the girl and was selling her as a prostitute to some Zurich underground night club that Eva, after trembling for an eternity, had turned right back and ran all the way home, missing her French lesson. So desperate and convincing was Eva in her argumentation -after all she had even written down the number plates- that Catherine couldn't resist the sheer force of her childish folly. She called the police. To her great dismay then; or

rather to her great relief in the wake of the initial confusion and threatening calamity; the police found out quite promptly, that the young woman had *only* just had her nose corrected.

The elderly gentleman was her darling father driving her home after the surgery at a private hospital in the outskirts of Berne. The drugged look was attributed to the side-effects of the painkillers that were still holding sway over her. As the man loved his daughter dearly and loved her just the way she had been, he had fought against this operation from the very start. But obviously he couldn't stand his ground against the female conspiratory forces in his family and had therefore lost the battle with his wife, the mother of the girl and the girl herself. Grinding his teeth over his defeat, he looked understandably "armed and dangerous". Catherine could just picture how totally *not amused* in addition, he must have been when the police called, on Eva's account, investigating him for human trafficking. From loving and caring father to cruel drug-administering-pimp in no time. Eva's story made it possible, fooled them all. At least for half a day. Then it was all settled.

Explaining the whole debacle to Eva's French teacher was a totally different story. He simply wouldn't buy it, didn't believe a word. *Pas de chance*. No chance. Eva wanted Catherine to get a police's certificate that the story was true but what was too much was too much. Catherine put her foot down and Eva had to go for detention. She wasn't happy and neither was Catherine, they both looked armed and dangerous then and war nearly broke out. Peacekeeping troops in the form of Brigid and Harvey had to be brought in. Now, with so much water down the river, the memory made her smile. Unpleasant and embarrassing then, a much cherished legend now. If only Eva was here, helping her make up stories about Jacob's Ladder. What was the story she

would tell? What was the real story behind her calling here? Catherine awoke from her reverie, she had better get moving. She was growing roots.

A Chinese tourist group had stopped right next to Catherine and broke her train of thoughts. The guide was holding a pink umbrella and started explaining something she couldn't understand, but the spell was broken. She was back on track. Of course, she wanted to see the hotel her daughter last stayed, she corrected herself instantly; presumably stayed, most likely called. A fairy tale of probabilities and chance. She wanted to see the place, the person Eva last contacted. Catherine felt so strangely forlorn and lonely. Emptiness crept upon her, clutching her heart and if it hadn't been for the memory of Greg waiting for her tonight, Catherine would have turned right then and there and walked to the nearest police station to confess a crime she hadn't committed. She felt as if she was paralyzed by the violence that had hit her life so cruelly. Cruelly and unexpectedly.

Leah

The entrance to Jacob's Ladder looked as if the hotel had been closed for months. But obviously it was open. An elderly couple had just left the guest house carrying two small backpacks, hers was red with blue stripes, his a matching blue with red stars. All about them screamed: "We're tourists and we know it." *Been there, done that. Yeah man.*

Catherine aimed for the door, letting them pass. Her heart began to falter. If only she could exude adequate strength and vigour in such a crucial moment of her quest. Scared and tired, that was her, desperate and agitated. How far had she strayed from the confident professional she had once been? *Been there, done that.* The words had a different ring for her.

When she entered, and the door closed, the sunlight disappeared at once. The air smelled of old cheap frying oil and Catherine could detect a faint scent of urine,

which must have stemmed from the violet woollen carpet and the enormous old dog lying upon it. It was hard to tell which way was front and rear for all the grey and white hair it had. As she came nearer, she could see its black tail wagging lazily in the air and its nose twitch on the other side in the place where she fathomed its face to be. She turned around to see where the light had all gone and looked at the walls of the entrance area which were made of red bricks giving the place an odd industrial look that didn't really fit the old building. But before she could take it all in, she jumped at the bell being rung impatiently by a young traveller at the counter.

Once again, he literally smashed his left hand upon a small golden table bell and she could see he was getting really restless. So young, having travelled so far and yet so impatient. Obviously *not* been there yet, not in the true sense of the word but wanting to do it all and wanting to do it right now. The young man was rubbing his hand gently, it must have hurt him to hit the bell so hard. Catherine guessed he had been standing here for a while. Casually, he then turned towards her once again and smiled while checking his watch.

"I have been here for what? Ten minutes? Just about. It says they should be open."

"I am sure there will be someone just now."



They both turned around at a slight movement behind the counter. A woman had appeared from behind a filthy curtain, smiling apologetically. She may have been in her late 50ties and looked at both of them through a pair of dirty old-fashioned glasses.

“Accommodation for two? How long are you staying?”

Vividly, she began typing stuff into the computer, heavens knows what, as she had been given neither names, addresses nor documents. She looked kind of weird, Catherine thought at first, not well-groomed, not taken care of, kind of neglected, the bad kind. And then she held her breath. It couldn't be. It could not be true.

“No, we are not together. A single room please,” the young guy said. Catherine was thunderstruck. She gasped, and held her breath.

She knew her.



This was Leah.

This was her sister, her sister who hadn't answered her phone calls in years, in decades, her sister who supposedly worked as a surgeon in one of Prague's finest and most renowned clinics. What on earth was she doing in this damp hole? And as a receptionist? Eva had called her. She had called her aunt. What a revelation. How obvious. Of course. Why hadn't Catherine thought of this before? Why hadn't she called Leah before? There was so much she didn't know, so much she could have found out if she had made the effort, if she had just gone the extra mile. What a nuisance that the most obvious was always the greatest revelation.

Leah didn't recognize her at once, but from the crestfallen look on Catherine's face she could see at once that something was utterly wrong. Then, she looked as if she was having a heart attack, a brain stroke, as if her vital functions simply stopped and she was collapsing right behind the counter. She must have recognized her sister.

Catherine didn't know what to say or do in the least. The options she considered at light speed were disappearing into thin air just as fast as she came up with them.

Should she run away? No, she couldn't. Where would she run to? Leaving Prague at once? No, she couldn't. Vomit on the floor? No, she wouldn't. Where should she escape to? Siberia? Australia? Vomiting was the most likely option, the stench of the dog was most abominable. She was retching. Then Leah opened her mouth. Her voice was heavy, dripping like maple syrup.

"Catherine, oh my God."



"Hello? Hello? Hey, you two. Hey. I was here first."

The young man was holding on to his Italian passport, waving it into Leah's face, wanting to check in.

"Mamma Mia. Can you see me? I am here. Here. Over here. Incredible"

He was pointing both his thumbs at his chest. It was pointless, the two sisters no longer saw him they had forgotten about him, as if he had completely vanished from this very place, sucked up into another universe by an enormous vacuum cleaner, and spit out into another galaxy, an entity no longer connected with their stratosphere or the space they usually inhabited. Both of them were totally oblivious to him standing there, in desperate need of a room with at least one bed, a beer, a Wi-Fi connection and a shower. Those were his needs at that time, in no particular order. When he realized how futile it was to reach any of the ladies, he gave up, withdrawing to the back of the room. Nervously, he got out his cell phone; surely Jacob's Ladder's

Trip Advisor Rating wouldn't go up now, he would make sure they'd plummet, rock-bottom-deep-top-notch-state-of-the-art.

"You are here, I am so sorry, Catherine, you must believe me. I didn't know. I wanted her to call, to go back. I always said -. But please -." The way she said Catherine's name, and she had said it twice already, felt as if she hadn't used it in years, in decades. In fact, she had not used it in years, in decades and therefore she mispronounced it, the stress was wrong. She placed it on on 'rine, whereas all Catherine's friends stressed it on Cath. Or had Mama Imma pronounced it like this when they were small? It felt oddly familiar. Leah slowly came around the counter and reached for her sister. There were tears in her eyes and Catherine felt her plump body warming her when she hugged her close. Leah began to sob and Catherine in turn began to wonder why their roles were thus reversed. It was her who had lost her daughter, not Leah. She should be the one crying, sobbing her eyes out. But she couldn't, not right now. She was too stunned. They held each other, didn't let go.

"Leah, don't cry. Sh....sh."

Catherine was swaying her in her arms, shushing her, patting her hair gently as if she was a little child. The younger sister comforting the elder, the roles once again reversed. She stifled another sob and Catherine let her go.

Somehow Leah had come back to her senses. There was a client, wasn't there? At the back of her head she could hear a man shouting at her. He was screaming. It was hard to understand. He was so loud. Now, he was silent. He had been silent for a while. Silence. Where was he? *Were these the voices again?* What were they saying? What must she do? Leah tried hard to listen carefully. The voices came from this side of the border. That meant, she had to answer them. She must give the young man a room.

She must move. *Now. Go, now.* Drying her face with her palms, she withdrew and went back behind the desk. Catherine wasn't sure what was happening, she looked at Leah quizzically. *Was she alright?* Her sister was acting strange.



"Does he want a room?"

"Who?"

Catherine turned around. The young Italian had left the lobby.

"I think he has gone."



"Has she come home?" Leah asked. Catherine looked irritated.

"Who?"

"Eva."

"Has she come home yet?"

"I don't know what to say. What do you mean?"

Did her sister not know?

"I cannot believe you are here. Why are you here?" Leah said tonelessly.

"She is dead. I mean-. Did you not know that?" Catherine said instead. I

The news came as a shock to Leah and Catherine could see how she shrank, her look all of a sudden blank. She had to sit down behind the counter.

"Are you not listening to the news? It was all over the Swiss newspapers. They must have reported it here in Prague."

"No, I was busy. I was here-. I couldn't -. I didn't -. When she left, she said she was fine."

"When who left?"

"Eva, when Eva left. Your girl."

"She was here?"

"Now, she is dead. Oh my God, Catherine. Tell me that is not true. I thought she had gone home. Back to Switzerland."

"Did she say that?"

"I can't remember. She said so many things. And now. I mean, dead? And the baby?"

"The baby?"

Catherine turned pale. This was getting ugly.

"You don't know. Of course. That's what I always thought."

Leah lifted her hands and hid her face. *No, no, I do know*, Catherine was going to say but couldn't.



"Eva dead. How are you coping with all of this?"

Eagerly she was holding on to Catherine's arm, waiting for an answer. *Coping? Am I?* Catherine couldn't really answer and Leah took her to what, according to a little brass plate, once must have been the green parlour of the hotel dating back to 1905. She made Catherine sit down, taking her own place right opposite her. Catherine was

overwhelmed by the splendour displayed most generously. There were red sofas, in the green parlour, with extra-large cushions, different satin-finished crystal-glass chandeliers that didn't match and slender blue Chinese vases, with purple and pink nylon lilies inside.

There were enormous mirrors with golden frames, totally out of proportion; tables covered with white starched linen tablecloths and laden at random with golden-rimmed china, cups and saucers, plates and platters. There were endless rows of carefully framed pictures, cheap reprints of all sorts of famous works. Some of the art showed lovers, half naked, faces ecstatic; others portrayed landscapes with cows and goats and sunsets and some displayed simple dirty patches of old paint and -, maybe marmalade? Most chairs were made of dark oak with beautiful carved roses and ornaments. And yet, all of them looked different, some had yellow and pink striped silk lining, others were caned in wooden rails and still others were altogether made of light wood. Nothing matched, nothing fit, but the room was fabulous. As if the kings and queens of all the fairy tales ever told had dumped their spare furniture in this place, Leah's place.

"Is this yours?" Catherine looked around, not quite sure what to make of all the clutter. Her sister was a doctor, a specialist for heart diseases, not a warden for misplaced and abandoned antiques.

"Yes, I had bought it shortly before Eva came. I didn't want to work at the Clinique any more. And also I couldn't. I was very ill."

"I am so sorry to hear this. You are no longer a doctor?" Catherine could not believe it.

"No, it's a long story. Eva helped me a lot."

“When did she -, I mean, when did she get here?”

“Let me get you some coffee first,” Leah got up again and left her sister alone.



Catherine might really have enjoyed the fancy mix of styles and centuries if she hadn't been so totally stressed out emotionally. She was seated comfortably in a large armchair covered with red velvet and waited for Leah to come back and bring her a cup of coffee. For a moment Catherine leant back and breathed deeply. She let her eyes run over the place and discovered more and more details: a large teddy bear that had a missing eye, several green bronze figures in the shape of warriors holding sword, flag and shield, peacock feathers in a vase that looked as if it had caused Andy Peacehol nightmares, and some beautiful old books bound in parchment and leather, surely full of forgotten lore and philosopher's rubbish. She couldn't take it all in, it made her head spin, her judgment dizzy. Catherine's eyes were bulging out from staring too hard. She had to close them for a moment, shut it all out. What a collection her sister had accumulated.

Finally, Leah came back with the coffee, it was steaming hot and when Catherine touched it gingerly with her fingers, she nearly burned herself.

“Has she stayed here?” Leah nodded and started to cry again. *Why is she the one who is crying? It was my daughter, for God's sake.*

“I have been wanting to call you, all along.” *Wanting? Wanting?*

“Why haven't you?”

It was hard to keep calm. She was going to strangle Leah in a minute. No more corpses Greg had warned her. No more corpses. Fair enough. She wouldn't strangle her. There were so many other and more sophisticated ways one could die of: Food and drink poisoning, accident, burn, choke, you could be sprayed in the face with some unknown liquid. Anything really, as long as a deadly outcome was guaranteed. But yeah. No more corpses. Leah was still babbling, Catherine tried hard to listen, not to miss anything.

"I cannot say. She said I shouldn't. You approved of her being here. She said you were glad she was out of the way. With the baby and -." *Approved? Out of the way? What the -?*

"Leah. I didn't know." They were looking at each other, both shaking their heads in disbelief.

"You didn't?"

"No. didn't. I mean you could have found out so easily. Why didn't you phone me?"

Leah shrugged.

"And then she disappeared. They have taken her."

"Who has taken her?"

"The Clinique."

"Which Clinique? Who has taken her?" Catherine was beginning to lose her nerve.

"The Clinique. The Clinique. For revenge."

"Why revenge? Leah. I don't understand a thing. Please explain."

Leah's thoughts were running wild, on the other side of the border, in the wilderness, in the jungle. She was losing control.

"We cannot save her now, there is nothing we can do. She is dead. We must accept it."

"Leah. You must tell me what happened."

"Happened? That was why she left. You tell *me* what happened."

The coffee was no longer steaming, none of them had taken a sip.

"I don't know what happened, that's why I am here. To find out."

"You must believe me. They have taken her. They have. They have- They do awful things."

"Who is they?"

Catherine insisted, Leah fell silent. She shrugged. There was no answer.

"And the father? Do you know anything about him?"

"I think he committed suicide before she found the courage to tell him. But I am not sure," she continued,

"I think he never knew." *Thierry. That must be him.*

"Leah, you must tell me what happened. If they have taken her, we must charge them with murder. Is it the Clinique where you worked?"

She nodded.

"Why are you no longer working there?"

"Catherine, this is so complicated. After Timmy's death, you know. I wanted so much to be a doctor, it was a compulsion. I couldn't think of anything else. If he had gotten a new liver after the accident, he would have survived. I mean you know that. You can transplant organs for children, you couldn't then. He would be a young man now. In March, 33 years. But now it all doesn't matter anymore."

She looked at her hands, one of her fingernails was broken, the others were glazed with transparent naillac.

“When Eva came, I realized it was all so wrong. Being a doctor, sacrificing everything for that. Such a meaningless devotion. And to whom? It wouldn’t bring him back. It only caused pain, each time someone died. I couldn’t help him when I should have. I just couldn’t, it wasn’t in my power. Eva said I should stop it and do something else. It was all so wrong and she was right. So, I just stopped and then I fell sick. I’ll -. You know. But when I recovered, I followed my heart and did what I always wanted to do: have a guest house. He wouldn’t have wanted me to be so unhappy.”

She paused, Catherine was aghast, listening to her sister with increasing horror. *What was Leah talking about? They had completely lost touch. She couldn’t really follow her.*



“All these long hours, all these people dying, not being able to help after a cardiac arrest. I cannot tell you, Catherine, it was awful, all that money I took and didn’t really know what to do with. I had to get out, somehow. And then Eva’s entry on www.change_the_world.com later. When I saw that I was just glad I was out, - out. Then, I bought this place. Eva said she would help me run it. We would raise the baby together. Oh my God, the baby. They haven’t taken the baby, have they?”

Leah was sobbing again, wailing. Catherine urged her to carry on, she simply couldn’t follow yet. *What entry on what website? What was www.change_the_world.com?*



“You must believe me Catherine. She wanted to come back to you once the little one was a little older, a couple of months or so, surprise you. I didn’t want to steal your daughter from you, or her baby. You must believe me. She said herself she was like a cat, hiding when her hour came and running then back home with her litter.”

Nothing of this made sense to Catherine. Leah seemed even more confused than herself. But what seemed absolutely clear was that, Eva had left Switzerland because she had wanted to, she had left voluntarily. She had fled home, had left out of her own will. Raw pain stung Catherine through and through. Eva hadn’t been abducted, she hadn’t been kidnapped. She had not been imprisoned, not been locked up. Until maybe the very end. That shack. What happened there?

They will say I have killed her because she had left home. They will say I have followed her, and killed her because she went her own way. She couldn’t think of it. Obviously, she even had a motive for killing her own child. And as with everything she did, it was good, a good motive. Catherine Cohen always excelled.

“I don’t understand. Why you? Why would you steal my daughter?” Catherine sucked in the air and felt that her lungs were about to explode, carefully she let the air out through her nose and listened to her own sounds. They both fell silent, Leah’s intricate explanations raised more questions than they answered.

“When Eva came here, she had just found out that she was pregnant. She had the pregnancy test in her bag and had carried it all the way on the night train from Zurich to Prague to show me. She said she had to keep looking at it in the dark with

the torch of her keyring, feeling the plastic tube again and again, feeling that it was real. A real, moving thing.”

“Why didn’t she talk to me, surely, I would have -.” Catherine interrupted. She knew she might not have -. It was Catherine’s heartfelt wish that Eva should have studied at one of the renowned Swiss universities. And Eva knew that, Eva knew what had been expected of her: She was to become a highly achieving professional like her mother, not a house-wife who stayed home caring for little ones. Being a mother wasn’t much of an achievement, not in Catherine’s eyes. And yet, she knew it was wrong to expect this of your own daughter; being a mother was such an achievement and so totally a demanding task. One that Catherine had failed completely.

“First, Eva said she needed a holiday, needed to get away from all for a while. She said you wouldn’t worry. I couldn’t know that she hadn’t told you where she was. I am alone. You know that. It was wonderful to have her around. But then it began to show and I kept asking her. She insisted that you two were in touch.”

“But really why haven’t you called? Why haven’t you. If only -.”

“I cannot say. Catherine, you know, I couldn’t talk to you-, not after.” She left the sentence unfinished and Catherine completed it for her.

“Timmy died. Leah, I am so sorry. So sorry. If only”

“Sorry doesn’t help. Sorry is no good. Sorry is really -. It is a ridiculous word. It doesn’t change anything.”

Leah blew her nose. The voices grew stronger on that side of the border.

“At least we’re even now,” she added. Sadness hung all over them, both of them. It was unbearable. *What on earth did she mean? Why were they even? Because they had lost each other’s little ones? How could this make it even? They had both lost everything.*

Greg

Greg didn't go back to JULIO&MONK, he knew it was time to finally face his master if he didn't want to lose his job with the police. Dimitrios, his partner had been sending endless messages to his phone and so had Adna. He should have answered, he knew he really should have. He took his time to arrive at *Policie České Republiky's* headquarters, in fact he took several detours, stopped at a little restaurant for a late lunch, walked forwards and backwards through the large city park, *Letensky sadé*. Finally, he approached the building from the north along *Wolkerova* which wasn't the usual way in if you came from the Jewish quarter. What could have taken half an hour took him a good hour, even more.

What would Adna tell him? Or rather: What would he tell her? When he entered the building, two of his colleagues, sneered at him. He knew he should have remembered their names, but he didn't, so he just nodded in their direction, hastening

on. Then he remembered, Anichka wouldn't be here. What a nuisance. She was gone. The floor smelled of the new soap that had been used since the cleaning was outsourced and the old housekeeper was fired, he didn't like the smell of it, reminding him too much of methamphetamine cooking in glass jars. Clearly, he could hear the sound of his shoes on the black shiny tiles. He passed the entrance hall and headed for Adna's office on the second floor. Hopefully, she was out.

As usually, his eyes were drawn to their emblem: Three white lions protecting the castle or were they attacking it trying to tear it all apart? He always wondered about that. It said: *Mesksa Policie Praha* in the blue circle surrounding the lions and on the banner in the middle he read as always when he was passing by: *Praga Caput Rei Publicae*: Prague was the capital of the people's cause if he translated the Latin correctly. All his Latin was ecclesiastical and related to the Nova Vulgate, the complete Bible in Latin. Church Latin was very different from Police Latin. He remembered, they had told him at police school what the phrase meant, but he had forgotten. Energetically, he strode towards Adna's office trying to brace himself for what was to come.



When he entered the room she was busy on the phone, listening intently. She waved him in and he waited patiently for her to finish. It took a while. He looked out the window, it had begun to rain and it was getting dark though it was only after 3 pm. She didn't say much so he couldn't guess who she was talking to. Finally, she put the phone down and faced him. Her long blonde hair was tied in the back and she

wore her uniform. The medals stuck out just above her breasts and he tried not to look at them fearing she would think he would be staring at her tits. She must love that uniform, so she'd wear it to work. He hardly ever wore his.

"Greg. You are here. Have a seat. Dimitrios is here any minute. You two are supposed to be a team. It takes two to form a team. You understand that, don't you?"

She was nervously shuffling through a pile of files.

"Yes, so what is new?"

"You are the one asking?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Listen Adna, I was exhausted, I had only slept a couple of hours when Anichka called me again and told me all my papers were ready. She woke me. I met her at the station, she gave me all I needed, I really didn't -." Adna laughed out loud.

"Greg, that was the sweetest revenge I have ever heard of. She really wanted you to have a holiday. Sure. A holiday." Obviously, she had found the right file, but her voice was full of sarcasm.

"You have sacked her?"

"Yes, I should have done that months ago, before you -, you know."

Dimitrios entered the room, he had just overheard that last sentence, looking alarmed.

"Before he what?"

"I know this is none of my business, but your private affairs are getting in the way while we are working on this case. It is all over the press now, the dead Swiss Girl, also internationally. The Swiss papers have run huge articles on the organ transplant story and so have the Germans and the Austrian. And what is the worst: We still haven't found the culprit or whoever has done this and yet we have a beautiful young girl in one of our morgues. And her mother's handbag. And a baby missing. And, not to

forget on this memorable list: a Clinique being accused publicly of horrid things. Simply appalling. But no proof, nothing. No evidence. The world is looking to Prague. We need results. Results," she slammed her hand down.

Dimitrios intervened: "Yes, but. I mean. On what evidence do they run all these stories? Surely they cannot all print wild rumours."

Adna wasn't listening, she kept shuffling through her pile. Greg remained silent. He didn't feel like contributing to the discussion. Dimitrios gave him a sombre glance. They both knew that was her favourite part, the savoury bit that was glued beneath her tongue and made her salivate: The world looking to Prague. To Prague. What she really meant was the world was looking to her, Adna, Nadstrazmistr Divin, Chief Divine Superintendent Adna Divin. Greg was so sick of it, he looked out of the window. It was still raining and Dimitrios was staring at him reproachfully. *Could it get any worse?* Greg was sick of him too. He was sick of all of them, Underdog, Chief Superwoman and all the others so-called colleagues and friends at work. *Friends*. One had to live in a monastery to experience true friendship or was that the reason it was called brotherhood? Friends were not brothers. Never.

Adna's phone was ringing again and she picked it up quickly.

"You and Anichka?" Dimitrios said to him sotto voce.

Greg shrugged and looked out the window, it was *still* raining outside. Dimitrios would be sulky for days. They had already gone through this phase before. It was when Dimitrios had found out that Greg hadn't told him he had been a monk. Why should he discuss his private life with someone he worked with? It didn't make sense also if Dimitrios expected it. People didn't understand how a Jew could become a Catholic monk and then police no matter how long you explained it.

He looked at the skyline of Prague in the distance. So many clouds. So much rain. Would it clear up in the evening? Adna put the receiver back in its hook and continued:

"I would have needed you here, not on a bloody plane to Berne. Greg, For God's sake, you know that." Yes, he knew that. They were understaffed. Yes.

"Couldn't you have checked with me first?" *No, he couldn't. It had been too late, too early to call.*

"Why should I? Most likely you were asleep." he defended himself lamely.

"You of all people have permission to always wake me." She had done it again, perfectly stressed each single word. It was fascinating. He looked at her inquiringly, mastering perfectly to hide all his emotions and feelings behind a professional face. It took quite some effort not to challenge her too much. He needed information. He needed facts. And he needed them now. What did they know? Was Catherine Cohen guilty of murdering her daughter? Was he hiding a murderess? Worse, was he falling for one? He had definitively decided not to tell Adna that he and Catherine Cohen had met, that they would keep meeting. There was no turning back now, he had crossed the Rubicon, crazy as it was.

"I will tell you what I know, the rest you will get from the other reports. They're all sitting on your desk, fresh from the printer's". She looked at Dimitrios and he backed her statement with a nod. How Greg hated it when the two of them looked at each other like this.



“The dead girl is Eva Cohen, that much is confirmed now. However, what complicated and slowed it down, was that she had pretended to be her aunt Leah’s daughter for quite some time. You said you remember her from the Clinique Case, didn’t you? She called herself Emily Cohen. You know all this? Don’t you?” Greg was nodding, avoiding Adna’s eyes. He only remembered Eva aka Emily Cohen too well. Adna continued:

“Here is what else we know. It is now confirmed that Eva, or your Emily Cohen gave birth and then she died of amniotic-fluid embolism, a complication in which amniotic fluid or other matter re-enters the mother's bloodstream, triggering a reaction that can result in cardiorespiratory arrest and haemorrhaging”. Adna didn’t hesitate a second, but had rattled it all down in a jiffy. She was always good with that medical stuff. How she could memorize and quote it without breathing or a twinkling of the eye was a mystery. But after all, that was probably why she was the boss, and not him or Dimitrios.

“Ok. And what does that mean? Was it not murder then? Why was she out there? Was she kidnapped? Greg asked impatiently.

“We don’t know. We are still working on the case. *You* are still working on the case. But if someone had brought her out there and on purpose - And then denied her medical help that would be a crime,” she stopped speaking in order to take the occasional breath even Adna needed and then she rattled straight on

“If they took her out there to deny her medical help, risking her life. Makes it worse. It then was intent. Take into consideration abduction, kidnapping and culpable homicide such as infanticide - don’t forget the baby is still missing too, - it could be manslaughter and definitely murder. Eva is dead. Anything could have happened.

Whatever the crime, that is for the judge to decide. The police investigate. So, investigate, guys. Come on. Write those reports.” She clapped her hands frenetically.

“Yeah, let’s -, guys” Dimitrios added laconically, chewing on the word “guys” as if it was a strawberry chewing gum. Adna glanced at him, annoyed, but then continued unmoved.

“Alright. I can summarize some of the questions for you. But, I am sure you can think of many more,” she looked right at Greg as if he was the only one she was addressing. Dimitrios sighed inaudibly.

“Here is the riddle: Why was she there? What did she do in this shack? Out there in the woods? And in the last weeks of her pregnancy? Why didn’t she contact anyone? Why didn’t she go to a hospital, to a midwife, anything really? Why didn’t she seek help? Could she have been saved if help hadn’t been denied? Well, maybe that is less important. What really counts is the mother. The mother. Did the mother, Catherine Cohen deny her the help she needed? Did she let her die on purpose? Was she there when her daughter died? We think that answer could be positive. After all, the mother left her handbag there. She must have been there, shortly before or even at the exact moment the poor girl passed away. Time of death, Saturday late at night. All the evidence places the mother in that shack. She was booked on a plane to Vienna and could have made it to Prague just in time. It would have worked out. We got proof that she rented a car in Vienna. She could have driven to Prague.

The Swiss police describe Catherine Cohen as highly ambitious, she wanted her daughter to embark on an academic career, become a lawyer like herself, not give birth at such an early age. Maybe she just couldn’t bear to lose her that way. And then, while

we are at it: who is the father of the newborn and why was he not there? He doesn't seem to exist."

"Exist."

"Exist, right," Adna corrected herself.

Greg nodded, his concern was not with the father, it was with Catherine. This was of course a perfectly logical argument why Catherine Cohen would deny her pregnant daughter help. So she could become a lawyer. Only a woman could take such a wild guess without having to face charges for misogyny. If he had uttered such nonsense, he would have been dragged instantly in front of an impromptu women's liberation board. He looked at a mountain here. *Mount Everest I am coming.*

"The girl could have had an illegal abortion," Greg added.

"Out there?" Dimitrios asked incredulously.

"Not out there -, but abortion. Sure. That's an option as well, however, why should she be brought to the shack after the abortion. That doesn't make much sense. We believe Eva Cohen wanted to keep the baby when her mother didn't. After all, we have to assume that there was a reason why she ran away from home. It is indeed a possibility that the mother wanted her to have an abortion or forced it upon her. Let us look into this. But without finding and questioning Catherine Cohen we cannot really confirm or deny that. The Swiss say there were links to atrocious websites on her computer. Just before she left, she had googled keywords such as: How to have an abortion with a coat hanger. Where to have abortions in Prague. Stuff like this. Can you imagine. A coat hanger?" Adna shuddered.

"And did you find one?"

"A coat hanger? No. Not yet, but she may have buried it somewhere in the woods. Maybe that's why she forgot her handbag. Because she went to -"

"Bury a coathanger? But that doesn't make any sense. And that's why she forgot the handbag?"

Both men looked at her, their eyebrows raised, frowning.

"We don't want to jump to conclusions. It's too early. First, you guys investigate. There is so much material from the shack. Have you checked that out yet?"

The phone on her desk started to ring again. She didn't pay attention to it.

"And what's more. Greg, why have you never checked if your Emily, well Eva really, from the Clinique case was on the missing persons list?"

"Why on earth should I have done that, Adna? She told me she was Emily Cohen and Leah Cohen her mum. She didn't say she was Eva and her mother had no clue where she was. Why should I have doubted her?"

"Couldn't you tell she had an accent?"

"Yes, she did. In fact, she hardly spoke Czech. We spoke English."

"So? Didn't that make you suspicious?"

"No. She told me, that she and her mum had only moved to Prague a year ago after living in Switzerland all her life. It was because Leah got a job at the Clinique that they came to Prague. I didn't check that either. My bad. It didn't seem important at the time. Before they had lived in Spain. That was what she said. As I said we spoke English, German, a little Czech. It wasn't a missing person case anyway. There was no reason to doubt her. The comment on www.change_the_world.com was in English, not in Czech. My focus was on that. I believed her."

"Greg, You are police. Police. Monks believe, Policemen investigate, you understand?"

"Sure, do."

Adna was biting her tongue and staring at the phone. It was still ringing.

"Yeah, right, then let's -", he was looking for the right word, hesitating a split second "investigate, Let's investigate. However, you seem to believe already that Catherine Cohen is guilty." He looked right at Adna.

"All the evidence is pointing towards her, clearly pointing towards her."

She was reaching for the phone. He could see that she was through with them now.

"Prove me otherwise. And, Greg by the way, don't forget about the Clinique. It is all over the net now. We must still try and find out whether these accusations are true. Eva is dead now, maybe it was the mother who killed her. But the Clinique. Just as likely a suspect. They may have wanted her dead too. Somehow all this is linked, we just don't know how. You have been on this case for weeks with no results. Get a move on. And you too! Team. You are a team. You understand?" She was scowling at Dimitrios.

"Yeah, right. Both of you, guys."



Greg wasn't keen to continue the Cohen case at all. He knew in advance it would bring disaster. There were more pressing matters he should be looking into. But he bit back mentioning the case that he thought was most pressing, more pressing in fact than anything. *The girl that was slaughtered on that video, Adna, you can add that one on a list for headaches.* Adna didn't like the pedophile cases. She didn't like Greg to interfere with the special unit that was on child pornography, but then also she let him

do pretty much what he wanted as he usually got some results, better results than everybody else. But now he couldn't even begin to see where he should continue: Catherine and Eva Cohen or the Clinique or the girl on the video. It seems he would have to do everything at once. As usually. As always.

When the door to her office was closed Dimitrios, asked eagerly:

"And? How was she?"

"Who? Catherine Cohen. I haven't met her when I was in Berne."

That wasn't even a complete lie.

"No. Anichka. I mean. T'is none of my business, but still."

Greg didn't answer and held the door to his own office open for Dimitrios. He bit his lips, he wouldn't answer and hopefully Dimitrios wouldn't ask again. It was one way to communicate and it wasn't the worst.

There was a huge stack of papers on his desk, and with Anichka gone, there was no assistant now, only the underdog to help, he hated it. They both sat down, grabbed a pile and started reading. Only one of them was concentrating.

Dimitrios

Working with Greg was a nightmare. Greg thought Dimitrios Xantopolous had a funny name and he came from a funny place when in truth Greece was Europe's cradle, Dimitrios's cradle. The place it all started for Dimitrios who hadn't always lived in the Czech Republic. He was born in Prague, but *Papáki*, Dimitrios's dad had smuggled him back to Greece in the winter of 1968 when Dimitrios's mum, *mána* had died of an alcohol overdose, leaving a swaddling baby, a mere infant in the care of his struggling father. The young and arduous mother had rapidly increased her daily shots after August 21 (the day the tanks tanked in) not surviving another quadruple Fernet Citrus on the eve of November 30th 1968. Those august Soviet tanks had been too much for her after dancing the streets so joyfully in spring.

A harsh winter followed an even harsher year that yet had started out so promising. Little Dimitrios was coughing all the time, crying, wailing night after night, day after day. *Papáki* couldn't take care of his son. He had to go to work, he had to

play his music, do his thing. So he packed a small bag for the baby, threw in some figures he had carved in wood as a memento and off they went. In spring 1969 on an adventurous trip that nearly cost him his life, little Dimitri was taken to Hungary, Romania and then Bulgaria, all members of the Warsaw Pact, to be run contraband as most precious cargo to Greece, the only place *Papákis* could think of: the home of the only relatives his deceased wife had. Uncle Linus, *mána's* brother and Dimitrios's grandmother his *Paramouthoula* raised him. He was lucky that they were kind to him. Caring. They loved him.

It was a difficult time for Greece when the monarchy was abolished and Papadopoulos became the president. Such tremendous transitions were never easy, very hard on the people, but they were lucky. Uncle Linus owned a large house on an even larger compound right by the sea and Dimitrios, loved the ruby sunsets and the hot lazy summers there that seemed to last forever. Occasionally, he realized that he was different, an orphan, despite his father still being alive, somewhere out there. Just not here. He missed his parents, or rather the idea of what that they might be, without truly knowing what parents were really about. So many idle hours were spent painting, imagining their picture and completing it to such perfection that the pain kicked in where it hurt most.

And then, Dimitrios no longer had the time to miss the carefully crafted effigies that were his parents, drawn up in lonely hours that seemed to last, -that did last forever. Travellers found their way to Greece. In the early seventies, the first tourists, mainly from Germany and Switzerland, began to show up on the southwest peninsula of the Peloponnese and Uncle Linus and his family took their chance. Owning their land, there was no more time for dreaming. Eight years old, Dimitrios started working

as a waiter in Uncle Linus' on-site-camping-restaurant, on the outskirts of Koroni, a village then, having been asleep peacefully for centuries while overlooking the Gulf of Messinia in its slumber, dreaming away the many years that had passed without change. The whole place was shaken awake now and livestock and people were waking only reluctantly to the glorious morning that was about to dawn. It was splendid, it was dazzling. The era of Tourism began. Southern Greece at its best.

Little Dimitri was right there when the compound was turned into a small camping ground and everything went upside down. They opened *Der Seeräuber*, The Buccaneer, in the summer of 1976 to attract German and Swiss tourists. Their living room was turned into a dining hall, so were their spare bedrooms that were on the ground floor. (Who needs a living room when you have tourists?) Stablings and pantries were renovated and done up. More sheds and roofs and tiles and paint were added on the in- and outside of the house. The poor building looked soon as if it was growing a cancerous ulcer on its skin, festering from year to year along longer and longer electrical cables, a convoluted maze made of plastic, clay, epoxy, wood and cement without concept, blue prints or concrete planning. It grew as fast as Dimitrios did and at the age of 14 he was already taller than his uncle.

Uncle Linus wasn't an architect, he was a self-made man and he took what he needed from what was available. The chicken yards, the swines' barn, including all troughs and fences, as well as the goats' hill, overgrown with ancient olive trees (and soon enough overgrown with kilometres of black and blue electrical cable) they were all turned into an alternative camping site where generators roared instead of the European cave lion, that used to roam these regions before it was shot and became extinct. Uncle Linus and Dimitrios didn't have the leisure to think about a historic past

long gone by, they made tables and chairs in winter, then in spring they painted everything in white and blue and built another large patio near the house. Dimitrios worked hard to repay his uncle for taking him in.

It was Dimitrios's idea to choose a German name, *Der Seeräuber*, for their joint venture, and it had been his idea as well that he'd dress up as a little buccaneer when serving the tourists. In summer he was constantly running forward and backwards, barefoot, carrying "ena birra", one beer as the tourists always said also if they wanted a dozen. He wasn't sure they ever realized he was dressed up as a little pirate or whether they believed his rags to be his real clothes, more likely the latter. He carried plates after plates of luke-warm potatoes cut in large slices by his *Paramouthoula*, fried hours before in hot, sizzling olive oil with garlic and thyme, a specialty of the house no one else served. The tourists loved Greek Salad with red onions and sharp sheep cheese that was called feta; a brand of cheese no one had ever heard of before arrival, leave alone tried. It was part of your initiation routine to become a Greek tourist, to become Greek totally. Try feta, like it and be Greece. You could bury your passport sand-deep, right there on the very beach you were camping on, and live on feta ever after, live off the land that had brought forth all European culture.

Never having heard of hippies or hippy-wanna-bes, the tourists looked like gypsies to Dimitrios, the only difference was they had money, lots of it. Endless resources. And fancy cameras, fancy shoes, fancy everything. Women and girls wore long colourful dresses and ankle-length skirts mainly in purple with silver elastic twines held together by yellow and red beads. Their long hair got tangled badly in the salty Mediterranean Sea. And they had no shame. Most of the time they were naked or at least topless when they thought they were all alone. But, of course, they weren't

- alone. The village had its eyes and ears, its limbs and extremities everywhere and the half-naked foreign females caused a great uproar with the village elders and of course an even greater stir with the younger ones.

The male members of the community raised their voices to condemn (sic) the foreigners's presence and their paradisiacal outfits. Not everyone was critical though: Dimitrios wasn't the only one who loved observing them from afar (or from close by if possible) and who loved the money they spent in the community. To Dimitrios it was his first encounter with a different species, with human beings that weren't Greek. And they had come to save them. Everything went up. Tourism brought development and development brought money and money brought freedom and swept along with it the prospects of a grand and promising future, -then it did. The many drachmae the tourists carried and scattered about the country brought immediate relief, immaculate new dreams, ridding Greece from the devastating poverty that had been clutching the country, that had been clutching Uncle Linus's family for so long.

Tourists were saviours, indeed they were. The only thing was the saviours couldn't shit properly. They threw the toilet paper into the water closet so it'd run over. Who would flush down the paper in the toilet when it blocked all the pipes? Only barbarians did that, imbeciles and they did it repeatedly. Again and again. Kind of hard to believe that they wouldn't get it, but then it wasn't them who had to do the cleaning or they might have cottoned on faster. Uncle Linus would swear and sigh and grunt when he had to empty the clogged pipes, it was appalling. Tourist shit stank awfully in the dry summer's heat and mingled with the toilet paper (which was not supposed to be flushed down) and women's sanitary pads (which were not supposed to be flushed down either and stank even worse) it was like inferno's own deadly

bubble mix growing upon Uncle Linus and his family from within the pipes that weren't built to carry that much shit. They all weren't built to carry all that shit.

However, the best story was about the little angelic boy with the golden locks. It was an exemplary story for saving and making ends meet, austerity at its best. Dimitrios guessed its meaning from the very visual telling of the story by the little boy himself to the rest of his pack, a troop of baboons. Such monkeys they were. Goldilocks must have wiped his ass with the dirty paper from the wastebin, thinking that as one side was still clean, it could still be used. One side *was* still clean he argued cohesively. Dimitrios got it without understanding the actual words. The listeners all shrieked out loud when he gestured the story to them, showing exactly how he picked up the paper, how he wiped his soft pink little bottom and how he disposed of the paper again. At least he put it back in the basket, used to its full extent, both sides, full of shit after the procedure, his own and somebody else's who had shat there before. And wasn't that great? They were like visitors from a different planet, from a new world and Dimitrios found them most fascinating and rather disgusting and primitive.

In the years to come everything got better, faster, cleaner and more expensive. Also the Greek began to throw the toilet paper into the water closet, the bin with the used toilet paper disappeared. Uncle Linus became richer, fatter, exchanging his ragged clothes with more and more expensive suits and freshly pressed white shirts, his smile increasingly frozen to his face throughout the never ending eternal Greek summer. Only in winter he could get rid of the constant sneer, as if the cold was thawing his facial muscles. Usually it took him a couple of days to get back to normal after the season had ended. It was a time when it was easy to find work if you wanted to work hard, and Dimitrios loved working hard. However, throughout his teenage

years, he had always wanted to join his father in Prague. Go back home, his real home, the place he was born. Go back to Prague. Prague was special, Prague was great. The home he never knew, the father he had never met. There was more than one piece missing to the jigsaw that was his life.

After Dimitrios had turned 21, the wall came down in Berlin, Glasnost and Perestroika ended the cold war and Prague became the centre of the universe, so it seemed. He realized that more and more tourists from all over Europe kept on talking about Prague, - Prague, nothing but Prague; -“Have you been to Prague? Have you seen the Jewish cemetery? The castle? The beauty of the Vlatava in the evening when the sun set? Isn't it simply incredible?” *Incredible*. So they whispered to each other. Prague seemed to have become the true Mecca with the educated and bohemian clientele that occasionally passed through the All-you-Can-Bufferets that young Dimitrios had to lay out and restock carefully. Prague, the one and only city. The rising star the cultured clientele turned to and worshipped humbly and fervently and less and less secretly.

He could spot true believers at once, instead of carrying cheap well-thumbed greasy tabloids they carried elegant books, red travel guides by Baedeker and novels by George Orwell. He could tell by the cover of their reading that these were not the usual dirty stories that were written for the hungry masses to play with. No cheap sex and crime and blood shedding tales of what everybody coveted, but real stories, real literature, such as he read himself, when he had the time and when he was not too exhausted after serving the hungry hordes all day. He had taught himself English reading Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a Wordsworth Classic, parallel with a Greek translation It had helped, but the tourists found his English quite

“quaint”, as a retired American professor for Geophysics at the MIT put it. He was told that sometimes he spoke like someone straight out of the 19th century. He simply couldn’t help it then and only lost the habit when he got older and had a chance to listen to how people really spoke. (And f-k, - he not liked)

There was a time when tourists at Linus’s hotel seemed to talk about Prague without end, incessantly, as if Greece wasn’t really worth the visiting at all. As if Greek culture was phoney and fake, old, *passé*. Serving what passed for Greek Seafood but was really captured in the Arctic made Dimitrios more and more restless, giving him itchy feet that made him feel tingly all over, his skin sore from the virtual rash his constant longing gave for real. The more wonderous the stories about Prague got, the more his yearning increased to go there, to move there, not only temporary, but for good, to go home forever. Join his dad, do as he did. Soon enough, he began to learn Czech with a book and a CD he had ordered from a bookshop in London, on recommendation of an English couple they had hosted. Each word he learnt took him closer and closer on his one-way-trip to Prague, riding with giant steps on the map that had become his life.

Czech, being a West Slavic Language, was full of subtle and more salient similarities with Greek. It was with great scholarly finesse that he detected the underlying structure, the basic scaffold of the two languages, easily interweaving one with the other, building from grammar and vocabulary, his ashlar blocks, and from literature, his stained window glasses, a cathedral that displayed the art of great masonry but to himself. Rather enjoying the strenuous process, he made rapid progress. He had always found it easy to learn, and Czech was the easiest of all languages as it was the most desired, the most wanted, his very own lingua franca

created but for him. He was so eager to learn that he gargled, it all down: vocabulary and idioms and collocations, tenses and adverbs and adjectives, slaking his thirst like a new born babe. The circles of his life were closing and they weren't concentric. A new centre was emerging, a new point of reference found. He was determined to make Prague his new home. Indeed, it had always *been* his home.

He also knew, he no longer wanted to work for tourists, that time had drawn to an end. In its place a fervent wish formed, carved out more clearly as the days rolled past: He wanted to work as a policeman, in Prague, enforce the law, do what was right. When he applied for the Greek police academy first, and then passed the hard entry exam, Uncle Linus didn't like it. Nevertheless, he let him go, grumbling and complaining for weeks, deploring the state of the family. Police in Greece wasn't really what he had wanted for his nephew, wasn't what you'd want for anyone you loved dearly. But after all, he was a wise man and although Dimitrios was his "only son" as he always said, he didn't stop him, but encouraged him to go his own way, even if it meant losing him.

After having served 2 years in Athens, Dimitrios applied for a job in Prague with the Czech police force. To his great amazement, he was accepted and it wasn't until much later that he found out that his father had pulled some strings. The guy who was servicing the police cars owed Papákis a favour. And the police owed him. Big one. It took Dimitrios to Prague. That was that. And then Papákis died.

At the age of 25 Dimitrios found himself in a city he didn't know, alone and endlessly tired of life. Things went from bad to worse and from worse to worst. It took him quite a while to get back on his feet. That time then was a dark blur. But Dimitrios managed: He found himself a wonderful wife, Ema, he had a sweet little girl, Lenka

and then – Greg. Greg wasn't really part of the big dream. Greg was not a nice person, not in Dimitrios's eyes. He acted as if he was the boss, a boss you had to fear. He made all the decisions, running the show Dimitrios didn't want to be in. He was allowed to watch, to stand by, be of help, if needed and always from the sidelines. Greg hadn't even deemed it necessary to tell him that once he had been a monk. He hadn't told him a thing and he never told him a thing. On the contrary: Greg called him the underdog behind his back and occasionally, but rarely, especially when the going got really tough, to his face. After serving alongside him for more than 15 years, he had run out of patience. Greg really was in his way. If only he'd make a mistake, Dimitrios would take care of it, eliminate him for good. Dimitrios was ready to take his chance and risk quite a bit in return.

But now the financial crisis had hit Greece and the nightmare began to turn into a full-blown apocalypse consuming all of Dimitrios' energy and concentration. Greg was banned to the attic of his mind and different questions moved centre stage: Would Greece keep the Euro? Would they still belong to a united Europe or were they being pushed out by the big loving family they belonged to? The German brother was a great bully and so were others. After all, were these simply the little boys who had used the wrong end of the toilet paper to wipe their asses, thinking it was clean when really there was so much shit on the other side? Had they still not grown up now, even if they were in charge now? Let the Germans have their way, let them clear the country, let them fight corruption and bribery and sweep up all the paper there was for a new Greek currency when toilet paper was in short supply. Or was it the other way round? Was the currency in short supply?

Paper was ever so patient. You could use it on both sides. You could use it to shove down these pipes, fully charged. But in Europe the contract of Maastricht prevented the countries from doing just this and Greece's crash was inevitable. Paper was so patient, it could be anything you wanted, only the Greeks couldn't. They couldn't be anything. They were reduced to poverty and dirt. Golden fabled days of heroic tourism and economic development were gone, gone for good. The new travellers that were about to hit the country wouldn't be welcome. There was too little of everything, only bribery was abundant and overflowing like honey in the Promised Land. The rich got richer and left the country, taking the nation's money with them, leaving but debts. People were hungry.

The newspapers had solid explanations for the present crisis; accurate, well researched articles, scientifically substantiated, based on intelligent studies, speeches and spooks. They were outbidding each other's quest for truth and explanatory frameworks that framed (framed the Greek? *Not my problem. The Greek's problem if they let themselves being framed*) with a currency (No, that sentence is ... and must be deleted). (Delete) (Recap). When the Euro was created everyone adhered to the No-Bail-out principle but when Greece first needed help in May 2010 it all changed. (More nonsense) So far no other European country had been held liable for another country's debts. But then Euroland faced turmoil never heard of. In Switzerland or the United States the national federal banks were lenders of last resort. If the country was in debt and the creditor wanted their money, federal banks would just print and print and print and print money as much as was needed. (Total nonsense, who can do this? The Swiss? The Americans? Really? Why can't everybody else?)

Dimitros wasn't sure he understood all the explanations that newspapers gave these days. Was saving the right way or would it simply increase Greece's debts? Often arguments were contradictory, claiming opposite ends yet basing all their theses on the same premises: It was really confusing. He didn't understand all the theory, but he understood what Uncle Linus wrote to him. Life had gotten so hard. His uncle was desperate. His emails and texts were full of fear and hate and desperation. He would have to close the four camping sites and his restaurants and the two hotels near Koroni. Bankruptcy was looming near, it was coming closer each day, step by step creeping up from behind until all was destroyed, until all employees would have to be sacked. Terminated. They were doomed. The drachma would be reintroduced and then Dimitrios' dream in Prague was over. To cut a long story short: Linus needed money, money Dimitrios didn't have. Money Dimitrios had to find if he didn't want to go back himself to help his uncle.

Uncle Linus would need help with everything, running and maintaining the campsites, but also farming and planting, food production: onions, salad, eggplants and tomatoes. Tomatoes. It would be a nightmare. Some of his fellow citizens were already planting vegetables next to the runways of the airports. How terrible was that? Dimitrios had been planting tomatoes all his childhood and throughout all his youth. For years, he had been watering tomatoes, picking tomatoes, slicing tomatoes, then dressing them up in vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper, not to forget crowning their soft aqueous flesh with a piece of greasy white feta, veiling the dish like a virgin when meeting the bridegroom. He had been serving tomatoes to little hungry tourist girls that ran around barefoot and went swimming in the clear waters of his beloved sea like boys; with nothing to cover their growing, budding breasts. He had been looking

after tomatoes all these years when he was young. He hated tomatoes, all he wanted was here.

What he wanted was Catherine Cohen. His only chance to move forward, to move up the ladder. He was ready to convict her, whatever it took. She was guilty, it would be easy to prove. All's well that ends well: If he found Catherine Cohen, he would arrest the woman who had so brutally slain her child, let her daughter die in childbirth without helping her. Eva Cohen could surely have been helped. She shouldn't be dead. He wanted to see that mother monster locked up behind the big bars, and so did the press. What a monster she was indeed. If he solved the case then he'd get the promotion and Greg wouldn't. He would be the one who'd get the pay raise. In addition to his other lucrative sideline work, there would be enough money for him, his family and Uncle Linus's hotels and restaurants. He simply couldn't bear it for much longer. No promotion, no pay rise, no money for Uncle Linus. Not a very complicated algorithm. Easy. He needed this promotion, he needed to solve this present case, he needed to find Catherine. That was all that really mattered.

The waggon

“And?”

Dimitrios looked up. Greg stood in the doorway. Lost in thoughts, he hadn't seen him get up.

“You look tired. You're alright?” Dimitrios chose not to answer.

“Found anything worth looking into?”

“Maybe this?” Dimitrios grabbed a fresh pile of papers right in front of him.

“What is it?”

“From the shack where she died.”

“Yes, but what is it?”

“I don't know. About the war? I don't really see the connection yet. It says something like-, let's see. 1945, The waggon. How could she raise life when she was hungry? How

could her thin sick body -. I cannot read this. What is this? Wine? Blood?" He turned the page to give the stain on it a closer look.

"Whatever. How does it continue?" Greg asked impatiently, Dimitrios continued reading in Czech.

"From Terezín they were brought to Poland, crammed in waggons, crammed. A waggon was 6 meters to 3 meters, There were two little windows. Bodies died from heat. No one talked to the children. How could no one explain to the children? One week on the train. Fifty trains a day." Dimitrios looked up.

"What is this all about?" Dimitrios shuffled through the papers, there were endless pages of handwritten scribbling. I cannot make sense of this."

"Don't know. We shall find out. But not now. I'll have to run."

"Was Eva Cohen a Nazi?"

"Don't be an idiot, Dimitrios. She was Jewish."

"How do you know?"

"Her mother is Jewish."

"Does that make her a Jew as well?"

Greg turned on his heel and was gone without answering the question.

Catherine

The weather had changed while they had been sitting in the green parlour. It had begun to rain a quarter of an hour ago and by now it was pouring down awfully. Still, she hadn't taken a sip from the coffee Leah had brought her. She couldn't swallow anything, her throat had swollen up completely, her tongue was paralyzed. The coffee had gone cold long ago. She didn't know where to rest her eyes, carefully she averted them from the intense rain outside the dirty windows, but also the skin blotches of her sister's pale face and the fragile gold-rimmed cup with cold coffee. The dirty silver spoon looked interesting and innocent enough with its black ornaments. Leah had

stopped crying, she was now ready to talk and Catherine was soaking up every word she was saying without understanding everything she said.

“When Eva first came, I had just quit working at the Clinique. Look Catherine I don’t know how I should tell you this. It is all so wrong, I know. We, I mean Julia, Dr. Julia Linder and I, you know my colleague from Switzerland. Remember when I had Timmy? And was studying? How she helped me? You do remember her, don’t you?” Catherine nodded, faintly remembering a young woman with long blonde hair, always in jeans. But she wasn’t sure that was really the one. How old was she when Leah was in med school? Maybe ten, eleven?

Leah looked away and fell silent. It was as if all language had been drained from her before the words would break forth like a torrent. Before the tsunami the water is always pulled out into the deep sea and the sandy beach was laid bare. The tsunami hit full blast only after.

“I mean. Remember how Timmy could have been helped?” She looked away, then continued. “Let me just spit it out: We were selling, whether you believe it or not. We were selling organs, mainly kidneys. Yes, it’s forbidden. I know. Don’t look at me like that. You can live really well without one kidney it is not a problem. Well, most of the time it isn’t, I mean strictly speaking from a medical point of view. Really, it isn’t.” Catherine didn’t trust her ears, not in her wildest dreams would she have deemed this possible. Her own sister, selling organs? Had Eva been involved in all this? Illegal organ trafficking? No wonder she was dead. Catherine was completely stunned.

“People do it for someone in their family they love, why shouldn’t they do it for money? And good money. We paid them well, I mean considering what they’d earn otherwise. I mean these are poor people. I would have bought a kidney for Timmy,

you know I would, I would have given one if I could have. Don't look at me like that, you would have helped me pay, if we had had the chance, but we didn't, not then, not without the web. You wouldn't find a donor, not fast enough. A donor that matched. It couldn't be done. We gave them 10'000 Dollars. Do you understand: US Dollars and they flocked in from all over the place Russia, Moldavia, Belarus, Uzbekistan and then the Ukraine. How could we know that there would be that many. I had never thought it would be such a success. And, I mean, it was a good deal for them. But then they started bringing their children. I mean -."

She paused and Catherine felt like running, hurling the cup of coffee onto the floor, into her face, screaming at Leah as loud as she could, howling her down like an Alpha She-wolf her competitor. Instead she sat still, deadlocked and listened. There was more to come.

"I was sceptical, but Julia, you know Dr. Linder didn't have a problem with it. I mean, operating the children." *The woman with the long blonde hair and the washed out jeans didn't have a problem operating on children, taking out their kidney, liver, heart, whatever and selling it on the black market? She didn't have a problem with it?*

Catherine sat aghast. *Please, please let this pass. No, it couldn't be true. She was hallucinating. Leah was hallucinating, The words were tumbling out of her sister's mouth but they couldn't be true.*

"She said they would recover faster than adults and most of the time she was right. But I am not so sure what it does to the growing body. Once you're an adult you might have severe traumas from that operation. I cannot really say and honestly, I don't want to know. We sold the organs to Israel, cash, leaving absolutely no traces and really there was no problem. Not until one of the donors died. A little boy. Julia

had done the surgery and I really cannot explain, I mean I don't know what had happened and why, but the little boy was dead all of a sudden. I walked in to ask her about something I cannot remember. And she was fiddling around nervously with all her instruments, totally stressed out. I tried to help, but I couldn't. Believe me, it was awful. A complete shock. I left the hospital at once. And when I came home, I was crying all night. It was then that I decided to quit, do something else, open Jacob's Ladder and that was about when Eva came. Last summer. I couldn't keep it from her as I was having such bad nightmares. Always about a boy dying, and, I mean, each and every time it was Timmy. Always Timmy. I couldn't help it. It was a difficult time. I had a complete mental breakdown, I was crying day in and out. Of course, Eva wanted to know -, and I was absolutely finished. So, in the end I told her everything. She was furious, you of all people most know how she could get and-. Look what she did the very night after I had told her. She submitted the petition from my very computer, from this very computer while I was asleep, can you believe it. I mean, can you believe it?" Leah got up and brought back her notebook. She logged herself into Firefox and went to www.change_the_world.com.

"Do you know that website? It is tailored to young kids, teenagers who still believe that they can change the world. You can log in and then sign it and create a petition or give a reason why you sign. Look at this." Catherine nodded. She knew how it worked in general. Such sites were usually linked to Facebook and Twitter and they kind of recreated themselves like a never-ending spiral. Tweets and messages were sent to famous people like Oprah Winfrey, Rihanna or Justin Bieber and they then sent it on to their followers, it was like a virus and once it was out there it couldn't be stopped, it had gone viral infecting each and everyone. Leah scrolled down to the

petition that was called: *Stop the Clinique in Prague* and read what Eva had written. There were 5'230'456 supporters already and in the last four minutes another 5 people had signed and supported it. It read:

Stop the Clinique in Prague

Outrageous things are going on at in the heart of Prague. People from all over Eastern Europe come to Prague to sell their kidneys. Now organized crime has began to bring in children, often from Roma families. The weakest are exploited and adults profit and take the money, it is outrageous and must be stopped immediately. Help me and stop the Clinique. Please sing the petition below and help stop this. Police and Politicians don't do anything.

There was a comment from chickenslaughterer in Rio de Janeiro, one from Miomjiocho X in London, San Francisco and one from Moscow, and so on and on. Most people had signed with their usernames or real names and email addresses and some even with their pictures. Most joined her plea. It was outrageous indeed. Catherine gasped. The Clinique case.

"It is unbelievable," Catherine said.

"Yes," Leah added, "she wanted to protect me. That is why she hasn't given my name, not her real name, but of course when I saw it, I was furious. Eva had also regretted it immediately and only realized after she had pressed the submit button that she had endangered me terribly. I think, she didn't really know what she was doing.

She was just angry, impulsive. You know her. Then of course it couldn't be changed and once she had filed the petition, she wanted to cancel it immediately. But then it wasn't possible. Cancelling a petition wasn't something that the website offered. And even then, even if we could have erased it. The web never forgets. It will always be out there now. The police will come and hunt me down. Me and -. They took your daughter. You must believe me. It was them who killed her."

Catherine was completely shocked. She didn't know what to tell her sister. The petition on the website sounded just like Eva. That she had created it after freaking out completely, yes, that sounded just like Eva too. And the part where she wanted to undo what she had done, but couldn't. That part had Eva's handwriting written all over the place. But Leah was concerned with another thread of the story.

"Here comes the most incredible: So far nothing has happened, people click on her message, but in the real world nothing happened. Can you imagine? She must have posted that months ago, but absolutely nothing has happened so far. I think it said created on 3rd of September 2011. Can you believe it? The police have interviewed me and Eva a couple of times afterwards because they had traced it to our IP address, but she denied it and so did I. We said we had let guests use our notebook. Anybody could have posted the petition. Not sure they believed it. And then nothing. No politicians, no protesters outside the Clinique. It is hard to understand. It was pure virtual. The protest. It's weird."

Catherine was extremely tired. The story Leah told her was outrageous.

"I had resigned already and had opened Jacob's Ladder, so I felt I might be safe. I had enough money, you can imagine, though I didn't do it for the money, I wanted to help

these parents. I really wanted to help. I didn't want the money. You must believe me. Catherine."

She broke down crying.

"You must believe me. Of course, it is wrong, it was wrong. When that boy died. I didn't want that, Catherine, you must believe me. I stopped, even before the petition. Catherine, I am really sorry, so sorry." She was crying hard now and it took a while until she could continue: "Linder is the one to blame. She started with the children, she was the one who thought -. She will get us all killed." Leah stopped dead, then changed the subject.

"Eva was helping me when I first started here. She did everything for me. She did the dishes, washed the floor, she was handing out fresh towels and preparing breakfast. Having her was great. She spoke such perfect German and English and she was so good with the internet. She created a new website for me. It was great. All our guests loved the Swiss girl. We always said she had chocolate hair and a golden smile; she was our golden chocolate girl, though she felt miserable occasionally. But then we didn't know what was wrong with her. If I had known that you didn't have a clue where she was. I would have called, you must believe me. I would have called you. About a month after we started, it began to show, it really began to show. That must have been late summer. In the beginning I thought she had just put on weight because of the fatty food here, all that oil, but then I realized that she was really pregnant. At first I was scared that she had gotten -, I mean that she had gotten it here and what you would say and all this." She stopped, losing her thread.

She wasn't sure whether she should keep it and I recommended -." Catherine was staring at her sister incredulously, finally interrupting her:

"You should have called."

"I know. I couldn't."

"So?"

"After she had been to the Clinique she decided to really keep it."

"You sent her to that very Clinique where you and -?"

"It is a good Clinique, the best we have here."

"The best Clinique? In illegal organ trafficking?"

"Yes, the best. You must believe me. We didn't mean to harm anybody. I mean. Anyway, let us not talk about this anymore. She was too scared of the procedure and it was kind of too late anyway. I think she really wanted the child though. She said you would kill her for it, would you? I mean. And she said the father of the child jumped off a bridge before she could tell him. She was traumatized."

Catherine was nodding. Eva had disappeared two days after Thierry's funeral. So, it hadn't been a coincidence.

"Yes, that must have been Thierry, her boyfriend. He had always been kind of depressive, very bright, very good at school though, very clever and so gifted. But he got so tired of doing what he was supposed to do, following his parents' instructions, living up to their high expectations. It was such a blow, such a waste. We just couldn't understand why he went over that bridge. I thought for such a long time that Eva had ran away because he had -. But then she never called or wrote and then we thought she was abducted.

"Abducted? Why did you never call? I mean. Didn't you think she could have come here?"

Catherine was slowly shaking her head. No, the thought hadn't occurred to her, not after Timmy died. She had even told the police Leah was dead when she was asked. Simply because they had always said to each other that Leah was dead; when of course, well-. When of course, she wasn't. Obviously, she wasn't.

"No. I never would have thought she'd come here." The two sisters looked at each other. *Alien, aren't you?* Thought Catherine. *We are such total aliens and to each other.* She pressed the disturbing thought down, continuing with great strain.

"But then. She went to the Clinique and then decided to keep the child? Did she?"

"Catherine, if only I knew. Then she left, all of a sudden. It was some time after Christmas. I don't know where she went. I swear, she just disappeared. Vanished. Gone."

"Leah. You must tell the police. You must tell them what you know. Tell them about the website. That it wasn't one of your guests using your IP address for the petition, but Eva. It was Eva."

"Well, we said Eva was Emily Cohen, my daughter."

"Your daughter? She is my daughter. Leah, do you understand? My daughter. What a complete mess. Why would you do that? Leah? For God's sake. Can you explain any of this. I mean, any -?"

"I don't know." Leah put her head on the table to rest her weary thoughts. She was tired too.

"Let me get this right. Just so I understand. Why would you create a new identity for her? That's a complete mess."

"I don't know, we thought it was funny."

“Funny? Seriously? Giving a false name to the police? And making her your daughter, when in fact she isn’t. Really? You thought that was funny? Really?”

Catherine, the mother, Catherine the lawyer she was getting angrier and angrier. None of this was funny. This was all totally fucked up.

“You must tell them the truth. Eva might have been killed by the mafia that is behind all this.”

“Tell them? You are asking me to tell them what I’ve done? There is no mafia behind all this. It was only us. We did this ourselves. We set up the contacts, Dr. Linder did. I have no idea why she wrote organized crime brought in the kids. They all came by themselves. I can’t tell them now. Let them find out for themselves. They are the police.”

“No. They won’t find out. You must tell them. Or I will.”

Catherine checked herself. She couldn’t really tell them either, not with her handbag surfacing at the crime site and her being a suspect in this lousy tragedy. She couldn’t really say anything either. What a complete mess.

Then, abruptly, she got up and walked out the green parlour into the entrance hall and out the door. No, she couldn’t take any of this anymore. She walked out on Leah and her glorious collection of teak chairs, mahogany tables and golden mirrors, leaving her startled and confused, - and hurt. Catherine was abandoning her sister to her grief, severely battling her own. Leah was calling after her, but Catherine didn’t hear, didn’t want to hear. She needed peace and space and quiet, a spacious room, a universe of her own filled to the rim with blissful tranquillity and distraction. That was what she longed for.

Fortunately, the cold had abated by now, turned its voracious appetite for encompassing sogginess into a gentle drizzle that gently brushed her cheeks as she walked faster and faster until she was running. The noise of the traffic hit her like an enormous wave and she let herself being carried away in the hustle and bustle of pretty Prague until the whale that was her sanity and common sense swallowed her up. Then she went shopping. It was the sensible thing to do. First thing she did was buy cheap boots. Shoes: always a treat. She put them on right away.



Catherine was heavily laden with fresh food, salad, milk, some chicken when she got back to Greg's apartment in the early evening. In addition, she was carrying a bottle of precious red wine grown in one of the many vineyards surrounding Prague since the middle ages. Greg wasn't home yet, he still had to be at work. She would use her time well until he came back. After she had spent quite a moment in the bathroom she felt female again, ready for action, ready to face anything. Her sister involved in organ trafficking, maybe even her own daughter hunted by the Czech, the Russian, the Chinese, no -, the Israeli Mafia. (Was there an Israeli Mafia at all?) It was beyond belief. She tried to relax. Preparing food always helped calm her down and think more clearly.

Barefoot and her toes still wet, she went into the kitchen and took out the chicken steaks, potatoes and the green beans she was going to cook. *Had she really forgotten the onions? She couldn't cook if there were no onions.* The tiles were cool and slick,

soon she would need to put on socks, but her newly painted toes looked so lovely, so shiny. What on earth had happened to her? *Quelle Merde.*

Greg's Place

She was about to peel the potatoes and dress the meat when Greg came back. The sound of the key in the latch made her start, then he called out to her:
"Catherine, are you here?"

She didn't answer but walked into the hall instead, being fully aware of her natural elegance and beauty, and her new haircut. The one he had given her. He was turning his back towards her, hanging up his scarf and gloves. And all she could think of was how he had touched her. The way he had run his palms through her hair when he had cut it, softly stroking the fine skin on her neck as his fingers lingered on, expertly holding the scissors so he wouldn't hurt her. The fine cold touch of the blades' metal when they brushed against her cervical, the warm and firm touch of his hands, it really gave her the shivers. They were connecting in their own special way she couldn't really explain. She was standing there, gracefully, head held high, while all

the time (and repeatedly) looking down upon her toenails, thinking of her thighs and calves and other parts of her body that were cleanly shaven now. Soft. Smooth. Tender. Velvety to touch, if you touched.

He was as tall and as handsome as she remembered, maybe even more beautiful than she could recall. Greg was holding his keys and wallet in his strong hands, still wearing his Cashmere coat she had loved touching when he had taken her to Jacob's Ladder this afternoon. Then he turned and saw her standing there.

"You look pale," he said, and she realized how he was hurriedly glancing at her naked feet.

"Are you alright?" Silently, she shook her head.

"Come on, you need some fresh air. Get dressed properly. We are going out. It is cold."

He just stood there, looking at her, ready to grab his gloves and scarf again.

"I've just started peeling potatoes."

"Peeling potatoes? Come on. Why would you do that? You're not my ship's boy."

"Didn't know you had a ship."

"Well, I don't. I wish I had though".

"You like ships?"

"Yes, I do. In fact, very. So are you coming?"

"Where are we going?"

"Out. I am hungry. And you, you must see Prague."

"I have seen it today."

"No, you haven't. All you got was a tiny glimpse. Come on. Let's go."

"If you put everything back in the fridge. I've just started to cook. In fact, there are no onions and I've forgotten them. So."

“So?”

“I can’t cook without onions.

“Are you moving in now?”

Catherine was startled, of course she wasn’t moving in. Cooking was simply the most natural thing to do. If she didn’t do it for a couple of days, she would miss it.

“Of course, I am not moving in. That is not the point.”

“Yes, it is. Only roommates cook. Or spouses. You are not my roommate, nor my spouse then you won’t have to cook. Forget about the onions. The whole lot. Let’s go.”

Catherine was shaking her head.

“But I have to put everything back into the fridge. Wait. And let me get changed.”

He rolled his eyes.

If she went out the police would find her more easily. They were bound to find her, it was only a matter of time. She sighed out loud. Maybe it was best if she was found, then she could tell the police about Eva aka Emily aka Mathilda Cohen. Would they believe her though? She hardly believed the story herself. She was looking at her pale face in the mirror. Lipstick or no lipstick?

It had been so long since her last date. Was that a date now? Or was it just grab some food to fill an empty stomach? She was ready quickly.

“Why potatoes? I mean seriously. Why not rice? You wouldn’t have to peel rice.

I never cook potatoes. It is too much work.”

Catherine gave him a jovial shove.

“Right. No more cooking. Alright. Let’s go.”

“Let’s go.”

Then she followed him out the door and down the old stone stairs. The staircase seemed endless.

Catherine and Greg

It had become chilly in Prague and the wind was much stronger now than after the rain in the afternoon, another blizzard approaching? Hopefully not. She was shivering, trying to hug herself. How dark the streets were at night. Greg, quite naturally, put his arm around her shoulders and she felt his warmth supporting her. She couldn't remember or recall where they were going or how long it did take. *Definitely a date.* They were passing the communist monument and a big market that was closed now, all the booths were covered up with grey tarpaulin. People hurried past them, buckled down by heavy coats and thick plastic jackets.

So many strangers. Catherine herself felt shaken beyond measure, as if she was a foreigner to mankind and the human condition. She; a mother that had loved her child more than any mother could ever love. She, a lawyer who had seen more misery and pain than the average citizen sees in the course of a lifetime, had become a stranger

to herself and her own misery. Greg's silence was soothing though and she appreciated it for what it was: an offer of friendship, a way to show that he cared for her. *Not a date then? Friendship? They were friends, weren't they? What the heck, she was hungry.* How much longer?



Finally, they sat in a small and cozy restaurant that was well heated by a wood-fired oven in the corner. Her feet were numb, her hands red from the cold, but the room was warm and not too noisy.

"Would you like your menu with or without soup?" The bald waiter asked, smiling at them. Catherine nodded:

"Yes, with soup and a beer." Her body urged for some liquid.

"Let us take the gyros. And two Budweiser Budvar. Dark." Greg said.

"Oh, is this the famous gyros you told me about in the car." With a nod he dismissed the waiter who seemed pleased at this recommendation and shuffled off quickly to pass their order directly to the kitchen.

"In fact, it is. And, not to forget, the beer is even more famous and definitely more Czech. You like brown beer, don't you?"

"Love it. A bit late to ask after having ordered." Catherine smiled. The waiter returned at once with two bottles of cold beer.

"Well, you have to try the real thing. You know the history of brewing the Budweiser dates back to the 13th century, when the city of Budweis got the brewing rights and today: it is the bestselling Czech lager in Great Britain. Imagine."

"You know all about beer, don't you?" She raised her glass to her lips.

"Well, had to. As a monk."

Catherine had taken another sip from her glass and nearly choked over it.

"Yes, sure. As a monk," she was grinning, wiping off foam from her upper lip.

"Seriously, beer is something absolutely fascinating. It is a living being. You have to care for it, feed it, look after it. It's like pet that you can keep in your fridge."

"Yeah right. With a soul that has to be saved? I am sure you monks were really crazy about converting beer."

"It doesn't need to be converted, it is perfect already."

"So what made you stop?"

"Brewing beer? We hadn't really properly started. The mills of God grind slowly."

"No, I mean, why did you leave the church?"

"That's a long story."

"Well, tell me."

"There was a woman. I told you."

"No, that can't have been it. Serious?"

"Well, yes, It was that simple -, but you're right: there was more. In addition."

"What can there be more to women?"

"I was ready to leave. Somehow it didn't make sense anymore. I had gotten past it.

The truth is I left because of the net." Catherine frowned at him and leaned forward:

"The net? You were a fisherman?"

He shook his head, smiling at her.

"Very cryptic indeed then. Is that supposed to be a reference to the New Testament?"

Remember, I am Jewish. I wouldn't get it."

"No, the internet," Greg laughed.

"You had access to the internet?"

"Of course, come on. *Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*"

"Oh God, more Latin. I've missed it already," she groaned.

"Everything changes, but we change as well. There are Catholic blogs and YouTube videos. You name it." Catherine was shaking her head, she still didn't get it:

"The internet? Why would that make you want to leave the church? Were you addicted to it? Child pornography?"

Catherine gave him a quizzical look, her stomach was grumbling. It was high time that gyros was served.

"You've become a pedophile. Watching snuff movies all the time. That's it. It didn't go down well with all that prayer. No beer in the world could wash that down"

But Greg snorted out loud.

"No, I am not an addict and no, I am not a pedophile, definitely not."

He took another sip from his glass as if to stress his genuineness. He was moving on thin ice now.

"Shouldn't you know me well enough by now?"

"Well you were catholic. That would explain a lot. Preference for these little boys."

"Come on. Cut me some slack. Wanna hear the story?"

"Sure. I keep waiting."

"Truth is, we have created all these fantastic algorithms",

"The church has? That's news."

She raised her eyebrows. He could see that she didn't believe a word. Quickly, he corrected himself.

"I mean man has, and maybe some women. If you enter a word into google you can connect with the whole world, with every computer there is. All that knowledge, all these ideas. Imagine. It is all there at your fingertips. A man-made universe bigger than we are, bigger than any brain is or ever will be. A fantastic, endless man-made room, so much larger than we are, greater than any brain there is."

"You have said that already."

"But it's true. The perfect algorithm. It's perfect. Big Data. And when it starts learning. Imagine what can be done with it. It knows more than we do. It can do more than we can. We have created heaven on earth. All powerful, all knowing, omniscient."

"And? I don't get why this would make you leave the church."

"All of a sudden I pictured God as the creator creating something that was far greater than he himself. The idea took a moment to sink in.

"Us?" Catherine started folding her napkin.

"Yes. Man and, of course -, woman. What if we are that fantastic wonderful creature, God has created and he is just a paralyzed simpleton so to speak? Gazing at us with his mouth full of slobber."

He grimaced at her, looking awry.

"You mean: if we are to God as the great, big wide web is to man?"

"Yes, if even our creations are so much bigger, cleverer, more intelligent than we are, then couldn't it be that his creation is also so much larger than he his? I simply couldn't get rid of the thought. Once it was out there, I simply couldn't take it back. I had stopped being a believer from one minute to the other. I began to look down upon our creator. I know it sounds ridiculous. But that is the true reason I left."

Catherine had become serious now.

“I have never really thought of it like that. Being Jewish it was always clear to me that God was God. Almighty. All powerful. Omniscient. I mean that he is so much larger than we are and that we could never create something better and more complex than we are ourselves. Never ever.”

“But we can.”

“Well, we tried. There was the tower of Babel, but God would not allow it. We failed.”

“What if he allows it this time and we don’t fail?”

“We will, we’re fallen creatures. I guess. If we could build a perfect world we would have done it by now, don’t you think?”

Catherine said, shifting uncomfortably in her chair. If there was something her mother had neglected then it was their religious education. They were Jewish on paper and that was about it. Spending her early childhood in an American Hippie community and then her adolescence in uptight Switzerland, she didn’t really know a lot about her own belief. In fact, she was not very well trained in anything to do with being Jewish. She couldn’t really argue her case, it was just some gut feeling she was relying on. Greg was far more eloquent finding words for what he meant:

“The tower of Babel is nearly complete, let’s face it. There are so many Nature-inherent principles that guide our world, what if that is one of them: An intelligent creator can create even more intelligent stuff than himself. Look at robots, for instance.”

“Well, I don’t know anything about robots, but I doubt they are more intelligent than we are, they only ever do what we tell them to do.”

Catherine said earnestly.

“No, they don’t. They are better at everything. They will be better at anything. You will see. A decade or so. Each generation of robots will teach the next one. A

completely new kind of evolution. They will do everything for us, they will completely write our stories, all of them.”

“But if they keep teaching the same nonsense how can they ever learn anything that is worth knowing?”

“They don’t teach nonsense.”

“Well, then. Good for us.”

The waiter brought the gyros and Catherine realised only then, that she hadn’t really had a say in what was for dinner. If Harvey had ordered for her, the rest of the evening would have been an only quarrel, but it was different with Greg and she was different, all was different, altogether different. She couldn’t stop thinking it: Different, different, different. They were both hungry and for a moment they were eating in silence.

“Catherine, I don’t mean to intrude. But don’t you want to tell me what happened? At the guest house? How did it go? You said the guest house belongs to your sister? She was there? Amazing, but it makes sense that your daughter would wind up there, wouldn’t it?”

“Ok. I see, no more robots and slobbering Gods. Well, Leah thinks, the Clinique has abducted my daughter.”

Greg nearly choked at this news, putting his knife and fork down. She had his undivided attention. The Clinique? He wondered how the text Dimitrios had read to him from the shack fit into that picture.

“Are you alright? Want me to hit your back?”

“No, no, it’s fine. I’m good, tell me about the Clinique,” he coughed clearing his throat with a sip of beer.

"It seems Eva had posted a petition on the web incriminating my sister and a colleague, Dr. Linder. Oh, Greg, you don't want to know about this. It's awful. They were trafficking -."

"Organs" Greg should have said, but he didn't. Then he would have had to explain how come he knew. And then she would know. He would have to explain. Eventually, he would have to explain. He kept silent.

"Organs," Catherine said in his place. *Yeah right. I know.*

"Can you imagine?" She continued. Greg was pushing his glass away from himself. *Yeah, in fact he could. Damn well, he could.*

"You remain so calm. Wouldn't it bother you if your sister were involved in illegal organs trafficking? If your daughter might have been abducted by some international organ traffickers."

"Sure, it would. Disaster, hey, I mean-"

Greg shrugged, trying to appear agitated. The waiter came to clear the table.

"See, I mean-."

"So what are you gonna do?"

"Right now?"

"Right now."

"I'll go to the bathroom."

She got up.

"Sure."

He leaned back and took a deep breath. While she was gone, he ordered coffee. What to say to her when she came back? Some way or another he would have to bring her in. This couldn't go on forever.



