

FATAL LIES

A NOVEL

Frank Tallis



RANDOM HOUSE
TRADE PAPERBACKS



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Praise for

Fatal Lies

“Elegant.... Tallis has come up with a particularly ingenious method of murder.... His novels show the modern world coming into existence in one of Europe's great cities, and are all the more poignant for the knowledge that the first world war will soon cast its shadow over his deeply human characters.”

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Praise for

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Also by Frank Tallis

A Death in Vienna

Vienna Blood

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A Novel

FRANK TALLIS



VOLUME THREE OF THE
LIEBERMANN PAPERS



RANDOM HOUSE TRADE PAPERBACKS

NEW YORK

The Saint Florian Mystery

THE BAROQUE BALLROOM was filled with flowers. Beneath three radiant chandeliers more than hundred couples were rotating in near-perfect synchrony. The men were dressed in black tails, piqué shirts, and white gloves, the women in gowns of tulle and crêpe de chine. On a raised platform a small orchestra was playing Strauss's *Rosen aus dem Süden*, and when the waltz king's famous heartwarming melody was reprised, a number of onlookers began a sympathetic humming chorus—smiling with recognition and benign sentimentality.

Liebermann felt Amelia Lyd gate s right hand tighten with anxiety in his left. A vertical line appeared on her forehead as she struggled to follow his lead.

“I do apologize, Dr. Liebermann. I am such a poor dancer.”

She was wearing a skirted décolleté gown of green velvet, and her flaming red hair was tied up in silver ribbons. The pale unblemished planes of her shoulders reminded the young doctor of polished Italian marble.

“Not at all,” said Liebermann. “You are doing very well for a novice. Might I suggest, however, that you listen more carefully to the music. The beat.”

The Englishwoman returned a puzzled expression. “The beat,” she repeated.

“Yes, can you not”—Liebermann paused, and made an effort to conceal his disbelief—“feel it?”

Liebermann s right hand pressed gently against Amelia's back, emphasizing the first accented beat in each bar. However, his guidance had no noticeable effect on her performance.

“Very well, then,” said Liebermann. “Perhaps you will find the following useful: the *natural turn* consists of three steps in which you move forward and rotate clockwise by one hundred and eighty degrees, followed by three steps in which you move backward and rotate again by one hundred and eighty degrees. For the *forward turn* you move forward on your right foot, rotating it to the right by ninety degrees, followed by your left foot, rotated another ninety degrees so that it is now facing backward....”

Amelia stopped, tilted her head to one side, and considered these instructions. Then, looking directly into Liebermann s eyes, she said plainly: “Thank you, Dr. Liebermann, that is an altogether superior explanation. Let us proceed.”

Remarkably, when they began to dance again, Amelia's movements were considerably more fluid.

“Excellent,” said Liebermann. “Now, if you lean back a little, we will be able to go faster.” Amelia did as she was instructed, and they began to revolve more rapidly. “I believe,” continued Liebermann, “that the optimal speed of the Viennese waltz is said to be approximately thirty revolutions per minute.” He saw Amelia glance at his exposed wristwatch. “However, I do not think it will be necessary for us to gauge our performance

against this nominal ideal.”

As they swung by the orchestra, they were overtaken by a portly couple who—in spite of their ample physiques—danced with a nimbleness and grace that seemed to defy gravity.

“Good heavens,” said Amelia, unable to conceal her amazement. “Is that Inspector Rheinhardt?”

“It is,” said Liebermann, raising an eyebrow.

“He and his wife are very... accomplished.”

“They are indeed,” said Liebermann. “However, it is my understanding that Inspector Rheinhardt and his wife are more practiced than most. During Fasching not only do they attend *this*—the detectives’ ball—but they are also regular patrons of the waiters’ ball, the hatmakers’ ball, the philharmonic ball, and, as one would expect”—Liebermann smiled mischievously—“the good inspector has a particular fondness for the pastry makers’ ball.”

As they wheeled past a pair of carved gilt double doors, Liebermann saw a police constable enter the ballroom. His plain blue uniform and spiked helmet made him conspicuous among the elegant tailcoats and gowns. His cheeks were flushed and he looked as though he had been running. The young man marched directly over to Commissioner Brügel, who was standing next to the impeccably dressed Inspector Victor von Bulow and a party of guests from the Hungarian security office.

