

THE LAST POGROM OF THE UNITED STATES OF HITLER

After the Nazi Liberation the American Dream became a nightmare society where sadism was the national pastime and murder a popular entertainment.

Homosexuality was the State ideal and human slaves were bred to serve the cruel lusts of their masters.

But for the New York Police Department business was the same. Crime investigation was still mainly routine. Until the message came from high Gestapo headquarters.

There was one last Jew left alive on Earth—and he was hiding somewhere in the city . . .

THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

THE HIGH-TENSION SUSPENSE SHOCKER BY ERIC NORDEN



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THE LAST JEW IN NAZI AMERICA THE SOLUTION

AN ULTRA SUSPENSE SHOCKER BY ERIC NORDEN

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THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION ERIC NORDEN

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A NEW YORK COP —ON A NAZI MISSION

Bill was a police lieutenant charged with keeping the peace in the Nazi-ruled city of New York.

Hitler's society had brought many changes; the words love and kindness had been dropped in favor of lust and sadism, mating with women was for reproduction only, and the Gestapo was supreme.

But being a cop was still the same dirty job.

Bill was poor, tired, overworked, and responsible for the toughest caper in the Reich.

If he scored, the Gestapo got the credit—and if he slipped he was dead . . .

THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

The Startling Suspense Shocker

By ERIC NORDEN

THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

by
Eric Norden



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To Ruth

WARNER PAPERBACK LIBRARY EDITION


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It started out bad, and got worse. An air-raid siren shrilled me awake and I fumbled the phone off the receiver, croaked something to the duty operator and slumped back into sleep. An hour later some subliminal guilt mechanism clawed me up to consciousness and I managed to scrabble a Picayune out of the crumpled pack on the nightstand, light it and shove it between my teeth, no mean logistics job. The room was hot, still sour with stale cigarette smoke and *schnappes*. I forced myself up, turned the cooler to high, then lurched into the head, shaved bloodily, and writhed for five minutes under an icy shower. Shit, what a night. Nothing registered after that dive on Blecker, the two dumb greedy blondes, the fat one trying to grope my balls. The miserable sow. There could have been trouble, but I checked the Schmeisser Special before tucking it into my belly clip and there were no expended rounds. I shrugged on a short-sleeved nip sports shirt over my slacks and rifled through the jumble of bills on the dresser. Sixty-five gone, half a week's take-home. For what? I tossed a lightweight jacket over my arm and took it all out on the door.

Outside, I felt a little better. It was still hot but some

of the humidity had drained out of the air overnight and there was a feeble breeze stirring. I decided to walk it, more for therapy than anything else, and cut crosstown along Seventh Avenue to Central Park South, feeling a little more human as the fresh air hit me. Two sailors were haggling with a hansom cab driver by the fountain outside the Plaza, and I walked through the park to the zoo past a parade of starched nurses wheeling prams and mothers dragging kids with pastel balloons moored to their grubby paws. I cut across to Fifth at the Sixty-sixth Street exit, leaving what little green was left in Manhattan behind for another day, thinking it would be a good morning to take off and just lie in the Sheep Meadow under the sun, or maybe hire a rowboat and drift across the lake. My spirits dropped again, and my belly churned in protest as I dragged in harsh lungfuls of smoke.

When I reached the precinct I was already an hour late, so I said screw it, and walked on to Sweeney's on the corner of Third and Seventy-fifth, picking up black coffee and orange juice at the counter and steering my tray to a corner table where I'd spotted Kappy hiding behind the *News*. Its headlines screamed a double rape-murder in Queens, which made me feel a little bit better, since somebody else had problems too. Kappy looked up and grimaced. He was unshaven, still in uniform.

"What happened to you?"

"Don't ask. You just go off?"

"Nine-thirty." He folded the paper and tossed it on an empty chair. "You want me to go back and clear the roster?"

"No, fuck it." My pack was empty so I took one of Kappy's. "It's the first time in months, nobody's gonna grab my ass. What's happening?"

He drained his coffee and wiped his mouth with the back of one hand.

"Not much. A couple of b and e's in the Eighties, a warehouse lift, just small potatoes, and some 311s in the park. Why the hell anybody goes in there after dark I'll

never know. And yeah, the Iberian Ambassador's car, a Mercedes, they pulled it right under his nose, double-parked outside his apartment house on Fifth. The doorman says he didn't see a thing."

"Joy ride?"

"Pro, it looks like. We swept midtown and had it on the relay. Nothing. Damn thing's probably getting sprayed in Jersey right now. So what are we supposed to do? Let him make a diplomatic incident out of it if he wants to."

"Am I supposed to tell him that?"

"Locurto's got it now. You weren't so dumb coming in late."

I finished my coffee, looked at the time, and sighed.

"Back to the thin blue line. See you tonight?"

Kappy nodded resignedly and returned to his paper.

Callender was duty officer this week and as I came in he called me over to the desk, his eyes speculative and alert.

"You got visitors, Lieutenant, been here a half hour or so. I let 'em wait in your office. Official visitors," he added quickly.

"Centre Street?"

He smiled.

"Not that easy. Washington."

"Our friendly Gestapo?"

He nodded, enjoying every moment.

It was going to be one of those days. The last time I'd worked with the feds was on the Toronto thing, and I'd prayed that really would be the last time. I ground my cigarette underfoot, put on what I hoped was a sufficiently steely-eyed expression, and walked down the corridor to my office.

There were three of them, and they'd made themselves right at home. Ed Kohler, a heavy-set guy in his mid-forties whom I'd gotten to know during the Toronto mess, was seated behind my desk, a plastic carton of coffee in front of him, and another guy was sprawled on the old couch picking at his cuticles with a nail file. A

little old prune-faced man in a rumpled double-breasted suit and shiny black turtleneck perched on the chair by the window, a decrepit briefcase balanced on his knees. He must have been at least seventy, and his shock of off-white hair had deposited a light film of dandruff on his shoulders. I waved to Kohler, who was a pretty good sort, not as gung-ho as most of them, and he got up with a smile and shook my hand, then gestured toward the man on the couch.

"Special Agent Beck, Peter Beck, he's with our New York office."

Beck unwound his lanky frame and ambled over to shake my hand. He had thinning sandy hair and pale, slightly hyperthyroid blue eyes that didn't blink once as they neatly scanned and filed me. He was dressed with the same studied anonymity as Kohler, dark suit, white shirt, sober silk knit tie, neatly knotted, a sliver of crisp white handkerchief in the breast pocket. Even their plain-clothes were a uniform. Kohler gestured to the old man in the corner.

"And that's Professor von Leeb, from the Seidlitz Institute."

The Professor jumped to his feet and snapped a spindly arm into the air. I was a bit taken back, since nobody really salutes anymore except on holidays, but I mumbled a perfunctory *heill* and flapped my right hand up, feeling silly.

"The Professor's just flown in from Berlin," Kohler said meaningfully. "He's in New York on official business."

Kohler took the leather chair facing the desk as I settled myself, pretending to shuffle some papers on the blotter while I thought quickly. Okay, a VIP despite his looks, but what was he doing in the 23rd Precinct? I hoped his car hadn't been lifted too.

"I've explained how you helped us with that Toronto business, Bill, and the discretion you showed then." Kohler spoke slowly, carefully, and I couldn't miss the

caution in his voice. "The Professor is assured you'll exercise the same discretion in the matter that concerns us now."

I nodded, in place of anything better to do.

Von Leeb looked at me intently, his little bird-eyes bright. "Those priests, you have no more trouble?" His voice was shrill, laced with a strong Bavarian accent, and his Adam's apple bobbed in the scarecrow neck as he spoke.

"No," I answered evenly, "there's been no more trouble." Christ, half the Nips in Canada had been purged. "The Imperial Mission granted us full cooperation, and it's understood the Emperor's protection extends only to Christians in the Home Islands."

The old man bounced on his seat.

"Soon it shall not extend even there!" His withered hands, mottled with liver marks, danced angrily on the briefcase. Apparently he went along with the Contraxists and wasn't afraid to say so, which meant he was either very dumb or very high-placed, and in either case I wasn't going to take him up on it. I looked at Kohler, almost in appeal.

"Some more proselytizing?"

He averted his eyes.

"No, no, that's all settled down. This is something. . . different. Perhaps Professor von Leeb would like to explain."

The old man nodded and regarded me silently for a moment.

"Lieutenant Halder, what in your opinion is the Third Reich's most lasting contribution to world civilization?"

Oh, shit.

"Professor," I answered, choosing each word, "I'm not sure I'm really qualified to answer. I'm a policeman, I've never been involved in politics, my cooperation with the Gestapo was just a question of inter-agency. . . ."

The Professor cut me off.

"I understand that," he said with a vaguely paternal

smile. "But I am not asking for political opinions, only your own personal evaluation, one which will never go beyond this room."

That last bit made me even more uneasy, but I had no out.

"Well, Professor, I suppose it would be the great advances in society, full employment, a lasting peace, the space program, the creation of a true folk community, the brotherhood of the Nordic peoples, the great progress in medicine and science . . ." I trailed off a bit feebly. I'd thrown in every sacred cow I could think of, and I hoped they were enough to satisfy him.

"Yes, Lieutenant, that's all quite true, but only a partial answer to my question." The Professor's voice was truly professorial now, and his eyes had glazed as if he were addressing some distant graduating class at Heidelberg. "Those achievements, however worthy in themselves, are not uniquely National Socialist. But what accomplishment of the Third Reich towers alone as an immutable gift to future generations, as our greatest legacy to posterity?" His voice was just above a whisper, his eyes half-closed. I squirmed in my seat like a student grilled by some merciless proctor while Kohler glanced at me apologetically and twitched his shoulders in a half-shrug.

"I'm sorry, Professor, I don't think I . . ."

He suddenly smiled again, warmly, and held up his hand. "I understand your difficulty. It is something we have all come to take as a matter of course, rather as a man accepts his health or the air he breathes, not as a precious gift but as the natural order of things." He paused portentously. "The greatest accomplishment of National Socialism, Lieutenant, is that after three thousand years humanity has been purged of its most terrifying organic pestilence. Today, the world is finally *judenrein*."

So that was it.