Catherine couldn't read him. That look on his face was scary. Boredom? Pain? Fear? All of a sudden, she wished he didn't know so much about her. What did she know about him? Hardly anything. He was from Belarus, he had been a monk, he was a hairdresser, he lived in Prague. That was about it. Now he also had a friend that was police. *Great news. What next? He would arrest her?*

"So what about you?" She asked, forcing herself to remain calm.

"What about me?" He stopped stirring and looked at her. Innocent enough.

"Tell me more about you." Catherine said feeling a terrible tiredness overcoming her.

"What would you like to know?"

"Tell me anything." She was yawning.

"Anything," he said.

"What?"

"You've said, I should tell you -,"

"Yes sure. *Anything*. Come on Greg."

"Well, it must be nearly midnight, Catherine and I am awfully tired. I think we should call it a day and take a tram back home. I can tell you all you want to know on the way".

He paused for a second, then added cheekily, "or tomorrow."

She laughed, looking the other way. Then he called the waiter and paid their bill, all gentleman-like. She was too tired to protest and happy to save the money.

They left the restaurant and a chilly wind blew straight into their faces when they cut the corner. The cold stung in her face, her chest, her feet. She took his arm and they started walking faster. They took the tram to *Svatoplukova* and then walked slowing along *Jaromirova*. The tram had left for the dark, taking its light and warmth away from them. His place wasn't far now. She shivered again, it was simply too cold.

When they got to his place, they climbed up the stairs, their shoulders touching casually and Catherine was so aware of his breathing that got heavier as they both mounted to his floor. Climbing higher on the stairs and hearing him breathe louder and harder made her dizzy, she became obsessed with the idea of lying in his arms, of caressing his body, his nipples, touching him where the skin was the softest. Was that what she really wanted? Catherine was struggling with herself, her decency, her grief. She was a mother in mourning, not some horny 18-year-old. She didn't really know how to tackle this. She hadn't seduced anyone for so long she couldn't even remember the basics. What did one do with one's eyes, one's hands? They had arrived at the top. *Was it love after all?* No, couldn't be. Another trashy novel's most valued treasury lie. "Greg, listen, I just quickly come in and get my things, then I'll find a hostel or some place to stay."

He just laughed at her and dragged her along.

6

Friday

Greg's Place

When they entered the apartment, she was drunk with anticipation and lust. All her tiredness had gone and her head was spinning like mad, turning in endless loops like the goddamn Ferris wheel she had been on in Vienna. When they had stolen her bag. When they had set her up. In a hurry she stripped off her coat, her right hand brushing against her full breasts. What now? She stared at him, electrified. Greg took off his shoes, very deliberately and slowly. Then, still wearing his damp coat, he walked over to his study. She saw him turn on the computer, looked at the humid traces his feet had left on the floor. What was he doing? Why wouldn't he take off his coat? Was he really starting up the computer? Now? He was indeed, wasn't he? Catherine felt like a complete fool when Greg looked at her, standing in the hallway

as if she didn't belong here, as if he didn't recall that he had brought her along. What was next? Had she forgotten all about it? It seemed she really had. This was hard.

"Catherine, I've just remembered, I'll need to check some emails. I'll say goodnight. Is there anything you still need?" He was now turning his back towards her, not even looking in her direction. At once she was sober, crestfallen. Had she misjudged the situation so drastically? Hastily, she was trying to cover up her confusion so it wouldn't show that he had caught her off guard. Being a lawyer helped a lot in such situations. Her voice sounded calm and serene as if nothing unusual was the matter.

"No, Greg, thanks so much for letting me stay here. Thanks again. There is nothing -. I mean -. I might make myself a cup of tea and then go to bed. Thanks for dinner. Sleep well."

She sneaked up to him and from behind kissed him lightly on the cheek. That did it. He turned. He looked at her. The spell was broken. They touched and he pulled her towards him, hugging her tenderly. She felt a massive and overwhelming force come towards her. He stooped down and buried his face in her long silken hair and his voice was slightly shaking as he spoke:

"Catherine, you smell so good. You make me-. You make me want -" He sighed and drew her closer, not very tightly though, she could have pushed him away, if she had wanted to. But she didn't. It felt so good to be so close.

"I know," she whispered gently, "me too."

He started stroking her hair and when it touched her cheek Catherine realized how soft it still was despite her age. She couldn't remember when someone had patted

it so gently last. Had Harvey -? *No, not Harvey, not now.* Somehow Greg's lips found hers and when he opened them, she sighed. Then he stopped.

"Catherine. Listen. I am sorry," his voice was hoarse, "I don't think I can-. Please don't get this wrong."

She waited for him to proceed, slightly shocked at this development. Obviously, she did get this wrong. Which other way was there to get it? How could she be desirable if he didn't want her? What was worse; she had never before tried to seduce a man since she had divorced Harvey. There had never been an opportunity, never the right moment. And now this. Waiting for an explanation she looked at him startled, confused. But he only stared at the wall behind her and again, she couldn't read his eyes. How on earth was she supposed to understand what he meant when he didn't care to tell her? What was wrong with him? Her thoughts were racing. There had always been an air of danger that hung above him. She became alert.

"I don't know if you understand. In fact -. You won't. You don't. The truth is -."

There he stopped. Whatever it was he was trying to say, she couldn't make any sense of it.

"Well?"

Her finger was tracing the lines of his face, there was a scar she hadn't really noticed before, it was sitting there right over his upper lip.

"That was when I fell, as a child. Off a tree," he mumbled.

"Sure." She was leaning over, seeking his lips, but he shoved her away, more gently this time but not less firmly.

"Catherine. Don't." He was playing with a loose strand of her hair, twirling it around his finger, but he kept his distance.

“Since Louisa died. I’ve had -.You’re different. I mean you really are. I don’t want to spoil this.”

“Ok. Good night then.”

Abruptly, she turned and walked back to her room, utterly confused, utterly dismayed.

“Catherine. Wait. Let me explain.”



She kept walking, not sure she wanted him to explain. In fact, she didn’t, or didn’t want to understand what he was hinting at. Why was he suddenly being so chaste, so withdrawn? How on earth could she face him in the morning? She had really overstayed her welcome. She wondered if she should leave his apartment altogether. Leave would be the best. Leave in the morning. She couldn’t sleep for hours, she couldn’t even close her eyes properly. Maybe there had been a misunderstanding, maybe she had gone back to her room too quickly. So finally, she overcame her confusion and got up again. She needed to find out what was going on between her and Greg.



The sound of her own naked feet nearly made her jump when she walked through his study towards his bedroom. Each step roared like thunder in her ears. What if he woke? Would he send her away? Would it be awkward? Would he kiss her again?

She was in his study now, near the door to his bedroom. The door was ajar, she could see him lying on his French bed. She hesitated, then her eyes fell on the computer. Catherine had no intention of snooping around but when he had started kissing her, one of his books, a notorious action thriller that was sitting on the desk, had been shifted onto the keys of his computer pad. It was now blocking the screensaver and keeping it so from going into standby.

Slowly, she lifted the book. She couldn't resist the temptation. The browser was up and running. There was no need for a password now. She hadn't been online for so long, not wanting to use the only device she had brought, Eva's phone. It was too tempting. Very carefully, she put the heavy novel onto the shelf above the massive oak desk, staring concentratedly at the screen. Then, she walked back quietly to his bedroom and checked on him. He was sleeping peacefully and his breathing was low and steady, no more snoring. Quickly, she went back to his writing desk and sat down. The next website loaded in no time, he must have a very fast connection.

First, Catherine checked out the most important Swiss papers: *Die Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Der Bund*, *die Basler Zeitung*; they all had short reports of Eva's death in Prague but nothing much was clear yet. There were no details, so the on-going investigations wouldn't be jeopardized. But it said that she was the prime suspect and that the police were looking for her. Just great. It was only a matter of time now until she was found. In one of the newspapers there was even her photo. It was all most disturbing. Hurriedly, she closed the window, panting heavily. What would Greg say if he saw this? Would he call the police? Betray her? Have her arrested? He knew she was being looked for, but this? This was serious. This was different.

She would have to erase the websites from the browser history, but couldn't quite remember how to do it. He was still asleep, wasn't he? Catherine could hear him snore again. She had better be quick. Desperately, she tried to find the chronicle, letting the cursor hop all over the screen. She would have to erase all traces of the sites she had been on; Greg was not to see any of this. Luckily, she found what she was looking for and felt much better after she had deleted all the names of the websites she had been on. Being a wanted suspect was bad enough, she didn't need any more trouble. Relieved she leaned back. At least Greg wouldn't know she had used his computer or could see what she had seen. There was no need for him to know. It was enough that she knew for sure now: she was wanted, she was suspected of murdering her daughter. And that was indeed bad news. She sighed out loud and stared at the screen as if it could tell her what to do next.

Catherine was leaning forward to switch off the computer when something caught her eye. Following an impulse, she decided she wanted to see some of the pages Greg had been on last. What would he be interested in? Cars? Music? New hairstyles? Tell me what you google, and I'll tell you who you are. Such a true saying. And wasn't she curious. A man that had refused her so clearly. When she took a closer look at his chronicle, the adrenaline kicked in: the names of the website didn't bode well. The first one she checked wasn't so bad. The girl was very beautiful and the photographer had wanted her to keep her dignity, *somehow, well-, not really*. This was the last site he had been on before signing off.

The website he had been on before was appalling and the worst was the video that started playing all by itself when the site started up. She flinched at the thundering classical music coming from the speakers relentlessly. The sound came out far too loud

giving her such a fright, making her panic. Frantically, Catherine tried to turn down the volume. In vain. She couldn't find the button. She kept staring at the screen. The girl must have been about 11 years old, with golden plaits, all innocent and beautiful. Beautiful. Catherine first wondered if that was his daughter, hoped to God it was a simple home video when she really was old enough to know it wasn't. The eyes of the girl told such a different story. Then, out of nowhere, as if the camera had conjured them up from the darknet itself, there were -. Men.

Catherine couldn't believe what she saw, she was totally paralyzed by the ferocious brutality about to be displayed on the screen. Catherine averted her eyes from the screen, while hectically looking for the right buttons to stop the video. She was hacking onto the keyboard to somehow turn down the volume, turn this off altogether- but, again, to no avail. Was she awake? Was this a dream? She was awake. Positive. Not a dream. Reality nightmare. Really, really a nightmare. Had Greg been woken up by the noise? *Negative*. He was still asleep. Her heart stopped beating.

She looked up again, couldn't take her eyes off the screen and watched and watched how these monsters worked their way on the little thing. She watched, completely paralyzed by the horror displayed before her. *Was she dead?* Then Catherine felt sweat on her forehead and a strong urge to vomit and bring forth whatever there was in her stomach. Catherine was in a complete state of shock, her smile gone, her face petrified. Incredulously, she stared at the screen when the video after 8 minutes and 33 seconds had finally stopped and the Play Again? button showed. She stared at the screen, stared on and on.

Then she registered an ad for more pornography, child pornography. Little ones-. There was no excuse for that, no explanation. You couldn't say Greg took a

scientific interest in such monstrosities or that he appreciated the art of good nude photography. This was-. This was-. Really, there were no words to describe, - *this*. It was a crime against humanity and reason, against innocence and life, the very core of civilisation was under attack, ignored, negated. Catherine had heard there were such videos on the net, but she had always chosen to avoid, to negate their existence. Now, she had lost her innocence and so completely-. Greg had sought this out and he must have watched it, in the hours, the days before they had met. He might have wanted to watch this instead of making love to her. Why else would he turn on the computer after-? Was he into girls? Into children? Was he thinking of an 11-year-old while he was kissing her? No wonder he had shunned her. No wonder, he hadn't wanted to sleep with her.



She felt such nausea, such revolting sickness and despair. And then, as if dealt a terrible single deadly blow, she remembered. And the thought made her panic. Total fear beyond description overrode her personal system, flooding all her vessels with scare and frenzy, alarum set tight on all her synapses, raging war against all the layers of her very being. And no respite. A total cognitive breakdown that lay everything bare and helped her remember the truth as if she were high on some memory serum. At once, she knew where she had seen him before. Greg. He had come out of the Erotic Market, at the freeway, just after leaving Bern, Gunzgen Sued. She *knew* she had seen him before. *She knew*. Catherine could now recall it all, but mainly his stare, these terrific eyes that were so hard to read. She had been so high on getting all that money

out of the machine that she hadn't really paid attention to him. He had been standing there, watching -, watching her, singling her out.

He must have been following her. What a sicko. He must have been-. Her heart stood still and when it beat again, more panic flooded in, in major, meter-high storm waves. Had he chosen her for her some awful dark reason? Was he to-? What would he do to her? Use her? Kill her? Put her in the freezer? Blindly, she stumbled out of his study, running as fast as the present darkness permitted. She ran for her room, feeling for the switch on the wall. When the light came on, she felt exposed, totally naked despite all the clothes she was still wearing. Where was her stuff? Her jumper? Her bag?

Immediately, she started to grab everything that was loosely scattered around the room. Why hadn't she been more orderly? Where were her jeans? Her wallet? If he watched such horrid videos what would he do to her? Abuse her? Gang-rape her? Were these his friends? Did he make the video? And again. What would he do to her? If he woke? In the morning? What would he do to her? Why had he followed her? After coming out of the Erotic Market? Was she his prey? His prize he would destroy, kill when time came? Was she his corpse he would feed on? Was that time near? Had she spoiled his plan by trying to seduce him? Frantically, she packed her bag, stuffing in everything at random and in no particular order. She hadn't brought much anyway.

Prague at Night

Catherine opened the door carefully and sneaked out smoothly, avoiding unnecessary noise by all means. As she was descending the old stairways that were leading down to the street, she felt an all-time low caused by too much adrenaline, sickness and fear. Disappointment. Shock. Slowly the extreme panic was ebbing away, giving way to a normal state of constant fear, worry and nausea. She moved quickly finding her way into a cold Prague night. She didn't think of the Peugeot that was still standing in front of Greg's house, the keys that were on the wooden kitchen table she had completely forgotten. She simply ran, ran from him and his sick videos. The wind had stopped and thick fog gripped the city tightly. The freezing air helped her come back to her senses. Had she overreacted?

Maybe she should have stayed and confronted him in the morning. Maybe there was an explanation for the video. But she couldn't have done it. It was so obvious. It was forbidden to own such stuff, download it, save it, watch it. She herself had committed a crime by watching it. A crime against femininity, humanity and innocence, a crime against children's centenarian rights to bodily integrity. Nothing could be said in his defense. Nothing at all. On the contrary. The voices in her head wouldn't stop accusing him.

Catherine clutched her bag closer and walked aimlessly through deserted streets and corners she hadn't seen on the day before. There were dark nooks and crannies, deserted alleys and empty alcoves wherever she looked, the ancient cobblestone all iced by a layer of glazed frost. She wandered the streets aimlessly, and when she turned the corner one more time, she realized, she was lost, completely. But of one thing she was sure: She had not overreacted. There was no way she could have stayed in the same house with that madman, a maniac, a pedophile, a sick, sick man. He should be locked up, behind bars, big bars, big heavy bars. There were laws that could be enforced if you had stuff like this on your computer. He was the one to go to prison, not her. Him, not her. For a while she repeated these words automatically in line with her steps, like a secret chant: Him, not her. Him, not her. Him, not her. Then she got tired of the monotonous rhythm. She was tired of everything. Why would it always end like this? Disaster upon disaster. *Quelle Merde. Quelle Merde. Quelle Merde.*



Catherine finally reached a tube station, she kind of recognized; the signs said *Muzeum*. Hadn't she been here yesterday when she went shopping? Slowly, she walked down the dirty stairs, adding tired to tired with each laborious step. She only realized when she had reached the bottom of the stairway that she was too early for the first train. Too early, too late. Eva dead. Dead. At the very bottom of the long staircase she sat down and wanted to rest for a bit. But the fear and restlessness within her got the better of it and she got up again. What on earth was she doing down here?

She would freeze to death or worse; be arrested when the tube was up and running and more people, including the police, flocked in. Slowly, she shuffled up the steps, it seemed to take forever; she was too exhausted to lift her feet properly. It was cold, it was dark: Her feet were numb despite the new boots she had bought. When above ground, she continued her aimless wanderings, listlessly without direction or goal. She needed to focus. She was wanted for murdering her daughter. Wanted. For Murdering. Her daughter. Her daughter. Eva. Beloved Eva. She was losing it, really losing it, totally. She kept walking.

When she reached *Můstek*, she was just in time for the first train. Catherine travelled all the way to *Staroměstská* and then walked to Jacob's Ladder remembering the way, quite well from the day before. She wouldn't get lost now. Something within her knew what to do and so she followed her inevitable course like planets do in our universe, like exoplanets orbit their stars strung up by the light years that keep them apart. There seemed to be an everlasting glow of streetlamps, neon signs, illuminated windows, car and truck lights flowing from all over, carrying Catherine safely along her way.

The question she was considering most urgently was whether to trust her sister: Should she really ask Leah for help? How could she believe her when she told such weird stories? Selling organs. It was hard to imagine and yet it seemed true enough. Was Leah the right person to turn to for help? Maybe it was only a question of days before her sister was arrested? And then: what would happen? Not that there was much choice now when her genteel helper along the way had just turned into the most atrocious pedophile monster. How could she have been so mistaken? Her gut sense had completely atrophied, dried out, died out, could no longer be trusted. She was still shaking from the experience, appalled by the very thought of all this. Leah would simply have to help her. She needed shelter urgently, food eventually, it was too cold and too risky out here all by herself. Common hostel and hotels didn't seem like a safe haven. Where should she go? Whom could she turn to? Leah was her sister, after all she was obliged to help by the inherent laws of their mother, Mama Imma, still looming over them even in her death.

The commuters weren't out yet it was still too early to go to work. When she finally reached Jacob's Ladder, it looked totally deserted. The house was dark, most blinds rolled down. She rang the bell. Nothing happened. Had anyone heard her coming? Was anyone there? She rang again, and waited. It seemed to take forever until the door was finally opened. The nightguard was young, not yet 30, maybe a student, but with his tousled hair he looked more like a footballer than someone who worked in tourism. Had he been asleep? All that mattered was that there was a vacant room and that he booked her in. After Catherine had deposited enough cash and told him that she couldn't find her ID, but was the boss's very own sister, he was awake enough to give her a room and hand her some keys.

Catherine dragged herself to room 17, which was facing the North of the Jewish cemetery, and where she fell down on the huge, soft double-bed. It smelled of roses and thyme, which was pleasant and relaxing and reminded her somehow of a distant holiday in her childhood when they had stayed in France. She couldn't remember where it was? Camargue? Bretagne? Ardèche? What did it matter now?

Catherine was devastated. Since she had met Greg in the snowstorm she had lived on a dangerous hormonal mix, getting her constantly high, nearly blasting her grey matter out through the humid hollows of her eye sockets. What had started as an innocent, romantic, peaceful comedy had turned into a scary splatter movie revisited. Weird horror pure. She would have to relax and come back to her senses if she wanted to pull this through. After all she was here to find out about Eva's death. How could she get herself so mixed up with Greg? How could she? Or was he the missing link between her and Eva? Had he killed her daughter? Brought her handbag to the crime scene? She had to find a way out of this. Somehow. Slowly she was inhaling the rose and thyme scent. It smelt so good, so pure and calming, so totally artificial. It made her sneeze. She didn't care.

What on earth was she doing? What on earth had she gotten herself into? What on earth. The right thing to do would be to head for the next police station and turn herself in. Tell them what happened. Tell them the truth. Tell them she hadn't ever been there; where they had found Eva. Tell them her bag had been stolen and, no- no- no-, she didn't have an explanation how her precious tote bag, the one Harvey had indeed given her, had ended up on the crime scene, near Eva's body. Nope. No idea. Turn herself in. That was what she should do. And yet she couldn't. Her pride, her gut

feeling forbade it. Not now. Maybe later. Tomorrow. The Day after tomorrow. She fell asleep immediately.

Catherine

Her dreams were most disturbing. Really, there was no relief while she was asleep: Catherine was propelled instantly into one petrifying nightmare after another. And they wouldn't end: One absurd scenario was chasing the next. The boundaries between waking and sleeping were now clearly blurred. She was sweating awfully; her breathing was increased, and her heart was pounding fast. Her throat was dry while her body was tossed around incessantly, electrified by the relentless flow of pictures streaming past her. Another dream resurfaced and another; only to be clutching her brain, while clasping her heart as if some invisible dark lord ruled over her. Dreams were powerful forces, not unlike tropical hurricanes.

There was Eva, 11 years old and she had her brown hair plaited carefully, the same way as she used to plait her doll's hair. Catherine was walking peacefully along the pathway, pushing a pram with Eva's baby, when hordes of elderly men ran into

her, knocking the pram over. She hadn't seen this coming. How could she have? All of a sudden, the baby's nappies were full of blood and then Eva was there, stark naked with a bloated belly and Catherine was screaming, screaming endlessly.

She then woke up with a start and realized that she was totally soaked. Catherine was still wearing her clothes and felt her bra cling to her breasts, its rods chafing her ribs. She had been too tired to take care of herself, but now it was time to get up, it was morning now. Through the narrow window she could see the next day dawn upon the turquoise roofs of the Jewish quarter. Another day. What a strain. Get up, get started: Impossible. She was exhausted before the sun had come up properly and so she gave in and leant back, feeling the softness of the pillow gently curving her shoulders and her neck, resting her head so peacefully. Before she could think or see more her heavy eyelids fell, and she went back to sleep. Catherine only woke up when the maid knocked at her door, it was time for room service.

She told the young woman to go away and lay back on her starched pillow that was too tightly packed with duck feathers. Desperately, she tried to remember what had happened yesterday. She saw herself have dinner, throw her hair back so elegantly, she saw Greg's smile and felt his hands upon her hair, his lips on hers for the briefest of moments. She felt so sick.

Finally, Catherine got up and stood in front of the toilet for a couple of minutes but couldn't vomit. She was retching awfully. She couldn't get rid of the film she had seen on Greg's computer, it was burned onto her own biological hard disk. Then, out of the blue, she jumped to conclusions. Had they done this to Eva? Eva. Had they? To her baby? Time stood still. She was hallucinating, she knew. She would have to concentrate, if she wanted to get out of all this. Greg was not the main story. He was

not, nor was the movie, or was he? All this was a terrible, unimportant side-story she wanted to forget as quickly as possible. There was really only one question she needed an answer to: Who had killed her daughter? Where was the murderer now? Where was Eva's baby? And that was not connected to Greg at all. At least that much she hoped.



What mattered most was: Who had planted her handbag onto the crime scene so suspicion towards her would grow exponentially? Who had been in Vienna on the Ferris wheel? Who had taken her bag? And more important: Why? Why did Eva have to die? And why was she herself blamed for it? So many questions and still no answers. When she changed into a new set of clothes, she realized that most of her stuff was dirty and she made a mental note to find a laundry,- somewhere, sometime. Under the rainbow. Soon enough. When she had showered and dressed, she sat again on her crumpled bed and tried to gather some strength.

Catherine couldn't stay in this room any longer, she nearly burst with unrest and emotion. Besides, she couldn't bear listening to the sounds of the hotel any longer. There were some female voices shouting at each other in a language that sounded Spanish, or was it Italian? She couldn't understand it and the more she listened, the less she could make sense of it, maybe Portuguese? A toilet flushed and a door was slammed: the sounds were muffled by the thick white walls. In the basement a heavy machine was humming somewhere, was that the heating? The kitchen? Or even a car?

She sighed and got up. She needed breakfast, urgently. Coffee, steaming hot and freshly brewed, would be just perfect. Maybe Leah was here by now. At least, she was family. If you had the choice between a male pedophile and a female organ trafficker to help you, whom would you pick if you were wanted for a murder you didn't commit? Suddenly, there was a thought that made her laugh out loud. She realized that she might in fact have been saved with Greg as she was no child anymore, but had still both her kidneys and her liver, her heart, her brain. She was chuckling for some time before she managed to restrain herself. All this was so absurd, so much out of the ordinary course of life it was frightening and revitalizing at once. She would have to be careful, either way. And no, this wasn't funny either. She had stopped laughing. This was dead serious.

Catherine wondered if somehow she would ever find the backdoor that led to her old life, a normal life in a little Swiss town with a little job, in a little apartment. A little of everything. A little of nothing. A little of anything. Anything that mattered. And what bliss that would be. It all seemed so far away and how much she now longed for it now.

Breakfast at the Green Parlour

When she came down the large marble stairway, she didn't see anyone at reception. A sign indicated that breakfast was served in the green parlour. The marvellous room was rather empty. A faint smell of coffee and delicious, freshly baked croissants lingered in the air, combined with the flowery airfresh smell from a toilet nearby. Slightly, she crinkled her nose at the unhappily paired aroma. She made her way to the next table and sat down. An elderly American couple next to her was discussing their plans for the day. Everyone could hear they were from Boston and had come here especially, yes, especially to see the Jewish quarter and its famous synagogues. The Old New Synagogue. And wasn't it funny. Old? New? Oldnew?

Catherine cleared her throat, yet couldn't really make herself heard. She got up, in search of someone who could bring her some coffee. Close to the kitchen, she ran into Leah.

"Catherine, you are here?" Leah exclaimed, full of surprise. "I am so glad you came back".

She tried to hug her, but Catherine shrank away from the warm welcome.

"We must sit down and talk." Leah wiped her hands on a white apron.

"Please let me have some coffee first." Catherine replied.

"Did you stay overnight?" Leah asked, she tried to hide her surprise.

"I came in the morning. Early."

"That's great. I'll get you breakfast. Have a seat."

Leah hurried away but then before she disappeared, she turned and whispered in a low voice:

"We *really* need to talk."

"Yes. Sure."

Catherine replied in a normal voice trying to steady herself, "but please let me have coffee and maybe some croissants first."

When Leah came back with what she had requested, Catherine offered her sister a chair. Leah produced some matches from her apron and lit the white candle in the golden candelabra, then she sat down. Catherine was looking at her sister's hands, wondering if she was happy that she had exchanged the operating theatre with such a common place as a kitchen.

"Sorry guys. Can we have more croissants, please? They are so delicious."

The elderly American couple wanted more pasteries and Leah had to go back to the kitchen and fetch them. Catherine leant back, trying to relax. Leah's life had always been more complicated than Catherine's, more options, more pain, more heartache, but also more possibilities, more fun and more excitement. Maybe that was why she lived in Prague while Catherine was stuck with their mother's grave in Bern. Leah had always been more adventurous, more curious. Catherine was the intelligent one, the

brilliant academic who did it all the right and correct way. But Leah was the brave one, the conqueror, the heroic maverick. When she came back with Timmy from the United States, she was radiant and so full of life. And then. Timmy -.

Catherine took a sip from her cup. The coffee was really delicious and so were the croissants. She began enjoying the peaceful moment and couldn't help but wonder at how normality could coexist with such endless cruelty, as she had encountered in Greg's apartment. Here she sat, having a wonderful breakfast while the movie with the slaughtered girl still ran on Greg's computer and on thousands if not million others. Still running. It hit her like a rock. She hadn't hidden her traces. She had watched the video and then got up and ran. She must have left everything just as it was. That much for her clean record. When the computer started up again, he would see what she had seen, he would know that she knew, instantly. A heatwave flushed her body. Would Greg come after her? She wasn't really that hard to find, not for him. He knew the address and name of Leah's hostel and would easily get to her if she stayed here. Would he want to find her? What would he want with her?

She couldn't run again. Impossible. *No, please no.* But within this very second it became crystal clear that she would have to find a new place to stay. Greg might be dangerous, he might come after her. She had totally blown it and she hadn't seen it coming. She couldn't rely on her own ability to judge strangers anymore. This shocked her most; that she had misjudged him so totally. Her hands were trembling now. What had become of the self-confident and successful lawyer she had been? Was there no end to her downfall? Hadn't she made up her mind about her clients in a few minutes, even seconds? And usually, she had been right, her sixth sense for mischief, murder and mangled males; it had been amazing and frustrating to her colleagues (including

Harvey) how fast she could grasp, assess, deal with situations, people, cases, solutions, the law itself. There were so many boxes and you could always find one to shove it into and label it nicely. Well, not this time. It was all out of control. Out of the box. No labels. It scared the hell out of her.

She put the half-eaten croissant down. All of a sudden, she wasn't hungry anymore. What next? If only she could think of anything intelligent. Then Leah came back from the kitchen with freshly baked croissants for the Americans. Finally, she sat down again.

"Catherine, I am so glad that you are here, that you have come here, finally-, after all these years, incredible."

Timmy

“Really? You are glad?” Feeling glad now was so totally out of the question. Catherine forced herself to smile at her sister.

“Yes, to tell the truth, yes.”

“There is hardly a day I don’t think of Timmy. The beautiful little boy he was.” The words had poured out of her without control.

“You do?” Leah was sincerely amazed.

“Don’t you?” Now it was Catherine’s turn to be surprised. She looked at her sister, puzzled.

“No, it is so long ago. You were still a child then yourself. I shouldn’t have left him in your care. It was a selfish thing to do.”

It sounded truthfully. *A selfish thing to do*, she had said. At once tears welled up in Catherine’s eyes. She was totally unprepared for this. *A selfish thing to do*. It would

pardon her. She was trying to ignore her sister's kind look and concentrated on the dark green velvet curtains that nearly kept out all daylight. Had she really forgiven her, or had she only forgotten Timmy more and more as the years passed? But how could a mother ever forget her only child? Even for Leah that was quite a task.

"That is why I came here. Remember. Why I left Switzerland?"

Leah asked laconically.

"And obviously you have managed."

Catherine was swallowing her tears. Leah took one of the spoons and stirred in an empty cup scratching the dry foam from the white china.

"It's been the best thing ever."

By now Catherine was crying silently, in between wiping tears of her cheek she was trying to speak.

"I am not sure I have ever told you how sorry I was, how sorry I still am. Mum and I, we had stopped talking about you completely. I couldn't bear it. How you refused me. Never called back. I simply couldn't. I couldn't talk about it. She would always have wanted-."

"But you never called. Did you?"

"I did. Often. There were times I called once a month."

"Really? Did you have the wrong number?"

"Well, maybe. I still remember it: +420 220 513 911."

"911? No, my home number is 912."



"Please don't worry anymore. It could have happened to anyone," Leah said tonelessly.

"But it didn't. It happened to me. No to you. When we buried him, it was -. Hell. All I could think of was how his blonde hair had been -. That blonde hair." And by Leah's look, she could tell her sister also remembered, remembered everything too. She couldn't finish the sentence.

"I shouldn't have let him ride his bike, that day. In all that rain. And then the truck -." The truck that had hit Timmy and killed him instantly: It had carried water bottles.

"Imagine, of all the necessities in life: Water bottles, and when it rained."

"It seemed so -."

"I know." Leah tilted her head.

"But Timmy loved that bike. He never cared about rain or sunshine as long as he could move, as long as he could be outside. Do you remember how it had that red star on the fork. He always said:

"'ed star, mummy, 'ed star" Remember? He was so wild, so full of life, really hard to look after."

"Yes, I remember," Catherine admitted. She was wiping her eyes with a napkin.

"He would be a man now. I might be a grandmother." Leah mused and Catherine saw that her sister appeared strangely reconciled with the past.

Catherine found it hard to think of Timmy as a grown man, to her he would forever be the dear little fellow he was when he hopped on his bike and took his final tour around the block.

"What happened to - What was his name?"

"Matt?"

"Yeah, right. Matt. Do you still see him?"

"No. Matt left. A long time ago. He couldn't bear our life anymore. Without Timmy. It was kind of empty. Empty and devastated. Incomplete."

Leah fell silent for a moment.

"He wasn't even the father, was he?"

"Well, not biologically, but he loved Timmy more than anyone on this planet. It broke him totally. And then, it just didn't happen again. There were men. Boyfriends. Good guys. But -. You know -. I just didn't get pregnant, and then all of a sudden I was too old."

"Yes, right". Catherine replied. She felt guilty. It hurt. You weren't supposed to survive your children and here they were both with nothing left, but each other. And she hadn't even seen Leah for years or talked to her or done anything at all that included her. It was all so wrong.

"Catherine. That's not what you are here for. What I've really wanted to talk about is Eva. You should go to the Clinique -", Leah said, changing the theme.

"Yes, but she is dead now," Catherine opened her handbag, fishing for a tissue. Then she silently blew her nose, trying desperately to stop crying.

"Go and see where she wanted to give birth, you could talk to Dr. Schnurmacher whom she trusted very much. Maybe you'll find out more."

"Yes, I thought about this too," Catherine responded, but then this wasn't quite the truth. Going to the Clinique wasn't an idea she welcomed. She dreaded going there immensely and she had no idea what to look for. After all, she was a lawyer, not a detective.

“They are still looking for you, aren’t they? ”

“I guess so. I can’t understand why they haven’t found me yet. It can only be a matter of time until- ”, she broke off and fell silent for a moment. When she continued talking her voice was hoarse.

“What else have you read about me?” She cleared her throat.

“Well, you did make quite some headlines, and there is a very pretty picture of you online. Where did you lose that stupid handbag anyway? I mean-, how come they found it in that shack where she died. Seriously? The same shack where she died? Catherine what did you do?”

“Nothing, I haven’t done anything. You must believe me.

Her throat was all dry, scratched and roughened as if she had swallowed fresh prickly pears straight from the prickly-pears-fresh-cactus tree without peeling, washing or cutting the fruits into thin, edible slices.

She forced herself to look right into Leah’s face. Her voice had such a familiar tone that rang out wild and free. It brought back promptly most precious memories of shared peppermint chewing gum, the stuff of their childhood, their life then, even of the oath they took when they were little. Before they even knew what an oath was, before they knew anything at all.



“You’re clever. You can take it from here.”

Catherine smiled, when all she really did was worry, worry non-stop.

“You are my sister,” Leah added. Right, Catherine thought, you are. *As if I’d forget.*

Catherine looked down upon her hands. She had to say something. What else was there to say? Catherine could have asked why she had never called. Why had Leah never liberated her from that heavy burden she had been carrying for years? Why had Leah never told her that it was ok now? Why had she remained mute, withdrawn to such a remote place? Leaving her to take care of their mother, tending to her in her last hour. So many questions. Not enough time.

“So, do you want the address,” Leah asked.

“Of the Clinique?” Catherine asked.

Leah nodded, got up and went to get a pen from an old chest of drawers sitting in the corner. She scribbled something on a clean paper napkin. Catherine could hardly read it.

“Is this a “k”, How would you say this? *Skalka* is this correct?

“Yes, but you pronounce it differently: you have to say Skolka. It’s more of an “o”.

That’s the name of the bus stop. The Clinique is on *Na Padesatem*.

Catherine repeated the difficult name to her sister several times until she was pleased with the result.

Greg

It was still dark outside. Memories of the previous evening appeared at once and he groaned at the thought of them, feeling automatically for his humid penis. What on earth was he getting himself into? Catherine had turned him on so incredibly. He winced at the idea that he nearly had slept with a suspect he should have arrested. Also, Catherine was not a woman for a one-night stand. She was like Louisa: Truly one of a kind. One in a million. He didn't want to waste that. He turned around to the side of the wall and closed his eyes, trying to shut out reality for just another moment. He had to tell her the truth: One way or another.

Surely by now, Catherine was wanted internationally, the respective search warrants must have been issued. As he was still half-asleep, lazing about in his unmade bed, efficient Swiss police constables were entering more and more details

into the European databank to track down criminals, robbers, drug-dealers, thieves and murderers including fascinating, marvellous, wonderful Catherine. By now, her online file would contain several pictures; of her, her black tote handbag, her apartment, the most important websites of her browser history, a full set of fingerprints, a detailed physical description, her licence plate: BE 357, her date of birth, profession: a lawyer, her crime: wanted for murdering her daughter. She wouldn't escape them. Was he still dreaming? He came to his senses with a start. He had to tell her the truth right now.

It said 6.15 on the alarm clock. He felt for the switch and turned on the light. 6.16 it said on the alarm clock. He owed her an explanation. Where was she? He jumped up from his bed and ran through the study, bumping into his desk and hurting his hip. He held on to it, stifling a sound of pain. Then he walked more guardedly through the hall. What if she had left? Her car keys were still on the kitchen table, he looked out the window. The Peugeot was still there. Was that a good sign?

He turned back and walked up to the guest room. There he listened at her door. He couldn't hear a thing. Softly, he knocked at the door, but there was no answer. He began explaining.

"Catherine, can you hear me. Let me explain. There is something I do need to tell you. In fact, I should have told you when we first met. I am police. I know about Eva. I found her. I found your handbag."

He turned the handle very gently. The door opened, but it was clear to him as he took it all in, that she was not there, not anymore. On the contrary, it was obvious that she must have left in a hurry. *She was running from him? Had she found out he was police? Had something betrayed him? What was it?* Drawers were open and a plastic bag

carrying a Swiss German slogan he didn't understand lay on the floor. He entered the room, making for the adjacent bathroom. She had left her toothbrush and toothpaste. Was *that* a good sign? Did she intend to come back? Where was she? He sat down on her bed and tried to wake up properly. His head hurt already.

His cell phone beeped. Dimitrios had texted him. *Ready for the day?* At this time in the morning? The guy was mad or teasing him or both. But then Dimitrios had smelled blood. And it was true, they had to find out what happened to that poor girl. From Dimitrios's perspective it seemed likely Catherine, the mother was guilty. The thought gave Greg the shivers. He had better go to work. There was so much to do at headquarters: All the evidence they had collected from the shack. All these texts. All that stuff that they had packed and that was still sitting in a box somewhere in his office. Analysing Catherine's handbag, all its contents, all its microbes and intestinal bacteria would hopefully bring clarity. And then, if the worst came to the worst, the next step: Finding and arresting her, the Cohen-mother-woman who was a daughter-murdering-woman-monster; it would be such an awesome media spectacle even beating the President of the United States' inauguration speech. Maybe they would arrest her today.

After a very hot shower, he made himself a cup of coffee. The fridge was full of food that needed cooking, stuff Catherine had bought and so he delved for some crackers at the back of his kitchen shelf. He took the coffee to his study to sit down at the computer. He couldn't concentrate. She had walked up to him and kissed him on the cheek, very gently and softly. But the touch of her lips on his skin was too much. That had done it. He still felt how much he wanted her and how badly he had lost control for a moment, he was way out of his depth. Hadn't happened in a long time.

Professing love to a suspect, it was incredible, incredible. But what troubled him more was how much he missed her right now. So strongly, so physically. Catherine made him dizzy, drove him crazy. Ever since he first saw her walk out her door to get into the orange BMW, he thought of her continuously, and his keen interest wasn't of a professional nature. On the contrary. He was trying to rationalize his fling with Catherine Cohen if that was what it was. A fling? No. What was it? A sudden, fleeting fancy, a whim of the moment? An *amour fou*. But he couldn't deny her, not totally. Somehow, she had gotten hold of him so vigorously and fully, she owned him already. *What a mess. A beguiling, riveting mess.*

She had touched something in him that he had forgotten about. Something alive, something good and strong. Something he and Louisa had shared when they were young and naïve in that wonderful most innocent way. Catherine made him love her, she made him want to protect her when what was required of him was the opposite. For a moment he had been lost in thought, staring at the black screen, trying to focus. But finally, he found strength and courage to switch on the computer. He wouldn't let her go, not yet, not now. Besides he couldn't think of her anymore now. Work had to be done. He really had to focus. He switched on the computer. Right after pressing the button, he realized that it had been running already.

The Clinique

The toothpaste Leah had given her tasted very strongly and artificially of a substance that was remotely recognizable as peppermint. She neither liked its taste nor the bitter acrid smell it gave off. After she had brushed her teeth, she looked carefully at herself in the mirror. Should she wear the blonde wig so she would blend in perfectly with the tourists? Oh no, she hadn't forgotten the wig in the car. The car! She had forgotten the car. *Quelle Merde. Quelle Merde.* The Peugeot was still standing in front of Greg's house. Had she taken a set of keys at all? She remembered one set on Greg's kitchen table. How stupid to leave it there. The other set had to be in her coat, as she always carried her carkeys in the pockets of her coats, parkas, sweaters, whatever she was wearing. Car keys don't go in your bag. Never. When she went to check, she found them right away. They were sitting in her left pocket. She could get the car to drive to the Clinique. Should she really drive to the Clinique? It would mean passing by Greg's apartment to get the car. No, she didn't have the nerves for that. She

would have to let the car go. How could she forget about the car? *Quelle merde. Quelle Merde.* This was a new low. And Pumpkin. She didn't even want to begin to think about Pumpkin in the care of that nerd. Had Brigid picked it up already?

With a heavy heart Catherine decided to go to the Clinique on foot. Just as Leah had recommended. Walking seemed more unobtrusive and natural. For a moment she thought she would even leave the hotel without make up, but then changed her mind for the better and put on some brown mascara to enhance the beauty of her eyes and a light cherry lip gloss. She remembered the place where she had bought it. It had been shortly before Eva had disappeared. She had, as a matter of fact bought it for Eva, the colour really only suited a young girl well. But then Eva had never used it and then she had disappeared, and now she was dead. She would put on just a little tiny bit. In honour of her dead daughter. But then she took her handbag, searched for some tissues and took off the lipgloss again. No, she couldn't wear it. Not now.

The hall was empty and one of the maids was cleaning the green parlour with a huge vacuum cleaner. By the noise of it you would think she was sanding the floorboards back to the bare wood. Leah wasn't around, neither was the young guy, student or footballer who was so pathetically disguised as the night watch. Catherine left the guest house and wrapped herself tightly into her coat. She walked along a couple of streets, definitely waking up. Despite the nightly fog, the sun had come out. But the cold was biting mercilessly at her body; her hands and feet were so cold. She then remembered that she had forgotten to bring her water bottle. She had left it in her room and over negotiating with the lipgloss she had forgotten all about it. And she wouldn't buy a fresh one, not now that she really had to save money hard and not now when her picture was online. There was a perfectly free waterbottle sitting in her room.

She stopped short, changed direction and walked back to the hotel. Never go anywhere without a bottle of water, not even in winter. She smiled. What a stupid habit, but she couldn't help it.



When she came around the large block again and the view was free upon the entrance of Jacob's ladder. She stopped short again. There was Greg. He had just climbed out of her Peugeot and was facing the guesthouse now. Her Peugeot. Her car. The one she traded for Pumpkin. What was he doing? Bringing her the car back? It couldn't be true. He of all people would of course know where she was hiding. She recognized him straight away. The way he moved, the way he held his head so high and upright. What a gift to recognize people so quickly and from afar. Otherwise she would have walked right into him. She peeked around the corner again, just in case she couldn't trust her eyes and was hallucinating. Then she quickly hid again behind the corner. It was him. He even wore last night's coat. No doubt. She could trust her eyes. Totally. Absolutely. Him. She leaned at the wall, panting heavily. Her head was spinning. Why was he here? What did he want? It really was none of her business. Greg was a maniac. She hardly knew him. She had to avoid him by all means. Catherine took a deep breath, pulling herself together was hard. But it was time to move. She would have to do without a water bottle. Without the car. Without anything.

Catherine started running towards the bus station that Leah had described to her, then upon seeing a taxi she changed her mind. If Leah was still at the guesthouse,

and that scenario was very likely, Greg would be questioning her right now. Frantically, she was searching her bag, but couldn't find the napkin with the address anymore. Without heeding the loss, she started rushing towards the taxi. The driver saw her at once and stopped, she jumped in before the taxi had come to a complete halt being totally out of breath when she collapsed onto the backseat.

The taxi driver didn't speak English very well and it was quite a challenge to communicate the address to him. *Sgolgga? Skalka? Skoolka?* Somehow her Czech pronunciation was not as good as Leah had made her believe and then also she didn't clearly remember the exact spelling. She said *Clinique, Clinique*, repeating everything several times placing the stress on different syllables. When he finally understood what she wanted it seemed to take forever to get there. In addition, she wasn't sure what exactly he had understood and where he was taking her. Maybe the Clinique, maybe some other place. Who knew? She would see when she got there. They seemed to be heading east most of the time. But then she could be wrong. She leaned back forcing herself to breathe regularly. Not easy when your heart was racing the long-distance All-Alaska Sweepstakes along the Bering Straits of your bloody channels.

More and more clouds were being blown in, the weather was changing again. Hopefully, it wouldn't snow. She was not sure the driver would take her anywhere she wanted to go until she saw the Clinique on her left. It was a gargantuan building and somehow it reminded her of the Pentagon. It was nearly as massive and compact, not octagonal though. The windows were dark and had been lined up on an invisible row some architect had once proudly put down on paper. It looked dull and grey, so totally uninspired. How could Leah have worked here? Awful. Her heart sank even more when she thought about Eva who had been sent here to look for help, such a

barren and inhospitable place. And then in her condition. If only -. No, not now. When she got out of the taxi, she paid the driver and tipped him well.



First, she couldn't find the main entrance, the building looked so massive and deserted as if there were no ways in or out. But then she saw some arrows pointing along one of the paths and a sign in several languages: "Vchod" it said, and also "Main entrance" in English, "Haupteingang" in German. An ambulance was slowly driving past her. The driver didn't seem to be in a great hurry. She followed the arrows and finally stood in front of a bulky and impressive glass door. Main Entrance, it said in English only. She had arrived. Behind the door she could make out a long corridor where nurses, male and female, were moving up and down like honeybees. The door couldn't be opened from the outside, but there was red button that one could press. Above it, it said, again in English, "Admittance". Catherine remembered it was a private hospital, funded with United States and South African money and internationally staffed. The board was very proud they could afford to hire the best specialists not only in Eastern and Western Europe but worldwide.

And now she was here herself, not to be hired of course, but to pull some stunt she had no idea of. She hesitated, not sure how to proceed. What was she going to say? This was the Clinique. She was at the right place and she remembered how Leah had told her that the Clinique wanted to protect its patients' privacy rigorously. Therefore, the closed doors. And the camera. She looked at it uneasily. How Roma children could be smuggled in here to be cannibalized in an operating theatre she couldn't quite see.

But then you never knew. If you bribed the right people. You might get anything. Fresh meat, fresh organs. Anything. Fresh videos. She shuddered at the thought of it.

The Clinique looked well secured, at least from the outside. Catherine stared at the dark windows, all of them closed. Was the glass tinted? It seemed. She couldn't see inside at all. The main building, a rectangular concrete block, might as well have been a military facility or a company that developed secret software for nuclear power stations. *Was coming here dangerous? What the heck.* Eva had been here. And there were no guards anywhere near. No sign of security or police forces. She would have the guts her daughter had. But courage wasn't everything it took, Catherine was well aware of this. She needed caution and cunning as well. After all, Eva had been here right before she disappeared. *Exactly. Very promising.* In any way, there here was no turning back now. She had already passed the point of no return. Finally, she took a deep breath, pressed the button and waited. It didn't take long until her call was answered.

"Prosim," an unfriendly voice said in Czech.

"Sorry, do you speak English?" Catherine was now looking straight into the camera. She forced a gentle smile onto her face. They had her picture now. She wondered how long it took before the entire Prague Police force would turn up. If they ran that picture in their database it wouldn't be long now before she was arrested. Thank God it was still early days for Big Data analysis.

"Yes, Madam, how can I help you?" the answer came promptly.

"I would like to see a gynaecologist, I am pregnant". The words had just tumbled out of her mouth. *Pregnant? Was she out of her mind?* Had she really said pregnant? Surely, they would see right away that -.

The voice of the nurse carried on, unperturbed by her outrageous lie.

“Have you called previously? Made an arrangement?” *Had she?* Better tell the truth about this one. Surely, they kept internal records of appointments.

“No, I haven’t. I couldn’t.” Keenly, she took out her Swiss ID and held it before the lens. *Always good to show off your Swiss ID.* She looked at the blue glossy plastic card and wondered if they wouldn’t mistake it for a gym membership. She held it close to the camera so they could see it properly.

“I only just got here. You were recommended to me and so I came especially -. I came for Dr. Schnurmacher. She is the best, isn’t she?” If the ID card wouldn’t do it, then flattery might. It was worth a try.

“Who recommended you?” the tinny voice said.

“Leah Cohen”, Catherine said, wondering if that had been a clever move, “she is my sister”. The whole conversation felt like playing chess without knowing the rules. First your boors disappeared, then your dame; then you were checkmate. *Am I checkmate now?*

To her great amazement the doors opened slowly, making absolutely no sound when they moved. She stepped inside, wrinkling her nose at the strong smell of Javel water in the air. Then the door shut again behind her, she could hear how it was being locked. She was in. A young nurse hurried towards her.

“Good morning, Ma’am. I am Nurse Nela. Would you please follow me.”

“Thank you.”

Catherine answered, running after Nurse Nela who had turned on her heel and hastened down the corridor. Catherine kept staring at her tight bun at the back of her head as she tried to keep up with her. Nurse Nela took Catherine to a big and

unfriendly waiting area that was empty. She ushered her in and then left without another word. Catherine sat down on one of the deep crimson plastic chairs and waited for something to happen. Nothing happened. She looked around. The waiting area was devoid of all friendliness and sympathy. She reached for a tissue in her bag, blew her nose, was startled by the echo of the room. The bare walls were reflecting every sound that was made. It was scary. The fiery red of the chair swallowed any other colour trying to digress. It was all very clean, she could smell more powerful cleansing agents in addition to the awful Javel water. She tried not to breathe, not to move, and put her hands in her lap. What now?



It seemed like hours had gone by, when only a couple of minutes must have passed. She was waiting and waiting. It was nearly lunchtime, her stomach grumbled. Catherine hadn't eaten for a while, but the mere thought of food made her feel sick. She wondered if anything was going to happen, or if she would stay here forever, left to die right here, on this very spot, on this ugly and uncomfortable red chair. Not a living soul was around and no one came to get her. Had they forgotten her? Then, out of the blue, the nurse came back, not a word of apology, nor a sign of recognition or anything. She said very curtly:

"This way, please."

She rushed away so fast, Catherine whose thighs had gone numb, could hardly follow. While walking Catherine tried to rub her legs to stimulate the blood flow. It

was hard to keep up with the nurse's speed. All of a sudden Nurse Nela stopped and pointed at a door.

"I understand, you are pregnant?" the nurse said, handing her a plastic cup.

Catherine nodded and obligingly followed the order given: she was sent to the toilet to urinate. What on earth was she doing here?

She left the cup in the toilet and came out again. The nurse had been waiting for her and gave her an entry form to fill in. Catherine decided spontaneously to change her name to Katharina Keller, hoping to God they wouldn't want to see her ID card, the one she had been flashing so excitedly into the camera. She invented a signature on the spot and then handed the faked form to the nurse, smiling her broadest smile. It was a new sensation to know there was so much criminal energy in her, but obviously there was. Just great. The police would be here any minute now and what did it matter then anyway? A lawyer faking a signature? You couldn't possibly do worse, unless of course you had murdered your own daughter. What a nightmare. Catherine didn't have time to keep brooding over these issues; she was brought to a white and sterile looking consulting room with a special stool for gynaecological examinations.

"Wait here, Dr. Schnurmacher shall be with you in a minute." the nurse snapped and left again. She was lucky. Schnurmacher was the doctor Eva had seen, Leah had told her so. And obviously she was available. That was positive. However, Catherine looked sceptically at the two metal plates where her feet were supposed to go and then sat down on a chair next to the awful item that soon would be used to examine her most intimate zones. She had never really liked sitting there on her naked bum while some stranger was shoving up her vagina all these metal mirrors and forks.

To her, all that well cleaned silverware used for rasping and scrubbing out secret fluids from her inmost being were nothing more than instruments of torture. She could control the procedure with her mind, her intelligence, telling herself that at least there was help and care in the Western world and she wasn't left to die in childbirth and all the other ailes of womanhood, thus mastering the humiliation. *That was a blessing.* It really was.

But looking at the instruments and the stool Catherine realised that she had not really prepared herself mentally for what was going to come. In addition, she would have to extemporize her little speech impromptu. *Wasn't that going to be fun? What would she say?* She had no idea. It felt like being in court without having read the file of the client you were defending. Not something she had ever done. Yet, Catherine had been so concerned with her encounter with Greg, her sister and then finding her way to the Clinique that there had been little time to think through the exact procedure of what was going to come. She hadn't really planned to pose as some one else, nor had she realized that following in Eva's steps meant saying she was pregnant and that this involved getting naked. All these crazy things were happening so fast, as if the waggon of her life had jumped the rail and was on a downslide that couldn't be reversed.

Crushing the thought, she forced herself to think of the exact story that she was going to tell Dr. Schnurmacher. She focused on this and only this and repeated silently what she was going to say. Would they believe that she was pregnant? And if yes, for how long would they believe her? *How ridiculous could this get?* What would they do if they found out the truth: She was as barren as a wide, open desert, full of sand, full of rocks, full of Bearded Dragons, Chuckwallas and Gila monsters. No baby.

Catherine (and the imaginary desert creatures in her womb) had to wait another 25 minutes until Dr. Schnurmacher appeared. She was an attractive woman in her early fifties, bespectacled and with fine, slender hands. Her grey hair was swept up in a knot. She put down a couple of files, her portable computer and then looked at Catherine directly. She seemed friendly enough.

"I am Doctor Mary Schnurmacher."

"Pleased to meet you. I assumed -." Catherine ventured uncertainly.

"You are here for?"

"I am pregnant." Dr. Schnurmacher looked up, if she was amazed, she didn't show it.

"You are?"

"Yes, first trimester. Only the beginning. I think-."

"Ok. Look I am really pressed for time. Your visit hasn't been scheduled properly. Sorry about this. Let us take a look right away at the little one. Would you please undress?" She waved at a curtain behind which one could get changed. Catherine nodded silently. She undressed quickly, then walked back to the stool, sat her naked *derrière* onto the paper that had been freshly put there and put her feet up. She tried to relax, breathing regularly.

"How old are you?" Dr. Schnurmacher asked directly.

"I am 45.", Catherine said truthfully. The two women looked at each other. Dr. Schnurmacher touched her black glasses lightly and routinely shifted them up along her nose.

"Well, a pregnancy at this age is rather unusual but not totally uncommon. You are HIV infected?" she asked without even starting the examination. Instead the doctor was looking right up Catherine's vagina. Catherine shook her head, irritated by the

direct question and what was more, terribly irritated by the direct stare. What was Dr. Schnurmacher doing? She knew they had to ask these things, but even at her age she found such questions hard to answer and most unsettling to respond to with ease. *How must Eva have felt?* Catherine didn't say anything, but shook her head gently. Her answer was duly noted.

When Dr. Schnurmacher had finally stopped looking, she entered a speculum into her vagina, looked again, took it out, then took endless notes into one of her empty files. Catherine tried to read the letters, but Schurmacher's handwriting was really bad and reading upside down was always difficult, especially when you had your legs splayed as far apart as comfortable. For a second she wondered what the doctor would do with her notes once she found out that Catherine wasn't telling her the truth. Dr. Schnurmacher seemed a very dedicated and hard-working woman that took her job seriously. From one professional to another, Catherine was on the brink of telling her how sorry she was to cause so much extra work for her. Posing as pregnant was so pointless. Ridiculous, was the least to say.

Maybe she should simply ask the doctor if she remembered Eva. But Catherine assumed that wouldn't do much good. Attorney-client privilege or rather doctor-patient privilege was also safeguarded by health officials and couldn't be waived just because some nutty mother walked in. And heaven help if she told Dr. Schnurmacher she was Eva's mother; the woman who was now wanted for killing her pregnant daughter. *That surely would go down well with a gynaecologist, a species which so intensely believed in the sanctity of life.* For a moment her heart stopped and she began to sweat. Pregnant daughter. Not only would she be accused of murdering her daughter, but also of murdering her unborn grandchild. The baby. Dead. Two people. At her hands.

Dead. Awful. Catherine's Life, her reputation, her future ruined. If only she hadn't put her handbag down on the ferris wheel. If only she had hung on to it. How was she ever to prove that she was innocent? Someone was framing her, framing her badly. But who? And why? Why had they killed her? Her beloved Eva. Killed them both, her daughter and her unborn child? Dr. Schnurmacher was looking at her. Had she missed something? She had.

"Has the test been positive?" Dr. Schnurmacher seemed to repeat the same question.

"I am not HIV infected", Catherine stammered, not sure what she was supposed to say.

"No, I mean," Dr. Schnurmacher looked briefly up from her scribbling and Catherine could see that she was losing her patience.

"The pregnancy test. Was it positive?"

"Of course. Yes, it was." Catherine lied, wishing she could muster lies more easily. It was a white lie, wasn't it? Ok. Maybe it wasn't. *Quelle Merde.*

"Good, when was your last period?" Catherine was glad to get a question that would bring her back on course. She did remember that.

"Just before Christmas. I don't usually write it down anymore, not anymore," finally Dr. Schnurmacher put her gloves on. She meant business now.

"Do you have sex regularly?"

She asked. Catherine nodded, wincing at the stabbing in her womb when Schnurmacher put her fingers into her vagina reaching for her cervix.

"You do?" Her tone of voice was even while she was examining Catherine carefully.

"Yes, I do," she said wondering if Dr. Schnurmacher could see she was lying. Again. She began to blush. The colour of that lie she would rather not think about. Purple?

Scarlet? If she was aware of some foul play, Dr. Schnurmarcher didn't let it show. *Could gynaecologist determine how often you had sex by feeling the interior of your vagina?* Most likely not. Surely not. What a ridiculous thought. But then, they could do anything today. Maybe she knew.

"Do you want to keep the baby?" the doctor asked.

"The baby? Of course," Catherine answered. *The baby. Right.* That was a crucial question and Catherine wanted to give the exact same answer as Eva must have given.

"You know -," Catherine began her unfinished story.

"I am all by myself. He wouldn't want to -," she left the sentence unfinished, not making it quite clear what the absent father would want to. She didn't really know herself.

"I understand perfectly," Dr. Schnurmacher answered professionally, reassuring the patient in her own beliefs. She was, at its best, making sense on a mere lexical level. Catherine recognized it at once for what it was: The way of the overworked professional who had learned to prioritize, to downsize it all brutally. Dialogues didn't matter, data did: Lab results, blood test, DNA. It had been the same for her when she worked as a lawyer. Dialogues didn't matter, evidence did: Lab results, blood tests, DNA. Catherine could just hear her own voice when she had been talking to some of her more challenging clients. *I understand perfectly*, that's what you said when you didn't have a clue. The thought made her smile. The similarities were striking. Then she remembered her next line. She was beginning to enjoy this, wishing she would have rehearsed her part better and more thoroughly:

"I don't want to have an abortion."

"Of course not. But I must insist that we shall have to inform you of the risks at this age. You might also consider some of the additional tests we do to determine fetal problems, Down Syndrome, possibly a CVS."

She was now looking through a microscope onto Catherine's fresh vaginal discharge.

"No."

Catherine said determined, wanting her voice to sound firm and calm.

"No additional tests, abortion is not an option."

Catherine couldn't even remember what a CVS was and that it involved taking a sample of the chorionic villus cells to determine whether the baby suffered from genetic disorders, chromosome and neural tube defects. It would have involved putting a needle into her belly. Definitely no.

"Very well, then." Dr. Schnurmacher raised her eyebrow and then put the instruments down. She nodded slowly.

"Give me one more moment to check my results," she added. Did she suspect the truth yet?

"You can get dressed again."

Catherine could hear her naked feet tap on the grey floor and disappeared behind the curtain. She was not sure about her next move. Maybe simply play the show a little longer? She might learn some news about Eva. Then she heard the nurse come back in, and when Catherine reappeared from the curtains, Dr. Schnurmacher and her helper were staring at her, both wearing the most quizzical look on their faces. The nurse whispered something to Dr. Schnurmacher then left. On her way out she curiously glanced at Catherine who didn't return the look. Then Dr. Schnurmacher brought down the sledgehammer.

"I am afraid, I must tell you that you are not pregnant. I couldn't find a fetus when I examined you, nor did you test positively. What makes you think you are pregnant?"

Dr. Schnurmacher looked at Catherine curiously, trying to make out what she was thinking. The closed period was over, hunting season had begun. Catherine stared right back, she could tell that she had just been promoted to an interesting and unusual case. She now had Dr. Schnurmacher's full attention. *A woman who believed to be pregnant and wasn't, always a treat.*

"Your hormones are absolutely normal, in fact we could determine that your menopause has been setting in early. Sometimes this feels like a new pregnancy, but, I am sorry to say, it is more like the opposite."

"Really?" Catherine said, trying to keep her calm.

"I am so sorry," Dr. Schnurmacher reiterated. She really seemed to be empathetic, wanting to relate to her patient by all means. Catherine couldn't stop staring at her. That was fast. She was at the end of her investigation and sent on her way out. There was absolutely nothing she had learned on Eva's death. She got up, took her handbag and picked up her coat that she had hung on her chair. When she turned Dr. Schnurmacher asked rather unexpectedly.

"You said you knew Leah Cohen?"

"Yes", Catherine replied truthfully, not offering any more information.

"What happened to her niece is awful, isn't it? And now they are looking for the mother. It is unbelievable. Imagine, she has killed her own child, murdered the poor thing."

Catherine looked at her, extremely tired. The doctor was bound to know who she was. Dr. Schnurmacher took a deep breath, and then out of the blue she continued.

“Is this why you are here?”

Catherine hadn't even seen suspicion dawn upon her, maybe the doctor had simply known all along. She was an intelligent woman, capable of hiding her feelings and thoughts well.

“I beg your pardon?” Catherine said, trying hard to keep her voice steady.

“I saw your picture in the paper. You are not Katharina Keller, are you?” She had lowered her head to see what Catherine had previously written on the entry form.

Catherine gave in, maybe something good will come of it.

“No, I am not”, she said exasperated, admitting to her lies.

“I haven't killed my daughter. I can assure you-.”

She couldn't proceed and lowered her head.

“Do you remember Eva? Do you?”

The doctor sighed and got up. It didn't look as if Dr. Schnurmacher would volunteer any useful information.

It came as a surprise when she spoke nevertheless:

“Yes, in fact, I do remember her clearly.”

The two women looked at each other, their eyes locked. Catherine could hardly bear Dr. Schurmacher's stare.

“She was so beautiful, very beautiful girl, but very nervous. Agitated. She seemed to be worried about the father of her child. He had committed suicide?” Catherine winced and didn't say anything, after all she didn't really know herself. She had hoped

Dr. Schnurmacher could have told her, anybody could have told her anything that mattered.

"I told her that she must take it easy, look after herself. Besides the high stress levels, everything was perfectly fine and normal. She was strong and healthy and so was the baby. I also told her so. There was nothing to worry about. Then she stopped coming to see me. That was shortly before Christmas.

"When was the baby due?"

"I think the due date was around now. I was going to look up the exact date, the police have been here and asked too. But I simply haven't had the time yet. It also didn't seem to matter that much. They said I could call later. They left their card." She looked at Catherine apologetically. She would make that call any time soon and it wouldn't be about the due date.

"So what do you think has happened?" Catherine asked.

"I don't know. I really don't know. Do you?" All of a sudden, the tone of her voice had changed from friendly to suspicious. She seemed no longer ready to disguise her thoughts:

"Although I find it hard to think that you have harmed her. But then, you never know. People, these days -. They do incredible things. Things -. I think you should leave now. Honestly, I don't want to have anything to do with it. I am trained to help people, not kill them."

"I have not killed my daughter."

"Well. I chose to believe that."

"You do?"

"It seems likely enough."

The doctor was getting ready to leave.

“So, will you call the police?”

Dr. Schnurmacher shrugged.

“That won’t be necessary, not really. Since there was that petition your daughter put online the police have been camping here. Inspector Shats and his colleague have been here often. They must know you have entered the building. Although after what your Eva wrote I’d assume they are looking for children who want to sell their kidneys. Sell their organs. It is ridiculous, as if something like this would ever happen, here. Incredible. No one here would do anything so terrible.

Catherine nodded and got up.

“Right.” *Time to leave. Had she said Inspector Shats? Was Shats as in Greg Shats a common name in Prague?* There wasn’t any time to give it some thought. Dr. Schnurmacher picked up the phone and said something in Czech Catherine didn’t understand. Will they arrest her now? But then, Schnurmacher ushered her out into the bleak January light that fell inside from one of the windows down the hall. She let her go and what was more, she told her where to.

“Dr. Julia Linder’s office is on the third floor, to the right, second door. You know, Leah’s *pal*. You should take a moment and talk to her, if you can. Believe me; this will be interesting.”

Then she walked off, not looking back or offering another piece of advice. Catherine was left on her own. For a moment she was lost, standing there as if Dr. Schnurmacher had slapped her right on her cheeks. Both of them. Then she remembered: *Third floor, to the right, second door. The police would be here any minute. Let’s go.*



It wasn't hard to find the staircase and Catherine swiftly walked up to the third floor, there she turned right and then looked around catching her breath. A couple of nurses and doctors were standing close to each other chatting animatedly in the hallway. They didn't look up when Catherine entered the floor panting like some wild animal on the run. Once you had passed the main entrance you were in, no one had noticed her so far. Catherine looked curiously at the group engaged in such lively conversation. All of them were dressed in white, one wore her long hair in a ponytail. She was the one who was laughing out loud. Then Catherine caught her name. Julia. Julia Linder. Her.

"Julia, about Saturday. I know you don't want to celebrate, but I mean 50. Half a century," one of the taller nurses said. Julia's eyes sparkled and Catherine wondered why. *Was it a good thing now to turn 50?* Catherine could overhear each and every word. The woman who was laughing was obviously Julia Linder and she replied quite indignantly.

"No, please, it really isn't necessary. I hate birthdays. You know that." *She hated it? Not by the look on her face.*

"But you're working? You're here?"

"Yes, I am here, dayshift as usual."

Dr. Linder was getting impatient now and began to move in Catherine's direction. She walked right past her and continued speaking over her shoulder, her ponytail bobbing sideways, nearly swinging into Catherine's face, she caught the smell of her

camomilla shampoo. Catherine stepped aside quickly. Linder wasn't heeding her; she looked right through her as she continued walking.

"Listen Sarah, I need the lab report about that patient in room 301. Could you run and get it for me? Please?" Now, she was shouting from the end of the hall.

"I am late, Thanks, Sarah." She disappeared around the corner. The stairways had swallowed her. Catherine was still standing there, looking at the incredible void she had left. The woman could really fill a room, fill the hallway one would have to say in this case. But now she was gone and so was Sarah and all other staff. The hallway was completely empty.

Catherine couldn't believe her luck. The woman her sister had worked with and her daughter had so terribly accused of an atrocious crime had just left. Dr. Julia Linder: The dead boy on her operating table was the reason why Leah Cohen was no longer a doctor, but running a guesthouse. Third floor, on the right. *Let's move.* Gingerly she walked up to the white door on the right and looked at the name tag that was hanging next to it.

"Dr. Julia Linder, Master of surgery." Her.

Catherine looked up and down the hallway, miraculously the staff had disappeared, to do whatever they'd have to do: tend to patients, dress wounds, cook tea, find lab reports about patients in room 301, cut out and trade off organs, whatever their sacred duty. She pressed the handle and to her amazement the door gave way. Catherine found herself in a clean office, neat and orderly. Quickly, she closed the door. The books on the shelves, all medical titles, looked new, the state of the art.

The little MacBook sitting on the black bureau, she saw at once. It was on and running. Catherine took a deep breath and sat down. No password required, free entry

to all of Linder's data. How careless. How stupid. How utterly convenient. Quickly, Catherine tried to find her way around. What exactly was she looking for? Why had Schnurmacher sent her up here? What did Dr. Linder have to do with Eva's death? Was she the one who had killed her, let her die, used her in some way? In a video? Catherine banned that thought right away. She was still haunted by the girl on Greg's computer when it had nothing to do with this story.

Had they killed Eva so she'd shut up? Had they wanted to muzzle her, gagging her too hard? She was about to enter Eva's name to search for relevant information, but didn't get very far. Catherine had just entered the letter "E" and was about to bring down her left index finger onto the "v" when she was stopped halfway. The door opened and in she came, Dr. Julia Linder. Had she forgotten something? Why had she come back already?

Dr. Linder instantly seemed to recognize her, as if she had been waiting for her for a while. Catherine on the other hand, looked at her, aghast. She was going to say something, but Dr. Linder rushed to the computer, unplugged it, grabbed it and rushed out again. Not a word. The woman didn't say a word. It was quite a performance. She slammed the door behind her, and Catherine could hear a key turn in the lock. Slowly, she got up, walked to the door. The doorhandle felt cold. She pressed it down, but the door was locked. She was locked in. Locked in.

Why that? What now?

Catherine turned around and leaned against the door. The room became a blur. She couldn't think straight. What next? The questions began preparing for their race down the main road of her brain, their engines were revving so loud Catherine could hardly bear it.

Were the police still watching?

Would Linder alert them?

Would she now be arrested?

Was that the end of her journey?

A ridiculous thought, Linder didn't look like a murderer, but then people, worse; children had died at her hands. Death. Death was imminent.

What if Dr. Linder did kill her?

Killed her now?

Gassed her through the keyhole?

Let her bleed to death while operating her kidney out?

Her heart?

Her liver?

Her intestines?

Her pancreas?

Her bladder? Could you transplant a bladder? All that urine.

Catherine knew she was overreacting and overreacting badly. She had to keep herself calm. But after all, she was her daughter's mother and Eva had obviously stirred up some dirt. She would have to be brave also if she was terrified now. But brave for who? Eva was dead, what did anything matter now? Killed in the forest, in a shack. It didn't make sense. Why kill her out there when they could have administered

her some drugs so easily while she was here? All of this didn't make sense. She had to stop asking these questions, but her mind wouldn't comply. The finishing line was out of sight.

There were no answers. But there were more questions indeed, pinching her like sharp needles, releasing their drugs along her brainwaves.

Why should the Clinique kill Eva at all?

Because of the petition on that silly website?

Because of the baby?

Would they?

Use the baby?

For a movie?

To steal a kidney?

No, they wouldn't. She had gone off track completely. They would not do this. Her weird thoughts were overpowering her once again and even though schizophrenia ran in her family, one of her uncles had suffered from it years ago, she knew clearly she was not suffering a schizophrenic seizure right now. She was not hallucinating. She was suffering from fatigue and stress and a lack of reasonable thinking caused by an enormous overdose of stress, worries and extreme pressure. That was that. That was all. Catherine took a deep breath, she tried the handle again. The door was still locked and she felt how her heart started racing again. There was no way out. She *had* to calm down, but somehow Catherine couldn't stop the stream of senseless questions pouring forth from her consciousness, dripping like golden

syrup onto her well-groomed rationality, staining it, clogging it all up underneath a sticky treacle, the full-joint-power-of-attorney-cogwheels all blocked terribly. She had to get a grip on herself. What was to be done? Something must be done. Nothing could be done.

Like the wild animal in a cage, she started pacing up and down. Up and down, up and down. Down and up. She was a tiger, she was a lion, she was a jaguar. She was a penguin. *No, not a penguin.* Then she wondered how much time had passed since Dr. Linder had locked her in. She had left her watch at the hotel. A mistake. Why couldn't she keep her wits together? *Always, always keep it together. Never let go.* Moving helped her calm down and the questions were racing her head slower, dilly-dallying down along the inside of her skull opposite the fine white line where her hair was freshly parted by expert hands. These expert hands. Gentle and strong. Why could she not stop thinking of him. Greg. Greg, the perpetrator. Greg, the pedophile, the maniac. It was no use.

For how long would they lock her in?

Would she just disappear behind these thick walls, would she never be found again?

What if they brought in the builders and sealed the room off with bricks and concrete?

She was exaggerating, exaggerating, she knew that perfectly well. She had to get a grip on herself. She had to. But then, she was locked in and she realized, she simply couldn't unwind. On the contrary. Time passed. More time passed. She became

more agitated. More upset. At some stage Catherine started kicking at the door. It hurt, but she couldn't calm herself. It couldn't be helped. Some things couldn't be helped, simply couldn't. Such as Eva being dead and gone: The days of her prelapsarian youth so cruelly ended. Couldn't be changed. She being in this room now: Couldn't be changed. Locked in: Couldn't be changed. What did she know? About anything? Nothing, she knew nothing at all. And then all the terrible questioning started racing her all over again. Overpowering her. An inexperienced and incompetent boxer on the ropes she was, a palooka in the ring: Would she ever, ever be saved by the bell?

After what seemed like an endless period of time, but couldn't have been more than a good half an hour, the door opened into the silence that was eating her up alive. Finally. The soft sound of the hinges turning startled her and she evaginated as if she was a

Common Typos (*)

unvaginate, jnvaginate, knvaginate, onvaginate, ibvaginate, ihvaginate, ijvaginate, invaginate, incaginate, infaginate, ingaginate, inbagate, invqginate, invwginate, invsginate, invzginate, invafinate, invatinate, invahinate, invabinate, invavinate, invagunrate, invagjrate, invagknrate, invagorate, invagibate, invagihate, invagijate, invagimate, invaginqte, invaginwte, invaginste, invaginzte, invaginare, invaginafe, invaginage, invaginaye, invaginatw, invaginat, invaginatd, invaginatr

Greg

For a splitsecond Catherine was ready to face whatever needed to be faced. But then, what lay in wait for her behind that door was throwing her off balance. Completely. Throwing her off completely.

Greg stood in the doorway. She didn't trust her eyes. But there he was. Greg. He was as well dressed as ever. His trousers were the exact right length and the black woollen polo neck fitted him perfectly, revealing his muscular build underneath. Catherine gasped at him. She couldn't make any sense why he was appearing so miraculously behind that door. The door she had been staring at for so long. Dr. Linder followed closely behind him, and Catherine observed to her own exasperation, that the doctor was closer to him than need was. A detail, that really, really, but really didn't matter right now, however, a detail that didn't go unnoticed.

Catherine couldn't but stare at him, hating herself for still feeling so attracted to him, for feeling slight pangs of jealousy even now, seeing beautiful boy-mudering Linder so close. She felt a churning in her heart that was painful and had to admit that her body -. *No. And that now, of all moments, no. Awkward couldn't even begin to describe it.*

She was trembling at the very thought of their near lovemaking last night. It had been so powerful and pure, such a good and wonderful experience, spoiled so terribly thereafter that the pain still stung in her limbs, her guts, her everywhere. But they had had this moment; a moment; their moment: so full of life, joy and lust, laughter and forgiveness, intimacy and nearness. If it hadn't been for the atrocities on his computer, they might now be lovers, a couple, getting married in a dress hastily made of white curtains, bedlinens and transparent ribbons. *Taradiddle!* Conflicting and ambivalent emotions were driving her insane: Evident confustication all over. It nearly split her brain. What was he doing here? Greg? Here? Of all places? She took a deep breath.

"Inspector Gregorivich Shats", he said flushing his mark at her while she was flushing too, only with anger and rage and some other feelings she couldn't name nor place.

"I am with the Prague Police," Greg continued, his face dead-pan. Catherine raised her eyebrows at this and made her forehead wrinkle that a shar-pei puppy couldn't have done it any better. Greg held her gaze steadily, he didn't easily scare and he had more to say.

"Dr. Linder called us and reported that you had trespassed into her office. I shall escort you out. We need to question you at our headquarters." He came closer. She gasped.

Then he grabbed her arm and shoved her out the door, pulled her along. Catherine was shouting at him.

“Prague Police? Inspector? Inspector Shats? Sure. A monk, a hairdresser, an inspector. Whatever. Whatever it takes. Whatever you want. But if you’re an inspector, I shall be the pope.” Catherine spit it out enragedly. She had more to say:

“The pope. Do you get it?”

Dr. Linder looked at Catherine, alarmed.

“Addicted to fucking, fucking little ones,” she finished off.

She stopped herself short, as if she had said too much, then carried on:

“How very funny, indeed. Remember? Last time I saw you, you were working as a hairdresser. A hairdresser, you should keep better track of your careers, you get them all mixed pup- up.” she said sharply with slight stutter. Greg held Catherine at arm’s length and spoke to her soothingly.

“Yes, I am also working as a hairdresser, but mainly I am working for the police, sorry for not telling you”, he looked at her; adamant, intense, resolute. She was fastening her gaze upon him. They were like two boxers in the ring, none of them gaining the upper hand.

Dr. Linder then chipped in:

“Don’t worry, she doesn’t know what she is saying. She must be hallucinating too. It runs in the family”, the doctor said harshly.

“Hallucinating? Well, I wonder who is hallucinating? Have you lost your mind?”

Catherine was shouting out loud now, drawing even more attraction to her.

“I am not hallucinating.”

“Just like your sister, Leah, just like her,” Dr. Linder added, turning on her heel. Catherine gave her a vicious look as she moved off.

“What do you mean? Like killing innocent children in the operating theater? Was that a hallucination?” Catherine screamed after her

“Exactly”, she shouted back “that’s exactly what I mean”.

Before Catherine could take in what *exactly* she was talking about, Greg was moving her towards the exit. Gently, he pushed her down the long white hallway towards the elevators. She went along reluctantly, trying to think of a way to break free. As they passed the stairwell his phone rang and for a milisecond he let her go to reach for it. With a jerk she moved away from him, kicked him in his shin and made for the stairs as fast as she could. Would he let her get away? Would last night count anything, anything at all? She threw the door open and sped down two flights when she heard voices come up from the basement. She stopped, peering down intensely. She didn’t dare look back up. Where was Greg? She hadn’t hit him that hard, had she? Why was he not following her, or was he? Was this the way to the garage? The way out? Where else could she go? She only had seconds to make a quick decision. Obstruct police work didn’t really call for mitigating circumstances. She had better get moving now. *Time to get out of here. Up or down?* She was paralyzed. The voices got louder.

He had introduced himself by the same name: Gregoriovich Shats, so at least he hadn’t lied to her totally, but he had added a title: Inspector Shats. Inspector; it made a world of difference. He was an Inspector, an Inspector? It was hard to process. Him, an Inspector? *Really? Really, now?* How would she ever calm down again, understand what was happening to her? She had to move. But where to? Should she go up or down? The railing felt cold, she was clinging on to it so hard her hand hurt. Catherine

was panting heavily, trying to listen to the voices from below. Someone was coming upstairs. More police? More security? The Clinique must have their own staff. She had already turned on her heel and ran upstairs again. Greg was nowhere to be seen. Up she went. She didn't go onto the floor she had come from, but ran further up the flights. Fourth floor. Where was Greg? Was she fleeing from him or running towards him? *No idea.*

More adrenaline was pumping in fast now. Catherine was scared. Had they set a trap for her? Did they have guns? Did they mean to shoot her when she was on the run? Was he police, police indeed? Wasn't it more likely, that he was part of the Clinique? They way they had met in the snowstorm: Had he been following her? Stalking her all the way? Had he taken her handbag? Had he placed it with Eva? Was he setting her up? Were they watching her right now? Was he Linder's accomplice? Did they make people disappear? Patients? She noticed the camera above her head glaring at her like the evil eye of an insect, a serpent, a huge and ferocious dragon bear. *They were hunting her. They wanted her dead. They wanted her to be responsible for her daughter's death.* He wanted her to be responsible. Be a scapegoat. But for who? And for what? Who was behind all this? Who did Greg work for? What were they really covering up? What had Eva stumbled upon? A massive scandal? An unlawful conspiracy?