Earlier in the evening, Liebermann had tried to engage the Hungarians in some polite conversation but had found them rather laconic. He had ascribed their reserve to Magyar melancholy, a medical peculiarity with which he, and most of his colleagues in Vienna, were well acquainted.

Liebermann lost sight of the group as Amelia and he continued their circumnavigation of the ballroom. When they had completed another circuit, he was surprised to see Else Rheinhardt standing on her own and looking toward her husband—who was now talking to Commissioner Brügel and the breathless young constable. Liebermann's observation coincided with the brassy fanfares that brought the waltz to its clamorous conclusion. The revelers cheered and applauded the orchestra. Liebermann bowed, pressed Amelia's fingers to his lips, and, taking her hand, led her toward Else Rheinhardt.

“I think something's happened,” said Else.

Manfred Brügel was a stocky man with a large, blockish head and oversize muttonchop whiskers. He was addressing Rheinhardt, while occasionally questioning the young constable. Rheinhardt was listening intently. In due course, Rheinhardt clicked his heels and turned to find his wife and friends.

“My dear,” said Rheinhardt, affectionately squeezing Else's arm, “I am so very sorry... but there has been an *incident*.” He glanced briefly at Liebermann, tacitly communicating that the matter was serious. “I am afraid I must leave at once.”

“Isn't there anyone on duty at Schottenring?” asked Else.

“Koltschinsky has developed a bronchial illness, and Storfer—on being informed of the same incident—rushed from the station, slipped on some ice, and cracked his head on the pavement.”

“What extraordinary bad luck,” said Liebermann.

“Why is it always *you*?” said Else. “Can't somebody else go? What about von Bulow?”

“I believe he has some important business to discuss with our Hungarian friends.” The air suddenly filled with the shimmering of tremolando violins, against which two French horns climbed a simple major triad. Nothing in the whole of music was so artless, yet so distinctive. “Ah,” said Rheinhardt, “what a shame... *The Blue Danube*.” He looked at his wife and his eyes filled with regret.

“Oskar,” said Liebermann. “Can I be of any assistance? Would you like me to come with you?”

Rheinhardt shook his head.

“I would much rather you kept my dear wife and Miss Lydgate entertained. Now, where is Hausmann?” The Inspector looked around the ballroom and discovered his assistant standing with a group of cavalymen, gazing wistfully at a pretty young debutante in white. Her blond coils bounced against her cheeks. Hausmann, having clearly been engaged in a protracted surveillance operation, was about to reveal himself. He was clutching a single red rose. “Oh, no,” said Rheinhardt under his breath.

The inspector kissed his wife, apologized to Amelia, and clasped Liebermann's hand. Then, moving quickly, he managed to intercept the rose just before Hausmann had reached his quarry.

THE INNKEEPER AT AUFKIRCHEN had been pleasant enough. Knocking a dottle of tobacco from the bowl of his clay pipe, he had warned Rheinhardt of a fallen tree: *It's blocking the road—you have to go the long way around.* The directions the man had given were full of local detail and were difficult to follow. When the little Romanesque church with its distinctive onion dome and spire vanished in the darkness, Rheinhardt doubted whether the exercise had been very successful.

The interior of the carriage was illuminated by a single electric bulb, the glowing arc of which was reflected in Haussmann's eyes. Rheinhardt fancied that this flickering scintilla of light was connected with the young man's thoughts—the fading memory, perhaps, of the pretty blond debutante.

Their ascent was becoming extremely uncomfortable. The narrow track that they had chosen was riddled with potholes, causing the carriage to pitch and roll. Rheinhardt pulled the curtain aside and pressed his face against the glass. He could see nothing. Releasing the catch, he opened the window and leaned out. The air was cold and dank. Ahead, the carriage lamps shone against descending blankets of thick fog.

Rheinhardt looked anxiously at his pocket watch and called out to the driver.

“Stop, will you? We should have arrived by now!”

The carriage came to a shuddering halt.

“God in heaven, Haussmann,” said the inspector. “At this rate we'll never get there!”

He opened the carriage door and jumped out. His feet sank into the muddy ground, and he felt his best patent leather shoes filling up with freezing ditch water. Cursing loudly, he squelched up the road, grimacing as the sludge sucked at his heels. One of the horses snorted and shook its bridle. Rheinhardt peered into the opaque distance.

“Where on earth are we?”

“Left by the turnstile and left again at the old well,” said the driver gruffly. “That's what you said, sir—and that's what I did. Turned left.” Then he mumbled under his breath: “I knew it should have been right.”