"Yes, of course, Professor." God, I could use a drink.

"Just ponder that fact for a moment, Lieutenant. Think

of it not as something you have read in dusty history books but as a vibrant, living human reality. An entire generation has grown to young adulthood without ever having seen a *Jew*"—he spat the word out like a man who's found half a cockroach in his mashed potatoes—"without ever having been exposed to their corruption, their perversion, their deceit. The world is free, Lieutenant, truly free of those mongrel vermin for the first time in history. And that is the greatest contribution of National Socialism, perhaps the greatest single achievement of recorded history."

I nodded warily. What the hell was this all about?

"I can tell you, Bill," Kohler broke in, "the Professor is one man who knows what he's talking about. He's been in the fight since the beginning. He's an *Alte Partei Kamerad*."

My guts tightened, and I could feel the sweat springing out on my forehead. An Old Party Comrade. A member of the N.S.D.A.P. before the Munich *putsch* in '23. There were maybe ten of them left alive in the world today, any one of whom had more power in his little finger than anybody outside of the *Fuhrer*. No wonder von Leeb talked as freely as he did. They could wear crappy suits and funny sweaters and look like Bowery bums and one word could turn a country upside down. I felt sick.

"Professor," I stammered, "this is a great honor. I had no idea . . ." I started to stand up, but von Leeb waved me back to my seat, beaming magnanimously.

"My role has been a modest one, Lieutenant," he said, his eyes giving the lie to every word. "Most of my friends have fallen along the way, and the credit is theirs, not mine. And, above all, the *Fuhrer*'s." He fell silent for a moment and when he resumed talking his voice was dreamy. "Do you know, when I joined the Party we were derided as crackpots, fools, starry-eyed idealists. We were beaten by the police, jailed, some of us murdered by Jews and Bolsheviks. But we never for one second contemplated giving up, and we kept on fighting till we gained

the world. Or most of the world." His mouth abruptly tightened and his voice grew harsher, probably thinking of Japan. "Our ideals have been consecrated in blood, and they have triumphed. But there is always the danger that a successful revolutionary movement will grow fat and complacent with the fruits of victory." I doubted that would ever happen to the Professor; his eyes gleamed with the light of a true believer. "As one of your own countrymen once remarked, Lieutenant, 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.' That is why we are here today."

I didn't know what to say, but mercifully Kohler came to my rescue.

"Bill, the Professor has been the director of the Seidlitz Institute for three years now. He retired from public life in 1969 at the same time as the *Fuhrer*, but until then he was in command of the *Einsatzgruppen*."

Involuntarily, my eyes darted to the little gnome in the corner. He looked like a librarian, bland and harmless. It was hard to believe.

Von Leeb smiled pleasantly.

"Yes, Lieutenant, in a sense we are colleagues."

"It was a monumental achievement, Professor." My respectful tone was genuine this time.

"Our task was not easy, believe me." His voice grew nostalgic again. "I remember the *Fuhrer* calling me in to Buckingham Palace right after the capitulation and saying, 'Johann, I have given Europe to Himmler. The rest of the world is yours!' What a task! But great times demand great efforts. We had not only to eliminate several million Jews in the British Isles and on the North American Continent, but afterwards to seek out those who had gone to ground in Latin America." His eyes filmed mistily. "Ach, they gave us a run for our money sometimes, believe me. I remember saying to myself after we unearthed the last nest in Brazil, 'Johann, you are no longer young, you deserve a rest, perhaps a little cottage on the Obersalzberg, time to read, reflect, even paint a bit.' But no, that was not to be. Next came South Africa, then

Palestine, and finally Asia." His hands clenched on the briefcase. "It took us *two years* before the Emperor agreed to give us a free hand, and even then his agents in Australia and New Zealand tried to obstruct us. It was not till 1964 that we polished off the last of them, a group of several hundred hiding out in the ruins of Angkor Wat in Indochina." He laughed happily. "What a feeling that was! To know it was all over, that after forty years we had finally won! We were tired men, Lieutenant, but our victory was sweet."

I tried to keep my voice firm, admiring but not obsequious.

"I've read about some of the *Einsatzgruppen*'s exploits, Professor. The way you tracked down that group in Sydney, the ones who'd had the plastic surgery. . . ."

He smiled deprecatingly.

"By that time, Lieutenant, we could smell the scum, no matter what they'd done to their noses."

He broke off, and a shadow seemed to pass across his face.

"Forty years, Lieutenant. Forty years of our lives. *Those years cannot be mocked!*"

He slammed his fist on the briefcase and his mouth abruptly contorted, a ropey blue vein springing to life on his forehead. What now, I wondered? Kohler caught the change and picked it up quickly.

"In a sense, Bill, the Professor is here in his old capacity with the *Einsatzgruppen*." He faltered, and I could see a thin trickle of sweat oozing from the part of his brilliantined hair. "Two months ago we received a report in Washington that was very disturbing. It's probably no more than a rumor, but we decided to . . ."

"*Do not dismiss it as a rumor!*" The Professor's voice was even shriller than usual, and the vein was pulsing spasmodically. "You do not know it is a rumor!" He turned to me almost plaintively. "Do you see what I mean by complacency, Lieutenant? If the *Einsatzgruppen* had thought in terms of rumors and dismissed leads on

those grounds, half our suspects would have escaped. Such reasoning is used as an excuse to evade action!"

Kohler's face had gone a chalky white.

"I didn't mean. . . ."

"I know what you meant, I know all you bureaucrats! The *Geheime Staats Polizei!* What do you do today? Chase down embezzlers and petty criminals, execute a few fugitive priests, drown yourself in red tape. *Ach*, if Heinrich were still alive he would roll over in his grave!"

I decided not to try and unscramble those metaphors. Kohler sat rigid in the chair, hands tightly clasped in his lap, his lower lip trembling slightly, his eyes boring into the wall. Beck had stiffened imperceptibly but he maintained his outwardly relaxed expression. Both their careers hung by a thread, and they knew it.

"This is precisely why I have come to you, Lieutenant," von Leeb said, turning to me. "For this job I need a man who knows New York City intimately, a man who is not chained to his desk, a man who has had firsthand experience in tracking down the most clever and elusive criminals. I do not want an armchair detective, I want a real detective!"

I looked at Kohler out of the corner of my eye, but he was still studying the wall. So von Leeb had picked me. For what?

"Professor," I said carefully, "it will be an honor to work with you in any capacity." Under these circumstances, ass-licking was equivalent to survival. "If you could just give me some details. . . ."

"*Ja ja*, of course." The vein was quieting down. "It will be good to deal with a true professional."

God, I thought, even if I make von Leeb happy, the Gestapo will never forgive me for this. The Professor opened his tattered briefcase, thumbed through a sheaf of papers, and held out two foolscap pages to me. Beck quickly took them and laid them on my desk, his eyes still expressionless.

"This report was forwarded to Berlin after an uncon-

scionable six-weeks' delay." Another nail in Kohler's coffin. "It is sketchy, incomplete, vague, it even could be an inconsequential rumor as Herr Kohler is at such pains to suggest. But *Reichminister* Heydrich was not prepared to dismiss it so lightly. He summoned me to Berlin and requested I handle the matter personally. So I have. Please examine it, and then tell me what you think."

My eyes wouldn't focus at first, and my shirt was plastered to my back with sweat. I read the file carefully, forcing myself to absorb every word. It certainly was sketchy. Nothing more, in fact, than a facsimile of a complainant's report by one Leonard Pickett to the duty officer at the 16th Precinct. It appeared that Pickett, who owned an antique store on lower Fifth Avenue, was assaulted and robbed by an unidentified male on May 14, 1974. In the struggle, an item of jewelry worn by the attacker was retrieved by Pickett and handed over to the investigating officer. This item, and a copy of the report, was forwarded to the Gestapo after a detective at the Sixteenth was struck by its appearance. A photograph of the thing was attached, a thin silver tube on a chain, covered with what looked like chicken scratches. I put the report down.

"That's most interesting, Professor," I said judiciously, feeling like a man picking his way through a mine field. "Is there any further. . . ."

"I am aware it means little to you, Lieutenant, and that is understandable." Unlike poor Kohler I seemed slated for kid glove treatment. "Let me fill you in on the background. On the day in question this shopkeeper had arranged a window display of his latest European consignment, and among those items was a small collection of Jewish artifacts from the camps, lampshades made of their skin, ashtrays wrought from their skulls, that kind of thing. Of no intrinsic value, but of considerable interest to antiquarians and specialized collectors. On the occasion of the assault, Pickett was about to close his shop when an elderly man entered and stood regarding the

Jewish items for several moments. Finally, he reached out to a lampshade and touched it, then picked up one of the skull ashtrays, holding it up in both hands before his face. At this point Pickett approached him and requested that he refrain from handling merchandise. Without warning the man wheeled around and attacked the proprietor, flinging him to the floor, where they grappled together. It was at this point that the object of jewelry the old man wore was torn off. Pickett succeeded in flinging his assailant from him, and the man fled the store, taking the skull with him. He was never found, and it was only several weeks later that an officer about to close the case examined the item of jewelry more carefully and detected its true significance."

I decided to risk an interruption.

"Which was, Professor?"

"The man was wearing a Jewish religious symbol known as a *mezzuzah*, containing a miniature parchment scroll from the Torah, their so-called holy book. It means Lieutenant, that the man who attacked Pickett is a *Jew*! It means that here in the heart of New York City a *Jew* is still alive, mocking us, denying all our years of struggle and sacrifice!" His voice was rising to a scream. "It means that unless we seek him out and track him down, the poison still lives on in the bloodstream of humanity, as virulent as ever!" He was shaking, his hands clenching and unclenching, the blue vein throbbing furiously. "But he shall not escape us. He shall not! You shall see to that."

I had to hold my own hands together to keep them steady.

"The last Jew on earth is here in New York, Lieutenant. And it is your job to find him."

I thought fast. Von Leeb might be mad as a hatter but he was still an O.P.C., and one word from him could finish me with the force. Or put me in the lobo ward at Bellevue, for that matter. I looked him straight in the eye, like I always do when I'm lying, and spoke softly but firmly.

"Professor, I'll find him for you if I have to turn the city inside out."