Arrest

She ran right into his arms when she pushed the heavy fire door open to get onto the ward. However, it was not a romantic moment. On the contrary. He grabbed her so hard that her wrists hurt the second he got hold of her. The pain stung her badly, when she heard the handcuffs close. He had tied her onto his own left hand and he had done it quickly. She didn't know what to say nor think. Being so close to him was, after all still very irritating. Her heart was hammering against her ribs so it hurt.

“Catherine. You are under arrest. You must come with me.”

He was serious, but she started laughing out loud, then thought the better of it. Laughing wouldn't get her freedom, wouldn't get her anything. She tried fighting and kicking, tearing and shoving and pulling and biting but then realized he would only hurt her the more, fending off her attacks professionally. The sensible thing was to give up, make him believe what was actually the bitter truth ringing out loud in both her ears, and all throughout her brain: He was stronger. He was in power. She had found her master. He had won. At least for now.

Greg pushed her in front of him, she nearly fell to the floor and he was dragging her to the elevator. When he pushed the button, the doors opened at once and they both stumbled in. Catherine hurt her foot and was groaning with pain. Greg, oblivious to her mishap, pressed the buttons to get to the underground parking. When she saw him do so, her thoughts ran wild again. She kept asking herself the same questions without finding answers. Was he really police at all? Has he belonged to the Clinique all along? Was the girl in the movie a former patient? Was he Dr. Linder's personal contract killer? Her fixer? Was she his supplier? Was he a killer in addition to being a pedophile? The man she had nearly fallen for? Had he murdered her beloved Eva? Is that what they had done to her? Push and shove her down here? Is that where she died? Would they also bring her to the shack now? Would they use her in one of these movies? At once the thought didn't seem to be so far fetched. It seemed realistic. She tried to pull her wrist out of the handcuff's tight grip. Couldn't do it. Impossible. The sensible thing was to give in. She was trembling with fear and outrage. It was impossible to think clearly. Impossible.

“I hate you,” she said. Her knees had become weak and her voice was faltering. A sudden tiredness had set in, paralyzing Catherine’s will to break free, gripping her whole body, her legs, her limbs, her feet. Greg looked tired too. He gave her a sad look. “I am not a monster, and you will, please -,” he stressed that word severely, “come with me now. Catherine you’re only making this worse.” As he grabbed her tighter, she felt how the blood stopped moving in her upper arm. By now she was in utter panic. “What can I make worse? This is as bad as it gets, isn’t it? That girl. You monster.”

“What girl? Your daughter?”

“Is that what you did to her? Use her? For this?”

“Catherine, by all means. Calm down. I’ve no idea what you’re talking about.”

They had reached the underworld, the doors of the elevator opened with a ding and gave way to a narrow hallway. It was dark, and cold. A clinic non-place of its own, never redesigned, never taken care of; colour and light installations ghostly and grey. A dystopian kind of place: The Otherworld. Where the soul fled the body, only to escape earthly suffering. Hades. Greg dragged her out there, schlepped her along the cold walls to the dimly lit opening that expanded towards the garage. Had her soul left her yet? She could still see and hear and smell and she saw a silver policecar sitting in the second row. At least it said *Policie* on the side. Catherine’s heart was racing. Weren’t police cars normally white? Shining and whitewashed like the tiles in any operating theatre? Anyone could stick a bumper sticker saying *Policie* to a car. Anyone could print these bumper stickers with a logo copied from the internet.

Greg was panting heavily, dragging her along like a stubborn toddler, like a headstrong mule, like a lamb to the slaughterer. It was hard work. She could smell exhaust fumes, hear the sound of another car reversing somewhere in the dark, an

engine revving up; her head was throbbing. Was the car speeding up? Was it coming for her now? There was nowhere to turn to, nowhere to run to. Was this the end now? The garage closed in on her like a flat, tight cave on a lonely inexperienced speleologist-wanna-be looking for mutant carnivorous baby bats. It was giving her the shivers. When they had finally traversed Styx, river of hatred, Acheron, river of pain, Lethe, river of forgetfulness, Phlegeton, river of fire and Cocytus, river of wailing Greg pushed her into the policecar and slammed the door. Like waking from a bad dream, and its ever changing scenes of utmost horror, Catherine realized that what she was sitting in what looked like a proper police car. Indeed, she was. Hard to believe.

They were no longer locked together, but she couldn't recall the moment he had opened the handcuffs to release himself. There had been mental blanks, complete blackouts, total radio silence. *Radio*. There was a police radio and it looked real enough. She let her eyes wander over the car's interior. It looked real enough. She had been in police cars before. Walkie talkies, headphones, computer displays, strange devices with lots of buttons and switches, she couldn't identify. Could one fake all this? Hard to say.

She watched Greg closely as he walked in front of the car and got into the driver's seat. Suddenly she saw him with different eyes. He was not a hairdresser. She could see it now. There was all that natural authority he carried; she had seen it all along, but mistaken it for a meagre leftover from his years spent in a monastery, a remnant of another time in his life. And yet: was anything he had said true? Most likely, he had never even been a monk. How could she trust anything he had said or done? Indeed, he looked like an officer, Inspector, whatever: he looked like a proper policeman. Should she be relieved now? Was she safe now? What she had feared most

had now arrived: She was under arrest. He turned towards her, it made her heart race even more. His eyes fell onto her lap. Her hands were no longer tied together. She only looked at him, dumbfolded. *What now?*

Greg started the engine and suavely reversed the car out of the parking lot. Catherine looked at her hands trying to focus on something else than Greg's right arm around her seat, nearly touching her shoulder. Not without brushing against her hair lightly, he had turned his torso fully towards her to look out of the rear window. It was the most confusing gesture. And no, she wouldn't be thinking about the moment they had had, even if that arm would be put all around her, even if he-. What she was trying to focus on, was the fact that her flight had come to a sudden end. She had had her open-air-run: Her moment under the fresh sky. It was time to hit the walls now. And yes: It wasn't exactly a homerun.

She was focusing hard on her hands. Her fingers were white, pale, they hadn't seen sunlight in months. Wintertime in Europe was dreary. Suddenly her ring finger looked so empty without a wedding band or any other tacky adornment. Not that she had cared a lot for rings when she was wearing the nuptial insignia, but now she wished she had brought some sort of jewellery caressing her fingers, something to play with in a crucial life-changing moment such as this, a soft stimulus for her nervous system to slow down, gear down when everything ran at full throttle close to a collapse. Total System Failure. All System Total Error. Any time soon. She looked up, Greg was still there. This was not a dream. This was not a drill. Not a dream? Not a drill? *What on earth was this?*



When she started rubbing her wrists instead, the tension gave way, the numbness began to release, blood was pumping through her fingers, pulsing vehemently underneath her nails. She could feel her body again, see her surroundings. They were leaving the underground garage now. The tyres were screeching and the car sped out onto *Na padesátém* as if someone was on their tail. Was there? Greg kept checking the rear mirror. Soon daylight would begin to fade and another night was to set in. And it was upon thinking this that Catherine broke down and began to cry. *Was that the end of it? The end of her, the end of everything?*

“Catherine. Whoa! Calm down, calm down. For God’s sake.”

Greg turned towards her while overtaking a slow transporter. High concrete walls were moving past them, more graffitis, more tunnels, more traffic, more 21st century garbage.

“Listen to me. Catherine, you must calm down.” She was mumbling something that sounded like: “Stop the car, I wanna get out”. It was hard to understand for her words were so distorted by her fear, her hysteria and consternation that he thought for a moment he had lost her. And he had. Catherine was still busy finding answers to the flutter of inquiries, the colony of questions, the battery of queries, that was hunting her down: Was he really police? The police? The one? Was he really who he said he was? What if he wasn’t and what if he was? She couldn’t tell what would be worse. She tried hard to listen to what he was saying. She had to listen to him. She had to connect with him again. Fluttery of inquiries, colony of questions, battery of queries: Be still and say no more. *Quiet now. Still. Shush. Silence. Ssss-*

"Catherine, I am really so sorry. I should have told you yesterday. But it all went so fast," he paused, then shifted the car's gears down.

"I was so amazed. I was so overwhelmed by your -. How can I put this: You -. Look.

"My look?"

"No, no, no, of course not. Catherine look. I want to explain. Look. See."

"Ok. Explain. I'll look." She was stressing that last word unnaturally.

"Thank you. Ok. Yes, I am working for the police during the week and, yes, I am also a hairdresser. At the weekend. I know this sounds odd, but it is the truth. I learned how to cut hair when I was a monk. Besides, many people here work two jobs. I haven't lied to you." She didn't say anything.

"Since your daughter has filed the petition we have been watching the Clinique." He turned a corner and slowed down even more, moving up to an ugly brown truck whose tarpaulin was flapping and fluttering in the wind. Greg's cellphone rang, he didn't answer.

"In fact, we think that there is a possibility they have taken her. There is no clear evidence yet, but I think they might be responsible for her death.. Catherine, I know that you are innocent. You must believe me. Catherine? Can you hear me?" Catherine nodded, looking at the street before them. He was going rather fast for her taste.

"In fact, you could help us. What did they tell you? The doctor? Could you - But your bag. That is a problem." He looked at her, from the side, steering the car safely throughout Prague's neverending traffic towards the city center. She simply stared back at him. Catherine had fallen silent and lowered her eyes. She stared at the floor of the car and looked at the dirty carpet. There were dark blotches which looked fresh, - was that blood or just dirt? She looked out the window, looked at her driver,

her eyes found Greg's. He was upset too. But she didn't know what to believe. Was he for real? For real indeed?

"Don't look at me like that. We are still trying to find the baby, *that* baby, your grandchild. Evidence matters. Every minute matters, do you understand? What did they say? Do you remember? Any of it?" Catherine turned towards him, sick with fear and anger and hope. Hope was the worst to bear.

"My grandchild?" She asked incredulously, "alive?"

"Yes. You told me yourself that Eva was pregnant. There was a witness who heard a newborn baby cry. From the coroner we know that she gave birth shortly before she—" Catherine winced and Greg didn't finish the sentence, couldn't finish it. He cleared his throat and continued in a matter-of-fact tone:

"We assume that someone has taken the baby after Eva died. Listen, I don't want to get your hopes high. Newborns don't survive so easily by themselves. Not in this weather anyway. They need care. You know. I mean you know better than I do. But, I—" Catherine was shaking her head.

"Are you saying my grandchild could really be alive?" It was unbelievable. She was being arrested by the police while her grandchild might be somewhere out there, *was* somewhere out there most possibly.

The thought of her grandchild being alive brought back reason and brains, logic and judgement and -what was most important right now-, readiness to fight, to persevere. It brought back the fierce and devastating anger of the tigress whose cub had been wounded, wounded and stolen, wounded and taken, wounded-, not killed. It brought back everything. Everything. It was her turn of the century: the moment it all peaked.



“Catherine. We don’t know. You mustn’t get your hopes high. So far we have established that Eva died after giving birth and that the baby has disappeared. We are working on the case. I am working on it. We don’t understand why she was out there in the wilderness in the first place. She may have been abducted, she may have been held hostage. We strongly doubt that she went there voluntarily. But it is not impossible. We don’t know yet. Why did you leave your handbag on the crimsite? For Godssake, Catherine. Your handbag. What did you do out there? Were you even there?”

“Will you use it for one of your sick videos?”

For a moment he was sincerely lost. Then he chuckled unnaturally.

“What? The handbag? For what video?” His voice trailed off while Catherine was interrupting him harshly.

“Don’t be so daft. The baby.”

“For a video? I really don’t understand. Catherine.”

“You do.” Her voice was toneless. He looked at her then it dawned upon him.

“Did you use the computer? You did? Oh my God. That must have come as a shock. No, no, no. It is not what you think. It really isn’t.”

“What do I think? You tell me. What do I think? Really?”

“Catherine, you must believe me. I am fighting crimes against children, I am not committing them. I really am. I mean, I am really not,” his genuine confusion evoked the briefest smile on her face. Was he telling the truth?

“I am sorry if this particular video has hurt your feelings. I surely didn’t want you to see it. I hate this part of my work. But, I must tell you I have seen worse.” He dropped the smile. Catherine’s response was immediate.

“Worse? How can there be worse? Tell me? How on earth can there possibly be worse?”

He didn’t answer. There was a long pause. There was nothing he said in his defense, nothing he said to explain. Greg was changing lanes, shifting gears and he was staring ahead, choosing his words carefully before he uttered them. There were more grey walls, more uninspired graffitis, more dirty trucks. More of the ever-same. He was moving fast in the heavy traffic. Then, after what seemed a long while, he spoke.

“Believe me, there is.”

“Tell me what is worse than the video I saw? She insisted.

“When you see them getting older. From video to video. How they grow up. That’s worse.”



The graffitis began to disappear more and more, the buildings were now higher and grander. They had to be somewhere near the old town when Greg spoke again:

“If you want my opinion. There is not much chance for Eva’s baby. Most likely, we will just find a little corpse, if we recover anything at all. Most likely, it is -. Catherine I am so sorry.”

She was terrified at his words, but couldn’t help hoping to God that her grandchild was alive. Would it be a boy? A girl? If the baby was alive, she would find

it. She made that commitment right now, right there in that car. She would care for it, look after it and make it up to Eva. And for now, she wouldn't answer his question about the handbag, not without a lawyer. He hadn't even properly taken her into custody. What was this anyway? Had she been arrested? Was she being interviewed? Where on earth were they going? His cellphone went, he ignored it, again.

"Catherine. The Clinique. I really need your help" Greg hit the brake abruptly, a black Mercedes was pulling out of a parking lot, nearly hitting the motorcycle before them. Catherine cried out loud and wrapped her arms around her body. Greg continued:

"The Clinique. The petition? Do you know anything? Anything at all? You made quite a fuzz there, goodness me. I cannot believe they even called us."

"You nearly ran into this motorbike. "

"The Mercedes did, not me." He grinned at her, but she turned her head, growling. She couldn't stand the way he looked at her, so seriously, so tenderly when all this was so awfully intricate and complicated. It threw her completely off balance. She tried to get herself together.

"All I am saying is: If you are working on the case you should know more than I do. So, what do *you* know about it? Why haven't you arrested anyone yet? *I* don't know anything. How could I? Why don't *you* tell *me* something for a change," she snapped. It was hard to find a starting point to sort it all out. Greg shrugged.

"Ok. There is nothing that we could do so far. We don't have any evidence, no one has come forward and said they had been operated on. There are no witnesses. It is not as if they kept books on how many organs they sold. It is not in the register. One pound of fresh liver, two pounds of kidney. That's 10'000 US Dollars, please. Thank you for shopping at our butchery." He looked at her sideways to make sure she got

the irony. She did. They were bonding again. Encouraged thus, he continued more seriously.

“They took the money and ran. Your daughter was very brave, filing that petition. I mean, very brave or very stupid. What did she think she was doing? Did she know there were operations? Who told her? Your sister was involved, wasn’t she? That was why she knew? Right?”

Greg pressed the brake hard again and the car slithered on the wet concrete. The motorcycle was still before them. Greg was going too fast but despite the wild ride Catherine began to relax. If there was anything she could trust in, it was Greg’s driving. But, she wouldn’t betray Leah, she would not say anything about her. If Eva hadn’t, she wouldn’t either. Let them investigate. Let them find out for themselves. What did she know anyway? Nothing, she knew nothing about the illegal operations and the ensuing organ deals.

“Why can’t you do anything? There is at least one witness, a Roma boy on the website. He signed not long ago. Leah has told me. I saw his digital signature, right there with an email address.” She spluttered out, hardly catching her breath”. He looked at her gratefully. They had definitely made contact again.

“Yes, that may well be. But we are understaffed, the police always are. And, you know, -one of the first things I did, when I was called about the petition your daughter filed, well- I gave it to our IT-department. There is a team of 2 people working on the Clinique case exclusively. Now that Eva has been found dead we are looking even more intensely. Maybe I can even get a third person assigned to the case, if we find the money. Fact is, I am sure they are checking this right now and are trying to contact your Roma boy. Fact is, this lead won’t take us anywhere. I can tell you even now: He

could be anyone. *In extremis*, he could be some stock broker from New York's wallstreet who has filed the petition: "I am Roma, I am 15 years old", so on and so on. He was having fun with his buddies after work, filing this on his expensive blackberry while drinking a beer on Wallstreet. You know what they said in ancient times?" Catherine was shaking her head.

"Fictio cedit veritati. There is no legal fiction where there is truth, today this is reversed. Truth yields to fiction. For us it takes months to sort through all these IP addresses. Months. And often, no results." Greg was staring straight ahead. There was a zebra crossing and he had to stop for a couple of tourists with umbrellas and cameras. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. In fact, we have been doing this for months and there were no results. We are chasing ghosts. And the people who really gave their kidney, given there were any at all, are not coming forward for fear we might take away the money they have earned. They end up with nothing, no dollars, no kidney. Why protest? The others that have signed are people that are bored and think they can change the world from behind the computer. They would never move, their fat assess out of their soft cushions. They think by clicking on a button things, -anything will change. But you cannot link these protesters to a face and nothing will change, nothing at all. Protest is personal, it's about giving your life for a cause. About sticking your neck out. Protest is not about clicking buttons. So, to cut a long story short: There is no evidence, not yet, *ergo*: we don't even know for sure whether these operations were performed. We have not found a single child that was missing a kidney or a liver or anything. Also, we haven't found any financial transactions with Israel. It is an urban legend. The whole story: A legend. Not true. Couldn't be corroborated by any evidence. The only true fact about all this, is that Eva is missing. And she turned up

dead. Dead. This is as serious as this gets. And this is serious. Alright. But no organ trafficking and sorry to hurt your feelings again, but she had all her organs when we found her. If there was-

"Yeah, right. You don't have to go into this."

"Sorry. Only, the Clinique had some interest in wanting her dead and also only if some of her accusations were in fact true. If she died, the rumours about the operations might stop. Clean record, a fresh start. That was what the Clinique needed foremost: A clean record and a fresh start. No more fairy tales about illegal organ trafficking. It hurt their reputation. Believe me, with Eva's death we have intensified the search. Maybe she was right after all? We simply didn't know where to look and where to find these children and operating theatres. Possible. If she had had access to evidence, and that could well be the case, it is lost now. We didn't find anything, did you? But what about Leah? After all, her aunt had been working at the Clinique. Leah is in on all this, isn't she? Maybe you could help? Could you? Do you want to help us?"

Catherine shook her head, she had nearly missed her cue expecting another long monologue.

"Right", Greg said, "she isn't part of this. No. Surely not. Of course-."

Catherine let out a long breath as if some invisible drug was finally calming her down. They were after Leah or the Clinique or whoever. There seemed to be no immediate threat on her own life. Surprisingly, she recognized herself so well in the bitterness that rang from Greg's words. It was an unexpected turn despite his untrustworthiness.

He had lied to her about his profession, even worse, he had listened to her telling him about Eva when he had known all along that she herself was wanted for murder.

How could he flirt with her when she was wanted by the authorities whose representative he was? He had pretended to be a hairdresser, well he was a hairdresser, she had understood that much. He had pretended to be attracted by her. But was he really attracted to her? He had refused her, turned her down. He was a fraud, only playing another little game when to her this was everything: the game of all games, her all decisive endgame that would decide, that would terminate it all.

The worst was the video. It played continuously in her head, she couldn't stop it, she could not rationalize it. It was simply there, had found its way into the most remote corners of her brain, blasting its festering content all over. When she closed her eyes, she saw the girl, she saw the men, she saw it all, again and again. And he said there was worse. He said he was police, but what if he did enjoy it? What if pure cruelty did turn him on? What if he chose that job to watch these videos, what if he was a mole in the policeforce? The questions were worthless. She had to stop it, she had to stop it right there, she had to stop the car. Get out and get away from him.



Catherine was stalling for time. Surreptitiously, she led her hand glide along the door of the passenger seat. Was the door locked? It wasn't. *How very careless.* Slowly, she undid her seatbelt, leaving the buckle in the hinge. She had to keep this conversation going, distract him. When would he stop again? For a red light? For a zebra crossing? *What was he raving about last? Her daughter? Buttons? Buttons.* She tuned in again.

“Greg, that is so unfair. Things do change, when people click on these buttons,” he took the bait and wouldn’t let her finish.

“Here in Prague? I haven’t found a single child who has been forced to give its kidney in the past months. We are watching very very closely. I haven’t found any evidence, not witnesses, not yet. This is a big Clinique of course we cannot control everthing and everyone. We cannot arrest all the doctors and and interview all the patients. We don’t have the resources to do this. Can you understand that? For a moment I thought your sister was involved in this, but given her medical history -,” he left the sentence unfinished.

What medical history?

Her sister may be suffering, but she was not a lunatic. They were approaching another red light. Could she get away now? Yet, she thought of Leah. For Timmy, Leah would do it again, for him she’d do anything. Catherine doubted very strongly that she could plead not guilty for her sister, she seemed capable of anything since her little boy passed away. Timmy’s death had been traumatic. The light switched to green and Greg pressed down the accelerator.

“I hate online protesters. Today some people write a few meaningless lines and that was it. But we cannot stop such a large Clinique on the basis of a petition your daughter filed and thousands of people have signed thousands of kilometres away. You of all people must understand that. You are a lawyer. We cannot sue anyone on this basis. We don’t have a legal foundation to do that. You’re a lawyer, you must understand.” She looked at him mutely.

“Imagine someone, anyone, invents a case about you and puts it out there on the net to put you out of practice, to put you out of your job, your home, your Clinique

even. What then? A malicious slander becoming real. People don't think. They cannot control what is going on here, they just click, and then there is no way to finding out whether the person filing the petition is speaking the truth or not. The stockbroker in New York posing as a Roma boy, what does he know? He is just having fun. He cannot be bothered, maybe even signs on to impress his girlfriend before they have sex". *Or after*, Catherine thought automatically.

"When people are scared or when they are bored, they make up stories, often really really bad ones. In the middle ages people invented dragons and knights and headless riders when they heard an owl hoot. They blamed the blacksmith, the sage woman, the midwife, the priest. *The Crucible*. We are getting closer to this. Closer and closer. Headless riders and dragons and owls. No foundation in reality, no link to the real world. No knowing of what has really happened. How do you want to change anything on this basis? There are so many serious issues out there, we need serious people to resolve these problems not lunatics who only tweet about them."

When she saw another red light come up, Catherine didn't listen anymore. Her state of alarm had reached new levels. He knew she was a lawyer, and she hadn't told him this, had she? He had never asked and she had not volunteered the information, of this she was pretty sure. What else would he know about her? It was scary and threatening to be left in the dark. She couldn't help but wonder what her file contained. Transcripts of phonecalls? Pictures? She'd love to get a photo of the moment when she wore that blonde wig and was withdrawing all that money. Surely that moment must be on tape. It was forever burned on the B-Roll that had become her life. Who even had a B-Roll to live by these days? It might be worth something.

Catherine looked out upon a drizzly afternoon. They must have arrived somewhere near the old town. Clouds were hanging low and it was still freezing cold out there, not long until sunset now. Silently, she bore his tirade, letting him harangue her about online protesters, witches and the middle ages. She knew he was right in what he said. But none of it mattered to her, none of it was meaningful now. Not relevant. When he stopped the car to give way, she was done with it.

Time to go. In one determined move, she slipped away the loosened seatbelt, opened the door, jumped out and, -when she had found her balance-, began running as fast as she could. Catherine was, again, on the run, she had missed her chance to take the bull by its horns. She ran and ran without stopping, panting heavily soon. Greg looked at her figure disappear, he didn't follow. Dimitrios did.

Dimitrios

Dimitrios had been watching Greg for a while through the glass door at headquarters. What on earth was he searching for? Was he totally out of control now? He was such a freak. Greg was working his way frantically through the stack of papers, letters and reports on his desk. Some papers fell on the floor and Greg squatted to pick them up. When he rose again, he held his phone in his hand and was talking agitatedly. After a short while, he put the phone down. Dimitrios shrank back automatically. Something seemed to be wrong. Who had he been talking to? Greg looked appaled, badly hurt. Dimitrios could tell at once that his partner had received terrible news, a real blow. Only, what was it about? He would find out. Greg couldn't leave him out in the cold forever.

Then Greg looked around and saw him standing there, behind the glass door. Rather ostentatiously, he picked up his cellphone and punched some numbers, then he stared straight at Dimitrios through the glassdoor. A split second later Dimitrios's

cellphone went. It said: Greg calling. Dimitrios only shrugged, Greg has become such a weirdo lately. What was wrong with him? By all means, he was standing right here, right under his nose. He didn't need to call when he could simply open the door and talk to him. Dimitrios was shaking his head without picking up his phone. Greg was still staring at him like some madman. Then, Dimitrios opened the door and looked at Greg:

"Everything ok?" Greg punched some buttons and put the phone down.

"We found Catherine Cohen," he said. There was silence.

"You're kidding,"

"No, I'm not." Greg gave him a deprecating stare. He was not in the mood for jokes.

"Where?"

"At the Clinique. She's there right now."

"You're...," Greg interrupted him impatiently.

"No, I am not. Let's go."

They rushed down the stairs to the car park. Dimitrios was nodding towards two young officers heading for the canteen.

"Do you think she's done it?"

"What?"

"Killed her own daughter?"

"No, I think she'd rather have killed herself."

"How do you know?"

"well-," they had reached the car park and Greg grabbed the keys for a policecar, saying Policie on the side. It wasn't really the kind of vehicles they would drive for work. They weren't patrol. Dimitrios frowned:

“Greg, you don’t want to go in this, do you?”

“Why not? Get in Geek, I mean Greek.” Greg jumped into the car and looked up to Dimitrios. *This was not funny anymore. Geek, I mean Greek, haha. Underdog. Haha. Why should Greece get any money if Czechia didn’t. In fact, if Czechia had to pay for Greece. Was all this his business? In fact, it was not. In fact, he was so absolutely totally fed up with it, he couldn’t even answer. What should he do? Refuse to get in? He kept standing there for a second too long. Greg had shut the door, and pressed the button to open the window. As the window pane was automatically sliding down into its silicon cover, he had already started the car and was reversing:*

“Well, you don’t have to come, do you? After all, it’s only work.” Greg shouted at him. Then he drove off. Dimitrios stared after him, Greg was gone. Again, he was left out, left behind. Dimitrios felt anger well up within him. His partner wasn’t really his partner, had never been. He would put up with this until he’d get his promotion. Then as his first act when in power he would sack Greg, fire him for good, and how he would savour that moment. There was nothing better like a little daydream tailored to suit your own personal demands. Greg sacked, by him. Simply wonderful. Powerful. The power would be his. His alone. He took a deep breath and started walking.



Minutes later, Dimitrios got into his own car and drove off to the Clinique. He caught up with Greg in no time. Patiently, he waited until Greg had driven the car into the underground parking, then followed and parked in a safe distance. Greg hadn’t

seen him follow, at least he didn't acknowledge him. Maybe he was just consistent with his usual behaviour, he never acknowledged him, never. Whatever. Then he saw Greg get out and run for the exit. Then he waited. He would come back this way, with or without Catherine Cohen. Dimitrios was so sure, he leant back and switched on the radio, besides Greg couldn't abandon a police car at the underground parking of the Clinique. Not here of all places. It was only a matter of time and luck until he'd come back. And lucky he was. His patience was rewarded soon enough. Greg came back and he brought Catherine Cohen. Dimitrios' heart began pounding heavily when he saw her. It was her. She looked like the pictures he had seen of her. In fact, she looked much better. Why was Greg dragging her along? Were they fighting?

If only it had been him who had captured her, if only this did lead to his promotion and a pay rise. Too bad, Greg had her for now. If only he could bring her in, then he wouldn't need to go back to Greece and could just send some money. Then he wouldn't have to help his uncle grow tomatoes and after all-. There she was. Obviously, she was putting up some resistance and he could see how she was struggling while Greg was shoving her into the car. She must have been screaming out loud. He could hear her dimmed voice from the distance, even when he had doors and windows closed. There was something intimate about their fight, as if they knew each other. Dance of the mating souls come to an end. Did they know each other? Impossible.

Quickly Dimitrios started his Seat and followed at a safe distance. Greg was driving toward the city center. What was he doing? Why did he not head back to their headquarters? Catherine Cohen must be questioned, must be brought in. Dimitrios didn't really have time to think about it, he had better not lose them. Then Greg

stopped. When Dimitrios drove past them, he could see Catherine and Greg argue vehemently. He feared Greg would see him, he passed so closely, but he wasn't even looking out the window. Obviously, he was concentrating hard on Catherine, lecturing her about something, the way he usually did. Dimitrios drove on and then parked at the side of the road, grabbing his cell phone for cover. They would overtake him any second now. There they were, he could see them in the mirror, he took a picture as they passed leaning over the passenger seat as if to pick up something from the floor. This was ridiculous. What was he now? A spy? Shooting secret pictures of his partner didn't feel right at all. The police car was now in front of him and he let it drive off another 50 meters or so.

Then Greg had to stop for a red light and to Dimitrios' great dismay, he saw Catherine get out the car, cross the road and disappear into one of the narrow alleys that went off Resslerova. Fuck. He had let her go, let her get away. Incredible. He couldn't believe that Greg didn't follow her but filtered back into the traffic leaving the site rather fast. Dimitrios jumped out and started running into her direction. Then his phone went. He stopped for a second to pick it up. She had already disappeared around the corner, but when he turned the corner, he could see her from the distance and she had stopped running but was strolling along casually. Then Dimitrios took the call, trying to master his heavy panting. It was Greg.

"Hey, Dimitrios, where are you? Why didn't you get into the car?"

He could hear the traffic below Greg's voice.

"Very funny. Where are you?"

"I am heading back. I lost her."

"You did?" Dimitrios was looking at Catherine's back as she was walking north along Pštrossova.

"She had trespassed into one of the offices, but then I lost her." There was silence. He hadn't specified where or how he had lost her. And Greg didn't want to question him.

"To bad, Greg. Sorry. I gotta go."

He cut the line. Talking to Greg was the last thing he wanted to do now. *Where was she?* Catherine had just disappeared into a little restaurant, *staročeská restaurace* it said, next to Pilsner Urquell signs covering the picturesque walls all over. He leaned against a lamppost and grabbed his phone again. He had better text Adna for reinforcements. Why had Greg lied to him? What was going on? But, then, he hadn't really lied. He had lost her indeed. The question was why did he lose her? And why didn't he go after her? What should he text Adna? He couldn't think of anything that made sense and that was short enough. And there was no time. Dimitrios' heart was racing. Catherine was right here. He could do this all by himself. He would enter the place in a second and arrest her. *Steady now.* He would be promoted. For sure. He would make it. Quickly, he let the phone glide back into his pocket. He would text Adna later, better not fuck up now. Better stay on track.

Then he pushed the door open to the restaurant. She must be right here. Only, where was she? He looked around but couldn't see Catherine in the dim light. There was a blonde waitress in a starched apron serving some cake to a young mother and a sleepy four-year old, a young man was drinking a large beer. He eyed Dimitrios curiously. But apart from these customers the place was empty. Where was Catherine? Somewhere a radio was playing the original version by Barclay James Harvest: Life is for living and Living is free. He knew he wouldn't get the chorus out of his head for

hours. Catherine was nowhere to be seen. But there was a second door. He felt cold sweat on his forehead, this couldn't be true. Another entry, rather another exit. He ran and peered out, but she was gone. He too had lost her: The waitress confirmed his biggest fear. She said a woman had come in and left again through the back door. Then she asked if he wanted some coffee. Did he look like he wanted coffee?

Catherine

Catherine had entered the historic restaurant because she was cold and thirsty, her feet were soaking wet despite the new boots she had bought. But she felt so driven and stressed out, she simply couldn't go shopping, not now. Looking at one of the customers stirring his cup, she longed for a hot tea, preferably with grated ginger, lukewarm milk and lots of sugar. But when she saw the backdoor, she changed her mind. For some reason she didn't trust Greg and wasn't sure that he wasn't following her. Maybe he had even sent someone else? Maybe he was right around the corner. It had all been too easy. He had let her escape, had he done it on purpose? What was the meaning of all this? Was she no longer accused of murdering Eva? Had there been some development? Was her name cleared already? But then, why hadn't he told her so? He could just have told her.

She stood there, waiting for a moment and before the blonde waitress could come and ask what she wanted to drink and where she would like to sit, she had turned on her heel and left again through the back door. It was chilly when she stepped out into the street. There would be more snow, more ice, more rain. Catherine couldn't remember being outside for so long in such gruesome weather. The light was fading quickly and it was getting darker by the minute. However, the dark would keep her safe. She kept walking and soon reached the river. Exploring Prague could have been so much fun, it could have been so beautiful. She could have been one of the tourists that kept coming her way. But not only was she wanted for murdering her daughter, she was also clearly obstructing police work by escaping her arrest and complicating matters terribly. Given Greg was police indeed, and not a member of the Czech mafia, there wouldn't be any mitigating circumstances. *Who was he anyway? Will she ever know? What next?*

A car was splashing dirty snowmud all over her. She was hungry and still thirsty. Where should she go? She had no idea where she was and tried to find a street sign. Luckily, she found a metro station instead. It was *Staroměstská*. Wasn't that close to Jacob's Ladder? She studied the map the public transport company provided and found out it was. Should she venture back there? All her belongings were there in the hotel. When she had left for the Clinique, she had only taken her handbag with the wig, her purse, Eva's cell phone, a few paper tissues. Would Greg go back to Jacob's Ladder? He might. Most likely he would. She was too close to him for comfort and spontaneously decided to put some distance between herself and Jacob's Ladder. Walking down the stairs to the platform was tiring her.

The train arrived and somehow, as if in trance, Catherine got on it. It was hot in the tube and there were too many people for Catherine's taste. *Malostranská*, then *Hradčanská*. She couldn't bear it any longer. When she got out and slowly walked up the stairs to the exit, her legs were feeling heavy. Her cold feet were pulling her down like lead. A cold draft, so typical for cosmopolitan metro stations, made her catch her breath. She desperately wanted to get out of the metro, get out of her wet stuff, get out of everything. Game Over. It had been too much. She didn't see a way how she could continue running and hiding. It was all a terrible cul-de-sac. They would find her any minute now. Someone would be watching the surveillance videos right now. Another B-Roll of her life, wasted. Images underexposed. Overexposed. Whatever. When she got out of the tube she got onto a wide open space. The wind wasn't as harsh as in the stairways of the metro, but still cold, adding cruelly to her discomfort. She crossed the wide road and looked at the apartment buildings right opposite, the windows were illuminated. It would be warm in there, cozy. People, their loved ones, coming home from work, from school: They'd be cooking supper, sitting at a nicely laid table, telling bedtime stories to little ones anytime soon.

She counted the storeys; there were seven. Seven families. Seven times seven. Then she realized she stood right at a tram stop. White arrows on green: Tram *Podbaba – Veleslavin*, the sign said. There were more directions listed, but she didn't care anymore. It was too tiring having to read a language you didn't speak. She simply got onto the next tram that came her way and sat down. No idea where she was going. With a jolt the tram started moving, carrying her along safely in its steely womb.

The Novel

It had been the right thing to let her go. Catherine was intelligent and smart; she might find the murderer of her daughter. She might. At least that was what Greg kept telling himself. He had come back to the office and switched on the computer while he was taking off his coat. He needed to sit down and sort out his thoughts. This he could do best in his office with a hot steaming mug of coffee sitting next to him. While Dimitrios was gone he also had some peace and quiet to himself, no partner that was bothering him. What was he going to tell them? What was he going to tell Adna? That he had let her go? On purpose? Not really good enough. He'd better figure out quickly. But there was no time. Maryia had come in with a stack of papers. She had been with the Prague Police for nearly as long as he had.

"Hi Greg. How are you?" She looked around the office curiously. Greg knew she was looking out for Dimitrios.

"Did you just get back?"

"Yes, I did."

"Where is Dimitrios?" Greg only shrugged.

"How are you?" He said instead of answering her question.

"You know -." She smiled and he smiled back.

"And? What have you got? Looks like a belated Christmas gift." He was referring to the enormous pile of paperwork she was holding in her arms. Carefully, she set it all down on his desk.

"Not so nicely wrapped. Sorry, Greg. We have translated most of the papers you found in the shack where Eva died. Iryina and the others have spent the past 12 hours on this."

"What time did you guys get up?" He frowned at her.

"You wouldn't want to know," she said sounding rather tired now.

"You didn't spend 12 hours on this?"

"About. Believe me or not. We are still looking into who owns the place. The land registry -."

"- doesn't know," Greg ended the sentence.

"They do know. They think they do, it seems -. It's just -."

"- that it takes a little longer. I understand. Don't worry", Greg says. Maryia nodded.

Dr. Iryina says the letters are wonderful and the novel absolutely gruesome.

"Novel?"

"Most of these are letters, they are in German. Iryina translated them for you into English. And then there are fragments of a novel someone was trying to write. That's in Czech and she has translated that into English as well for you and for the Swiss police. Greg frowned, not sure yet he would share this with anyone, nor sure it was

relevant in any sort of way. Novels, even more novel fragments, didn't usually help solve murder cases.

"Shall we send it to Switzerland? You think they want to read it at all?"

Greg shrugged. What did he know? Someone would have to read it and most likely it would be him anyway.

"The Swiss will get a summary. Don't worry. You can leave it to me. I'll have it covered."

Greg was nodding at her, she continued, shifting from one foot to the other. Did she have to go to the loo?

"Anyway, everything is in English, the originals are attached, so don't lose them." She patted the papers carefully.

"Your confidence in me seems unlimited. Lose it? All this? I wish I could. Turst me Maryia I will not lose this, I will read it and if I won't find any relevant evidence I will burn it. Not lose it. Burn it. Fair enough?"

She smiled at him, and he managed to smile back, but inside he groaned. It would take hours to sort through all this also if he only read a fraction.

"Iryina says it is really worth reading. Have fun." She turned and left for the door, there she looked back.

"Greg. And." She let her fingers run along the doorframe.

"Yes", he looked up impatiently from the papers she had placed right under his nose.

"Iryina said you desperately needed your very own Aimée."

"You are talking in riddles, Maryia."

"The letters are signed by a woman. She is called Aimée Rochet."

"And? Who is this Aimée woman? Did she kill the girl?"

“I don’t know. She said you’d ask this and told me to tell you: You will see. And she also said, she has put the documents in some sort of order. Just in case you wonder.” Maryia giggled and left. He felt desperate, really desperate. Why couldn’t these women tell him what he needed to know? What good did it do to work on a team that was mystifying you?

Then he started reading, trying to forget his plight; falling head over heels in love with the prime suspect of the murder case he was working on. It was the most stupid thing he had ever done. Ever.



Ferociously, he dug into someone else’s chaotic life, plunged himself right into it. This couldn’t possibly get any worse. He started with the novel fragments. It seemed they were mere sherds, history shellshocked by random chaos itself. It seemed like a good start to get totally lost and off the track of the case. That’s where he was already. Off the beaten track. Better do this right. Go all the way, down the street and off the alley. Over the bridge. Over the meadow and the field and the swamps. Where the crocs were. He started reading.

סלח - Forgive

1945

The waggon

How could she grow life when she was starving? How could her emaciated sick body (illegible due to stains on paper). From Terezín they were brought to Poland, crammed in waggons, crammed. A waggon was 6m to 3m, there were two little windows. Bodies died from heat. No one talked to the children. How could no one explain to the children? One week on the train. Fifty trains a day. Very orderly. The Germans ruled, they were the rulers of the world. That was what they thought. Everyone was screaming when the train had arrived. Take off your clothes, hand in everything.

Then they were burned and the ashes were handed out. The fields fertilized.

I was working in the fields, in my knickers only. I didn't have shoes.

There had been white roses. In the garden, next to their swimming pool. He hadn't seen them for so long, but he knew they were there. He had seen them grow,

leaf by leaf, unfold, petal by petal. Before. Before they had had to leave in October. For Poland. Before she had to leave. Before they would wilt. Everyday he had looked at them, then. Everyday he had looked at her, she wasn't growing, but she was sure. She was with child. His child. And how could she grow? How could she? On nothing, nothing at all. On the pig's blood omelet. Father said we are not allowed to eat porc, but Father said we had to. Eat the omelet. Eat the pig's blood. Grow our offspring on the pig's blood. My father died there.

That's when I cried last.

There were other pregnant women and I didn't understand why there was blood on their feet. I didn't understand.

The soldiers walked around. In their boots.

The Can

Everyone was given cans, one for water, one for the toilet. We were scared. I didn't wash for half a year. The can was used for the toilet. Sometimes also for eating. They threw them out in the snow. That looked awful. In the snow. The rats were the worst, the most dangerous. We got carrots and meat. Later I was told it was human meat.

Mother said we shall survive, we shall take away Father's bones from there. We shall not leave him there.

But now they were sick, so sick. Typhus. And she was so slim. And the roses? Would they flower soon? Some said the war was nearly over, when really it was raging. For them. Raging. It was nearly May and they were back where they hadn't wanted to be.

They had escaped, finally, after so long. They had thought. So far east they had gone. So far. And survived. When all the others. They had survived, she had survived. When all the others. The others. But now they had come back, had been brought back, been pushed back, they had walked on, they had dragged themselves through endless fields, mud, cold, endless rain and sun and clouds, endless-.-. Endless. The carts.

Jacob

She walked into the camp with a child's shoe. On the other foot she wore the shoe of a woman, a shoe with a high heel. And then they shut the doors and locked them in. The Russians had. They did. And he got sick, so sick, with typhus. Quarantine. But she? Where was she? Had she given birth before they locked the doors? Had they bound her legs in labour? The SS leaders, had they?

Would the roses be growing? Still. Still growing. He hadn't seen them when they had arrived, it was night and there was confusion, much confusion, people running, people scared, sweating, freezing, much confusion, much shouting and wailing, much despair. He hadn't seen her. But they had seen the monster, it was still there. Luring. Luring. Luring. And how much he hated it for this, for surviving, for

being so strong, for changing the sides, for pretending, for looking so healthy when they were all doomed. Doom to die. And die she did. And her name was taken.

Abominated. What season was it outside? Was it really spring yet?

But there she was. He remembered so clearly, saw her in his visions, his dreams. She. He looked at her so tenderly. Her beautiful auburn hair was wet and clung to her starved body, unwashed for weeks, for months and on. Skin and bones and stuck in between was life. His child. His son. There was a faint smile on her face, before -, but she had closed her eyes now, tired, exhausted, all used up. She didn't even hold on to his hand anymore. She had let go, she was going, -release was close, for her, not him, not the little one, not the others, not yet. It was all done, all completed,- for her. The empty belly looked like an old balloon, all wrinkled up, all empty. She was all torn up. There was so much blood. It was running down her upper thighs and it was all over, it didn't stop running. He had covered her with the dirty blanket, fleas crawling all over and all over. He could no longer look at her legs, how she was tripping. How there was no one here to help.

The doctors would use her otherwise. Or had they fled?

He looked at the boy instead. In his vision, in his dream. Surely, it would have been a boy. How small he was, how fragile- so tiny. The little one tried to move his heavy head, but couldn't. He couldn't see his father. But he, he could see him. Before his very eyes. He felt so tired, so sick himself. She had been fighting for hours with the

contractions. They had come and gone and come and gone for hours and on. Maybe the little one was lying the wrong way round? Maybe his head was stuck? Maybe. She had fought until he could bear it any longer, until she could bear it no longer. Then the little one was pushed out into the cold. He had grabbed him and held him close, how much love he felt for his own, he was overwhelmed, overwhelmed. But how much despair there was, how much blood. Such frenzy. In his vision, in his dream. A new life, he was shivering, trembling, afraid he might drop him or squeeze him from holding him so tight. In his dreams, he put the little one on her belly and she stroked him, once, then dozed off, delirious. The little one was trying to suck from her breast. He was sucking the cold air, sucking and sucking and sucking. But there was nothing, no colostrum, no milk, no water, just dry skin, dirty old skin. Old dirty skin of a young woman. She was so young. Then she fell asleep properly, her breathing was faint and regular, very faint. The little one fell asleep too, embedded in the outside, the folds of the womb he had lived in for 36 weeks and 4 days.

How well he remembered the night of the lovemaking, so secret, so perfect, so quiet, so strong. Hidden. But now the little one was barely breathing, so foul the air. Quarantine. Or did she give birth before? He was beautiful and perfect, but now they would have to say goodbye. In his vision, in his dream, he said goodbye, and then goodbye. He whispered, goodbye, then louder. Goodbye. Goodbye. Then he screamed.

They would take him. The monster would take him. Take him away. Away. It was waiting outside the door. Luring. Luring. Luring. Lurching in, in a moment, to bring

him out, to bring him to a new life. He was all tense waiting for it to come and snatch him away. But it didn't come, not yet, -then he felt he was crying, he was sobbing, the dirt ran over his cheek. The tears were real, something alive, something else, not death, not despair. His tears, they were alive. Alive. He couldn't give up, not yet. She was dying and so were the others. They were all dying, so close to the end.

Typhus. Typhus. Typhus. He wouldn't give him up, not ever, not ever. He swore he never would, never would give him up. Never.

Then it, she came. He knew. In his dream. In his vision. He knew. Then it took him. She took him. The little one gone, gone. Jacob gone. He put his head down, so sick. And wept and slept and wept and slept for a very long time and on. And on. And on. He was so tired, so sick, so sick. But his day would come, not yet, but soon, not yet soon, but soon enough. An eye for an eye.

The blue sky made me crazy. All I wanted was run and scream. Run and scream. And write. Write. No words. No truth. No letters. No -.

סלח - forgive

The Letters

He put the papers down. Greg's head was spinning. What on earth was this? Greg wasn't sure he could make sense of the text. In fact, he was pretty sure he couldn't make any sense of it at all. First, he had thought it was a text about Eva, but then, clearly, it wasn't. And if it wasn't about Eva, what was it about then? Terezín? World War II? So, he turned to the next document, careful not to skip any of it. He wasn't sure he would want to read any more. Rather not. *This was a strange case.*

The next paper was a letter in German, the original paper felt old and the creases were deep from folding and unfolding several times. He opened the attached translation carefully and read what Dr. Iryina had translated for him from German into English.

Arolsen, Germany 13th of April 1951

Dear Mr. Cohen

Thank you for your letter asking about your son Jacob Cohen brought away from Terezín after his birth on May 7 (or 11?) 1945, presumably to Switzerland. Unfortunately, the Red Cross cannot help you in this matter and is very sorry to inform you that no child of such a name and place of birth is registered in our files. Already in April 1945 the archives of the Reich Main Security office, the RSHA were destroyed and not many records were kept thereafter. I have even contacted Erna Furmann who brought a group of older children to England in May 1945. However, she cannot remember a newborn by the name of Jacob Cohen or a woman big with child. But then, she also said pregnancy wouldn't show. Surely, you know more about this, than I do.

For your loss we are deeply sorry. Please do not give up and continue looking for your little Jacob. It might be worth sending a letter to Moscow too. And remember: it might take years for families to reunite. Do not despair. There is hope. And don't worry. Your German is very good. I understood perfectly every line you wrote.

Yours sincerely

Aimée Rochat, Tracing Office for Missing Persons of the International Red Cross.

The original letter was carefully typed and bore the Red Cross insignia and some other colourful stamps. Greg stared at it for a while. Then he took the next letter that looked similar enough.

Arolsen, 2nd of June 1951

Dear Mr. Cohen

Thank you for writing again and sharing your grief. I can understand very well that the loss of your newborn child 6 years ago must still be of such terrible pain that anything which lies in your or in our power must be undertaken to find him. Just to make sure, I looked through all our files again turning over each single record card. This is not something that is usually done but your letter touched me more than I can say. I simply had to make sure I hadn't missed little Jacob the first time I looked. But unfortunately, I found nothing that could be of help or importance to you. Let me assure you, we have not overlooked anything. However, take my word, I know how hard it is to accept the inevitable.

I have myself lost a brother, Kaspar, when he was 2 years old and though my mother mourned for him, she was somehow glad of the mouth less there was to feed. To me however, the sun had stopped shining, his laughter, his cuddles. Gone. He had been so

bright and had brought me limitless joy that I couldn't bear it when he left for this other world we cannot see yet. Pneumonia. It was my own personal tragedy and made me an adult at the age of 12. I hadn't lost a brother, I had lost a child. Everything changed thereafter.

I wish I could assist you better and ease your sorrow more. May these words bring you some comfort, if not hope. Please feel free to write again. You have a real gift for writing. Please, do continue your search. Please keep writing.

Cordially

Aimée Rochat, Tracing Office for Missing Persons of the International Red Cross.

Geneva, 23rd September 1953

Dear Abraham

Using an address in West Berlin I didn't realize you lived where you said you would. Thank you for explaining everything to me with such great care and in such detail. I understand everything much better now. I read your letter again and again, it was a great joy to me also if some of it scared me awfully. ~~how good that you. I didn't mean to.~~ I admit that I have been most naive. Please do accept my humble apologies. Have you found your little Jacob? That is all that matters now. I understand that is all that has ever mattered to you.

I am enclosing this letter with a parcel full of Swiss chocolate, as you have wished. I can send more or other things: Coffee? Cigarettes? Please let me know what you need. I am sorry you will not get any of it. Have you heard of Pawel? I cannot believe they arrested him. Be more careful. I will write again soon. Don't lose hope. Don't give up.

Yours most faithfully

Aimée Rochat

Geneva, 16thFebruary 1956

Dear Abraham

Thank you for the many letters you sent these past months. What a risk. Thinking of Pawel and his fate. How scared you must have been. You really shouldn't have. You shouldn't have.

I am so sorry I couldn't write before, but I had been too weak and very sick all winter. Lie in bed was all I could do for many weeks. It was impossible to get what you have asked for. Christmas was gloomy as I was running a high fever and couldn't go to Derborence to ski (as we usually do at Christmas). Also, there weren't many gifts on Christmas's Eve as father had passed away in November and no one, not even Geneviève, was in the mood to celebrate. We didn't even have a tree. However, mother had knitted me a cardigan in lime and orange. Finally, the colours have come back to fashion. What a relief. The cut is adorable and she said it was just what women wear in Paris these days. I really love it and wear it whenever I can.

The parcel containing all your letters I got by mail from West-Berlin. I cannot believe you have written to me so faithfully and regularly. I have read all your letters with great joy and enthusiasm, but also with worry and fear. It has been so kind of you to write every fortnight when I never managed to respond. I keep all your letters carefully in the drawer of my bureau. It serves you right that you have lost the one I sent in October. How silly to carry it around in your pocket. And again. What a risk.

I am so sorry you feel so unhappy and I have thought about your words a lot when I was ill and bedridden. However, I cannot understand how you can make such a clear difference between happiness and pleasure. To me it is quite the same thing, but reading all your elaborated philosophical ideas of life, beauty and pleasure I felt like quite a simple girl. A simple girl with a pure heart though. And isn't purity what we should all strive for most? To me it is the most important. More important than anything. More important than all your, -please forgive me-, pompous words. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed is the man who can forgive. For he is forgiven. For his is the kingdom of God.

Abraham you must find a way to forgive the wrongs in your life or all this hatred will tear you up. It will eat you from within and destroy you. The only one who suffers from your hatred

is you and you alone. Learn to forgive, learn to let go. Follow the Lord's example. He has forgiven your trespasses, now forgive those who have trespassed against you and then finally you shall be free. Don't hold on to the grudge, the revenge, the pain. Let go, I urge you from afar my dear friend.

I'll have to run and help poor mother peel potatoes. She has already called me twice. To answer your question: Yes, I am no longer working for the Red Cross. Have you heard of Jacob?

Yours faithfully,

Aimée Rochat

P.S. Don't lose this letter.

There was more. A lot more. He leafed thoughtfully through the stack of papers Maryia had brought him; the original papers felt old and rich, so different from the paper of the translations. All the letters were originally in German, the first officially written on a typewriter, the later carefully composed and in Aimée Rochat's very neat handwriting. She must have written dozens and dozens of letters. How could anyone write so many letters? In fact, he couldn't think of many people that would write any letters these days. Letter writing was a habit lost within one generation.

A new story, a new motive unfolded before him: A woman had died in childbirth, then her child, a Jacob Cohen, was taken, in 1945, in Terezín, the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, near Prague, leaving this Abraham Cohen full of hurt, hate and sorrow. Now it seems a similar thing has happened again. Has history repeated itself? Was Eva's baby stolen? Abducted? And if yes, who had taken it? And more important: Where had it been brought to? And was it still alive?

Where should he start? He had to consult Catherine about this, didn't she say her mother had been at Terezín in the war? If only he could call her. He looked up on the ceiling and took a sip from his coffee. His mind wandered freely trying to find a rational explanation to all this. Did someone want to see history repeat itself? Did someone want to see Jewish mothers ransacked, their children raised by their enemies?

Were the neo-Nazis involved? Did one of them kill Eva because she was Jewish? Because she would by ancient traditions pass on her belief to her unborn child? Did they take a Jewish child to raise as a neo-Nazi? In 2007 they had tried to march through Prague. They were, in their evil blood frenzy, celebrating the anniversary of the Reichskristallnacht in 1938, immortalizing when the dam first broke and the Nazis attacked synagogues and Jewish homes and businesses all over Germany and Austria. Nearly 70 years later they had had over 1400 policemen in the capital. He and his colleagues from all over Central Bohemia had sealed off the historic quarter of Prague to protect its core, the core of their history, the core of European history and decency, the core of civilisation.

It had been an incredible experience. He remembered it all too well. There weren't only the Nazis, but also the left-wing extremists trying to prevent the neo-Nazis from marching. Some of them were throwing cobblestones at the police forces,

the air was high on dust and loud hoarse voices, filled with sweat, aggression and anger. And he had been right in the middle of it. Compared to what could have happened things kept rather quiet. They ended up arresting about 80 people.

How Greg had hated it all. Neo-Nazis were bald, ugly, loud and violent. All the klischées were true about them, without any exception. There had been lots of press, journalists from all over the world taking pictures of their fat asses and bloody noses. Some of the pictures were still online. He knew because he was clicking through the respective newspaper articles as he was pondering about how to move on. Greg couldn't stand looking at them. He had hated them before this march and thereafter, he hated how they vented all their frustration and anger by hurting others and he hated the hierarchical structure that was directing and guiding them even now. He hated the puppets they were and were creating in turn, hiding behind such inhumane and complex structures following orders from a *Führer* long dead. *All this hatred will tear you up*, Aimée had written. He buried his face in his hands for a moment and took a deep breath. Right. Forgiveness - סלח

An impossible concept. *Impossible.*



What had become of man that their litter, their young ones would turn to such atrocious ideologies again? What was happening to Europe's young generation now? Were they losing their young ones again? Why didn't anyone do anything useful? Provide jobs, provide opportunities, provide hope. Once an authoritarian terror

regime was established, it couldn't so easily be broken. If neighbours, friends, acquaintances disappeared again, then silence would fall, like another iron curtain and all would be covered up, swallowed up by a newer darkness. No one would dare challenge them. Not the police, not the church, not the judges. He shivered at the thought of this. The implications were too frightening and painful, he couldn't take it in all.

Greg turned away from the screen and looked at the stack of papers before him. He had hardly read any of it. Soon enough, he would have to look through all these files again. Maybe there he could find something useful. He returned to his initial question: Why would someone kill Eva? Let's assume the baby was taken: Why would they take it? Because she was Jewish? And the novel fragments? They weren't really written by a neo-Nazi. How did the novel fit it? Roses and blood and waggons and cans and awful. Awful.

He needed an analysis of this goddamn situation and he needed it now. Greg couldn't do this by himself. He dialled Alexej's number, but it was engaged. Why was IT never there when you needed them? Greg decided that he would just write him a text message. That was faster anyhow. But what should he ask him? What was to be analysed? What he really needed was a historian and they didn't have one on their team. Usually, they weren't involved in solving actual crimes. He let go of the keyboard, better think of a proper question first. And who to ask.

He ran his fingers through his thick hair and thought about Catherine. What was wrong with him? He had let her go. What was he? A madman? He couldn't arrest her, simply couldn't, though he should have had. It would have been his goddam duty. To hell with duty. What he had done was nuts and didn't make sense at all, he

couldn't think properly anymore, it was dangerous. Greg was perfectly aware of the fact that he was jeopardizing his job, his career, and all it involved, his apartment, his life, everything. But he didn't care. If worst came to worst, then so be it.

Then an even more disturbing thought crossed his mind, crossed it for the first time, blocking out all other thoughts: Catherine might need help. Why hadn't he thought of this before? Mastermind of the Prague Police he was. He was really losing it. Incredible. Catherine had managed to get to the Clinique, but now she didn't have another lead to follow. What would she do? Where was she? What was she getting herself into? It was so cold. It was still raining. She might be in danger. Eva's murderer was still out there somewhere. If the neo-Nazis had the baby they wouldn't want the mother to find the little one. They might be looking for her, be looking for her right now. Greg got up, pacing the room restlessly. Something had to be done. Wasn't his duty to help and to protect? He had to find her, find her better sooner than later. He had let her go. What a mistake.

What a dreadful mistake he had made. How could he be so irrational? He must have been totally out of his mind to let her go. What had happened to his ability to plan and foresee rationally, to analyse and to plot without any emotional burdens? These were his strengths, these were his credos. How come he had strayed so far from his own predictive analysis based on years and years of experience? He never acted on the impulse, never, not in a trillion of years. How could he now? Greg felt sick with remorse and shame, maybe guilt and some other very negative feelings he couldn't figure out. It sucked. That was about the closest definition he could find in his textbook: This really sucked.

Greg's cellphone went. Adna calling. He knew what she would say; reproach him for losing Catherine as if he was a child that needed scolding, scolding and looking after. Surely Dimitrios had already complained to her about it. He was good at whining about anything and everything. Greg let the phone ring, grabbed his keys, put on his coat and headed downstairs. Where would he start? Should he drive back to the redlights where Catherine had eloped? Should he stroll the city and look for her? But then it was all so wrong; how would he ever find her? Nothing felt right these days. All was so completely and totally off-target. Greg sighed and took the call. He had better start sorting this out. Adna was a tough one, shouldn't keep her waiting if it wasn't absolutely necessary.

What Now?

Catherine had ridden to the end of the line and back. The wooden seats were rather uncomfortable, but the tram was warm and somehow cozy. It's rhythmic shaking lulled her nearly to sleep. It was wonderfully relaxing to say the least. To Catherine the space the tram provided was a wonderful safe haven, sheltering her from the chaos that had broken loose around her. Moving without effort helped her think, helped her reconsider it all. Eva, the handbag, Greg. After some time a solution formed in her mind. She would simply ask Leah for help, she needed a place for the night. She couldn't give up, not now. Leah would help her, wasn't that what sisters were for? She had to get back to the Clinique and find out more. Catherine got out Eva's phone, switched it on, and pressed her sister's number. For a second she wondered where Eva had gotten the phone number from. Leah picked up the phone

immediately as if she had been waiting next to it. Had she *indeed* be waiting next to it?
Probably. Most likely.

“Catherine, is this you?” Leah asked breathlessly.

“Yes.” Catherine said, but Leah interrupted her at once:

“How did it go?”

“I talked to one of the doctors. They suspect I have killed her.”

“Dear me. I am so sorry.” Leah said, then hesitated.

“The police were here, looking for you. I think you should come and turn yourself in.”

There was a pause. Was she talking about Greg?

“You changed your mind?”

“Yes, I have. It’s the sensible thing to do. Listen. You cannot keep running”

There was silence, Catherine didn’t respond, she hung on to the receiver, shaking badly.

“Catherine, Catherine. Can you hear me? Listen. Are you ok? Where are you? You must come back. Please.”

No, I am not ok, Catherine thought. She felt tears well up within her.

“I won’t. I won’t be tried for something, I haven’t done,” her voice was shaking. It seemed so outrageous and unfair. And all this happened to her, a lawyer. She had been a lawyer, was, technically speaking, still a lawyer, someone who was defending what was right. And her being on trial. It simply wasn’t right.

“Catherine, don’t be ridiculous. They seem to be quite sensible. Really. I am sure they can sort it all out with you. It will be alright. Just come back. You are making it worse by running away. Can you hear me? Catherine?”

Sort it all out? How? The police must be eavesdropping on this very conversation. It hit her like a truck driving off a bridge, then in free fall, diving right for the hard rock bottom she realised she would have to end this conversation asap. To call had been wrong. Totally wrong. Had she really expected her sister to help? The thought was at once dismantled and lay bare in all its abstruseness. Leah couldn't be trusted. She wouldn't help her, she couldn't help her, not now anyway. She had had the police over. What on earth had happened family ties these days?

"Leah, so sorry," Catherine didn't know what else to say to her, so she cut the line and took a deep breath. Right. That was settled for now. Another link back to normal life blasted. How much time did she have until they would arrive here? Surely, they would trace the call. They were on it right now. It couldn't take them much longer. The tram stopped as if some invisible strings had been pulled to stop it in its tracks. Was this a regular stop? Were they here now? The SWAT team, the special forces? They always were in the movies. Her breathing nearly stopped, cautiously she turned her head, but she couldn't see anyone in uniform. That wouldn't necessarily mean anything anyway. The exit doors opened and Catherine bolted for them as if her life depended on it. In fact, her life did depend on it. When she hit the wall of cold air wallowing towards her, she realized that it had become completely dark outside.

Night had set in. The darkness embraced her slender figure as she flew down the narrow staircase, landing hard on the pavement, nearly straining her ankle. She started running down the street, a large alley, she had never been to before, a place she didn't recognize at all. She went faster and faster, around the corner, along a cobblestone street, around another corner and then down another long alley. Her breathing was unnaturally irregular and once in a while she gasped, holding her side

tightly, then rubbing hard where the unpleasant pain from the stitches was spreading relentlessly.

It was then that she was slowing, but only a little. Most of the time, she kept on moving as swift as she could. Not heeding anyone or anything, she bumped into a fat tourist who followed a group with dark umbrellas, he only stared after her dumbfounded. Catherine didn't apologize not to him, not to the rest of the group. She mumbled something that was incomprehensible, even to herself and dashed on.



Then the Charles Bridge opened up before her. It was a splendid sight: All the soft streetlights, the moist rocks of the ancient walls and buildings, the dark river flowing from century to century bringing endless streams and uncountable drops of water and water. Water. It was such a beautiful vista and for a moment it let her gasp out loud. She slowed and looked over her shoulder. There were so many tourists, but no police. If someone was following her in plain clothes it was easy to hide among the masses. However, Catherine couldn't detect anything suspicious and started relaxing a little. She crossed the bridge slowly, stopping again and again to look at the statues. Whose history did they tell? What events did they commemorate? She had no idea. There were so many of them and some of them were grouped together to tell a story. There was a Madonna holding little Jesus and two men kneeling beside her, as if to implore her to let go off the baby. One of them was holding a book, making his claim based on the Scriptures. Why couldn't the woman keep the baby? Why couldn't she

raise it? Nurture it? With love and prayer, compassion and patience, long suffering and kindness. Why was it taken from her?

Then there was a group of five. Centerpiece was another woman with a long plait, braided in stone for eternity. She was kneeling, empty handed, no baby in her lap nor at her breast. Four men were surrounding her as if to shield her from her own fear and power. Her antagonist was tall, towering above the small group, she was looking up to him, imploringly. He was a frightening man with long hair, lecturing her relentlessly, holding up his index finger as if to tell the woman who was beseeching him.

“No Catherine, even down on your knees I will not give you back your life, nor your offspring.”

The statutes were telling her story, her life, it was all there. She was hallucinating, she knew. She had to relax, breathe slower, disconnect. She was terribly overreacting. These statutes had nothing to do with her. Nothing at all.

Catherine turned back quickly and walked once again over the bridge. She should really be standing here with a Baedeker Travel guide. She should be *reading* all about the statute’s real origins and meanings, not fantasizing, hallucinating about them. Instead she was fleeing the police, hiding from them, an impossible mission. And to what end? Would she ever find the murderer? Would she ever find her grandchild? She pictured its little body already rotting away somewhere in the icy mud. She pictured the tiny feet, the little fingernails, so soft, so gentle, so iccold. The thought made her wretch, nauseous. She was close to vomiting. Mother dead, Daughter dead, grandchild missing, presumably dead. All of them missing, all of them dead. And she: alive. *Quelle merde*. And worse: was she responsible for parts of this?

For all of this? Mothers were always responsible for everything. A feeling of desperation spread from within, chilling her veins. It was hard to bear, she stopped, leant on the bridge railing and looked at the dark waters flowing underneath. The Moldau looked serene and peaceful and quiet.



Why couldn't she be in charge again? Why couldn't she get back some control over her life? She had no clue how to carry on, all of it seemed so pointless. Since she had left her apartment a couple of days ago, she was living in a total nightmare, in complete shame and misery, waiting to wake up, waiting to *live* again, to be alive. But morning didn't come, dawn didn't set in, instead an even darker night was clutching her more and more severely. She entered the old town. Wasn't this where she had come from? Where were these policemen? Was Greg really one of them? Why didn't they finally arrest her?

She tried not to think of him, how he had hugged her, how tenderly he had stroked her skin. A shiver ran down her spine and her body warmed up from within. The blood rushed through all her limbs. She blushed and her cheeks must have turned rubyred, and this time she couldn't blame the cold. Lost in thoughts she walked along fast, but aimlessly. Only when she had ran past it, she saw what it was: an Internet Café. A gate to heaven. It said *U Svateho Vaclava* on an purple plate it and was obviously also a restaurant.

Gladly, she went inside. The place was nice and warm and looked extremely cozy despite the fact that it was packed with computers. A low humming was

reverberating from the machines as if they were singing their sad *Bajuschki Baju* to the walls, the chairs, the rest of the furniture. The light was dimmed and very comfortable to the eyes. On a red wall opposite the entrance there were a lot of colourful postcards and posters put up: Ibiza, California, Iceland. Amsterdam, Sidney. The Café looked like a place that in summer would be swarmed with visitors from all over the world sending home their snapshots, videos, pictures and texts. Now it was nearly empty. There was an elderly man sitting behind one of the computers and a teenage girl, gnawing a pencil as she was typing fast. She couldn't have been more than 16 years old and Catherine was painfully reminded of Eva.

The whole place seemed to be run by a girl behind the counter who was knitting. When Catherine entered and looked around searchingly, she pointed to one of the private computer booths that were empty. Catherine nodded and then sat down, she switched on the computer automatically. Only now she realized how tired she was. She had hardly eaten, walked so far and her life was being unhinged right underneath her very eyes. Her hands were shaking and so were her arms- There was no way she could get it all under control again, not even with access to the net. Whatever she typed into the blank search field, the open arms, the glibbery tentacles of almighty, all-powerful and awesome Google would reach for her. The keywords would betray her, give her away. They would find her. The police must be here any second.

Leah was right, she should just turn herself in. Let the police do their work and help them. She could start by explaining properly how she lost that bag. But then she realized, she couldn't. She couldn't even describe the thief that had taken it. A woman? A man? No idea. Fact was her handbag was the most incriminating piece of evidence. How was she ever going to explain its being there? It was impossible. And because she

was a lawyer, she knew this. Her DNA was all over the bag, the bag was at the crime site. Ergo? She had murdered her daughter, even if she hadn't. Most likely, justice wouldn't be done and she would indeed be arrested, sentenced and committed for a crime she hadn't committed.



What if the real murderer would go free, what if he counted on all this to happen? Forsaw it somehow? What if his strategy had already been successful and couldn't be thwarted anymore, was irreversible in its brutal logic? And what if it was even a he, but a she? One of the doctors? She had no idea whom she was dealing with. All that she couldn't bear. She wouldn't let the culprit get away, the person who brutally had slain her Eva and then, in addition to this outrageous injustice, made her pay the price. She simply couldn't do it. She knew so little about the circumstances of Eva's death: In a shack, near Prague. She knew that her handbag had been found on the crimesite. That was what she knew. All the rest was still being investigated.

The computer had started up finally and she stared at the screen. Where should she begin? She had no clue. First, Catherine was tempted to read the Swiss news online, but then decided against it. She wasn't confident enough to dig right into it, fearing she might read more about the manhunt for herself. She wasn't sure how long this cat-and-mouse game could be going on,. It wouldn't be for too long now. All the ifs and buts and why and wherefores were burdening her beyond return and she expected the police to barge in on her any minute. But no one kicked the door down. No one shouted "Freeze" or "Get down on your knees". No alert appeared on her

screen, only her heart was pounding hard, deafening her from within. She went to DuckDuckGo.com for her search steering clear of almighty Google.

Catherine got restless, on her chair she shifted forward and backward nervously. The computer wouldn't help her, she had no idea what keyword she should enter. What exactly was she looking for? How could the machine tell her who the murderer was? No algorithm ever designed could answer her questions. Catherine felt she urgently needed to talk to a person, a living human being, and so she got up and walked back to the counter. The girl behind the front desk was still knitting, she was counting the stitches and compared the number to her notes. The old man was switching off the computer, ready to call it a day and the teenage girl was giggling non-stop, staring mesmerized at the screen. She looked like Eva, indeed she did. Catherine found her most irritating.

"Can I ask you a question?" Catherine asked politely in English, addressing the girl behind the counter in a hushed voice, trying to suppress her nervousness. She must have been in her early twenties and seemed nice enough. Her hair was brushed carefully to the side and there was something homely about her despite the hip clothes she was wearing.

"Hang on a sec, I need to finish this", the girl was still counting her stitches.

"45, 46. That's it. You were saying?"

"What are you knitting?" Catherine asked to start the conversation. Small Talk always opened locked doors. The girl pulled a face that turned into a warm smile.

"A jumper for my cat. Was that the question you've wanted to ask me?"

Catherine returned the smile.

"No, it wasn't."

“So, shoot.”

“I know this may sound crazy.”

“Don’t worry. You have to be crazy to work here. Believe me. Crazy helps. “

“You seem quite normal, ” Catherine joked. She laughed out loud.

“Oh, Thank you, but let me tell you: I am not. It’s just a disguise. So, what did you want to ask?” Catherine summoned all her courage and came straight out.

“Let’s pretend. Let’s say. If you were pregnant and the father of your unborn child had committed suicide and no one would help you, not your friends, not your mother. What would you do?” The girl laughed.

“Sounds just like me. Have an abortion,” she ventured at haphazard.

“No, no, you want do keep the child,” Catherine put forth hastily.

“Do I? Ok. I do.” She pulled her lips down, thinking hard.

“And you’re in a new city,” Catherine added quickly.

“New?”

“You haven’t been here before.”

“Ok. I understand. I ran away from home, boyfriend dead, mother a bitch, friends sluts. Do I have any relatives in this new city? Aunt? Godmother? Grandma? Grandpa? Is that why I came to this new city in your scenario? Grandparents always help. You know, blood is thicker than anything. In fact, I am knitting this for my two-year old daughter and guess what? Her grandma is looking after her right now, so I can have this job.”

Catherine turned white, her face became a very unhealthy colour instantly.

“Are you alright? You look pale, you didn’t really believe that was for my cat, did you?

All that work? For a cat? No. Seriously. Are you alright?”

The girl got up.

“No, no I am fine.” Catherine was walking backwards to get to the computer.

“You know, there are girls these days that don’t want to have abortions, we’re not all sluts, some of us are mothers,” the girl said apologetically.

“Sure”, Catherine said, “sure, I know that. I didn’t mean to say that. I am sorry.” The girl looked at her keenly and rather curious. Catherine had indeed managed to get her attention. Catherine mustered up a weak smile. She felt faint and it wasn’t only from hunger.

“Was that helpful in any way?”

The girl asked, not sure how to continue or whether the conversation had ended.

“Yes, yes, you could help me so much. Thank you so much.”

She turned on the heel and stumbled back into her cubicle. Then she sat down. The scales had fallen from her eyes, she could see clearly now. Eva had run from Leah after finding out she was selling children’s organs and then she must have turned to the next relative. *Whom had she turned to?*

Grandfather

The grandfather. Frank's father. Mamma Imma's husband. Of course. The man whose name they all had been carrying, had been carrying all their life even though Abraham was only Frank's real father: Abraham Cohen. Mamma Imma Cohen, Frank Cohen. The core of the family. And then Leah Cohen and her Timmy and Catherine Cohen, Eva Cohen. It all went back to Abraham Cohen, so her mother had always told her. He hadn't survived the ghetto but died of Typhus shortly after the Russians had taken over the camp in the beginning of May 1945. Surely, he must have family, a brother, a nephew, a cousin's son down the line, someone who was still alive. Surely that was where Eva had turned to in her distress.

How often had Catherine and Eva heard Mamma Imma talk about Abraham and the last days at Terezín. How the Red Cross took over, how they were trying to protect the ghetto from harm in vain, how the SS left, and the Russian tanks arrived.

All in a week. Catherine even vaguely remembered the date now, the 8th of May or was it the 10th of May? 1945. It was 1945, the end of the war had come, was no longer imminent, but certain. That was why Abraham's death was so tragic. You were not to die after the war had finally ended. In fact, Frank, her half brother was born on the 7th of May 1945 or was he born on the 11th? She couldn't remember. Life was supposed to start when wars ended.

The story of her mother's first love was heart-wrenching. It all came back to her now. Around April Imma had been separated from her beloved husband, separated again. Then in the turmoil of these last days she had managed, during puerperium, to get away before the Russians had established the quarantine. Imma had managed to escape, taking little Frank with her, only a newborn baby. How guilty Catherine's mother had felt about this, all these years. She and Frank had survived, her beloved Abraham hadn't. Abraham had been forced to stay behind. He was so sick, he was too weak to move. Abraham was quarantined, locked in with all the other sick deported and emaciated victims of the terrible war the Nazis had unleashed upon their family, upon their city, their country, upon the whole world. And there Abraham was left to his fate. And his fate was death when only hours before, everyone else had started celebrating the end of the war. Everyone celebrating, Abraham dead. Dead.

"Terrible", Mamma Imma had used to say in all kind of moods and tones, colours and shades. "Terrible," her voice shrieking, her voice gentle, her voice shaking, her voice born down with old age and anger and grief and remorse.

"Terrible."

How well Catherine remembered this *terrible*. She had never used any other expressions, as if none were available to her but this *terrible*. She used it as if to say that

what had happened couldn't be described, couldn't be expressed not by a thousand synonyms, not by a thousand different more sophisticated words. "Terrible" was all she ever said about the time then, about Abrahams death, about everything. How often would Mamma Imma simply drift off, resorting to the role of an infantile absentee, present only physically among her beloved.

Her mother had always lived behind a secret and invisible veil, as if she was unable to participate in whatever excited her very own little crowd of children. Mamma Imma couldn't or wouldn't, but surely didn't talk about what had happened then, so the girls pictured everything themselves, very vividly and in great colours, but also extremely innocently. Their little minds were incapable of even beginning to picture the atrocities the Nazis committed: the horrors then were sealed off to them simply because they were children. Children were innocent of all hatred and evil and bloodshed.



Enlightenment came only later, when Frank embarked on his crusade of educating and "finishing" his younger sisters. He insisted they had to know more about *real* history how it *really* was. No longer safeguarded by the belief in the few "terrible" tales mum had told, was like being exposed to a very viscious and cruel form of deflowering. A rape of a different kind. Really, it was more like wilting away instantly under the scorching sun before any of the petals could unfold properly. When Catherine began seeing the first movies about the 3rd Reich at the age of 12, she started to glimpse what really must have happened. She was disillusioned, close to anguish

and despair. Heaps and Heaps of dead bony bodies that were their people. Suffering and suffering and death. Her people. The inflicted pain was nagging off her carefree teenage years, at times more, at others less. Really grasping or coming to terms with it was a different story. A story untold. A story suppressed. Her very own story untold and suppressed.

The grandfather's line. Abraham Cohen. Of course. Like an ad bar his name flashed across Catherine's inner eye interfering boldly with her fear, her desperation. She felt it in her guts that this was the right track. That was what Eva would have done. She had always been into history, a keen student and even more interested in her own family's history. She had peppered her grandmother with questions, assailing her in the most direct and spontaneous way. Catherine could never have done it, not with her very own mother but Eva got a couple of answers from her grandmother Catherine couldn't have gotten from her in all their life. She really made her grandmother remember the old days, as things were - then. Being here in Prague, Eva would surely have taken up the challenge and found out about more about her grandfather's remaining family. Uncles, aunts, nephews, cousins: A great wonderful rewarding treasure hunt. The archives at Terezín: a tool to the stories never told. Access. Catherine would never have had the energy to dig so deep into her own past, but Eva would have done it, she would have done it for sure. Especially after what had happened with Leah. So close to giving birth, she would have needed help from someone. Family came first.

Catherine had sat in front of the computer for a while without moving. It was like waking up. Terezín. Abraham Cohen. Why hadn't this crossed her mind before? Why were the blind spots always covering what was most obvious? She would have

to go there, she wanted to see this with her own eyes. There was no way she could do this from behind the computer. Eva wouldn't have done this via the computer, she would have gone there, seen it, smelt it, touched it. And maybe that was what got her killed in the end. Her curiosity, her longing for the truth. Catherine got very restless. Now. She would have to go right now. The idea had formed within her instantly before she could fight or refuse it. There was nothing else to be done. Never mind the cold, never mind the dark. It felt as if she had come to the end of a very long road. Quickly, she did some research on how to get to Terezín, then printed out the map. The last bus was leaving from *Praha Nádraží Holešovice* at 7 pm. *Nádraží Holešovice* was a metro station quite close in the suburb north across the Vltava river from the old town. Supposedly, the bus station was right next to *Holešovice* train station as indicated on the map, she'd make it. Tonight.

Catherine switched off the computer energetically, nearly knocking a little vase with plastic roses over that had been put there to pacify the customers who needed pacifying. She picked up the maps that she had printed and went back to the counter. The girl that was running the shop was still knitting her baby pullover and Catherine could even look at it with a small smile. She paid for the prints she had made and the 16 minutes she had used the computer. She also got a ham sandwich and a coke. All of a sudden she was hungry again, felt capable of eating again. Some sort of plan had formed within the back of her mind. She gave the young woman a generous tip for the invaluable advice she had given. Then Catherine left. *Terrible*. She could still hear her mother's voice say the word. She lifted her shoulders and released them again quickly as if to shrug it all off. The trick didn't work today. *Terrible. Terrible.*

It was still so dark and cold, and she was loath to leave the little Internet Café. But once out in the cold she was walking fast, pressing her chin to her chest. Were there cameras? Eyes in the dark? There must be. She saw two policemen standing at the end of the road and her heart nearly stopped. Not now. She couldn't be arrested now. She checked her watch and glanced in their direction. Luckily they were moving off towards the other side of the road. She had to get the muzeum metro from *Wencelas square*. Twenty minutes after she had left the café, she got to the bus station. At one of the booths, that sold food and were frequently found throughout town, she bought another coke and another ham sandwich. She was starving.