“Then why didn't you say so?”

The driver had not intended his final remark to be heard. He concealed his embarrassment by soothing the horses.

They were in the middle of a dense forest. An owl hooted, and something rustled in the undergrowth. Rheinhardt knew that they were only a short distance from Vienna, but the capital—with its theaters, coffeehouses, and glittering ballrooms—felt strangely remote.

The trees looked tormented: thick, twisted boles and bare branches that terminated in desperate, arthritic claws. There was something about a deep, dark wood that heed unspeakable terrors for the Teutonic imagination. *Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood*

Rapunzel. Within every German-speaking adult was a child who, from infancy, had cultivated—under the tutelage of the Brothers Grimm—a healthy respect for the natural habitat of wolves and witches.

Rheinhardt shuddered.

“Sir?”

Hausmann's head had emerged from the carriage window.

“Yes?”

“What's that?”

“What's what?”

“*There...* Oh, it's gone. No, there it is again. Can't you see it, sir?”

An indistinct luminescence was floating among the trees—a pale glow that seemed to vanish and then reappear.

“Yes, Hausmann,” said Rheinhardt, consciously modulating his voice to achieve an even delivery. “Yes, I can.”

The light was becoming brighter.

Rheinhardt heard the carriage door opening, a splash, and his assistant struggling through the adhesive mud.

“What is it?” Hausmann repeated his question.

“I don't know,” said Rheinhardt. “But it is my impression that we will find out very soon.”

“Do you have your revolver, sir?”

“No, Hausmann,” Rheinhardt replied. “This may come as a surprise to you, but when dancing, I very rarely carry a firearm. The unequal distribution of weight about my person would make the performance of a perfect turn almost impossible.”

“Of course, sir,” said Hausmann, noting the appearance of a sly smile on his superior's face.

The advancing light was surrounded by an indistinct shadowy aura, the dimensions of which suggested the approach of something very large. The vague outline was lumbering ursine. Rheinhardt wondered if the mist might be creating an optical illusion. Nobody could be that big! Yet twigs were snapping beneath a ponderous tread. The horses began to whicker.

“Gentlemen,” said the driver nervously, “perhaps you'd like to get back inside. Shouldn't we be on our way?”

Rheinhardt did not reply.

The footsteps became louder and the light grew more distinct.

“Well, Hausmann,” said Rheinhardt, “I suspect that in a few moments all will be revealed.”

The thick curtains of fog parted and a huge figure stepped out of the darkness, the glow of the flickering candle in his lamp preceding him like a spirit emissary. Rheinhardt heard his young companion gasp.

“Steady, Haussmann,” Rheinhardt whispered.

The man was well over six feet tall but appeared even more massive on account of his clothing. He was wearing a Russian hat, with the flaps released over his ears, and a long fur coat pulled in at the waist with a thick leather belt. Hanging from it was a cleaver. In one hand he held a tin lamp suspended at the end of a whittled staff, and in the other the hind legs of a brace of bloody animal carcasses that were slung over his shoulder. Almost all of his face was concealed behind a wild, wiry black beard.

“Good evening,” said Rheinhardt. “We are looking for the Aufkirchen *oberrealschule*.” The mysterious woodman remained silent. Rheinhardt tried again: “The military academy? Saint Florian's?”

At last, something in the big man's eyes showed recognition. He grunted an affirmative and began to speak.

“Back down the hill.” The sound he produced was low and sonorous. “Take the right fork.”

“Right fork?” Rheinhardt echoed.

The giant grunted again. Then, turning abruptly, he trudged back into the woods.

“Thank you,” Rheinhardt called out. “Much obliged.”

Rheinhardt and Haussmann stood very still, watching, as the mist closed around the giant's shoulders and the shimmering flame faded into obscurity.

“You see, Haussmann,” said Rheinhardt, straightening his bow tie and adjusting the studs on his cuffs. “Country folk: full of stolid virtues, I'm sure. But their conversation always errs on the side of brevity, don't you think?” Rheinhardt turned to address the driver.

“Well, did you hear what our friend from the forest said?”

“Down the hill—right fork.”

“Exactly.”

“And you want us to follow his directions?”

“What else would you suggest?”

“*Himmel*, he was a strange one.”

“True, but I dare say we looked a little strange to him too.”

THE DORMITORY WAS PITCH-BLACK but alive with sounds: snoring, rustling, mumbling, and the occasional terrified cry as one of the boys surfaced from a nightmare.