The old man darted a snidely triumphant glance at Kohler.

"I knew my instinct was right in bypassing the Gestapo." Kohler continued looking straight ahead as von Leeb turned back to me and smiled fraternally. "Lieutenant, I'm convinced you are the right man for the job. You shall pursue this question to the exclusion of all else, and you will have the full cooperation of the Gestapo, as well as the local branches of the *Abwehr* and *Wehrmacht* Intelligence." He extracted a sheet of paper from his briefcase, unclipped a vintage fountain pen from his jacket pocket, and scrawled something on it. "This is a commission from the Ministry of Interior, instructing all civilian and military authorities to grant you full and unquestioning cooperation. For the duration of this investigation it grants you more effective power than anyone else in the country, up to and including President Lindbergh. With it you may commandeer any men, resources or transport you deem necessary." He gestured impatiently and Beck scurried over, took the paper, and deposited it on my desk. "The one thing I stress most emphatically, however, is that you inform no one outside this room of the true purpose of your investigation. Not a word of all this must be allowed to reach the public. Do you understand? Not a word."

I nodded solemnly, and von Leeb snapped the briefcase shut and got to his feet.

"This office shall be the command headquarters of the entire operation. I am staying at the *Neue Adlon*, and you shall install a direct line to my suite. I wish you to call me at precisely eight o'clock every evening to report on the progress of your investigation. If there is a breakthrough, come directly to the *Adlon*. Understood?" His voice was clipped, military, the camaraderie gone. I nodded again, feeling I should be saluting. "Good. For purposes of identification we shall give this business the

code name of Operation *Nibelung*. At no times in speaking to me will you use the word 'Jew.'" He scowled abruptly. "There are those who would like to exploit this situation to their own partisan advantage, Lieutenant. Even a man in my position is not immune to surveillance by anti-Party elements within the state apparatus. You understand?"

I did indeed. If von Leeb was in with the Contraxists, Schirach and Speer would like nothing better than to sully his reputation by proving a Jew had escaped the *Einatzgruppen's* celebrated net.

The old man shot his hand into the air again and I responded with a more enthusiastic *heil!* than before. Without a word to Kohler and Beck he swung on his heels and strode out the door. There was a long silence after he left, broken only by the slow expelling of my breath. Finally I turned to Kohler, who'd remained motionless, sweat coursing down his forehead.

"Shit," I muttered, "is this really happening?"

He forced a wan smile.

"You're in the big time now, Bill. How does it feel?"

"Like a sheep to the slaughter." I glanced quickly at Beck, still as sphinx-like as ever, and got up from behind the desk.

"Look, Ed, I need a drink. Let's get out of here."

"You're on." He turned to Beck. "Arrange the phone hook-up. We'll be back in a half-hour."

Beck's eyes narrowed, but he nodded. Kohler and I left the precinct house and walked over to Sullivan's on the corner of Third and Eightieth. There was nobody there but a few rheumy-eyed old dipsos trying to kick the mid-morning shakes, and we took our double Scotches to a quiet corner table. I drained mine in two gulps and Kohler wasn't far behind me. I took his glass, went to the bar for refills, and struggled to assemble my thoughts.

"Ed, you know why I wanted you alone. Can I talk freely?"

Kohler sipped contemplatively from his drink.

"No, not really, Bill." He sighed. "Look, let's be honest about it. If it would help my position I'd dump you without blinking an eye, just as quick as Beck, so we might as well understand each other. But for the time being it seems our interests are pretty much identical, and there's no reason for me to screw you. Yet."

That was about as straight as I could get it, and I wouldn't have expected anything else, no matter what he told me.

"Okay," I said. "Some questions. First off, why me?"

"Just the luck of the draw. He wanted a local cop, one who could be trusted, and I remembered you from the Toronto thing. Nothing personal, old buddy."

I thought a moment, nursing my drink.

"The Jew. Is he for real?"

Kohler shrugged.

"Who knows? Von Leeb thinks he is, and Berlin must think he could be, and that's all that concerns us. In a way I hope he really is walking around out there, because if he doesn't exist and we draw a blank, the Professor is gonna have our balls on toast. In his book, failure is just another word for treason."

"But how *could* a Jew have escaped? And here in New York of all places? I could maybe understand it in Latin America, hiding out in the jungle somewhere, but not here, for Chrissakes. I mean, shit, the ovens were going full-blast twenty-four hours a day at Croton for over a year, it wasn't humanly possible for anybody to escape." There was a note of desperation in my voice. "Was it?"

Kohler gulped the last of his drink.

"How do I know?" he asked wearily. "I'd say the odds are a hundred thousand to one against it. But try telling von Leeb that."

"Look, the whole thing rests on this *mezzuzah* or whatever you call it, right? Well, how does that prove he's a Jew? Maybe the guy's just some kind of nut, he found it or bought it somewhere. I mean, the way he behaved in the shop, maybe he's got some kink about Jew stuff,

collects it or something, that doesn't necessarily mean he's a Jew himself."

Kohler leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"Look, Bill, don't you think I've run through that whole line of reasoning already? And sure it's possible, logical even. But there's something else von Leeb didn't get around to telling you. You know the skull, the one this character made off with?"

I nodded.

"It still had a price tag on it with the name and address of the shop. Four days later a woman returned it to Pickett. Her kids found it while they were playing in Washington Square Park. Dug it up. It'd been buried in a shallow grave."

"Oh, shit."

"Yeah. And for von Leeb, two and two make Jew. You try talking him out of it. I'm sure as hell not going to."

I finished my drink, accepting defeat.

"Let's get back to the office. I've got to get started on Operation *Nibelung*."

Callender called me over as we entered the station house, a glint of malicious interest in his eyes.

"Headquarters called while you were out. The Commissioner himself. He wants you to get back to him right away."

Between the Gestapo and Centre Street the bastard probably thought I was in hot water. Well, he was right. I grunted something noncommittal and led Kohler to my office. A guy from communications was installing the direct line to the *Adlon* and I had to shoulder him aside to ring Gunther. When I finally got through, his voice was sputtering with anger.

"What the hell is going on down there? I just got a call from somebody called von Lipp. . . ."

"Von Leeb," I corrected him.

"Von Lipp, von Leeb, all I want to know is what is he

up to? He gave me some line about you being seconded to the Interior Ministry and being out of my jurisdiction. I couldn't follow half of what he was babbling on about. Who is this nut?"

I let him have it with both bores.

"He's an O.P.C. and former Commander of the *Ein-zatgruppen*, in New York on the direct orders of Heydrich."

There was a long silence, broken only by the Commissioner's heavy breathing.

"My God," he whispered finally, "I hung up on him."

My spirits lifted somewhat; misery does love company.

"Call him back. After all, the worst he can do is have you shot. He's staying at the *Adlon*."

Gunther's voice regained some of its normal nastiness.

"Is this your idea of a bad joke? Because believe me, Halder, if it is I'll break you so fast . . ."

He was the least of my problems.

"Look, Commissioner, I'll put you on to the Gestapo, they'll explain the situation. I've got to get moving on this thing."

I signalled Kohler, who'd been conferring in the corner with Beck, probably about retirement plans, and he took the phone as I left the office.

Callender was reading a boyie magazine at the duty desk, a well-hung blonde Viking straddling the lurid cover, but he looked up expectantly as I approached.

"Find Macri and get him to my office fast, say it takes priority over anything else he's working on. And tell accounting I'm requisitioning a thousand marks cash, I want it right away. They can send along a 202, I'll fill it out when I get the time."

His jaw dropped.

"Shit, Lieutenant, on whose authorization? I mean, I can't. . . ."

I took out von Leeb's letter and shoved it across the desk at him.

"On my authorization. Read it, and move your peach-like ass."

His eyes were wide as he handed the letter back.

"Yes sir, Lieutenant, right away."

This business had some redeeming features, anyway.

Kohler was still on the phone when I returned, and he waded me over, cupping the receiver in the palm of his hand.

"The Commissioner wants to talk to you. He's pretty pissed off."

I mumbled something into the phone and Gunther started to roar.

"What is this investigation about, Halder? That prick won't tell me a damned thing. Now you'd better . . ."

"I'm not allowed to, Commissioner, I can't say a word about it to anybody, not even you. They'd bust both of us if I did."

"Halder, I'm warning you. . . ."

"Ask Professor von Leeb. I can't say anything. I'm sorry."

I hung up on him, something every cop dreams of doing, but I didn't get much satisfaction out of it. I was caught in a three-way pincers movement between von Leeb, the Gestapo and Centre Street, and I'd be lucky if I came out of this thing pounding a beat on Staten Island.

"Trouble?"

Kohler was regarding me sympathetically, but I just shrugged.

"My day for it. But so long as I'm von Leeb's fair-haired boy, Gunther'll handle me like rare crystal. It'll be another story once this thing is over."

"If it's over," he corrected me gently. "Where are you going to start?"

"With Pickett. What else have we got?" I sprawled into the swivel chair and thrummed a pencil lightly on the desk calendar. "Did you come up with anything you haven't told me yet?"

Kohler shook his head.

"We haven't really launched an independent investigation. I didn't even know that fucking report had been forwarded to the *Wilhelmstrasse* until von Leeb wired me he was on his way, and he threw the whole thing into your lap before we could get going on our own." He smiled with more than a little bitterness. "Naturally, the *Geheime Staats Polizei* stands at your disposal."

I let that one pass.

"Who was the investigating officer at the 16th?"

Kohler extracted a slim leather notebook from his inside jacket pocket and flipped through the pages.

Hagburg, Fred Hagburg. Sergeant, a *landsman*, third generation *Ausland-deutsch*. Non-political."

"He was the one who spotted this *mezzuzah* thing?"

Kohler studied the notebook again.

"No, that was a file clerk, a patrolman, Ernest Fiske, five-gen Asax. It was just an accident, he was closing out the docket and spotted the photograph. He's an active member of the *Herrenvolk Bund* and it rang a bell."

"Just our luck. Without him that goddamn file would be gathering dust today."

"I didn't hear that." Kohler slapped the notebook shut with a ring of finality. "Remember, be careful how you approach Fiske. He's the one guy who might be able to fit the pieces together, and von Leeb wants this kept under the rug."