The Bus

It took her a while to find the right bus, but communicating her destination with hands and feet and a good deal of patience she managed. The bus driver who was in charge of the bus to Terezín had an enormous belly and rotten teeth. He was smiling continuously at Catherine and said:

„Terezín, Terezín, yes. Yes. Get in. Get in. This is last bus tonight.“

„The last bus? Right.“

„Yes, only back in morning.“

„But out there, - can I stay anywhere ?“ The driver laughed out loud.

„ Yes, yes. Good hotel. Hotel Salva Guarda, Hotel Churchill, Hotel Helena, Hotel Koliba, Hotel Apollon in Litomerice. Lots of hotels, very good. You have credit card? Dollars? Euro ? Yes?

„ Yes“, Catherine said. She had it all.

„Yes, yes“, the driver said.

„Churchill is the best. Very nice, not so cheap. Very nice, very close to station. I show you. Here, sit. Sit. Very comfortable bus.“ Catherine complied, she climbed on the bus, sat down and leaned back. How futile all this seemed.

What would she do once she got there? She had enough money for a night, but Leah was right, the whole enterprise was tilting against windmill, an uphill battle she was bound to lose. Fighting the fully fledged Swiss-Prague European police force all by herself was nuts. Madness. Catherine Cohen versus everybody and everything, it was too good to be true. She knew, she couldn't keep running, couldn't keep chasing ghosts, chasing her daughter's murderer. It was against all odds. Maybe she should stop it right now, get off the bus, walk down to the next police station and turn herself in.

Staying at a hotel would be impossible. If she showed her ID the alarm would go off immediately and she would be arrested before she'd make it to her room. For a brief moment a myriad of legal terms hijacked her conscience, obstructing police work, delaying the arrest of a suspected murderess were only the least of her crimes. She was not a gullible woman easily confused. But Catherine got dizzy when she imagined what all this would mean before a court. It really didn't look very well. She could tell. After all, she was a lawyer and with a jolt she realized she had nearly forgotten that in her old life she used to be on the other side of the bar. Bars. In her mind she could hear the police sirens wailing, screeching nastily. Catherine leant back, closed her eyes and concentrated hard so the sirens would be fading away. She took a deep breath and ran her fingers through her long hair. She was still running, still on the loose. *How much longer?*

Greg

He rushed into her office, slamming the door into the wall, as he usually did. They should really get these doors fixed, but then there wasn't enough money for all the odd jobs the ailing building extorted from maintenance. Greg had made quite an entry, but it was his belief that one should never face Adna unprepared. First, he saw Dimitrios, then Adna and only then he recognized a computer screen with Chief Inspector Philip Müller's face, the Swiss police officer who was in charge of the Cohen case back in Bern. He was the only one who looked startled by his fierce entrance. Could he hear the door slam online? Probably could. Too bad.

„Hey Greg.“ Müller said, his voice lifeless and oddly contorted by the online transmission.

„I understand you have found her,“ Müller continued, trying to hide his eagerness by revealing what was first and foremost on his mind.

„Well“, Greg answered. He felt how his hands became sweaty and hot, Adna was scowling at him and so was Dimitrios. Chief Inspector Philip Müller starred him down from the screen and then went on without waiting for an answer.

„I heard you have arrested Catherine. Well done. Where is she now? Have you questioned her yet?“

Greg avoided Adna’s eyes. Even without looking he could tell she knew already something was amiss. Adna could smell this stuff from afar, she knew his efficiency, his ethos. If he had arrested Catherine, she would be holding a press conference now. If he was here without Catherine Cohen, that was because there *was* no Catherine Cohen at hand. Adna had understood immediately, understood it right away when the door slammed into her wall.

He could feel her anger rise. Ultimately, it was her who had to account for Greg screwing up, who had to stand straight before the Mayor, the city, the Swiss police, before the press, before the world. She had to answer for it, and then and that was worse, he would have to answer to her. Greg looked down at his shoes. Quick, he had to come up with a story or the loss of face was incredible for her and for him. He could hear himself say.

„Well, There was a woman there, at the Clinique, resembling her slightly and asking questions about the case. But, it turned out, after all, that she was not Catherine Cohen.“

Adna still scowled at him. She wasn’t buying any of this, he could tell straight away. He would have to try harder, put up a real fight. Nervously, he ran his fingers through his hair.

„And?“ Adna asked impatiently. Greg shifted forwards and backwards nervously, waiting for the final blow. Adna pretended she hadn't heard him:

„You didn't interview her here? You should have brought her in. That is standard procedure. Greg. You can still let her go thereafter, *even if she wasn't Catherine Cohen.*“

Greg relaxed and began to smile. All at once he knew exactly what to say. He hadn't ever lied to Adna, but once it was the first time. Once everybody lied. Greg felt how the tension went out of his body and he relaxed completely. He couldn't stop smiling, then he said slowly, savouring every word like a sip of expensive Bordeaux.

„I couldn't bring her in. She insisted on being released.“

Dimitrios smiled at him with that whacko smile saying: Of course Greg, no one wants to be arrested, don't you know? But then Greg brought the hammer down: „She held a diplomatic passport, issued by the Embassy of the United States. I had to let her go. She showed me in the car.“

„And her name? What was her name on the passport? And the number?“

„I can't remember. It didn't seem important as she wasn't Catherine Cohen.“

Adna scowled at him. She looked as if she was about to have a heart attack.

„Maybe Smith?“ *Reagan? Clinton? No idea. Check with the embassy. They would know.*

„Of the United States?“ Adna asked slowly, stressing every syllable. She was aghast.

„Yep. I mean you can also try the Japanese Embassy, if you want. But she didn't really look Japanese. She looked more like - “

„American“, he then completed the sentence. Greg tried hard to keep a straight face when Adna looked at him as if she was going to shoot him right then and there. He couldn't read her exact thoughts, but he knew she would be clever enough not to

follow up this nonsense with another question. If she pretended to believe him, Philip Müller might take the bait, Dimitrios would for sure. She gazed at him as if in trance. Then, without asking any more questions or doubting what he had said, she took the deal.

„A diplomatic passport? Well that is too bad then. Really, too bad.“

She shuffled the papers on her desk and put them all onto a nicely ordered pile.

„Let's call it a day. It is getting late,“ she said, her face frozen, „we shall continue tomorrow. I am sure you understand. She looked at the screen. Chief Insepector Müller frowned.

A diplomatic passport? *Seriously?*

Dimitrios

Dimitrios exhaled. Was that why Greg hadn't followed the woman once she had left his car? A diplomatic passport. She had had a diplomatic passport? What a fool he would have made of himself if he had tried to arrest her. How lucky that she got away. Greg, at times, could be a total asshole but he was such a person of integrity where his work was concerned. He smiled at Greg ruefully. Each time it was such a blow to find out how much better Greg was at his job than he was. He opened the door for him and followed meekly. Nevertheless, due to Greg's failure, he still had a chance at finding Catherine Cohen himself. His chances to get the promotion and the payrise were still intact. He would have to concentrate hard, work hard. Focus. If only he could. Too much other stuff was on his mind: The Clinique was under scrutiny. Greece's collapse was imminent.

The situation in Greece was disasterous, so many people had lost their jobs or simply weren't paid anymore. It was still not clear whether Greece would remain in the Euro zone and Dimitrios at times had nightmares about the whole situation, it had gotten totally out of hand. One of his best friends had opened a place where people could come and bring stuff they didn't need and take what they needed in return. The Greeks had gone back to a barter economy. Everyone was growing tomatoes, even in winter when they really didn't grow very well, didn't grow at all. How could you even begin to think of growing tomatoes in winter?

Uncle Linus wasn't sure anyone wanted to travel to Koroni this year. The German tourists would all go to Spain, he predicted. He had blurted out in his last phone call that he hoped to God that the Spanish would again manage to infect their cucumbers with some pandemic disease everyone would be terrified of. May all tourists stay away from the deadly cucumber-infected shores of Spain where they shall be cucumber-poisoned and end up dead in masses on the sandy sunscreen-oily umbrella beaches of the Iberian peninsula.

Imagine that fat white baby in its little pink elephant swimming diapers, wailing in the hot yellow sand before it gave off its last fart. Poisoned by a large watery chunk of really green, freshly picked Spanish cucumber. Press Photo of the Year, Uncle Linus said. Press Photo of the Year. Would make everyone turn to Greece for their holidays: The only place of refuge, the only safe haven to turn to for these well-fed, rich, fat, pale Northeren-Alps-Oetzis and their golden dimes they carried between their polished, dental-hygenic-tortured titty teeth.

Dimitrios hoped to God Uncle Linus wouldn't call him back to Koroni, to build up his new Greece outside the Euro zone. And he had wondered what „ titty ” meant

anyway, but hadn't dared asking. It didn't seem important, not with a whole country on the brink of total collapse, chaos and monaxiá. That last word was Greek for aloneness, desolation and seclusion, he remembered that. And then, who needed the Euro if you could grow tomatoes yourself? Do it all yourself. Be the man. Anarchy. Self-Reliance. Autonomy. Who needed capitalism? Uncle Linus could be so terribly pathetic.



Dimitrios didn't want to go back home, but if, - when, the call came what kept him here? He knew he wouldn't be able to resist the his uncle's calling unless he had a very good reason to stay : such as a promotion and a substantial pay rise. And then of course his extra income he had managed to secure. That was helpful too, illegal but helpful. He knew he took a risk, but it seemed worth it. The only question was; would there be enough money to support his family in addition to Uncle Linus's failing business? Was it reason enough to stay in Prague? And what if he had to make a choice between Uncle Linus and Ema and Lenka? Which side would he choose? He knew which side he would choose.

His marriage was fading away faster than he had feared it would. Ema and Lenka had made it up between them, but as always he had been left out. They had gone to Mc Donalds together to celebrate their little reconciliation. They were laughing, eating Happy Meals and drinking Coke when he was cleaning the floor after the Mousaka Fall Out. It was hard to believe: All that good, rich, precious food wasted and Mc Donalds instead. Dimitrios decided not to think about it anymore. He wouldn't be

able to change anything now. He had to help solve the Eva Cohen case. That was all that mattered: Finding Catherine Cohen and finding her fast.



The Cohen case was all over the international press and he felt more than ever that this was his chance to overtake Greg, leave him behind for good. Of late, Greg was behaving so strangely. That was his chance. Arresting Cohen would keep him from the heat of Greece and the money that went along with his promotion would patch up his marriage and increase his value on the market. Higher clearance, better value. Ema said he looked so dashing in his uniform like the young man he used to be. And wasn't that a compliment?

Everything would fall back into place. He wouldn't need the extra income anymore that put him at such risk, he could get rid of the pressure it put on him. All these kids. What if they ended up dead? What if they didn't know what they were doing? What if the tests didn't turn out well? And worse, what if they found he was covering up for them? Would Ema still love him if it all came out? Would she still back him up? After all the test were for the good of it, they were, weren't they? She would understand, she would have to. He pressed the thoughts deep down. No more brooding over stuff he couldn't change, decisions he had taken long ago for reasons he remembered only too well. He loved his wife and his daughter so much.

He loved Ema so much and simultaneously felt truly sorry he couldn't satisfy her hunger for material things, useless stuff, expensive bric-à-brac he couldn't and didn't want to pay for. Dimitrios felt even sorrier that he couldn't keep her from feeling

this hunger, this endless ever growing yearning for the material world and its tempting and sparkling beauties one could touch, one could buy, -with money, with the sweat and blood flowing from hard work. His love, as devoted, as strong as it was: it wasn't enough, it didn't touch Ema from within. His wife. Didn't touch her. Somehow it just bounced off her as if she was wearing this impenetrable, opaque suit that directed her from one shopping mall to the next, from one convenience store to the next and from one beautician to the next. And to the next. In endless loops and circles on eternal spirals. No -. He must get away from thinking about Ema. He would have to concentrate on the facts now.



Then his phone went. It was Adna, he steeled himself before he answered. The women in his life, his wife, his daughter, his boss; it was really out of the frying pan and into the fire and back again and into the frying pan and back again. Without end. He was continuously sizzling like a piece of bacon when there wasn't an inch of fat left anywhere near or in him. These women, they went through everything, simmering his brain, his heart, his lung, his liver, his manhood, everything. She started without greetings nor an introduction:

„That woman Greg had arrested did not hold a diplomatic passport. It must have been Catherine Cohen“, she paused.

„Something is very wrong here.“ There was another pause. Longer this time. It seemed to last forever. Then Dimitrios breathed again, then he spoke:

„How come you know?“

He was genuinely amazed. Greg was a nuisance, but not necessarily a liar.

„I went straight to Alexej after our meeting and he was running the videos from the Clinique for me. Face recognition software positively identified the woman that Greg arrested as Catherine Cohen and Catherine Cohen doesn't hold a diplomatic passport, not by the embassy of the United States nor any other embassy. Not that I am aware of anyway“.

What was the meaning of all this? Greg had indeed lied to them? That was hard to believe. *He had lied to them?* Dimitrios couldn't take in what that really meant. Greg falling from the throne of heavens, his waxen wings weakened by the minute, the second. Falling, he was falling. He would be falling low and instead - . The promotion. Within reach, his reach. He took a deep breath, trying to control the flow of adrenaline straight into the very larynx of his nervous system. It didn't work. He was so tense, on edge. Adna had reached the end of her monologue. All he ever heard was the last sentence she said:

„Call again, if you need anything.“

Then she rang off. What had she said? What did he need?

Some sort of clairvoyant serum: What would Catherine Cohen do? That was the crucial question. The bag she had left on the crime site incriminated her terribly, but what if she really wasn't an assassin? If she had murdered her daughter, wouldn't she have escaped to the other side of the world? To a country without an extradition treaty? After all she was a lawyer, she would know about such things. But no, she had come back to Prague instead. It didn't make sense. What would Catherine Cohen do? That was what he had to focus on. That was what would get him those results. What would she do? He had absolutely no clue. No clue whatsoever. Another woman who was driving him insane.

Prague - Terezín

The station was a dark place, illuminated only sparingly by a few dim bulbs swaying on top of metallic lampposts, some of them terribly bent out of shape. Catherine leant back in the dirty seat of the bus that would take her to Terezín. On a normal day she would never have rested her well-groomed locks on such a greasy cover. But right now she was emotionally and physically exhausted, her hair was undone, her soul hanging loose and she couldn't care less about grubby covers and other such trivialities. She really needed a rest. She needed a break, a way to get away, away from everything, even from herself. Gladly, she closed her eyes.

But peace was a long way down the road. At hand was an unknown future, full of darkness and uncertainty, the hourglass filled to the rim with fear and despair. If only she had paper and a pen to write down all that had happened, then she could sort out her thoughts, then she could gain the upper hand. But so her weird thoughts wandered her brain aimlessly, torturing her incessantly. The bus driver had

withdrawn, smoking another cigarette. Still waiting. He had begun to get on her nerves anyway. When did this bus finally leave? When was the police here? There were cameras all over the station. She had seen them when she was looking for the right bus. When would she be discovered? It really couldn't be that hard to find her. There had to be live feed somewhere on the net. Someone must be watching her.

When she opened her eye lids again she could see the driver through the window, he was still smoking and at the same time wildly gesticulating with a young man carrying a large backpack. She was sure he would tell him all about hotels in Litromice, the Churchill or whatever the place was called. Catherine wished he would finally drive the bus, not lecture passengers. She was overreacting, she knew, he was simply trying to be friendly. It was hard to stay fair if you were on the run. How much longer? How much longer could she play this game? Keep a straight face and not lose her nerves?

Somewhere out there was her little grandchild. Greg said the police hadn't found the baby's corpse. It might be alive. It might indeed be alive, waiting for her ever so patiently: the little feet, the tiny hands, the soft fingernails, how well she remembered it all, as if Eva had been born yesterday. Her heart nearly broke. Such monster, such atrocious brutes, murdering her daughter to take the little baby. Maybe that was why Eva was killed, so they could have fresh flesh, a tiny baby and then the thought pushed itself up onto her consciousness again: a new video. Was that why Greg had been following her? To set her up for killing her daughter, so he could help himself to the baby? Was he Eva's murderer? It was possible. She was retching. Her stomach turned and she got up and ran out. She pushed the bus driver away and vomited on the floor, right beneath his cheap blue shoes. He looked at her stunned for

a split second or two, but then assiduously, he dug out a tissue at once so she could wipe off the spit from her mouth. As he handed it to her, he looked at her deeply concerned.

„You are sick Madam. Before we leave. That is no good, no good at all.“ Catherine was trying to mumble an apology. She didn't manage, but didn't feel too bad about it either. His concern was after all more for the bus he was driving, than for Madam, the Vomistress herself. The bus driver kept shaking his head and repeated. „That is no good, not good at all.“ He was mumbling something Catherine didn't understand.

Then, he went to get a some water from under his seat and gladly she took a sip from the bottle that had already been half emptied. Instantly, she vomited again. The young traveller took her handbag and rubbed her back.

„Wowie zowie, You aren't well. You should lie down,“ he said with a strong Scandinavian accent. But Catherine shook his head at him.

„No“, she breathed, „I cannot. I have to get to Terezín tonight.“ *Or I might not get there at all.*

„Here, I have some fresh water.“ He handed her a fresh PET bottle and Catherine took it thankfully. His jacket was open and she could see his T-shirt on which it said: [mī-'noir-məs]. It took Catherine a moment to decipher how to pronounce it. Minormous. What was that supposed to mean? My enormous ass? She looked at the guy's ass. It looked about right, nothing conspicuous there. She frowned, but really couldn't be bothered. She felt too weak.

„Thank you. That is very kind. I must sit down.“

„Wowie zowie, you really look terrible,“ the young guy said. Catherine gave him a weak smile and swallowed the water. She had to sit down indeed, her knees were shaking awfully and her stomach was burning like fire. The bus driver looked her up and down suspiciously as she was clambering back onto his bus.

„If you wanna drive with bus, you must have plastic bag. Do you have plastic bag?“

He climbed after her, bent into the driving cab and began rummaging for a bag underneath his steering wheel. With a triumphant smile, he pulled out a red plastic bag and gave it to Catherine who was still hanging between two seats, unable to move forward or backward. Her hands were trembling when she took the bag.

„Thank you. That’s very kind. I hope I won’t need it.“ she whispered.

The driver smacked his lips to express she shouldn’t worry and helped her find her seat, then he turned and had to get past the young traveller who had followed behind, still holding Catherine’s handbag. He looked kind of familiar.

„Here, this is yours. Are you alright again? Have you eaten something bad? Fish? Raw eggs? Coca Cola? Ice Cream?“ He beamed at her in such a nice and innocent way only the young can.

„Yes, maybe, too many sandwiches“, she answered weakly.

„Please, don’t worry, I’ll be alright“. She forced herself to smile at him. He nodded towards her and walked up the aisle to sit in the rear of the bus. The bus driver finally started the engine. Slowly he pulled out. Was he whistling to himself? She forced herself not to think of the baby, Eva’s baby, her grandchild. How sick she still felt. Sick and dizzy. Catherine closed her eyes, trying to breathe steadily, finding a rhythm that would calm her down.

When the bus finally gained speed, she stirred, leant towards the cold window and blew onto it. Her breath was foul and she realized she would badly have needed a chewing gum. In her old life she always had a stock of fresh peppermint gums and sweet candies in her handbag, now they were all eaten, all gone. She touched the glass with her finger, letting little blobs of the inevitable condensation water drip along her naked arm. This helped her relaxed, it was such a simple gesture she had always made on trains, buses, any vehicle with a window pane. She wrote Eva's name onto the dark, wet window. Then she traced it with her index finger. Once. Twice. And again and again. Had they buried her yet? Could she ever see her grave? She wouldn't get to organize her funeral. The thought hit her hard. She shouldn't be here. On this bus. Right now, she should be the one organizing Eva's funeral. On the phone. Talking to people. Grieving. Weeping. Sorting it all out.

Who would do it in her place? Harvey would -, Harvey would bury her. He owed it to Catherine, owed it to his daughter, their daughter. Surely, he would be busy, busy right now, organizing everything. Grieving. Weeping. It would be taken care of. Everything would be taken care off. The coffin, the flowers. The funeral. Food. Drinks. Music. Everything. She spelled funeral on the window pane, staring at the first three letters: F u n. Fun was in fun-eral? Crazy. Language. Crazy. She was going crazy. She wiped everything out, stared outside, trying to make out some of the landscape, but there was not much to be seen. Tiny lights were flickering past nervously, other cars, other buses making their way, finding a pathway through this forsaken, dark country. She hated travelling, it inconvenienced her so much, and took its toll on her energy. When the bus finally left the centre of Prague and got onto the freeway she tried to sleep, using her handbag as a pillow. That was all that was left to her: Her second best

handbag with a purse, three useless credit cards, some money, quite a lot of money in fact. Enough to be robbed at knifepoint. Enough to be killed. If only she could have stayed home. Home. The thought made her smile, made her cry, exhausted her and it wasn't much later that she fell asleep.

Greg

Greg had been acting against all odds. After meeting with Adna, Dimitrios and an online version of Müller he went all the way back to his apartment, only to check if Catherine had come in. Clearly, she hadn't, but he still felt a sliver of disappointment, remorse even. After clearing every room, he opened the fridge to grab a bite to eat. Cauliflower, meat - Was that raw chicken? And sour cream. Food that needed cooking? Catherine had left her mark not only on his heart, but even in his fridge. *She got right into me, everything needs chopping up now, - boiling.* He closed the door quickly and went back to the hallway.

He had to get out of here. At once. Greg left his place and walked down the stairs slowly. He needed some real food now, cooked food not that DIY stuff. Then his phone went. It was Alexey.

"Man. Come here at once," Alexey said. That was all, he said. Then the dialling tone could be heard. That much for calling to have a conversation. *Man.* Why didn't he send

a message? Maybe he didn't want to wait for a reply? Takes too long. Greg sighed out loud, he had better get back. Dinner could wait.

It didn't take him long to reappear at the office. As he was entering the building most of his colleagues who worked the night shift were leaving for patrol, they nodded to him politely acknowledging his higher rank. Hopefully, he didn't run into Adna right now. She usually left the building around 6 pm. He knew he had to come up with some results soon. Adna wouldn't buy the story with the diplomatic passport for much longer. He felt hot in his coat as he was walking up the stairs quickly.



The door to Alexey's office was ajar. Rumour had it that Alexej lived in his office day and night. There was a running gag among his colleagues about a sleeping bag that he hid under his desk. Greg had never seen it, but presumably it was there if you cared to look for it long enough. Greg didn't care. The room was a total mess, there were cardboard boxes in all sizes and colors, cables, mainly white and black, printers, paper, computers, laptops, screens and cell phones scattered all over the place in no particular order. Alexej was right in the middle of the chaos staring at one of the many screens that was on. In his left hand he held a bottle of Coke, sipping occasionally from it. Greg stood there observing him for a moment and then Alexej spoke without looking up from the screen he was working on:

"Hey Greg. How are you, man?"

"Thanks Lexu. You?"

"Fine. Been busy?"

"Yeap." Alexej lifted an eyebrow and typed in some letters, then he sat down, shoved his chair back and looked properly at Greg.

"I might have something for you."

"Is that so?"

"That is so. Greggy Boy." Noone dared use that nickname. Alexey knew he hated the name. Greg was about to complain when Alexej continued:

"Adna and Dimitrios were here. They had me identify a woman from a video. She is positively Catherine Cohen. Did you know about this, man?"

"Where was the video taken?" Greg asked, beginning to sweat.

"At the Clinique, Adna used our online access to their cameras. You do know we can do this now? Man? Don't you?" Greg went pale.

"Sure, I do. But yes, thanks for reminding me," Greg said. Adna already knew then. The diplomatic passport had gone down the drain within the hour.

"Why is Dimitrios now working with Adna? Has he been promoted?" Alexej asked curiously. Greg didn't answer. *No one was irreplaceable, but yes, that was quick.*

"I thought you were lined up for this, weren't you, man?" Alexej added fishing for an answer.

"Well, that was before I screwed them all," Greg said somberly

"You did? All of them?"

He paused, then letting Greg's answer sink in, he added, "I see." Alexey was sneering, then stared at the screen again, pressed a button on the keyboard before him.

Not Adna, you technical moron, Greg thought, but didn't say anything to clarify the misunderstanding.

"There are no news, nothing new on Eva or Catherine's facebook account, not on anything. I finally got around to check out this last email that was sent from Eva's and to CC's account. You know the mail that said CC should go to Vienna. Remember?"

"CC?"

"Short for Catherine Cohen. CC"

"CC, ok, makes sense." he smiled.

"Thanks." Alexey pressed another button, then continued half-heartedly:

"and -," He didn't finish the sentence, had no intention to. Instead he put his coke bottle down and stared at the screen. Then he speedtyped something into the keyboard Greg couldn't read and pressed enter. The screen went blank again.

"But what?" Greg interrupted him irritatedly and came closer.

"Greg, I cannot really do it without the legal stuff. I need permissions, papers, Adna's signature, the real stuff. Man, you know that. The whole lot. It has to be authorized properly"

"Yeah, right. I will take care of this. But you could do it, technically speaking." Alexey nodded.

"I have a friend who works at a firm who is into servicing some of the big servers here. Yes. Wonderproxy, Mellowproxy, Taxypoxy5, the whole list. If she sent that last email from there, I could theoretically get you a real address, but as it is -."

"Just do it." Greg said.

"I don't know."

"Just do it." Greg repeated.

"Ok. I have already - In fact. Well-" Greg raised his eyebrow at this and began to smile. Alexey smiled back and shrugged.

"Never mind. I thought someone was eventually going to ask for it anyway. This is what I know so far. That last email to CC from Eva was sent from somewhere close to or within the Outer Prague area. I can confirm this. Whether it was Eva or someone else I cannot say." Greg's face fell.

"Alexej that simply isn't good enough. I need more. Do you know how many computers there are in the Outer Prague Area? Hundreds? Thousands? Hundred-thousands? A million?"

"Millions in fact. I will text you when I know. I need more time. Do you understand? More time. You're not the only one who wants things done around here. Why don't they hire more IT people if all work's done online now? And all the administrative crap they want in addition. Imagine, they want a new system to book police cars online. And they want to see the first version tomorrow. Let me spell this for you: T, O, M, O, double R, O, W".

Greg glanced at his watch. It was getting late indeed.

"What would that be good for anyway?" Greg asked.

"An electronic booking system for police cars? Come on Greg, so that policemen who need a police vehicle actually get one when they need it. If there is an emergency call you can hardly have the operator say: *Pick us up, we don't have transport, man.*"

Greg laughed out loud and Alexey challenged him:

"I suppose you usually take a car without telling anyone."

"That is the easiest."

"Yes, sure. Listen. Go home. I will text you when I have something for you. I really need some time to work through the booking system first. Man. You look like a ghost. Go. Sleep."

"Thanks. Just what I needed."

"Sorry for speaking the truth."

"Ok. I will go. You keep me posted".

"Sure."

Greg was on his way out when Alexej called after him:

"Hey, Greggy Boy."

"Don't."

"Listen, when I have news, I'll give it to you exclusively. You know what I mean.

Partner"

"Thanks Lexu." Greg understood perfectly. Last year Alexej had failed them on an important mission and Greg had taken the blame for him. He said he had misread the map that had been sent to his cellphone when in fact Alexej had sent the wrong sector of the map altogether. A crucial mistake in a crucial phase. Alexey owed him.

Suddenly, Greg felt exhausted, although it was only half past ten. He would take the morning off.

Christian

"Ouch, that hurts."

"Come on. Wake up."

The young traveller had grabbed her left arm and was shaking her softly to bring her round. Her arm felt still sore from her fight with Greg in the Clinique. She looked at him and wondered for a second who he was and if she should know him. She couldn't place his face to a name. *Where was she anyway? On a bus? She was on a bus? Why was she on a bus?* Sleepily, she rubbed her eyes and tried to rearrange her hair.

„We are nearly here. I thought you might like to wake a little early to find all your stuff. By the way: I am Christian Sörenson.“

Catherine sighed, trying to find some words. Her mind was blank.

„I am Danish, from Copenhagen. You?“

„From Switzerland, she whispered, clearing her throat.

„Pleased to meet you.“

„Pleased to meet you too.“ That was all Catherine mastered to say. Her mouth was awfully dry, her lips sagging. Were there white blotches of spit in the corner of her mouth? Quickly she licked her lips.

„We have kind of met already“, he said.

Catherine nodded, smiling faintly. Feeling incredibly weak and ill she couldn't even sit up straight. Luckily her bag was still here, she had half expected to find it stolen again. That would have been perfect. Another bag stolen, ending up at another crimesite with another dead body. Maybe her ex-husband's this time? Harvey. Dead too. And her the culprit. Just great.

She focused on Christian's face, trying to get a hold on her weird thoughts. Harvey was not dead. Her handbag was not stolen either. Everything was fine. She was fine.

„You're alright?“ Christian asked.

„Yeah. I'm good“, she answered.

Her head hurt and she was still nauseous, but Christian had sat down next to her and had started on a lecture, she found hard to follow when all she really wanted was peace and quiet.

„You know, I am Jewish and my grandfather was in Terezín. Then. He was brought here in October 1943 and spent two years in this hell. It must have been awful, but luckily he survived. Somehow. And was brought back to Denmark in April 1945, you know. The Red Cross hired some trucks and took all the survivors back“.

Catherine was wide awake now.

„Really?“ Her voice sounded hoarse and sleepy.

„I am not making this up,“ Christian looked at her reproachfully.

„No, of course not, you’re quoting wikipedia“, she cleared her throat from the sleepiness that had beset her and switched on her lawyer’s brain.

„How did you guess that?“ He looked genuinely crestfallen.

„I can just tell. What was your grandfather called? “

She started out, her lawyer’s brain up and running.

„Henning Sörenson. Why? You know him?“ He looked at her from the side.

„No, I don’t. But he may have known my mother’s first husband.“

„Why’s that?

„He was also in Terezín, around the same time.“

„He was? Why is that?“

„Long story.“

„Well, tell me. What was he called? I mean there were hundreds, thousands of people.

It would be such a coincidence if he had met my grandfather.“

„His name is, well was Abraham Cohen. He’s dead,“ she shifted her body nervously to sit in a more upright position. She was awake now.

„Well, I am sorry about that.“

„Yes, me too.“

„You said April 45 your grandfather was brought back to Denmark. Do you know which day?“

„I think it was on the 15th. Why?“

„My brother Frank was born in Terezín. He was born on the 7th of May 1945. That must have been shortly after your grandfather had left.“

„You're Jewish?“

„Can't you tell?“

„No, sorry.“

„I've got a huge crooked nose. See?“ Catherine touched her nose and they were both laughing. Catherine's nose was tiny.

„Well, now that you say it, yes you look very Jewish, blonde hair, blue eyes“.

„My eyes aren't blue.“

„Aren't they?“

„No, look,“ she turned towards him, he laughed when he looked into her eyes.

„No, they are not. I cannot really tell the colour of your eyes.“

„Does it matter?“

„No, not really,“ Christian continued:

„That was his first name? Frank? I only know it as a last name for Jewish families. Anne Frank and so, you know?“

„Yes, of course. I know Anne Frank. Everybody knows Anne Frank.“

„Of course, anyway. When they took Henning Sörenson, my grandfather there must have been a bit more than 400 Danish Jews on that transport. And now I want to tell their story. I am a writer, you know. I used to be a student, but I quit. I mean, I wanna be -. I wanna write down his story. It seems like everybody forgets about these times.

I want to do a book about his life, you know. I am not sure if I can get access to the old documents and see what it was really like. I cannot believe, I finally made it here. Finally, you know“, he smiled his broadest smile.

Without heeding what he had just told her, she had only listened to half of it anyway, Catherine changed the theme. She had just remembered him.

„Minormous,“ she said, „we have met before. Remember? At Jacob’s ladder. You were wearing that T-shirt.“

„Yeah. I had thought I’d seen you before. You know. You’re really hot“.

„Hot?“ Catherine ran her finger through her messed up hair. What was he talking about?

„Good looking. I mean, for your age. I always remember good-looking women. No matter how old they are. No offence,“ he checked himself.

„None taken“, Catherine smiled. *For your age? What exactly did that mean?*

She straightened up, he seemed genuine enough.

„You got so engaged in that conversation with that nutter. That woman there at Jacob’s Ladder. She was absolutely mad, wasn’t she?“

„My sister.“

„Wowie zowie. My apologies. Wrong turn again.“

„What’s with the Wowie zowie? “

„Why? It’s just something I say. “

„Ok. Wowie zowie then. Don’t worry. it’s hardly your fault that she’s my sister,“ Catherine smiled. “

„No. I mean. You know.“

„Yeah, right. Don’t worry“. Catherine’s head was aching.

„So, what’s minormous?“ she asked.

„Yes, whatever you type into google is saved, stored, linked with your IP address and then turned against you. Big Brother is watching you. Continuously. Always. And once the flag is raised on you. There is no mercy. No mercy. The net is tight. There will be no escape. And imagine you’d be accused falsely. Or you’d be accused because you’re Black or Jewish or anything really. Imagine. What then? Not sure the Red Cross could then simply send buses. If you download minormous, wrong information is sent to Google and the other datalords. The ultimate goal is to destroy their business.“

Not sure people who were accused falsely need a bus the Red Cross sent, Catherine thought. They’d need a lawyer.

„There is no escape. What thou wouldst highly that wouldst though holily, wouldst play false and wouldst wrongly win. Macbeth, Act I, Scene 5.“

Christian prattled on. Catherine looked at him blankly, she really didn’t know what to say to this. Macbeth? She didn’t get it. It seemed she was not the only paranoid person on the planet.

„Next stop Litomerice,“ they could hear the driver’s voice on the loudspeakers. Catherine got up, stretching her limbs thoroughly. *Destroy google by sending false information? Some people had strange jobs.* She reached for her coat and took her handbag.

„But you know what’s the worst?“ Christian obviously wasn’t done yet.

„No, I don’t.“

„Of course you can’t know. My friends, the money nerds, they sold minormous. Right after we had finished develop it. It hadn’t even taken off yet. It was really just starting up.“

„Whom did they sell it too?

„Take a guess,“ Christian wouldn't wait for an answer.

„To Google. Minormous sold to google. Can you imagine? That's the same as if you would sell all your weapons to the enemy.“

„And what did they do with it?“

„I don't know. What would you do if you got hold of software that was sabotaging your business?

„You'd destroy it?“

„Right, but you know what? You cannot destroy ideas. They will come back. They will. Eventually. Always. The truth always prevails. “

All of a sudden, Catherine had to think of Eva: that was also a line she would have believed in



The bus had come to a halt and people were disembarking slowly. Catherine felt stiff from the ride and now that she was standing again but swaying uncomfortably, she was still feeling rather nauseous. After all, it was late. She followed Christian outside, relieved to finally leave the bus, glad to feel the chilly air sting in her lungs. The bus driver laughed at them.

„Welcome to Bohemian city Litomerice, Leitmeritz as the Germans used to call it then. It lie on new border between the Greater German Reich and the Czecho-Slovak state, within Sudetenland. That was in 1938 when Germany occupied the Sudetentland and my father was born. But surely, you are not interested in politics and war. War not good, not good at all for business, for tourism. Not much luggage? Hey, lady. Very

good, very good. I don't have to carry. I will show you the way. My uncle's place. Come. Come. You too."

Then he grabbed Christian's backpack and walked along the road. There was hardly any traffic at this time of night, they walked past a large parking space and after walking a couple of minutes, they all stood in front of the Hotel Churchill. Christian had followed obediently.

"Very good place and good price for service. Go in, go in. All Swiss go there. "

"I am not Swiss," Christian protested. The driver smiled and gave Christian his backpack, then waited patiently. Christian tipped him quite generously, and off he went.

"Shall we?"

"Isn't this too expensive for you ? "

" Well, " Christian said,

"I don't know.

"It doesn't look that expensive. Although the green baldachin is really gorgeous. And it's a beautiful house. Baroque style? " Catherine laughed.

" Don't ask me. I've got no idea. " Christian gave her a warm smile.

" Do you want to share a room ? "

Spontaneously Catherine wanted to say „No“, but then changed her mind on the spot.

"Of course, why not. I could easily pass as your mother. Come on, son." He smiled at her.

When they entered the lobby, Catherine felt numb. *What on earth am I doing here?* *The police will be here in no time.* The counter for the reception desk was made of solid wood and the blue carpet on the floor looked used from the wear and tear of previous

years, months, days, weeks and the many visitors that had dragged in their heavy luggage. Catherine's eye fell first on all the plastic plants the room was stuffed with, in a futile attempt to give it a homely atmosphere. There was an elderly man behind the counter, his black hair greased enormously. When they entered he looked up from his paper, but then he continued reading the news as if they weren't standing there at all. Catherine walked up to him, very determined. She looked at this nametag, it said: Isaac Joss. He ignored her completely, in fact when he looked up, it seemed as if Catherine had scared him to death, so startled was he. He was sitting in the lobby of a hotel, but obviously he didn't expect any guests.

„Good evening, Sir. Do you have a double room for tonight? And en-suite bath would be nice.“

„ All our rooms have bathrooms, Madam,“ the man had turned as pale as a ghost. He looked rattled.

„ Are you alright, Sir ? “ Catherine asked politely.

„ Yes, Ma'am. It is nothing. “

„ Great then. We take the double room. Two separate beds. Sorry, we haven't booked before.“ He looked at her less startled and said:

„ It is 59 Euros a night. I need your ID or passport, Madam “. Catherine still smiled, trying to keep her cool:

„I am sorry but I simply forgot to take it. My son has his though“, she looked at Christian, daringly. „Do you think that will do?“

„Name?“

„Sörenson,“ Catherine said, then she started coughing.

„First name?“

„Catherine“, she answered truthfully. All of a sudden she couldn't go through with it any longer. Her courage left her speedily. Catherine Sörenson? Who on earth was that?

„Would you please excuse me. I urgently need the restroom. My son will sort it all out with you, won't you Christian?“ She spoke lightly, amazed at how easily she could fake it all, and for a moment it also seemed she had fully recovered from the nausea and the vomiting. The rest on the bus had been wonderful.

„Of course,“ he said, „Mum, I will take care of everything. Don't you worry about a thing.“ Christian winked at her conspiratorally. He was beaming with joy at the nonsense they were talking. Same kind of humour indeed. This was all very much to her liking. Only his declaration of war on google scared her. Was he in trouble as well, on somebody's black list too? She shook off her concern.

Catherine had turned her back to the two men and went in search of a bathroom.

„Go down the stairs and turn left“, the receptionist called after her across the lobby, „Yeah, thanks,“ she said. As soon as she was out of sight, her heart sank. What on earth had she gotten herself into? Pretending to be someone's mother when she wasn't? How on earth could she? She was Eva's mother, hers and hers alone. And she was wanted for killing her, letting her bleed to death in a remote cabin. Her baby dead, she wanted. It was too much. The bathroom was easy enough to find and she pushed the door open with too much force.

She went inside to find the place empty. The Ladies room was kept in perfect white and smelled faintly of lavender. Her tired face looked down upon her from a sparkling golden mirror. There were lines underneath her eyes, wrinkles, *deep wrinkles*. She sighed out loud while listening to the sound of her breathing. She felt her

eardrums pulsing, her carotid artery swell. The air was fresh indeed and Catherine took another deep breath of the purity the anteroom emanated. Then she washed her hands and looked at herself in the mirror.

She had lied, lied again. She had lied at Udo's Garage about Pumpkin. She had lied at the Clinique, she had now lied to the receptionist. Had she really just adopted a tween, like tourists adopt stray puppies in Spain? Just like that? Would there never be an end to all these surprises? She was no longer Catherine Cohen, but Katharina Keller or Catherine Sörenson. As she was walking deeper and deeper into this maze, entangling herself more and more in a tighter and tighter web, she made up names and matching identities to go along with at random: once jilted, once pregnant, once a young man's mother. Her life had become a series of lies worse than what some people claimed true on the net and she was not even a digital immigrant. What next?

Against all odds, she had to smile. Christian hadn't minded. He was a funny one. What did he run from? Why didn't he go to Ibiza, or London, or New York, places young people went to? But Litomerice? Write a book about your grandfather after helping to invent the minormous app? She couldn't quite figure him out yet, but there was something wild and mischievous about him that reminded Catherine of herself when she was young, something that reminded her of beloved Eva. He was bright and learned and wanted to make something of himself. He did get on her nerves when he was prattling like mad, but there was something lovable about him; after all he was her son. *Oh my God. What have I gotten myself into? This was getting worse by the hour.*

When she came back from the lobby, he had already gone up to their room. „I gave you room 307, the honeymoon suite, you will like it Madame.“ He winked at her.

„Thank you“, Catherine replied politely, ignoring him winking at her. „Which way do I go?“

„Room 307 is on the third floor. Turn right and walk along the aisle to the very end. 307 is on the left, no wait, on the right hand. Sorry.“ The receptionist shook his head at his mistake and tried to make up for it with a weird grin, displaying yellow teeth.

„You can also take the elevator“, he added. Slowly, he reached for the phone.

„Thanks“, Catherine said again, „I prefer the stairways, „keeps me fit“.

But most important it gave her time, time to think. Isaac Joss had already turned his attention to the number pad. He didn't hear the last sentence.

The door to room 307 was ajar and when she entered the room, Christian was in the shower, his dirty clothes covering the floor. He had worn a pair of blue jeans, and a T-shirt on which it said Carlsberg, surely not another one of his inventions. She avoided looking at a pair of pink boxer shorts that was lying on top of the dirty socks he had worn before. Clean knickers. Clean socks, Catherine sighed. She hadn't brought any spare clothing. No underwear, nothing. All her stuff was at Jacob's Ladder where she had left her bag in the morning. It was a disaster. Quietly she sat on the bed, looking at her hands. *What next?*

Abraham Cohen. That was why she was here. Never mind the fresh clothes. *That wonderful smell jumpers gave off when you took them out of the machine, still lukewarm from the hot water.* She stopped herself short. The reason she had come here was to see someone who knew about Abraham Cohen, her mother's ex-husband who died on her in Terezín, the ghetto. She would start her research first thing in the morning. There were so many questions, more than ever. When her mother had still been alive, she had of course answered some of the questions the girls had asked, but mostly there

was silence. Once she couldn't remember, then the story was too awful, or they didn't have time. There was always a reason why she couldn't tell them more about it. There were always reasons. Endless reason, endless silences stretching from one horizon to the next and the next. So many horizons and such little space to live in.

Catherine heard Christian turn off the shower, he must be grabbing a towel right now. At that moment, she wished she had declined his offer of sharing a room. She would have had enough money to have her own room, but now she was stuck here with a man many years her junior. She told herself that it was for her best as the police were looking for a divorced woman, called Catherine Cohen and not for some mother by the name of Catherine Sörenson. For the moment she was safe. Christian came out of the bathroom and had slung a white towel across his hip. His hair was dripping and she could see that he was more muscular than she had thought. He was lean and tall and blond, his features very even and his eyes exceptionally large. She had to smile even more when he addressed her in this light and carefree tone.

„Hey, mum, how do you like it here?“

„Junior, the room is very nice, indeed.“ She played along happily:

„They gave us the honeymoon suite for the normal price? Imagine. Have you seen the bar? And look at the fridge: it is fully stocked. What do you want?“

He took a beer and opened the can to drink straight from it.

„Thanks, I am fine.“

„Do you want to have a shower? Might make you feel better?“

Catherine grinned at him and shook her head. There was nothing in the world that would make her feel better unless it was Eva's baby being alive and her name being cleared of any wrongdoing and of all charges.

„Don't shake your head, mummy. We must make the most of it,“ he was teasing her.

„I have also just ended a relationship with the most beautiful woman in Copenhagen. I am free. Free. Free.“ He started to dance wildly around the room, waving his arms above his head. The towel slid from his hips revealing his penis. Catherine looked away at once, but not without registering that it was hanging there, between his legs, pretty relaxed, soft as candy floss. She turned her head even more, looking away deliberately, and walked away to the adjacent room.

„I'll let you get dressed.“

„Don't worry,“ he shouted after her, sensing her unease.

„No, I don't worry, just get dressed.“ What a nuisance he was.

„Aye aye. Ma'am.“

He didn't take long to put on his jeans, and, carrying his beer in one hand, followed her into the sitting room. His breast was clean shaven and bare. He had no intention of putting on a T-shirt, but slumped into one of the armchairs.

„Where is your luggage?“ He asked straight out, letting the beer run down his throat. Catherine sighed. Maybe it was the best, she would tell him parts of her story, only which parts that was the question.

„It is a long story, she said. Do you want to hear it ? “

„I'd love to. Will you come and walk the dog with me afterwards?“

„What dog? You haven't brought one.“

„I have. Start now. You will see later. And by the way. Can I take notes? I might fit this into my book.“ Catherine rolled her eyes.

„Suit yourself.“

Abraham Cohen

Look what the cat's dragged in.

Isaac Joss, receptionist at the Churchill, didn't call him often these days. Their friendship hadn't really stood the test of time. But tonight he had. Catherine had indeed come. It was hard to believe. Isaac hadn't even dared look at her when she had stood before him in the lobby. He said he had continued reading the newspaper so startled was he. She had looked just like her. Just like her. A younger version, an older version. The women in this family looked so identical, it was stunning: The daughter, the mother, the grandmother. He had summoned them all, without really wanting to and now she was here. There was a young man accompanying her, how disturbing and most inconvenient for his plan. Isaac said they had checked in as mother and son, but *he* didn't believe that, Isaac did, what a fool. And he was the one working at reception

All was wrong with these young people nowadays, they faked it all, parenthood, marriage, beliefs, truth everything. Believing the fake copy was better than the original. Just like they did, just like they had. But then. It wasn't the same: they had done it for a purpose, they had done it because there hadn't been another choice. He didn't know what to do, it was getting cold and it was dark. Night had fallen hours ago upon Litomerice and she was warm and snug in the Churchill. Wouldn't she come and look for him? Wouldn't she care? Care for her grandchild? Her daughter?

Unmoved by the cold, he stood there like a statue, motionless, stockstill. He kept on looking up at the honeymoon suite where she was. What was she doing? What were they doing? Surely, they weren't making love? Were they? She was so much older, it couldn't be. He had stowed away the letters to Catherine safely into his briefcase. He wanted to give them to her, so she could read them, on paper, not on a screen. He had written them although he knew that with words he wasn't good. He usually got it all mixed up. But he couldn't tell her, he couldn't say it out loud. His voice would fail him. He wanted her to read the words, to keep them safe in her heart. He wanted her to know her story, to know her mother, her daughter, to know the truth and nothing but the truth. He patted his case. The letters were inside. Soon enough she would read them.

Dear Catherine

I have been looking for you and your loved ones for so long, I can hardly believe I've found you, now. After all these years, decades. I have been watching you from afar. Without you knowing. Without you seeing me. But here you are. I recognized you immediately. You truly have your mother's eyes and her hair. Yours is a little lighter though. Finally, I can tell you your story. I wished your daughter wasn't to die while I am writing this down. She is in labour now. I am writing you these lines while she is fighting with the little one, while she is struggling to survive, but won't. I will make sure of this. When a woman is weak from birth it is easy to let her go, she'll slip away so easily. Your Eva will die just as our Imma died. An eye for an eye, a mother's life for a mother's life. That's only fair.

I wish I could show you where it all happened. You'd have to see the tunnels and the sites where they were hung, where we were shot, the swimming pool where their kids were splashing around while we were dying. But for now writing will have to do. And you will listen now, you will hear me out. I can hear your daughter screaming. She is in pain. Her hour has come. There is no one here to help her. There is no help now, there was no help then. She'll die. I won't have many more lucid months now. I must write it down while my memory is still fresh and clear, certain things are already fading into an untraceable fog and

soon they will be lost forever. All is so clouded I can hardly tell right from wrong, above from beneath. What you want or don't want to know happened all so long ago. So long. But then I remember it so vividly, as from a dream I dreamt last night. The pictures are clear and colourful, and I shall try to convey them to you in the simple language I have. Please do not expect the impossible. I am no learned man.

I have spent years and years in the United States, looking for Frank, your brother Frank who was really our Jacob, looking for your mother, the monster. When I had finally thought I had found them, they had disappeared again, vanished into thin air, as they say. And then I had stopped looking, simply stopped.

Now it is 2 years, 3 months and 15 days that I am back here. I am not sure why I've come back after all these years, come back to a museum, a shrine for things which I'd rather forget and eliminate from my life forever. But I can't. I won't. And now I am here.

Her name was Heike Strassmann, your mother's name. She was born in Prague and her parents were, this cannot come as a surprise, Sudeten Germans. Has she ever properly taught you how to keep the Sabbath, how to celebrate Yom Kippur, Hannukah, Passover, Tzom Gadalia? Anything that is important, anything that truly matters? She hasn't, has she? How could she? She is German. You are German. Your name is Catherine Strassmann. You are not a Cohen. You are not Jewish. You are a fraud, a gentile, a heathen. That's what you are.

When I had married our Imma, she was big with child soon enough: Me, the father; Imma, the mother. And Heike? Heike had no part in this. You understand: No part. But I must start in the beginning or you won't understand a thing and it will be very tiring answering all your questions afterwards.

Your mother was all by herself, no siblings, no family. Your grandmother had died of pneumonia the winter before and your grandfather had been dead for years, killed by lightning on a pasture. That was right after she was born. She had no one left in Prague but my beloved Imma. Her best friend, her childhood friend. And Imma was taken to Terezín. So to Terezín your mother would follow. Friendship between Jews and Germans was most dangerous then. But before it hadn't been. Before they were friends. Simple as that. It didn't matter what you were: Jewish or not. Noone really cared.

Your mother was lucky to be so blonde and her blue eyes made her perfect for breeding only with her own: A German girl, as she considered herself to be, should keep herself chaste and pure. When she got married to one of the SS guards in Terezín that was an advantage. I couldn't believe she only did it for Imma, but the two always claimed that was the truth. They were such close friends that Heike, your mother married an SS guard to be close to my Imma. They both insisted that it was the truth, they did. But I cannot be fooled. Your mother only married to survive. All she could ever think of was herself.

However, your mother always told my Imma everything and she told me in return. Lots of things a man shouldn't know, embarrassing things, you women share so freely. My wife whispered them to me in the dark, before bedtime. I will now relate them to you even though I feel such shame. But then it's your family's shame, not mine. It's ashes upon your head, not mine.

Don't be mistaken. Heike, your mother, felt that the Munich agreement in 1938 was a relief. Her mother's grandfather whom she had never met, had been from Berlin and she felt a romantic connection to anything that was German. She always said that was where she really belonged: To the German Reich. When Hitler had come to Prague on March 16th, she was totally out of her mind with joy. He proclaimed from [Prague Castle](#) that Bohemia and Moravia were now a German protectorate and though Heike didn't really understand what that meant she understood that we now belonged to Germany. And that made her happy.

Fischer was a young SS-officer of 28 and looked incredibly fetching and handsome in his neatly pressed uniform. How the evil can look so smart is hard to grasp. Your mother was extremely beautiful. She had a fine face and clear intelligent eyes. Everybody fell for her at once. Early in her life her body was shaped very womanly and at sixteen she looked like any fully grown woman did: luscious and salacious, they say.

Later, when no make up was available anymore, she'd sting her finger and rub her cheeks with a drop of her own blood. Hermann Fischer saw her in the street when she was queuing for

potatoes for herself and our Imma, she then shared a room with. That was just before Imma was taken. Taken to Terezín. I cannot write this letter in chronological order, don't really remember what was before and what was after. It is too hard for me to keep track now, but you will understand. You are smart. I learned you are a lawyer. Lawyer can always patch a good story together. Not that this is a good story for you, but you can surely patch it together and work it all out.

Fischer checked your mother's paper and then told her to come to his offices near Prague castle. She came the following afternoon at 2pm. She was a few minutes early and was told to wait. Fischer first had to send his secretary on an errand, then he did what he did. When she got into his office, he made her sit on his table. She first didn't want to, but then he told her she must obey German orders if she didn't want to be shot. So she obeyed and he approached her. He stood in front of her and slowly opened her legs and lifted her skirt. He undid her and then he pressed himself onto her nudity and she felt him harden. She didn't know what was happening for she had never seen a man naked, not between his legs and didn't know about what happened in lovemaking. She said she was stiff with fear and didn't know what to do. He was, I guess, stiff with other things.

When she came to his office for the third time, it no longer hurt, she said. No more blood between her legs, only pain in her heart, her brain, her chest. That was when he asked her to marry him. To move with him to Terezín where he was stationed as an SS

guard. And she complied. Your mother said it was to be close to Imma who had been taken there as well. But I think that's not the whole truth. You judge yourself.

I remember every word she told my Imma, they are forever burned in my flesh. And I also think she told me the story so accurately to show me that Heike thought they weren't evil, they weren't animals, but tender lovers. Her words burnt themselves into my flesh and bones, shaking me intolerably. I have now repeated them to you. They were lovers. And they were: Lovers of evil and death, murder and devastation. Lovers of the worst, the chaos, the war, death. All gone. My hands are washed clean.

I thought it was awful, so appalling. Can you imagine? Marry the rapist. Your mother Heike always trying to defend them by telling Imma how kind they were: shooting the children first and then the mothers and not the other way round. So the children wouldn't have to see their mothers die. You understand, they might be frightened. Do you understand: Frightened, she said frightened. Your mother said. Your German mother. Poor frightened Jewish children. And what a relief they shot the children first. What mercy. I ran to the toilet and vomited. When my wife told me. I vomited.

Sometimes, I think Fischer had continued to rape her when they were married that spring and early summer of 1944. But she never complained about it because her husband somehow gave her a sense of belonging. It was a miracle she wasn't big with child.

She said Fischer did something about it, but she didn't want to tell Imma what. And I didn't want to guess. Fact is, she was ashamed for not being pregnant. It was a crime to deny the Führer his children.

Some nights after Imma had finished telling me of your mother, I retired to the bathroom and I vomited. (I think I have already written that before).

I hear Eva. I can still hear the screams of your daughter, Eva. She is still in pain, still in labour. This will take all night. I will leave her to it, as your Heike has left my Imma to it and I will await the morning eagerly when her soul will have flown away just as Imma's had flown away so many years ago.

Dear Catherine

It is the morning and your daughter is dead now. And still I haven't accomplished my task. I need to finish this letter. This is all so long ago and I will try to be shorter now. Imma and Heike had always been such close friends, the most intimate friends you can think of. You know that already. But you must understand that before the war, it hadn't mattered that one of them was of German origin. No one cared, before Hitler rose to power.

When we were first brought to Terezín-, that is hard to describe. Imma and I had been married for a couple of weeks. And there was Heike, supposedly, one of us, but indeed the enemy: Heike who had been our friend, who had played with us since we could remember, the friend with the golden plaits was now on the other side. She was our enemy, a powerful enemy. And then my Imma was big with child and we were taken East. East. You know what that meant. Annihilation. Death. Gas. And complete. No, you do not know what that meant. You have no idea.

But, then we were taken back to Terezín. It was such a mess then. Chaos. War. The Russian army pushed closer and closer. It was chaos. It was luck. We were brought back, back West.

The Germans evacuated their wives and children on the 24 of April 1945 from Terezín. I remember the date so well it could have been yesterday. But she didn't leave. She stayed on. Then

everybody left, she stayed behind. Still. When Soviet troops advanced on Prague and Leitmeritz, she still stayed behind. She stayed and waited for Imma to give birth to our little Jacob. But Jacob clung on to his mother's womb. He didn't want to be born. He didn't want to be taken.

I don't know how she knew when Imma had given birth, but she came, the monster she had become, came. She walked right up to her and took my son, took him and left. Then Imma died. And Heike Strassmann became Imma Cohen.

You have to understand when the war ended it was bound to come out that she wasn't Jewish. It was bound to come out she was German, wife to Fischer. She was SS material. It was bound to come out that her name was Heike Strassman, Heike Fischer after she had married. They had written it all down so accurately. All the papers, in her name. But then our Imma took pity on her, she was so weak with Typhus already and her hour was close.

The deal was thus: I would break into the *Geschäftszimmer* and bring all the documents on your mother, on Heike Strassmann so they could be destroyed. She'd be simply wiped out. Imma would then give Heike her papers, her identity and her name. She gave her everything. In turn, Heike would take our son and raise him as her own. My beloved Imma died, you understand, nameless. But that was what we did. That was what I did.

I was locked in shortly thereafter, left in the quarantine area that was then established the day after Jacob was born, the

day the Russians came. She left me to die at Terezín. Catherine, do you hear me? She left me there to die. And stole our son. And took our name. My name. Your mother. Your name that is not your name. She stole it from me, she robbed me.

That is why I have taken Eva and the baby, that is why you will suffer now. That is why Eva must die in labour, out there in my shack. An eye for an eye, a mother's life for a mother's life. My Imma for your Eva. That is only fair. Don't you think?

And as I have broken into the Geschäftszimmer to redeem our family, to give Jacob life, you must break into the Clinique and bring me Dr. Linder's computer as evidence. She is responsible for the death of my great-grandchild. She is responsible for his death as she operated upon him. I want to see her punished in court. As I had to do, you will do now or we shall kill Eva's little one.

However, if you get hold of the computer, I shall let it live and give up your grandchild for adoption. Just as I had to give up our son for adoption. You will never ever see the little one. Just like I have, you will be deprived of everything.

Sincerely Yours

Abraham Cohen

The lines ran on and on. It was a long letter, but he had managed to write it all down as it was. The letters he would give to Catherine Cohen and deny her the right to his name. His name: Cohen, Abraham Cohen. She was not entitled to this, not ever. She was not a Cohen. She was not of priestly descent, on the contrary. She was born and bred from the monster's lair. She was up there somewhere behind these curtains, somewhere behind these windows.

Just as he wanted to give up and go home, he saw her come out, laughing incredibly loud and false, hanging on to the young blonde man's arm. Then the young guy who was carrying a heavy backpack pulled her onto the empty street. They were crossing it now, still chattering happily. They were coming right at him. It was now or never.

„Catherine“, he said, „Catherine Cohen?“

Meeting

When they left the hotel, she hang on to his arm. Christian could have been her son, indeed. After knowing each other for just a little longer, they really got along so well; he was a source of strength in difficult times. Christian had been listening to her intently and asked all the right questions, until he felt they had to go for a walk, to walk the dog as he said. He didn't tell her more and she thought he was rather strange and secretive. What dog? There wasn't much to see in Litomerice, especially not on a cold, dark January night, and Christian obviously didn't have a dog unless he was hiding it in that backpack of his. And that was highly unlikely.

A lone figure was looming on the other side of the street. The temperature must have dropped far below zero and it had stopped drizzling. Fog had set in again. Christian wanted them to cross the road and he walked straight towards the old man on the other side of the road. Did he want to run him over? She didn't like it, it went against her instinct which told her to avoid strangers, especially at night, take a detour

and be safe. That was her motto, but Christian was so effervescent about her story that he didn't see the old whacko nor did he care for him. Catherine felt differently, she felt danger loom in the dark without being able to tell where exactly it would come from. She would learn early enough.

They had already crossed the empty road and Christian walked right past the dodderer, but Catherine couldn't. The old man turned to her and he stopped her. His long fingers, skeleton encrusted with skin as fine paper, grabbed her arm and didn't let go.

„Catherine“, he said, „Catherine Cohen?“

„Yes“, she answered tentatively, „let me go.“ He had given her a fright. How come he knew her name? His grip began to hurt her and she was amazed at the strength the old man displayed, he looked so weak and frail, but his voice was the voice of a young man.

„No, I won't let you go. Finally“, he said, his dark eyes staring at her enigmatically.

„Finally, all things come to an end.“

The riddle, he posed, she couldn't resolve. The old man wore dirty black shoes and grey flannel trousers, there was a brown coat with big black buttons hiding his slender figure. Somehow he hadn't managed to find the right holes for the corresponding buttons and the coat was hanging across him diagonally displaying a checkered shirt. The skin in his face was all wrinkled, he looked very old but still had

nearly all his hair. It was combed back neatly, but in an old-fashioned style. There was kindness and evil in his eyes, their expression scared Catherine immediately. Also there hung an air of familiarity about him. Had she seen him before? She couldn't remember where. *Definitely not at the Erotic Market.*

„Come with me. Please.“

„Who are you?“ She asked.

„I am the past,“ he said cryptically. „I am your present, your future. Come. You'll see,“ he urged. She tried once again to jerk out her arm from his grip. This time she managed, he let go of her and grabbed his black, timeworn briefcase tighter, clutching it tenaciously to his stiff body.

„I am Abraham Cohen,“ he answered. „I knew your mother, I knew Imma and Heike. I must talk to you.“ *Who was Heike?*

„You are alive.“ Catherine was stunned: You are alive. Indeed. Alive. I cannot believe it. How come- .“ She took a deep breath then added suspiciously

„You are really my mother's exhusband? Imma Horowitz's husband?“ She was going to say, who died in Terezín, but then checked herself. He looked alive enough.

He shook his head.

„Yes, I am Abraham Cohen, I was Imma's husband, but no I am not your mother's husband.“

„But Abraham Cohen was my mother's husband“.

„No, I was not. I am who I am: I am Abraham Cohen.

„Can you prove it?“ Do you have an ID? A birth certificate “ She was waiting for him to answer. As if the law, as if identity papers could resolve the conundrum she was faced with. He wouldn't comply with her request.

„Come with me. For the baby's sake. “

„The baby?“ Something in Catherine broke, she cried out.

“Is it alive? I am asking you, is it alive? Have you taken it? What have you done? Oh my God, what have you done?“

Tightly she pressed her fist onto her mouth. She was beginning to shake and it wasn't because of the cold. Abraham didn't respond. It felt like shouting at a wall, it was utterly useless. More quietly she said, „Where to? “

The blood was pumping in her body, she didn't feel anything anymore.

„ You shall see, just come. “ Catherine looked at Christian. He had been following their conversation silently, but very attentively.

She hadn't told Christian everything, only bits and pieces about Eva and how she disappeared. The truth was she had hardly told him anything. But he had no idea who Abraham Cohen was and she had no intention of explaining anything to him. Not now anyway.

„Christian, I really need to do this on my own. Just go back inside. I will join you later. “

„ Are you sure ? “ He looked at her incredulously.

„ Yes, 100%.“

„Ok. I will see you later then, for another beer.“

Christian shrugged and walked away backwards from the odd couple still facing them, as if he couldn't let her go. What was going on here?

„Have fun, Catherine, don't be too late, Mum.“ He called after her. Then he stumbled over a garbage bag and had to laugh out loud. Christian crossed the street again and walked back to the Churchill. When he had disappeared Catherine began to feel uneasy. Why had she told Christian to leave? Suddenly she felt awfully exposed to the unknown forces that lay in wait. Somehow she sensed, this was only the beginning.

„Now. Come.“ Abraham Cohen pressed her. He started walking, and Catherine followed, she thought that he was going quite fast for his age. He wasn't frail at all and she had to take two steps at once to follow.

„How far is it?“ Catherine asked.

„Far“, he replied as he was shuffling faster and faster along the road. Her anticipation kept her on track. Where were they going? And how far would „far“ actually be? One kilometer? Two? Ten? More? Catherine was exhausted. She wanted to sit down. She wanted all this to be over. She wanted to go home. And also, it was hard to believe. Abraham Cohen alive? Not dead? Not died in Terezín? How could that be? If Frank had known that his father was still alive? If he could have met him? The father he had always missed so dearly. Had her mother known this? She couldn't have, could she? Or she wouldn't have married again and borne two girls, Catherine and Leah to another man. And what did he mean when he said her mother had never been his wife. She didn't understand. What an amazing turn this had taken. Did he know about Eva? Had Eva come to see him?

It was so totally unexpected to find him alive when her own mother was dead. It was outrageous and somewhere within her grief welled up. Why was Imma dead, her beloved Eva dead when he who was so old was alive? What did he want? Why

now? They were leaving Litomerice and its few lights behind. It was difficult to see where they were going. Abraham was carrying an old gas lantern that gave off a dim light. They were still walking on bitumen, but when they had left the village, all of a sudden he changed direction and started to walk up a gravel road. The lamp was swinging up and down in his shaky hands, unsteadied further by his limping gait. It was hard to see where they were going. The path had become quite steep and narrow. She was now walking behind him and heard him panting harder and harder, his lung was rattling, his breath whizzing unnaturally. Where were they going? When she reached out, she felt frozen bark. Trees. He was obviously taking her into a forest and she began to feel scared. He was an old man and not very strong, but couldn't he be carrying a gun, a knife, something to slit her throat? What if they lost their way. What if they froze to death? Out here it was getting chillier and chillier.

„Is it still far?“ , she asked trying to hide the fear in her voice.

„Yes“, he answered and kept on walking.

„How far?“

„Another hour.“

„Another hour? Really? You cannot be serious. “ Catherine exclaimed. The old man chose to ignore her complaint.

„I am exhausted, I cannot walk for another hour. “ She stopped.

„I have not eaten. My shoes are wet and hurt me,“ she complained.

„You are fine, well nourished, you have just eaten and had a drink. Everything is fine. We are not at war now.“

„I am tired.“ Catherine exclaimed.

„No, you're not.“ It was outrageous how patronizing he was. She had stopped walking and shouted after him.

„My feet hurt“.

„No, they don't, you have no idea what it is like when your feet hurt,“ his voice came from the dark. Catherine tried to catch up with him.

„I will turn back now. I've had enough. Where are you taking me?“

„I am sure you will want to see this.“ He continued walking, without heeding her complaints.

„I am asking you one last time : Where are you taking me ? “ She wanted to add „nutter “, but then let it be as she didn't want to insult him, it didn't seem a wise thing to do given the circumstances. He seemed to know about Eva's death and maybe he had the baby, her grandchild. Would it be a boy? A girl? He had advanced a bit further onto the steep road and now looked back upon her. She could sense his presence in the dark. They were standing close now. His dreamy voice was carrying the most outrageous words. He spoke very silently, but she could understand him clearly.

„I am taking you where she died.“

She stared at him and then instantly, it dawned upon her where she had seen him: On the Ferris Wheel in Prague when she was waiting for Eva to arrive and she had never shown up. He was the old man who had stared at her so wilfully. „You have killed her. My God. Why? Did you not love my mother? Frank who was your child? Eva was his niece. Your Frank. Your son. Do you understand? And why did you take my bag?“ Something in his behaviour changed. He stared at her in awe.

„Frank? Right, she said that was how she called him. Frank. What irony, what irony to call a child of lies thus. Frank. He should have been called Jacob.“

„Why Jacob?“ Catherine was confused.

„Because he was supplanted.“

„Supplanted? In what way. I don't understand.“

„Of course you don't,“ he answered. „It is not far now. Come on. I shall explain. But not here.“

She took a deep breath. He would take her to the shack, she would see where Eva died. Wasn't that what she wanted? Wasn't that why she had travelled to Prague, found Leah, gone to the Clinique, come to Litomerice? It was all about finding out about Eva. Why did she die? How? Who was with her? What had happened? Where was Eva's baby? She took Eva's cellphone from her pocket. It was time to call the police now, but there was no net, not out here. She put the phone back into her pockets, hoping Christian might call the cops. But then, why should he?

Catherine continued following the old man meekly, the mysterious person who said he was Abraham Cohen. She tried to brace herself for what was coming. She would see the shack, the bed where Eva died, she would see it all. Was the police still there? She hoped to God they had placed someone there to keep an eye on the crimesite. A guard to help, a guardian angel to save her. Would there be blood? They must have taken Eva's body, but would there be tokens of her stay? Had the police not taken it all? Would the objects found there betray to her the fact how Eva died, and why? Why, goodness gracious? Why on earth did she have to die? Then she could see it in the dark. First it was only a dark rectangular shape sitting behind the next tree,

then it became more distinct: The shack. And no, there was no guard. At least she couldn't see one.

On the right of the shack stood an enormous tree. The white fir. Its branches must reach high into the black sky. Catherine could see no end to it from where she was standing. It was really too dark to see anything. The tree's stem was disappearing into the night, it was swallowed by an aphotic zone reaching down from the heavens. She turned towards the shack. The area was sealed off with tape and she guessed the words written on it said: No admittance, crime site. They had arrived. And she could see clearly now: The place was completely deserted. Not a living soul could be seen. It was only her and the man who said he was Abraham Cohen. Oh my!

The old man didn't mind, he shoved the tape away, took his key from the pocket of his coat, turned it in the hole and opened the place. He looked back to see what Catherine was doing, then he entered the place. Catherine followed. He took a match and lit a candle, then he went in search of the flip that would turn on the generator. When he had found it a silent humming could be heard and at once light swept through the cabin. Catherine looked around, stunned. The place was very cozily decorated. There were red and white checkered curtains, a fireplace, an old iron hearth, a big wooden table and a shelf with a lot of books, some of them in Hebrew. A lot of the shelves very empty though. There was also a bed covered with pillows and linen. Everything was clean. There was no blood. The room smelled of soap.

„Well, Come on in.“ He said. She was still standing in the doorway, trying to take it all in. How did Eva end up here? Why did she die here?

„Why did she come here?“ She asked.

„She came here to look for me. And she found me “, he said.

„Yes, she did “, Catherine answered. *If only she hadn't.*

„ You daughter was scared of what the Clinique, especially Dr. Linder would do to her. And she felt that something was wrong with Leah. Was she sick? Hallucinating?“ Catherine didn't answer. She couldn't quite follow yet. Leah sick? Not that she knew of.

He sat at the table while Catherine remained standing. There was silence. It was awkward.

„Sit down“, he said and then he busied himself with some glasses he had taken from the sink. Catherine looked around. The cabin was library, kitchen, bedroom, living room and attic at once. One room to rule them all. Catherine was extremely exhausted, despite the short rest on the bus. Walking so far had tired her beyond her means, worn her out completely. But in vain she looked around for a place to sit. There was only the bed left to sit upon. The bed on which Eva, presumably had died. She wasn't sure she could sit on it, so she remained standing, facing the old man. She was trembling with fatigue, feebleness and debilitation. It was as if all her strength and energy had been sucked up by a giant invisible exhaust fan hidden in the remotest corner of this weird place.

„What do you want? Why am I even here?“

„Indeed,“ he answered, then he got up and said:

„Sit down, Catherine, I want you to read this.“ Copiously, he opened the briefcase and let his hand glide into it, he was rummaging for some papers he then found. When he pulled them out, Catherine noticed that he must have been carrying them all along. She took the pages very gingerly and looked upon them. It seemed to be a very long letter. She overcame her hesitation and sat on the bed. On the first page it said:

Dear Catherine

I have been looking for you and your loved ones for so long, I can hardly believe I've found you, now. After all these years, decades. I have been watching you from afar. Without you knowing. Without you seeing me. But here you are. I recognized you immediately. You truly have your mother's eyes and her hair. Yours is a little lighter though. Finally, I can tell you your story. I wished your daughter wasn't to die while I am writing this down. She is in labour now. I am writing you these lines while she is fighting with the little one, while she is struggling to survive, but won't. I will make sure of this. When a woman is weak from birth it is easy to let her go, she'll slip away so easily. Your Eva will die just as Imma died. An eye for an eye, a mother's life for a mother's life. That's only fair.

The lines were beginning to blur into each other and the writing became indistinct. Catherine couldn't read any further, she had to start crying and couldn't see properly anymore. Then it dawned upon her. She had finally found him. Here he stood, the person who was responsible for Eva's death. The person who had abducted her and let her die, out here in a forest near Prague. Eva's murderer was her mother's long lost lover. He had risen from the grave to take all she ever had. What a ghastly encounter was this; to be made to walk so far to the cabin where Eva died? And then to read these lines. What had Eva done to him? Her innocent little baby, what could

she possibly have done to him to deserve death at his hands? She turned her eyes upon him in despair, but he looked at her reproachingly like a severe school master.

„You must continue. Please. You must.“

He was imploring her gently, begging her politely and it seemed like a stark contrast to his position of power he was otherwise exploiting so mercilessly. She wiped away her tears aggressively and continued reading. After all, she was a lawyer, she was used to reading the most outrageous stuff. It took her a moment to go through all the pages and decipher his neat handwriting. The myriads of emotions she underwent were overwhelming and devastating. The story pulled her way back into a remote past she hardly knew anything about. It all made sense, but what did all this have to do with Eva? Why did he do this to her, to them? She and Eva weren't to blame for her mother's mistakes. They weren't. And what was more: Did Heike alias Imma even make a mistake when she did a favour to her beloved friend and took the boy? Was that a mistake? Was that cause for revenge? Who was he to judge? And so harshly? When Frank, when his Jacob, did survive. He did survive the war.

When she had finished she was panting heavily. There was so much to take in. She was not a Cohen. This was the truth and nothing but the truth. She was not a Cohen. No. It couldn't be true. She was-, she was not of Jewish origin, not of priestly descent. Worse. She was German, a Nazi. The worst. She was with the people who shot the children first. Her people. The truth was so freaking terrible, she had to repeat it: She was not Jewish, she was German. And how it all made sense at once: Frank, her elder brother who had never really belonged to them who was always a foreigner, an

outsider, he was really the little Jacob. Abraham and the real Imma Cohen's son, their beloved Jacob. That seemed true at once. Intuitively it seemed true. It had to be. But did Leah know? Leah who had called her guest house Jacob's ladder? Was that a tribute to her brother who had never ever really been their brother? She must have known their mother's secret.

Then there was Mama Imma's stay in San Francisco, when she became that hippie who had tried to drug it all away. How she would try to forget the past. How she stole that child, abducted him. Even years later, there was so much to forget. More than Catherine could ever imagine when she had been a child, more than she could imagine even now. But Catherine knew instinctively the letter was right. It was true. Her mother must have been born as Heike Strassmann. It made sense. In fact, coming to think of it, there wasn't a shred of doubt about this. She had stolen the true Imma's identity to protect herself. What was right, what was wrong had all come loose, unhinged on the spot. Undone. Surviving not only the ghetto, but also the years thereafter, that was all that had mattered. That, too explained a lot. Catherine's thoughts were tumbling. The memories came up and all was falling into place.

Frank's death that had shaken her mother so much. The change thereafter. When she came back to Switzerland. When she sobered up completely. The promise to the real Imma so terribly and prematurely broken: The baby from the ghetto saved with such diligence and care had now been killed as a young man in a pointless accident on a Swiss freeway. And yet, with his death her mother was released if not purified from all guilt. Purification would, could never ever come. But at least she was free. There was nothing she could do now when Frank was dead. She had been

released. Her duty was done. She couldn't do any more. Her mission was accomplished, fulfilled, it had come to an end. Therefore the change. The sobering. The return to Switzerland. That, too made sense to Catherine now. It was as if finally her life had been explained to her.

She'd found the answers, was holding them in her hands in the form of this ghastly letter: the missing jigsaw piece, not only an answer to all the questions she had ever had. No, the missing jigsaw also cut into her flesh deeply like a a falchion, a Japanese katana, a mighty longsword. It sliced her skull open like a horseman's pick, a warhammer, a bec de corbin, a bec de faucan, a battle axe, a parashu, a dane axe, a tomahawk. It left a blunt wound on her heart inflicted by a gunstock war club, a knobkierrie, a jutte. The jigsaw piece made its eternal mark, leaving one nasty mortal wound that would never heal. She would not survive this.

There had always been this gap, this void staring at her so relentlessly. And though she hated Abraham Cohen for revealing it all, she also felt relief, a faint and dawning gratitude even that he had finally bridged the gap. The missing jigsaw. Here it was. It fit perfectly. And how the girdle hurt. But also there was a sense of belonging, all at once. Not that she was relieved not to be Jewish, on the contrary. All her life she hadn't wanted to be Jewish, because it had meant to be different, to stand out, to be apart, to be separate, but now that it was taken from her she yearned for it instantly. It was who she was, Catherine Cohen, Jewish of priestly descent. How could she ever become Catherine Strassmann? How could she ever become who she really was? Who was she anyway? She felt like a burning candle melting into the wooden floor underneath her feet.

The experience was painful and came at a price: The relief to finally understand her life, to see through the veil and read what had been hidden between the lines. To be exposed to the secret that had always been kept from her was bliss and torture at once. Finally, to understand where she came from, what her mother had never told, what the silence was really about. It was comforting, it was painful. More painful than comforting. This was what her mum had gone through; being raped into marriage by a Nazi, so fully and totally taken and manipulated that she mistook violence and power for love and tenderness. Mutilation at its worst. At its best. Brilliance in devastation. Perfection in annihilation. Loving your oppressor, falling for the man who enslaved, tortured and littered you like faeces are shed after a massive bacchanal. In its atrocity, knowing the devastating truth, - finally, was a deep relief to Catherine; and how awful it was. She had lost her daughter to learn the truth. Eva's life had not been spared to pay for the truth. Grief overcame her.

And what truth had she learned? Was it worth the sacrifice? Indeed, it was not: This truth was painful and cruel: Her mother a Nazi: Infiltrated, inseminated with a deadly doctrine a venomous semen that had poisoned her mother's heart and obfuscated her senses to the utmost. She who had posed as a Jew all her life had then hated the Jews, had probably hated them all her life until death. What she had been true to was Imma, her friend from childhood days. And she had helped save her baby, in the name of friendship. Her mother had looked well after Frank. *Her* mother had when his mother couldn't. It all made such perfect sense. Frank had never been one of them, he didn't belong. It made sense. She couldn't deny it though she tried.

After minutes and minutes of silence Catherine finally spoke.

„But when we went to Israel, we were welcomed as the Cohens, we even stayed with one of my –one of the aunts. How can you explain this?“ Abraham smiled.

„She had my picture. You forgot I couldn't travel then. I was locked up behind the iron curtain, my relatives were all scattered to the end of the world. It was after the war, no one really knew who was who. Sons were married off somewhere on the battlefield to wives noone had ever seen before. They believed your mother, because she had his picture, my picture. I didn't know some of my uncles had gone back to Israel. They were scattered all over this planet, besides there were so many aunts and uncles. I couldn't find them, for me they could have been anywhere.

„ But what does this all have to do with Eva? I still don't understand. What do you want? My mother has saved your child. She has taken it to Switzerland and raised it as if it was her own. Frank was my brother. She has done -“ Abraham interrupted her and Catherine could see he was very hurt.

„She has done good. Is that what it is you believe? Let me tell you. She is a monster, she stole him. She stole my baby. Our Imma was dying, and then she came and took him, took him and never ever she gave him back. I was thinking of him always, always. I was pining for him like a dog. Why hadn't she looked for me? I wasn't dead. I had survived the heaps and heaps of bodies piling upon me. I crawled away from underneath them. I have survived. I have. But you know what I've kept asking myself all these years: Why me? Why not the others? There must be a reason why I had to survive. A reason why it was me that crawled away from all the others. I kept telling myself it was because of him: my son. He was the reason I had to live. He gave me strength to overcome the rotten stench of dead corpses, he gave me hope to

overcome the despair in the many years I kept looking for him. I wanted him back, wanted him so much. But then I was locked up, the big bars. There was a wall. Right through Berlin. You do remember that, don't you? When I finally found your mother again a few years ago she told me Jacob was dead. Dead. Can you imagine how pointless life then became? It was too late. For everything.