Kiefer Wolf listened to the breathing darkness. It had an orchestral quality—a heaviness and restless depth.

“Drexler?” He reached out across the narrow space separating his bed from the next, and poked his fingers into the warm eiderdown.

“Drexler, wake up!”

His neighbor moaned.

“Drexler, wake up, will you!”

“Wolf?”

“Wake up, Drexler. I can't sleep.”

“Oh, for God's sake, Wolf,” said Martin Drexler.

“I'm going for a smoke. Are you coming?”

The boy sleeping in the bed on the other side of Wolf began to stir. “What...” His voice was thick with sleep. “What's happening?”

Wolf's fist swung out with ruthless ferocity, slamming into the boy's stomach. The youngster let out an agonized cry.

“Shut up, Knackfuss!” Wolf hissed. “Just shut up!”

The boy began to whimper.

“Oh, for God's sake, Wolf!” It was Drexler again. “What's the matter with you!”

“I'm going *upstairs*. I'm going to the *lost room*.”

Wolf got out of bed, felt for his clothes, and slipped on his jacket and trousers. He did not bother with his shoes.

“Well, Drexler? Are you coming or not?”

Wolf heard Drexler turn over, grumbling into his pillow.

“Sleep, then!” said Wolf angrily. “You... you baby!”

Wolf groped his way into the central aisle and—orienting himself by touching the bedsteads—took short steps toward the door. Turning the handle very slowly, he pushed it open and peered through the narrow gap. The corridor was empty. Slipping out of the dormitory and closing the door quietly behind him, Wolf took one of the paraffin lamps from the wall and tiptoed off into the shadows. He had not gone very far when he heard something: footsteps, rushing up the stairs, and voices.

Damn! Damn! Damn!

Wolf sprinted to the end of the corridor and, skillfully negotiating a sharp corner, pressed his back against the wall. He held his breath and listened. He could hear a man's voice (speaking very quietly) and then a woman's voice.

Nurse Funke?

He had no intention of waiting there long enough to find out. He hurried off.

On one side of the corridor were windows overlooking a courtyard, and on the other side was a row of empty classrooms. At the end of the corridor was a wooden staircase that rose in a series of right angles and small landings. A further staircase ascended to a locked iron door.

Wolf paused—and listened.

Apart from the sound of tiny claws behind the baseboard, there was silence.

The upper level of the school had—over a period of many years—been subject to a series of eccentric modifications and revisions. Thus, the partitioning of spaces around the attic had led to the creation of many architectural anomalies: redundant corners, blind alleys, pointless niches, and steps that led nowhere at all. Among these architectural anomalies was the *lost room*—a neglected cavity that existed between the attic and the third story of the building.

Wolf crept underneath the final staircase and, crouching down, ran his hand over the floorboards. The tips of his fingers soon found the edge of a trapdoor, which he lifted gently. He sat on the edge of the hole, dangling his legs in the cold emptiness. Then, lowering himself, he eventually found support on a crate that had been positioned there especially for the purpose. Reaching up, he grabbed the paraffin lamp and then leaped down. He landed with a hollow, dusty thud. Wolf hung up the lamp on an overhead beam and made his way to an old leather suitcase in which he (and his small circle of associates) retained a cache of recreational aids: cigarettes, matches, brandy, some games, and a modest collection of pornographic postcards.

Wolf immediately lit a cigarette and began pacing around the room. He was annoyed with Drexler. Why hadn't he come? He wasn't the same, these days. Something in his character had changed. He was becoming more contrary, obstructive, less willing to go along with things.

Wolf sucked on his cigarette and blew the smoke out through his nostrils.

He didn't really want to confront Drexler; however, if he had to, he would. Wolf slumped down on a pile of cushions, and dragged a blanket over himself. Then, reaching into the suitcase, he pulled out a volume of philosophy that Professor Gärtner had given him. It was titled *Beyond Good and Evil*, and it contained a passage that had played on his mind. He didn't quite understand it, but he felt that repeated readings might reveal its secret—some special truth that resided just beyond the literal meaning of the printed words.

Wolf lengthened the wick of the paraffin lamp and opened the book at the correct page. He read the passage aloud: "*There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena...*"

Wolf stubbed the cigarette out on the floor.

Yes, this was true—and so, by implication, one could never really go too far.