"No more than I do, Ed. I'll play it as a normal follow-up check."

There was a rap on the door and Macri entered, carrying a small suitcase, his identikit folio tucked under one arm. I got up, and held out my hand to Kohler.

"Wish me luck."

"You want me to come along?"

"No, I'll fill you in later. Can I reach you at headquarters?"

"All night. I'll be sleeping there till this thing is settled." He took a small chamois pouch from his side pocket and

handed it to me. "Von Leeb wants you to take this along. Our only hard evidence."

I undid the string and a tiny silver cylinder fell into the palm of my hand. It felt oddly cold, and I shivered in spite of myself.

We had to wait at the desk for the cash, and I had Callender dispatch an unmarked car. When we got outside a patrolman had pulled it around, a '68 Opel, and I signed a chit and dismissed him. Macri looked at me curiously as I nosed out into the midday traffic.

"What's up? Callender tells me you've been roped into something big."

I grunted, and cut across Seventy-second to the Horst Wessell Drive.

"Callender should keep his mouth shut. As far as you're concerned it's just routine. Understand?"

Macri held up his hands in mock surrender.

"I *capish*, Bill, I *capish*. Mine is not to wonder why . . ." "Yeah."

I switched on the radio as he hit the Drive, listening with half my mind as Kirsten Flagstad dissolved into the news, the announcer prattling on about the *Duce's* funeral as if it were the social event of the year. Which in fact, it was. The *Fuhrer* was attending personally, as well as most of the *Gauleiters* and *Reichsleiters*, and Mosley had just flown in from London to join Lindbergh, Laval and Quisling, who'd been in Rome a week drinking toasts to Allied unity. Even the Contraxists were putting on a show of mourning, though I'd lay odds they were already carving Italy up in private. Macri toned the volume lower, and spoke in worried tones.

"Ed, you don't think this is gonna make any difference for us wops, do you?"

I wished he'd keep quiet and let me concentrate on important things.

"Why should it? Graziani's a good man, he'll carry on just the same."

"No, I mean all this crap you hear about how maybe some of us will be reclassified now, you know? I mean, with the *Duce* gone some people think maybe things will change. That's just bull, isn't it?"

I glanced at his swarthy features and coarse oily hair.

"You're not Sicilian, are you, Tony?"

"No, no, of course not," he said too quickly. "I'm a northerner, Florence, we got nothing to do with those A-rabs."

Macri's racial purity was the least of my concerns right now.

"Then forget it, you've got nothing to worry about."

I pulled off at the Fourteenth Street exit and followed Second Avenue over to Houston, double-parking outside the precinct house. Macri waited for me in the car as I walked up the steps past a gaggle of grimy kids booting a soccer ball across the sidewalk. I didn't know the duty officer but I flashed my badge and asked for Hagburg.

"Second floor, to your right," he said disinterestedly, and went back to his crossword.

Hagburg was a fat, florid guy in his late forties with about four remaining strands of black hair carefully plastered down in an intricate spiderweb across his shiny skull. He was pecking away with one finger at an ancient typewriter, his eyes squinted in concentration, and he didn't look up when I identified myself.

"Take a seat, Lieutenant, I've gotta finish this complaint. Be widdya in a minute."

I settled myself uncomfortably on the rickety wooden folding chair in front of his desk and lit a cigarette while Hagburg laboriously clacked out his report. When he was through he left the form in the machine and looked up at me without much enthusiasm.

"What can I do for you?"

I'd mentally rehearsed my story on the way over.

"We've had a series of 605's on the upper East Side, all antique stores. Nothing so far, but we've been checking out the docketts for anything similar in other precincts,

maybe give us a lead. You listed one a couple months back, lower Fifth, so I thought I'd see if you'd come up with anything."

Hagburg's brow furrowed in concentration and he massaged several of his chins with a pudgy hand.

"Antiques, lower Fifth. . . ." A gleam of recognition sprang into his small eyes. "Oh, yeah, Pickett's place on West Twelfth." He shook his head. "I don't think there's anything for you there. Nothing professional, most likely a nut case. He attacked the owner and grabbed some ashtray or something, nothing valuable. Broad daylight too, it wasn't planned or nothing."

"Is it still open?"

"Nah, I think we closed it about six weeks back. We didn't have nothing to go on, no hard make, nobody around who'd seen him get away. A dead end."

"No prints on record?"

Hagburg shifted in his chair, his eyes abruptly avoiding mine.

"Well, you know, Lieutenant, on a thing like that, minor assault, petty theft, with so much hard stuff hitting the fan . . ."

I sighed. I did know.

"You didn't dust."

Hagburg shook his head.

"Did you check your sources?"

He squirmed again.

"All he got away with was one fuckin' ashtray, Lieutenant, worth maybe sixty bucks, I mean it was more shopliftin' than a heist and I figured he wouldn't know who to fence it with even if he wanted to. The guy was mental, it sounded like, and we got so much here . . ."

I hadn't really expected anything more.

"Okay, Sergeant, relax, I'm not doing an efficiency. But there could still be a tie-up."

Hagburg didn't look interested one way or another now I'd let him off the hook.

"Yeah? Maybe."

"That's why I want your sources."

He looked up sharply.

"Hey, now wait a minute, Lieutenant . . ."

Every cop guards his personal informers like the crown jewels, but I wasn't in the mood to swallow any shit.

"That way I can mention your assistance in my report, Sergeant." I spoke slowly, meaningfully. "And I wouldn't have to mention anything else."

Hagburg glared at me, but at least he knew when he was beaten.

"Awright, awright. The best guy for you is Pinky Larsen. What he don't know around here, nobody does." He scribbled something on a lined yellow pad, tore the page off and handed it to me. "Here's where you can reach him, but play it cool, he wouldn't last long if his friends knew he was on the vine. And don't screw me up with him, either."

I pocketed the paper.

"You got anything else?"

"Nothing that's not in my report." He regarded me resentfully. "But I'm telling you, Lieutenant, it's a dead end, you'll never get anything, not after all this time."

I couldn't disagree with him, so I got up and left.

Records was in the basement, a windowless plywood-partitioned room stuffed with puke-green metal file cabinets. A floor fan feebly stirred the damp air and the whole place smelled clammy as a tomb. A middle-aged police-woman with a not-so-faint moustache sat behind a desk, oval patches of sweat ink-blotting from under the arms of her pale blue tunic. She grimaced when I identified myself.

"We sent over everything we had on Duncan, Lieutenant, I don't see what more . . ."

"I'm here to see Fiske," I said, and her mouth softened into a scowl.

"He's not here." The fact seemed to please her.

"Where can I find him?"

"You tell me, Lieutenant, I haven't seen him since

yesterday." The moustache quivered indignantly. "I've had to carry his case load for two days now."

"Did he report sick?"

"The bastard hasn't called in at all. When he does, he's going to get quite a reception, believe me. He and his friends can enjoy their binge, but when he gets back he'll be on the carpet, I can tell you. . . ."

"What friends?"

"The two men he left here with. I should just call up his roommate and let him know, he's a jealous type and you can bet. . . ."

The room felt suddenly colder.

"Who were these two guys? Precinct cops, friends . . ."

She shook her head.

"I'd never seen them before. He was going out with them when I got back from delivering some files upstairs." She sniffed. "A cut above his usual type, I must say, respectably dressed at least. . . ."

I fought down the thoughts, keeping my voice steady.

"Could you give me Fiske's home address and phone number? It's important I get in touch with him."

She flipped through a circular card index.

"25 Jane Street, Apartment 2-D, CHelsea 3-3299. But he's not there. The switchboard's been trying to get hold of him all day, no answer. His roommate's home after six, though, he works somewhere uptown. If you find Ernest, you can tell him for me. . . ."

I left, thinking rapidly. It didn't have to mean anything, Fiske could just be out on a bender. I kept on telling myself that all the way to the car.

Macri must have caught my mood, and he stayed mercifully silent as I inched through the congealed traffic crosstown to Avenue of the Liberation and over to Fifth. For the first time that day my luck was in and there was a parking spot on the corner of Thirteenth, facing a row of pay phones. I gave the keys to Macri, scabbled through my pockets for some pfennigs, and dialed Fiske's

number. No answer. I let it ring nine, ten times, then took out the paper Hagburg gave me. Pinky Larsen answered on the second ring, and I introduced myself.

"So?" His voice was wary.

"Fred Hagburg said you could help me out on something. When can we get together?"

There was a loud silence on the other end.

"I said . . ."

"Yeah, I heard you the first time. Look, Lieutenant, I ain't no friggin' information desk. That arrangement between me and Fred, that was private, he shouldn'ta gave you my number."

I forced a conciliatory tone.

"Look Larsen, this is only routine, nothing that'll put any heat on you. Just a few minutes of talk, that's all it'll take. And you never know when you might need a friend uptown."

He snorted.

"What I don't need is no more enemies. All right Lieutenant, I'm gonna be at the fights tonight at the Garden. I'll leave off a ticket for you at the Fifty-third Street window. Get there before the main bout."

Macri was waiting outside the store, which was grander than I'd expected, occupying the entire streetfront of a modern and obviously expensive apartment building. There was no sign outside; just a discreet, highly polished brass plate beside the door, "Pickett & Villiers, Antiques & Objets d'Art." There wasn't much to see in the large display window, just lots of cream satin hangings back-dropping a few spindly chairs and tables and something that looked like a jeweled Easter egg. Inside, the place was even classier, thick Persian carpets, subdued lighting, a subtle but pervasive aroma of sandalwood and old leather clinging in the air like incense. Somehow I'd come to think of Pickett as a storefront junk dealer, but I couldn't have been more wrong.

As we stood in the areaway an elegantly slender young man materialized out of the gloom and minced over to

us, his hands folded in front of him like a votary in some Odinst temple.

"May I be of service, gentlemen?"

The voice was hushed.

"We'd like to see Mr. Pickett."

"Ahhhh." His tone seemed to congratulate us on our good taste. "He is occupied right now, but if you'd care to wait . . ."