„But all this is not Eva's fault.“

„No, not Eva's, but your family's. So, I will put you through the same ordeal. Eva is dead, just as my Imma. And just as your family have, I have also taken one of your children. And just as your mother has, I will not give it back to you. However, you shall have a choice and your suffering may relieve the situation.

„What do you want me to do ? “ Catherine's face was ashen now and her voice nearly forsake her.

„Break into the Clinique and bring back Dr. Linder's computer.“

„The Clinique? But why should I do this? Why would you want me to do this?“ Catherine took a pen into her hand that was lying on the wooden table. Could it serve as a weapon? Should she attack? But she couldn't, the man was too old, too frail and somewhere there was her grandchild, somewhere out there. He would have helpers, a clan, a gang, a mob to help him with this monstrous plan. If she attacked him, she would surely never see the little one.

„Because“. There was silence, and Catherine looked up at the old man.

„No, no. You will not do this. Absolutely. Not. No.“ As she was screaming her lungs out, panicking totally, the door to the shack opened slowly bringing in a whiff of the cold air of the night and in came a creature both of them had never seen before.

It looked like a dog, but was made of metal and dark glass. It was about 30 cm long and just as high, had head and tail and ears and wore a black collar. Its paws were white with black claws and on its head was a LED panel, it wagged its tail and then started singing: Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday to you.“ As it was singing it was dancing to the rhythm of the music it played and then sat down. It looked at Catherine and lifted its paw, then it stopped dead. She was dumbstruck, speechless and so was Abraham. Seconds before she had been screaming at the top of her voice, but now she was brutally silenced by the little manmade Frankenstein creature that had joined them.

In came Christian, larger than life, just the way he was when she had first seen him at the busstation. He was holding his cell phone as if it was a remote control, in fact it seemed likely it was indeed a remote control. He was in charge of the little shiny iron dog.

„ I heard you scream, and then, I am sorry I followed you. I am. I don't know. Ok. This is AINTON. He needed to pee,“ he said apologetically. He looked at his cellphone and pressed some buttons, AINTON played the beginning of Mission Impossible and Christian smiled proudly.

„ AINTON ? “ Abraham asked, at a loss. Catherine was staring at the heap of present-day technology, she was totally bewildered. That was the dog he had meant: a robot, a lifeless thing. What was happening here? Any sense of coherence was vanishing from

her life, leaving her deprived of all common sense and control. Christian for once, was rattling on as if his life depended on it.

„ AINTON is modelled on a robot which is called AIBO. And AIBO stands for A as in Artificial, I as in Intelligent and ro BO t. AIBO. It means love in Japanese, but it can also mean partner, or pal. The first version came out in 1999, and when Sony sold it I went to Japan especially to get one. I've changed and adapted it, but never mind. Isn't she a beauty? ”

„Was it expensive ? ” Abraham asked after a short pause.

„About 2100 Euro, not too bad, I think, don't you ? ” Abraham and Catherine were silent, both silenced by that strange intermezzo. Christian continued breathlessly:“ It has distance and image sensor and edge detection sensor and accelarion and vibration sensors and also in the paws. It is really quite sophisticated.” No one said anything and Christian stopped, then he continued in a lower voice:

„It has a stereo microphone in its ear and MIDI sound and wireless LAN in his thighs. Ok. I see. You don't really want to. Well-. I heard you scream. I thought you needed help. I am sorry, I will go at once. I am sorry, I misjudged-, I didn't mean to intrude.” He pressed a button and AINTON lay on its back, folded up his legs nicely, like a baby in its womb and Christian lifted him up to put him back into his backpack.

„I was wondering what you were carrying.” Catherine said, coming round from her stupor.

„Now, you know.”

„Yes, now I know.” She looked at him, then began laughing hysterically. It was such a relief that he had come and delivered her from this old monstrous manikin. She just wanted to get out of here, go with him, to the hotel room, have some peace, eat, lay

down, curl up, sleep. Rest. That was all she wanted; rest. And maybe hear the robot dog again, let it sing Happy Birthday. How wonderful when life and all its meaning were just completely deteriorating. Her own personal supernova. It would change her life, it would blind and bind and bury her. *Just great. Just what she needed.* She got up and turned towards the door.

„Ok, I will do it.“

She looked at Abraham, but he was looking away.

„I will get the computer. You will have your way.“

A Helper

He was curious, had been all his life. No way he would let Catherine get away with the old weirdo. Besides from what she had told him so far her story sounded far more interesting than the story of his uncle. In fact his own story bored him already. Reading about his uncle too often, he could really quote wikipedia by heart. It said on the subject:

„ In 1943, 456 Jews from Denmark were sent to Theresienstadt (Terezín). These were Jews who had not [escaped to Sweden](#) before the arrival of the Nazis. Included also in the transports were some of the European Jewish children whom Danish organizations had been attempting to conceal in foster homes. The arrival of the Danes is of great significance, as the Danes insisted on the [Red Cross](#) having access to the ghetto. This was a rare move, given that most European governments did not insist on their fellow Jewish citizens being treated according to some fundamental principles. The Danish

king, [Christian X](#), later secured the release of the Danish internees on April 15, 1945. The [White Buses](#), in cooperation with the Danish Red Cross, collected the 414 who had survived. ”

Or were there 413? Who cared? Wikipedia was boring. Boring. As if they could ever put it out there. As if they could ever give the truth about the people then. As if they could tell posterity what really had happened by providing these awful facts and numbers. It was important, - Christian was not dumb, it was in fact very important to know that in the Holocaust 11 million people were killed and the war „ resulted in an estimated 50 million to 85 million fatalities“. Christian also did remember more or less the exact wikipedia wording for World War II. He knew it was important, and yet, he felt it was not enough. Not enough to prevent it from ever happening again. There wasn't any life in this, any spirit, just facts and numbers.

One needed more. One needed stories for this, many of them. Stories that convinced and hurt and tickled. And that would be his part, his destiny now that minormous was sold. There was more than one weapon to fight the enemy. His grandfather had been on one of these white buses and he wanted to honour him with a novel. He wanted to write down his story, keep it alive for the generations to come, keep it alive for himself. That was why he had come here. If not him, who else? If no one would read it, never mind. At least he had fulfilled his promise to himself to his family. The process of writing was more important than publishing anyway. By writing his story, he would find out who he was.

But after meeting Catherine and hearing all the bits and pieces about her story and Eva's, he was curious. Maybe he should write her story first? If she let him. If she told him all there was too tell. Yet, it didn't start very promising: she wouldn't let him

join when the old man approached her. After saying goodbye, he had very slowly and deliberately gone back to the hotel. There he waited for a couple of seconds in the lobby and then pretended he had forgotten something. Hitting his forehead hard, he shouted out loud: „ Oh, no ”, and out he went again. Into the cold, into the night, to find Catherine and her companion. The receptionist at the counter didn't acknowledge him and Christian wondered if he had slightly overdone it with his little show as there had been no one to really watch and appreciate it. How cold it was. He retraced his steps to where he had said goodbye to Catherine and the old man, but couldn't find them. Where were they? They couldn't be far. It hadn't taken long to go back to the hotel and come back. He looked right and then left. There they were. In the distance he saw a moving light. That had to be Catherine and the old man disappearing behind an old cottage. He started running to catch up with them.

When he reached the cottage he slowed down, listening to the beat of his heart. He should really exercise more. Slowly and carefully he looked out for them from behind a broken wood door. There they were, he could see the light move and heard their voices from afar. He hadn't followed anyone since primary school. He and Pete used to play detective in the streets of Copenhagen when they were kids but then gave it up for more grown up stuff like checking out the girls and buying Coca Cola and other intoxicating things that kept you awake (and asleep). However, being a detective felt good and exciting, and somehow he managed to connect with the feelings of his childhood, especially as the forest grew darker and darker. This really took some courage. He should have taken a torch. In the worst case he would get out AINTON. The robot dog was safely stored away in his backpack. No way he would

leave him alone in the hotel room. What if someone stole him? And now AINTON would come in handy, leading him through the dark.

The old man had taken Catherine into the forest a while ago and she seemed very loath to follow him. From the sound of their voices he could tell that they must be arguing. Why on earth did she comply with his request and walk into that awful wildwood? She had to be out of her mind. Why didn't she resist? Why didn't she simply turn around? Was he blackmailing her? Catherine hadn't told him everything yet, that much he guessed. Christian couldn't overhear what they were saying. He sneaked up to them closer and closer, but made sure they couldn't see or hear him. The pathway was icy and full of frozen mud and twigs. He set down his feet very carefully. Finally, he could see the contour of an old shack under the wide branches of an enormous fir tree. He heard the old man unlock the door, saw him go inside and saw how Catherine followed. Then there was silence. Was she in danger? He didn't know what to do. The next thing he heard was a scream. Catherine was screaming terribly and he felt so helpless and scared at once. He didn't have a weapon, he didn't know what to do. After all she was with an old man who had looked so decrepit, feeble, frail, the whole lot. Why would she scream that badly? God, he better do something.

Quickly, he took out AINTON from his backback, set him up and sent him towards the cottage. Christian followed him cautiously to open the door for him. Then he sent him in via his cellphone and let him do the Happy Birthday Dance he had programmed for Pete two days before he left. He couldn't think of a more clever move, not then and he was simply too afraid to walk in there himself. It was all so spooky, so completely out of the ordinary. There was silence, AINTON had stopped singing and would now do its little dance. Catherine had obviously calmed down, or was she

dead? The thought frightened him and for a moment he realized that he might have put himself into danger. Finally, AINTON's camera worked. Why did this always take so long? The hotspot of his cellphone wasn't strong enough. He should really try and fix the transmission.

There she was, very much alive, very beautiful and bewildered. Obviously, she was staring right into AINTON's eyes which hid the two cameras that were transmitting the image onto the display of his cellphone. Thus reassured, he pressed down the handle and entered the room, only to find a totally puzzled Catherine and a befuddled old man. He owed them some sort of an explanation:

„ I heard you scream, and then, I am sorry I followed you. I am. I don't know. Ok. This is AINTON.“ He looked at his cellphone and pressed some buttons, AINTON played the beginning of Mission Impossible and Christian smiled proudly.

„ AINTON ? “ Abraham asked, at a loss. He looked a lot older now than the energetic man that had approached them so determinedly on the street. Catherine was staring at the sterile creature that Christian called AINTON. What was happening here?

He tried to explain to them what an AIBO was and how he had modified it. But it was hopeless, he could tell from their faces that indeed they had been born in the last millenium.

Catherine seemed very concerned and dismayed with some news she had received from the old weirdo. Christian was sensitive enough to see that she wanted to leave, wanted to get out of here. Whatever had happened between the odd couple had obviously happened before he had arrived.

Catherine got up and said:

„Ok, I will do it.“

She looked at Abraham, but he was looking away.

„I will get the computer. You will have your way,“ then she looked at him and moved towards the door.

„When I have it, where do you want me to take it to?“

„Terezín.“ He said.

„Yes, but where?“

„In the rooms where the police doctors performed surgery. As they called it. It's number A on the plan. Tomorrow at 10pm.“ He handed her a crumpled plan of Terezín. She took it and shoved it aggressively into her pocket.

„ Tomorrow ? And so late ? It will be dark. “

„ Yes, it will be dark “, he repeated after her, „ I guess so. “

„That won't be enough time.“

„ It will be . “ He said silently, she shrugged and turned around.

Christian made a mental note to get the plan from her afterwards. It would go right at the beginning of his book. Wouldn't that make a great start?

„Oh God, can this get any worse? Will the area not be locked?“ Catherine was asking, exasperated

„Yes, the small fortress will close at 4:30, but everything will be taken care of. Just get the computer. From the Clinique. You will find the gate open.“

Catherine nodded, she was totally numbed, dulled to the bones, nothing could shock her now, nothing at all. What a strange coincidence that the old man's child had died in an organ transplantation her sister and Dr. Linder had performed.

In her best times, Eva could have come up with such a crazy story. But Eva was dead, and this was for real. Not some story, this was reality. Catherine looked at

Christian, nodded and they both left. The way back to the hotel was far and wet and cold, she hardly made it. But Christian urged her on and on. What a great story this will make. The adventure was about to begin and he would be playing a major part in it. That he would make sure. *You could only understand and write what you had experienced. Experience it will be.*

7

Saturday

Litoměřice - Prague

The first bus to Prague was late. A freezing morning was about to rise slowly upon Litoměřice, one of the oldest Czech towns, established in the 10th century on the site of an early medieval Přemyslid Dynasty fort, a Czech royal dynasty which reigned not only in the Garden of Bohemia, but also in parts of Poland, Hungary and Austria.

Early dawn was loosening gently and in its own time the tight grip of another cold and dark winter's night. Walking from the hotel to the bus station had taken them through an empty street in a deserted, lifeless neighbourhood. The occasional light, that was already on, flickered through opaque glass, moonlike, as if not from this world. Cold damp air stuck to their faces leaving tiny waterbeads that tickled first, then hurt uncomfortably, leaving sore spots on their lips where they were chapped. Catherine longed for that cassis and honey-rose pink lip balm Eva used to have. She could literally taste it on her tongue, so strong was the memory and so painful.

Stop licking your underlip. Stop it. Keep walking. Heavy fog covered the sky like a ceiling that hung low above their heads. Catherine could smell the exhaust fumes from many coal heatings. She hadn't eaten any breakfast, not that they would have served it so early, but Christian had produced a crumpled Müesli bar from his backpack of which he had offered her half. When she declined, he wolfed it down quickly while

she winced at the mere thought of eating anything at all. She felt sick even the more. Walking then, too, was laborious and the short way to the bus station seemed to take forever. There were the occasional stomach cramps that had made her slow down on the way. Christian was always well ahead, waiting for her again and again. She pulled her coat closer around her slender body, wrapping herself tightly into its warm down feathers, defying the cold as well as she could. Her feet were cold. Her stomach grumbled. Nonetheless, she must be hungry and should have accepted Christian's offer. He walked along with great ease. *That Müesli bar must have been invigorating. Why hadn't she eaten some? Quelle Merde.*

The icy air stung painfully in her lungs as she plowed on. Her limbs were heavy, her muscles sore, her feet, as always, numb from the temperatures just below zero. It took so much energy to walk in that biting cold. Catherine hoped to God, she wouldn't vomit again from exhaustion, from pain, from utter sickness and despair. Christian had been very quiet. Their hike back to the hotel on the eve before had been a nightmare, a total nightmare. What a sick weirdo that old man was. Walking through the nightly woods, after receiving the blow she had, took some nerve. If it hadn't been for Christian's GPS on his phone and his navigating skills to find your way with it, she would have been totally lost, frozen to death somewhere on a clearing in the midst of that giant forest out there. She had come face to face with death and so had Christian even though he denied it, thinking this was exciting, the time of his life. Him. As crazy as they get. In that respect he reminded her of Eva.

Last night, when they had got back after their *tour de force*, they collapsed on their beds and slept. Catherine didn't even take her clothes off, not that there would have been much to change into anyway. She hadn't exactly brought the lingerie of a

Parisienne: an overnight trip without any luggage. *Crazy*. Somehow Brigid's wig had found its way into her bag, but that was about all she had brought. Christian, however, had taken matters into his own hands. Somehow, he was dedicated to her cause: He had googled when the first bus left and set his alarm clock accordingly. His cell phone woke them both with the sound of a digital music box. And here they were. Silent. Waiting. Kind of focused on nothing at all. Neither of them wanted to talk about anything, not for now. *Where on earth was that bus?*

Catherine shifted nervously from one foot to another, to get rid of the tension, to get rid of everything, but what seemed more important, to stop her feet from going necrotic in the cold. That's how it felt: her limbs were dying off on her, bit by bit, toe by toe, finger by finger, strangled and guillotined by the chilly air that cut through her clothes and shoes like an invisible and deadly sword whose potent cutting edge was continuously cooled by a polar vortex and its squalls from all of Antarctica's 14,000,000 square kilometres. Christian was constantly scribbling something onto his ipad and hardly managed to look her in the face nor was he willing to make conversation. His mind was busy. What she would have found irritating in a friend, she was glad for now; after all he was just another stranger. Sharing the room with him had stretched their budding friendship far enough.

Catherine looked at her watch repeatedly, but that didn't make the bus come any earlier. She tried not to think of anything for a while, but it didn't work at all. She thought of Eva, and she thought of Eva's child, her grandchild. Adoption? Or worse: Death? *What a wicked old man*. What purpose served his revenge? It was all so pointless. Maybe she should simply give up, involve the police now. But would that mean the baby'd be killed? Could she really bring up the energy to break into the Clinique,

again, when she was so tired, so exhausted? She wouldn't get in again, would she? After all, there were cameras. Everywhere. They were bound to find her this time, arrest her again. *Where was all this going?*

„Look, the bus is coming. T'was about time“, Christian said, packing his ipad into his backpack with stiff fingers. Catherine hardly raised her head. For a split second she wished she had his energy and zeal and his youth. To start over again. Marvellous. „Come on,“ he said, giving her a faint smile. The bus had stopped now and Catherine and Christian barely made it to the entryway and onto the bus, before the doors closed and the vehicle started moving again. The driver didn't look very friendly, but luckily he had change. They left Litoměřice immediatley. Catherine felt like an old sailor, sailing foreign and stormy waters: Heading for Terra Incognita on a sinking ship; doomed, wrecked, bedeviled.

Christian called her back to reality.

„ Hard to believe we're back on the bus already,“ he stated laconically.

„We didn't get to see much, did we?“ He gave her a friendly shove and laughed. Catherine didn't respond, there was nothing that was hard to believe these days. She had taken the window seat and looked outside.

„ I've wanted to -, “

„ Oh, just shut up,“ she stopped him, waving her hand into his face.

If Christian got into another one of his prattling fits, she would need ear plugs. Determinedly she stared outside although there wasn't much to see. Occasionally there was a light, originating from a car, a house or a street lamp that worked. He tried again.

„Let me help you,“ Christian offered, sincerely concerned with her plight. She turned towards him, lamely, lethargically.

„Do what?“

„Steal from the Clinique. That is what he asked you to do, hasn't he?“ Catherine could not only clearly hear his Danish accent, but also the excitement he was trying to suppress.

Why was this exciting? Reluctantly, she said.

„Christian, I am not even sure I will go through with it. I might just go straight to the next police station when we get to Prague. This is so crazy, so totally crazy. I don't think I can do this. I am absolutely exhausted. I think I'll give up now,“

“No, please don't give up. You have come so far.”

She looked at him and added earnestly.

„You really think that? There are limits. I think I've reached them now.“

She took out the letter Abraham had made her read the night before and handed it to him. He looked at her as if to get extra-permission to read the lines that were so obviously meant for her and her alone. It said Catherine on the envelope. The C was beautiful and neatly drawn with the feather of a pen that was raised and nurtured on real black ink alone, aqueous ink made with pigments straight from the octopus's mouth. The letters of her name looked full of passion and eloquence, speaking of secrets long hidden and hard to get by. Only studying the fine art of calligraphy and years and years of practice would grant your writing to look so distinguished, sophisticated and exclusive. The letter would contain matters of great importance, so the elegant handwriting promised. Christian took it gingerly in his hands.

“Open it. Read,” she demanded. He looked at her in surprise. She seemed so stern all of a sudden. Then he took the pages out of the envelope, unfolded them and read the opening lines.

Dear Catherine

I have been looking for you and your loved ones for so long, I can hardly believe I've found you, now. After all these years, decades. I have been watching you from afar. Without you knowing. Without you seeing me. But here you are. I recognized you immediately. You truly have your mother's eyes and her hair. Yours is a little lighter though. Finally, I can tell you your story. I wished your daughter wasn't to die while I am writing this down. She is in labour now. I am writing you these lines while she is fighting with the little one, while she is struggling to survive, but won't. I will make sure of this. When a woman is weak from birth it is easy to let her go, she'll slip away so easily. Your Eva will die just as our Imma died. An eye for an eye, a mother's life for a mother's life. That's only fair.



Christian looked up and turned his head to look at Catherine. She raised her eyebrows, eager to learn his reaction.

"There is no date," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"There is not date on the letter. We don't know when he wrote it.

"Does it matter when he wrote it?" Catherine asked, exasperated.

"Well. Usually, there is a date."

"Do you really think it matters when he wrote it?"

"I do, don't you?"

"Well, he must have forgotten. It seems kind of weird that you go on about the date.

Have you thought about the content? About what he wrote?"

"I haven't finished yet."

"Well, you have read the part where he claims Eva will die."

"Yeah, I've read that."

"And that doesn't strike you as -? I mean-,"

"Well, she's dead. So, no. That part doesn't strike me as odd. Seems like the truth. Let me finish the letter. I don't get why there is no date. That strikes me as odd."

Catherine shook her head at him

"You are weird, Christian Sörenson. You are so weird."

Yes, but there is no date. I don't get why you are so upset about all this."

"About my daughter being dead?"

"No, sure you'd be upset about this. No, I mean about the fact that *I* think there is no" -

"date," she completed the sentence.

"Yeah, right," she shook her head at him and her eyes filled with tears.

"You are crazy," she said, then she fell silent, fighting the urge to cry out loud.

"Alright, forget it. Just let me finish the letter." He continued reading until he had finished all that Abraham had written. Then he put the letter into his lap and looked at her.

"Absofuckinglutely terrible."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That is terrible. I mean, seriously. All the stuff on the sex life of your mother. Why did he have to put this inside? I mean. Seriously, this is absfuckinglutely terrible.

"Yes, it is," Catherine confirmed.

"Can I use the letter for my book? As a resource?"

She stared at him and snatched the papers out of his hands.

"No, you cannot absonot-e-lutely use them for your book. Christian."

"Absofuckinglutely," he corrected her. She only gave him a scolding look.

"This is real. It is not fiction. You cannot use a real letter for a fictitious book," she said, besides you are writing about your grandfather, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. And I am not writing fiction. I am not a novelist. I know this is not fiction.

That is why it is so exciting. I want to be a historian and I might do a documentary on a larger theme than only my granddad. Truman Capote did it, with Cold Blood."

"Yes, and he completely lost it afterwards. It broke him completely. And he didn't write a about history either, he wrote about a murder case that did in fact happen while he was alive. He was not a historian, he was journalist."

"You know Truman Capote?" He looked at her, amazed. She nodded.

“Christian, my daughter died. I have showed you this letter in confidence so you might understand better what I am going through. I don’t want to talk about Truman Capote. I want you to understand, why I want to give up, why I feel like I can’t go on. I might need you as a witness when we go to the next police station. You saw the old man,” she paused. “

“I could simply tell them-“

“We? I shall not go anywhere near a policestation here.”

“Why not?”

“Just because. You don’t want to talk about Truman Capote, I don’t want to talk about policestations.”

“Ok. Fair enough. So, you wouldn’t come with if I turned myself in, would you?”

„No, no, no. Catherine, I wouldn’t and no-, don’t give up now. We will find a way into the Clinique, without the police.“

“Oh come on. This is ridiculous.”

“No, it isn’t”.

“Yes, it is. It’s completely pointless.”

“No, it isn’ pointless. If he is a crazy as he seems he might actually go through with it. You should not involve the police. Don’t risk your chances. I mean think of the baby.” Catherine sighed out loud, arguing with Christian was hard work. He reminded her so much of Eva. Like her, he wouldn’t take no for an answer. On the contrary, the more resistance she put up, the more excited he got. Just like her daughter.

„Into the Clinique might be easy, but how to get out again? And with the computer?“

„That is the question,“ he completed the sentence for her. He straightened up and turned eagerly towards her, brushing lightly against her arm.

„We will work something out. The important thing is to dodge the cameras.“

Catherine was laughing out loud, shoving him away from her. He was invading her space.

„Dodge the cameras. Sure. I can wear a mask. In fact, there is a wig in my bag. Wanna see it?“ Catherine reached for her bag at once.

„Wowie zowie, you are joking, you’ve got a wig in your bag?“

Christian looked at her incredulously.

„No, I am not,“ she opened her bag and searched for the blonde wig. She found it without any difficulty.

“Catherine, oh my oh my-. What are you up to?“

“See, here it is,“ She held up the fake hairbunch like a hunter its trophy after the kill.

„ That’s incredible. “ Christian yapped, then he grabbed it from her and shoved it over her head.

“Catherine, this is simply great,“ he couldn’t stop laughing.

Some of her brown hair was sticking out wildly from underneath the blond. She looked like an inmate from a closed psychiatric ward high on mix of antipsychotic psychoactive drugs,

- Loxapine
- Fluoxetine (Prozac), SSRI
- Paroxetine (Paxil, Seroxat), SSRI
- Citalopram (Celexa), SSRI
- Escitalopram (Lexapro), SSRI
- Sertraline (Zoloft), SSRI
- Duloxetine (Cymbalta), SNRI

- Venlafaxine (Effexor), SNRI
- Bupropion (Wellbutrin), NDRI
- Mirtazapine (Remeron), NaSSA
- Isocarboxazid (Marplan), MAOI
- Phenelzine (Nardil), MAOI
- Tranlycypromine (Parnate), MAOI .



„You think that’ll do ? ” She turned to the window to look at herself in the mirror it provided. When she saw her reflection, she was laughing out loud. That was hysterical. What a joyride. All she needed was handcuffs.

„Perfect, “ Christian cheered, trying to keep a straight face.

„I’ve also got glasses,“ she opened her bag again and put on the dark spectacles.

Christian looked at her sceptically.

„That is a good start indeed, but modern cameras will detect your body movement.

You’ll have to change the way you’re walking.“

„Seriously? They can do this, now? Detect your body movement?“

„Seriously. Believe me. Limping will help. Ministry of Silly Walks and so, you know.“

„Ok, Monty Python. If that is all it takes. Wig, glasses. Easy. I will also limp. Limp, crawl, hop, skip. No big deal,“ she shrugged off the growing panic. *Of course, they could detect your body movements today and surely they could do even more.*

„I mean you can try. You haven’t got much to lose. Hop in like a kangaroo, crawl out like a snake. Great idea. If they get you, you can still give up and tell them your story.“

„Well, I won't really have an option then, will I? But right. Breaking into the clinique twice. And failing twice. Looks great on my record. I am a real champion.“

„Why twice?“

„Oh, forget it. It's such a long story.“

„What? You mean you still haven't told me all of it?“

„Right. I haven't told you half of it, and no, no -.“

„Please, come on Catherine. You have already hit the Clinique once? Got some good stuff? Is that why you are on such a constant high? Couple of pills? Can I have some too? Come on: Sharing is caring.“

„No. You can't have anything and no-. I won't. tell you. No pills. No sharing. No story. Period.“ Christian pretended he was sulking. He looked out the window. They sat in silence for another minute or two. The bus had now reached the freeway and was gaining speed. Was the sun never ever out in this country? Whenever it was dark, she was awake. That was what was wrong; her sleeping rhythm didn't correspond to the sun's cycle. Although in her old life at this time of the day she would already be sitting in her office. Busy Swiss life didn't really correspond to the sun's cycle either. So much work in winter was done when it was dark. She had always hated it.

Catherine leaned her head back and closed her eyes, trying to rest for a moment. Christian wanted to help her for some mysterious reason. He seemed like a good guy. Fair enough. Let him help. But how? Her thoughts were wandering freely when she remembered an important detail.

„It is her birthday“, Catherine let out suddenly.

„ What? You talk again? And to me?“ He gave her an innocent smile. She returned it graciously.

„Yes junior. I just remembered something. It is her birthday today, Dr. Linder’s 50th birthday. I overheard one of the nurses as she passed me by.“

„Are you sure? ”

„ That’s what they said. Mention a woman’s age publically? Dangerous. I mean. Do you think they would really lie about this? „

„ Women always lie about their age. Don’t they ? ”

„ There is nothing all women always do. Lesson Number One.“

„ Right. Let’s assume you’re right and it is her birthday. Then. We could. In fact, that’s quite perfect -” Christian exclaimed.

„ It is ? ”

“Yes, of course,” he exclaimed.

Catherine only shrugged her shoulders but this piece of news had pulled a trigger with Christian. *He* couldn’t be stopped now, instead he was explaining his plan to her in detail while he kept glancing at the notes he had taken on his ipad. Obviously, he had been working on some sort of plan for quite some time this morning before he woke her. He had been working nonstop, even while waiting for the bus. *Why was he so into this? To get material for his book?*

After all was said, they were both silent for a good while. The cars and houses were moving by. All of a sudden Christian spoke out loud, startling Catherine awefully. She had drifted off into a light slumber.

„ It will work out. This will even be fun. You will see.“

He gave her another friendly shove with his elbow, then rubbing his hands in eager anticipation.

“Yes, maybe for you. It is not your life that is at stake. You only see this as some kind of entertainment you can then write about.”

“That is not fair. I will not write a thing, if you don’t allow it.”

“Good. I won’t allow it.”

“Let’s see. Ok?”

Catherine raised her eyebrow, then continued looking outside the window, unmoved by his touch or his enthusiasm. She still wasn’t sure she would go through with this. Wouldn’t it be better to find a police station now? Turn herself in. Pass the next decade in a cell if worst came to worst. She wanted all this to pass. What a nuisance he was. What a nuisance all of this was. *Please, please. Let it go away. Now.*

The Great Crime

By the time they got to Outer Prague all contingencies were covered for the great crime: Stealing a computer to redeem a tiny baby's life. And his ideas to the plan were crucial: *He was a clever boy after all, as smart as they got.* Burglar or not, here he came to win this trophy. Hadn't his mother always said so? Whatever he did, he did it well and with great care. It was after all true. He would make sure Catherine succeeded. He was the man. They reached the Clinique around lunchtime, Christian then took a good while to explore the area and what he found pleased him greatly. He could see a way in if Catherine walked down the slope to the underground parking. It looked easy enough: The cameras in this area were focused on the numbersplates of the cars not on the people. The identification was then used for the billing. A clever system to keep cars away, which didn't belong; not so clever however, to keep burglars out. Going in through the underground: It was worth a shot.

So, they had decided they were to enter the hospital separately. Catherine would go first. Now that she was properly disguised, she looked very different from their trial run on the bus. The blonde wig was well coiffed, the dark glasses shiny and spotless. To Christian she looked more stunning, more mysterious and aloof than ever. The way she carried herself, simply awesome. He was sorry she didn't seem to enjoy any of this. He could understand though, - somehow. Catherine was supposed to commit a crime to buy her grandchild a future, a petty crime, but still it took some criminal energy after all. And what would she get in return? Nothing really.

Never would she see the baby, never would she hear it giggle and laugh, or sing a lullaby to send it to sleep. A bleak future without her as a grandmother. All she, all they could do, -to keep the baby alive, was steal a computer, break into the *Clinique*. They were to repeat what Abraham did when he had to break into the *Geschäftszimmer* to give Catherine's mother a new, a fake identity. They were to steal some documents, just as Abraham had. But in order to do what? In order to give who a new identity? The baby? Catherine? The old man? It was all very weird.

Doubts had crossed his mind repeatedly: How could Abraham have done all this anyway? And by himself? How on earth did he get into the archives of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* anyway? It must have been nearly impossible with Abraham being so weak and frail. And locked up in a cell. Behind thick doors. How did he get out of there? It was near to impossible. Christian seriously doubted his story on the basis of what he knew how Terezín was run. The Nazis had been efficient, they wouldn't let their papers being stolen by an inmate. There were locks, there were dogs, there were guards with Luger P08 pistols, Mauser C96, or the Czechoslovak ZB vz. 30 a *Maschinengewehr* produced in occupied Czechoslovakia for Waffen-SS use by a

manufacturer called Československá Zbrojovka in Brno. They made firearms, vehicles and tractors. Sure, they could make locks to keep sick and frail inmates in place. And why would Heike Strassmann's papers be in the Geschäftszimmer anyway? She was German, not Jewish. Didn't they only keep records of their inmates there? Or did he mean he stole Imma Cohen's papers? Did he not remember the details from so long ago? The story didn't check out at all.



But then Christian hadn't been there. All he knew he had read in books, historic journals or on the net, wikipedia most, and some of these pages seemed terribly inaccurate. These last days before the Russians came to liberate Terezín, to be precise it was the Ukrainian front that was there first, were chaotic. It might have been possible, anything might have been possible. It just seemed strange enough that Abraham could get the papers. And could hand them on to Heike Strassmann, Catherine's mother. Strange indeed.

And why did the old lunatic want Dr. Linder's Computer? What a fateful coincidence that his offspring ended up dead on *her* operating table: Dr. Linder, Leah's pal, the *monster's* daughter. All very strange. Highly unlikely, statistically speaking, highly, highly unlikely. Yet, one must consider: Life, as the saying goes, was so often stranger than fiction. A very momentous mix of many unhappy coincidence it was. And yet, Christian couldn't let it go. There was more that didn't add up for him. Why couldn't they just hack into the clinique's system and break their server? That would have been so much easier and safer. He was sure they didn't have proper encryption.

Correctly implemented AES encrypted data was nearly impossible to read, but usually some genius engineer had made a mistake somewhere down the line, rather somewhere down the code. That was if they had AES encrypted data at all. And he strongly doubted that. Catherine could have let him try at least. Stealing a computer in the real world, it was so outdated, so old-fashioned. A degenerated motif from a really bad James Bond plot; and James' Bond plots usually weren't degenerated.

Stealing computers in the real world was something they would have done in the last millennium. But why would you want to steal a computer in the 21st century? If the old man wanted justice, it would be more efficient to hack the entire hospital's network and run a search command for whatever it was he was looking for. On the other hand, the old man couldn't ask Catherine to do this. Hacking was something Christian could do, not her. It seemed there was a strong ulterior motif why the old man gave Catherine the task of breaking in. Most likely, there wouldn't be much on this computer anyway. Not if they had a central server where all the data was stored. It was all very, very weird.

What exactly was it that Abraham wanted? What was he hiding from them? Did he simply want to frame Catherine for murdering her daughter when he had killed her himself? When he had robbed the baby? Maybe sold it? Had Abraham planted the handbag at the crime site? Had he even made up the story about the child dying on the operating table? It was so very likely Catherine would be arrested at the Clinique when she was trying to steal Dr. Linder's computer. Was that what he wanted? Have her arrested? The justice he wanted may not be about his great-grandchild. All this might be another trap to set up Catherine for good. They would have to be careful or Catherine wouldn't make it out of the Clinique.



Whatever the incongruencies, there was no time now to reconsider. Besides, Catherine would hear none of it: They just „followed the mad man’s instructions,“ those were her words. Prostrating before his savour for revenge, this was her plan. Their total obedience to all details required was essential, the baby’s life depended on it, thus her plea. All things considered: If it wasn’t for Christian there wouldn’t be a plan altogether, of that he was proud, and he knew he would figure the rest out later. He would keep her from being arrested, keep her out of harm’s way. Whatever didn’t fit right now would surely fit later. For the time being he was set on his course. He was on a mission. Minormous may have failed, but this was far larger. He was part of something that mattered. Really did.

What fascinated him most was that Catherine’s life was being disrupted, devastated even, by the evils that still rose from the abyss of WWII. As if it was all ressurected in some gruesome horror show to ensure that the hatred never disappeared in the first place, not before, not after. The war. *That* war. How Abraham must hate Catherine’s family for taking his only son, how much he must want revenge. Revenge fostered and nurtured throughout decades and generations, like a festering boil, like the infected leg a soldier couldn’t yield for amputation, wouldn’t yield, if ever given a choice, a chance, but none given. Never. Ever. Leg gone, all gone: Sanity and decency, forgiveness and love, goodness and mercy. No more.

All good things ever, gone. For good. Sacrificed to a cruel and bloodthirsty man-made deity who separated itself into random ethno-religious races and clans and

mobs, then shoved them off into different airtight cages, some seemingly more valuable than others but still as airtight, still as deadly. Some were shipped to inhumane death camps, sent onto laborious, excruciating death marches to cramped, dirty ghettos in which no one could breathe or live a life ever worth living. At the hand of this man-made God all mankind would, all mankind did perish, even the most fervent worshippers in the most luxurious cages. Those were the ones who lasted the least, the ones that were slaughtered first. Their minds, their reason, their sanity all brought to the altar of Deus Ex Hominum. A place where they were bleeding out until only utter chaos, devastating wars and immense bloodshed was left on the blue planet. A habitat no longer our home, but ruled by all evil, so bloody and dead. Figuratively speaking. The earth wasn't really blue, he knew she was all sort of colours. But still these words would make a fantastic paragraph in his book.

Christian shivered. Imma, or rather Heike had saved her own life by taking the real Imma's name and identity. But in doing so, hadn't she also saved the little Jacob from a certain and cruel death? Even if she was the enemy then, the monster as the old man claimed: She *had* raised that boy, she *had* cared for him. Abraham's play after all this time seemed so unfair and foul, a madman's scheme, not worthy of a true believer. Didn't he see that *then* he didn't have an option when now, in fact, he would? He had the option to let go, to spare Catherine and her family. He could have spared Eva and the little one. He could have shown mercy and forgiveness if he had only wanted to.

Why was he doing this to them now? Why couldn't he simply let his old grief go? Forgive and forget, as the saying went. Let the past rest. Find peace. Why not be reconciled to the past before you met your maker? Reconciliation: the highest and most precious good mankind had ever possessed, a readymaker for new and glorious days

full of matutinal, virginial beginnings. Why didn't he strive for that? Christian didn't really get it. Abraham was so old now, wasn't it time for grace and mercy, absolution and compassion?

The Great Crime - Continued

Catherine on the other hand, hadn't had time yet to fully consider what exactly had hit her: The ambush; all perfect. Her dead mother not Jewish, but a Nazi, her dead daughter murdered for revenge, framing Catherine on purpose as her killer. She herself not Jewish. All of them. Not Jewish. It was too much. Too much. Too much. She had seen the old weirdo before, she remembered so clearly now, even getting some sort of a hazy visualization before her inner eye: He was indeed the old weirdo on the Ferris Wheel. He must have stolen her handbag then. The more she thought about this, the more she recognized him. Perception was so modular, folding and molding according to your *Weltanschauung*, beliefs, situations, even dreams, and the most important: fear and anger and fear. Fear. The fear matrix was the strongest; the outer and the inner layer when it came to the boundaries of reality distortions. And how they could be shifted. And how they could bend. Bend over backwards. The boundaries.

And yet, she was sure- so sure and even more sure- he was the old man she had seen on the Ferris Wheel. The stranger who had been hanging onto the table for his dear life when the waggon rose high above Vienna, propelling her forwards and backwards in its own time. He was the one. The one who had stolen her handbag, the one who had set her up. He was the one who had taken all she ever had. It came as kind of a disappointment to discover that her opponent was so frail and weak and old and yet so sly and full of evil cunning to overcome her. All the terrible lies about the Jews, true for him. If unsure, blame a Jew. It was an anti-climax in many ways.

She would have needed time to think, time to figure it all out, when time she didn't have. There was no way she could get into all of this now. What she tried to do was focus on her grandchild. Eva's child. Most likely Thierry's child too. The newborn. That was her priority, she had to get this computer, Linder's computer, take it back to Terezín, the small fortress, to number 10, the room where the doctors had performed surgery on their helpless, innocent victims. Hand it over to Abraham Cohen. She had to satisfy the old lunatic. Whatever it took. Suit him. Please him. Then only later, when she had gained his trust, somehow she would con the old man, abduct the child, carry it off, rescue the baby, her own flesh and blood. Get it back where it belonged: back home. Find out who the father really was. A question she hadn't really had time yet to consider. A question she had pushed away with Thierry jumping off this bridge. It was simply too painful in addition to everything else. An orphan baby, she couldn't bear the thought: Her grandchild a lone and deserted orphan. Mummy dead, daddy dead. The poor wrench.

What was for sure: it hadn't been a virgin's birth. There would be a father somewhere down the line, even if meant that he was dead too. There might even be

other grandparents she would have to deal with. But not for now. Right now, she had to get the baby back first. That was all that mattered. If she was arrested in the process, then it wasn't for not having tried. She would give everything. She surely would. Her life, her reputation, her everything was at stake. She would gladly put everything on the line to get the little one back. If determination showed in your face, Catherine's features were not only lined with it softly, but fully overridden with its black tainting stink. She looked evil.



When she passed the first camera on the pathway leading down to the underground parking, she kept her head down steadily, standing towards the wall as a Mercedes Benz drove past her on its way out. She looked away, inhaling the exhaust fumes. Would they recognize her? Would they arrest her simply on the grounds that she had used the wrong entry. This entry was for cars only. But Christian had said – never mind what he had said. Nervously, she was touching her false hair, dabbing at her sunglasses again and again. *Who on earth wore sunglasses on a foggy winter's day?* Christian had said the cameras to the parking area only read the numbers on the plates. She took another deep breath, trying to calm herself, soothing her frayed nerves.

Forget about the sunglasses, forget about her look, nothing could be done about this now: she must remember to limp. And to perfection. Even if the cameras would only get a glimpse of her feet, her white and golden sneakers. The cameras. Catherine looked at her legs, her feet, trying to coordinate their movement into a dyslocomotory walk, a true-to-life-limp that didn't look too stagily. Her performance was lousy. She

broke into perspiration and felt hot the first time since she got up, her cheeks turning red as a wintry beetroot. She felt her heart pound in her chest, her ears, her feet. Also as an actress in her own shabby play, she felt she failed. She couldn't even limp convincingly. Someone would recognize her, the camera would, the camera saw everything. *They* saw everything. Even if it was her failing, flailing feet only.

She looked down at the concrete to hide her face, nuzzling her chin and nose into the thick collar of her coat. She was feeling the humid damp cold that her breathing produced; its tiny cirrostratus vapours pressed against her collar bones, evaporating along the hills of her dry lips, raining softly onto her hot parched cheeks. Catherine's eyes were focused on the dotty pattern on the ground. The irregular spots must have stemmed from yucky old chewing gums drivers had disposed of. There were roundish circles on the bitumen, most of them fringed and tattered and greyed out by the many tyres that had excoriated their rubber onto them. Catherine tried to count them, but stopped quickly. There were too many. She had better focus. The plan was to get into the clinique through the basement, whereas Christian would try the main entrance gate with the excuse of having sprained his ankle. She hoped she could get into one of the elevators and take a ride up to the third floor where Dr. Linder's office was. Were there cameras in the elevators? She didn't remember from when Greg had dragged her there. If there were cameras they wouldn't be focused on her feet. What then? She kept walking.

The underground garage was rather busy as it was lunch time and people were driving in and out. She felt silly walking through the gate without sitting in a vehicle, but the outgoing cars simply drove past her without heeding her. Once inside she took off her glasses and put them in her bag. Wearing glasses in an underground garage in

the midst of a foggy winter's day might, after all, be too noticeable. As she was approaching the elevators she saw a white van of a pizza delivery firm standing on one of the parking lots. The sign said: Pizza Queen. The delivery boy was struggling to hold all the flat large cardboard boxes, nearly dropping them onto the floor. Quickly she walked up to him.

„Let me help you,“ Catherine said, reaching for one of the falling containers. To her own amazement her voice had sounded friendly enough, steady and calm, the competent lawyer's voice she used to know so well, it had reemerged from somewhere within. How useful it was still there.

„Oh thanks so much, “ the courier answered gladly, holding out some of the cardboard boxes to her. He was really only a boy with a wispy facial growth and Catherine was amazed somebody would even let him drive their delivery van. His toque looked awkwardly out of place, a baseball cap would have better matched his juvenile face.

„Take this here. Don't drop it,“ he winked at her.

„I won't“, Catherine gave him her best conspiratorial smile. It wasn't hard to muster up.

„Do you work here?“ He asked.

„Not anymore,“ she lied and felt her cheeks redden even more. Luckily, the errand boy was so busy fiddling around with his pizza boxes that he didn't get to look at her properly. She could have told him she was the Blessed Mother Teresa herself. Nevertheless, Catherine hoped this conversation wouldn't take much longer. Christian hadn't prepped her for an occasion such as this. Yet, she was so frantic, she couldn't make up any more stories herself. There was a limit to the fairy tales she was willing to tell. And it seemed, she had reached the remote bordertown of fairy land at this very

moment. She had reached the end of it. It would have to be the truth soon enough. The truth, and nothing but the truth. A concept she had not only based her life upon, but also her career, her family, her education. Everything really. She had studied law because she had wanted to defend and uphold the truth. Do what's right.

They were approaching the elevator and for a second she got a visual picture how Greg had been dragging her from here to that police car. It seemed like ages ago, but in fact it had been yesterday, or the day before? She was so stressed out, she couldn't remember. Not now, anyway. She was focusing on contorting her face into a smile for the pizza boy when she didn't feel like smiling at all. On the contrary, she felt like going into a fit, a fit of crying, screaming, tearing her hair out, her eyes, her heart, wearing sackcloth and ashes, covering herself with dirt. But before she had blinked an eye, Catherine was on the elevator, holding on tightly to four pizza containers. For a moment she relaxed, feeling the warmth of the food seeping through the cardboard boxes and run pleasantly along her fingers. Her feet on the other hand were still icy and wet. It was impossible to unwind. Female serotonadrenaline was in charge, a mighty warlady, an amazone ruling her very being; keeping all her systems on a constant alert: Defcon dark and powerful.

„Let me take this now. Thanks so much“, the delivery boy said. He was turning straight towards her when the elevator dinged and the doors opened. She transferred her own load carefully onto the containers he was holding already and before she could say „Bye“, he was gone. He had got out onto the first floor, leaving the smell of hot pizza in the cubicle with her. Catherine took a deep breath, tried to loosen up her tense muscles. Being hungry didn't really help. All that nice food nearly made her jump.



Then she froze, held her breath. The nurse that had taken her to Dr. Schnurmacher yesterday had entered the lift when the pizza delivery boy got out. Catherine nearly had a heart attack. Was she found out so quickly? What a shame. She shouldn't have taken off these glasses. For a moment she was tempted to get them out of her bag, but then decided against it. There was no real reason to put on glasses in an elevator in January, was there? *Was this the end now?* She had better not move. So, Catherine stood stockstill and looked upon her feet, trying not to breathe. There was nothing really to look at besides her shoes: Normal golden-white Nike sneakers. She was really too old for such shoes. She knew well enough. Did she look inconspicuous enough?

The nurse didn't pay attention to her or to her shoes nor the colour of her hair. She was busy reading some of the papers she was holding, while glancing at her phone repeatedly. Then, before Catherine ran out of breath, they had reached the 4th floor where Nurse Thatcher, the only name Catherine could think of right now, got out. Thatcher was wrong, she knew. What was that nurse called again? In that movie. The one with Jack Nicholson? Her mind was blank. Thatcher? Turner? Ratcher? Matcher? Upon leaving, the nurse simply nodded towards the blonde woman in acknowledgement. Catherine returned the greeting. The nurse had not recognized her, *well done*

Catherine kept her eyes on the floor and waited for the doors to close. She was alone now. The doors didn't close. Seconds passed. The doors didn't close. An Eternity.

It was only then that she realized that she had completely forgotten to press any of the buttons. *What on earth was she doing on the fourth floor?* She was trembling as she finally pressed the button to close the doors and get back onto the third floor. Right. She had to take it from here and had better get a grip on herself quickly if she wanted to go through with this. She was a nervous wreck already and that wasn't helpful. It took forever until she was on the right floor. When the doors dinged again, she repressed the urge to flinch. Dr. Linder's office was to her left. Her computer would hopefully be sitting right on her desk, ready to be stolen. But where was Christian? She needed him now. Was she early or was he late? Timing was everything for the plan to succeed.

When the elevator's doors opened, she peered into the hallway and then quickly, she walked along the aisle, past Linder's door and along the whole ward. Then she turned back, walking slower. Where was he hiding? Hadn't they let him in? If he wasn't here, she couldn't get in. If she couldn't get in, she couldn't take what she had to. If she couldn't take, then-. *Stop it now. Focus.* Once again, she passed Dr. Linder's office. The door was ajar and Catherine could see at a glance that Linder was talking to someone on the phone and laughing gleefully. She seemed happy. In fact, Catherine could overhear fragments of a conversation.

„Yes, it's here now. Come and pick it up.“

„No, we haven't finished yet. We still need -.“

Catherine couldn't tell what else she was saying, what else they still needed, as she had walked past her office now. But she could tell that Dr. Linder sounded relaxed, even cheerful. After all it was her birthday. Catherine though could have swallowed her whole fist to muffle the scream of despair she was about to let out. *Where on earth was Christian? Had he forgotten all about their plan?*

Finally, she saw AINTON cut the corner. Christian must have arrived although she couldn't see him. It was about time. Catherine watched anxiously as he sent the little robot dog into Dr. Linder's office through the gap between the open door and its frame. Will their plan work? AINTON was wagging its tail and doing a little dance, then it said in its rusty voice: „Follow me, follow me.“ Dr. Linder and her assistant left the office following the little remote controlled dog, following the inanimate machine gleefully. It worked. Christian's plan worked. She could hear them laugh out loud at the pleasant surprise. AINTON took them along the hall into the next corridor and then held out its paw. When Dr. Linder took it, laughing out loud, it began again to sing: „Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday to you.“ It sang out of tune, but it sang. And then it sang the hymn again and Dr. Linder and her secretary couldn't stop laughing at the little robot. And, imagine, then it sang *Happy Birthday* once more.

Catherine didn't wait to see all of it. As soon as the two women had left, she walked into Linder's office, not too fast and not too slow and closed the door behind her. How much energy it took to move so steadily, but she managed. The room hadn't changed. And hadn't Greg arrested her last time she was here? She had better hurry. It gave her the creeps to think he could show up any minute, any second she lingered here. For a moment it felt wrong that Abraham wanted so much what Eva had wanted too, when he hated them all so much. What a strange coincidence. But then, everything felt wrong these days. She took a deep breath, looked around and saw the computer. It was sitting on Dr. Linder's desk; the screen was black. Its dark case gleamed in the neon light. Quickly, she walked up to it. It looked asleep enough to be stolen right away. At once, she took it and let it glide into the big bag she had bought at the bus

station especially. There were no bags the right size for a computer, so she had settled for a much bigger bag. *Time to go.*

As she turned towards the door her eyes fell onto the shelf with the medical books, she had already seen it yesterday: they looked like the latest edition, all state-of-the art. But something was different today. She saw the shoe carton at once, it said UGG boots, size 7. Her size. She knew the brand. How she needed proper shoes, boots, just like these: lamb wool and leather, weather- and water proof, feel good gear. The new boots she had bought were worth nothing at all in comparison. Without hesitating another second, she grabbed the cardboard box. She was a thief now, she might as well steal things. The shoe carton just about fit into the bag as well, sticking out predominantly at the top, feeling unnaturally heavy. *Time to go.*



She opened the door again, slowly and peered out carefully. Her heart was pounding like mad. Never in all her life had she stolen anything. Now she was carrying a computer that wasn't hers and shoes that weren't hers either. *Quelle Merde.* Noone was to be seen, but she could still hear AINTON sing from afar, he had moved on to Tina Turner's Simply the Best. Christian hadn't said anything about the dog being a Turner Fan. - Ratched. That was the name of the Nurse in that movie. Nurse Ratched: A stark symbol for the system Jack Nicholuson was fighting. Why would she think of all this now? She had to leave immediately. Relieved, that the hallway was empty, she sneaked out Dr. Linder's office and made her way back to the elevator. Her

stay in Linder's office had taken less than a minute, 45 seconds at most. It all went according to plan. Catherine tried to steady her breathing, but to no avail.

She didn't run into anyone else who recognized or stopped her. And she didn't see how Christian talked to Dr. Linder telling her that a good friend had hired him to give her a surprise. For her birthday. It was her birthday today, wasn't it? No, he wouldn't say who the friend was. And no, he had no idea how old she was? Maybe thirty? (Laughter.) And no, he didn't have time for lunch, but thank you. Yes, he would pack AINTON, now. Yes, it was called AINTON, like ANTON, but with an I. Yes. It was. And yes, unfortunately he would have to leave now. So sorry and Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. He would really have to go now. Sorry, but yes. He had to. Go. Now. And Catherine didn't see how he made his way down the stairs, past the cameras and out of the Clinique. According to their sketchy calculations the city tram was due any time, and soon they would, again, be on their way to the bus station where the buses ran for Terezín. The room where the doctors had performed their surgery. Room 10. That had been the plan, and so far it had worked beautifully. So far, it had.



The timing was perfect. The tram pulled up after a couple of minutes, maybe two, maybe 90 seconds. No idea. Catherine held on tightly to her large bag when she got on. She took the next seat that was empty, balancing her load precariously on her knees. The package containing both the cardboard box and the computer was quite large and had gotten harder and harder to carry, the closer she got to the tram stop.

Christian sauntered onto the carriage at the last minute and slumped into the seat next to her.

“And?” He stared flabbergasted at the cumbersome package on her lap.

“Fine,” she said, “all done,” she said, patting the top of the cardboard box that was sticking out. He turned towards her to inspect the bulky parcel she was holding.

“What’s this?”

Curiously, he reached into the bag to read what it said on the cover of the huge cardboard box.

“This? Well-.”

“Catherine? Shoes? Shoes? You must be joking. How can you-,” he was shaking his head at her.

“Women! Absofuckinglutely.”

“Shut up. I really-,” she hissed, leaving the sentence unfinished.

“What? You really needed shoes, love? Now? You got perfect timing.” He rolled his eyes and was still shaking his head.

“These are not shoes, they are boots, huge boots *love*.” How dare he call her “love,” she only scowled at him.

“I cannot believe this. You steal a computer *and* a pair of boots. Do you want to boot the computer with them? Yeah right. Let’s boot the computer right now.”

She couldn’t help but snort out loud with laughter. The joke was simply too good.

They were relaxing, mission nearly complete. So, it seemed.

“You are crazy.”

“I know, but hey, UGG boots, they are so warm. They are the best. I couldn’t resist.”

“Ok, put them on,” he was challenging her, “Women and shoes. Incredible.” He was still laughing.

“No, not here. It is too crowded,” she was keeping her voice down, looking around timidly. She had ventured out too far, already. Drawing even more attention didn’t seem to be a wise thing.

“Why not? Do your socks stink? Holes in it?”

“No, it just doesn’t look right.”

“Look right? I didn’t know you cared about how this looked-. Boots, I cannot believe this. You are so crazy.”

“You know I’ve never ever stolen anything in my life. Can you believe it?” Catherine whispered holding on tightly to her package.

“So, you thought it wouldn’t matter if you took a little more this once?”

“Exactly,” she couldn’t help but smile. Soon her feet would be snug and warm.

“Crazy.”

“I know. This is all crazy”.

She put her head onto the cardboard box and sighed. The brown material felt warm on her cheek and she couldn’t wait to put on what was inside. Warm lambskin boots. But she had to be patient, they were still a long way from the city centre, stuttering away somewhere in the more modern suburbs of Prague. Most of the time the tram was rolling away smoothly on straight tracks, occasionally breaking into a uncomfortable squeal when changing direction. It took about half an hour and one more transfer to get to the bus station from where the buses left for Terezín. When they finally arrived, Catherine hurried off to the ladies’ room. She went into one of the

cubicles, all eager to change into the new boots. Carefully, she opened the cardboard box. Carefully, she looked inside. Her heart stood still.



It couldn't be true. The box didn't contain boots. Then, without touching its content, she closed it again, just as carefully as she had opened it. She looked up, she looked down, took a deep breath. Her heart was racing. She checked again. But it was still there, all nicely bundled up. She shut the box again, hurried out and searched for Christian. He was buying a couple of sweet cinnamon rolls at a local bakery booth and was just receiving his purchase and some change.

"I have bought us some rolls. You're hungry? Where are your new shoes?" He asked, looking at her feet and raising his eyebrows. He broke off a piece of the sweet, soft yeast bread and shoved it into his mouth, savouring the taste. This was good. *Gosh, he was so hungry.*

Catherine grabbed his arm tightly and pulled him away from the counter.

"Come, come with me. Quick," she hissed.

"You wanna kidnap me? Hey, careful, my roll," he was laughing out loud at her.

They walked a few steps and then she looked around. No one was overhearing them or paying attention. At least, she couldn't see anything suspicious from where they were standing.

"It is full of. It is full of money." She whispered, trying not to gasp out too loud.

"Money?" Christian asked incredulously, nearly choking on his sweet roll. She hushed him and started whispering

“The box. It is full of Euros, there must, I don’t know, thousands and thousands of them.” Catherine was so excited she could hardly breathe. She was panting. Christian gave her a stupendous smile.

“You must be joking. Is it real?” Catherine looked crestfallen at once.

“Real? Why shouldn’t it be? I mean, I don’t know. You think it might not be?”

Her face fell. Christian grabbed her by the arm and led her away from the booth.

“Come on, it could be counterfeit,” he said, heading for a darker corner at the station while pulling her along.

Dimitrios

It was nearly half past four. The gloomy, late afternoon seemed to stretch on forever. Soon it would be dark again. The parking lot was deserted and he looked at a grey concrete wall. There was only one graffiti. Incredible, usually they were all over the place. He tried to trace its verves, comparing them to the tags he knew, but he couldn't make head nor tails of it. He didn't recognize this one. The lines wound on like a snake, like a bear, like some strange wild city animal immortalized by a lone hunter. Cave paintings by homo cosmoplasticus, not in chalk, not in soft earth colours, but straight out of a paint spraying gun, permanent for decades and centuries to come. If the wall held on. If the city did. And man. And the Eurozone. If they all held on.

It was already getting dark again and Dimitrios let the car running with the heating on. His mind wandered back home as he read the latest news on his cellphone. The situation in Greece was catastrophic. Bankruptcy, corruption, salary cuts and unemployment wherever you looked, Grexit looming over their heads. The young

generation was deprived of their future. Why didn't they make room, room for the young ones to develop their ideas, start up their businesses, raise children, build their families? Why did the neoliberals, the banks, the whoever-they-were run the market, run the world? Why did the big companies control it all, why did the Chinese work so much cheaper and faster? Why did everything collapse now? Why did journalists, politicians, why did no one answer his questions? Uncle Linus had just texted him, he needed money and needed it soon. For taxes. More taxes.

Had they really not worked hard enough, not saved hard enough? Uncle Linus had worked his ass off being totally consummated in the process. What he now got in return for his labour was: a tax rise, more taxes and another tax rise and, not to forget about the real benefit: more work. And more work, and more work. And guess what in addition to smoothen the deal? A tax rise. And then the threat of the Drachme. Again and Again. Some thought it would be best if Greece left the eurozone going back to the Drachme, but Dimitrios doubted it strongly. Setting up new Federal Banks in all European countries wouldn't be easy too. And then again, Germany, and its protagonists: Merkel and Schäuble getting no results, some results, not enough, not soon enough.

He was scanning through the small pages on his cell without reading anymore, the headlines kept repeating themselves. He couldn't take it all in, he couldn't understand it anymore. Obviously, his beloved fatherland was close to be divided and devoured by the present economic crisis. It was like cancer, eating up everything that was in its way and there was no cure, nothing that could stop it. More than 2000 years of solid great history swept up in an age of plastic and consumerism. What a shame. What a loss. And all he could do was witness it from afar. His hands were bound, tied

by marriage he added silently. Ema would never ever leave Prague and neither would Lenka, and to be true about this; neither would he. He would send Uncle Linus that money. There was no way he could actually go and support him right now. He really needed to find Catherine Cohen. He really needed that promotion, the pay rise. He couldn't give up, not now.



His cellphone rang.

„Hey.“

„Hi“

„You got it?“ Dimitrios asked.

„Yes, it's here now. Come and pick it up.“ It was about time they paid him for keeping their backs clear. 50'000 Euros wasn't much for the service he had provided, he kept providing.

„And have you done completed the studies. How much longer - ?“

„No, we haven't finished yet. We still need more time. They cannot say whether it works, not yet“ .

“Ok“ . He rang off. How long would it take them to get these drug tests done? One would think the pharmaceutical companies knew what they were doing. He had googled the numbers: They spent 80 to 90 billions a year on these clinical tests, money that went a long way in emerging countries. Greg sighed. It was wrong to take bribes. He knew. Coming from Greece he even knew *all* about it. Bribery kept destroying his country brutally and on a daily basis.

But then it was also wrong that these drug tests couldn't be done in the United States, in Switzerland, in Great Britain. They should be allowed there as the procedures were safe. So, in this case, the bribes helped further a good cause. The tests will help the sick, the poor, especially the poor. How else could they afford medication? The patients got everything for free, Dr. Linder had explained. And Greg was convinced; the tests were safe, not quite legal, especially not under present European law. But after all, lawyers were not doctors, weren't they? Who cared for European law if lives could be saved? If children could be spared? Who cared for Europe anyway? Brussels, Germany, France. Screw them all.

His salary was low, too low for what Ema and Lenka and Uncle Linus needed. Austerity was all about saving, saving, saving, when everyone knew that spending money mattered most, nothing else really did. That was another reason why he had made sure the Prague Police turned a blind eye on Dr. Linder's patients. Not such an easy thing to do after Eva Cohen had stirred up so much dust. All these made up allegations on that website. That girl's vivid fantasies had nearly broken his neck and Dr. Linder's. Life had become even more difficult after she had turned up dead. But so far he had managed to keep out of harm's way, keep the tests safe. It was important that they could continue without interruption, Dr. Linder had stressed that repeatedly: the test series must be uninterrupted. In fact, it had gone quite well with that handbag turning up on the crimesite. What a miracle. All the attention centered elsewhere. Very handy indeed. Catherine Cohen; the guilty one.

Risks were involved. If Adna learned the truth about the drug tests it would get really tough for him and for Linder's research. He was not so sure Adna would take this lightly and accept his point of view. Adna might not defend the clinical studies,

even if Linder said they were now in their last phase, ready for proper and legal production and procedures any time soon. After all, Adna had to stand for European law; that was what *she* was paid for. He closed his eyes. What a mess. He didn't want to think about this now. Luckily, Linder had suggested early on to run the tests out of some pharmacies protecting the Clinique thus.

So, the Prague police had been looking in the wrong place for the wrong things: They were searching for kids with missing kidneys and livers, at the Clinique where nothing out of the ordinary was happening while illegal drug tests were indeed done at some of Prague's pharmacies. Eva had got it so wrong, it was amusing. Quite hilarious in fact if it hadn't turned out so tragic. What a waste that she had had to die. She had been such a lovely girl with a lively imagination, close to delusion though. Where did she get all these ideas from? And then publish them online without any solid evidence at all? You had to be mad to do this. That crazy aunt of hers, she must be delusional too. And once you had it, contracted from your ancestors, didn't it then run in the family? Haunting generation after generation? How lucky that his family was sane and serene, that he and his kindred had gathered all their wits together. No fits of madness in his family. Well, not real madness. That moussaka on the carpet didn't really count. *After all, we were all mad, somehow.*



He tried to focus on the positive parts. The parts where he did get even luckier: Hard to imagine that such things would even happen these days with everything going down the drain. And yet; Catherine Cohen's handbag had miraculously turned

up at the crime site. What a miracle. Can you imagine? What a relief. Suspect found, guilty as charged. Evidence secured. Perfect murder case, drawing even more attention away from the illegal tests. Wasn't that just great? Did he really want to look into the Cohen case any closer? Did he really want the matter to be investigated properly? No, he didn't and Greg shouldn't either. He would make sure of that. What did he know why that girl was really dead? What did he care as long as she would just shut up? And now she had even shut up for good. And the mother guilty of her death. Tragic, but in fact, quite good. In fact, just simply great.

What was important now was to fabricate an official version that was air-tight, water-proof and sealed with a royal, regal, kingly seal not only made of wax, but true gold, *aurum verum* as Greg would say. That was the job for Dimitrios to do. In his head, he had already written most of his report: That crazy mother had killed the crazy pregnant daughter with intention or without, as long as she was accused of being responsible of the crime. Dimitrios thought it was more than likely that she had performed some witched abortion on her. Here was what happened: Catherine Cohen had abducted her daughter, taken her to the shack, then narcotised and killed her daughter. In that shack. For reasons that were obvious: The girl should have continued her education instead of becoming a teenage mother at such an early age. Better be dead than a young mother.

He had googled CC. What a record as a lawyer, All these papers she had written for all these legal magazines. And all in addition to her daily lawyering. What an ambitious mother. Surely there could be built a case against her. He would provide the judge with all the right evidence. Pure fabrications of his head, but if corroborated with the right evidence, who knew? He might actually get through with it. It was worth

a try. The handbag was a start and a good one, even though he had no idea how in the world he got so lucky.

He continued putting the pieces together in his head. Catherine had been trying to give her daughter an abortion to rid her of a cumbersome child, then things went terribly wrong. After all, she was a lawyer not a midwife and not a gynocaelogist. However hard to imagine that a mother would do this to her daughter, that was the way it must have been. Terrible indeed. Apalling. But wasn't that what Catherine Cohen had researched on her computer before she had left for Vienna? Coathangers and abortion clinics. All the names of these websites were meticulously listed in the Swiss reports. And it was quite a list. Another piece of evidence that would corroborate his story.

The only question was: Why hadn't she gone to a proper Clinique? Abortion was no longer illegal in Switzerland, she had money and all. Had she really wanted to kill her own daughter? Probably not. That was the major inconsistency in the story. He would have to find a way around this. Maybe Eva wanted to keep the baby and the mother wanted her to get rid of it. Then they got into a fight. Women could fight, how they could fight. Oh baby -. Then the mother drugged the girl. Out into the shack. Attempted Abortion. Daughter dead. Sounded about right. Some people were brutes. Like mother, like daughter. Brutes. Served them right they got hunted or arrested or even killed in the making.

To cut a long story short: That was why Dimitrios would take the 50'000 Euros, to close the case. To turn a blind eye. And that was why that was a good thing. The pharmaceutical industry could afford it. It wasn't as if he was stealing from the poor. Not him, he wasn't. He wasn't even stealing, he was "taking" from the rich, money

they were giving voluntarily and he would provide certain services in return. So, it was kind of a proper salary, a proper legitimate deal that only the law didn't approve of. There would be no harm in this, on the contrary, only good things would come from it.

He leaned back and closed his eyes. The station waggon was his mighty cathedral that sheltered him from this chaotic world that was his life. He relished the peace before the storm, before all things would come loose again. Come hell or highwater, he would stay put, see this through to the end. Then his cell phone went again. He got it out of his pocket and looked at the number. Why did she call again?



„Hey.“

„Have you already been to my office? It is gone.“

Her voice sounded agitated.

„What do you mean?“

“Did you take the money?“

“I didn't. Why are you asking?“

He shifted around nervously.

„You didn't? You must come here at once.“

„I can't. Not right now. Sort it out yourself,“ he hung off, not sure that line was altogether secure. These days you could never be sure. Were they betraying him? What was gone? His money? What was she talking about? His heart began to race. What if Dr. Linder had never intended to give him any money? What if the promise was only

words, words and hot air when he had kept word? He had simply believed they would pay for his services. It seemed kind of logic. The tests they did were illegal and they did them on real people, real children. Sick people. Sick children. He leant back and tried to breathe regularly. The minutes passed. Should he call her back? He really should. Why had he hung up so quickly? He should have made sure he had understood correctly.

Greg

His cellphone must have been ringing for minutes. He he had been dreaming rather vividly that his alarm clock was buzzing and he couldn't find it first. In his dream he was trying to switch it off, but it wouldn't stop. Finally, he realized that the tone was coming from somewhere else: His mobile. There was actually a caller in the line. It was Alexej:

"Christ, Greg. What is wrong? Were you in a coma or what? Why don't you answer?"

"Agh. Answer what?"

"I've sent you a dozen texts, saying I found the computer from where Eva supposedly sent that message to CC. I had to access some -. Well-. Never mind. The address is in

Litoměřice. From the WiFi of a hotel. It's all in the message I sent. In the attachment.

You saw it?"

"Litoměřice, near the ghetto?" Suddenly he was awake. That would be kind of close to the shack where he had found Eva's body. That could work.

"Yes, you should have all the details on your phone. In fact, I sent it all hours ago. You never got back to me, so I called."

"Alexey. Thanks. I really appreciate it."

"You'd better hurry. I cannot keep this for much longer. Adna's been strutting around the floor all afternoon. And Dimitrios texted me her picture. He said he'd pulled it from the cams at the clinique."

"He can do that? Dimitrios?"

"Don't be daft. The Clinique did it for him."

"They did?"

"Was the picture from yesterday? I don't understand," Greg was fully awake now.

"She is wearing some kind of wig. CC alias Blondie. But face-rec programme says it's her. She looks quite hot. In fact. Wait-. Let me check. It's from today. After lunch. It says 1:34 pm. Precise enough? Any idea why she went back?"

The wig. Yes, Greg remembered that. That was what she was wearing when he first saw her. Had she really gone back? Back to the Clinique? Wearing that wig? What was she up to? Why had she gone back? And why was Dimitrios on this already? His head was buzzing.

"Can you forward that picture to me?"

"Yes, sure. But listen. I've got other stuff to-." Greg cut him short.

"Sure. Can I book a Chevy online? I'd really need one now."

“Greg. Shut up!” Then Alexey cut the line.

Greg had a headache from working all night and sleeping all day. A habit he had dropped long ago, as it didn't agree with Adna's work ethic. But when he had gotten home the night before, he had started working on a new strategy to find Catherine. It was way past 5 am when he gave up and went to bed. When he couldn't sleep, he got up again and did more research on that awful video Catherine had seen. He was obsessed with that girl. If he couldn't find and help Catherine, maybe he could help solve that case. But of course, he couldn't. He would need better computer skills to follow the digital tracks. He only made it to bed when a new day dawned upon Prague. Sleeping from nine to five, was not a good idea, it had made him dizzy and nauseous. It took a moment to understand what had to be done next.



He switched on his cellphone and entered the code that was required. Then he checked his emails for the details Alexey had sent him *while* he was drinking his coffee *while* ignoring the four texts and seven emails Adna had sent him during the day. What did all this mean for him and for Catherine? The message Eva had sent to her mother was sent from the Churchill Hotel in Litoměřice. Litoměřice, near Terezín? The concentration camp? Greg took another sip. Coffee was good. Black, no sugar, as always. He was still trying to get his systems back to work. What had zonked him out most was his own totally idiosyncratic behaviour in the last few days. He, Czeck police force's best man, had been acting in full knowledge against his very own policies. In the name of love, or whatever you wanted to call that itchy feeling in his guts, he had

hidden a suspect in his apartment, nearly made love to her, saved her from what was a very likely arrest at the Clinique. He let her run and then denied all this to his superior, worse lied to his superior and a foreign police officer. He held his breath. If found out, he would be in serious trouble. He really had to do something to steer away from the iceberg that was about to rock his ship, buying a life-jacket wouldn't do, not this time. Besides, in Prague you couldn't buy life-jackets in winter.



He put the cup down. His eyes fell onto Catherine's keys. The Peugeot. It must still be standing somewhere in front of his house after he had used it to get to Jacob's Ladder on the morning when Catherine had left his apartment so hastily. He had left the keys on the kitchen table, the exact same spot she had put them down. In case she came back, but of course she hadn't. Incredible. Catherine had been so upset that she had simply forgotten to take her keys, her car. And she had never returned to claim them or claim the car. On his way out he put on his coat and off he went into an early evening. It was still cold, but the wind was not as bad in the streets of Prague as elsewhere. The houses were sheltering you from the worst. Luckily, Greg still remembered where about they had parked the Peugeot.

Adna wanted them to drive different vehicles so they would move less obviously and more anonymously through the city. She called it to *go dark*. But growing older he found the task of finding different cars in different positions on a daily basis more and more troublesome. And this wasn't even a car that belonged to Prague Police, it was CC's car. Had he left the Peugeot near the green grocer's or next

to the butchery? No, the butchery was the week before when he was driving that old Fiat. He had put the Peugeot near the Chinese Take Away. And there it still was. Waiting for him ever so patiently to take him to Litoměřice. It seemed only fair to take Catherine's car on that business of hers. He would get petrol on the way.

Some idiot had given him a parking ticket and Greg threw it away without even looking at it, then he jumped into the car, swerved out onto the busy road and turned on the heating. It would take a while until it got warmer. And as it did, he smelled that the car carried Catherine's scent, her smile, her look, the touch of her hands. Her tears and laughter. Her laughter. He could hear it ring out loud. First, it was hard to bear, sitting there without her, in fact *with her out* there, somewhere. But then he got more and more used to it and the memories didn't haunt him as much. Would he ever see her again? Would they ever be together? What an *Amour Fou*. That was what this was unless, he could clear her name, and that was at best wishful thinking. Maybe she had been to the shack. Maybe she was indeed involved in her daughter's death. Maybe and maybe not. Time would tell and evidence. It was hard these days to commit the perfect crime. You would always be found out in due time. The police would always find out. He would. It didn't look good. Why did she ever leave her handbag out there? It didn't bode well.



The drive out of the city was slow. There were too many trucks, too many cars, too many bikes, there were too many people that wanted to move from one place to another. Sometimes he hated Prague, though these times were scarce, sitting in the

capital's traffic jams was definitely a moment he could have done without. He tuned into his favourite radio station. Radio Prague, one for all and all for one: One Station, One Nation. Stupid slogan but you couldn't expect too much these days. They kept on playing Beyoncé's song 1+1. *I got you. If I ain't got something, I don't give a damn. We ain't got nothing without love.* She had a beautiful voice. His mind went blank and he only focused on the music and the traffic. When they broadcast the news, he switched off the radio. He didn't want to hear about the Cohen case. The humming of the Peugeot's engine was the only sound to penetrate the silence that surrounded him. It was wonderfully peaceful, - or at least a wonderful illusion of peace. And illusion was good enough for now. It seemed to take forever to get into the suburbs, but once there he found his way quickly into the countryside. After leaving the freeway, he had to concentrate hard on the road. There was the sudden surprise, a black cow that trespassed, a truck with only one light, a tractor on its late way home pulling a carriage full of pigs, cut tree twigs, illegal whiskey. It wouldn't be long now. He stopped at a petrol station to gaz up. The tank was full when it was only 6 kilometers to go until Litoměřice.



When he finally arrived in Litoměřice it didn't take him long to find the right place. The Churchill didn't look as shabby as the other resthouses he had passed, but clearly his grandeur was long lost and the painting of the facade stemmed from another decade. He wondered if Eva had stayed here, if she had been hidden here? Was it her who had sent that message to Catherine to meet on the Ferris Wheel in

Vienna or had it come from her abductor? Had she been abducted altogether? The place he was looking at was indeed close to the shack where he had found her body. It would take you about an hour to get there if you walked fast, maybe two hours if you were pregnant. Did she walk from here? Was she driven out there? Did the kidnapper stay in the hotel, using her login? So many questions.

He was lucky, a small delivery truck was just pulling out from a parking slot opposite the hotel and he reversed into it, handling the Peugeot with ease. Then he switched off the engine and rubbed his palms. They were sweaty despite the cold. He would wait, see what happened. CC. The name seemed appropriate. Instead of "hear, hear" it was CC as in "see, see"; CC as in Catherine Cohen. They all called her like that at headquarters: Dimitrios, Alexey, Adna. It was simply CC. He liked the ring of it. Would he ever see her again? And if they met what would he say? Would she ever trust him? Could he even trust her?

He looked at the grey outside of the hotel, what stuck out predominately were its old fashioned purple curtains in some of the windows. Most of the lights were on now and from the outside it looked like a cozy place. The question he kept repeatedly asking himself was who had contacted her. From the coroner he knew that Eva most likely had been alive at the time when the message was sent. She might therefore have sent it herself or might have been forced by someone to send it herself. Or her account was hacked in altogether. The more pressing question was: What did she do out there in that shack, that remote place in the middle of the forest? Which pregnant girls goes out to a shack in the woods to give birth, gets rid of the baby, then dies with her mother's handbag sitting next to her? But these were all correlating facts. What were

the causal realtions, the factors that held it all together like magic unfathomable spiderglue a web?

Really, it was a riddle. Someone, anyone could have taken Eva hostage. It seemed the most likely theory, some sick weirdo who wanted to have his way with a pregnant woman. Some criminal. But then the coroner had contradicted his theory. She hadn't been molested or harmed in any way, she had simply given birth. It would take a while to find out to what extent a third party member was involved in her death. Bottom line was: The baby had torn her so apart, not some Jack the Ripper Imposter. More likely it all had to do with her exposing the organ transplantations on www.change_the_world.com. Maybe someone from the Clinique had abducted her? Left her there to die in her hour of need. But who would have profited from her disappearance. Dr. Linder? Had she hidden Eva here at the Churchill and sent that message? And why involve CC at all? This was all muddled thinking. It simply didn't make sense, not yet. He couldn't see through all this mess and his crazy guesswork just made him angry. He needed more data, more evidence, better explanations. More witnesses, more interviews. As it seemed Prague Police didn't know a thing yet about the Cohen case.



He was reaching for his mobile phone as there was an incoming message, but then his attention was diverted otherwise. A woman approached the Churchill, hurrying towards the main entrance. Her slender figure looked familiar. She was carrying a large bag that contained an even larger cardboard box. It was so big parts

of it stuck out of the bag. A young man was following and she was gesticulating wildly to him and talking very animatedly. He didn't trust his eyes, this was CC, Catherine Cohen alive and kicking, accompanied by some strange young beau he hadn't seen before. Who was she with? That guy. Who was he? She was focusing hard on getting the huge box through the doors. What was she doing here? And what's with the box? Had she sent the email message to herself after killing her very own daughter? For a moment he was completely thrown off balance.

Faster than lightning, he took a decision, opened the door and got out of the car. It was colder than in Prague. The smell of night had already embraced the late afternoon draining all light from it. Slowly he walked up and down the pavement, checking out the situation. Was the young man a danger to Catherine? Had he kidnapped her too? Was she in his power? A rather ridiculous thought, Catherine was hard to kidnap. She would know how to help herself. He could tell from experience. Then he crossed the street and made for the entrance of the hotel. He went inside. CC and her mate were gone, just as he had hoped. The receptionist looked at him from behind his computer. Greg crossed the lobby and flashed his badge.

"Prague Police. Inspector Gregoriovich Shats. I will have to ask you a few questions."

"Sure."

The man looked at him more curious than intimidated. He was old and by the look of him, he must have lived through most of the 20th century. The guy would have seen a lot. His hair was white and there were deep lines in his face, wrinkles around the mouth and especially around his eyes. Greg, his expensive shoes and his badge didn't impress him much. Hopefully, he would nevertheless volunteer some information when questioned.

"What's your name?"

"Isaac Joss. I am the receptionist," he pointed at the name plate that stood on the counter and Greg felt foolish for asking. He was obviously distracted.

"Right. Mr. Joss."

The old man shook his head:

"Call me Isaac. Everyone calls me Isaac."

"Isaac. Fine. Did you host a young girl, about a week ago? Very pregnant," he showed him Eva's picture on his cellphone and closely followed the man's reaction. He saw him flinch and Greg could tell at once that he was barking up the right tree.

"Yes. Pregnant. She came on, let me see-.", he was leafing through a huge guest book.