RHEINHARDT WONDERED WHETHER HE had treated the driver's remarks too flippantly. The woodman was indeed *a strange one*. Might such a man purposely instruct strangers to follow a dangerous road? Were they—at that very moment—blithely rolling toward some fatal precipice?

Again, he was reminded of the old stories: wolves, witches, and supernatural beings whose appearance invariably presaged death. To dispel his unease, he began humming *Rosen aus ie Süien*. His thoughts returned to the ball. What would the orchestra be playing now? *Künstlerlehen*, perhaps—or *Wein, Weft uni Gesang*?

After some time had passed, the driver let out a cry. “Inspector! Inspector! This must be it!”

Rheinhardt opened the window. They were passing between two cast-iron gates set in a crumbling high wall. The fog was less thick, and in the distance, across a flat expanse of land, he could see illuminated windows. Rheinhardt sighed with relief.

The carriage rattled down a long drive and finally stopped. The inspector and his assistant jumped out and took stock of their surroundings. They were standing next to a weather-beaten statue, the features of which had been worn smooth; however, it was still possible to identify a bearded warrior holding a lance, with one foot raised on what appeared to be a tub.

“Saint Florian,” said Rheinhardt.

“He looks more like a Roman soldier,” said Haussmann.

“Well, that's because he *was* a Roman soldier—a military administrator, posted here, in Austria. But that, alas, is the limit of my knowledge.”

Rheinhardt faced the school.

The building was Gothic in design, possessing three rows of triple lancet windows and four octahedral spires. A cloistered courtyard could be seen through a central stone archway. Rheinhardt and Haussmann entered the courtyard, and as they did so, a door opened through which an elderly man appeared. He was clearly a servant, but he wore a military decoration on his jacket.

“Gentlemen!” the old man cried.

Rheinhardt and Haussmann stepped forward, but as they did, the veteran's expression changed from eagerness to disappointment.

“Oh dear—very sorry—I mistook you for someone else.”

“I beg your pardon?” asked Rheinhardt.

“The headmaster is expecting two gentlemen from the security office.”

“Indeed. I am Inspector Rheinhardt and this is my assistant, Haussmann.” The old man narrowed his eyes. “Yes,” Rheinhardt continued, recognizing that their appearance might

require an explanation. “We *are* somewhat overdressed, but it was our misfortune to be called here directly from a ball.”

“Ball, you say?”

“Yes,” said Rheinhardt, adding emphatically, “The *detectives’* ball.”

The old soldier mumbled something to himself and then, pulling himself up, said: “Humboldt report—this way, please.”

He guided them to a door beneath the cloisters, and they entered a long, shadowy corridor. At its end, in a pool of blue light cast by suspended paraffin lamps, stood two men in academic gowns.

“Headmaster,” the old man called out. “They're here, sir. The gentlemen from the security office. Inspector Rheinhardt and his assistant.”

“Thank you, Albert,” said one of the men. “Dismissed.”

The old soldier stamped his feet, saluted, and shuffled away. Catching Rheinhardt's eye, the headmaster whispered. “A good fellow— saw action in '48. The Budapest siege.”

The headmaster was a man in his late fifties, with gray, almost white, hair. A snowy thatch had been raked over his head to conceal a thinning crown. Although his cheeks were ruddy and plump, he possessed an alert, severe face, with high, arched eyebrows. A small triangle of hair curled outward from his chin. He executed a perfunctory bow. “Professor Julius Eichmann, school superintendent.” He gestured toward his companion. “And my deputy, Dr. Bernhard Becker.”

The deputy headmaster inclined his head.

“Thank you for coming, Inspector,” Eichmann continued. “And from a social engagement, it seems.” He scrutinized the policeman from head to toe, his expression souring slightly at the sight of Rheinhardt's muddy shoes and splashed trousers.

“An accident,” said Rheinhardt.

The headmaster nodded sharply and said: “Well, Inspector, this is a most unusual circumstance. We are entirely in your hands. How do you wish to proceed?”

“I would like to see the...” He hesitated before choosing to say “boy” instead of “body.”

“Very well. We will take you to the infirmary.”

Rheinhardt frowned. “What? He's been moved?”

“Yes,” said the headmaster.

“Why?”

“Why?” repeated the headmaster. “Why?” His voice suddenly changed, climbing in pitch and volume. “What was I supposed to do? Leave him in the laboratory?” His rhetoric of sarcasm revealed years of experience in the classroom. He glanced at his deputy, and something passed between them. When the headmaster resumed, his voice was more steady. “I feared the worst, but was reluctant to pronounce the boy dead. I am not a medical man, Inspector. I thought it best to get him to the infirmary and send for Nurse Funke; however, as I suspected, she could do nothing for him.”