I nodded, and he detached himself and pranced to the back of the room. I looked around, scanning the subtly lighted oils on the walls, the darkly gleaming furniture and display cases of jewels, china and crystal. The only other customer was a stout blue-rinsed matron browsing along the silver counters, swathed in a floor-length chinchilla coat that was twenty thousand marks if a pfennig. Her picanniny, one of the few I'd seen since the labs made them commercially available, pranced on its leash, gurgling excitedly in little drooling sputters. As she passed us it stopped and sniffed at my trouser leg, and I could see the neat stitches of the lobo trepanning across the kinky curls and the puckered white scar of the tracheotomy like a pale half-moon on the black throat. I tried to see if the thing was spayed but she'd dressed it up in silver lamé pantaloons and a little brocaded vest. It started to snuffle up to Macri but he lashed out with his foot and it scampered away, mewling in terror. The old broad cast us a filthy look and patted it consolingly, whispering little endearments, before exiting with a final glare in our direction.

"Ugh," Macri muttered. "Those things really turn me off. You know, before Liberation some people used to think they were human, and to look at 'em you could almost believe it."

"I've always thought they're kind of cute," I said absently.

"You want a real pet, Ed, you get an Alsatian. Our Blondi, she's so great with the kids you wouldn't believe. . . ."

I was saved any more chit chat by the arrival of a thin, middle-aged man with a Skorzeny haircut, dressed impeccably in a navy blue Farbentile suit, double-breasted white waistcoat and a fastidiously knotted maroon silk cravat. The clerk bobbed obsequiously as a nip mamasan in his wake.

"This is Mr. Pickett," he whispered reverently.

Pickett's cold blue eyes glided quickly over Macri and me, neatly digesting the ninety-mark ready-made suits, the scuffed shoes and shiny ties, and then fixed on a neutral point in the airspace halfway between us.

"That will be all, Thayer." The younger man melted into the opulent shadows. "How may I help you, gentlemen?"

I flipped my wallet open to the badge and he nodded silently, probably relieved we weren't customers.

"You've caught him then?"

"No, I'm afraid not. We'd just like some additional information for our investigation."

He sighed.

"I've already told the police everything I know, Inspector. . . ."

"Lieutenant," I corrected automatically.

"Lieutenant. I really don't see how I can be of any further help."

"We may have a lead," I lied, "and there are a few things we'd like to double-check. We won't take much of your time."

His lips pursed petulantly, but he nodded.

"Very well. Perhaps if you'd come into my office . . ."

He led us to the back and through heavy brocaded curtains into a small but richly furnished room dominated by a giant naval desk. Several nudes hung on the wall, expensively framed, obviously old and probably valuable. They were all men, and Pickett didn't believe in fig leaves. He settled into a red leather swivel chair studded with brass nailheads and regarded us without much enthusiasm across the burnished expanse of desk.

"Well?"

He didn't bother to offer us a seat.

"I've taken over this case from the original investigating officer, Mr. Pickett, and I'd just like to familiarize myself with it a bit further. The man who attacked you—could you tell me how he behaved in the store?"

Pickett tapped an ivory letter opener on the desk pad impatiently.

"Precisely as I told your colleague. I'd seen him looking through the window earlier, but I hadn't given it any thought. Then he entered and wandered over to the back of the window display, which opens directly into the shop, and began studying it from that angle. Finally he reached out and touched one of the items, a skull ashtray, he was stroking it actually, and it was at that point I intervened."

"You were alone in the shop at the time?"

"Yes, my assistant was down at the docks transshipping a new consignment."

"What did he say when you approached him?"

"Nothing at first. His back was to me and he didn't turn around when I requested he refrain from handling the object. I was perfectly gracious about it, even though the fellow was quite shabbily dressed and disheveled. Dress is not a sure guide in my field—some of the most prominent collectors and antiquarians tend to be, shall I say, a bit eccentric in such matters. So I was in no way rude or insulting."

"Then there was no provocation of any kind?"

"None at all. When he didn't respond to my initial request, I touched his sleeve very lightly and suggested in a polite tone that he allow me to show him the merchandise." Pickett shook his head, as if still disbelieving. "It was incredible. He put the skull down, very carefully, and then wheeled on me like a madman, shrieking, and went for my throat with both his hands. He wasn't particularly strong but sheer shock swept me to the ground. He tried to strangle me." Pickett looked up querulously, suddenly

vulnerable in his bewilderment. "He wanted to *kill* me, Lieutenant. To kill me."

"And you have no idea of the motive for the attack?"

Pickett ran a hand over his forehead. The re-telling of the incident seemed to have rattled him.

"None whatsoever. Oh, in the past we've had a few smash and grab incidents, some hoodlum will come in, pretend to browse, then snatch a portable item and make a run for it. That's why all our smaller pieces are in locked showcases, unless they're on display. But this item had no commercial value whatsoever; there are thousands of such artifacts around, from fetuses preserved in formaldehyde to actual mummified corpses. The only reason we had these particular bits and pieces in the window is that they dated back to the original camps at Auschwitz and Maidenek, way before Liberation, and could fill specialized niches in collections. Why this lunatic would want that skull, and why he would attack me so brutally to get it, I just don't know."

He nervously extracted a slim black panatella from a humidor and snipped the end off with a gold clipper.

"I understand you subsequently found an item of jewelry on the floor that you'd torn off the man. Were you able to identify it?"

He lit the cigar with a jewel-encrusted lighter. The smoke smelled perfumed.

"No, I studied it to see if it was engraved with his name or initials, but it was just an old silver charm or amulet covered with Arabic script."

"Arabic?"

"Well, I'm not much of a linguist but that's what it appeared to me."

Pickett was regaining his composure, and his impatience.

"I see. Just one more thing, Mr. Pickett. You mentioned that when this man attacked you he was screaming. Could you pick out any identifiable words?"

Pickett frowned in concentration.

"Words? Well, not really. I mean, under those circumstances I was more interested in keeping alive than listening to him." He paused. "I really hadn't thought about it before, but looking back I do have the vague impression he was shrieking imprecations in a foreign language. German perhaps." He looked up abruptly, little pinpoints of red springing into his cheeks. "Not that German is a *foreign* language. I only meant to say that it was not English."

I nodded, thinking fast. German. That just added new complications.

"Can you remember any specific word or phrase?"

He spread his hands helplessly.

"No, I don't think so. I'm sorry. In any case, it couldn't have been much more than the rantings of a madman."

"Yes, I'm sure you're right."

I turned to Macri, who was leaning against the floor-to-ceiling bookcase that covered one wall of the room, a slightly baffled expression on his face.

"Mr. Pickett, this is Sergeant Macri. He's a police artist, and if you could describe this man to the best of your ability he'll attempt to sketch a likeness. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, yes of course, anything to help." Belatedly he waved both of us to chairs, and Macri opened his case and extracted a sketch pad and grease pen.

"If we could start with the hair, Mr. Pickett?"

Forty-five minutes later a small forest of crumpled sketches scattered the floor around Macri's chair, but he'd finally come up with one that satisfied Pickett. I can't say it did much for me. It was the face of any of a million elderly men in New York, no unusual features or distinguishing characteristics, just a bland gray face that I passed on the sidewalk a dozen times each day. I'd subtly hammered away at the nose, but Pickett remembered it only as another ordinary, run-of-the-mill proboscis, nothing like the predatory beaks you still saw in *Der Sturmer*.

Finally we were through and Pickett, now the soul of cooperation, offered us a *schnappes*, which I politely declined for both of us. As we left the office, I asked him if he'd mind if I sent two men down to dust for fingerprints.

"It's been three months, Lieutenant, and you can see for yourself that everything here is constantly cleaned and polished. I don't see. . . ."

"You're probably right," I admitted, "but there's just a thousand to one chance a latent impression might still be intact somewhere."

He agreed reluctantly, and we shook hands in the doorway. We were halfway down the street when he came hurrying after us.

"Lieutenant!"

I turned and Pickett's face was excited, his eyes gleaming.

"All the time we were working on that composite I was trying to remember what the man screamed at me. One word, I'm sure of it, it just came to me as you left. . . ."

"Yes?" My voice was too harsh, but Pickett didn't notice.

"*Ungeheuer*," he said, "I'm sure that was it. While we were struggling it didn't register, but I can hear it now just as clearly as if he were still screaming. *Ungeheuer*." He smiled apologetically. "That does sound German, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Yes it does."

I thanked Pickett rather abruptly and strode to the car, Macri half-trotting to keep up with me.

"*Ungeheuer*," he said thoughtfully as I switched on the ignition. "Is that somebody's name?"

"It's a word," I said quietly.

"Yeah? What's it mean?"

"Monster."

I dropped Macri off at the I.R.T. station on the island in Sheridan Square, relieving him of his sketch before he

got out. He was surprised I didn't want any dupes, but I wasn't going to let the original out of my hands. Not that I figured it would be much use.

It was past five now-so traffic was even more snarled and it took me almost twenty minutes to cover the eight blocks to Jane Street. When I finally pulled up in front of Number 25 there were two prowl cars double-parked outside and a knot of people clustered on the steps of the old brownstone. I jackknifed into the curb by a hydrant, flashed my badge to a uniformed patrolman holding back the crowd and hurried up the steps, a tingly feeling of foreboding crawling over my spine.

Another patrolman stood by the door of 2-D, ignoring questions from a couple of tenants on the landing. Inside, three plainclothesmen were talking to one of the police doctors, Zeider I think his name was, and a bored-looking photographer sat on the couch, fitting a fresh flashbulb into his Rollei. I knew one of the detectives, Magnusson from Internal Affairs, and he waved me over.

"Out of your turf, aren't you, Bill?" He didn't seem to care much one way or another. "You know Fiske?"

I shook my head.

"I've been trying to track down an old file from the 16th and they gave me his home address, said he was the only guy who could dig it up on short notice."

Magnusson smiled narrowly.

"You're going to have to find somebody else. Patrolman Fiske blew his brains out a few hours ago."

It wasn't too much of a surprise.

"Did he leave anything?"

"Not a note, but amounts to the same thing." He reached into his inside jacket pocket and extracted a sheaf of smudged 8 by 5 photos. They hadn't been done by a Heinrich Hoffmann, but everything showed except the girl's face.

"No negatives anywhere, which makes it pretty obvious. He was a reserve lieutenant in the SA, a perfect target for that kind of blackmail. You know how they treat

closet hetties. I guess the pressure just got too much for him."