"Here it is: She came on the second of January. Is she the girl that was found dead?"

He asked timidly.

"Which name did she use?"

"Use? I don't know. I've got her here as Eva Cohen. That is the dead girl that is on the news, isn't it? I was wondering whether I should contact the police or not. But then-, I wasn't sure what to do. You know."

"Most likely it is her and we have now found you. So, don't worry. We are trying to find out what happened. When did she checkout?"

"In fact. She didn't. I told Abraham from the start it wasn't a good idea to take the girl out to the shack."

He fell silent, playing with a pen and rubbing it between his thumb and index finger.

His hands were large. *The shack*

"Abraham?" Greg had taken out his notebook now and was running his fingers through the damp pages to find an empty slot where he could jot down a few notes.

“She was so pregnant. Due in a few weeks. Not that I could tell, but my wife said so”.

He was shaking his head at the folly in the world, at the folly of the young especially.

“Do you know the surname of the man who took her? You called him Abraham? Do you know him?”

Greg asked eagerly. *And yes, you should definitely have contacted us,*

“He didn’t take her, she went all by herself. She said he was her grandfather. His name is Abraham Cohen.”

Cohen. Greg let his pen sink. That was an unexpected turn. Was he the tenant of the shack? When he had checked the land registry he found the shack belonged to the community as it was on public ground. The name Abraham Cohen hadn’t come up.

“How come you know Abraham Cohen?”

“Everybody knows him. He is one of the survivors. I mean the ghetto. He lived abroad for years, but came back a while ago. Must have been a couple of years.”

“How did she find out about him?”

“Sir, I am really sorry, I don’t know. We don’t ask our clients that many questions. She seemed very happy to have found her grandfather. I didn’t think anything was amiss. I didn’t ask if and how and why. Sure, you understand. We like our privacy and the privacy of our customers.”

“Sure.” Greg kept nodding while taking notes.

“Do you know why she wanted her mother to come to Vienna?”

“I am sorry, Sir. I have no idea.” He seemed genuinely surprised at the question.

“Your clients have access to the internet?” Greg asked. The man pointed at a sign and explained:

“There is free WiFi and we also have two computers here in the lobby.” He pointed at two small desks”. Greg nodded. She could easily have sent the message from here. Or someone else could have.

“Have you ever seen the girl at the computer?”

The receptionist was distracted, looking fearfully over Greg’s shoulder.

The woman who was standing behind him looked so pale, as if she would vomit onto his freshly polished floor in a second. Greg, worried at the unusual stare of the receptionist, turned around and, to his great dismay, looked into a beautiful pair of blue eyes. There was surprise in them and disgust and gentleness, such a myriads of emotions that were so closely interwoven that he felt he would blush and perish any minute. But he didn’t. It was Catherine Cohen.

Meeting Again

Catherine was thunderstruck. Should she pinch herself? Was this really him. Again? Didn't this take an end? He was stalking her and he was doing it well. How come she left all these traces? It seemed he was police indeed. There must be a full team supporting him 24/7. Someone was indeed watching all these cameras and following up their findings feeding him her whereabouts straight from the horse's mouth. Greg started talking:

"I've let you go," he said drily, looking straight into her eyes.

"You have? How come you're here now? Change of mind?"

Before he could answer her questions, Catherine turned around and left the lobby as fast and dynamic as she had entered it. She escaped quickly to the stairs, fumbling for her key to their room as she was heading up the stairs. What a shock. Greg here. Why had he come? Arrest her again?

"Catherine. Please let us talk. I am really putting my career on stake here." She turned:

"You are?" She nearly snorted with rage, with laughter.

"Yes. They have pics of you at the Clinique, my boss wants to know why I haven't brought you in."

"So, you're coming to get me now?" She was accelerating her steps.

"I mean no harm. Look I don't want to chase you" Greg said from below. He tried to remain calm, his voice steady.

"No harm? Yeah. Right."

"Look here, my badge, just look at it."

She had stopped walking and looked him in the face:

"You mean the one you bought online for your sick games? I have no idea what a Czeck Police badge looks like."

"That's what it looks like. Come on. It isn't bought. Catherine. I really am police. Really. You can check online."

He ran his fingers through his dark hair.

"Right, online." Catherine said ironically, she wouldn't believe him.

It drove him insane. She broke free from his grip and walked towards her door. He was coming after her. Catherine opened the door and wanted to slam it into his face, but Greg was faster. What was she thinking? That she could outsmart him so easily? He had in fact had some real police training. Not that he would have needed it in this case as he simply put his right foot into the gap and forced the door open before she could close it. For a split second it jammed and then Greg threw the door wide open. Quickly he stepped into the room, following Catherine on her heels.



On the bed sat Christian, the notorious shoe cardboard box open before him, counting money, a lot of money. There were bundles and bundles. Greg closed the door behind him. There was silence. They all looked at each other. Greg looked at the money and then Catherine started to laugh.

“Oh no. It can’t be true. This is absurd. I must be waking up any minute. Like now. Now would be a good time, come on. Wake up.”

She was clasping her arms around her chest, pinching her upper arm.

“Ok, not waking up”, she murmured, “ok, ok.”

“What is this?” Greg asked, pointing at the open cardboard box.

“This? As you can see,” Catherine answered, trying to regain some poise.

“This is money. Oh God,” she held her hands in front of her face to hide her red cheeks.

“Money?” Greg asked.

“Money.” Christian said, folding his hands as if to pray.

“Yes, from the Clinque. Doctor Linder’s office.”

Catherine tried to come up with some sort of explanation that would justify her sudden wealth. Her mind was blank. The words wouldn’t come. She shrugged.

“You are joking,” Greg said.

“I am not. Why should I?” she said, “Do I look as if I am joking? Is this what this is to you: A joke?” Catherine sat onto the bed and grabbed a handful of bills, holding them into Greg’s face.

“Yeah, right”, she sighed and lay down, closing her eyes to all this. Christian took over readily.

“So far, I’ve counted 18’000 Euros. And I think this is only about half. It could be up to 50’000 Euro. Do you think we’ll get to keep this?” Christian gave Catherine a nudge and she sat up again. He looked at the nicely stacked bills he had piled up on the mattress and the rest that was still sitting in the box.

“Money in a cardbox?” Greg asked, “and you want to keep this?” He was trying to ignore that Catherine was lying on a big French bed with a much younger man. *What was going on here?* He was determined to find out.

“A shoebox, not a cardboard box” Catherine said. “There were supposed to be boots in there. Shoes, that’s why I took the box.”

“You took it?”

“I took it.”

“You did say “took” the box. You mean took as in stole the box? You’ve wanted to steal shoes?” He asked incredulously, raising his eyebrow. She remained silent.

“I am not going to explain this now. No, I am not. I don’t have to explain this.” Catherine said exasperated. She was kind of talking to herself as if no one else was listening.

Greg’s mind was exploring some of the options as he was intensely staring at the money, at Christian, at Catherine. *How was she involved in all this? Where did all that money come from? Who was the young guy?* He couldn’t make heads or tails of this. One thing he knew: She became more and more fascinating to him. However, this development was increasing his predicament, things would get worse when she was not only a killer but also involved in laundering money. He had never really checked if she was Eva’s mother for real. He had always taken her word for it. Maybe she was a hitman, the young man her helper: They may have killed Eva and this was their

reward? Everything seemed possible for a split second. He pushed the thoughts at the back of his mind.

“Believe it or not, I thought these were boots. And believe it or not -. It is the first time ever, in my life that I stole anything. I wouldn’t have -. I didn’t -. What a mess.” She was trying to connect with herself again. It didn’t help that Greg was here, or Christian and all that money she simply found absocackinglylutely - or whatever that word was- disconcerting. Stay on course was really hard these days when all she ever wanted was find her dead daughter’s baby. Where was the little one? How could she ever find it when she had so much other meaningless stuff at her hands? Men, Money: A double menace to thwart her mission.

“But what were you doing in Dr. Linder’s office? Why did you go there *again*?” Catherine didn’t answer. It would be too complicated to explain.

“And who are you?”

Greg turned to Christian who was still absorbed counting bills. He came out of his reverie when Greg addressed him.

“My name is Sörenson, Christian Sörenson. Pleased to meet you. You are?” Catherine looked at the two men making formal introductions to each other. Was this getting any weirder?

“Greg Shats. Prague Police. I am here to investigate the death of Eva Cohen, Catherine’s daughter”. Catherine didn’t trust her ears. Investigate Eva’s death? It sounded so official. That was incredible. *He was indeed police? She may eventually have to believe him. He kept repeating himself. He might acutally be telling the truth. How else would he have found her again?* Christian nodded at Greg, but then he continued counting the

money, he was whistling to himself. The tune sounded very much like Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday Darling by Conway Twitty.

“What do you know about Eva?” Catherine snapped at Greg.

“I found her at the shack, in the woods. It was awful. Your bag was found there too and so I was sent after you to Switzerland”. He decided not to mention the true reason why he had gone to Bern. It was embarrassing at this stage and would only complicate matters further. He might tell her about Anichka later. Some other time. If really necessary. Now it was time to come clean on what really mattered. She had a right to know and he had really wanted to tell her for so long. He tried to start at the beginning:

“I checked out your flat, in Zimmerwald and then I recognized you from the pictures in your file. So, I followed you. Beautiful car. Also, it seemed the natural thing to do. Then I lost you again at that resthouse in Germany where you got petrol. It was pure chance when I was right behind you in the snowstorm. I was looking out for that old BMW not the Peugeot,” she only looked at him blankly without really hearing what he was saying. More words came out of his mouth:

“Since Eva had filed her petition on www.change_the_world.com. I had been responsible for what we called the Clinique case. We were looking for doctors involved in organ trafficking. Just as Eva had claimed. We are still watching the Clinique. When Dr. Linder called because of your trespassing into her office I was notified by the head of security at the hospital and so I came. To arrest you. Do you think it was a coincidence that I was there? The rest you know yourself. I did let you go. You must give me credit for that.”

“Credit?” Catherine looked at all the money, then searched his eyes, trying to drop all that irony between them, sweep it out cold.

There was a minimal moment of mutual understanding. There was truth in his eyes and strangely enough love. Catherine was rather bewildered. She had liked him so much when they first met but after seeing the movie on his computer, things had gone sideways, gone south altogether. She was still so disgusted she didn't have any feelings of romance left for him. He had been lying before. Keeping stuff from her, the truth, essentials that mattered: All that way from Austria to Prague. All these hours in the car. All that nonsense he had told her while keeping to himself what really mattered. Spying on her, interviewing her. From a legal point of view, she might as well sue him for not following procedure. If he was telling the truth by now she could actually turn this into a case. Catherine Cohen versus Greg Shats. Always a pleasure. She didn't have time or energy nor was she willing to bear his lies and stories any longer. But it would have to wait or Catherine would miss her appointment with the wicked weirdo as she had begun calling the old man. Adoption or Death. He was out of his mind, everyone seemed to be these days, but her life, and the baby's were running on his clock. She had better hurry.



"Catherine. I really want to help you. You must trust me." The guy was repeating himself too often, never a good sign. Loops: always dangerous, always boring. Like the Ferris Wheel. Worst mistake in her life she had ever made. Letting go of that bag on the Ferris Wheel.

"I can't", she said wringing her hands until they were white. Christian felt obliged to mediate between them.

“She is being blackmailed, she has to take the computer to Number 10 where the doctors performed the surgery.”

Christian grimaced at the word surgery. Then taking another stack of bills and savouring their feel, he continued counting the money. Greg cottoned on immediately.

“Is this ransom money? For the baby? Don’t pay. Catherine. Don’t. Let us work something out. Catherine you must tell me what is going on. I will call in a team immediately.”

“No, I can’t. Take the money,” she snorted. “It has nothing to do with this. Seriously. I saw the box, I thought these were boots, so I took them. I didn’t know it contained money. We have no idea where this comes from or what it is about, don’t we Christian? Christian, don’t we?”

Christian was barely listening, he was so engrossed in the process of counting: “22’000 Euros and more to come. What absofuckinglutely – I mean Catherine, if we get to keep this.”

He was shuffling through the bills, licking his index finger repeatedly. There was a big fat grin on his face.

“This is fantastic, you know. No one will believe me.”

“If we don’t arrest you and keep you in a Czech prison for a couple of years,” Greg threatened.

“Years? Come on. Months, days at the least. Truly. You should say, “Thank you.””

Christian continued indignantly:

“We do all the work for you, get out of the Clinique what is most likely illegal money, let’s say nearly 50’000 Euros, plus a computer.” *Plus a computer.* Catherine winced at the mention of the laptop. Christian continued:

“And you all you can think of is a threat, a lousy threat? A couple of years? On what charges?”

“All I want to say is that for the time being you cannot tell anyone. We’ll first have -.”

“Sure. I will not put it on Twitter, don’t worry. I will tell my grandchildren. Easy. Wow. Look at this. Here come another 10’000 Euros. That would be 40 Grand by now. Or was it 30? Now I’ve lost track. Oh no, please don’t tell me I’ll have to start all over again,” he moaned.

Greg tried to focus.

“You said you got one of their computers?”

Catherine walked past Greg and reached for the computer notebook. She closed it determinedly, put it in a bag and clutched it to her breast. Time for action. Time to move. She had better get this done, and get it done now. And by herself. Adoption or Death. Ridiculous. She had to think of a way how she would get that baby after she had handed the old man what he wanted. She couldn’t allow herself to be distracted by Greg’s questions. It was her grandchild after all. She tried to silence the men:

“No. You two can take all the money, but I’ll take this.” She patted the computer then checked her watch. It was nearly half past nine. There was still time. She had better not be late.

“I want to go. Now. We may need some extra-time to find a way in if the gate is locked.” She looked at Christian for support.

“Are you coming? You said there were a couple of things you’ve wanted to ask the old man.” Christian didn’t look up.

“And the money? He asked.

“The money, the money. Who cares for the money? Stupid.”

"I do", Christian said: "Stupid yourself."

"Alright. Stay here and I'll do this by myself."

"Do what? What man? Where are you going? Catherine, you must tell me what is going on." Greg demanded.

"Really, I can't tell. Please let me go. Please. Greg." She was begging him now and he sensed how serious she was about this.

"I will come with you," he offered distinctly.

"Don't."

"I'll come. You cannot take the computer. It belongs to the Clinique and I can confiscate it right now. It's evidence." Greg insisted. Catherine rolled her eyes.

"Greg, I need to pass this on. I cannot give it to you. I can't. Simply can't." She starred him down, he starred back. Then he looked away.

"Do you have a weapon?" She asked

"Always." He patted his hip. Catherine nodded, not sure if she wanted to believe him or not. What had Brigid said: "You're not in the Mafia. You silly cow." But now that was exactly how this felt: Weapons. Money, Hotelroom. Cheap B-movie that was. All that was missing was blood sputtering, splaying and spurting all over. *Heaven forbid.*

Catherine held out her arms, holding onto the computer with one hand.

"So, if you want the computer, shoot me," she ventured, her voice was trembling. Greg only looked at her, then reached for her wrist.

"Don't be silly, Catherine."

She shook him off determinedly and he let go, reluctantly. *Ok then: No blood.* He couldn't touch her again, somehow she had set a spell on him.

“Alright. If that is settled, may I please leave then? You are sure you’re not comin’?”

She addressed Christian one last time.

“No, sorry, love. I am sort of sorting out the finances. Any ideas what you want me to do with all this? Shall I split it threeways or shall I split with it straight away?”

Christian was the only one who was laughing at the nonsense of his creative wordwork. Catherine didn’t think it was funny and neither did Greg. He understood that he had to decide between the money and Catherine, f he didn’t want to wrestle her down. He gave it one last try:

“Catherine. Don’t go. Theoretically, I mean technically, I mean you are under arrest. Let’s wait until my colleagues are here, then you will be interviewed and we see what we can do for you. There are special teams for this. I am sure we shall get your grandchild out alive. Don’t go anywhere right now. It is too dangerous.” Catherine rolled her eyes at him.

“I cannot assess the situation, especially if you keep everything to yourself. You must tell me what is going on. Sit down. I shall question you properly right now.”

“Good Luck with that”, Christian mumbled sotto voce, “not sure you are gonna get anything out of her.”

“When did you last see your daughter?” There was a pause. Catherine was putting her boots back on.

“Catherine.” She tied the long shoelaces of her left boot, ignoring him completely.

“Last time you saw your daughter?” Then, she tied her right shoe, then raised her head.

“You are not serious, are you? You don’t really want to question me now, do you?”

She fiddled nervously with her hair.

"I've really got to go. Greg, if you want me to stay here, you'll have to handcuff me to the bed. I've got to show. I don't care for your colleagues, or interviews, or anything. I only really care for my grandchild. Please. Greg. Please." The way she looked at him made it extremely hard to go through with the normal procedure. He would let her go, again. It was, he knew damn well, idiosyncratic to all his life-long habits of policing, it was so totally way out. All the reports that would follow. All the real interviews. Lawyers, Paperwork. Maybe even judges. It would be a nightmare. In fact, he should confiscate the money here and now and that computer and handcuff her to that bed as she had suggested. And he should call in reinforcements. But he wouldn't do it, he wouldn't and that was consistent with himself, with who *he* was. He had to see where this was going. They were not done yet. Instinctly he trusted Catherine and the course she had chosen. He sighed and Catherine voiced mutely: *Thank you.*

She busied herself getting everything she wanted to take. Christian suddenly jumped up: "Here take my torch and take AINTON, Catherine." He handed her a small LED torch and his large backback.

"May it bring you luck. You have attempted the impossible and will prevail, as Charles the Bold said. In fact he said it in French: and then the Swiss beat him, but never mind. It's still a great quote and you are Swiss. Right?"

"Christian. Shut up. I don't care and I don't want your mechanical dog or whatever it is, but I'll gladly take the torch. Thank you," she reached for it and let it glide into her bag with the computer.

"It's not a dog, it's a computer, a living being."

"Whatever, I don't want it. And no: It is not a living being. You are aware of this?"

"AINTON lives."

“Ok, Whatever. But I won’t take him. I am gonna do this by myself.”

Christian looked at Greg and Catherine followed his gaze.

“Yes, right”, she said. *He’s coming too.* Her heart skipped a beat. She had better concentrate on what was relevant. *Where was that leaflet?* The leaflet the old man had given her of the small fortress at Terezín. *The plan to number 10 where the daughters performed their slaughter, no where the doctors performed their surgery.* She was really losing it. Daughters. Slaughter. Doctor. Surgery. They were all tumbling in her head.

She found the leaflet on the nightstand next to her bed and reached for it, nearly knocking over the purple glass lamp that was sitting there. The paper felt greasy as if it had been sitting in a scrapbook for years. She looked again at the map it displayed, searching a thousandth time for number 10, the room where the police doctors performed surgery. She had looked at it so often she would find the way without it in the dark. Greg eyed her surreptitiously, trying to guess where all this was going. The old man Catherine kept mentioning had to be Abraham Cohen. And they were to meet him in due time. If he couldn’t question Catherine, then he would surely question him instead. Maybe letting her move freely was the right decision. After all, she might lead him to Eva’s killer. Given, she was not guilty.



“Let’s go.” Catherine was ready, she looked at Greg impatiently and he nodded. “Alright. You first.” Catherine scowled at him and left the room. How disturbing that Greg had found her, even if he didn’t seem like an immediate threat to her mission, he was still a nuisance. A very good-looking nuisance. His profile looked more manly in

the dark when she glanced at him from the side and his hair had gone all black in the semi-darkness. He looked very determined, very dangerous. And he was armed, he would protect her. She felt a sudden urge to stop, hold on to him and kiss him, rest in his arms and let go. But then she got a grip on herself. He was not a prince, neither she a princess and the old man, surely no dragon that wanted slaying. She wanted-, she could do this on her own. She even had to do this on her own if she wasn't to endanger her grandchild's life.

Greg followed after her and they left for the lobby. How would she get rid of him? There was no way he could come along. *Should she knock him down? Maybe not such a good idea all things considered. But then, hey, when can you consider all things?* She would have to knock him out somehow. One way or another.

The receptionist was busy with papers. When he saw Catherine and Greg enter the lobby he looked up and put the papers down.

"I've found something that could be of interest, I haven't finished telling you all," the receptionist said somehow reproachfully, very keen to share his findings and somehow offended that Greg had disappeared so quickly. Catherine looked at the floor.

"I shall wait outside," she made for the door and quickly glanced back at Greg. He was hesitating.

"I'll be with you in a second." She nodded and went outside.

"I'll wait. Don't worry," her voice was icy. Sure, she'd wait.

For a moment she wondered what Christian had planned how they'd get to Terezín. Maybe a taxi? Or then, he hadn't thought of that. Or forgot to tell her after they had found the money. *Whatever.*



“What is it?” Greg went up to the counter. The receptionist leaned towards him: “I found when the girl-, the girl you were looking for. Eva Cohen you said, didn’t you?” Greg nodded and the receptionist continued obliquely:

“She checked out. It was on -”, he turned to look at the screen: Saturday the 7th of January, a week ago.” Greg got out his notebook. He recalled all the events perfectly. The witness had called 158, the Czech emergency number at 11 pm on Sunday, the day after the check-out. She said she had heard the screams more than twenty-four hours before that would have been on that very Saturday when Eva had left the hotel.”

“Can you remember when she checked out? Morning or evening?”

“She didn’t check out herself, her uncle checked her out. Abraham’s son, Levy. In the evening. Must have been towards seven. He came to fetch her key, had her ID and everything, then he went to pack her things. We didn’t think that was irregular. He said the father of the baby and Eva had finally patched it up. What young woman would stay, all by herself, in a hotel out here, when her hour was so close? She could hardly move, she was as large as an elephant.” He checked himself.

“I mean, I said to my wife: Finally, they patched things up, that baby will be born into a nice family, will be well looked after. It was so nice of Levy to help, still speaks Czech fluently.”

“Did he have the baby with him?”

“That I wouldn’t know. Maybe it was in the car. I don’t know. I didn’t see a baby.”

“Did you get a name of the father of the child?”

"No, sorry. I didn't."

"But why would" Greg glanced at his notes: "Levy Cohen check out her things?"

"Oh, Levy is mighty nice, has always been, he said he was here to pick up her belongings. I mean he had her papers. He was so, how shall I put it? Polite? Has always been. He is a good kid." The receptionist couldn't carry on, his voice was failing him and Greg nodded still taking notes.

"Is the lobby surveilled? I'd like a picture of Levy Cohen."

"No, sorry, we like our privacy. No pictures. But I can describe him. About 1.90, tall, brown hair, maybe 30, 40, maybe a bit older, he was wearing jeans and a white shirt. Said "Giants" on the Shirt. He has really grown into a giant. Has always been tall, even when he was kid. He is slim though, not lean, but you know, well-built, a sportsman."

"Colour of his eyes?"

"Sorry, I cannot remember. I wish I could be more helpful. At the time I really didn't make much of it. Was awfully glad for the girl. Things seemed to have worked out for her, well it seemed- then. Given-. Well." he checked himself. He knew that wasn't the right thing to say.

"So, you didn't see her on Saturday?"

"No, I didn't."

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"Shortly after the New Year. I really couldn't tell the day. So sorry. Guests come and go. You know. We don't really keep an eye on them. Although the girl. So pregnant. But no-, I couldn't say."

"Well, thank you, you helped us a lot. If you remember more, give me a call," he handed the man his card.

“Thank you. I will ask my wife. She may remember more. Although, she doesn’t work in the lobby, I simply tell her everything that happens here,” the man was smiling sheepishly as if he had said too much. Greg nodded good-bye and left the hotel.

Who on earth was Levy Cohen? How was he connected to Eva and Catherine Cohen? Abraham Cohen’s son? He would have to ask Catherine whether she knew him. He looked up and down the street. Where was she? It took a moment for the truth to sink in.

Catherine was gone and so was the red Peugeot.



Incredulously, he stared at the black station wagon that was sitting in its place right across the street. She was gone. It couldn’t be true. And he didn’t have transport nor a lead to follow. He should have called Adna and Dimitrios hours ago. Why hadn’t he thought of it? Now it would take precious minutes, if not hours to get a patrouilling police car anywhere near this godforsaken place and for sure he didn’t want to involve his colleagues from Litoměřice. An Inspector from Prague, who had his vehicle stolen; that was unheard of. It would create such mirth and laughter. Scorn and scoff and sneer and jeer. Funny. Funny. He took a deep breath, it seemed the tension in his muscles hadn’t eased for days. She had escaped again.



Well-, he had let her go again.

The Peugeot

Catherine turned one last time to look at the reassuring warmth of the well-lit windows of the Churchill. Christian would still be counting that money. Then she faced the cold, the winter that had subdued the Czech farmlands so totally. It was a cloudy night and there was no light from the moon. Thick winter fog was covering the skies totally. The wind was getting stronger and Catherine hoped that the moon would come out later despite the fog. The cold air stung in her nostrils and she reached for her scarf to cover her face. It was then that she saw the car. Her car. The red Peugeot she had exchanged for Brigid's pumpkin. Oh Pumpkin. It seemed she had driven her in a different life on a different planet. It was so long ago.

But the Peugeot was parked right opposite the hotel. Automatically, she put her hand into her coat and following a well established routine she delved deep down into the pockets and found the spare key she had put there upon leaving Udo's garage. She knew it, she would beat them all. She grabbed the key tight, crossed the street and got

into the car. There was a faint smile on her face. At least some things were working out. Taking a deep breath, she now knew, she would make it in time and she would do this by herself. Screw Greg. Screw them all. This one was for Eva, and the baby. She could really do this without anybody helping her. Quickly, she turned the key in the ignition. Hopefully, she would find her way to the small fortress. She remembered seeing some of the signs when the bus had taken them back to Prague in the morning. That too, seemed incredibly long ago. Days on the run would stretch without end.

It didn't take long to follow the signs to the small fortress at Terezín concentration camp. Catherine used to know a lot about the fortress when she was younger, but by now she had forgotten most of the facts and numbers. However, there were a few she did remember: The fortress had taken a decade to build and was finally finished in 1790. It was named after the Empress Maria Theresa, the mother of Habsburg Emperor Joseph II who had given the order to build Terezín. Its original purpose was to protect Bohemia from the Prussian troops, however, it was later used as a prison hosting such illustrious prisoners as Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria and his wife, giving thus a pretext to the world to behead itself in a man-made catastrophe later referred to as World War I. By 1940 the Gestapo had started to adapt Terezín to a concentration camp. Thousands and thousands of people had died here. She didn't remember the exact number. Catherine thought it was a horrid place whatever the numbers of the unknown dead. Visiting it in the dark of winter and after opening hours was an absolute nightmare. All of a sudden she was scared.



The parking lot was close to the small fortress and totally deserted. In winter the memorial site closed at 4.30 and if Abraham hadn't kept his promise that she would get in somehow, she would have to climb the wall. She would have done it gladly, she would have done anything to redeem the baby. Anything really. She owed it to Eva and to herself. Carefully, she grabbed Christian's torch, felt in her backpack for the computer and then pulled her coat closer around her body. Dark again, about a quarter to ten. She had plenty of time. Catherine started walking towards the entrance clutching the backback with the computer tight to her heart. She was determined to buy her grandchild freedom. Somehow. It couldn't be. Adoption or Death. Adoption or Death. It couldn't be. Couldn't. Her steps fell in with the rhythm of these two ghastly words. Adoption or Death. She was prone to weird meditations these days.

When she reached the bridge that would take her to the entry gate, she was calm and concentrated. Whatever the challenge, let it come. She was ready to face anything. It couldn't get any worse. She had lost everything already; her daughter, her mother and her newly found love. What else could happen? She could get shot, she could die. This was as bad as it was going to get. Death or Adoption. No, for sure she would not be adopted. But death was likely. If they had killed Eva they might kill her too. She really was beyond caring.

Walking over the bridge towards the small fortress, she could see its black and white stone blocks surrounding the gate from afar. The white stuck out clearly, the black was swallowed the more, devoured by the dark. And Abraham had kept his word. Working at the Ghetto Museum he must have a key to the memorial site. The gate was only ajar and she passed the entrance area easily. No one was to be seen. She

thought she could see several candles further down, but she wasn't sure, maybe the dark was playing tricks on her retina? If you press your thumbs hard on your closed eyelids you'd also see spots and dots dancing all over the place like tiny little lights, rumbling and tumbling and gleaming and glowing like fireflies, like luminous fluorescent snowflakes swirling down the funnels icy air thrifts created.

Maybe there were candles down there, maybe there weren't. She didn't know, she couldn't tell. What was for sure: Somewhere out there, she would meet him. Abraham. At number 10. The room where the police doctors performed surgery. She shuddered and felt her foot skip. Her heart missed a beat. She heard some chisels fall, was someone climbing the wall? Was someone following her? The ground was frozen to the bone and each single step she took however cautiously, resounded loud and clear through the night. She was an easy target. Would they attack her now? Would she be dead within the hour? Killed and haunted, hunted within these old stold walls?

There was something above her head. She felt the difference in temperature. Walls. An Arch. She shone the torch above her head and read the Nazi's slogan: *Arbeit macht Frei*. Labour sets you free. Catherine shuddered. Did she really want to proceed? She had to be brave. It was as dark as in a blue whale's stomach. She tried to find the leaflet with the map in her bag, but it was gone. Screw the map. Was it left or right? The map yielded to her memory easily and based on the visual image she got in her head, she made a decision. Left. It would have to be left. She remembered she had to walk straight away from the wall once she was inside, and then left and then straight. Number 10 was at the bottom. But how could she be sure she was keeping track with only a small torchlight? The memorial site was huge. How would she ever find number

10? Had she really lost that damn map? It had been here a second ago. Why hadn't she taken a picture with her cellphone? She began panicking.

Why had she prepared all this with such haste and carelessness when it was all of the utmost importance? For herself? For her grandchild? Why hadn't she worked through this with more diligence and care? There wasn't much time to begin with, but she could have done better. Wasn't she usually thorough with everything, her work? Herself? Eva? Which way should she turn? It was pitch dark. She blamed the money: the money in the shoebox, it had thwarted all her plans and thrown her off her track. That money had taken up so much of her time and energy at a moment when she needed time and energy for saving her grandchild. How excited she was when she saw it first, and Christian, he was really beyond himself. Shouldn't he be here to help? Covering her back? As he promised.



She stepped forward and stumbled upon a large angular rock, hitting her left knee hard on the frozen dirt road. It hurt awfully and she rubbed the spot, wondering if she was bleeding under the thick material of her jeans. It didn't matter, not right now. Catherine got up quickly, tried to calm herself and enlisted her resources: she had a torch, she wasn't cold, she had white sneakers that were not warm, but comfortable, she had friends who were waiting for her: Christian, Brigid, Harvey. Why Harvey? Not Harvey. He was not exactly a friend. He was Eva's father. What made her think of him now? After seeing Greg, after knowing he was a fraud, she'd think of Harvey again. It was ridiculous. Why would she think of him now?

What other resources did she have? She had her wits, her ability to argue any case, her way to improvise, to demonstrate power. She would find number 10. The doctors that performed. Surgery. She would find the place. She would find the old man. Justice would be done. Slowly she continued walking, shining the torch with one hand, holding out the arm of the other so she wouldn't hit anything anymore. The torch was getting weaker.

Was she there already? She couldn't see Abraham. All she saw was the candle. There was a candle indeed. Was that the light she had thought to see from afar? Had her eyes not been playing tricks on her? Now that she was closer, she could see more clearly. The candle was sitting right there in its holder that kept it upright for proper burning. Its incandescent glow came from a white, slender body of an elegant dinner candle. It must have been burning for a while already. The wax was liquid and melting its way slowly onto the chisel ground, hardening at once from the cold. Was she late? She checked her watch and realized that she should have been here a couple of minutes ago. It was already four past ten. What ghastly game was played here? How come she had lost so much time? What had she been doing? She must have been lingering while contemplating which way to go. Catherine tried to breath regularly. She would find Abraham, and give him that godforsaken computer.

Then she saw the second candle as upright and slender as the first, giving off the same intense glow. She walked towards it and saw the third candle a little further away, to the right. It was placed at the entrance to a door. That was the moment she began to get afraid. He had said Number 10, hadn't he? Wasn't this the place? Should she wait here? Should she follow the lights? Was she not in the right place after all? Had she misunderstood? Misheard? Her heart began beating even faster and she knew

she had to take a decision. Then she heard someone behind her and turned around. It was dark, she couldn't see anything. She could only sense someone's presence. The small torch shone into the dark, but there was nothing, at least nothing that would reveal itself to her. It was so "gespenstig", she could only think of the German word, not remembering the English "eerie" for it. She turned around again, facing the candle. Then she heard it again.

She was sure she heard steps. They had resounded clearly between these doomed barracks. Someone was breathing, some living, livid creature was here with her. She had felt a warm draft in her neck. It couldn't be. Was she hallucinating from fear? Was it an animal? It couldn't be. What animal would that be? In winter? In the night? This was not the rainforest crawling with creatures lurking for prey. The wall was too high for larger animals to get in. And she couldn't see an animal. It must be Abraham, but then why was he not revealing himself to her? Who was there? Her imaginations were torturing her. It was hard to steady herself. Her breathing had become irregular.



Catherine was desperately trying not to lose her nerve. The cold crept through her clothes, nagging on her bones, making her shake. Should she enter? The door was before her and when she stepped inside she saw it was not a door at all, but a long, dark tunnel. A black hole. Cold. Moist. Narrow. Long. It stretched before her without end. How long would it be? Then the caption from the leaflet rose from her memory. The map had said: *17. Entrance to the long tunnel , which ends at the execution site.*

She had stared at it when studying the map. And she had wondered: How long was “long” in “long” tunnel, which ends at the execution site? For the prisoner, who were sure to await their end at the other side it couldn’t be long enough. Maybe it offered redemption. Maybe it offered a way to escape. Maybe it offered release and freedom. Freedom. Maybe. Maybe it offered nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing, at best. That was what Catherine thought when she entered the tunnel. That was what she thought before she knew, that all the tunnel ever really offered was death and destruction, demons and damnation: complete and total demolition of sanity, reason and human existence. Annihilation.

There was another candle about 10 meters into the tunnel then there was darkness. Enclosure. The smell of Fear. Moist and humid air, foul with the blood of innocence, pouring forth from it for centuries. Catherine couldn’t go on. She looked back at the candle, at its glistering bright light. Claustrophobia. Was there a light further down the tunnel? She couldn’t see properly. She had to go back. She simply couldn’t go on. Adoption or Death. No, it couldn’t be. Adpotion or Death. That was what made her change her mind. The baby. She simply had to go on, she had to. So, she took a few steps in the dark until she could see another candle, she walked up to it, slowly, carefully, she walked even past the light. But then, again, she couldn’t see another candle. There was only darkness, more foul air. She would chicken out now and turn back, search for Greg. Go back to the hotel. She was so sorry for having driven off without him. Who was she to do this anyway? Maybe he had only been trying to help, maybe his offer had been genuine. Maybe. Too late to find out now.



Then she heard the breathing again, she heard it quite clearly, she wasn't hallucinating, but she couldn't see anything at first. When only seconds later a dark shape appeared in the tunnel behind her, her heart stopped beating. Someone was coming. She could see it clearly. Someone was coming to get her. The way out was blocked. Forward it would have to be. Claustrophobia was moving in and moving in fast. She had to start moving.

Now.

At once.

Forward it was.

Catherine ran into the tunnel, not minding, the edges that cut and bruised her, not minding, the stench, not minding the warmth that all of a sudden enclosed her. Her fingers ran feverishly along the wall. Her nails were splitting and breaking as she was frantically searching her way through the tunnel. Her feet were tripping onto the uneven ground, her breath was racing, she was running, stumbling, falling down on her knees, getting up at once, hunted, forsaken, haunted. Then it happened. She lost the backpack with the computer. It fell onto the ground. She'd lost it. She tried to reach for it, grabbing nothing but the walls of the tunnel. Was there a hole in the ground that had devoured the bag? Where was it? Her hands empty, bleeding. Catherine couldn't pick it up. She looked over her shoulder. She could see the shadow move.

There wasn't time to look for the bag.

The creature was behind her, chasing her. She stumbled forward. Forward. Onward. Then she heard someone scream, back there. Screaming out loud, for fear. Screaming. Her name. Someone screamed her name: *Catherine*. Panic. Long tunnel to the execution site. Long. She ran. She ran. Long. Who was behind her? Abraham? Greg? A killer? Why did she trust the old man? Why? How could she have believed him? How could she be so naïve? How could she even think of meeting him here? They had killed Eva. They would kill her too. She was high on the adrenaline pumping in her system. The trip was a nightmare. The tunnel was long and longer. No end. No end. She ran, the cold foul air penetrated her lungs, her heart, her neural cells, her brain all fired up, all on edge, - escalating. All systems full throttle. Full heat: such calefaction and torridity. She was deliquescing into her fear, into her panic, into herself.



Then the sky. Fresh air. She gasped. Cold air. Gaspd again. No moon. Still Dark. Night. Fog. She ran out, ran out into the open, ran for the open space, ran for the gallows, not knowing where to go, where to turn to, not knowing anything. Her breath was fast, she was panting hard. Blind with fear and raw with shock. All the skins of civilisation peeled from her, exposing her to the elements. Her shell, her armour gone. Gone completely. She ran straight into him tripping over the concrete on the floor. A tombstone. Abraham. He was standing under the gallows and she was stumbling right into his weak arms. He smelled of unwashed dirty clothes, sour and acid. He felt so frail when she clasped his body. And she had lost the computer. It was somewhere in

the tunnel. No, she couldn't go back, simply couldn't. That was it. She had arrived at the end of a very long road. *That was it.*

Then she heard the shots. He heard them too, and span around with the strength and vigour of a young man, despite his age and frailty thus sheltering her with his body from the bullets. He sank down, taking her with him, burying her with his body. "Revenge", he whispered, "Revenge", "Revenge." Then she couldn't hear him anymore. There were more shots, from another direction? Greg? More shots. Someone running, someone calling. A woman? Was this Harvy? Was this Eva? Had she come back? *Eva? Is this you?* There was pain. Terrible pain. Her arm. Warm liquid blood, unclogged, unfiltered. Spilling out. Pain, pain, pain. Searing, sizzling, sweltering pain. There was blood now. Lots of blood. Her blood. His blood. Blood sputtering, splaying and spurting all over. She passed out, being kept warm by the heat of Abraham's body, being kept warm until he grew cold.

Teamwork

Greg kicked against a lamppost. She had gone and wasn't he frustrated. He was behaving like an amateur these days, the woman had somehow vaporated his brainpower, leaving him with a random mass of cells, real solid eukaryotes but useless; All their organelles kept malfunctioning at light speed. Why on earth had he let her go ahead? He hadn't thought she'd find a way to escape. He hadn't thought any of this was a problem. Now it was a full-blown disaster. He felt trapped like a big fat rat in a tiny cage.

Rubbing his hands to get warmer he began pacing up and down, reaching for his cellphone. What next? He needed transport, he needed backup, he needed some sort of plan. He would have to call Dimitrios. And how he hated that. Dimitrios would overindulge in Greg's failure until he'd vomit flowers, chocolate and golden Swiss luxury watches for Adna like the Gold-Ass in The Wishing-Table, the Gold-Ass, and

the Cudgel in the Sack. What an Ass he really was. He really deserved the stick, a good old lesson including the Full Monty: spanking, flogging, whipping. Greg took a deep breath. Why did he get so aggressive? It wasn't Dimitrios fault that he had lost Catherine. And lost her again. In addition, he hadn't really lost her. She could speak to his heart and she did it well: The gentle yet forceful voice of reason, forgiveness, goofiness and love. She would always set him straight. If she was around.

He pulled out his cellphone and nearly dropped it on the concrete. His fingers were stiff from the biting freezing cold and only with great difficulty did he manage to press the right button. The display sprung up to life. He was about to key in the code to unlock the phone when he heard a car brake. A black Mercedes pulled up alongside and the driver wound down the window:

"Alexey texted you too? Anything new at the Churchill?" Like a really bad movie, just when the hero needed help, some jerk comes along. But it wasn't just any idiot. It was Dimitrios. And, of course, Dimitrios would know. Alexey had said he couldn't wait much longer.

"No, it's a dead end, I'll brief you on the way."

Greg jumped into the car.

"We're going to the small fortress, Catherine is on her way to meet someone there," Greg said, taking off his coat. The car was overheated, the long drive up from Prague city had done its stint.

"Who is she meeting?"

"She said the guy who knows where her grandchild is."

"Ok. You've been busy."

"Know where to go?" Greg asked as Dimitrios was accelerating fast, already turning a corner.

"Yeah, in fact, I do. I once took Ema and Lenka. It's just up the street," he looked at Greg and added:

"They hated it."

Dimitrios revved up and took the next to the left.

"Your driving?"

"The concentration camp."

"Right".

"Any trace of the money?"

"Money?" Greg asked wondering for a split second how Dimitrios knew about the money.

"In the cardbox."

"What cardbox?"

"The one Catherine was carrying, didn't you see the pictures?"

"I did, but I couldn't see through the cardbox. Could you?" Greg asked warily. What was he missing here? How come Dimitrios knew about the money?



Dimitrios fell silent, concentrating on the icy road. Greg looked at him from the side. The money? How come Dimitrios knew about the money? That was weird.

"Is there money inside?" Greg asked, faking complete innocence.

"It must be just around here. Can you help me watch out for the signs?"

Dimitrios was stalling for time, he didn't want to answer the question. Greg was alerted. Something seemed wrong all of a sudden. He had said "any trace of the money?" Hadn't he? His partner had said that. He didn't imagine things. Was Dimitrios hiding anything from him? And if he did what was he hiding? Greg was fully awake. Dimitrios knew more than he would let on. If you lied, you were always found out. And he had just found out about Dimitrios, not the whole picture, but some of it. He seemed to lie about that money. He simply couldn't know that Catherine had carried away money from the Clinique. Greg's intuition was intact, he was still, if not at the top of his work, a reliable police officer.

Then a thought crossed his mind. Dimitrios might be on their payroll. The explanation was usually brutally simple, as always. Corruption. Bad man gives good cop lots of money and good cop becomes bad cop. New version of the old good-cop, bad-cop game. A version in which more, new, parties were involved. The Clinique paid Dimitrios so he would do what? What were they paying him for? What was the Clinique hiding? And how could he have been so successful for so long? Had they really fooled him too? They must have been looking in the wrong place or they would have found out. What were they hiding? Murder? The murder of Eva Cohen? But why would they kill her? Why would they want her dead? Because she exposed something that didn't happen?



They were both silent until they got to the parking ground of the small fortress.
"She is here."

"The Peugeot?" It was the only car that was sitting in the large parking area. Greg nodded and they both got out. The night was cold and foggy.

"You got torches?"

"Yes, one. You?"

"I am fine, got a torch app on my cell," Greg countered. They walked across the bridge and found the gate in the entry area ajar. Dimitrios shone his torch at the info board and looked at the map displayed there. Christian had said Number 10 where the doctors performed surgery. That was closer to the left. He would get to her, before Dimitrios would.

"Let's split. I'll go left. You right."

"Ok." Dimitrios nodded, reaching for his gun.

"You think that's necessary?" Greg looked at the gun.

"You never know. A loose woman. Always dangerous," Dimitrios chuckled nervously.

"Yeah, right," Greg said drily.

They parted.

8

Sunday

Bloody Mess

It was just past midnight. Whatever it was that happened then: It was a bloody mess. Things were moving, and were moving fast. Dimitrios couldn't see clearly in the semi-dark of the gothic-like scene staged below him. Someone had opened fire: the earsplitting sound of a gunshot rang out loudly. A single, lone gunshot. Frantically, he tried to make out what was going on. It gave him the heebie-jeebies: A shooter he didn't see properly. A threat he couldn't place. The darkness, all around. The Cold. Movement. A shadow in the dark. He looked down, straining his eyes. The figure running underneath him looked like Greg, moved like Greg. Had his partner fired his gun? The noise had rumbled deafeningly among the historic walls of the fortress, a hollow loud noise, tintinnabulating forever in his eardrums, giving him the creeps. He nearly tripped over the edge of the high wall he was standing on.

Quickly he went down onto his knees. From his eagle's nest, he was overlooking all the strategic points of the execution site of the small fortress of Terezín. *This was where they had hung them, shot them, starved them to death. Back then, when Terezín was in use. Back then, when-*. Steady Dimitrios, steady. It was the 21st century. It was 2012 not 1943, not 1944, not 1945. Now, it was just a memorial site; a large outdoor museum in times of denial and ignorance and [naïvety](#). The fortress had risen from the dead as an immobile, mute clerk of the remembrance to all mankind. A remembrancer of First-borns-un-alive and Tenthhs of Thousands slaughtered, hanged, gassed, quartered. Terezín was a sore vexatious wound to commemorate where the Nazis had shot and hanged Jews and Gipsies, Homosexuals and the Handicapped. The weak. The unworthy. The non-essentials.

He had to get a clear and crisp understanding of the situation below *asap*. There was danger. His life could be at stake. He could die here. That could be it: The end. The current predicament he found himself in, was real, not some surrogate TV show in which some surrogate criminal shot at some surrogate policeman. This was not a re-enactment of some sort to entertain tourists and modern pilgrims standing by, ready to clap their cold hands and share their mediocre pictures on facebook on the spur of the moment. This was for real, and just when his breathing began to go steady again, a second gunshot followed. *Tzing*. Just as loud, just as deadly as the first one. Was it Greg who was under fire? Was it himself? Had someone spotted him up there on the wall? He was laying low now, kind of-, he was a big man. He wasn't hurt, was he? There was no pain. Why couldn't he see more? Where did that second bullet go? And more important: Where had it come from?



Dimitrios couldn't locate the shooter. The crackling loud noise of a semi-automatic had come from further away, not quite as shrill as the first shot, but just as scary and still too close for comfort. What was happening next? He couldn't see properly, but he could sense it. It felt as if the thunderstorm came right your way: The lightning, the thunder, the pounding rain, a blizzard heading for the storm chaser at light speed, full throttle. More bullets would be whizzing around him in no time. He couldn't stay put. He would follow suit. He would take action, defend himself, defend his partner, defend Catherine Cohen. He needed her alive. They were all down there somewhere. And again. He saw something move. Shadows. Things were there, in the dark below him. People. And moving. Plotting. Danger had its own smell, its vapour stung in his nostrils, tickling the fine hairs of the inner membranes of his nose, enticing his entire nervous system to be so alert that all his hormones were running riot among the more lenient fluids of his physiological system. Three of a kind: Ecstasy. Danger. Fear. He tasted them with his tongue, his throat, the gastric mucosa of his empty stomach. He swallowed hard. Bitter. Sour. Salty.

Things were getting out of hand fast, fear took over, this primordial instinct that overruled everything: Civilisation. Etiquette. Pity. Compassion. The gun was already in his hand, had found its way there as a self-moving entity with a life of its own: the epitome of an automatic pistol: it found its way automatically into the hand of its rueful master. Semi-automatic, he thought absent-mindedly, as if in trance, then Dimitrios pulled the trigger. In self-defence. And pulled it again, a second time. More

self-defence. So he told himself. So he wanted to believe. Instantly, he knew that his training would have forbidden him to shoot. He couldn't really see properly, he just wanted to make his mark. The wild had taken over, his instincts had had a say in this. He fired again. Three of a kind. Couldn't be helped. Not now. Not ever. Couldn't. *Ecstasy. Danger. Fear.* God, he was losing his nerves. He fired again, and again and again. Then he reloaded the gun. God, this was good. Realising the pressure, realising his distress.



He had done it. Fired his gun. Pulled the trigger. His finger still crooked, bent, curved as if he was beckoning his enemy to come forward, ushering him to an empty airtight room where he'd suffocate silently. All these candles. There was silence. All of a sudden. Silence. Eerie and still. The stillness. Had he shot someone? Oh my God had he shot someone? That hadn't been his intention, but then that was what guns were for, what bullets were for. Guns and guts. Two of kind. Guns and guts and bullets. Three of a kind.

Was he going mad now? Ema had feared it all these years when he came home wearing his CZ 2075 RAMI, a semi-automatic pistol, made by the Česká zbrojovka, the ČZUB. Why would he remember now what he had been taught at the Police Academy? The piece of useless knowledge ran through his brain, blocking out all other thoughts. He could even hear it in Železný's, his instructor's, voice: „the ČZUB, established to confront the rising power of the German Nazi party, especially after Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland. The aim was to remove the manufacturing of

firearms from the German border.” Here the voice was fading, blending into the look on Ema’s face when he would place the pistol casually on their kitchen desk.

How she had hated him for doing this. Ema who was so afraid of his weapon; his beloved wife who, back then, hated him for nothing but this. Innocent times those were. He heard her clearly now: “If you shoot someone you will lose yourself”. That was what she used to say, what she kept saying even today, her most reiterated credo, and how much had he denied it. He kept telling her that the opposite was true: The weapon meant safety. Protection. Safety and Security. Nevertheless, he stopped the habit of placing it somewhere she could see it, unless he wanted to annoy her on purpose. It was part of his work protecting people, *not* shooting them, not shooting them indeed. Rather be prepared and facing the random and utterly odd possibility that he would have to use his gun. To protect. In action.

Like now. Like now? There had been a shot and then he had pulled out his gun. That much he remembered. Then there was another shot. From further back. Then it had been his turn. Had he shot Greg? Had he shot Catherine Cohen? Were they both dead? He couldn’t really see. The memories came back, kind of. Like a movie played backwards. He had seen her run out from a dark opening in the wall, some kind of hole or tunnel, and then a man in her pursuit. A man with a gun in his hand. He had looked like Greg. Now that his breathing was calmer he had to admit that he had identified the tracker as Greg immediately. He knew it was Greg who had shot first. But the next shot had rung out from the other side, from further away. Someone had been shooting at Greg. Yes, indeed. He had heard it clearly. Not that he could see much. All these candles. Shadows moving in the dark. Was that why he too had pulled the trigger? To defend Greg? Greg of all people? Greg who would work out the truth

about him. Greg who knew already. The money. Why had he mentioned the money? How stupid could you get? Greg would work out the truth. Eventually.

He lowered the gun and sat down, dangling his legs off the high wall he had climbed so clumsily earlier on. Carefully, he touched the pistol's muzzle. It was still hot. He must try to recall each step he had made, each decision he had taken. What on earth had happened? As if waking from a nightmare, he realized that there was cold sweat on his forehead and he was shaking terribly. His fingers were numb from the low temperatures and he was grinding his teeth, a bad habit from his childhood he reverted to when under extreme pressure, such as now. There would be an investigation. Adna would want to know and her boss, he would have to answer to the mayor, the press and everybody else. *Better sort this out now. But what on earth had happened? What on earth had he done?* It was so silent.



Dimitrios hadn't been able to make sense of any of Catherine Cohen's action. He had recognized her at once when she stumbled onto the scene, her slender figure hourglassing her fine waist and the large breasts that didn't go unnoticed. Her heavy grand boobs had to be swinging precariously high underneath her coat, if not in reality, after all she was dressed in a thick coat that pressed everything flat, but then the more mind-bogglingly in Dimitrios's fantasy. To think that he might have touched them, felt their softness, their warmth, their hard nipples, the thoughts left him aroused but with a latent shallowness he couldn't really explain. It wasn't the time nor the place to fantasize about boobs. Not when everything went down the drain. Too

much was at stake. Dimitrios was still shaken by the crime scene he had helped cause. It took him a moment and a couple of deep breaths until he realized what had to be done: he got out his phone and punched in a text to Adna.

She must send in reinforcements and an ambulance ahead. Send it fast. FAST. He spelled the word in capitals to make sure she'd get it. Not that Adna was slow to grasp what was important, but just to make sure it was clear how much he cared. For the record, for the reports. How much he cared. He did care. After all. He cared now. Then, he put his cellphone carefully into the pocket of his jacket, closed the zip, and swiftly, trying not to make any noise he prepared to climb down the wall. He had to see for himself if someone needed help. If that shooter stuck around. What was going on. He hung the weight of his body onto the top of the wall, stretching his legs to get a better grip. His shoes were dangling uncomfortably for seconds, then he let go.

He landed on his feet, but he had scratched his hand and swore silently at the fact that not only his cap but also his mittens were back at the car. At once he got out his gun again. Catching his breath and inhaling the cold air was reassuring and calmed him down. It was chilling. Not Ema's choice. Or Lenka's. They disliked the cold so much. He knew he would have to focus on securing the crime scene, but his wife and daughter would pop up in his inner monologues no matter how hard he tried to repress the thoughts of them. The harder he tried, the more they both stirred within him, getting in the way of his investigations, making him feel not as much awkward as insecure. They led a listless life of their own, rummaging within him without mercy and regardless of the consequences. They had chosen his body as a helpless, impotent host they were continuously feeding on with their long manicured claws: A sacred yet defiled temple for their restless, careless souls, leaving him abominably powerless yet

sound and-what was more important- alive. A slave to womaness and femininity. A slave, yet sound and fury and healthy.

Tediously, he was trying to make out any visual stimuli in the direction where Catherine and her pursuer were last seen. He was straining his eyes, standing stock-still, facing what he believed was East. Dimitrios was waiting patiently, inhaling the fog deeply, filling his lungs to the point of near explosion and then letting the air stream out, silently, pressed, full of tension, like a wild cat ready to launch for its prey. But there was nothing. Prey must be asleep, most likely hibernating. Cold enough it definitely was. What was his next step?

His phone vibrated and quickly he read Adna's message: *Reinforcement on its way. Will reach Terezín in about an hour, ambulance should get there any time now. You're ok?* Was he ok? He didn't answer, but put the phone back into his pocket and took a deep breath. Not long to sort this one out then. He had to get closer. Carefully, he walked in the dark, minding his steps, not wanting to stumble or fall over some loose debris. There were more candles at the execution site. Long, slender white dinner table candles. Some of them still burning, others extinguished already half fallen to the ground, melted away, devoured by the heat, eaten by the cold. Someone must have been staging some sort of morbid and mad ritual here. It was some true gothic horror show. How sick was this? Why was he involved in all this? Why did he have to be out here? His heart was racing. He was waiting, watching the execution site with growing horror and fascination. To feel safer, he gripped his gun tighter and weighed it in his hand. When he nearly dropped it, he decided to put it back in its fitting. He needed his hands to find his way.

Behind an alcove, he had been waiting for what seemed minutes, but in fact must have been seconds. He was listening to his own irregular and pressed breathing. It sounded unnaturally loud. He was not sure what to do. The ambulance would arrive any time now. He would have to give them all the details. He fumbled for the words, the story. Here is what he'd say: "A figure that he had assumed to be Catherine came stumbling out of the tunnel." He thought he recognized her clearly in the light of the two candles that were set at the exit. The exit of the long tunnel ending at the execution site. He now remembered the map they had looked at when they were at the gate. She had sprung out of the tunnel, half crawling on the floor, dragging herself along on her knees, half walking on her feet. Her breasts - . He checked himself. What then? He could barely remember the sequence of things.



She ran straight for a dark shadow under the gallows. It was only then that Dimitrios had realized that there had been someone under the gallows. Or were there two of them? Even three? A whole pack of them? The Gallows. The Gallow Brothers. The Gallow Gang. The Gallow - they could be the Gallow sisters in arms. Women. With guns. Creepy. The shadows must have been waiting for her, waiting ever so patiently. And then there was her chaser, coming right after her. That would have been Greg. The guy who chased her out of the tunnel and out of her mind. And then he heard the first shot. Greg? And then another shot from even further. The pack was stirring, barking, ready to attack. It all went so fast, later when he was trying to give a clear account of what exactly happened he failed miserably.

Space, Time and Action were so annulled in his memory that he didn't recall what was first, what later. Despite all the training. Despite him being there. The gun had been in his hand then, all along. All of a sudden fear was here, hitting him hard. He had better get this right. He tried to access the information he had stored away for such occasions, but it was temporarily unavailable. Where on earth was Greg? Why was he never there when you needed him? That was what he would say: "Why was he never there when you'd need him." What a great line. So true. He was indeed never there when you needed him. Where was he anyway? Where was he now? He heard someone moan. Sounded like him. Just like him. Didn't sound very well though, but he seemed alive enough. Dimitrios took another step, and one more. He walked towards the gallows. Slowly.

Finally, the darkness released a body to him. His blood froze. The jacket looked familiar. It was Greg indeed. His leg was bleeding badly, surely it looked more dramatic in the light of the candles that were still burning than it would have on a bright summer's day. Surely, it couldn't be that bad.

"Greg. What happened? Did he get you?" Dimitrios squatted down beside him, reaching out for him.

"Jesus. Look at all the blood." Dimitrios took off his scarf and wound it around Greg's wound to stop the bleeding. He looked at him aghast.

"God. That hurts. I cannot believe it. I was shot." Greg was wincing, biting his lip hard.

"Is Catherine ok?" Greg asked with clenched teeth, "she was right before me when-,"

"Did you shoot at her?"

"No, I didn't. I tried not to. I shot at the guy waiting underneath the gallows. In fact it seemed like two of them. One of them had a gun. I saw something, the muzzle of a gun...ouch. I can't move. God. What the -."

"Ambulance is on the way. Stay with me. Come on. Greg. Can you hear me? You shot at the guy? But Catherine Cohen was right in the line of fire.?"

"Dimitrios, I didn't shoot her. Catherine was standing a couple of meters away from him. It was all clear. I could see where she was. I didn't hit her." Greg was screaming, his breath was pressed as a woman's in labour. Then he continued laboriously

"She kept running towards him though. God. Women. Run towards a guy with a gun. Why didn't she wait for me?"

"You had a gun too. Guess she was less afraid of the guy she ran for."

Greg was howling out loud.

"You got some painkillers?"

"No, sorry."

Dimitrios looked up towards the wall. It was too dark to see anything clearly. Greg took the prompt.

"Look, I shot at the guy next to her, but someone shot at her. God, if she's -. I can't. Aaargh."

Greg was wincing out loud from the pain in his upper thigh. Greg followed his gaze, looking down upon his bleeding leg. The scarf didn't seem to help much.

"I didn't shoot at you. I aimed further away."

"At Catherine? God that's even worse. You're crazy, you could have hit her, you could have hit me."

"I aimed at the guy with the gun back there. I thought-."

"How could you aim at something you didn't see?"

"I heard -. I couldn't see, not properly anyway."

"You heard?"

"I kind of knew it was you down here, so I aimed further back."

"God. You shot her. I saw her go down. What a mess. What a bloody mess. That leg is killing me. There must be painkillers in the car. Go and get them."

He clenched his teeth.

"Ok. But you cannot possibly have seen much yourself."

"I could. I saw the muzzle light up. She had a torch."

"She had a gun?"

"No, she had a torch. Are you listening to anything I am saying? Aargh."

"You're ok? Greg, I am listening."

"You are?" He was groaning with pain.

"I am. Sure."

"Good. This is great Dimitrios," Greg was nearly passing out.

"Where is Catherine?" He winced out loud.

"I don't know."

"God. You shot her. She's dead. If she's dead, I'll kill you."



Greg lay down his head, exasperated. He began to whimper. Louisa dead. Catherine dead. It couldn't be.

“I’ll go and check, she may be alright.”

Dimitrios started walking towards the gallows. He was trembling and it wasn’t from the cold. Had he shot Greg? Had he shot Catherine? It was possible. He didn’t have to walk very far. There she was. Down indeed. And the shadow that was lying on top of her, down as well. It was Catherine Cohen and some old man he had never seen. Had he shot him too? He couldn’t identify him. Not at once. They’d have to run his picture, get his DNA, ID him right away. As soon as the team was here. Adna would take charge. It would be out of his hands. Debrief and go home.

The old man looked peaceful, relaxed, as if everything was alright now. Dimitrios took his pulse, searched for his breath. He was dead. It was obvious within seconds. No weapon on him, no weapon on the floor. Who had fired the shot? There was a guy with a gun. Greg had seen the muzzle in the dark. Dimitrios couldn’t see anyone else. The shooter was gone and had taken the the mysterious weapon along with him.

And Catherine? She was buried by the frailty of the old man’s body. But she seemed alright. Pulse still there, breathing alright. Alive. She was bleeding quite badly though. Her arm looked terrible. Dimitrios’s cognitive skills were functioning again. It became clear to him at once that it had been him who had fired at them, both of them. He had indeed shot at her, shot the old man. An unarmed old man, a woman. Shot by the police. He would explain. Later. Not now.



She was alive. Thank God. That was all that mattered. She could still be charged with murdering her daughter. He wrung his hands, realizing he had left the plastic gloves for emergencies in the first aid kit in the car. Why was he thinking about such trivialities now anyway? What did gloves matter now? Never mind.

He knelt down beside her. She had her eyes closed, saliva dripping from her mouth. He moved her away from underneath the old man's body. Then he searched her, thoroughly, but couldn't find the cardboard box, nor the money. As if she had been carrying it with her. A huge cardboard box. Stupid. He was scolding himself. It was gone. His hopes scattered. The money. All gone. His money. The ambulance would be here any time soon. Adna would be here. The place would be swarming with police. Ballistic Reports would soon be written. His name would be in the ballistic report. It would come up inevitably. These 9mm Luger known as the 9x19mm Parabellum, they would be found somewhere on the site. How many had he fired? Out of sheer panic? Five? Seven? More? He had shot them. He repeated it to himself: He had killed the old man. He was so old and looked so frail and innocent. He had killed an innocent, old man. If there was a time to walk away from all this, it was now. He was in the wrong country at the wrong time in the wrong place with the wrong people. Everything wrong when the sun was always shining in Greece. Dimitrios got up, turned on his heel and left the little fortress. That easy. He would work on the story later. He had better find that money. He had better go back to the Churchill. It might still be there.

Wounded in Terezín

Greg was in pain, but not in enough pain to pass out completely. He began dragging himself towards Catherine with all his might. Where was Dimitrios? Why didn't he come back with these painkillers? Why didn't help him sort things out? He needed help, surely Catherine needed help. Was Dimitrios helping her? Endless minutes passed. Time was slow, this took forever. He cursed his wound, the affliction it gave him. The pain. It hurt so badly. He moved so slowly. She had to be somewhere over here. It couldn't be far. How hard the ground was, how bitter the cold. His leg. The Pain. It hurt. Slowly he began to move, move towards where he guessed she must have been when the havoc all started. It took him forever. He robbed forward on his knees. His bare hands. It took forever.

Then he made it. Sat down right next to Catherine. She was there. Wounded. Worse. There was a corpse: The old man next to her was dead, shot. Greg took it in, all

at once. It was hard to imagine that the old frail man had abducted Eva, killed her, then stolen the baby. But then he must have had help, he must have had his reasons. Greg could have sworn that someone else had been on the site. Just a second ago. The guy who had fired the shot at him. A tall dark giant. The giant. The guy who had picked up Eva's stuff. Greg swore out loud. Why hadn't he been more careful? It shouldn't be him who was wounded. After all, he was the good guy, he was police. *Goddammit*. He shouldn't be swearing. It never helped. *Goddammit*. He was in so much pain.

"Catherine, Catherine?"

He shouted at her, then whispered.

"Catherine." She didn't respond. Catherine was delirious. Her face. Her gaze. In the light of these awful candles. Some were still burning. Others were dead and gone. She looked him in the eye, helpless, tired, then closed her eyes. Frantically, he tried to stop the bleeding from her left upper arm, clasp the wound with his bare hands, then by binding it off with her scarf, She couldn't die. Not now. But the bandage didn't really do its job, her blood kept seeping right through it. He simply couldn't do it. His fingers were stiff, he didn't have any strength left. The candles were dying, their tiny embers decaying as the minutes past.

It was harder to see anything, to keep the connection with her. Then she fell back and went all limp and soft. She was unconscious now. Carefully, he turned her sideways and lifted her chin. His thigh hurt terribly. He had to help her or she would bleed to death. His own pain nearly killed him, slowed him down. After a moment of rest, he tried again. He took off his coat and his jumper and wrapped the jumper on top of Catherine's scarf, tying a tight knot over her wound, covering it up with his coat.

Was that too hard? Would she lose the arm thus? He didn't care. She had to stay alive, she couldn't go, not now. Then it was dark. All the candles had gone out, one by one. The night had fallen back onto Terezín's execution site. The darkness. The gallows. They were right underneath them.

Was she still breathing? Faintly, Greg could feel her breath on his cheek and he looked up relieved. Surely Dimitrios had called for help. How long would it take an ambulance to get here? How long would it take Adna? It simply took too long, far too long, way too long. They should have arrived by now. His cellphone went. It said Anichka calling. The display was lighting up the dark. For seconds. When he reached for it, he dropped it accidentally. The phone kept ringing, but Greg couldn't reach it. She had a gift to call him in the most impossible situation. Couldn't be bothered. The pain was too severe. Then the ringing stopped and the silence was even the more disturbing. What did she want? Send him to some capital city again? Anichka. Long time since he thought of her. Long time since she called.



How cold it was, so crystal clear the night. Catherine must be cold, lying thus contorted and twisted on the cold floor. He put her head into his lap to keep her warm. He shoved her closer to the dead body, that was still warm, covering her with the thick woollen fabric of the old man's coat. Keeping her alive was the most important. He would keep her from hypothermia, whatever it took. He sat next to her on the floor, shifted her, reached clumsily for his cellphone, finally managed to get hold of it and then hit the keys as hard as he could. Adna would come. She would and she would

bring a team, an ambulance, medicine, a quick shot of good old epinephrine. Catherine would live. He turned to Catherine's limp body and tried to remain calm. She was still bleeding, even worse than before. The blood wouldn't stop flowing out of her. She was fading and there was nothing else he could do for her. He couldn't stop life flowing out of her. He couldn't keep her from going. He hadn't prayed in a long time. Not sure he still knew how. The first words appeared out of nowhere:

Pater noster qui es in coelis,
sanctificetur nomen tuum;

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

hallowed be thy name;

adveniat regnum tuum,
fiat voluntas tua,
sicut in coelo et in terra.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

And from there the ancient Latin prayer just flowed into him, out of him, flowed all around him.

Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie,
et dimitte nobis debita nostra,

sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris.

et ne nos inducas in tentationem

sed libera nos a malo. Amen.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Long time since he lived in a monastery. Long time since he prayed so arduously. Then Catherine stopped breathing.

Escape

How lucky that Christian had found a way to get to Prague at all. In Litoměřice he had stood next to the highway for four and a half solid hours. No more buses during that time of day. The service had stopped completely during the night. He was hiding in a dark corner each time a police car or an ambulance passed. And there were quite a few of those. Busy night in Litoměřice. He wondered if Greg and Catherine had anything to do with this. Bet they did. Sure as hell they did. In that case he'd rather not catch a ride with the authorities, especially not with that hearse that passed him just a moment ago. Someone dead. A corpse. Going to the morgue. Not a good place, not where he would want to be going.

He wanted to get back to Denmark as fast as he could. Hitchhiking back to Prague was the best option under the circumstances, especially given all the cash he was carrying. He wouldn't want to be picked up, he wouldn't want to leave a trail. Finally, a doctor gave him a lift. Dr. Buranik had been called in for an emergency operation at this unruly time of the night. Unfortunately, he had decided to spend the

night with his mistress out in Litoměřice instead of going home to his wife waiting for him in an old mansion in Prague 1. Christian was only too happy about this. Never mind the guy moaning about how his wife knew now. Too bad the hospital had called in the middle of the night and called him at the wrong location. One man's meat was another man's poison. Dr. Buranik's short visit to his *inamorata* surely bought Christian safe passage. And that was that. It was something.

However, when finally in Prague, Dr. Buranik made straight for the hospital he worked at, letting Christian out somewhere in the middle of nowhere. It was a Prague suburb after all, but it took Christian forever to walk to the station. Lucky he had that App. Lucky he had GPS. When he dragged himself into *Praha Hlavni Nadrazi*, Prague's main station at the core of the city it was long after midnight. He was exhausted and his feet were sore. The money he carried had become heavy and the backpack was scratching his left shoulder, he couldn't adjust the rims properly it was so worn out. He paid cash for his ticket to Berlin and waited a quarter of an hour for the departure of the Euro Night Train EN 476 Metropol 2 via Dresden to Berlin at 04:30 am. He hid in the men's room. Awesome. Just the place to be. But he wanted to stay clear of all the cameras and the occasional security guard. He would be in Berlin just after nine. The rest was a piece of cake. Hopefully.



Finally, it was time and Christian got on the train as fast as possible. He found the seat he had booked online only minutes ago without any difficulty. The train was half empty. What luck. Christian relaxed, he even began to enjoy the ride, spreading

his long legs all over the place. All that money. The past hours seemed like some weird dream and he wasn't sure yet whether it was a nightmare or whether he had really hit the jackpot. When Catherine and Greg had left, Christian knew they were bound to be back soon, bound to bring in more police. Leaving straight away seemed like a sensible option. He didn't finish the counting giving the rest of the sum a rough estimate and figured that there was a total of about 50'000 Euros. Ballpark figure. Not too bad. In fact, it was unbelievable. He was sure he had never before seen that much money in cash, not in his whole life. It would be enough for a fresh start. More than enough, in fact this was simply awesome. He had packed up all of it. Every single cent.

What would he do with all that money? One thing he had learned on this trip was that he couldn't write about his grandfather. He had known it all along, all these years when he had wanted to but couldn't write it down. He couldn't tell the story. His grandfather had taken it to his grave and there it would remain. Buried. Rotten. He couldn't dig out some mellow mass and turn it in some fictitious bullshit. Reality couldn't be captured it would remain forever evasive.

Maybe others could tell the story, the historians surely could, the filmmakers could. But Christian? No, he couldn't do it. He would forever fail. As had his grandfather, surviving, when all the others had died, failing them so terribly and their families. It was the worst when you survived and everybody else was dead. No, he couldn't write about this. His grandfather had never really talked about it anyway. How could he write about something he didn't really know? You couldn't write about silence. But he could write Catherine's story. She talked, a lot. And he had had a part in it. Yes, he would write her story. And he needed that leaflet with the map of the small fortress in Terezín. He would put it right at the beginning of his novel for the

reader to wonder. He would write that book that had been haunting him for so long when he was busy saving the net, saving the world and saving it in vain. There was nothing that could be done about Minormous now. It was out of his hands and that too, it still hurt. But there were things he could do, considering all that money. Like write that book

First, he had to get home to Copenhagen safely. First that awfully long train ride. He got out his notebook, started it up, ready to take notes and come up with a draft for an outline. Then it occurred to him that he wouldn't know how the story continued, even how it ended. He could roughly wrap it up until he had parted with Catherine at the Churchill. The rest he would make up as he went along and watched his book grow in letters, words, pages, chapters. He didn't lack imagination. But then? After she left the hotelroom with this over-eager over-handsome policeman? What had happened then? Did they get a room? Probably not.

Had she met the old weirdo? Did he hand over the baby? Despite the threats? Was she holding the little one now? Had she found her Aiden? There was bound to be a happy ending. Maybe not. After all, there had been lots of police cars and ambulances. A hearse. Someone dead. Maybe the worst had happened. Was Catherine dead? A shiver ran down his spine. Was that it? Was she dead? Dead and gone. Forever, wiped out completely by the old lunatic? Everything seemed possible. She might be dead. The end.

He hadn't really thought of this when he saw the hearse. It was always "the others" that died. Never a friend, never yourself. But this time it might have been Catherine. Was Catherine a friend? Was Catherine dead? Somehow anti-climactic to let the story end like this: The protagonist dead, her child handed over to the enemy.

Pure Revenge. Was that it? However, there was something to it. He kind of liked it, it made for a good dramatic ending. A true and solid Shakespearian tragedy in modern times. What a lesson. It seemed logic enough: the old man had achieved his goal. Revenge. He had taken revenge on Catherine's family, had avenged whatever obscure crime Catherine's mother had committed. Christian's thoughts drifted off. The life of a little one was at stake. It might make for a good story. Catherine dead. The little one growing up with the enemy. Quite *the* ending. He hoped to God, she wasn't dead for real. What was he thinking? Absofuckinglutely No. Catherine dead. No. No. If ever he wrote that book, Catherine would live in the end. She'd find that baby. No matter what.



He reached into his pocket for his phone to distract himself, when he realised that it was gone. He had left his cell phone in a bin near the Churchill. Not that he had forgotten it. He had left it on purpose and not without stamping on it until it broke completely, SIM card wrecked and all. It had been a well considerate move so he couldn't be traced. That was how they did it in all the TV series. He had seen it many times before on screen. Leave that burner phone. Get rid of it. And it always worked, in the movies it did. Not that his phone would have been a burner phone in the first place. And not that he would have thrown it away in a place like New York where the crooks threw away burner phones like chewing gums. No, it was his own personal, correctly and properly registered phone, with all his contacts, phone numbers, emails, everything. In addition, he had thrown it away in Litoměřice, where people probably

went through the garbage before they disposed of it for good. He might as well have brought it along. In fact, he should have.

For it hadn't occurred to him at the time that without this very phone he himself couldn't contact anyone else. And to add forgetfulness to mere stupidity, he had also forgotten to write down Catherine's number before leaving the phone behind. *Who wrote things down these days? Write down phone numbers? He wouldn't even have had a pen, leave alone some paper.* How would he ever contact her again? He could have written her number into his notebook. He could have, but he didn't. How could he forget? Christian broke into sweat. Hopefully, she was on facebook. Sure she was. She had kids. Had had kids. One kid she had had. She would be on facebook. If she wasn't dead herself. That hearse that had passed him. It had been a hearse, hadn't it? He gloomily looked out the window. How many more miles until Berlin? How many more miles until he was in Copenhagen?

Anichka's Call

The night was silently slipping away. Greg still sat with Catherine. He had been resuscitating her several times. 100 impulses straight onto her heart, then another 100 per minute. It was excruciatingly painful, but somehow he had managed. The cardiac massage had indeed helped and she had started breathing again, just before the ambulance came. The paramedics had stopped in front of the fort and texted him for further directions. His hands had nearly died off from the cold. When they finally found their way to the execution site they had only brought one stretcher. He had ordered that Catherine would be taken to hospital at once. She was the most important. He could wait, would wait. For the next ambulance. He could hold out just a little longer before he'd pass out.

Now she was on her way to the hospital and they weren't sure she'd make it. The paramedics gave him that look. He must have looked like a lunatic, screaming at them so loud. Full blast. Not very professional. Not very policeman like. Better not

think of this right now. Greg was full of her blood and exhausted from the low temperatures. The biting cold had taken its toll on him. The woollen blankets didn't help much. Adna was walking up and down organizing a team of sleepy policeman to secure the crime site. She had arrived after all, and along with her an army of policemen. And she hadn't asked one single question yet. Not spoken to him at all. He had to look bad. He was treated like a victim, not like an inspector. Debriefing was a long way to go.



When Greg's cell phone went again, he felt too weak to answer it. But when he saw that it was Anichka again, he decided to answer it. After all, she had tried before.

"Hey there," she said, she sounded cheerful enough.

"Hey," Greg replied lamely. It took a lot of energy to hold that phone to his ear.

"I've found a way to get my job back."

"You have?" He faintly smiled at her bravery.

"Yes. Adna will love me for it." Greg heard her chuckle silently. He strongly doubted that she would ever be hired again or that Adna would even love her, but he decided to listen to what she had to say. She sounded so enthusiastic.

"I've never told you about the tests I did with Jasha."

"What tests?"

"It was my doctor, well it was really the pharmacist that suggested it. She said free medicine for Jasha if we were prepared to sign some papers. In case something went wrong. Of course I had asked what could go wrong and they said nothing could go

wrong. It was just that the pills were not really on the market yet, not here in Europe. They said in other countries the drugs were allowed and used for primary ciliary dyskinesia. So I signed. They said it wasn't a big deal.

„Is that what he is suffering from? Say again“. Greg felt the pain in his leg increase. He winced out loud, at once repressing the sound. Was that bullet still stuck in his leg?

„Are you ok? You sound strange.“

“No I'm fine. Don't worry.“ He clenched his teeth.

“It's called: Primary ciliary dyskinesia. However, they are not sure whether it's really this. But it seems likely. The saccharin test was positive. You know where they give them a crushed saccharine tablet into the nose and then measure how long it takes until they smell the sugar.“

„Right.“

Greg found it hard to follow the medical details, he had never heard of the disease or the saccharin test. And he was in pain. The second ambulance to bring him in, must be due any minute now. Did they only have one ambulance in this forsaken district? Anichka continued.

„But she also said there were other medications for other diseases they wanted to test. But that wasn't for us. And then, last time when he took it again. I think it was the third phase. After the Beta-Tests“.

“Beta-Tests?“

“Don't ask me the details. That's what they said. Beta-Tests. Well, it didn't go well. There were complications. He couldn't breathe at all, when the medicine should really have helped him. Fact is: Jasha nearly died. We had to rush him to hospital and lots of

questions were asked. I gave them the meds I was given and they were outraged. They said Jasha could have died from taking them.“

He could hear Anichka was nearly crying now.

„They said they should be sued for involving Jasha in these medical tests. One of the doctors used very strong language. And then I remembered whom I had seen there once I went to pick up the drugs for Jasha“

„Who?“ Greg was trying to make sense of what she was saying. It seemed incoherent enough.

„Dimitrios.“

„Seen where? With the doctors?“ Either the story was full of plot holes or he must have lost too much blood. It was kind of hard to follow what Anichka was trying to tell him.

„No. At the pharmacy.“

„He was buying aspirin or something?“ Greg suggested.

„No, I saw him in the backroom, with the pharmacist and the doctor we investigated at the Clinique. I think the name is Linder. Isn't it? Dr. Linder, right?“

„Maybe they have an affair.“

“At the pharmacy where I picked up the medications?.”

“You never know.”

„Seriously Greg. Have you ever heard anything about these drug tests? And when we were researching that Clinique thing, have we ever come across them? It could be important. I have been told they were illegal. Maybe we were looking in the wrong place. I should have realized. I am so sorry.“

Greg didn't answer. His blood pressure seemed to drop. He needed some sugar himself and definitely not through his nose and now that he thought of it, he might

need something stronger. And he needed it fast. He could barely hold the phone in his hand.

„There were no organ transplant ops on kids. There were med tests on kids. I took part with Josha. And Dimitrios, he knew. He knew. Greg, can you hear me? Greg? Greg?“
Had she said med tests?



„And how is all this supposed to give you back your job?“ Greg lulled, his voice was blurred now. *Med tests? On kids? On his watch? Impossible. Couldn't be.*

„I thought *you* knew,“ Anichka said innocently.

Anichka, we'd need proof. Hard solid proof, he wanted to say, but his lips failed him.

He wanted to add, *You may be wrong.* But he couldn't say a word. She was wrong, had to be. Dimitrios, right under his eyes. It made sense. Kind of. Med tests? On kids? On his watch? It was then that Greg passed out. All became a blur. All became dark.

9

After and Before

Nostrum

/ˈnɒs trəm/

noun

1. a medicine sold with false or exaggerated claims and with no demonstrable value;
a quack medicine
2. a scheme, theory, device, etc., especially one to remedy social or political ills;
panacea.
3. a medicine made by the person who recommends it.
4. a patent medicine.