Rheinhardt automatically reached for his notebook but then, suddenly remembering that he

was wearing his tails, allowed his hand to drop. The headmaster's expression declared—quite clearly—that he believed Rheinhardt was an idiot. The inspector took a deep breath and continued his questioning.

“And after sending for Nurse Funke?”

“I telephoned Dr. Kessler and the police. Some constables arrived within the hour. They are still here—one is standing outside the infirmary; the other is in the laboratory. I have no idea where Kessler is!”

“Kessler is the school doctor?”

“Yes.”

“Where did he set off from, do you know?”

“His apartment in the sixteenth district.”

“The main road above Aufkirchen is impassable—a fallen tree, apparently. He may have been delayed, as we were.”

The headmaster tutted, almost as if Rheinhardt were a schoolboy presenting a weak excuse for not having completed his homework.

“The infirmary is upstairs, Inspector,” said the headmaster. He then walked off at a brisk pace, calling back, “This way.”

Rheinhardt and Haussmann followed the headmaster and his deputy down an adjoining corridor. They began ascending a narrow staircase. When Rheinhardt caught up with the headmaster, Eichmann proceeded to give an account of the evening's events.

“The deputy headmaster and I were in my office. We had barely begun our meeting when Professor Gärtner appeared at the door. He was evidently distressed. He had seen a light on in the laboratory and had entered, expecting to find the deputy headmaster.”

“Science is my discipline,” Becker interjected.

“Gärtner,” the headmaster continued, “had found the boy, Zelenka, slumped over his workbench.”

“At what time?”

“It must have been...” The headmaster glanced at his deputy for confirmation. “Just before seven?”

Becker agreed.

“What was Zelenka doing in the laboratory?” asked Rheinhardt.

“An assignment,” said Becker.

“Which, presumably, *you* had set him?”

“Yes,” Becker replied. “A simple inquiry into the effects of vinegar on certain compounds.”

Rheinhardt studied Becker more carefully. He was Eichmann's junior by a decade or so. His hair was relatively long, but receding, which had the effect of increasing the salience of his high, domed forehead. This feature, taken together with his perceptive eyes and gold-rimmed spectacles, conveyed a strong impression of superior intellectual endowment. His mustache was stiff and straight, projecting outward beyond his jawline, and his thick beard was

unusually styled, the tip having been clipped to achieve a forked extremity.

“Why was he doing this assignment on his own? Was he being punished?”

“No,” said Becker, “not at all. Zelenka was one of our keener students. He was always requesting additional work.”

“The deputy headmaster and I...” Eichmann resumed his story with renewed firmness of purpose, and his raised voice suggested he was a little piqued that Rheinhardt’s attention had shifted to his junior. “The deputy headmaster and I hurried down to the laboratory accompanied by Professor Gärtner. We tried to rouse the boy... but our ministrations had no effect. I returned to my office and made the telephone calls I referred to earlier, to the police and Herr Dr. Kessler. The deputy headmaster went to get Nurse Funke—she lives in one of the lodges.”

“The lodges?”

“Accommodation for the staff: built on our grounds and mostly occupied by masters. Nurse Funke has rooms in the building nearest the school.”

“And what did Professor Gärtner do?”

“He organized the transfer of Zelenka from the laboratory to the infirmary with the help of Albert and two prefects.”

The mention of prefects made Rheinhardt ask: “Where *are* the boys? I haven’t seen one of them.”

“Asleep, of course,” said the headmaster. “In the dormitories. They have to get up early for drill.”

“And Professor Gärtner? Where is he?”

“I believe he is resting in the common room. I suggested he retire there with a brandy. He was very upset.”

As they ascended the staircase, Rheinhardt noticed that the walls were very bare: blank expanses of grubby whitewash, no regimental photographs, trophies, or flags—in fact, nothing to please the eye. He also noticed the smell. A musty institutional smell—redolent of boiled vegetables, poor ventilation, and latrines. It was a smell that permeated virtually all official buildings in Austria, and had attracted its own special appellation: the “treasury smell. It was one that had followed Rheinhardt throughout his life. Sometimes, even outside on a cold, clear day, he could smell that distinctive cloying odor in his nostrils.

They arrived at the top floor and the infirmary. A constable was standing outside.