"Yeah."

They'd done it neatly, I had to give them that. The photos explained the lag between disappearance and discovery; they'd needed time for the set-up and developing the negatives.

"Where is he?"

Magnusson waved me to a closed door.

"In the john. It's not gonna help your appetite."

Fiske was sprawled naked in the tub. The bullet looked like it had gone through the roof of his mouth and exited through the left eye, and there wasn't much left of the face, just a mushy pink paste. There was something else, too. I stood silent for a moment, then shut the door softly behind me.

"We'll see it's a closed coffin." Magnusson had got hold of a cup of coffee somewhere, and he took a desultory sip. "Have to feed a cover to the papers, too, it don't look good, a cop going out like that."

"What happened to his prick?"

"Pretty, hah? He took a pair of pliers to himself just before the end, some kind of self-punishment I guess. Jung could explain it better'n me."

"They told me he had a roommate."

Magnusson laughed.

"You mean Mrs. Fiske. Yeah, she's in the bedroom, down the hall. Takin' it pretty hard."

"Mind if I see him?"

Magnusson sipped from his coffee before answering.

"I thought you were looking for a file."

I shrugged.

"Just curious, that's all. If you've got any. . ."

"Oh, no, of course not." His eyes were brighter. "Be my guest."

So he guessed something was up; so what? Fuck him.

The bedroom was done up in chintzy pink and blue, dominated by a huge swastika-draped photo poster of the

latest UFA star, Tony Denck, his hard-on thrusting half-way to the ceiling. A plump young man in his mid-twenties sprawled on the bed, tears streaming down his cheeks. He was totally bald, his skull shaved Streicher-like, the dome glistening in the half-dark like a luminous egg. I pulled up a chair and regarded him silently for a moment until he turned to look at me, his mouth trembling.

"Can't you leave me alone? Can't all of you leave me alone?"

"I was a friend of Ernest's, from the 16th." Soft, sincere. "I just wanted to tell you how sorry I am."

Suddenly his flabby body was wracked by great gulping sobs, and he thrashed back and forth on the bed, his hands rending the rosy satin coverlet. I needed a cigarette, but it wouldn't have fitted my role. After a couple of minutes the weeping subsided and he lay there gasping air for a while, then slowly turned to look at me.

"You really are a friend of Ernest's?"

"A good friend." I remember Kohler's briefing. "We both belonged to the *Herrenvolk Bund*."

His eyes fixed mine with a look of desperation and one pudgy hand clutched my wrist.

"They say he killed himself, he shot himself." The words came in a torrent, tripping over each other. "But it's a lie, I know it's a lie. All they care about is covering it up, they don't want the bad publicity, but I know it's a lie, it has to be. And those photos, with a *woman*, Ernest would never do such a thing, never. . . ."

He faltered, and seemed on the verge of another crying jag.

"It certainly is hard to believe," I said, and he squeezed my wrist gratefully.

"Yes, yes, you knew Ernest, you know he could never do a thing like that. But the others, they don't care, they just want to sweep it under the rug." Rivulets of sweat streamed down his naked skull. "But I know Ernest could never have done it, never. Oh, my God! His face, his

beautiful face. . . ." His hands ripped deeper into the bedspread, bunching it between his fingers.

"If Ernest was killed," I said carefully, "it might be connected with something he was working on. Did he mention anything to you?"

His voice was choked.

"No, no I don't remember, I can't think straight, I just came home a few hours ago, and there he was, in the tub, lying there — "

"He never mentioned anything about say, jewelry, anything like that?"

"No, no, we never really discussed his work, there was so much else we had in common. . . ." He started to blubber again. I sat silent, letting him get it out of his system, and finally, snuffling, he looked up at me.

"There was one thing . . . about a month ago I think it was, he seemed very excited about something, he wouldn't tell me what it was. All he'd say was, 'Just wait, I'll have a real surprise for you in a couple of days,' and he'd go on about how they were all fools down at the precinct, shortsighted fools, and he'd found out something that would make him famous. But then nothing happened and I got the feeling he was disappointed. At least, he never said anything more about it."

Which means, I thought, you may just manage to stay alive.

"Was Ernest home last night?"

He blew his nose with his fingers.

"No, no, but we'd had a little tiff at breakfast and sometimes he'd just like to go out on his own, I'd never try to stop him." Suddenly he half sat up in bed, his eyes bulging. "But that had nothing to do with it, nothing, Ernest would never have destroyed himself over a silly meaningless thing like that. Never! We were supposed to go away together this weekend, to the beach . . ." He collapsed back on the pillows and started twitching again. "To the beach. Oh, God, his face, his beautiful face . . ."

That was all I'd get from him.

In the living room Magnusson raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Curiosity satisfied?"

I grunted, and glanced toward the bathroom.

"Do you have a make on the gun?"

"Police Special. His own." Magnusson frowned. "Look, Ed, why don't you level. What's your line on this?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. Like you said, just curiosity."

I left before he could remind me about the cat.

The car had been ticketed while I was gone, the least of my worries, and I left it and walked over to a spaghetti joint I knew on Bleecker. The bartender, Sal or something, gave me the glad-hand and started running off about the rape in Queens, but I ignored him till he went away, leaving me my thoughts and a double Scotch. Neither afforded much consolation. After a couple of rounds I ordered a plate of fettuccine at the bar and dug in halfheartedly while I struggled to fit the pieces together. I'd been looking at this thing in career terms, worrying about the penalty for failure, when all along I should have thought about the penalty of success. Which, the way it looked now, could be death.

I shoved the half-eaten plate across the counter, ordered another Scotch and took it to the phone booth in back. Kohler didn't seem particularly relieved to hear from me.

"I just finished a check on the subvert files, old Resistance types, Christies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Freemasons, Jap sympathizers, every malcontent in metropolitan New York. Most of them were under surveillance anyway, and nobody fits the bill. How'd you do?"

"Great. I've got him here with me, he'd say hello but he only knows Yiddish."

"Save the funnies for von Leeb. How's it going?"

"Nowhere, so far." I glanced at the dial. "Look, we've got a lousy connection, can you call me back?"

"You sound clear to me."

"I think the trouble's on your end. In fact I'm sure of it. My number's TR 5-4625."

There was a pause while it sank in.

"Okay, I'll get back to you."

I waited a couple of minutes while he found an outside phone.

"All right, what the hell is it?"

"You out of the building?"

"I'm in a fuckin' candy store, what's going on?"

"We're not the only ones on the case."

There was a long silence.

"You sure?" His voice was hoarse.

"Definite. Two guys called for Fiske at work yesterday and he never came back. He was found dead in his apartment today, face blown off with his own gun, apparent suicide. Very slick."

"No chance . . ."

"None at all. They planted phony extortion photos for motive, just about tore his cock off during interrogation. He must've spilled what little he knew, because they didn't touch his roommate."

"Jesus. Who . . .?"

"I don't know. But somebody's tidying up all the neat ends. Remember the pirates who used to bury their treasure on desert islands, then throw in the sailors who'd dug the hole? Well, we're both holding shovels."

I could hear his breathing.

"I've got to think . . . When can I see you?"

"I'm meeting a grasser at the Garden tonight. How about the information booth at Penn Station, about half past ten?"

"I'll be there."

I hung up, looked at my watch, and dialed von Leeb at the *Neue Adlon*. There was no answer.

By the time I got back to the Opel I'd decided that either I wasn't being tailed or somebody was doing a damn professional job of it. Along the way I'd gone through the whole bit, quick stops, reflections in store windows,

sudden turns through deserted side streets, but nobody tripped over my heels. Which, of course, didn't prove shit. If they were there they were keeping their distance, probably an interchangeable tail with one guy on foot and the other in a car.

The patrolman was gone outside Fiske's place, along with the crowd of neighborhood ghouls. I drove cross-town to Hudson and up along Eighth, parking outside the *Angriff* offices on Fifty-fourth. As I got out I automatically pulled down the visor with my NYPD tag to avoid another ticket, feeling like an asshole when I caught myself. As if that were all I had to worry about. The sun was just beginning to set across the Hudson, and it was still muggy. I felt like a drink, I needed a drink, but that was out for the duration. A clear head was about all I had going for me right now.

The sports lovers were already inside the Garden so the streets were fairly empty, but I couldn't spot anybody behind me as I strolled down to Fifty-first. The tickets were waiting like Larsen had promised, but the first bout was still going on so I killed a few minutes lounging at the back of the hall smoking a Lorelei and half-watching the action. It was even hotter inside despite the cooling system, the air heavy with smoke and the musky locker-room smell of ten thousand sweating, screaming fans. This must have been a big one, maybe a Team elimination, because the place was packed to the rafters and even the aisles were jammed with standees. For all I knew Jubala himself could be on, but I'd never been much for blackfights outside of an occasional match on the vidy, and now I just hoped for a quick decision so I could get to Larsen. The loudspeakers were drowned by the mob's screaming, but by the shape of the fighters it looked like I wouldn't have long to wait. It was hard to make out too many details from this far back, but the taller of the two pugs seemed to have already lost his left eye and the other side of his face was scraped into wormy pink hamburger. He seemed pretty badly slashed around the

upper arms too, and now his opponent, a squat pyramid resembling a black suomo wrestler, ducked under a flailing right and raked his Claw in a shining arc across the other buck's neck. Everybody jumped to their feet then and I lost sight of the action, but he'd obviously missed the jugular because when the crowd slumped back into their seats the tall one was still standing, blood cascading down his chest, feebly flailing out with bare lefts. He was game, all right, but then Fatso's Claw lashed out again, gleaming silver in the spotlight, and the big buck's right arm fell uselessly to the side, half torn from his shoulder, his own Claw effectively immobilized. The fans went wild again, scenting their kill, and I ground out my cigarette and started struggling down the aisle.

Larsen was ringside, a hell of a lot better than I'd ever be able to afford on a cop's salary, and it took me almost five minutes of shoving and cursing to reach him. By the time I slumped into the only empty seat in the third row the big buck was down on one knee in Appeal, his bare left hand clutching at his throat to staunch the flow of blood, fingers plucking at the rubbery lips of the wound, trying to pull them together. From the decibel level of cheers and catcalls I gathered the audience was pretty evenly divided, which meant he must have put up a good show in the earlier rounds. So maybe he'd make it, and good luck to him. I was beginning to know how he felt.