Word Origin

C17: from Latin: our own (make), from *noster* our

Source: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/nostrum>

San Francisco

The baby. They had to find the baby. Whatever it took. Airberlin was usually in time, but there had been turbulances caused by a bad weather spell, tricky huge airholes in particular, and so they got into New York just after sunset instead of early afternoon as had been scheduled. The ride from the German capital Berlin over the great ocean had been bumpy to say the least: Oceanicity overruling all attempts at a smooth passage, the plane pervious to the raging of the elements. It was obvious why sailors said that this time of the year the Atlantic didn't easily yield to the traveller. Well, the captain had said so on the intercom, quoting some anonymous offspring of Magellan, da Gama, Columbus or the like, while a handsome flight attendant was discreetly disposing of another full airsickness bag. Why were people eating all the

time while in the air? Munching crisps and mint chocolate, nibbles and peanuts, and drinking. Drinking: While flying a thunderstorm with over 540 miles an hour. Simply appalling. But then it was the only thing that really did help. Vomit. Brought out all that didn't belong.

And then they had missed the connection to the West coast. And they had to wait. Hours. The whole night. Forever. Catherine wasn't even quite sure where they were. New York? It was hard to keep up, keep track of things. Especially since she had been shot and her life had come away from the thethers that had kept her on course as the mighty sun's stellar magnetic fields kept its planets gracefully in their orbits: An incessant and unfailing flow of power and heat no one could escape from, not even when riding in hotfoot not even when you were Jupiter, God of sky and thunder and queen of all other Gods. Where on the planet had they stranded anyway? Washington? Boston? Reykjavík? Brigid said repeatedly it was New York, but it didn't look it at all. It looked like any other boring airport. New York was supposed to be glamorous, captivating, entrancing, but it wasn't. Waiting in JFK was just as tiresome as it would have been at Seattle Tacoma International or Chek Lap Kok Hong Kong or Kingsford Smith Sidney, anywhere in the world really. Airports were an apopentic, boring drag.

Finally, there was a new plane, but also new turbulences and more airsickness bags. Someone said they were bound to travel on the massive airstreams that brought along the spring rain storms. Some bad spell that was. And then, after what seemed like another endless flight, they finally landed in San Francisco in the early afternoon. And the sun had come out - storm over - just like that. Game over, no longer a kickball of the gods. In a perfect jiffy. The light was so bright and transpicuous it hurt your eyes. Catherine's inner clock was still set to Central European time; which meant it

was nearly time for bed. According to her system it should be dark, tenebrous, long after sundown: Nighttide was rushing in on her neural networks bringing along deep slumber and drowsy European mountain trolls. If only she could lie down instead of heading out into another sunny afternoon. They should have gotten here hours ago. She was too tired to even yawn.

And then it got worse. Not only was the plane contaminated by foul air and delayed, so was the luggage, not contaminated though but delayed and delayed for so long it seemed like pure contamination of one's mind, patience and imagination. The trip; rocky all over. A complete nightmare. Why hadn't they flown without the stop on the East Coast? Catherine didn't remember. Why hadn't they booked First Class instead of slumping around in Economy Class with everyone else? Catherine didn't remember. Not much she remembered these days. The baby that was all that mattered. Finding the baby was all she remembered. She did remember that and she remembered that well.



Brigid had sorted out the flights. Somehow they were faster that way, even though it was further. Something like that. It didn't make sense then, it didn't make sense now, it wouldn't ever make sense.

Worst of all, they were both absolutely exhausted. Catherine was still hurting from the wound in her arm, she could barely move her fingers, and flying long distance, squashed in her seat like a sardine, did not really help recovery, not after laying in a coma for so long anyway. She had lost count on how many weeks she had

passed out, despite having been told on numerous occasions. Nurse Viola had told her in Prague (or was it Violet?), and so had the doctor on her exit interview, she couldn't remember that name either, couldn't even remember the face. Dr. Vikhran, tall good looking Indian doctor from Dehli, she easily remembered. He had told her again when she left the Inselspital in Bern.

The Inselspital was the place she had been transferred to by the Swiss-Air ambulance, after the worst was over. What was it she was trying to remember anyway? Right. The duration of her coma; was it two weeks, three? A month? Not longer than a month that she was sure of. They had somehow kept her day-night rhythm and when she was stable, she was woken. And she had recovered quickly. Some said it was a miracle she lived at all. A miracle. Those came by cheap these days. However, she had to keep reminding herself of the basics, such as the seasons, -it was spring now-, words, the date, names of cities and places, people she knew. Harvey. Brigid. Greg. Eva, her beloved. No. Not Eva. Always remembered that name. Dr. Vikhran would be pleased.

And she remembered a couple of other things. Useless stuff mostly, painful too. Memories kept hitting her like the long, transparent tentacles of jellyfish, afloat in the water and invisible to the eye of the beholder until their touch sent you spinning with pain, roaring searing pain really. The deeper out she went, the more they were, all these liquid, mellow memories, and their bite stung, pulling her down into the dark realms, muffling whatever sound was left in her throat and her breast, her soul muted, abased, broken.

She remembered, she really did: It had been winter. Dark. Cold. The small fortress. Terezín. It had been, how to put it? She couldn't say. Not really. The memory was visual, ephemeral, not ready for language and its stark letters, its rigid syllables

and its complete words and sentences with commas, full stops, semi-columns, question- and exclamation marks: Memory was mellifluously painful, memory was euphonically agonizing; a wounded bitch filled to the rafters of her uterus with little fiery dragondogs ready to scorch and parch what was in their way when they exploded through her leathery skin upon being born.

Her head was still sore. Wounded. Aching. And when she thought of it all, trying to get at the details, her heart started pounding so hard that it hurt. Hurt again. Mornings were the worst, as if a good night's sleep revived, reawokened, the coma she had been put in artificially. *No, reawokend wasn't a word, was it?* Well, she was awake now. Reawokend or not. Her biological clock was set to late at night when in San Francisco it was 9 hours later. What would that do to her very own morning sickness? Would she go through the morning in the evening now? Mornings were so weird, it was then that she dealt with her daily ration of hallucinations and confusions. She kept seeing burning white candle wicks. They were floating in the air and she knew for sure they weren't there. Not for real. It was her share of craziness she was dealt with. Her burden, her thorn in the flesh. They were floating before her eyes, all over the place. Weird. Really, weird. But if there was a picture for all of this, it was that: a floating and burning white candle. It subsumarized the trauma for Catherine. *No, Subsummarize wasn't a word either*, Catherine knew, but was at a loss for the word she would have needed. Subsume was hard to come by, temporarily unavailable these days.

Not remembering words, imagining things, even sweating terribly; according to her doctors, all these were perfectly normal reactions, sound behaviour of her frail physical shell to the trauma she had been exposed to. *Frailty, thy name is woman*, - well it was Catherine. Her name was. And until now it had been a paragon of strength and

paramount to vigour and manly nerve; full of audacity and brave to its limits. Always ready to push it further, to go the extra-mile. And yet, since Eva had gone missing it was normal that she was beyond help. Nothing to worry about they said, nothing to worry about at all. She would recover from her daily share of neurotropic bullshit in no time. Her body had to work out all the medication first. So, they had explained. It would take a while. Like it or not, she would have to be patient, not one of her strengths: Being a patient.

Dr. Vikhran had advised her against this trip and Catherine began to see why. Travelling was tedious, excruciating and utterly, and most, (and was there a superlative to most? Can one say most most? or mostest?) tiresome. Probably one couldn't. She still held her arm in a sling and Brigid took care of all their luggage cases. A job that wasn't so easy to muster, considering everything Catherine had wanted to bring: All these adorable, little, cute things straight from Eva's old treasure box. Just in case they'd find the baby: To bring the smell of home to a faraway land. The baby. Just in case. That was why she had come: to finally find the little one. And now there was hope. Was there? Or was coming here simply ridiculous? Greg had given her that strange look when she mentioned it to him on skype last time they spoke. What did he know that she didn't?

When the airbus landed, and Catherine felt the balmy wind of the San Francisco bay break the nearly air tight shell of the plane, she couldn't really hold out any longer. The change of air when they flooded the plane, it was so fresh, so clean and salty from the wind that came in from the seaside, well it was more than anyone in Catherine's shoes could have borne. Inhaling such bliss after all the irrevocable hours of that tedious exhausting long trip; it was simply too much. She started crying, and then the

crying turned into real-time, grief-drenched-sobbing sighs that quickly turned into the most nerve-wrecking-loud-and-louder sobs. She was totally oblivious to people's reactions around her, given up to that grief, like the goat given up as prey in the leopard's cage: a good old-fashioned ordinary luncheon for a good old carnivore gnashing his teeth at the lustrous juicy meal before him. That was what she was: being devoured, completely eaten up by the grief that so totally and powerfully overwhelmed her.

Not that anyone would take much notice anyway, not now after all the cell phones were back on and the airplane was taxiing to its destination: the final gate of its destination. (Destination twice? Wasn't it one destination only? She didn't get it.) Catherine was howling like some wolf (or like a Ferrari) - (What are differences between wolves and Ferraris? There *are* differences.) - and Brigid was the only one really who gave her a worried look, but she too was too tired to speak. And what was more, she could see Catherine the way she really was: given over to a temporary fit of complete tiredness and exhaustion surrendering to the demons within her, too tired to keep them at bay after having battled with them for too long. They'd go away again into the big black boxes they had been kept in, but for now they wouldn't. For now, they were here to create havoc and Tohuwabohu, disarray and lawlessness, turmoil and bedlam, discord and misrule; frenzied, maniacal, crazed chaos. They were doing the jumping jacks until they got tired, exhausted, until they'd vomit their brains out and their intestines would be slung around their swollen tongues while their fine, crazy laughter rang out louder and louder. Then these chums would hang out until Catherine and Brigid would get off the plane, they'd spooky-dooky Catherine until the space-time continuum of her life would somehow go on.

(*Spooky-dooky definitely was not a word, was not anything at all, but it sounded sooooo nice she could feel it melt on her fungiform papillae*). But until all that was to happen, these demons had brought everything to a stop, to a complete halt, nullifying all attempts to struggle against with or towards them (no you cannot struggle towards someone, can you? Not even your very own personal demons) (or was that how one got rid of them? Was more struggling *towards* needed?). And such chaos they created. And such liberties they took. The noise in Catherine's head, in her brain, her cochlea, was deafening, nearly blasting out her tympanic membrane. And Brigid's silence, in turn, it was soothing and healing. Under the gentle touch of her arm around her shaking shoulders, Catherine eventually recovered from her fit. Somehow they had made it off the plane, onto the bus and into the airport.



And now they were queuing to enter the United States of America. *The America*. Home to all forlorn children. Giver of hope to all lonely and desperate mothers. *No, lonely wasn't a word. Sure wasn't. Negative*. By the look of it, crossing the border would take forever; the queue was about 400 meters and not moving. Loads of people. Very few counters. The very counter they were lined up for was for Non EU and Non US residents only. So, basically everyone arriving right now. The plane had been full of Swiss residents booking their spring holidays with a cheap German airline, not minding the stop over in Berlin. Not if they could save a dime or two. How much longer would they have to wait? How much more would she have to endure? If only she could hold the baby in her arms, kiss its tiny naked toes, cuddle those wobbly

cheeks, pinching them with her fingers and feel the skin bulging out gloriously between her thumb and index finger. Smell that baby smell of freshly baked rolls mingled with profound scents of wild roses and thyme, strawberry cake and scented washing powder. But baby was far, baby was out of reach. Baby was gone. Eva was gone. And still, there was no end to this. She wasn't done yet. Long time. Not done yet. Not yet.



Brigid looked crumpled, her mauve suit had been pressed diligently when they had set out in Zürich more than 24 hours ago, before their initial flight had been cancelled, before they had had to wait in Berlin forever, before they missed the connection, in a place Brigid seriously thought was New York. (As if New York was just another boring airport?) And now Brigid's carefully chosen attire looked cheap and her hair stuck out in various places despite her genuine efforts to tame it in regular intervals. Catherine looked olden. (*olden wasn't a word, but it sounded a bit like golden and golden was nice, so nice*) When in fact Catherine's face had become so ashen and pale that she could even see it herself when occasionally she glimpsed into a mirror or a large glasspane. So many glasspanes at the airport, so much ashes, so many pales. (Was it many ashes? What were ashes anyway? Trees? She was confused now.)

In hospital she had put on weight. Lying in bed for weeks without moving had deteriorated her fitness completely. She didn't feel comfortable in her newly bought jeans. None of her old would fit her. Maybe jeans hadn't been the right choice after all. Nothing of this seemed right, nothing of this would fit. It was as if there were no right choices these days. What had become of her? Everything seemed, and not only

appeared, but in fact was completely and utterly and most most wrong. And waiting to enter the U.S. was wrongest. (*Was wrongest a word? Guess not. Screw language, screw her brain, screw them all.*) Why was there no end to all this?



“Catherine, I am just quickly stepping out. Will you be ok with all the luggage?” Brigid reached for her handbag and let her eyes run over the large arrival hall to find the Ladies Room. Catherine nodded, she had to calm down. It wouldn’t do any good to be so upset. Then she took a deep breath, tried to relax her muscles, her joints, closed her eyes for a second, just as her physiotherapeut had shown her. He had been such an esoteric busybody. Serioulsy, closing your eyes and taking a deep breath? Since when would that qualify as physiotherapy?

Your mother could teach you that, *Darling, close your eyes and count to ten before you speak. Yes, honey. Lovely. One, two, three...You’re doing just fine. Don’t open those lovely eyes of yours, keep these long lashes shut tightly together, honey, don’t cheat. I can see you’re cheating. Come on.* Her mother, no, she couldn’t think of her. She was not Imma, but Heike. Heike? Her mother’s name? Unreal. So, there he was: her very own physiotherapist, teaching her on the art of closing your eyes. Couldn’t remember his name either. Had blonde hair. Nice guy. And his technique seemed to help, she quietened down. The colours blended back in. She was here. San Francisco. The baby. Not much longer now. Hopefully.

The queue didn’t move, Catherine didn’t move, really couldn’t move. She simply had to stay put, endure this agonizing torment. It wouldn’t matter if Brigid

disappeared for a couple of minutes, a couple of hours, days, weeks, years -, even millenia. Catherine would just keep on standing here, stockstill in midst of a sea of strangers, seeking admittance to the United States; the same as people had for decades and centuries. Maybe they moved, maybe they didn't. What did it matter? She would hold on tight to the baggage cart and she would wait. Grow roots here. Become a tree. A Bird. A Truck. Anything really. As long as she would be something else than herself, something other than that bloody, broken mess she had become. Brigid would come back. After minutes, hours, years-, millennia. Then, they would get in. Then they would move on. Everything would be fine. The America. Eventually. In the America. Catherine saw her friend disappear somewhere far in the crowd and waved to her when she turned and smiled at her. Here she was all by herself, the nightmare had not been ended, only prolonged. If only her grandchild lived. If only -. So many things.

At least she was no longer accused of murdering her very own child. Greg had worked miracles by simply believing her story and getting all the evidence sorted out the way it needed (being sorted out). The muscles in his upper thigh was severely injured by the shot he had taken. He had had to keep still for weeks. But as they had first both been delivered to the same hospital, the ominous Clinique, they had found a way to talk and talked they had. After she woke from her coma, after language slowly came back to her, somehow it came in big pieces really, chunks after chunks, trunks after trunks (no trunks had to do with elephants hadn't it? Or with cars? With trees? Tree, Bird, Truck, she was confused now, but when was she not confused?).

And Greg was there before Swiss insurance claimed her and had her *remitted*, *no*, *retransmitted*, *readmitted*, *recommitted* -whatever, had her brought back to a Swiss hospital by air. Greg had taken notes, many notes and written reports from his sick

bed, many reports. The nurses didn't like it, he had been in for a recovery not work, but who could deny Greg anything? The powerful maniac he was. Maverick. That was what he was, a lone maverick. But he had done his job, and more. Taken her heart? At her age? Had he? She didn't really know. She was so confused.

She tried to repress thinking of him, her emotions were too tangled and it was painful. Stuff that needed sorting out later. Stuff she needed time for. Not now. No time now. There were more important things to think of. If she could do any thinking at all. Lots of *things* and *stuff* and *whatchamacallit* these days. She had to focus. Focus, Catherine. There were more important people to meet on the other side of the stupid boring queue that was not moving, still not moving.



The old man had taken her child, had taken her grandchild, had taken revenge for a family mystery that had been kept sealed off for so long. Her own mother a Nazi, helping run the Ghetto instead of being the victim, taking, stealing her childhood's friend's baby, giving her hope in dying, wanting to do a good thing in the midst of evil, but leaving the father of the child so totally bereaved, taking everything from him, his dearest: His most beloved very own son. And now Abraham was dead. Killed by a corrupt Czech policeman. Against all odds, Catherine felt sorry for him. How the old lunatic must have suffered all these years with the little one missing in his life, the snotty teenager missing in his life, the young strong man. Missing. Such a stark empty void there must have been, most terrible to face when you were at your best and even

worse when you had to endure it year after year and year; growing older and frailer and weaker.

And how Catherine could relate to what he had done, she really could. Despite everything. Despite the man's cruelty and the pain he had caused her. Somehow she felt that she deserved it. It served her right, served her family right. Who wouldn't want revenge if your baby was stolen? Who wouldn't subject the family of the kidnapper to the same kind of suffering? Who in his right mind wouldn't put all the blame onto Catherine's family, her mother, her daughter? Why on earth did her mum have to steal little Jacob from the Cohens and turn him into their Frank? Why on earth did she take that baby? Why on earth had she done that? She wanted to help, - sure, and yet -. There were no answers, will never be, only more questions and much bitterness. And sadness. (*sadyness? really?*)

The dead shouldn't be ill spoken off. But the more she came to think of it, the more her mother was to blame for the whole debacle. How angry she was at her for lying, for lying for so long, for wanting to help a friend and thus destroying someone else's life, Abraham's life, her life, Eva's life, everybody's life. That was what mothers did: Destroy everybody's life. Always. When they should be givers of life, they were takers of life, when they should redeem, they would bind, when they should release they would enforce (sentence incomplete. Enforce needs an object. What object?) She couldn't think of a way to complete the sentence. Mothers were bringing death and destruction, to their very own. Ladling out misery and pain to those the closest, the most innocent and weakest, to those that depended upon them with their lives the strongest.

No wonder Abraham had taken revenge on her, on all of them. No wonder he had borne such grief and anger, such relentless pain, such vengeance. And wouldn't anyone do the same in his place? If it hadn't been for her mother, Eva would be alive now. If she hadn't saved that little Jewish brat but let it rot in Terezín while the Typhus epidemic raged none of this would have happened. Why couldn't she? Why couldn't she just have let it be? Catherine bit her tongue. But her thoughts raced on. If her mother hadn't interferred, Eva would be alive. But Mamma Imma had interferred, Heike had. She had.



And what had it all been good for? Her mother's heroic action had been so pointless: Frank had died young in that awful car accident. If at least he had achieved something great in his life like Ghandi or Martin Luther King (or Justin Bieber), if he had been second to none, then it might have been worth it. But so? Why did Frank have to take the detour into their lives, her and Eva's Life? Why did her mother have to take him in like a stray dog, an emaciated kitten? She hadn't been one of the good guys anyway. She had been a Nazi. Why that sudden change of heart? Why that selfless pity on a friend? Only to save her own life, to protect her own pitiful existence? It was an act of mere selfishness. The baby meant foodstamps, the baby meant credibility when hordes of Allies (her enemy really) were moving in. A Jewish baby meant life for someone who had to change sides ever so quickly. Frank, as a matter of fact, had saved Mamma Imma's life in return. Catherine could see that somehow. But how she wished that her mother hadn't interferred. The little Jacob, the little Frank

would have died there and then and her Eva would be alive. Her Eva alive. No strings attached then. None. Once that thought had crossed her mind, it couldn't be undone. History had unravelled itself in a way Catherine could never have foreseen only weeks ago. And how she hated it. Hated every little bit of it. The whole lot of it.



If it hadn't been for Brigid, she wouldn't have survived, not the time in hospital, not the time afterwards. Not this trip with such an unknown outcome. What held it in store for here? What if there was more pain, more death, more dead bodies; stiff and cold? A dead little baby. She wouldn't survive it, not again, her Eva baby dead, Eva's baby dead. A little, little corpse. A little, little coffin. Not now. It would be the end. Couldn't be. Couldn't happen. She couldn't think of it. Where on earth was Brigid? Shouldn't she be back by now? Brigid was so strong, the world a lot smaller and less frightening with her in the picture (*afrightening? really?*). They had been talking, whispering, crying, hugging, blowing their noses and laughing hysterically, -nonstop - throughout all the hours from Zurich to Berlin, and then to New York and were in an ever worse condition during the long hours from New York to San Francisco. Such a terrible fatigue they began to feel on this long distance flight. They had been talking their tongues out, crying their eyes out and found no solution. It was all to no avail.

The money was found easily enough, Christian had been arrested in Copenhagen for taking it (What a mess!) and Dimitrios arrested in Prague for wanting to take it. Catherine was not sure she got that part of the story right. In the end all had sorted itself out somehow, found its natural end. But the baby. What about the little

one? Eva's child had disappeared in the midst of all that confusion. And not only had she disappeared completely, she remained missing. Missing.

Catherine wouldn't get tired reminding herself that at least her own name was cleared. What exactly had happened was still a blur. She remembered bits and pieces. The large sum in the shoe box was meant to be a bribe for Greg's colleague. She couldn't remember his name, something Greek. She had stolen a mercenary's wages, taken it by accident, mistaken dirty money for clean new boots. He was going to use it for some financial transactions in housing in Greece, they said. Corruption. And this tough little police woman whose name she couldn't remember either. She had found out it all came from the pharmaceutical industry to cover up some awful med tests they were doing. On children. Could one believe it? How could one run such tests on children?

And then Prague Police had obviously found more money, discovered it in of the doctor's houses, under the planks of the floor. (set apart for more tests? Or bribes?) Catherine then had lost track of what exactly had happened, it was all too terrible and too intricate. Following all the details, she found too hard, too tiring, too complicated. She didn't read Czeck and each time Greg translated something from a newspaper she simply shrugged. The connections seemed vague and rather far-fetched for her lawyer's ears but, obviously, taking the shoe box had caused a landslide she couldn't have foreseen.

In fact, she had had to protect herself from all the bad news that spilled over her like an ice-cold debris flow covering a mountain road when intense rain settles in for days after heavy snowfall. She was injured, had been in a coma, was mentally unstable when she woke, was mentally unstable now. She couldn't take anything. Even some

of the nurses in hospital had to be kept from her, she had become a well-known celebrity everyone wanted to pay respect to. She was treated with a certain reverence she couldn't explain. Greg explained it was for finding the money, for bringing it all out into the open, but she was too tired to see all the connections.

What she did get was that the country underwent a political crisis because of that shoe box. So good she was in a coma most of the time and missed all the heat. It would have been simply too much for her, overwhelming her in ways she couldn't have coped with. All the heat the press gave: Greg took it gladly. The ball had been in his court ever so often and he played it well, Federer-like, Catherine thought. (Roger-Federer-like. Famous Swiss tennis player? Yeah, sure, you know him.)

The sleeping beauty, that was Greg's favourite bit of fabrication, that was how she was constantly referred to in the news and luckily it was Greg's idea to tell all the reporters that she hadn't woken, when in fact she had and had been taken to Switzerland (*no, a token was something else*). (She knew *taken*, she knew that word!) What a blessing that all the commotion didn't follow her to Bern. It was all such a swirl. From what she heard there was talk of waiving immunity of a member of parliament and the Governour of Central Bohemia. (What was it with him again?). She couldn't remember. Most of the social democrats had suffered from an enormous loss of credibility in the wake of the story. Shoe boxes could be dangerous especially in the hand of the wrong people.

There were bumper stickers and internet memes. The slogan went: *Boot it up, loot it down*. (Dr. Vikrhan had confirmed that it didn't really make sense, but who cares? It went viral. 46M clicks on YouTube alone. So some people must have understood what it meant. Maybe one of the 46 million, or two. Three? Maybe three.) The political crisis

her petty thievery had evoked was enormous. When all she had wanted was boots, all she ever really wanted were warm feet. For some weeks that fact was all over the press and a real big thing. But all things come to an end. In the end. If they did.

By the time she was woken from the artificial coma, it was no longer news, no longer of interest. Her name had mostly kept out of it. And that was Greg's doing. Unknowingly, he had proven an excellent marketing strategist when he named her sleeping beauty. Have you ever heard that Sleeping Beauty owned up to a name? Amybeth? Lilly? Geraldine? Sleeping Beauty didn't have a name. She was Sleeping Beauty and wasn't that enough? And even more important: Catherine's good name had been cleared and that was all that mattered. So, when the storm was finally abating after raging the most around mid-Februray, she had slept right through it. That was that. And it was something.



And the baby. How much she had wanted the babygirl, and how much she wanted it now. For some reason Catherine would continuedly think of the baby as a her. Not necessarily in pink, but a female being, a girl, belonging and pertaining irretrievably to womanhood. And she was sure she was alive, out there, somewhere, some place she couldn't see nor hear her, at least not yet. But Catherine could literally sense her: alive and kicking, screaming her lungs out, weeping and crying just like herself. She simply had to find her, console her, hold her. Be there for her. All the way through. She simply had to. Why was the queue not moving? Why did this take forever? She took a deep breath. The artificially cooled air trickled down her trachea

like tiny icicles in winter when the subzero temperatures hit town. Each breath she took was chilling her from within. Her mouth was dry. She swallowed hard. Where was that water bottle? She needed it right now.

“And?” Brigid had sneaked up from behind and touched her shoulder lightly so that she spilled the water all over her top. She gasped, but laughed at the same time:

“Gosh, you gave me a fright, Brigid.”

“Hey, everything ok?”

“Yes, Sure.”

“Still not moving.”

“No, doesn’t look as if we’re any closer.”

“Too bad, really.”

Catherine tried to steady herself, her fingers were grabbing the bottle tightly, she could tell by her white knuckles and she felt cramps in her hands. The ritual, she needed her ritual: very consciously she tried to release the tension, finger by finger, joint by joint. Just the way the physiotherapist had taught her, Matthew was his name, she remembered now. Physical reactions had become strong these days. Brigid’s light touch had indeed frightened her; friggin’, frackin’, freakin’ triggered something within her. She was easily startled now. It was the nerves, Dr. Vikhran said, they were freed, no fried, no, was it frayed? (Gosh, she hated those f-words). They were rotten. (r was a good sound) But, no, rotten didn’t sound right. Nerves didn’t rot, tomatoes did. And she wasn’t a tomatoe, that she was sure of. The thought made her smile. Sometimes people were happy with small things, like knowing they weren’t some vegetable, well definitely weren’t a tomato. Well, she was happy with that, but she also realized, and that was far worse, that she couldn’t really say what she wanted to say. She couldn’t

even think it properly. Especially not under stress. She'd have to go back to speech therapy and think therapy and whatever get-your-life-back-therapy there was when she got back. Tough Luck.



"Not moving."

"Not moving." Brigid smiled at her. Both of them sighed, they would be late, not that it really mattered, they were late already, by about half a day, but they had texted the new time of their arrival ahead. Now they would miss that deadline as well. Catherine wanted to get out her phone to write again, but couldn't find it: This new handbag wasn't as practical as the one that had been stolen. Not as many compartments. The police wouldn't give it back to her, not just yet, it was still registered as evidence. As if anyone could prove anything with that handbag. It was rih-rah-ridiculous. But nothing could be done about it.

On the other side of customs, they were to meet FBI special agent Joy McMillan and her team who were in charge of child abduction. There might be some reporters, cameras, microphones. The press, yeah that was how these people were called. *Hey, the press, right.* She did remember how they were called. Now, she did. Catherine certainly wouldn't say a word to any of the reporters. She was prepared for the worst, her sunglasses ready in her handbag. The wig she had left at home, maybe she should have taken it too? Did they sell wigs in San Francisco? Sure, they did. Stupid question. Before making an actual decision on whether to buy a new wig right away, maybe really dark-haired this time with long Austrian pigtails held together by green rubbers

(rubber as in rubber condoms?), her cellphone went and she fumbled for it in her bag. She could hardly hear anything, pressing it harder to her ear.



“Yes, we have arrived, yes, we are queuing. Queuing. I beg your pardon? Yes. Standing in line, queuing. Yes. No, I am Catherine. Brigid is right here. No, we haven’t had lunch yet. Don’t worry.” she had to repress the urge to say: “No, I am not a tomatoe” when asked who was on the phone, but luckily checked herself and gave a viable answer. When talking to the FBI you shouldn’t turn yourself into a total lunatic even if you were a total lunatic. That was really what she was, after all that had happened. Totally off the hook.

By the look on Brigid’s face she was shouting too loud and not making too much sense either. Had she just repeated the same word five times? Four times? Queuing. Queuing. Queuing. Dr. Vikhran wouldn’t be pleased. Only tomatoes did that, say the same words all over. She would have a proper laughing fit if she thought of talking tomatoes one more time. She got this picture in her head (were there pictures in her head? Real pictures? In her head? How did that work? Was her brain not empty?) Anyway, the picture in her head was of a big fat, red, watery tomatoe that was wobbling its belly and dancing wildly while singing and talking and rapping and flapping its wings, trying to fly off a huge Jambon de l’Ardèche. What on earth was wrong with her? (Tomatoes wings? Bats in the belfry? Her belfry?) She needed rest, time to herself, time away with the fairies to recover from this long and strenuous trip. The queue in front of her still wasn’t moving.

Later

“And? Have you found the baby?” Catherine looked pale, her voice sounded flat. If the baby was gone, she knew it would take years to digest. She knew it was the stuff that could break her, end her in a clinic, make her lose her marbles, her wits and all sense of reality and common sense. Dreadful, dangerous stuff. Stuff she couldn’t fight off with a smile or laugh off. At least not now, not later, not ever. If her grandchild was dead or sold or used for-. Catherine’s thoughts stopped right there, sealing off the perimeter from lower darker grounds immediately. She simply couldn’t go to that place, she couldn’t think the unthinkable. A baby. Harm a baby. How could you? How could anyone? Impossible.

“Have a seat first. You must be hungry”.

FBI Special Agent Joy Mc Millan was a beautiful red-head. Her warm smile made Catherine and Brigid calmer at once and the relaxation helped in remembering that yes, in fact they were quite hungry. Mc Millan’s face looked noble, like a beautiful Roman sculpture; she held her head high in an aristocratic way, her eyes brave and

encouraging, challenging, demanding. Mc Millan and her team had brought them away from the airport to a hotel (Catherine didn't get which one, all she got was that San Francisco was not as noisy as she had imagined it to be.) Mc Millan had them both seated in the lobby while their luggage was taken to their rooms by one of the agents, a tall good-looking guy (was he carrying a gun? Catherine hadn't seen it).

They ordered a club sandwich with salad and chips and when the waiter had put their meal, huge platters with too much of everything, onto the little white bistro table, Mc Millan leaned back and sighed. Joy McMillan had beautiful slender hands, she held them calm on her lap and when she spoke her voice was firm and soft at the same time. She went right into *medias res*: The baby.

"To answer your initial question. Unfortunately. No. We haven't found the baby." She paused as if she was not sure how to proceed. It stroke Catherine that she wasn't the kind of person who wouldn't know how to continue.

"We haven't found the baby *yet*. I am really so sorry." Catherine started crying at once. It was impossible to hold the tears back. She didn't know whether it was from tiredness, shock or travelling (how many miles? Well, simply many, and long miles. Were miles not all the same length? There were longer miles. Sure there were.) Maybe it was also from nearly going mad with all these words tumbling all over the place in her bloody, in her body, in her bloody, in her bloody brain. McMillan continued.

"You know we found a possible match on a Lufthansa passenger list on the 11th of January. Levy Cohen and Aviva Cohen, born on-", McMillan shuffled through her papers, "9th of January 2012. So, we can confirm that we are looking for a babygirl." She looked up and smiled.

"A girl? I knew it", Catherine sobbed out loud.

“They were checked through from Prague to San Francisco. Security cam’s picture matched. You can’t see the baby-, but the guy”

“You have a picture of the guy?”

“Let me see, if I can show you.” Macmillan took out her laptop and found the picture quickly. She showed it to Catherine who looked at it eagerly. There was nothing much to see. All it showed, was a huge guy pushing a stroller. You couldn’t see his face as a big black cap carrying the SF initials covered his face. From all Catherine could tell the stroller could have been empty. MacMillan was continuing:

“That man here, he was positively ID-ed as the guy in the Giants shirt. He is the one that picked up your daughter’s things from the Churchill.”

“Giants?” Catherine asked, when all she could think of was that she had been right. Eva’s baby was a girl. A girl. She had a granddaughter. Hard to believe. And babygirl was sitting somewhere under the badalchin of that toley. She was gazing at the picture raptly. She didn’t really have a clue what McMillan was talking about.

“You know, the Giants?”

Catherine shook her head.

“Mountain trolls?”

“No sports,” McMillan laughed.

“Rugby? Catherine cautiously volunteered.

“No Baseball,” McMillan smiled.

“Right. Baseball. Ok.” She shrugged. *Rugby? Baseball? Throwing jars of marmelade? What on earth were they talking about?* Cathrine’s headache was on the increase, as if someone had just turned up the volume with a nearby remote control. Maybe she would feel better if she increased her sugar level. She reached for that sandwich. Was that tunafish

inside? Had she really ordered this? She couldn't remember ordering tuna fish. The sandwich smelled strange. She nearly reeked and put it down. No, she couldn't eat this. Whatever they had put into it, it was inedible. A girl. The baby was a girl. Incredible. If only-. If she-. If they-. If -. She tried hard not to hyperventilate. Her Broca's area had been drained completely: No more words left to think or speak with. Her mental and cognitive powers were reduced to nil.

McMillan was still speaking. Had she missed out on something important? She was trying to tune in again. Listening still worked. Somehow.

"Well, we got his address and then we had a team of snipers observe the house for a week before we went in. But there was nothing. No traffic in nor out. It looked deserted and when we hit the place there was nothing. Not even a trace of a baby. The neighbours said the tenant had moved and we are still looking into finding his new address. Please don't lose hope." She reached out for Catherine's arm. But Catherine withdrew it, asking harshly in return.

"Don't you register your people in this country? Don't you know where everybody is?"
"Of course, we do", McMillan confirmed slightly irritated, "but in this case the tenant simply left. He may have moved in with a friend. We don't know."

Catherine winced

"How come? I mean how is this even possible? Why can't you keep track of your people?"

McMillan stayed calm, but reached for her large black leather briefcase. She held on to it and tried to relax. Dealing with the relatives of the victims was always difficult, sometimes even more difficult than deal with the offenders. Their hopes, their dreams, all broken in a crime. Shattered. How could she ever offer comfort and relief? She knew

she couldn't until she'd find the child that was missing so painfully from their lives. And in Catherine's case she wasn't even sure she could deliver anything at all.

McMillan had told Prague police from the start that there wasn't much sense in Catherine coming here. She had insisted on flying out to the U.S. nevertheless. McMillan had read all the transcripts of the interviews the Czech had done. Catherine didn't seem to know anything that was of value to the FBI. It would take time to find the baby after all their leads had gone cold. It could take weeks, months, even years, if worst came to worst it would take decades. The case might never be closed. McMillan's experience told her not to raise Catherine's expectations too high, but then she also had no intention of crushing her completely. Catherine would be interviewed as soon as possible. McMillan was hopeful she would learn more about the case. After all, she may have something new to offer.

"As I said, my colleagues are looking into this as we are speaking. Please bear with us just a little longer. If she is alive, we shall find her. If she's - . Please." She was going to say: "Please don't worry," but then didn't. It would have sounded cheap. Catherine had got up and started pacing the lobby. The place looked nice enough and other circumstances given, it would have been so much fun to be here. In fact, she and Brigid, they could have had such a great time here. This was San Francisco. But right now she could hear herself shout at the red-head woman that was an FBI Top agent.



"Why if? *If* she is alive, what do you mean. If? Are you saying she is dead? I want my grand-child. I want Eva." No, she knew, Eva was gone. This was ridiculous.

Catherine knew she came across as very unprofessional, as desperate. One didn't shout at FBI Top agents, one didn't sob all the time. And yet, she was sobbing again and shouting at an FBI Top agent on top of it (too many tops in that sentence but really one couldn't top any of this. Top-Dee-Dee-Top-Top). Brigid had jumped up and was holding onto her arm. Catherine was shaking beyond control. The little one, dead too. It was too much. What had she done to deserve so much violence, hatred and cruelty in her life? Hadn't she always tried to be good, do good, help others, defend those that were in need of support? Why her? Everything and everyone had turned so terribly against her. What on earth was her crime to reap such distress and meanness? (Was meanness a word?) What had she possibly done wrong? She had absolutely no idea.



The waiter was staring at her, ready to pick up the plates now if it hadn't been for Catherine's untouched sandwich. The hotel manager glanced nervously at Joy McMillan. If the three women hadn't been so good-looking he would have interfered now, but as it was, he didn't really know how to best transfer the drama that was unfolding before his very eyes to some more secluded and private place. He hoped they would eventually leave all by themselves. Most problems in his hotel were resolved by time and patience and politeness. Most were. These women obviously were difficult customers, and he couldn't help but stare at the odd threesome.

"Let us go to your room. You need to lay down."

Brigid tried to comfort Catherine. She nervously glanced at McMillan who had reached for her phone and was now standing besides them talking vividly into the receiver.

Catherine had withdrawn into herself and Brigid had to sustain her with all her might. McMillan ended her call.

"Yes, take her upstairs. She needs some rest. It's been a long trip. Do you need some sedatives? I could send for a councillor."

It wasn't a question.

"We should have brought someone along right away." She began dialling a number.

Brigid interfered.

"No, don't worry, we've just had a long trip. Let's meet again tomorrow. I am sure she will be feeling better then. We shall be coming in around 3, aren't we? For the interview?"

"Yes, right. You're picked up at 2.30. However, I can send someone in the morning if you wish. Sure, you don't want to see that councillor before you come?"

"No, we'll be fine."

"We'll be fine," Catherine repeated monotonously after her friend. McMillan glanced at Brigid.

"Sure, you don't need any help?"

"No. We are fine. Don't worry. She is just tired. Thank you so much for everything. I shall see you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow then."

McMillan picked up her suitcase and straightened out her gray suit. She was ready to roll: A date with a famous baseballplayer, a secret covert operation, a car chase in a dark Jeep Wrangler expropriated from a Mexican motorcycle gang whose *comodore* had stolen it in under two minutes. The Wrangler's windows would be open in the warmth of the early vernal evening; McMillan's hair, blowing in the wind as she was

riding her steel horse over the Golden Gate Bridge. Brigid looked at her admiringly, sustaining her tarnished friend.

“Bye,” she said clumsily.

“Bye, have a nice evening.”

Bridgid didn't have an empty hand to wave her goodbye. Catherine had completely spaced off. She hadn't said anything for minutes; she was near a total catatonic state. Brigid nudged her gently along, continuously supporting her with both her hands and arms.

“Come on Catherine,” she said softly.



Then Brigid took her upstairs, opened her room with her keycard and sat her on her bed. She took her shoes off, and Catherine curled up on her bed, gladly, wiggling her toes like a little girl in a buggy. The cushion was enormous, a big cotton candy entity that swallowed your brain completely when you put your head on it. Catherine knew she wouldn't be able to sleep one second on a thing like this. She threw it on the floor impatiently. Her thoughts centered on the one fact that now stood out predominantly: The baby, most likely-, was dead. She could see this clearly now. It had been written all over McMillan's face. As a lawyer, wasn't she trained to read stranger's faces like a city map? That map had revealed a dead end to her, a one-way street to the city morgue. What a little coffin there would be. Little and empty. Aviva Cohen, born 9th January 2012. Rest in Peace. That was the end of it. She would have to accept it.

“Catherine,” Brigid was whispering.

“I will leave you now. Sleep well. You really need some rest. I shall see you in the morning. I am right next door. Call me, if you need anything. Do you hear me? Catherine. Please. It will be ok. There is nothing you can do now. Get some rest. Can you hear me?”

Catherine was nodding.

“Shall we say breakfast at 9? Is that alright?”

Catherine nodded at her once more.

“Here is the key.” She reached for an RFID plastic card.

“In case you go out, take it with you. But I really think you should rest now. Stay here. Sleep. Ok?”

Catherine nodded and Brigid withdrew, leaving the card on Catherine’s bedside table.

When she closed the door, she shut it properly, it locked instantly.

The mattress was hard and the air smelled foul from too much air conditioning. She got up, but the windows couldn’t be opened and Catherine suffered from this too. She needed fresh air to survive, to think, to do anything at all. In here she felt like suffocating. There was no room for life in this enclosed, dark and damp cell; a mere hole. It felt like she was being buried alive. The room was awful. The hotel was awful. Everything was awful. All Catherine wanted was to go home. Home. But home was forever gone. It was all shattered. Harvey was gone and so was Eva. Eva was gone. Forever. No more home.

She had seen her grave before they left, stood before it, reading the inscription repeatedly: Eva Anna-Maria Cohen, Beloved daughter (and mother he should have had them write). Born May 5th 1995, died on January 9th 2012. Harvey had chosen a

beautiful granite tombstone, tropical green was the colour he said. Of her tombstone. Tropical green. How could that be a colour for a tombstone? Tropical-fucking-earth-friendly-chemical-free-fucking-fucking-verdant-tombstone-green. She sat up and looked around the room, blind to its terribly outdated furniture, the dull long curtains and the beige walls. Her mind was wandering, she was feeling dizzy: The baby, her grandchild, most likely dead. Her daughter, dead for sure. Her eyes fell onto the minibar. Then she looked away. No, not the minibar.

There was nothing left but herself. Would that be enough for a fresh start? It had to be enough for a fresh start. She was going to do this, pull through. It wasn't the end of it, whatever the outcome. Not like Thierry. How could he have done it? Bring up that recklessness, that courage? To end it all. Jump off that bridge. So terrible. How could he? Didn't he know Eva loved him? Didn't he know he had fathered a little one? Most likely not. Thierry. How little had she thought of the father in all of this. If Thierry was indeed the father of her grandchild. She still didn't really know. But, would she ever know? It was likely though. So many guesses, so many questions. So many of them. And most of them will go unanswered, will simply go unheard, will be forgotten. Soon enough. Forgotten. *Tropical-fucking-earth-friendly-chemical-free-fucking-fucking-verdant-tombstone-green*. If they didn't find the little one how would they ever know who befathered her grandchild? They never would. When she was dead too, who would remember her and Eva and the little one? That thought exhausted her completely. She couldn't stop thinking about it until she nodded off. She slept all night, didn't wake once, didn't dream either.

The next day

When Catherine woke up, everything seemed easier than the night before. Sleep had given her respite and fresh strength. She got up and opened the small fridge. Was that Evian? Flown here all the way from France? It said Evian on the bottle. She reached for the water bottle and drank it hastily. Coming here was a mistake. She could see clearly now. Catherine needed a flight back and she needed it fast. McMillan wouldn't be able to help her finding her grandchild. The little girl might not even be here anymore. Slowly, she opened her computer. She also wanted to write a to Greg. Greg. Maybe that's where she should go: Back to Prague. Move there altogether. Start all over. He kind of wanted her to come, leave Switzerland and live in Prague. New country, new place, her sister would be there too: Kind of appealing, but not quite right. Too many loose ends. She wasn't sure she could do it. She leaned back and

looked at the screen. Starting up the computer took forever. The password for the WiFi was ready on a slip of paper to be entered.

Falling into an old habit she opened her email account first and checked her messages. There were 46 new messages, most of them spam or people she didn't know, two Czech reporters who were still interested in interviewing her, as if she had anything to say, as if she knew anything of relevance: hadn't they realized, she had been in a coma when the going got tough? She deleted one message after the other. Then her heart skipped a beat.



"Need to talk. Little one misses you." Sent by a levy.cohen@hotmail.com

He had sent the message late last night. Catherine sat up with a jolt. Was it him? Eva's murderer? The sick guardian, the abominable keeper of her grandchild? McMillan had pointed out that the giant's name was Levy Cohen. She clicked onto the message immediately. The message was empty but for the title. Had he sent it accidentally? Had the little one sent it? No, that couldn't be. Of course not. She was being ridiculous. What on earth was she thinking? The little one would only be -, how many days, how many months? She couldn't do the maths, she didn't know which day there was. She didn't remember when Eva had given birth. Her mind was blank: Hard disk erased, all memories gone. All she knew was that he had got in touch.

She answered straight away.

“Who are you?”

Then she stared at the screen, holding her breath. Would he write back? He would.

The answer came instantly. Obviously he was online.

“Some kind of relative. How are you?”

She looked at the screen. Read the sentence again. What did he mean: Some kind of relative? She was not related to killers and kidnappers. And then the question: “How are you?” Had he really just asked her how she was? Was he trying to make conversation? Smalltalk? Catherine was wide awake now. And she could think clearly.

“What do you want? Money? Where is the little one?” She wrote back without answering his question but raising those that were important to her impromptu. Then she pressed “send” and regretted it immediately. She should have answered his questions first, should have appeased him. She would from now on. If he wrote back. She could do better than this. After all, she was a trained lawyer, not some nutcase. Luckily he wasn’t put off, but wrote back instantly:

“I need you to come to San Francisco,” he answered “me and the little one. You understand?”

“You do?,” she typed quickly, her fingers were trembling. “Where do you want to meet? I am here.” She pressed *send*. What would his reaction be?

Did he know she was here already? Had he been stalking her? Why would he approach her now? Will he set her up again? It took him a minute, two minutes, three and a half minutes to answer.

Finally, he wrote back: “You are? That’s absolutely incredible.” *Was it?* She hesitated a moment then wrote boldly.

“On request of the FBI.” That wasn’t quite true, she herself had requested to come, but the phrase sounded good enough. She kept on reading:

“Can we meet? Without the feds. Don’t want to do this online.”

As if one could do any of this online. What was this supposed to be: a virtual hostage exchange? And what did he want to do anyway? What did he want? She started typing:

“Do you want money?” Dilatorily, she typed in the sentence, then pressed send. Her fingers were stiff, her thoughts were racing ahead of herself. Somehow she knew, she should stop it right here, not take this any further. She should inform McMillan. But she couldn’t. She was mesmerized and sure she’d vanquish him. Sure, she’d beat him.

“No. No money. Just meet,” the answer came instantly.

“Where do you wanna meet?” Catherine typed again. If he wanted to meet, meet it shall be.

This time it took longer, Catherine was about to get up and walk up and down when her email account notified her of a new incoming message:

“Fisherman’s Wharf. In an hour? Come alone. Be on the Ferry to Alcatraz at 08.30. Sincerely. Levy Cohen.” *Sincerely*. He had written sincerely, what mockery. And he has written his very name. Wasn’t that odd? She was trembling. *Sincerely* looked so dangerous. *Sincerely*, you are going to die too, sincerely the baby is dead. *Sincerely* you are not going to make it. *Sincerely*. The word frightened the life out of her. She shuddered.

He had made contact. At the weirdest times. Why now? Why had he not written before when she was still in hospital, when she was still in Switzerland? Why now? It was so early in the morning, she looked at her watch: it was just after 07:20. Time for

breakfast soon, but all this was stomach-churning. She wouldn't be able to eat, not a single bite. Catherine tried not to hyperventilate. What next? Go to Alcatraz? See the Rock that had been a military prison from 1859 to 1933 and a federal prison until 1963.

Brigid was probably still asleep in the room adjacent to hers. Should she knock at her door now, wake her? McMillan had left her a business card. But she couldn't call her. The email, for obvious reasons, had said to come alone, not to bring some Top-of-the-class-heavily-armed-beautiful-witty-charmin'-red-head FBI agent. Who knew what was going to happen if she involved Joy McMillan? She might get them all killed. No, she could do this, she would do this all by herself. She was herself Top-of-her-class, beautiful and witty (not to say charming if need be) material. As an experienced lawyer she could handle this, she could handle such transactions. She was trained for this; she was up for it. Totally. *Absofuckinglutely*, Christian would have said.

For a brief moment she wondered what had become of him now that he was waiting for his trial in *Vestre Fængsel*, the main jail of Copenhagen. She would visit him once she was back on the old continent, nothing she could do now for him now. He shouldn't have taken that money. He really shouldn't have. Slowly, she got up, grabbed her handbag and tiptoed out of her room. No one was in the hallways and she took the stairs, the bar wasn't open yet and no one saw her sneaking past the lounge. Little did she know that she embarked on a self-adventure-awareness-trip of a different kind. She knew that she had forgotten to take the key, but decided not to worry about this now. She left the hotel through the lobby. The morning air was fresh and light bearing the faint smell of cold seawater, algae and salt mingled with stronger fragrances of Japanese cherry blossoms and acrid exhaust fumes.



Once she was in the street, she started to jog and then she found herself running around the block, hoping Brigid wouldn't look out the window. What would she think if she saw her run from the hotel? She'd probably come fleeing right behind her. No, fleeing was not right. She was fleeing. Brigid would do something else. Not flee. Follow? Never mind. Hopefully she would still be sleeping Catherine stopped a taxi that was passing by. She had better get moving, before anyone would catch up with her. The driver, an overfriendly large Italian, jumped out, bowed to her, then opened the rear door for her. (The world was full of klischées, wasn't it. An Italian taxi driver in San Francisco?) All she said was: "Fisherman's Wharf" and he nodded. With a jump he switched on the engine. The engine started up with a roar.

Before

Eva

Eva saw the cemetery first: A large field covered in snow, dipped deep into the flocculent mercy of a dull post-Yule winter's day. She stared at the vast spaces filled with graves stretching across the land, - endlessly: A futile attempt at covering up man's awful, awful deeds by burying the shattered, broken bodies in soft gravel and moist soil giving them eternal refuge. However, the soil was frozen now, rock solid and hard. And yet, underneath the gravestones half buried in natural windblown white waves, there must be flower bulbs, soon ready to pierce the ground and unfold their godforsaken beauty as crested iris crocuses, tulips, daffodils, snowdrops, even wood hyacinths, fritillaria, winter aconites; soon a sea of colour and lightness and hope, a full early summer-to-be, promised in the making.

And yet, picturing the sleeping, hibernating flowers and all their brown, dirty bulbs strung up in horrible, cold darkness and dirt, with many tiny growing baby tulips, baby daffodils and baby snowflakes clinging to the mother bulb-, that thought

alone was enough to make Eva weep. Her eyes were all watery, for all that she could think of were the many bones underneath the flower bulbs, underneath the widespread roots of the many naked weeping willows, mighty large trees that were now stripped of their green billowing curtains by winter's rough and merciless hands. The rotten, decaying bones, buried deep down; whom did they belong to? Whose story did they tell?

The winter sun, even at lunchtime wasn't strong enough to shed light upon the scenery, all looked hazy and dead. And what was more, -nearly impossible to bear;- more and more endless rows of gravestones appeared as the bus drove past. Death had happened here: Death and torture and sickness, typhus and insidious suffering: In Sickness and Health. I swear. In Sickness and Sickness. In Death. In Death Alone. By God Almighty. May God have Mercy. I swear. The graves seemed to stretch on, stretch on, stretch on - forever. It was fascinating and it was scary. Eva could hardly move in her seat, so big was her belly and she felt the little feet kicking against her womb excitedly. Bringing her unborn child to a place such as this seemed so wrong, but right now it was the only option she had. She did need help.

Something was wrong with her Aunt Leah. Terribly wrong. Why hadn't she realized earlier? OMG, she must have been so blind. OMG. For weeks Eva had lived with her under the same roof, but she had found the medication only yesterday morning when she was rummaging in Leah's broken bathroom cupboard for some headache pills. Not that she would take a lot of pills now that she was pregnant, but she had had such a splitting headache from her online research late into the night that she had resorted to taking some painkillers. Were mothers-elect not entitled to some

relief? And then she had found it: Loxapine. And quite a few packages. It hadn't taken her long to figure out what it was used for.



First, she was paralyzed, not sure what to make of her find. Then she had started to search her aunt's apartment properly and the results that search yielded were worrying and most devastating. Not good for her delicate condition, not good at all. Her heartbeat was raised to maximum speed, lots of adrenalin pumping in her blood system. Not good for the baby. Her Aunt Leah hadn't resigned because she wanted out of these illegal operations. She hadn't resigned because she wanted to run Jacob's Ladder, she had been laid off for schizophrenic fits. Imagining things.

The letter of dismissal Eva found in one the bedroom drawers. It spoke clearly. Her eyes hovered on the text, jumping from one line to the next.

It said: "no longer fit for practice in a hospital."

It said: "due to severe hallucinations indicating a complete loss of reality."

It said: "a growing tumour in your left brain hemisphere".

It said: "we regret to inform you that there is no continuance of employment."

It said: "your services are no longer needed." No longer needed. No continuance.

She was suffering from schizophrenia, hallucinating due to a growing tumour in her brain. Imagining she could bring her dead son back to life by organ transplants: Organ transplant that had never actually happened, organ transplants Leah had indeed only pictured in her mind. Transplants she had nevertheless talked about incessantly.

Eva didn't trust her eyes. Leah had lost her job as a surgeon after suffering from severe hallucinations at work. But Eva had taken her word at face value, believed that she was done with the hospital, wanted out of these illegal practices, wanted to self-denunciate, to self-disclose, wanted her colleagues who stayed on arrested, especially Dr. Linder. It had been Eva's idea not to mention her aunt as a source when she went public on www.change_the_world.com. Leah would have been ready to be arrested, to go to jail for what (she thought) she had done. But Eva had talked her out of this. Journalists, so she had argued, didn't have to disclose their sources and so she could, she would protect Leah. By all means. Also, if she wasn't exactly a journalist, but who cared? Everyone could do it these days: Report the news, be a journalist. Obviously, you couldn't. It made sense now that the police never found any evidence to try a culprit anyway. No wonder, they didn't. And yet she had trusted her aunt completely.

Eva had put it all onto www.change_the_world.com. Every single word in the un-official indictment was typed by her very own hands: That the Clinique was responsible for organ transplantations, that they were using children, were cutting up *them little ones* to sell their organs to rich buyers overseas. That was what she wrote and in great detail. And now all this was not true but a mere fantasy; a part of Leah's sickness and her contorted way to see what wasn't there? All this was but an

expression of her very own personal grief for poor dead Timmy? It couldn't be true. But then one said that everyone grieved differently, individually. Her aunt's grief had most wickedly affected her niece as well. And the stories her aunt had made up. Eva just knew all about them. Stories. She made them up too.

Eva was desperate first. How could she have gotten herself so mixed up in her aunt's lunacy? How on earth? After half an hour of maximum shock Eva wasn't sure what to believe anymore. Maybe, it wasn't that easy. The medications could have been planted right here in her home, the report might have been sneaked into the top drawer of Leah's bureau. It might be a last, clever move of Doctor Linder: Getting rid of Leah like this, disqualifying her completely, destroying her credibility, reducing her to someone that couldn't be trusted at all, a sick and schizophrenic person who needed medication more than anything. What worse could there be if you were a trusted and respected doctor? The questions kept repeating themselves: Why had Eva only found the Loxapine now - after she had exposed the Clinique on www.change_the_world.com? Had the medications always been there? Had she simply never seen them, or simply never wanted to see them? Had she ever opened the little cupboard before? She didn't remember. OMG, was she confused. She had to sit. The child within her was kicking. It hurt. *God, it had feet like steel.*

It didn't take her long to come up with a resolution, a solution really. Eva had to know what was true. The truth was mandatory, always was, always had been. Was her aunt sick, suffering from severe hallucinations due to a brain tumour or was she telling the truth about the organ transplantations? She would have to find out. She carried a responsibility to herself and her followers. Eva kept reminding herself that, after all, it was her who had exposed it all online, others had chipped in, expressed

their outrage, their concern, their sympathy. 23'865 likes her entry got until yesterday. She was www.change_the_world.com's investigative, most treasured member of the week. What a title. There was a virtual reward for having scored the highest numbers of likes, the icon had miraculously appeared right next to her username Petite_Princess: It had taken the shape of a white chrysanthemum and for a moment Eva had wondered what the flower and the colour might stand for. Whatever it meant, she was kind of famous for exposing the truth, when really she might become famous for disseminating lies born and bred of mental illness. What a downfall that would be.

And hadn't she always been a good girl believing her mother, her aunt; all these omniscient adults? Eva had simply believed what she had been told. And what good had it done now? What good had it done?

She was under complete shock. Frantically, she tried to remember what the police had said to her. She remembered she had talked to some Inspector, a guy named Gregorovic Shats, good looking guy from Prague Police. He had repeatedly told her that she had made accusations, possibly false accusations, based on what he had called no "substantial evidence" at all. Eva felt hot. Of course, at the time, she hadn't believed a word of what he had been saying. *How could the police ever be right? They were always in the wrong.* The police were always wrong by definition and corrupt *a priori*.. No wonder they hadn't found any patients, any proof. That was what Prague Police had kept saying all along: there was no evidence for organ transplantations at the Clinique, no evidence for what aunt Leah had claimed was the truth. Eva was straining her brain repeatedly, forcing herself to think clearly, logically. Panicking wouldn't help her.

Shats had interviewed her twice, but with no results, she kept making the same statement, and so did he. The guy repeatedly said they would need a search warrant

to search the Clinique's premises and that couldn't be obtained easily, not enough proof, not enough evidence, a rumour on the internet wasn't enough. It still rang in her ears: Premises, he had said, premises and rumour. Yeah, right: A shitstorm on the internet wasn't enough. The Czech Republic was obliged to adhere to the Rule of Law. Screw the laws, screw them all. She needed proof whether these children had been eviscerated or not, she needed to know. Someone had to take care of it. It would have to be her, -pregnant or not. Here she came. But what a mess. What a complete mess. It took her only a brief moment to recover. After all, she was her mother's child. She would clean it all up. Just not quite now. She had, - literally, a more pressing matter at hand. First, she would have to give birth. Then she needed her mother to come around and accept her and the baby.

After finding out about her aunt's sickness, Eva couldn't stay at Jacob's Ladder for another minute. Too many questions had been raised and had remained unanswered: Was her aunt schizophrenic or wasn't she? Did she have a brain tumour? Did she hallucinate? Was she for real? Was the tumour for real? Was it causing the hallucinations? Could she be trusted? What else could that Loxapine be for? Did she really take it? Had it been planted there? Eva was so upset, the baby within her womb was kickboxing his little soul out. The amniotic fluid went sour with her distress. And then, when all her thoughts had peaked in a decision, Eva ran; she literally bolted from Jacob's Ladder. Not before grabbing most of her stuff from her room; her most beloved black and white GRL PWR jumper, her box with large, fake golden jewellery and the bag she had already packed to go to hospital when she would give birth. When she was out on the street, she realized she had forgotten all her socks, her toothbrush and

her toothpaste and more important: she had nowhere to run to. Where would she run to? Her lungs were aching from the cold. What a mess. She kept going.

For a moment she was mortified, even tempted to go back to Bern. Go back home to mummy. Crying. The prodigal daughter. Humbled as humbled one could be. But then she dismissed the idea faster than lightning. Catherine, the stranger, as she kept calling her mother, surely wouldn't help her: Not in that condition, not now, that she was unfit for that career, her mother had always had in mind for her, unfit for following in her footsteps and meeting her high standards. Like that, she couldn't live up to her mother's complex plans and schemes she had been fostering for her ever since she was born. Plans, that had become more and more fixated after the divorce of her parents. Nor would she get any of the awards for excelling, Catherine had planned to win with her, like a prize winning horse, a prize winning fat hog, a prize winning black and white rooster. Eva felt she was really, really unfit for anything that had ever been asked of her. Asking Catherine for help was completely out of the question. No way. That option was ruled out immediately. First Catherine would have to reform and it was her, Eva, her daughter who had to come up with the right story to teach her mother love and truth and acceptance.

And she wanted to do this properly. She couldn't go back before she had achieved something great, something worth being loved for. Giving birth didn't qualify, but uncovering a medical scandal, that would hopefully compensate for getting herself so hopelessly knocked up. Unless of course her aunt was really sick, and there was no scandal at all; then it would all have been in vain. She pushed the thought away, concentrating on what was relevant. Only question was: What was relevant? If there was a scandal to be discovered, she would be the one to hand it to

the police on a silver platter, a golden silver platter, a platinum silver platter. For a moment she thought that silver would forever be only one thing: silver, no matter how much gold, platinum and other bullshit you added. But whatever the allegory, she would have to finish this first before she could go home. If people were arrested because of her, her lawyer mum would be so proud. That was what lawyers did, be proud of their sprightly litter, when they uncover injustice and bring evil to fall. And how she would make them fall. And how mum would love her, the deeper they fell, the deeper her love would be. And how proud mum would finally be. And happy she'd be, extending her grace to the little one, to her. And yet, it might not be enough. She might need more, more convincing matter and evidence to sway her mother off her feet.



Everyone could be an investigative journalist these days, mother might say. If they had set up her aunt Leah, if they had planted that Loxapine, everyone could find out. Even if Eva did uncover the whole scandal, even if she did bring it out into the open, it might not be enough. Besides, now she couldn't do any more reserach. Her hour was close. She would see to it after she had given birth, after the little one was here. She sure would. As she was standing out there, in a mighty sea of colourful tourists, at the bottom of the street that was leading up to aunt Leah's house- beautiful dear Jacob's Ladder- it was suddenly crystal clear to Eva what needed to be done. She had to do this without mum, without her aunt. Going home or going back to Leah's was definitely not an option: Finding her grandfather's family was.

In fact, it was her only hope, her grandfather's family would have to help her uncover the truth. She would simply make them do it. After all they were family: Mishpocha as her grandmother used to say. And family helped. They always helped. They had to help her. And Terezín was the place to start. Surely, they kept records. It had said there was an archive when she googled Terezín the other day just for the fun of it. Who on earth googled concentration camps for the fun of it anyway? But archives. Archives that sounded good. That meant a paper trail, pictures, reminiscences she could indulge in, she could cherish and look back to. After all, those were her roots, her beginnings in some way. This was where her grandmother had survived the ghetto. Someone there had to be willing to help her. And if they weren't, she would force it down their throats. Too bad they might not like it. But the little one was on its way. She couldn't do this on her own. She needed help now, when the baby was here, she would take care of everything else.

Eva hadn't realized it was so gruesome out here: All these graves, all this anguish and woe, when she was carrying budding, growing life within her. If she could have, she would have turned then and there. But sitting in the bus, she was bound to move on. The little one jumped as they rattled along, the continuous motion giving her a slight travel sickness. Finally, the coach came to a halt. They had reached the end of their journey. The beginning, Eva thought. Carefully, she raised her bottom that was heavy from child bearing and damp from sitting too long and too uncomfortably on a synthetic surface. The ride had made her sweat terribly between her legs, leaving tiny valleys filled with water and grime in the enlarged, swollen folds of her pubis. It was difficult to stand, she held on tight to the bus strap although the bus was no longer moving.

She felt tired and exhausted, sweaty and cold, as if she was running a fever. Her clothes simply clung to her body. The luggage she carried, her big gym-bag, didn't help either. Her belly kept being in the way, swaying dangerously before her as if it had a life of its own. Well, it really had, but Eva didn't think of it that way. It was her belly after all. Being pregnant, it was cumbersome to climb out of the bus even if she had carried a bridal bouquet only. She nearly tripped on the steps as she couldn't see her feet anymore. Finally, after the bus driver gave her a helping hand, she managed to put herself, the baby in her womb and all her belongings safely onto solid ground.

"Thank you and sorry for this," Eva said obligingly as her womb bounced repeatedly against the bus driver's belly which was nearly as big, only that he wasn't big with child. She was here now. What a relief. The cold air helped her breathe. It felt good to have the sky stretch above her head. The bus driver smiled at her.

„Welcome to Bohemian city Litomerice, Leitmeritz as the Germans used to call it then. It lie on new border between the Greater German Reich and the Czecho-Slovak state, within Sudetenland. That was in 1938 when Germany occupied the Sudetentland and my father was born. But surely, you are not interested in politics and war. War not good, not good at all for business, for tourism. Not much luggage? Hey, lady. Very good, very good. I don't have to carry. I will show you the way. Come. Come. You too.“

He gloated at her belly, which made her feel uncomfortable, then he grabbed Eva's s gym-bag and walked along the road. There was hardly any traffic only a large parking space and after walking a couple of minutes, they stood in front of the Hotel Churchill. He turned around and grinned at her:

« Very good place and good price for service. Go in, go in. I'll bring your luggage in»

Eva smiled, glad she would be rid of the driver in due time, yet hoping she could afford the place with her meagre savings. But it turned out that not only was the room rather cheap, the elderly receptionist was also extremely friendly. The old man took an immediate liking to the young woman so alone and so enormously close to what he called «her hour of need». She would be safe here and besides, she didn't intend to stay here for very long anyway. Really, she had no intentions whatsoever, but to find her grandfather's family and find a place where she could give birth and was looked after for some weeks before she could go back collecting evidence on the Clinique's case (or on Aunt Leah's case if she was a nutcase indeed). Her *other* family, they would only have to take her in until she had delivered, after she had delivered. She was sure of that. Who wouldn't want to give a helping hand to a relative when «her hour of need» was about to come? Searching for them would be easy she would start with these archives right away. And she did.

The way to the museum was long and very cold as the sun had already begun to set in the early afternoon. Crossing the river Labe when she set out, was still romantic and definitely worth the trip, but then the kilometers stretched endlessly and she felt as if the road was ten times longer. Try walking a marathon when you're pregnant; it is a nightmare. As it got darker and darker, her heart was pounding more and more heavily within her. When would she finally get there? It had been a bad idea wanting to save some money by walking. Taking that taxi would have been a good and clever idea. The receptionist knew after all what he was talking about when he recommended it.



Eva was absolutely exhausted when she finally arrived at The Muzeum Ghetta. She could hardly get up the steps and through the door. What luck that she had made it before they closed for the night. For a moment her gaze lingered upon the illuminated Hebrew letters above the entrance and she wished from the bottom of her heart that she would have been able to read and understand what they said. Shalom? Death camp? Free hamburgers? OMG, she was getting hungry.

When she entered, an elderly lady scurried towards her, took her damp hand as if she was some acquaintance and made her sit in the reception area.

„You shouldn't be out and about, travelling, in your condition, dear“, she said soothingly. There was sweat on Eva's forehead and her hair clung to her scalp, no wonder the woman felt for her. Eva took off her coat and straightened her jumper, her belly bulging out even the more. She hadn't really bothered buying a maternity wardrobe. Clothes kind of stretched as she went along or kind of didn't, this jumper kind of didn't. The baby was moving within its boundaries, nevertheless.

« I know I shouldn't, » Eva said, patting her belly. It had gone rock-solid hard. She took a deep breath. What a strain. Hopefully, the little one was alright.

« How can I help you ? » the friendly lady said invitingly. Eva took another deep breath and brought forward her request:

« My grandfather died here. His name was Abraham Cohen. He was married to a woman called Imma Cohen. He must have died during the Typhus Epidemic at the end of -. You know. The war. That was what I've been told. Anyway-“. She didn't really know how to continue. The woman looked at her and gasped. She leaned back, folded her hands in her lap and then said more silently than before.

„Oh, I am sorry to hear this. But I think we can help you indeed. I am sure you would like to talk to the registrar. I think now is actually a good time. It is kind of late. No meetings anymore. I'll go and see if I'll find him for you. Just sit and relax for a while. I'll bring you a cup of hot tea first. You may need it.“

Eva nodded and folded her coat neatly as she hung it over her arm. Restlessly, she got up and looked out the window. The early evening outside had already proceeded to a sombre afterglow, she would have to find another way to get back to the Churchill. Walking was completely out of the questions. She wouldn't find her way back to the hotel in this complete darkness. It was too dangerous if she got lost in this cold.

Eva turned on her heels, not as suavely as she used to before she carried the little one, and shoved the mittens into the sleeves of the coat that she was holding. Then she sat down on a little bench that was placed there for visitors to relax. Not that one could relax in the midst of children's drawings portraying shootings, hangings and killing of beloved ones, but at least you could sit. Eva averted her eyes and looked at her belly and the unborn child. The future may bring what it may, she would be strong. And she would care for her baby, play with it, cuddle it, be there, always, not like mum who had spent most of her time at work: in her law firm while she was with some ever-changing nanny. Mum who was always absent. The missing link in her life. She would definitely do better. Whatever, she did; really, it would be "better". Even as a lousy mother, she'd do better than Catherine. Of that she was sure. Catherine: The stranger.

The woman brought her a cup of steaming hot tea and smiled at her, "Oh you're over here. Is the bench more comfortable, dear?" Eva only stared at her.

“He won’t be long. I told him what you wanted and he will be with you in no time. Don’t worry. I am sure the registrar can help you with all your research.” The lady gave Eva a comforting smile, then she disappeared again. Eva looked around and felt so tired. Maybe all this hadn’t been a good idea after all. It would take forever to get back to the Churchill when all she really wanted was lie down and put up her feet and sleep. Dream sweet dreams of tiny cuddly babies.

She hadn’t even thought of supper. Her intestines grumbled. It was definitely her stomach, not the baby. She got these sudden fierce hunger pangs lately. Eva was hungry and dizzy and tired and exhausted, she didn’t feel well at all. She should have stayed in Prague, with her aunt. No matter what. No matter how crazy and deluded she was. If she really was: Deluded and crazy. Leah. Leah had been so good to her, had looked after her so well. Why had she left her now? Her aunt must be worried sick. She should text her, she would text her right now. She felt the baby push and shove hard against her belly, the little one had become so big lately and so active. Hopefully it would stay where it was for a little longer. Then she looked up.

The registrar was an old man who could hardly walk straight. Slowly he shuffled along the aisle. His back was bent from bending over too many times, his neck was stooped. The guy was old. He approached Eva and sat right opposite her, his keen gaze resting on her full and bloated body.

„Abraham Cohen? You are looking for Abraham Cohen?“

He said and Eva was amazed at the sound of his voice, it sounded so young and fresh, vigorous, kind of eerie.

„Yes, Abraham Cohen, he was married to Imma Cohen, and he is my grandfather, I mean step-grandfather. He is not my real grandfather. It's just-. I was wondering if he had any descendants that are still alive. Is there any way you could find out?"

„Well.“ The registrar said, „yes, he does. Son's name is Levy. Lives in San Francisco.“

„Are you sure? Have you already looked this up? Wouldn't you have to check your files first? On your computer? San Francisco, you said?"

Eva was confused and exhilarated; she couldn't hide her commotion. Obviously, she hadn't come all this way in vain. Although: Had he said San Francisco? San Francisco was far. Not sure she'd get there before she'd give birth.

„No, I don't need to look this up,“ the old man replied and then without faltering he revealed himself to her.

„I am Abraham Cohen, I was married to Imma Cohen, but you are right. I am not your real grandfather, and I am also not your real step-grandfather. To you I am not anything at all. I am a total stranger. Not family.“

There was silence and Eva looked at him confused.

“I don't understand.”

“Sure, you don't. It is a long story after all. I shall tell you in the morning. Let me get you back to your hotel. Have you eaten yet?”

The Shack

Abraham came back for her the very next day, shortly after breakfast. He took her to a deserted parking ground near an enormous forest. There he stopped the car and told her to get out into the pouring rain. It was a long and strenuous walk for Eva, it took more than an hour. Abraham had said it was forbidden to drive in the forest. That was why they couldn't take the car: Eva had believed him, she believed everything he said. She couldn't walk fast and had to sit again and again despite the cold drizzle. Sitting on roots and wet leaves was uncomfortable. It was still very cold, and they only got to the shack shortly before lunchtime. There was an enormous tree standing right next to the little wooden cabin. To Eva it looked like an ancient white fir: The tree was mighty, the tree was big. It had a sacred, mystic presence of its own; a life lived since times yonder. Its stem was enormous; the dark, wet bark old and brittle; its living green branches reached high up into the low hanging clouds of a dark, grey turbulent sea that was the sky.

In 8th grade Eva had had to study the Latin names of all European trees at school: *Abies concolor* (white fir), *Malus sylvestris* (wild apple tree), *Quercus coccifera* (European oak), *populus tremula* (common aspen). She still remembered some of them. How far away that seemed; school, homework, learning stuff: Names of trees, names of cellular constituents, countries, European capitals, African capitals, chemical formulae, math formulae, physics formulae, French words, English words, German grammar and spelling. She kind of used to like it. It was fun, it was easy. But now it seemed so far away: As if she had gone to school in another life, another era, actually on a totally different planet altogether. As if none of this mattered any more.

The old man started the generator so that there would be power and then made a fire in the tiled hearth. The flames heated the room quickly. Finally, he had fallen silent. Abraham had been talking all the way up to the shack. For more than an hour he had revealed to her the life of her ancestors.



Eva now knew everything. She knew who Heike Strassmann was (her grandmother), she knew who the real Imma was (Abraham's love and not her grandmother), she knew about Frank, the lost baby of the Cohen's whose true name was Jacob (and not her uncle). She knew that Heike Strassmann stole Imma's papers when the Nazis burnt the archives, just before the Russian invasion. The way Abraham made it sound she only took the baby to save herself; the baby meant food stamps and fresh milk, the baby meant free passage. Raising a Jewish baby on Allied grounds in particular, meant life. German babies weren't worth as much. Being German was

dangerous, it meant prison, labour camp, death by hanging when worst came to worst. Eva knew the gist of the story now and her thoughts were racing. It was still all falling into place. Abraham cut some leek and potatoes and cooked up a soup for Eva and her unborn child when there was a knock at the crooked door. A tall, handsome man in his forties came in without waiting for an answer. He was large, not pinguid or plump though, but rather sportive. A giant.

„Hello there. Knock, knock,“ Levy said while bending his head because the doorframe was hanging so low. “Hi Dad. Smells good. Am I late? Hike here took forever. Why don’t you get a permission to drive here?”

He hung up his brown waxed jacket on a large iron hook near the door.

“It is not a hike, come on”, Abraham looked at him teasingly.

„And who is this? I see you have a visitor.“

He raised his eyebrows, looking directly at Eva.

“A visitor, out here? In this weather? And she is pregnant? Welcome!”

„This is Eva. Eva Cohen,“ Abraham stressed the surname.

„Are you a relative?“ Levy asked amazed, “I cannot remember dad told me I had such an enchanting young cousin. Welcome! And welcome to the baby!” He waved plethorically at her belly.

« No, she is not a relative. Well, in a way she is,» his father said.

« She is Heike’s daughter » Levy raised his eyebrows.

« So, you are Heike’s daughter? I was never quite sure whether he hasn’t made it all up. Stealing his firstborn and so. Quite the family legend. Wow. Heike’s daughter.“

He came around the table and took her hand. His handshake was warm and firm.

„You know all about it?“ Eva asked amazed.

„Yes, my father has told us all about it many times. Heike took his firstborn to bring it to safety when all she was really interested in was saving herself. That is a story we have all heard since childhood. I got nightmares from that story and honestly, I cannot bear to hear it one more time. So where is that older brother of mine? I wanna give him a big hug. Did you bring him too?“

“I am so sorry, but he died when he was pretty young. A car accident.”

“That is too bad.” Everyone fell silent for a moment.

“I knew, he was dead”, Abraham said tonelessly. His voice was trembling, “I knew.”

“Yes, he is. I am so sorry. I wish, I could have brought happier news,” Eva apologized. She shrugged. She hadn’t really thought of her uncle Frank for such a long time. She had never even met him.

“Never mind. We had to let the past go a long time ago.” Abraham pointed at Levy.

“This is my son, and he is pretty much alive. Let me introduce you properly:

“Lives, breathes and works in San Francisco, big fan of the Giants. Never misses a game, aren’t I right, son? Well, he had come over to visit for Hanukkah and now he has decided to stay until the end of January. Keep me company. That is what sons should do anyway. Shouldn’t they? Levy? Shouldn’t they?“

He stared intensely at his son. Levy smiled at him.

„Father, please I am sure the young lady is here for a different reason. What is your name again?“

„Eva.“

„Eva. And what brings you here to this wonderful and lonely place.“

“You don’t have to say it like this. I know you don’t like it here”, Abraham said, glancing at Levy sideways.

„I need help,“ Eva said. The two men looked surprised.

„Will you help me? I now know you are not relatives, but still, will you? I thought you were family. Might that be enough?“

„Of course,“ Levy replied spontaneously.

«Shoot, we will do anything. Let's hear». He took a chair and sat next to Eva.

„Depends.“ Abraham said.

„I will help you. What do you want me to do?“ Levy stressed only for the sake of opposing his father. Eva was going to say: Help me have the baby. Help me investigate the Clinique case. Help me win my mother's love. But then at the spur of the moment she knew she had to tell them of her other idea. So many voices and stories in her mind, swarming like insects. This one she had pinned down.

Eva's story

It was such a stroke of luck that the day before yesterday she came up with this ingenious idea when falling asleep. It was a warm, good feeling; Like when she was a little girl wrapped up in a soft furry blanket in front of the TV with a cup of lukewarm chocolate milk. Now all she had to do was sell the idea to Abraham and Levy. Would they buy it? Would they help her?

„Look, my mom will freak out when she hears about the baby, I am so scared to tell her, but it is inevitable.”

“Your mum doesn't know you are having a baby”? Levy looked alarmed.

“Maybe she already knows. I don't know. Fact is, I cannot hide for much longer. Now here is what I think we should do -.” She paused for effect. Both men looked at her, keen for her to continue. Eva brought the hammer down.

“If she thinks I am lost, or dead and my baby is lost or dead she will be so sad that when I am suddenly alive again she will be so pleased. Relieved. Do you understand?” Was she making sense? The two men looked aghast. She would have to explain this better. The idea had only formulated itself in her marvellous ideas-for-better-life-

generator a couple of days ago. Eva wasn't altogether sure she understood it herself yet. She could feel its tumescence. It was there somewhere, hovering around her, on the increase, getting louder. She had to try and grasp it and pin it down for good. This was going to be good. She knew it.

„Somehow,“ Levy said tentatively. “I don't quite see-“.

„No, not at all.“ Abraham interrupted.

„Tell her I'm dead. Then she will-. No. I mean.“ Eva got really excited.

„What if-. I mean, if you told her that you would do the same to our family as our family had done to yours. Wouldn't that totally freak her out? That's good. Let's do that. Revenge. Revenge always works to scare someone.“



„I really don't understand. Why should I tell her such an awful thing? And no, revenge never makes sense.“ Abraham said, scolding her amicably. Levy had fallen silent, he saw what she was aiming at. It kind of made sense, to him, it did.

„Ok. I'll spell it out for you: Tell my mom that I died when giving birth, just like your wife had and that you have taken the baby and given it to your son. He doesn't need to adopt it. It already carries his name: Cohen, I am Eva Cohen.“

She took out her Swiss ID and showed it to him.