“Security office?” asked the constable.

“Yes, yes,” said the inspector, now becoming rather irritated by the effect of his clothes. “Detective Inspector Oskar Rheinhardt—and my assistant, Haussmann. You will kindly open the door, please.”

The constable, detecting both tetchiness and authority in Rheinhardt’s voice, clicked his heels and meekly did as he was told.

Rheinhardt entered a stark, featureless room, painted over in the same monotonous whitewash. The ceiling was low, and four beds occupied most of the space. A tin sink was

fixed to the wall, into which a dripping tap was reproducing the rataplan of a snare drum. One of the beds was the body of the boy, Zelenka. A sheet had been thrown over him.

Sitting at a small desk, next to the door, was a middle-aged woman in a nurse's uniform. She stood up as the men entered. The headmaster thanked her for waiting, and introduced Rheinhardt and his assistant. She then went to the nearest bed and gently pulled at the cover. It slipped away, revealing the face of a young boy.

"Thomas Zelenka," said the nurse.

"How old was he?"

"Fifteen."

"I see."

As far as Rheinhardt could make out, the boy was of medium build. He had a handsome, stoic face: a square chin and full, sensuous lips. His light brown hair—which originally must have been closely cropped—had grown out a little, producing a covering of dense bristles.

"What happened?" Rheinhardt asked, puzzled.

"I don't know," said the nurse, shaking her head. "He was already dead when I arrived. I tried to resuscitate him—but there was little point in trying."

"And the cause of death?"

"I am afraid you will have to ask Dr. Kessler when he arrives. I have no idea."

Rheinhardt leaned forward and examined Zelenka's head. As he did so, he registered a light dappling of juvenile freckles on the boy's cheeks.

"No bleeding? No signs of the boy having been struck?"

"No," said the nurse, sounding a sudden note of surprise.

Rheinhardt looked into her eyes. They were gray and watery.

"Did you know the boy?" he asked.

"Yes," Nurse Funke replied. "I knew Thomas Zelenka very well." She blinked a tear from her eye. "He was always catching colds.... I used to give him a balsam inhalation to help him breathe."

"Did he suffer from any serious ailments?"

"No—not to my knowledge. Although you had better ask Dr. Kessler."

Rheinhardt turned to face the headmaster.

"I would be most grateful if you would allow my assistant to call for a mortuary van. They will have to be an autopsy, and it is my preference that this be conducted at the Physiologic Institute." He then turned to Hausmann. "See if you can speak to Professor Mathias. I'd like him to perform an autopsy as soon as possible."

"Tonight, sir?"

"Yes. Why not? Professor Mathias is a famous insomniac and is always happy to assist. And while you're at it, see if you can get a photographer... but tell him to get a driver who is familiar with the woods around Aufkirchen. Otherwise they'll never get here!"

"Yes, sir."

“You will then meet me in the laboratory, equipped with pencils, paper, a notebook and...” He broke off to address Eichmann. “Is art taught in this school, headmaster?”

“Yes,” Eichmann replied. “We have a drawing and calligraphy master—Herr Lang.”

“Good,” said Rheinhardt, before continuing to address Haussmann: “Some clean paintbrushes—preferably unused—and about twenty stiff isinglass envelopes. I am sure that the deputy headmaster will help you to find these items. You, headmaster, will kindly escort me to the laboratory.”

For the first time, the headmaster and his deputy were looking at Rheinhardt with something approaching respect.

“Well?” said Rheinhardt, his voice rising in a fair imitation of the headmaster's earlier reproach. “What am I supposed to do—find it myself?”

LIEBERMANN HAD HAILED A CAB for Else Rheinhardt and was about to do the same for Amelia when she surprised him by saying:

“No, Dr. Liebermann. I would very much like to walk home. I am still excited and will not sleep. A walk will do me good.”

“Very well,” said Liebermann. “You will, of course, permit me to escort you?”

Amelia offered the young doctor her arm, and they set off in the direction of Alsergrund. At first, their conversation was given over entirely to the subject of Fasching. Amelia showed keen interest in the historical origins of the ball season; however, in due course, Liebermann inquired how her studies at the university were progressing and she began to speak of more serious matters: microscopy, anatomy, diseases of the blood. She had also chosen to attend a course of philosophy lectures and had become very interested in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.

“Are you familiar with his works, Dr. Liebermann?”

“No, I'm afraid not.”