The guy on my right had to be Larsen, and there was nothing pink about him, either in complexion or dress. He was a pasty-faced little guy in his early fifties with shrewd eyes, pockmark-pitted cheeks and a moist slash of a mouth juicily savaging the remnants of a cigar. His green ersatzwool suit must have cost at least 500 marks, but it still managed to look shabby on him. Larsen shot me one brief, wary glance as I sat down, then turned around quickly and looked straight ahead, talking out of the corner of his mouth, his words barely audible above the din.

"You can tell Hagburg for me this is a shitty thing, he

gave me his word for God's sake, then he starts throwing my name around. If you guys get greedy you can forget it, I'm not cooperating no more, unnerstand?"

I played the game and kept my eyes on the ring.

"This hasn't got anything to do with your scene, I just need to get a make on somebody who's been around the Village."

The loudspeakers announced ballot time, and Larsen angrily stabbed the red button on the armrest.

"I lost five thousand on that fuckin' animal, I need more problems?" Just to be perverse, I pressed green. "Awright, awright, whaddya want from me?"

I took out Macri's sketch, unfolded it and handed it across.

"Have you seen him?"

Larsen studied the sketch.

"Odin, man, this could be anybody. Yeah, I see a dozen of him every day." He looked closer. "Have I seen *him*? Not on my turf."

So much for Macri.

"He'd need phony papers. Where would he go?"

Larsen hesitated, sucking on the soggy stump of his cigar while the computerized results flashed across the scoreboard tabulator. The auditorium was hushed, expectant.

"Only two guys be any good, Billy Reagan and the Professor. Reagan's cheaper, but the Prof does the class work."

He pulled out a battered address book, ripped out a page, and scrawled something on it. "You don't tell nobody where you got this, unnerstand?" I nodded, pocketing the paper as the tabulator turned two-thirds red and the audience let out a greedy collective sigh.

"They shoulda put that one down a year ago, he ain't even cuttin' it at stud no more."

Pinky, I decided, wasn't a good loser. I took the chamois pouch out of my jacket pocket, slid that damned *mezzuzah* thing into my palm, and held it out in front of

him as they led the big fighter out into the middle of the ring.

"You ever see somebody wearing anything like this?"

Pinky's eyes darted down, appraised it quickly, then flicked away.

"Nah, never."

I slipped the cylinder back into my pocket and got to my feet. The trainers had scurried to their corners and the big buck stood alone on the grid, swaying, blood still gouting out between his fingers, the great bunched muscles coiling under the glistening black skin, a bewildered expression on his scarred face. The room was quiet again, hushed.

"You don't say nothin', now, remember?" Larsen's ferret eyes were worried.

"Fuck you."

As I pushed my way out, anxious to beat the intermission rush, the grid flashed on and I watched the buck's mouth slap open and shut like a landed fish as the voltage crackled through the soles of his feet. The whole face was mouth now, white teeth flashing against the useless stump of tongue, a silent scream bursting from somewhere inside as the juice squirted through him and blue flame spun out of his hair and fingertips like sparklers on *Fuhrer Tag*. Everybody was on their feet screaming, particularly the women, who'd soon be fighting tooth and nail over trophies, and between the noise and the heat I began to feel nauseous. The black's bowels voided as I started up the aisle, one argument against ringside seats, and the sour-sweet stench of burning meat clung to me as I pushed past a pimply-faced usher at the gate.

"Great fight, hah Mac?" he asked excitedly.

"Yeah, great."

Traffic was messed up as usual around Times Square, and it took me twenty minutes to reach Thirty-fourth. I pulled up behind the taxi rank outside Penn Station and

just waved at the visor tag when the dispatcher started to say something. Screw him.

The terminal was still busy, crowded with bleary-eyed commuters who'd dined too well with their secretaries and now had to wait for the last trains to the Island. I stood five minutes outside a call box while a perspiring red-faced guy in his forties tried to convince his wife he'd been working late, but von Leeb answered on my first ring.

"You were supposed to report at eight o'clock promptly, Lieutenant." The voice was high, querulous.

"I tried earlier, Professor, there was no answer and then I had to see a contact." Somehow, von Leeb no longer seemed quite so terrifying. After all, he could only destroy me slowly.

"In the future, try to be prompt." He sounded tired. I suppose ten's late when you're his age. "Have you made progress?"

You might call it that. "I've been going since I left you, Professor. I spoke to Pickett and . . ."

"You can give me the details tomorrow morning," he interjected hastily. "The *Adlon*, nine o'clock."

"I'll be there." Wishful thinking? "Good night, Professor."

"One second." There was a long pause, broken only by the sound of his raspy breathing. By the time he spoke I'd begun to think he'd nodded off on the phone. "I have just received some . . . some information. Disquieting information."

I didn't say anything, and there was another pause.

"My associate on this matter, Karl Grauber. He was my adjutant in the *Einatzgruppen*." Can a man's voice sweat? "He was joining me today, flying in from London with a computer printout on statistical Jewish survival odds. He never arrived."

"Have you . . ."

"His plane. A Junkers Valkyrie, he piloted it himself. It crashed halfway across the Atlantic Ocean."

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Shit.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Professor." I was.

More breathing. Then, very softly, almost inaudibly,
"He was a very experienced pilot."

"I see."

"It is a tragic loss. I was relying on his aid." The
voice quavered, and sounded suddenly very old. "Lieuten-
ant, I have a *fingerspitzengefühl*, how do you say, a fin-
gertip feeling on this. I have had such feelings, such
intuition in the past, and they have always proved valid.
Grauber was a *very* good pilot. Do you understand me?"

"I do, Professor." Too well.

"Then I will see you tomorrow morning. Good night."
This time, he'd forgotten the *heil*.

Kohler was lounging against the information booth
reading an early edition of the *News*. He'd brought along a
suitcase, which seemed overdoing it a bit, and didn't look
particularly overjoyed to see me.

"I've been here for forty fucking minutes, I
thought . . ."

"I was tied up at the fights, sorry."

"The fights? My God, Halder . . ."

I gave him a fast briefing on the day's events and he
quickly forgot his tired feet.

"First Fiske, then Grauber. It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Yeah. Somebody's tidying up behind and ahead of us,
and doing it damn neatly."

"Von Leeb could be . . ."

I shook my head.

"No, it's not only Grauber that clears him, he could
have thrown that out as cover, it's everything else. He'd
snuff us out without batting an eye, sure, but his main
interest now is the Jew." I realized I no longer was putting
the words in quotes. "He needs us, or at least he thinks
he does, and the only thing on his mind is finding the
bastard. He might wonder if we were expendable after-
wards, but he wouldn't divert his energy this way. Not
now."

Kohler ran one hand through his hair, ruffling the regulation part. He looked beat.

"I don't know, shit, I just don't know. I mean, scrubbing Fiske could be seen as a precautionary measure if it'd been done *after* we'd pumped him dry. I probably would have advised it myself. But doing it before, and now eliminating Grauber. . . ." He stopped, looked up hopefully. "You know, that *could* be an accident. Planes do go down, even with the best of pilots."

I nodded.

"Yeah, maybe. And Fiske's death could have had nothing to do with us. It could all be coincidence."

Kohler just sighed. He didn't believe it any more than I did.

"Okay, let's see where this thing leaves us. If we're not dealing with a parallel sanitizing job then we've got to work on the assumption it's a preemptive operation, right? Which means, to phrase it in the nicest way possible, that we're not exempt." He grimaced. "So screw von Leeb, screw Heydrich, how do we save our own skins?"

A subject close to my heart.

"There's only one way." I lowered my voice although nobody was around but a couple of downy-cheeked *Luftwaffe* cadets necking on top of their duffie bags. "We've got to broaden the investigation, turn the whole Gestapo onto it. The opposition obviously want the Jew for themselves, and as long as we're the only ones in their way we're gonna be targets. But once a couple of hundred trained investigators are working on the job there isn't any percentage in silencing you and me, they'd have to wipe out a small army. We're only a threat to them, whoever the hell they are, as long as we're operating solo—once it's out in the open we're safe."

Kohler coughed uneasily.

"I'll buy that, but von Leeb would never . . ."

"Von Leeb is no fool. He suspects something's on, and if there's a choice between secrecy and getting the Jew

he'll take the Jew anytime. Besides, you can tell him the Gestapo will keep the thing under wraps no matter how many agents we assign to it."

Kohler smiled wanly.

"Maybe, just maybe, it could work."

"It's got to. Schedule a meeting with your boys at the New York office tomorrow afternoon, and in the morning we'll both go over to the *Adlon*. We'll either get clearance from von Leeb or leak it ourselves."

Kohler's spirits seemed to lift with the prospect of action.

"Okay, Bill, I think we just might be heading clear." He picked up his phony suitcase and we walked together to the Thirty-Sixth Street exit. It was cooler outside and I stood with Kohler on the curb as he waited for a cab.

"While we're at it," he said thoughtfully, "who do you think is handling the cleanup?"

I just shook my head, but as he got into a cab I leaned through the open window.

"Maybe von Leeb is only half-right," I said quietly. "Maybe this guy isn't the only Jew left on earth."

I stepped back to the curb and the cab pulled out into the traffic before Kohler could say anything. I stood looking after it for a long minute. Sleep on that, buddy, if you can sleep. If either of us can.

I picked up the car and drove downtown again to check out the two names Larsen gave me. I'd planned to do it in the morning, but the opposition was moving fast, too fast, and every minute counted now. As I pulled up outside the seedy old hotel on West Fifteenth, I glanced at my watch. A little past eleven, only twelve hours or so since I'd first seen von Leeb. It seemed like a lifetime.

The desk clerk said he'd never heard of anybody named Reagan, so I flashed my badge and he gave me the room number without blinking. Reagan was a friendly little butterball, about five-five, with a funny nervous habit of taking off his glasses and wiping them on the sleeve of his plastron jumpsuit. But he was cool, and once

I'd identified myself and showed him Macri's sketch he didn't try to deny anything, just looked at it closely and shook his head.