„Here, take this. You can say I was his wife and he was the father. If someone asks.“

Levy laughed out loud.

„I wouldn't be a very good father, trust me. But who is the father? Anyway. Why can't he help you?“

„He has -“, she fell silent. „He’s dead. I don’t want to talk about this now. I really, really don’t. »

„Eva. I am so sorry about your loss. That is awful. What happened?“

“I’d really rather not talk about it. Really.”

“Sure. I am really sorry about whatever happened, but this is totally absurd. Why should we want to do this to your mother? » Abraham said.

Eva shrugged and then continued without listening to him properly, without taking heed to his opposition:

„Then, you tell Catherine, she must break into the Clinique, just as you had to break in-“, Abraham interrupted her:

„I didn’t have to break in anywhere.“

“But you could make it up. Where were all the records stored?”

„In the *Geschäftszimmer*. But it was impossible to get in. I couldn’t have gotten the papers if I had wanted. And it was all burnt down before the Russians came. And I’m sure that was when Heike got the papers herself. It was chaos that day. Everything on fire. Papers flying all over the place. Typewriters, stamps unobserved. If she didn’t find them, she could even have made them herself. On the spot. That day. It was chaos. She was clever. People running. Those who could -. Those who could. They did.“

He closed his eyes.



„Oh come on. My mother wouldn’t know that. Mother is not omniscient, after all.

“No, but still-.”

“Never mind. She will never know the difference. You tell her, you had to break into this Geschäftszimmer to get Heike’s papers. Tell her to break into the Clinique and to get out one of the computers. An eye for an eye. I really need to prove that Dr. Linder is involved into organ trafficking.

“What organ trafficking?” Levy asked incredulously.

“My aunt, supposedly, she is involved in this. She is a doctor. It must stop and I need proof to involve the police. Something must be done about it. We must protect these children. I must know whether she is suffering from hallucinations.”

The two men looked at each other, they couldn’t really follow her incoherent story. Was the girl hallucinating herself?

„Eva. Are you out of your mind? No sane person would break into any Clinique to steal a computer. You could probably just hack the network from over here anyway. Want me to do this right now? What are we looking for?”

Levy said and Abraham was nodding:

“He works as an IT specialist. Cyber defence is one of his -.”

“No, no. I want her to do it.”

„Why should your mother do such a crazy thing?”

„You don’t know my mother, she is totally insane. I am sure she will do it if you threaten her. She will simply panic. She loves me, somehow she does. She just doesn’t want me to be a mother so soon.

„But why would I want her to break into the Clinique? I have no reason at all. She would see through all this immediately. She has an education, doesn’t she?”

Abraham said. How could he get across to this girl?

„Yes, she’s a lawyer.”

„You want to fool a lawyer? Good luck with this. They have trained. Brains and stuff, I mean -.“ Levy said.

„Not a lawyer, my mother. And I don't want to fool her, I want to heal her, educate her, teach her. About me. The baby.“ She patted her belly.

“About loving us.”

Eva fell silent and then made up more, as the voices seemed fit.

„Ok, ok, ok. I see. Tell her one of your grandsons was in the hospital my aunt worked and died in these operations. That's true. I know that one of the kids died.”

“You do?”

“Well, my aunt said so.”

“Your aunt is involved in this too?”

“Yes, she did the operations”

“On the kids?” The two men looked at each other, not sure what to make of the story Eva kept telling. It was outrageous.

“Yes, she told me, but she wants out. That was why she told me. I was supposed to help her. But now I don't know if she was hallucinating”

“Your mother?”

“No, not my mother, my aunt.”

“Ok. And how is your mother involved? I don't get it.”

Levy chipped in.

“The way I understand it is that there is not enough proof whether the aunt is guilty of organ trafficking and therefore Eva wants her mother to steal the computers to put her under pressure. But it is more about teaching her mother to love her than finding

out more about the Clinique. Because seriously, if you want me to I could try hacking their network? Right now. Shall I?"

"No, no, no. Let mum do this first. But if she isn't successful, I might take you up on this. And tell her that you would kill my baby if she didn't bring the computer and only give it up for adoption if she brings it. Best tell her to come under the gallows in Terezín, no better: I saw that there was a room where the police doctors performed surgery. Let her come there. Let her really panic." By now, Eva was smiling again.



Abraham was shaking his head and Levy was aghast at the atrocious ideas this young woman had. Eva was indeed hallucinating. Maybe something was wrong with her too?

„Why are you hating your mother so much?"

„I am not hating her. Why would you think that? But she needs a lesson. She really does." Eva fell silent for a moment, thinking about the question once again.

"No, I don't hate her. Well. Maybe sometimes, but no. You make it sound as if I was out of my mind »

"You are. Young lady. You are out of your mind. Completely insane. You -."

Eva talked without stopping now:

« You don't understand. I do love her, so much. But she would never, never, never accept I was a mum so young. She will want me to give up the baby for adoption. She would want me to abort it. Kill it. Do you understand? But I want to keep it, I want to care for it. It is alive. I can feel it. It's funny how this all grows within you."

“It is a child dear, of course it’s moving” Abraham said.

“It is alive.”

She rubbed her belly tenderly.

“And I will need her help. If she believes all is lost, the baby dead or given up for adoption. She will be so relieved when all this isn’t true. I know she will then change her mind. And also, I need this computer as evidence, I need to prove Doctor Linder is guilty. I need to prove my aunt isn’t sick. They must stop these operations. That’s a different story, ok, but we can connect it beautifully. Can’t you see this?” Eva was desperate now. After all, she feared that even if she had the computer the Clinique case could just have been a fabrication of her aunt Leah’s sick mind.

„No, frankly,“ Levy said.

„I can’t. This is the weirdest idea ever. I would just hack the network. Usually you get past the firewall quite easily. I am sure the police have tried this already. Unofficially.“

“That is exactly the point: you would do this. But we have to find something my mom can do. To punish her. For taking your kid.”

“You mean for her mother taking my kid. Your mother didn’t take Frank. It was your grandmother. Why should we punish your mother now?”

“Let’s turn this into a family feud. She cannot hack into their network, but she can break in. She can get out a bloody computer and surely it is easier to hack into a network when you have a computer that is part of it, isn’t it” She looked at Levy sideways.

“Isn’t it? Come on, Levy?” Levy shook his head. He didn’t want to support her claim. He was too busy trying to figure out what Eva had in mind, arguing with her seemed pointless. She was absolutely determined. This was not about the computer, this was

not about her aunt, not about the Clinique. This was all about a daughter and her mother. And if the Clinique ran on an intranet only it might actually be easier to have one of their computers to get full access. It was definitely worth a try.

Eva went on and on.

“This is all about “torturing” mum. Tell her you too had to invest some blood and sweat to break into the Geschäftszimmer. You couldn’t have hacked the Nazi’s computer network then and you want her to do the same. I mean that makes sense, doesn’t it? That makes so much sense.”

Abraham was still shaking his head.

“Doesn’t it? Come on.”



This was all out of the question. The girl was simply mad. Eva felt their apparent reluctance, their opposition to all her plans, but she was determined to have her way.

For a moment she hesitated, then she thought of something new:

„Ok, tell her you want revenge and it is an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. Isn’t that what Jews believe in? I don’t really know. Not that I ever really knew what Jews believed in. Anyway.”

Abraham sighed. Eva was obviously tiring him with her crazy ideas which flowed from her like milk and honey from the promised land, only one idea more poisonous than the other, such as arsenic and cyanid from an apothecary's lab.

„Wait a minute young lady. People always get this wrong. It must be understood in the historical context: An eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth was a way of controlling relentless anger, stop the unleashing hatred. For usually it was ten eyes for an eye or four sons for one of my own dead sons. This is not a call for violence, on the opposite, it was a call for reducing it. Can you see this? It was a call to be moderate, not a call to be violent » Abraham looked at her directly, his eyes red from the strain. “You might have to be Jewish to understand it. It would surely help.”

„Whatever,“ Eva said. « You do to Catherine just as my grandmother has done it with your son, Frank, Jacob, as you called him. You steal my baby. And you make her break into the Clinique just as you. Ok it doesn't quite work. But she wouldn't really know. But she has to risk something. You can just tell her Heike wanted you to steal the papers from the Geschäftszimmer? You say you do the same. I mean it cannot be so difficult to understand, can it?» She got exasperated, but Abraham couldn't take this seriously anymore and he had to laugh at such absurdities. He was shaking his head determinedly.



„Young lady, none of this makes any sense at all. I didn't do any of these things. I didn't break into the Geschäftszimmer. And I don't hate your family. She did what

had to be done. It was wrong. But then everything was wrong then. The war. My beloved wife dead. Everything was wrong. Totally wrong. I have forgiven her. Long ago. In a way she helped us. She gave Jacob, Frank as you call him a future. Also, if, as you say, he later got killed in a car accident. After all, he had some good years, he was loved. I have no hard feelings against her, whereas you-. I still don't understand why you hate her so much?"



Eva continued without listening to Abraham properly: „But you must understand where all this leads to. She will come round. In the end. She will love me, me and the little one. In the end. Of course we just pretend. It's just a storyboard we are creating. Can't you see this? Then all of a sudden, I will turn up alive and kicking and she will be so pleased and accept me, and the baby. I am so sure. She will be so glad I am alive. We can then tell her it was all fake and all. But I need this computer to prove that there were operations on kids. Kids.“

« No, Eva. No, you don't. And it doesn't work. What sense would it make? Besides, my dear child. Revenge. Revenge. Revenge is not Jewish.“ Abraham said, looking at Levy for confirmation. „He always says it thrice. Always. Revenge. Revenge. Revenge. Not Jewish. It is some kind of meditation »

“Maybe“. Abraham smiled at his son.

„Ok. I see. This won't work. I'll make up something for you to do it. Something, that; -else. Wait.“ She looked up at the ceiling and Abraham didn't know what to do with

such a strange young woman. She was really deluded. The pregnancy must be confusing her mind, she had the oddest ideas.

„Look. Anti-semitism is growing again, in Europe. Right?“

„Dear child. It isn't so easy. It has always, always been there and most likely it always will be there.“ Abraham said acquiescently, no longer wanting to fight anything.

„But it is growing. Right?“ He looked at her silently, wondering what will follow.

« So you can do something to make people think.

« Think? »

« Yes, you take the baby and first say that this is revenge and all this, but then, then you say : Revenge, revenge, or how often you care to say it, is not Jewish and you give the child back to me and my mother. You can show the world that one can overcome this cycle of evil and murder. It would be such an important lesson for the world, for everybody, all the conflicts in the world. You show that you harbour these feelings of revenge, revenge, revenge -“, she turned her eyes towards the ceiling, „in your breast but you have the power to overcome them. That is what makes us human. To forgive.“ Eva was prattling carelessly now. She simply couldn't stop and Abraham waited patiently until she had finished her sentence and took a deep breath.



„Child“, Abraham's face was unmoved, then he said: You are young, so young and so foolish and you don't know anything about the world. You cannot learn from such fake ideas, you cannot learn from history and you cannot learn from somebody else's experience. The only person who would possibly learn from it would be

Catherine, your mother. Is that what you want? And she wouldn't take the conclusion you want her to take. She would hate me for putting her through such an ordeal and if you told the world it would even increase anti-semitism and not reduce it: „Why did he do it, why?“ Why did he give in to such wicked plan? Even though it was your plan, your idea.“ That is what she would ask, what everyone would ask. This is a wicked plan and I will hear none of it.

And they would blame me. And I am Jewish. Jews may always be blamed for everything. Your intentions are good and noble, but your ideas are all wrong, and I will not do anything like it. I don't want your child. I hated your family-once, but I have forgiven you now and I have worked hard to get there. It took a lot. Besides, no one would think about such a weird story, no one would even hear about it once we are through with it.

„Yes they would. I would write it all down and make a book.“

“You wouldn't find a publisher.“

“It could be placed on the net. A kindle book. I could do a blog and then release it all when it is over.“

„Eva, this is all so ridiculous. I think you should go home at once. I am sure your mother will even now be ever so glad to see you. You don't have to stage such an atrocious, terrible show for her. She loves you, she will accept you. She will accept the baby. You cannot do this to her. This is simply terrible. Really, really terrible.“ There was silence and only Eva's breathing could be heard. She had placed her head on the table, her hands on her womb.

Silence.

Her shoulders were heaving. And then she began to cry.

San Francisco

The taxi stopped and Catherine looked around nervously. Where they here? There were so many people in the street, mainly tourists, (world was full of them these days anywhere you went) how could he ever find her? Had he said he would recognize her? Was there anything she had to do? Had to wear? Carry? A newspaper and a red rose? All of a sudden, she was terribly scared. What had she gotten herself into? Most likely this was dangerous. After all they had murdered her daughter, taken her hostage, let her die out there in the cottage. They were animals, they were the enemy. Then her phone went and she rummaged for it in her bag.

"Greg. You don't believe where I am."

"Hopefully with your granddaughter."

"No, in fact. Not yet. The house was empty."

"Why empty?"

“The FBI said the apartment was empty. I really don’t know. They don’t give people like me more details. But they say they are still working on the case. Hope that’s a good thing.”

“Catherine, they better are. So, where are you?”

All of a sudden Catherine wasn’t sure whether she should tell Greg.

“Madam, we are here: Fisherman’s Wharf.” The taxi driver said out loud and Catherine nervously fished in her bag for her wallet to pay him. She tipped him generously, still holding the line.”

“Are you going to watch the sealions”

Greg said, looking out on a wonderful Prague spring morning.

“Greg, sorry, I cannot really talk now. I am -. Can I talk to you later?”

“Sure. You always can. Is everything ok? Catherine. You sound worried.”

“No, I am not. “

“Confused?”

“Yes, sure. I am talking to you.”

“Really? You flatter me,” she could clearly detect the irony in his voice.

“Listen, I will call you later. On skype.”

She rang off and threw the phone back into her bag. Despite the early morning there were already crowds of tourists. The sun was bright, and she put her sunglasses on. A black street musician was playing some jazz piece she had heard before but couldn’t put a name to. He looked kind of rugged. Where could she get the ferry to Alcatraz? Over there? It wasn’t difficult to find Pier 33 Alcatraz Landing located on *The Embarcadero*. But it would be harder to get a ticket for the ferry at 08:30. Why were there so many people milling about? She might be late.

Prague

Greg was a good and attentive listener. He heard that Catherine had arrived wherever she was headed. The noises were different now. No longer muffled by the interior of a taxi. He could detect more cars, more people. He could hear the street music. Someone was playing *Tears in Heaven* on the other side of the ocean. And he was worried. Something was queer. She had sounded strange, exhausted, but also exhilarated. He sensed that she was trying to hide something from him. She was not a good liar, indeed she was lousy at it.

Then the phone went and Alexej was in the line.

“Greg, somehow the ticket was still open and I couldn’t help but read her mails. Have a look at what Catherine Cohen got half an hour ago. It is on your screen now. Greg opened the file Alexey had sent:

“Can we meet? Don’t want to do this online.”

“Where do you wanna meet?”

“Fisherman’s Wharf. In an hour? Come alone. Be on the Ferry to Alcatraz at 08.30.

He went beserk. She was in danger, she really was. The kidnapper had contacted her and she was following his instructions. Hopefully the FBI had seen this too. What if not? What if some crazy bastard wanted to take out her whole family. Her daughter was dead already and now it was Catherine’s turn. She might be dead within the hour.

He stormed out of his office and jogged all the way to Adna’s office. She was busy, but he didn’t wait. He couldn’t, not now. He simply interrupted her.

“It is Catherine. You must call the feds, at once. She is meeting the kidnapper now. It seemed to take forever to dial the number, to get someone in charge. Finally, Special Agent Joy McMillan picked up the phone. Finally. He hoped to God it wasn’t too late.

The Shack

Eva was weeping, very silently at first. The two men felt uneasy, overcome by a peculiar helplessness especially Abraham felt hard to deal with. She looked so fragile, so young, so pregnant. She looked like Imma, his real Imma. Not the Mamma-Imma-Heike version. In a way Eva looked like her. Very much so. In a way she looked like his beloved Imma. How very much so. A young mother to be. Abraham couldn't take his eyes off her. Levy got up and started pacing up and down the small space of the shack that wasn't taken up by the kitchen with its small sink and fridge, the round wooden table with one old oak chair, the bed and the shelves on which his father stored all kind of papers. The shack was really too small for three people. It was uncomfortable as such. And what was worse; Eva sighs and the silence in between were hard to bear after all her happy prattling. Her slender shoulders were heaving

rhythmically to the beat of her grief. Finally, she rose her swollen face and looked at Abraham directly, defyingly.

„You don't know her, you really don't.“ There was such pain in her face it was completely contorted. She sobbed out loud once more, then she added:

„She will not, she will not accept me, or the child. She will -. I am outcast. Forever. She is such a hard woman.“ Eva broke down crying without end. Her sobs were getting louder and louder. It seemed to take forever. Her sounds were intimate and rattling, heart-wrenching. Tears were streaming down her face.

But her grief was so deep and real that Abraham was touched by it deeply and profoundly, more touched than by the fake story she had wound up before. In fact, it is hard for anyone not to be touched by a young pregnant woman weeping her eyes out so totally. She was shifting so uncomfortably on her chair, fidgeting terribly and one could see she was not well, she was not well at all. And then that massive round belly sitting on her small body like some huge fat boulder rocking the fine lines of the coast. It was too large to bear for her slender, delicate shape.

And then the memories he had repressed for years, even decades, came back full throttle to claim their tribute: His beloved Imma. She had been weeping like this, fidgeting so terribly and begging him, imploring him to give their baby to Heike once it was born. Heike, her best friend, the trusted confidante who would take it away. Out of this present danger. She would take it to Switzerland, it would be safe there. It would have food, enough of everything, even cake on Sunday, every Sunday. Chocolate not only on Christmas and Easter, but every day. There would be meat and honey. Honey. He would have a brilliant future, a career, become a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer. He would have enough coal to get through the winter, get through every

winter. He would have a bike and books and boots and clothes, little white shirts with black ties, velvet bow ties and shoes, leather shoes, in the right size, not too big, not too small, boy's shoes. In all the sizes. Everything, he would have everything. Please, please give her the little one once it has come.

He saw Imma crying when he looked at Eva, he saw her grief and he felt moved, beyond measure, beyond what could be expected, even beyond reason and all common sense. Eva was Imma. Imma was Eva. He couldn't distinguish the two. They had become one in his clouded perception. He couldn't see clearly anymore. Back then there was nothing he could do, he was sentenced to bear the quarantine when the Russians came. He was locked up with his dying wife, her empty shrivelled womb, locked up with all these other fatally sick prisoners. He was deprived of the right to do anything to save his son. Now history offered him a unique chance again to righten its stakes, a chance to change someone's fate, a chance to help and reconcile a family, even if it wasn't his own, even if their strange ways weren't his. What a terrible, terrible idea this girl had. In its nature as terrible as Imma's back then and that had turned out for its good. Somehow it had.

What if Eva's plan was the right thing to do? What if the older generation only listened if the young ones rose their voices in such drastic ways. What if the gap between the generations had become so big that only pain and forgiveness could bridge it? Wasn't it all wrong? Wasn't it all so wrong? Still. Didn't they, the old, the ancient, didn't they need teaching, painful lessons? Drafted up by the young, raising their swift, cristall clear voices singing new songs, so painful so despairingly awful that the tunes in their beautiful truth could hardly be borne? They needed their chance,

their unique way of putting their ideas and beliefs into practice. They needed the room, the love, and the trust of the older generation. He felt sickened and empty.

And yet. He was alive, his bodily functions all working perfectly. He had eyes to see, he had ears to listen; he had heard the young woman's plea, it was crazy, it was wrong. Still. She had raised her voice and he had heard it, he had taken her request to heart. In fact, it had pierced his heart, torn it apart, rent it in two, three, many pieces. Too many. Too much. All of it. And yes. It was wrong. So wrong. Yet, somehow he believed her, wanted to believe her indeed from the bottom of his heart. What if she was right? What if her mother needed a painful lesson? What did he know about their way of life?

She was so totally credible in her youth and folly, so innocent and strong, she was a forceful time-machine and he the time traveller who rode her. Now he was given a chance to be active, to be up and about, to do what had to be done. He simply couldn't remain passive any longer. He may be old in his body, but he felt like the young man then, so strong, but so broken. How could all these years have passed by without him noticing? How could they have just sneaked past, out-witted him so awfully? He did still feel the same. In fact, he was one and the same, the one and only Abraham Cohen. He was old, he was young. And how he loved his Imma, his beloved wife, their unborn child she carried. He was young. He was old. He was young. He was old.

All these feelings, all the hopes for peace and love: the quiet life in the countryside, the chicken in the yard, the goats in the barn, the red roses on the fence, the yellow roses along the vegetable beds, the white roses on the red brick walls. It all welled up within him. All that had so long been buried, it flushed up from within,

overruling all and every opposition he had claimed before. Now he would rise, now he would do what had to be done. He would help Eva follow this absurd plan, he would help his Imma; he would trust a young woman, again. He would help this young mother-to-be, this younger version of Imma. Love overwhelmed him, Love for Imma and Love for Eva, Love for the lost and sick, those worried and confused. Love for those who had lost their way, who had gone astray without any chance of ever returning to the fold.

He changed his mind.



Eva felt his change, felt how there was something new between them and she took heart, sobbing less hard:

„You are listening now?“

“I am”, Abraham said. Levy had fallen silent. He didn’t know what to make of the strange scene that unfolded before his eyes. What was happening? He didn’t quite get it?

“I shall help you. Tell me what to do,” Abraham said.

Eva woke up as if from a dream.

“Will you?“

She looked as if she came back from a long journey.

“Will you really?“ She wiped away her tears from her cheek. A faint smile formed around her dimples.

“I will”, Abraham answered.

Had his father changed his mind? Was he going to help the girl? Seriously? Was he out of his mind too? Somehow they had teamed up. There was a connection that hadn't been there before. It was a strong bond; Levy could feel it physically.

Eva dried her eyes with her sleeve and looked at Abraham for what seemed an eternity. She hadn't expected any help from him. But soon enough, she got ready for plotting and planning everything in detail.

“Ok.” She blew her nose and folded her hands over her large belly, stroking the unborn child gently with the palms of her slender hands.

“I know how we shall do this. Let us write to Mama and tell her to come to Vienna. She might not come to Prague, because of her sister. She is responsible for my cousin's death. Prague is not a good place for her.”

“Ok”, Abraham said. “I shall go to Vienna.”

“Good. I have always wanted to visit Castle Schönbrunn with her. If she comes to Vienna, you go and tell her that if she ever wants to see me again she must break into the Clinique as you had to break into the Geschäftszimmer at Terezín. No, I have a better idea. You cannot tell her all this, we shall write her a letter.”

Eva's eyes were all red and her nose was swollen. She was searching her bag for a tissue.

“You know, this is an offense, we cannot simply kidnap you and the baby. What if the police -.” Eva interrupted Levy, stifling another sob:

„Don't worry about the police, I will tell them all later. I will say it was just a way of teaching my mum to love me, to accept me and the baby. So will you? Will you help me? Please. You said you would.”

„Yes. I said so. I shall help you. But mothers don't really need teaching. They love their daughters already, always, don't they?“ he looked at her quizzically.

„Yes, but in the wrong way. Please, Abraham, Levy. In the wrong way.“

Abraham got up and took a piece of paper and a pen. Then he sat down at the wooden table and looked at Eva. « What do you want me to write to her? » He sighed and looked at her.

„You will help me. Oh God. Good. You will help me, indeed.“ Eva sobbed out loud again, then she leaned back and rubbed her red eyes. They were quite itchy. She looked up on the ceiling, hesitated a moment and then began dictating to him.

Dear Catherine

I have been looking for you and your loved ones for so long, I can hardly believe I found you, now. After all these years, decades. But here you are.

Abraham looked down. The page was empty, he hadn't written down a word.

“Something like this. Look I will write it down for you, that is faster. You can then just copy it from here. Or better can you type it? Do you have an old typewriter?“

“A Hermes Baby? Yes, sure, I can type it on there.“

Eva took the pen from him and wrote the words she had dictated from the beginning and then went on to write some more.



Dear Catherine

I have been looking for you and your loved ones for so long, I can hardly believe I found you, now. After all these years, decades. But here you are.

I recognized you immediately. You truly have your mother's eyes and her hair. Yours is a little lighter though. Finally, I can tell you your story. I wished your daughter wasn't to die while I am writing this down. She is in labour now. I am writing you these lines while she is fighting with the little one, is struggling to survive, but won't. I will make sure of this. When a woman is weak from birth it is easy to let her go, she'll slip away so easily. Your Eva will die just as Imma died. An eye for an eye, a young mother for a young mother.

Here she stopped and looked at her handwriting. She snickered nervously. It sounded about right. Quickly, she shoved over what she had written to Abraham. He glanced at the lines but he had fallen silent. What could he possibly answer this young, eager woman that wrote such commanding letters? What produced these words? The brain? The tongue? The stomach? Or the little lost girl Eva was in the past? Whatever it was, these words, they could, they would light such big fires, could cause proper incendiaries that burned down everything and left all wasted. He wasn't really sure he wanted a part in this. He wavered, but Eva's eyes shone brightly when she looked

at him imploringly. And when their gaze locked - unified in some secret way they couldn't understand or even begin to fathom - it was as if she had come to him from a lost world: his very own past. Imma looked at him. Imma talked to him. Imma implored him.



"But really, you must write that letter. I don't know how to continue, honestly. You have to think of the rest for yourself. Please. Abraham. Please. Make my mother come to Vienna and then give her the letter there. "Please, I beg you." The words just spilled out of her and Abraham wasn't sure whether any of this was preconceived or premediated in some way. Most likely she made it up on the spot, as she went along, not knowing herself what she was going to say next.

"I will text her and then you will go, or Levy can go. Can't you Levy?" She grabbed Levy by the shoulder and searched his eyes for an answer, but Levy looked down at the floor. His father always picked up the weirdest people. He had a gift of finding people that were harmed by life badly, mentally ill, unstable or deeply in trouble and in this case young, pregnant and utterly foolish. That young woman will be their ruin. His guts somehow told him that this wouldn't end well. But he kept silent. She carried on.

"They have WiFi at the Churchill where you brought me. I shall send a message to her from my Ipad. Come on." She looked at him imploringly and continued: "And then, you will bring her here, to Terezín where the lies started."

“What if she contacts the police”

“She won’t. Believe me. She won’t. She will want to solve the problem herself. Typically, my mum,” Eva chuckled at the thought of it. “But if she threatens you tell her that if she involves the police you will kill the baby, however, if she complies you will only give it up for adoption.” Abraham frowned at her. He looked at her quizzically as she carried on without stopping.

“Not in Switzerland. I don’t know which country. Say, the United States, she absolutely hated it there. Hippies and so. It will surely scare the wits out of her,” Eva was smiling now.

“Your mother hates Americans?”

“No, she doesn’t. She just didn’t really like it when her mum dragged her over here”.

“She drugged her?”

“No, no, no, she didn’t. She dragged her over here and then back to Switzerland. Long story. Please, Abraham you must just continue the letter in your own words. She will have to know, about Heike. And Imma, and about all the rest. I don’t know. I wasn’t there. Please Abraham. We shall mix facts and fiction, but never mind. In the end she will understand. We shall then tell her the truth.”

“What truth? Mine? Yours? She will hate me for it. Never mind. If she loves you in the end, I shall gladly be the scapegoat.” Abraham said.



He had taken a deep breath and grabbed the pen tighter. He looked once again over the lines Eva had written. The pages that followed her hapless scribbling were all empty, so empty and white. They were staring at him mercilessly. All these lines, all these lives unlived, lost so brutally, so senselessly. He took a deep breath, why was there still life in him and in the others there wasn't? Yehuda his best friend who died in Auschwitz, Elena his cousin who shone so radiantly, his parents, his uncles: They had to leave, they had to go. Why had God left his breath in him and taken it from his beloved? All this emptiness, all this white paper; Jacob, his son; Imma, his love, his dearest. How could he? Could he? Should he? Write it down? Think about it once again? Mix fact and fiction to its own ends? After having thought for so long that he was done with it? Wasn't it futile, all a chasing after the wind? Wasn't it?

He heard Eva's voice from afar, her words were stroking the silence gently now and Levy was murmuring back to her. Their soft, tired voices were breaking like waves onto an ancient sandy beach, everything now was so peaceful. Eva and Levy were talking complacently, but he had shut them out. He had to do this now. There was not much time left, not now, not anymore. His memory was fading, the wax that was his life's candle was melting, his whole existence was burning down. Things were coming to an irrevocable end. They said one could sense the very end, fathom it ahead and to him it seemed true enough. Then he took up the pen – it was a cheap plastic pen, a give away from a kebab shop the girl must have bought a meal from- and Abraham held it tight in his rough old hands. That was the moment: the moment he started writing.

Abraham focused on his handwriting, it wasn't as neat as it used to be. Maybe she was right, maybe he should let it all out, all the secrets he hadn't told anyone. Now

was the time or all these stories would be buried alongside his skeleton, his dried up bones, his empty hollow skull. He started filling the pages and the writing stared right back at him, all these weird stories, so many loose ends, so much plot without structure and order. Lore from another century, another millennium not worth believing in, not worth the telling.



And then he thought of Aimée, her letters, her love that she had poured upon him so lavishly, the way she put her glorious balm upon his invisible wounds. His thoughts were wavering, his thinking was unlinear. It was hard to grasp it all and put it in some form, some sort of shape that others would be able to relate to, that Catherine would be able to relate to, some form that would deploy Eva's plan.

He tried hard to connect with the feelings of hatred and despise he had been harbouring for years, but he felt he had outgrown them, like a boy a suit that now seemed small and shabby and no longer worthy of keeping. Was the piece of clothing still hanging, screaming out loud in an angry cupboard of his house? It wasn't. All the angry cupboards, all the screaming suits that were too little, too shabby, too small were gone. Human kindness ruled in his home, human helplessness walked along the aisles, its hand firm in God's strong hands. He had forgiven Heike indeed. There wasn't anything else he could have done but to forgive, not to forget what she had done, but to forgive.

Heike upon becoming his beloved Imma, had wanted to help. She had wanted to do a good thing when it was the worst that could have been done to him. But then she never knew he was alive, she never knew he was caught behind the iron curtain

until he managed to flee when he was as a trainer for the men's volleyball team on the Czechoslovakian Olympic team in 1972. It was in Munich during the turmoil caused by the Palestinian attack on the Israeli team that he had managed to break free. That he should use that incident to win his freedom and walk out of Munich a newborn man. Incredible.

He left for the United States, hoping he'd find Jacob there. But learned that he had just missed them, Jacob, -Frank and his "mother" had left again and no-one knew where they had gone. Switzerland? France? The North Pole? Once more he had come to late, been too late. Then he had given up trying to find his eldest. He had met Sarah. And Sarah helped him move on. San Francisco gave him a new life, a new love, a new family. Looking for his lost son had become too painful, it was taking up too much of his time and energy. He gave up, repressed the thought of him. And he had managed. After he had defected he had never wanted to go back to Terezín where it all started. Not until much later, not until now that he was old, Sarah had died and everything drew to an end.

It took him long, it took all his strength, but he wrote the letter and somehow it felt good, it felt right. Eva's plan was so odd it might work, if not for the others then for him, only for him. That was all that mattered. He could get it all out, get it all on that white, spotless paper. He should have done this so long ago. It wasn't right per se, but it was what had to be done and it would help, it might help Eva, help her and her mother find, love and cherish each other again. It was what was right for the new baby, to provide for the future, to provide for a new family. At least he hoped so. Finally get it all off his chest. What a relief. What peace. Hopefully it would all work out, bring the expected results. But then it didn't. It all went south as the Americans

say. It all went so totally wrong and once again everything went out of hand. Once again.

Levy Cohen

He recognized her at once; Catherine Cohen. She held her head high, her long hair being blown all over by the warm morning breeze under the rising Californian sun. By lunchtime it would be pretty warm for the season. Tourists would be hiking along the San Francisco Bay Trail, the kite surfers would be out given the wind picked up and down south, near Monterey, kids would be playing in the many tidepools at Lover's Point Beach in the Pacific Grove area. The new day was ready to unfold gloriously upon the North American West coast. When Levy saw Catherine embark the boat, he realized he had come to surrender. She was so gorgeous; he couldn't take his eyes off her. No way he'd be standing tall and straight when all this was over.

She was more beautiful than in any of the pictures he had seen in the newspapers. Catherine was larger than life, a beauty, a prima donna, the diva he had always dreamed of. For a split second he was thankful to Eva for connecting them; Eva with all her mad and crazy ideas, Eva who had brought so much harm to herself and

her mother, him and his father. He winced at the thought of him being shot so cruelly under the gallows. Catherine, however, seemed untouched, unaffected, unscathed and yet she looked exhausted, so tired and sad. A sadness, he had helped cause, had helped bring on. Such guiltiness crept upon him that it nearly weighed him down, discouraged him from any further action. For a moment he felt unable to proceed with the plan he had laid out so meticulously before his inner self. He would chicken out of this right now, before more harm was done. He couldn't go through with it. It was bad enough already, he couldn't make it even worse: His voice was hoarse, his tongue was lame. No way he'd speak a word even though he had rehearsed every phrase again just seconds before seeing her. But then she came his way and walked closer and closer until he could smell her perfume. Then she walked past him, obviously looking for someone. Looking for him. She leaned at the railing and looked back to where he was standing. Had she noticed him too?

He looked up at her and their eyes met: Locked for that millisecond that was too long for strangers unacquainted. She wasn't sure whether to look away but then he nodded and he could see her fear and her relief. Would he be able to address her now? Speak to her of all the many things that had to be said out loud? He went up to her and they were standing at the railing, side by side, their naked arms touching lightly, looking out at the calm, serene morning sea, trying to ignore the many tourists buzzing around them like lazy, fat bumblebees gearing down after a rich and solid summer's harvest. The ferry was nearly ready for departure. He could feel the lump in his throat when he tried to swallow; it had become the size of a giant pebble, hard as a diamond, solid as concrete and more resilient than a spiderweb. He looked at her

from the side. Her fingers gripped the steel hard, so that her knuckles turned as white as the bar she clutched. He could feel her tremble. She was petrified.

“Sorry for taking you to another prison, but my father had willed it so. He said, “Terezín could be anywhere”. Then he fell silent. Where should he start? There were no words.

He could have told her what his father had told him when he gave him the baby: „Because she is pleasant, delightful and beautiful and her mother shall not see her, nor her grandmother. She is now ours, she is yours“. How perfectly he had staged Eva’s horror show. How perfectly he had wanted to follow her last will using the exact wording she had had repeated to him on countless occasions. How should he tell Catherine that his father only bluffed when he said that he would take her granddaughter? None of his grandchildren had been operated on at the Clinique. Revenge was not Jewish, that was what he had wanted to say. That he only wanted to scare her, teach her, heal her with a remedy so strong it would bring health and joy forever. As had been Eva’s plan. Eva’s sick plan that was so wrong and muddled. His father had wanted to bring peace to her and her daughter, to reconcile them forever.

He had wanted them to seek and know God. From the beginning it was planned that the baby was to be Aviva. That was how Eva had named her before giving birth. Spring. A new beginning. For mother, for daughter, for daughter for mother. But it didn’t work out. Should he tell Catherine that spring was when people really had starved in the old times? They starved in spring, not in winter: When all the stored supplies were devoured: Grain and oat and flour and meal, lard and dried pig’s tails, dried fruit, dried fish, and peas and potatoes and carrots covered in dirt and mould. All gone. All shoved and crammed into hungry mouths, swollen bellies and children

far too little for their age. Then they died, then they perished - when the grounds were still fallow and barren and impoverished from the cold, the snow, the ice that had just melted. When the sun came finally out, they were all gone and rotting in their graves.

Alternativley, he could tell Catherine that this had only been a desperate fantasy of a lonely girl that had needed his mother more than anything. That was really what it all boiled down to: This was all a spoilt kid's doing, their downfall a mere charade. Fiction and fantasies, to Levy's great devastation, had become true, entangled in some horror show that was worse than any talented screenwriter could ever think of. Levy could have told Catherine that only God knows our minds and that he nor his father had had any intention of evil. They had had no intention whatsoever to harm her or Eva or the baby born alive and thriving well. He could have said all this and more, but instead he finally turned towards her and he said.

„Would you like a Coke?“



Catherine nodded, relieved that the stranger next to her finally spoke, finally had made contact. She followed him to the bar, careful not to trip over the high curbs onboard. And when they had patiently waited in line to get their drinks, a bottle of Coca Cola for her and a St. Pauli Girl Lager (the only wheat ale there was) for him, he took her to one of benches on the upper deck. And they sat down under the strong Californian sun in the midst of hundreds of noisy tourists. Now that the ferry was picking up speed a cool breeze has sprung up and Catherine wished she had brought

a warmer jacket. The marina hugging Pier 39 could be seen clearly now. The white sailing yachts looked like toys from afar. From here the tourist boats left for whale watching. On the starboard side they could have seen Treasure Island with its famous Avenue of the Palms facing the waterside, the Treasure Island Flea Market next to Rear Admiral Hugo Wilson Osterhouse Square or San Francisco's Oakland Bay bridge. Had they looked. But they were lost in each other, not seeing not worrying about anything else.

"I really don't know where to start. I stayed-."

"Is the baby alive?" Catherine asked impatiently.

"Of course, it is. My God. You wouldn't believe we have -. No, no no. It is a girl. Your daughter has named her Aviva. Aviva. You will see her soon."

Catherine gasped and clasped her mouth, pressing her fingers onto her face until it hurt. Aviva. The girl had a name. She was alive. She would see her, see her soon. So soon. Levy was still talking. She tried to tune in again to what he was saying:

"but father wanted you to go out to Alcatraz first".

"As I said", he continued, "Terezín was everywhere and I am sorry about this. But I promised to him I would do this and now that he is dead-. I know this is silly. But if you had known my dad you would understand."

Catherine was scowling at him, he had to make some sense here or he was losing her. He had to put the story together for her. Instead he apologized: "We won't have to do the tour. We shall just stay where the boats leave and go. It's nice there with the sea and the flowers and the Golden Gate Bridge further back. You will like it."

"Why should I?" She asked. He shrugged helplessly.

“You killed my daughter, you kidnapped my granddaughter.” He could feel a wave of hatred come towards him.



“Please. Let me explain. I stayed with Eva when my father went to Vienna to get you. He wanted to give you the letter he had written. Eva and I couldn’t read it, all I knew was the beginning that Eva had dictated him, wanting you to believe that she was dying and we would take the baby from you. She. It was her who wanted you to believe this. Your daughter. Eva.”

He let this fact sink in for a moment. He could see Catherine’s adam apple move as she was was swallowing. How unusual in a woman, he thought.

“You are not? I mean you are not taking the baby?” Catherine didn’t trust her hears “Eva was dictorshating this to your dad?” she burst out.

“Dictorshating?” Levy looked at her confused, “what do you mean? I don’t understand.”

“Tell me what happened. I don’t understand,” she said annoyed at her own failure to express herself.

“Well, where to start?” Levy looked at her and then just started somewhere in the beginning, when he had seen Eva first at the shack.

Catherine listened and listend as Levy unfolded the whole awful story to her. As it began to dawn upon her that daughter had planned all this she got a splitting headache. It was outrageous, but this was Eva. True to life. Her very own colours, like a goddam-mossgreen-seawhaleblue-fieryred-purplegray-rainbow. Catherine could

really see this happening. It sounded all but too true. It sounded really like Eva. The oncoming headache nearly lobotomized her. She was all bone and skull, no more flesh, no more blood, no more heart, no more life. She was basically severed from herself, her life, her past and her future. She ceased to exist, as a mother, as a person, as Catherine Cohen. She was no longer there. She was annihilated. Her daughter had done all this to her.



“Say it again”, she said tonelessly and looked at the stranger completely thunder-struck. He smiled down at her and repeated it again. She couldn’t get enough of it. “I will not keep your baby. Of course not. We have never wanted to-. We are not monsters. I will not keep your baby.”

“You won’t. You really won’t,” she chuckled out loud.

“Please, let me finish the story. Please. When my father was in Vienna to meet with you, Eva started to have contractions. It was way too early and she didn’t take it very seriously at first, but after a couple of hours she was getting worse and worse. I am no expert. The baby was only due in another 2 or 3 weeks. Or she wouldn’t have come out to the Shack. Then she had more and more contractions, but she said it was nothing. She said it had happened before.”

Levy looked at Catherine helplessly.

“I believed her.”

Catherine looked at him as if he was from another planet.

“It came early and. I. I. -” Levy couldn’t go on.

"I couldn't help her. I am not a doctor, I work in IT. I could have helped if she had given birth to an algorithm. Maybe. Then-."

He fell mute and looked at her for help. She starred right back, silent as well.

"An algorithm?" She asked tonelessly. He shrugged apologetically.

"I am so sorry, Catherine. There was nothing I could do for her. She just simply didn't stop bleeding. After the little one came. It came so fast. Shouldn't they take longer when it is their first birth?"

"How long did it take?"

"Maybe six, seven hours, at first it wasn't very serious. The waters broke-. She was in such pain."

"She really gave birth out there? And you were there?"



"Yes. She did. And yes, I was. But then -. It was terrible. It was awful. I cannot. I mean, you know. She died, but the baby lived. I was there and-. All this blood. And. I.- And I texted my father straight away. I mean after. After she-. He was already in Vienna and very close to the Ferris Wheel when the message reached him and I think he made a new plan at once. He would still give you the letter, but he couldn't bring himself to talk to you or bring you to Prague with him. That was what we wanted. That you'd go with him. He would have told you that if you'd wanted to see your daughter again you'd have to drive him to Prague. Hence the car Eva asked for.

"That was the plan?"

"Stupid, isn't it? So stupid."

“Well, I don’t know. I might have believed him. But I don’t understand why she was in this shack in the first place. Why was she not at the hotel?”



“She loved it out there. She loved the woods and the wilderness. I told her it might not be a wise thing to always walk so far from the hotel. But she said it was home. And walking was good and that she wasn’t sick only pregnant. She and my father they had formed this really special connection. Somehow-. I envied her, how she arrived there and found a way to his heart straight away. I couldn’t really explain it to myself. I’ve wanted to contact you, always, always. You must believe me. I know it was so wrong what we did.

“But why did your father not tell me when he came to see me in Vienna?”

“Knowing that your only child had just passed away, Abraham was in shock. He had loved Eva like a real grand-daughter and he couldn’t lie to her family. He would have felt compelled to tell you the truth then and there and so would have spoiled Eva’s plan altogether, he felt he would have betrayed her, betrayed her memory, her last will. And he didn’t want that. It was an awful dilemma. He didn’t want to lie to you, but he wanted to be true to her. She had moved him so much. So, he needed a moment to get back in character. At the time he really wanted to go through with this. It was also about him, not only about her. He wanted to honour her, honour her memory and the memory of his first wife, Imma Cohen.

“The one?”

"Yes, the one whose identity she, I mean your mother, took." Levy sighed and then continued.

"So, he hopped onto that Ferris wheel despite his fear of heights and then he took your bag and wanted to place the letter inside".

"The old weirdo. That must have been him. I do remember him. He was -," Catherine exclaimed.

"Really? You remember him?" Levy smiled faintly.

"Maybe. I don't know. I cannot say it for sure. I think I do. He was so-. I can't say. The word is gone. I have been in a coma. I talk strange, I cannot remember things, words. I don't make sense." Levy looked at his feet, then went on.

"I am sorry to hear this. I haven't been in a coma and I talk strange too. This story still doesn't make any sense to me".

"Well, it does to me. Carry on. Why did he take the bag? Why didn't he put the letter inside and left?"

"He couldn't open the zip."

"Well, it's an anti-theft mechanism. It's called safety pin."

"Yes, the safety pin. Well, obviously that was quite safe, so he took the whole lot and got outside. After he had placed the letter into your bag, he then wanted to give it back to you. He was waiting for you to come down from the Ferris Wheel, but somehow you stayed on and on and then he missed you.

He had said he couldn't take the tour once more. He is so afraid of heights. He must have stayed behind that entrance building for too long. He looked for a hide-out. It was so cold, his fingers stiff, he was under shock. Time somehow elapsed, he simply stood there staring, brooding, horrified about himself, horrified about Eva's death. So

there he was, with your bag and the letter. And when he came round from his reverie and came to look for you, you were gone." Catherine had reached for a tissue in her bag, she was pressing it against her lips, listening intently to what ensued.

"Eva's plan hadn't worked out and he was very sorry for it. He didn't see you anymore on the Prater, it was freezing cold, dark and not many people were around. He didn't know what to do".



"Yes, I remember it was freezing cold. And then?"

"He took your bag with him because he didn't want anyone to steal from you. He saw that you had your cards and all your stuff in there. He wanted that to be safe. Then he came back to the shack and we decided that some way or another we would have to go through with Eva's plan. It was her last will after all, and especially my father deeply respected that, he felt bound by it, even more after she had died. He felt he couldn't betray her or he would be just like them. And that was the last thing he wanted: Be untrue.

Eva wanted you to believe that we would take revenge on your family for taking our Jacob and turning him into Frank. She wanted you to be scared out of your wits so that you would love her and her baby afterwards. We never meant to harm you, we wanted to teach, we wanted to heal you. We wanted to help your daughter and you to be reconciled. But then all we ever did was hurt you. We did. We really did. I am so sorry. You cannot believe how sorry I am."



Catherine was in complete shock. That was what Eva thought? That she wouldn't love her grandchild? That her own mother wouldn't love her now that she was pregnant. She was thunderstruck. How could life be so cruel? How could your loved ones misunderstand and hurt you so much? How much easier would it have been to blame the old Jew. The old Jew who died under the gallows in Terezín. He was evil. He was to blame. He was guilty. Of Everything. Eva's death. Her misery. Their misery. Everything. The whole world's misery and suffering.

How easy it would have been. And now she was told he loved Eva. Loved her daughter. Like a grandchild. Like his own family. That he had wanted to heal, to help her. Help her. Her whole world was backflipping, her whole world was blackflipping. It all went black, it all went flip. She flipped out completely.

Catherine had wept so much since Eva was gone, there were no tears left within her. Her saliva wetted the tissue she was holding. That was all so unexpected, so sudden and yet, knowing Eva so well, it was the resolution that made the most sense.

She knew at once that Levy was telling the truth.



“How awful, this is so terrible. Why would she think I wouldn’t love the baby? Why would she? I mean. Oh my God.”

“She was so scared of you, she said you wanted her to follow a career, not to be a mother so young. You were so ambitious, she said.”

“Yes, but I’ve wanted -. I’ve only wanted - ” She clasped her mouth again and looked up at the sky. What a blow. All that she had worked for, fought for, all had been in vain, on the contrary not only in vain but harmful to its extremes. She didn’t see the clouds that were passing high above the Atlantic Ocean, she didn’t see the seagulls looking out for fish, mollusks, crustaceans. Catherine couldn’t talk, she was muted, waiting for those tears that would unburden and relieve her, but none came. Time had halted, all had come to a standstill.

Total standstill

What a terrible ending, waking from a nightmare like this. It was the worst of all scenarios, your own hurting you so, your own daughter torturing you thus. And yet, it made sense to her. That was Eva, this story sounded so much like her, so crazy. Fiction at its most dangerous: Hurling Catherine down from her mighty tall ivory tower and taking her daughter down with her in the falling, burying her deep down. The story her Eva had made up, dead-good, totally and thoroughly convincing, yet - and that she hadn’t considered in her teenage zeal-, lethal to herself. Finally, Catherine could see through it, and how she could see it. The sight was dazzling bright, a pain in the eyes, a dagger in the heart if one wanted to put it more dramatically. Deathening.

No deathening wasn't a word. There were no words. She gasped, opened her mouth, then closed it.



Eva must have believed she had it all covered, but she had planned it all so wrong, -her baby. The birth. She didn't know how precarious giving birth could be. Even nowadays, without the proper care. A serious encounter one had to prepare for properly. The foolish young girl, she was. Foolish. Foolish stupid girl. Catherine caught herself. She was still scolding her very own daughter, and yet she was long dead. She was forever gone. Eva was no longer here to bring dissatisfaction to her mother, her dissatisfaction she had to account for all by herself. No more daughter to blame. The blame now, was all Catherine's to own up to. Eva was gone, her story had devoured her, the story she had made up to reach her mother's heart. It had completely and totally backfired leaving Catherine high and dry and Eva at its deadeast. No, deadeast was not a word either, was it? There was only death and dead. That was it.

Death and dead and dead and death.



"Catherine."

She hardly heard him, staring out at the sea. Where was she anyway?

"Catherine? Can you hear me?" She turned her head.

“I am so sorry. It was an accident. She simply didn’t realize that the baby would come already and there was no hospital close. I am so sorry. Please, you must believe me. I am the one responsible for her death. I should have taken her to Prague much earlier. But then she didn’t really want to go. She said giving birth was not a sickness. She said she wasn’t ill. I simply didn’t. I didn’t realize it was so-. But then when she was dead we were panicking. Father had come back to Prague as fast as he could. Me and my father were -.”

Catherine looked at him, the man is still talking to me, she thought. There must be more. What was it he was saying? What more was there possibly to say?

“And then we wanted to take your bag with us. But we forgot it, we simply left it behind, we are not murderers, and facing the corpse of a dead girl was more than any of the two of us could really bear. We tried to cover her up. We didn’t mean to incriminate you. We really, really wanted the bag to be safe. That was it. We clean forgot it. Next time we came, the police was there. We couldn’t get back in. Everything was sealed off. Crime scene and so. You know. And then the bag was gone.



The police had taken it and they drew the wrong conclusions. However, father had taken the letter, I took the baby. He said he wanted to give the letter to you personally, later when things were a little more settled. As if anything could ever be settled after this, Catherine thought. I am so sorry. You cannot believe how sorry I am.” He hid his face in his hands.

"Yeah, you've said that before. But why did you leave for the US with the baby? Why didn't you come forward after your father died?" Catherine asked reproachfully. She didn't know how to proceed. All this was simply too much. Even if she had been in full command of her language skills, cognitive and motor, she couldn't have found the right words to manoeuvre through the Bermuda cliffs of that hell of a conversation. The conversation of her life. That was what this was: The conversation of all conversation.

"I shot him. I shot my father. I was scared."

Levy looked down onto his hands.

"I was there that night, to protect him. And then I saw you, run out that tunnel and someone was running behind you. A guy with a gun. I was afraid."

He looked up and Catherine looked at him horrified.

"You think you killed your own father?" Then she hesitated.



"No, you didn't." She looked at him, frowning, amazed at this conclusion. Why would he think that? It wasn't true. There were few things she was sure of, but this was one of them.

"Accidentally, I didn't mean to. I wanted to protect him. I only saw the guy with the gun. He shot at my father and I shot back. But they were standing in a line. I am not a shooter. Do you understand? And my father was closer. When I had fired the shot -. I am not good with guns. I have never owned a weapon. It was my father's gun." The large man's shoulder sank.

“He spanned, he spooned around and protected me.”

“Yes. You ran so fast. I waited too long. The shooter, he was in the line of fire, and a second later he was. My father was-. He must have known I was there. He must have known I had taken his gun. And yet.”

“Hang on,” Catherine said: “You haven’t killed your father.” She shook her head.

“Well, I heard the scream and he was dead afterwards. It must have been me that killed him. The police never disclosed fully to the press what exactly happened at the execution site, so I kinda guessed. I know the guy who shot at him missed.”

“Yes, sure. But I know someone who saw the bell-, the bellistic reports. (Was it really bellistic? It wasn’t bells, it was bullets. Was it bullistic report? A bull?) The bullet of the unknown shooter didn’t heat anyonw.

Whereas your father was shot by another Prague policeman. He must have shot at the same time like you. I cannot remember his name. Something Greek. He was taken off duty afterwards. I think he’s even in prison now.” She paused and then remembered more.

“It was some corruption scandal he was involved in. Nothing to do with you, me or your father. Just an awful coincidention. You must believe me. You are not responsible for your father’s death. Of that I am sure.”

Levy held his head down and Catherine nudged him slightly.

“I am so sorry for your loss.”

“Oh wow. Really? That is such relief. Incredible. You cannot believe -. Thank you.”

They both looked out onto the many blues of the sea. He spoke again first.

“Concidence? What a word. I like it.” He smiled at her, repeating the mistaken word tenderly.

“Yes, sure, sure. Absolutely positive. Goodness Levy, you haven’t killed him. You should have come forward nevertheless.”

“Eva wanted us to keep the baby for a while. Remember she wanted to you to panic for real. She said to torture you for 2 or 3 months before revealing the truth and that was what I did. I just did that. I didn’t. Oh my God. I couldn’t really think straight anymore? So. I guess I am in trouble.”

“They found your name and Aviva’s name on a passenger list, but that was kind of a dead end. You must have been covering your traces really well ever since you got here. The address from your father’s diary was wrong. The FBI found the house empty”.



“The FBI? Oh my God. They - . I had moved. The week before I came to Prague. I was going to anyway. I left my wive, well-, she left me. I couldn’t stay there. The house so empty. The baby. And the prying neighbours. Well, it’s complicated. I didn’t yet-.” He stopped dead and it seemed as if for the first time it really began to set in what he had done. What Eva had involved him in.

“God, I had been so preoccupied with the idea that I had killed my beloved dad that I hadn’t even thought of the little one. It was kind of clear I had to take her and couldn’t leave her behind. I really couldn’t think clearly. What is it they charge me with? Kidnapping?”

“Right. Kidnapping and extortion maybe.”

He laughed out loud.

“Of course. I would be wanted for kidnapping. Can you believe it?”

“I guess you are.”



Levy turned white and Catherine looked at the tall man before her with different eyes. He looked so desperate and broken at once. It seemed as if only now he began to realize what charges might be brought towards him: maybe attempted murder of a policeman, definitely kidnapping of a baby, child abduction. The sentence would be a long and severe one, maybe even life. If he was tried here in San Francisco, he might even be facing death. California was nationwide the leader in killing prisoners for their crimes. His face was completely distorted. Catherine impulsively grabbed his arm and held it tight.

“Levy, stop it. Stop it right there. I -, we will explain. After all, we bear the same name. We are family, in a way, aren’t we? We tell them something. Somehow. That you thought I knew you had the baby. That I had asked you to take it. We shall think of something. We tell them the truth. We simply tell them the truth. Please, don’t worry.”



Catherine reached into her pocket and got out the rose stone that she had taken from Eva's room when she left for her long and adventurous odyssey to Prague. She handed it to Levy and Levy reached out for it.

"What's that?"

"It used to belong to Eva. We found it on a hiking trip. Take it as a token."

"Of what?"

"Friendship? Commitment? Family Ties. I don't know. Just take it"

She shoved it into his hand so hard, he nearly dropped it.

"I've had it in my pocket for too long, I can no longer bear feeling it when I put my hands in my pockets. It's just a stone. It's dead matter. It's-."

Catherine stopped right there. She didn't really know why she wanted Levy to have the stone. She had loved running her fingers along the even surface of the cold stone. It had been such comfort. Maybe that was why.

"Thank you", Levy said closing his fingers carefully around the stone as he put it into his pocket. Catherine could feel him stroke the stone in his pocket, explore its cool smoothness with his fingers.

"Please, continue the story. I want to know how it all ended."

Levy nodded, he tried to focus hard, but his thoughts wandered to the rose stone he was still holding. Why had Catherine parted with it? What a token of confidence and trust.

"Thank you."

"What for?"

"The stone."

"Oh sure. You're welcome."

"You wanna know what happened then?"

"I sure do."

"Sure?"

"Sure"

"Nothing is sure."

"I know. Well, death is."

"Right. Death is."

"Tell me what happened."

"Alright. I had Eva's ID and I quite easily registered Aviva as my own child. You wouldn't believe how easy that was.

"No, I do believe you. Bureaucracy is a domestic monster of its own. And then?" He had raised his head and looked at her sideways.

"Well, I tamed the monster".

"Yeah. Sure. Where is she now?" Catherine nodded, thankful to him for guessing her thoughts. "You will see her, but please, let me finish explaining all this. I really owe you."

"You don't owe me anything" Catherine interrupted him and smiled properly for the first time since they had started this conversation. Relief was coming, deep relief. The girl was alive, her baby, she was alive. It was only really a question of time now before she could hold her.



She looked at the man next to her, Levy was handsome, indeed. He wasn't a killer. And to think that he had lived in that constant agony of believing he had killed his father. It must have been torture. She gave him a proper smile, the first she could muster for a long time and it wasn't only for the white mark on his ring finger where the wedding band should have sat. He smiled back, relieved.

"You will take her? Care for her? See her grow up?" He asked candidly.

"Of course".

"We will have to sort out the legal stuff. You are the grandmother, but technically, I am the father now. And I haven't even adopted her. I really don't know how we will sort this out. It is a mess indeed, such a mess. To think that we are not really related at all."

"Well, we are, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are now. By fiction and fantasy. I see. You would be what? My mother-in-law? How old are you?"

"You don't seriously expect me to answer this question, do you?"

"Ok. Different question: Can I visit?"

"Me?" Catherine raised her eyebrow. Was he beginning to flirt with her?

"You. The little one. The two of you."

"Any time. After all you're the father," Catherine joked.

"Ok. Granny Catherine", they both laughed out loud.

"Gran Kate," he mused, "it suits you."

"What? Being a grandmother?" She gave him another smile.

"Yes, it does. If only I could say the same of my role as a father."

"Well, the real father is dead. I think he committed suicide by jumping off a bridge."

"That is awful."

"Yes, isn't it."

"So, I am the father and I am not. I cannot adopt the little one because- ."

"You are the father, when really, you're not. I understand."

"Absolutely crazy."

"Don't worry. I am a lawyer. Really, Levy. Don't worry. We will find a way of explaining all this to the authorities. I will press no charges. I will tell them that you have really helped us. I know my daughter. There is nothing you could have done". She let the words sink in for while.



"Believe me. If she wants her way, she wants her way", then Catherine added soberly: "If she wanted. You know. If she wanted."

"Yeah, I know", he put his arm around her and gave her a light shove. Catherine swallowed the lump in her throat. The touch of his arms had done it, had loosened the tension in her muscles, her body, her jaw. And then the tears came and she started crying. Levy took her in his arms and patted her fine, soft hair. He felt her shirt rub against his naked arm, her smell entering his system. Soothingly he whispered to her: "I am so sorry for what my father has done to you. I didn't want to go through with it. But then when he died in that terrible shooting. Everything was simply too much. I don't know if you can understand. I simply left, fled from Europe. It is ironic. Under the gallows, I understand. In such a place, shot dead like an old, stray dog. He hasn't

deserved that. He who believed so much in faith, marriage, diligence and honesty. The virtues of the founding fathers. Shot dead like this. It shouldn't have been like that. I should have stayed in the Czech Republic, I should have gone to the police. I haven't - And then I read you were in a coma. That's when I left. I wasn't sure you were going to make it." He folded his hands before his face and took a deep breath, letting Catherine go.

"I did it all wrong. I am so sorry." Then he paused and they both listened to the sounds of the sea.

"At least I have now fulfilled everyone's last wishes. My father's, your daughter's. I've told you all I know, there is nothing more. I am a free man now. Ready to move on. No longer bound by promises and stories. And I don't know what. Crazy. All this. So crazy."

Catherine looked at him and she felt his pity, his pain for his own family, his father, his very own life and for all that had happened to her, and for her family: Her daughter's death, all these terrible stories Eva had made up and the terrible consequences she has caused with it. It couldn't be borne. Not with grace, not with patience, not with long suffering. It simply couldn't be endured.



"I want to see her, now." Catherine said abruptly.

"We can't leave right now, we have to wait until the next boat arrives. I think they run every half an hour", he glanced at his watch. "There is still time. Let's take a walk. We

can walk towards the entrance of the museum. I think we can even walk around the whole island. Let's find out." He bounced off the railing where they had been standing and started to walk slowly along the jetty. Catherine followed reluctantly. They were both silent for what seemed like an endless moment and felt the spring sun warm their faces. The air was rich with the moist and salty odours of the sea and Catherine felt that these were the scents of home. In a lighter tone she began to banter with him:

"This is torture. I mean. I really want to see my granddaughter. Now. Why do I have to be here? Can't we go back right now? We could swim. Or hijack that yacht out there?" She nodded in the direction of a beautiful white Tri-Deck lying idly at anchor near Alcatraz Island.

"See, Eva's plan worked." He laughed, mirroring the change in her mood and suddenly trying to flirt with her. But she couldn't respond to it, not fully, not now.

"Yes, her plan worked, but it cost her life. Her life. Imagine. When I would have loved her anyway, would have loved the baby anyway. How can two generations grow so much apart? How can she misjudge me so totally? I cannot understand why she did it. Do you understand what she did? Why she did it? Why has she done it? I mean-. Why was she so scared? Why couldn't she just tell me, straight into the face: Mummy, I am pregnant. Help me. Why this story? Why Prague? Why leave? Why stay in the shack when she. - I mean. Why? Why Why? It drives me nuts."

"I don't know".

"See. You don't know too. And you discussed this plan with her."

"Catherine, I think no one can ever answer all your questions. Maybe my dad could have. But then he was crazy too.



“Maybe she didn’t really know you? The way you really are.”

“Maybe. Maybe she didn’t. God, it is too late now, anyway.”

She glanced at him and realized that their talk had lost its innocence, had lost it long ago. Was she now beginning to flirt with him? It was most disturbing. Especially as Greg was lurking somewhere at the back of her mind. And Harvy. No, Harvey was married again, Harvey was not lurking anywhere. Harvey was not the lurking type. Harvey was married. But Harvey was not the marrying type either. Stop. Stop it right there.

She was here now. She was not in Europe, not in Zimmerwald near Bern, not in Prague. She was in the New World (not so new, really, a bit *démodé* these days) And Levy looked awesome with his blonde hair tousled by the spring breeze, his T-shirt flapping in the wind and she realized again how tall and good-looking he was. A giant of a man. Not someone she should let go of. And what she liked most; he carried himself so straight and so upright despite the blow he had taken. After all, the guy had lost his father and believing it was him that had killed him must have been awful. Terrible.

She felt so strongly attached to Levy, bound by the most incredible, frightening story encompassing love and embracing death in one grasp, that it was hard to keep her eyes off him. They were both victims, they were both offenders. In some way. Both involved in killing their loved ones. In some way. Both guilty. Both innocent.



“Catherine, I don’t know why all this has happened. Honestly. Don’t turn to me for answers, because I don’t know. I have no idea. Luckily I don’t have children.” He ran his fingers along his thighs and looked at her scrutinizing every line in her face.

“Having children is the greatest luck on earth and the greatest pain.” Catherine said.

“Is that a Jewish wisdom?”

“I don’t know. You are the one who is Jewish. I have come to learn over the course of the past weeks that I am not. So.” She laughed and continued.

“No. This is not Jewish. It is Catherine Cohen’s wisdom. I am but one, but one I am.”

He smiled at her, raising his eyebrows at the pun she had made.

“But revenge, revenge, revenge is not Jewish, that must be a Jewish saying, isn’t it?”

She asked.

“You wouldn’t believe where my father had that saying from.”

“Why? Where from? A rabbi? The Talmund?”

“No. He’s got it from a TV series. Can’t remember which one though.”

“You’re serious?”

“Yeah, absolutely positive. That was where he got it from.”

“A TV series? Not the Talmund?”

“No, not the Talmund. Maybe the screenwriter got it from there, but my dad got it from the show.”

“And I had thought-,” she gave him a playful shove, “that it was some -well, never mind.”

“Shall we go back? The boat should be here any minute.”

“Sure? Let’s go back at once.”



The sun had come out again from behind a far away cloud and half closed her eyes, finally, the next boat arrived on the pier. Talking to him had absorbed her so much that she hadn't seen it coming. Finally, finally they could go back. Finally, she could see the baby. Slowly they walked towards the pier. There was no hurry. Masses of tourists had to get off the boat first. They could both see the boat was packed with people carrying colourful backpacks, wearing dark expensive sunglasses; impersonating the tourist stereotype everyone embodies, but everybody flees from. Then Catherine started to talk again:

"My own daughter. - My very own." She shook her head, then went on:

"You know there was a time when I thought that if everyone was like me the world would be such a perfect place. Seriously. I know this is very vain. But, hey.- That was what I thought. Now I begin to think that the world is such a mess because everyone is just like me. Isn't that crazy? Isn't that absolutely crazy? What a kick turn."

"No this isn't crazy at all. I understand very well what you mean. We all need so much forgiveness, a saviour. I am a Christian after all. That is what I deeply believe in."



"You are not Jewish? Surely you are a Cohen?" She looked at him in deep amazement. And Levy smiled sheepishly and chose not to answer her last question. He only shrugged. The boat had now been secured to the dock and people were

streaming off it for the next tour. It seemed to take forever until everyone was finally off the boat. Catherine wanted them to hurry, but most of them took their time, documenting their arrival on the prison island for their useless digital life archives. She was still waiting for Levy to answer her question.

But no more was said of it. It wouldn't have been right. There would be a later to discuss all this, at least that was what they both thought. All that talking had exhausted them too much already. Catherine and Levy went on board, both lost in their thoughts, their pain, their loss, their broken dreams. She slightly brushed her arm against his in the crowd. The fine hair on his forearm were golden and looking at them from so close, made her heart beat faster. The prospect of seeing Eva's daughter, her granddaughter added to her dizziness and excitement. Now, it wouldn't be long.

When all the tourists from all over the world, -Italians she had heard, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, she had seen, New Yorkers, Levy had insisted, finally, when they were all on board and the ropes loosened the boat made its way back towards Pier 33, San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. Finally, they were moving towards the girl Eva had named Aviva. Aviva. It sounded so nice, had such a fresh and joyful and powerful ring. The vessel was gaining speed quickly and they had even found a place to sit. They were now at the very end of the boat and Catherine couldn't help but stare into the white wave that the ship was creating moving tons and tons of water to advance and gain more and more speed.

Levy had promised that his friend Ruben would be there, waiting for them, ending this torture, this terrible ordeal she had been put through. She couldn't wait. The crossing took forever. It took long. It was *undurable* to bear. She couldn't think, she couldn't talk, she couldn't do anything. The words were continuously jumbling in her

head, kicking and running and playing squash against a thousand invisible walls with hundreds of colourful hard balls that hurt when they speedraced against the warm fleshy skin of her cheeks, her ears, her forehead, the caves of her eyeballs. But somehow they made it, across the sea and back to the pier.

And indeed Ruben was waiting. Levy pointed him out to Catherine. He was right there, pushing a fancy pink pram and Catherine flew from the boat towards it, opening the deck swiftly and gazing at the little babygirl aghast.



Aviva was sleeping peacefully, only twitching occasionally with her fat, little naked babyfeet. Wasn't she cold? Catherine thought, wasn't she beautiful, awesome, glorious? She wanted to reach for her face, stroke it gently, then was stopped abruptly.

Bodies everywhere. The agents were all around them. Swarming like wasps. Armed and Dangerous. There were guns and more guns and someone was shouting. Crystal clear voices seering in the air. Commands given, orders taken. Ruben on the ground, Levy on the ground. She was pulled away from the baby or was the baby pulled away from her? All these glossy, shiny, dark guns: And the pram, and the babygirl in midst of all that authorized violence. It said FBI on their backs. It said EFF-BEE-AI. Everywhere. They were all around. Catherine could still see the little one. Aviva wore a pink dress and a small matching hat, she looked so fetching and dashing that it made Catherine's heart ache. She winced. What on earth was going on?

Catherine heard Levy shout her name when he was taken out and handcuffed. He was dragged away and put into a huge black SUV before Catherine could catch her

breath. And then Ruben was handcuffed, dragged away, put into another huge black SUV. *These cars are even bigger in reality than they are in all these crime series* Catherine thought. The doors were shut and the car left, slowly making its way through the throng of people watching. In a second they were gone and hordes of people were staring at the scene. All had happened so quickly and then Catherine saw Joy McMillan. She looked at her, reassuring and happy, broad smile on her face, giving her a thumbs up from afar. Catherine stared back at her, feeling numb and abused. She was totally bewildered after this act of powerful governmental interference. Levy hadn't deserved that. He had meant so well, after all he had only followed the script Eva had written and Abraham Cohen had executed. But meaning well-, meaning well usually was far from being enough. It took more to straddle the ox. And what a huge wild brute, her daughter's unfathomable fantasy, they were trying to straddle.

Then, finally Aviva was brought to her, again. And awed, she took her up, softly, careful not to wake her. Wasn't it amazing that she could sleep through all the clamour and noise the grown ups made? Undisturbed by the last act of the play they staged, believing so boldly it was reality and fact when all this was only mere teenage fiction? Made up and orchestrated beautifully and most cruelly by her beloved Eva from the grave.



But then only Catherine and Levy knew the truth. Abraham was dead and so was Eva. They could tell no longer and Levy was in prison. It was now all Catherine's story, it was hers to tell, it was hers to set things straight. After all she was a lawyer.

She straightened up, raising her neck as high as she could. She stood tall, holding Aviva tight. How wonderful she smelled, how soft she felt. How alive.

People were still shouting, talking agitatedly; pointing their fingers at her and all the agents who were now properly securing the scene. Cell phones were held high and all was forever digitalized. What did Catherine care? She pressed the baby girl onto her bosom, her face and drew a deep breath, a *baby breath*. She smelled just like Eva had, she smelled so wonderfully and she looked like Eva, just like Eva had. She groaned, groaned like Eva, just like Eva had and yet, she was not Eva. Catherine felt such happiness, such peace. She could have groaned herself, from pleasure and happiness if she hadn't been so aware of the FBI's presence. They were everywhere around her. And she thought of Levy (and Ruben), how they had been dragged into the cars, speeding away from her so quickly. Wherever he was taken to, Levy would be tranquile, serene and maybe he was smiling. That was the kind of man he was. He knew there was nothing to worry about. He knew, given time, change and new ideas, prisons turn themselves into museums and memorial sites for the weak and oppressed.



Later, later she would take care of it all. She would help him, she and Harvey would. Aviva was his grandchild too. He must have a part in this. She would let him do all the tiring, dull paperwork. Awesome idea. It would all be taken care of. Miraculously. But for now she looked at Aviva's tiny hands, tightly curled up, she

softly touched her tiny feet and kissed her cheek, kissed her again and again until the little one woke up and started crying.

How strong her voice was and how faint: a true baby's cry. Catherine was crying too, there was no keeping back from it. There must be a chance for life, a change. Alienation must end. This and more Catherine was thinking, the thoughts flew through her mind, racing faster and faster, leaving her tired and exhausted. Finally, the struggle was over or was it just over to begin again, all over again? Was this the beginning, was this the end? It is the beginning. It is the end. But all is different now. Was it?

She was kissing the baby, stroking her cheek, rocking her gently and Aviva fell quiet, then opened her eyes and looked at Catherine, for the first time consciously. She reached out to her gently. There was perfect peace, perfect love, for now there was. Aviva could become anything she wanted, a lawyer, a mum at 17, anything. Just as Eva could have. Beloved Eva. What pain, what joy. Then Catherine was sobbing again, this time without control, clutching the baby helplessly to her breasts, making her cry, then even scream at the top of her tiny lungs. A wailing baby. All was dissolving totally, disintegrating into the most blissful awful blur. She was so afraid and so happy. Someone took the baby from her. Was it McMillan? She had to let go, she couldn't hold her any longer or she'd drop her. The antithetic forces in her life nearly pulled her to pieces, rent her apart for good. How broken she felt, so much in need of a rest. All that mattered now was Aviva. That she was sound and well. And that they could go home now. She couldn't stop crying.



She needed to lie down, sleep, rest and get ready for the flight back home. Now, she would take Aviva home, home to Bern, to Zimmerwald. She would take her home to Switzerland. Gateway to Europe. Home of Catherine Cohen she thought, Home of Aviva Cohen. They would run in the fields, see where the daffodils were about to bloom, smell the tulips and soon the white lilac, inhale the solemn petrichor when rain fell on dry dusty land in June. They would go for long walks along the river, stroll the woods and pick bear's garlic to make pesto with pine kernels. Finally, she would be who she was and she would fail. She knew, but she didn't care. Failure didn't matter. They all failed, they all had their flaws, they all had their rough edges that hurt beyond imagination. They were all hunted outlaws in their own personal nightmares. That was what made them human, to bear it and not to break; to break and not to vanish, to vanish and, yet, not to perish. Not yet.

Imagine

If God created man and woman -

we are his children -

and if men and women created artificial
intelligences,

are they our children too?

And what if our children grow up?

What if they wanted a life of their own?

Or if they die by trying to make us love them?

Can we let them go? Can we truly love them in
return?

Can we programme love and can we programme
to be loved in return?

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy,
it does not boast, it is not proud.

It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of
wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the
truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes,
always perseveres.

Love never fails.

And now these three remain:

Faith, Hope and Love.

But the greatest of these is Love.

Remember.

Love

Author's Note

C@t_RATtidUde was *not* written by Mae Lee Magellan ©, a master-algorithm designed and shaped by deep-learning software. That is fiction. It also took more than a couple of seconds to write. The author of C@t_RATtidUde is well, and painfully, aware that it took her more than a decade to complete this novel: In fact, it nearly took fifteen long and interesting years from the very first ideas she had when she was walking through the long tunnel that ended at the execution site in Terezín in 2007 and the text's final completion in 2021.

On the Holocaust

This author is also aware that she has crossed a line by writing about the Holocaust. Nor is she a survivor, nor is she Jewish nor does she really think she is able to write proficiently and truly about the holocaust. On the contrary, she thinks she has not captured the essence of the Holocaust enough or captured it at all. She is guilty not only of trivializing, but also of simplifying an essential and atrocious chapter of history. This author admits that she doesn't really understand the holocaust. She therefore refers to the many historians and eyewitnesses who have written accurate and precise historical accounts of the holocaust. However, the author has once read that every author who writes fiction must try its hand at this dark chapter of history to be a *real* author (also if he or she fails miserably). She has therefore thought it likely a learning algorithm would do the same: try its hand at the holocaust (including the failing).

On Diversity

This author is also aware that C@t_RATtidUde doesn't reflect any diversity whatsoever. It is rather Eurocentric and doesn't include many or diverse cultural, ethnic or other perspectives or experience. Also, there is no LBNTQIA+ love depicted or brought up in any other way. As many state-of-the-art algorithms, artificial intelligence are biased *per se*, this author thought it likely the stories written by such algorithms would be favouring an all-white, Eurocentric-Western perspective before gradually learning to include more diversity.

Disclaimer

C@t_RATtidUde© was *not* written by Mae Lee Magellan©, an algorithm designed and shaped by learning software and artificial intelligence. This is why you cannot register for your very own personalized novel in case you've just tried. However, you can of course read C@t_RATtidUde© which was personalized for Catherine Cohen. It makes a lot of sense to the author to pass off her work as the work of Mae Lee Magellan©, a learning master super-algorithm yet to be fully invented. Here is why:

Introducing the m!normous© test

By creating Mae Lee Magellan©, the author hopefully raises questions and debates on art and culture, on human beings and being human. There is a myriad of art projects, which reflect on apocalyptic and catastrophic scenarios, involving artificial intelligences. However, very few art projects explore the utter banality of how artificial intelligences more and more permeate or daily lives. These debates must not be neglected. The author therefore relies on her fellow conspecifics to think of more and more complex matters than she could ever discuss herself. She can rely on the community to ask and answer better and more relevant questions crucial to this field, as perhaps Alan Turing could, Alan Turing did.

Alan Turing, the brilliant and outstanding inventor of the modern computer, was chemically castrated by the British authorities, for being a homosexual. He committed suicide in 1954 ending an unbelievable and brilliant career many, many years too early. Intelligent machines increasingly pass the Turing test with greater and greater ease. A learning algorithm passes the Turing test when human beings no longer realise that they are communicating with a machine but think they are communicating with a fellow human being. Or, to put it more bluntly, when they can be cheated by the machine. The Turing Point by which learning machines will be declared “more intelligent” than human beings will be here anytime soon. We may have passed it already depending on who makes the declaration and which criteria are applied.

Lacking the technical and scientific understanding Turing had, the author of the m!normous© series thought nevertheless it was high time for a new 21st century challenge. Now that we can all so proficiently be cheated into believing machines’ thoughts and human thought are the same, we need to move on to the next level. This is what the m!normous© series is about. By extending the frontier for learning machines, their many fathers, the few mothers and all other humans on the planet; to encourage **collective regulation, education, parenting, control, etc.** of artificial intelligences so they can become a vital part of the democracies they should and must help sustain, promote or even form (e.g. when a nation actively aims for transition to democratic control). This democratic process must also take into account that democracies are far from perfect, but as Winston Churchill claimed, “the worst from of government except for all those other forms that have been tried”.



An artificial intelligence passes the m!normous© test when an educated human majority, trained in critical thinking, not only continually reflects and debates on artificial intelligence, but also fully understands the work, tasks, calculations, doings, aims, achievements, etc. of such an intelligence. An artificial intelligence can only pass the m!normous© test when the energy used in running and training such intelligence is considered **within reason** for its task by a majority (e.g. running and training the artificial intelligence does not produce more CO2 than it helps reduce.) An artificial intelligence passes the test when it follows, integrates, decides, runs etc. upon a majority's democratically composed laws, regulations, rulings, etc. Law-making in a democratic, entrepreneurial state must be on-going. A **vast human majority must benefit** from that artificial intelligence while firmly protecting all human rights, but especially minority rights. Artificial intelligence cannot serve the very few and their endless greed or be a means for political, social, religious, etc. control and suppression. It must help address what a majority considers pressing issues of our times, e.g. to preserve the habitability of the planet for all species.

m!norming [maɪ 'nɔ:rmɪŋ] of artificial intelligence could thus help ensure the habitability of the planet. It could help resolve present and future health crises, address climate change, prevent mass extinction, as well as address any other sector and area a democratic majority sees fit.

Artificial intelligence fails the m!normous test when it helps and does establish what Shoshana Zuboff in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism- The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019) calls *instrumentarianism*. E.g. when artificial intelligence gains control over all original human thought, all text, fiction or non-fiction, all meta-texts (including all meta-texts on all human on and offline behaviour), all narratives, **religious, political or social to name a few**, all stories, tales and fables told. It fails the m!normous© test when it cannot only manipulate humans into believing that the text, meta-text, narrative, story, tale, and fable all came from another source than indicated, be it human or machine, but also direct and steer and nudge human thoughts and actions into whatever direction its creators and rulers intended. Failure of the m!normous test is complete when redefinition is complete: Machine intelligence is then thought to be **original**, whereas all human thought is considered fake, and futile, not worth considering nor acting upon.



So many questions must remain open. The author of C@t_RATtidUde© passes off her work as the work of an algorithm. But can you even trust that claim? Will there be a controversy, extensive and earnest debate about the origin of C@t_RATtidUde© and origins of novels and other texts to be published in the future? These debates may, for some time, matter to humans; but do they matter to artificial intelligence too?

The author