“A pity. As a devotee of Professor Freud, you would appreciate his thoughts on the importance of unconscious mental processes. I have been somewhat preoccupied of late by his notion of eternal recurrence.”

“Oh? And what is *that*, exactly?”

“The idea that we are destined to repeat our lives again and again—in perpetuity.”

Liebermann was taken aback by Amelia's comment. She possessed a very logical mind, and he could not understand why such a whimsical notion had captured her attention.

“As in reincarnation?” said Liebermann disdainfully. “The transmigration of souls?”

Amelia shook her head.

“No, Herr Doctor—not at all. Nietzsche's proposal is rather different, and should not be confused with Pythagorean or Hindu doctrines.”

She had turned her face toward him. Beneath the brim of her feathered hat, Amelia's expression was typically intense. A silver ribbon had loosened and was dangling past her ear.

“If my understanding of Nietzsche is correct,” continued Amelia, “then he is suggesting something much more plausible... something that—unlike comparable religious ideas—does not contradict science. Perhaps this is why I have been so preoccupied. I have had to reevaluate a notion that I had previously rejected. Nietzsche seems to have provided a perfectly rational explanation for a supposedly metaphysical phenomenon.”

“But how?”

Amelia's forehead creased.

“If time is infinite and there is also a limited amount of matter in the universe, then pa

configurations of matter must eventually recur. Is that not so?"

As Liebermann considered the argument, Amelia pressed on: "Imagine, if you will, that the world in which we live is analagous to a game of chess. Because of physical limitations—for example, the number of pieces, the number of squares, and so forth—there are only *so many* games possible. Therefore, if two immortal adversaries were locked in competition forever, at some point the precise sequence of moves that constituted a previous game must necessarily be repeated. And so it must be with atoms and the universe."

"Well," said Liebermann, slightly perplexed. "That is indeed a fascinating argument. If one accepts that time has no end and that matter exists in only finite quantities, then one is also bound to agree with Nietzsche; however, I find the idea of my own personal reconstitution vaguely depressing. It makes me think of all the mistakes I have made."

"Nietzsche hoped," Amelia continued, "that contemplation of eternal recurrence would inspire humanity to make wiser choices. If we are trapped in an infinitely repeating cycle of existence, then we should make every effort to live our lives to the full."

Their destination came into view: a substantial town house, where Amelia occupied room on the top floor.

Liebermann had been so absorbed by Amelia's conversation that their walk across the city seemed to have taken no time at all. Reluctantly, he released her arm.

"Thank you so much for inviting me to the detectives' ball," said Amelia.

"I am delighted you enjoyed it."

"It is such a shame that Inspector Rheinhardt was called away."

"An occupational hazard, I fear."

"And thank you also for your invaluable guidance on the dance floor."

"It was my pleasure."

Neither of them moved. The subsequent silence became awkward, and they both began to speak at once. Liebermann gestured that Amelia should continue.

"If I am to stay in Vienna, I must take lessons. Can you recommend a teacher?"

"Herr Janowsky. He instructs my younger sister. But you must not judge yourself unkindly. You did very well... considering."

They were still standing close together. Amelia's face was tilted upward—the silver ribbon reflecting the yellow lamplight.

Liebermann's fingertips were troubled by memories of the ball. The warmth of Amelia's body—flesh, shifting beneath velvet. There had been so many accidental brushes, touches, inadvertent intimacies. Now these memories were crowding back, accompanied by turbulent feelings that he had hitherto successfully repressed.

"Dr. Liebermann." Amelia said his name softly—so softly that it was as though she had merely inflected a sigh. The exhalation carried a faint note of inquiry.

He could smell her perfume—a heavy, soporific lavender.

He felt curiously dissociated—*Too much champagne?*—and became aware that he was leaning forward.

He stopped himself.

The moment passed.

Amelia was raising her hand.

He continued moving forward, bending low until his lips were pressed against the silk of her glove.

“Good night, Dr. Liebermann.”

“Good night.” His voice was strained. “Good night, Miss Lydgate.”

The Englishwoman found her keys and opened the door. She paused for a moment on the threshold, and then stepped into darkness.

Liebermann did not go home. He felt far too agitated. Instead, he walked to the Josephinum, where he paused to gaze at the statue of Hygeia—the goddess of healing. He lit a cigarette, and addressed the deity directly: “Well, if old Nietzsche was right, I’ve just missed an opportunity: an opportunity that I shall continue to miss for all of eternity.”

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