"Never seen him. Anyway, he's too old. I get mainly ex-cons, they need travel papers, work permits, that kind of thing. But this guy is over fifty easy, anybody who goes up at that age winds up in the sleep shop. Take a look at the Euthanasia Bill."

I nodded glumly, and left. It'd been a long shot anyway, but I'd still have to try Larsen's Professor. I didn't have enough leads to throw any away.

The address on the sheet of paper turned out to be a sadie parlor on Maccougal that catered mainly to sailors and Waffen SS men. The greasy-faced tout outside gave me a quick onceover and directed me to a small bar in back facing the stage.

"This is a licensed joint," he whined as I went in. "We never have no trouble."

It turned out that the Professor was both bartender and owner of the place. He was a beefy guy in his mid-fifties with the coarse, flattened features of a wrestler, but the hands that served my Scotch were those of an artist, the fingers long and tapered, and stained with ink. He had a thick Austrian accent, and looked like a tougher nut to crack than Reagan.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Lieutenant. This is a legitimate establishment, I would never deal in anything illegal, much less forged papers. Do you take me for a fool?"

He kept on wiping glasses with a dirty towel as he talked, and the indignation in his voice didn't reach the cold appraising eyes. He must have been through this a dozen times before, and was just waiting for me to set the terms of the payoff.

"I don't care what you do on the side, and I don't want your money, just information." I slid the sketch across the bar. "Have you ever seen this man before—in any capacity?"

"No."

"Look at him, goddamn it."

Reluctantly, he slid his eyes down.

"No, never."

There hadn't been any flicker of recognition that I could notice, but then he was obviously a pro. Well, as long as von Leeb had given me *carte blanche* I might as well throw some of his money around.

"There's five thousand marks in it for you."

That drove some expression into his eyes, and he looked back at the sketch, carefully this time. But he still said no, now with some regret, and I retrieved the sketch.

"Have another drink, Lieutenant. On the house."

I sipped a second watery Scotch while he prepared a tray of *schnappes* for some noisy soldiers at a corner table. Business sounded good by the grunts and screams and whipcracks echoing from the curtained alcoves lining the room, but the place stank of stale beer and semen, and I didn't plan to hang around. When an aged three-piece orchestra groaned into life and the curtain opened on the crucifixion of a nude Slav with stringy blonde hair and saggy tits, I slid the change from my first drink across the bar and got up. The Professor hurried over and asked me if I wanted him to circulate the sketch, and I let him have it. Who could tell, he might come up with something. I could always pick it up and get a few dupes made tomorrow, and anyway I wasn't in the mood to search through every bar and flophouse in the neighborhood for the rest of the night.

As I walked out a reeling sailor was driving the first nail through the blonde's palm, and she was squirming on the cross like a fat snake as the blood squirted into the air, her mouth gulping in the same mute scream as the big buck in the Garden. I wondered why they were always tracheotomized, since you'd think the screaming would be a natural turn-on for the fans. So they wouldn't beg, probably.

The fresh night air felt good, and I took a roundabout

way back to the car, passing through Washington Square Park and wondering where the Jew had buried his precious skull. A shiver tingled up my spine, and I hurried on. Somebody walking on my grave. Or somebody planning to put me in it.

By the time I got home I was feeling sick again. I'd always had a nervous stomach and it was working overtime today. The night was warm, somewhere in the sixties, but I still felt clammy and as I lit a cigarette I noticed with clinical detachment that my hands were trembling slightly. I stood by the stoop for a minute, needing the smoke but almost gagging on it, watching the lights go out in the wop deli across the way. It was past two and nobody was on the streets except an old Bowery bum scavenging garbage cans on the corner. I had to be under surveillance, of course, it wouldn't make sense if I wasn't, but whoever was doing the job was an expert. I felt even colder.

As I ground out the cigarette the bum shuffled up, a battered shopping bag full of junk clutched under one arm, his shredded winter overcoat flopping around his ankles.

"Got any small change, pal?" he whined. "I ain't eaten all day, just enough for a bowl soup, hah?"

It wasn't soup he wanted, I knew the feeling, so I tossed him a ten-mark piece. He deftly fielded it and grinned, baring yellow stumps of teeth.

"Odin love you, friend. Widdy have a cigarette too, maybe, I'm goin' crazy for one, I sure would appreciate it."

Soft Touch Halder. I took out the pack of Loreleis, put one in my mouth and leaned over to hand him another. He grabbed the pack with blackened hands, scabbled a cigarette out and held it up to my lighter, his stubbled face bathed in the flame, bleary eyes fixed on mine. He must have worn that coat year round by the smell of it.

"Thanks mate, the best of luck."

I just grunted and turned away. I'd mounted the steps and put the key in the lock before it registered: the fingers that took my cigarette were filthy all right, but the nails were polished, manicured. I hadn't heard him come up behind me but I wheeled around just as his arm slammed past my neck and struck the door, the rigid chopping edge of the palm splintering the central panel like cardboard. It wasn't any lightning reflex that saved me, just sheer clumsiness. As he spun around and slashed out again with his left I toppled backwards over the stoop and sprawled into the basement areaway, a pile of old newspapers partially breaking my fall. I lay there dazed for a few seconds as he leaped to the sidewalk, but he had to come down another flight of steps to reach me and the time it took him was enough for me to get the Schmeisser out and cocked. He saw it as he appeared on top of the steps crouched in the classic karate attack position, feet pointed out, arms flung back, hands poised to strike. The street lamp framed him in a pool of light as he stood motionless for a second, the coat billowing behind him, a ludicrous little old man who could probably kill me with one blow.

I held up the Schmeisser in both hands.

"Lie down flat on the sidewalk with your arms over your head or you're dead."

The words came out a croak, but with some surprise I noticed my hands were steady. He just stood there for what seemed like an hour but could only have been a few seconds and then he was airborne, flying at me feet first as the gun bucked in my hand. I'd set it on automatic and the bullets tore him apart in the air, punching the body back five feet onto the steps. I struggled to my feet and looked down at him. The chest was gone, just a gleaming wet hole, and one leg had been torn off below the knee, the stump pumping out blood like a broken fire plug. But his weather-beaten face was untouched, the broken mouth rictused in an ugly smile. Lights were flashing on across the street and I could hear shouts from the upstairs win-

dows, but I just stood looking down at him, a little crumpled panhandler who must also have been a black belt, and who wanted me dead. I could hear a siren in the distance so I hurriedly propped him up against the steps, trying without much success to keep my hands and clothes clear of the blood, and started the messy job of searching the remains. But as I pulled his coat back the streetlight shone clearly on his face, and I started. There was something wrong about the man's features, they seemed to be melting. I reached down, touched the bristly chin, then ran my fingers up behind the ears. His head came off in my hands.

I could hear running footsteps but I didn't look up. It was a beautiful job, molded out of some plasticene substance, replete with mobile lips and those convincingly ruined teeth. The face of the glossy-haired young man who lay in front of me was finely featured, the flat black eyes serene in death, the yellow skin not yet cold to my touch. I remembered something Kohler told me during the Toronto business and pulled back the grubby sleeve of his undamaged arm. On the underside of the wrist was a tiny tattooed red dot. The little old derelict who had tried to murder me was an agent of *Komeito*, the Intelligence arm of the Japanese Imperial Staff.

Before it could really sink in, a patrolman was standing over me with a drawn gun and I had to spend the next half hour identifying myself and persuading the boys in the squad car to forego standard procedures. Finally we dragged the corpse into the back of the car and I went into my apartment to change my blood-spattered clothes and ring Kohler. Somehow, he didn't sound surprised.

"Get him over here right away, I'll call the precinct and tell them it's security. Do you have any press?"

"Not yet, but somebody in the 22nd will have tipped off the *News* by now. At least they weren't monitoring calls or I'd be up to my balls in 'em already."

"All right, if anybody shows just refer them to me.

And for God's sake don't flash that authorization of von Leeb's around or they'll be all over us."

He was waiting outside the Federal Building on Chambers Street when we pulled up, flanked by Beck and a burly guy in shirt sleeves propping up a stretcher. We unloaded the Jap and sent the two patrolmen off with instructions to keep quiet, for all the good that would do. Kohler told Beck and the other guy to carry the corpse down to the lab and get to work, then led me to his office.

I'd been operating almost automatically till then, high on adrenalin, but the minute I sagged into a chair I started shaking again, not just the hands this time. I'd only killed a guy once before, when I was a rookie, and then it had been strictly in the line of duty, a crazy Mick who'd run berserk with a carving knife and was going for my partner. I hadn't enjoyed it, but it hadn't bothered me that much either. This, somehow, was more personal. That bastard wanted me dead, and all that stopped him was one little slip. Clean fingernails. Shit.

"Try this."

Kohler took out a bottle of Steinhägen and poured me half a water glass. I drained it in one gulp, the glass rattling in my fingers. He doled out a lesser dose and I sat there in silence, sipping now, feeling a little more together.

"Pretty close, hah?"

I just nodded, and Kohler smiled sourly. "Well, it proves we're not exempt, that's one thing."

"Glad to be of service." I managed to light a cigarette without dropping the match. "So where does this leave us?"

Kohler sipped thoughtfully at his *schnappes*.

"Well, we know it's the Nips, which puts us one step ahead. The only question is why."

"What do you mean, *why*? Hell, we should've thought of them right away, they've got a perfect motive, even better than the Axists, and von Leeb warned us how anxious they'd be to get hold of this and rub Heydrich's

nose in the mess. How would the whole war party look if it was proved their leader couldn't even finish off the Jews?"

I thought my reasoning was pretty good for a guy who'd almost been karated to death an hour ago, but Kohler didn't look impressed.

"Sure, sure, it would be a big propaganda coup. But not that big. Not big enough to kill for, and on our territory." He shook his head impatiently. "Christ, Bill what happened tonight alone could trigger an international incident, not to mention sabotaging Grauber's plane or however they got rid of him. The Nips wouldn't gamble at those stakes just to make Heydrich a laughing-stock in the hierarchy, they'd have to be out of their minds."

All this palace intrigue was beginning to lose me.

"All right, Ed, hold on, let's forget motives and politics for a minute and just look at what we've got. A Jap spy tried to kill me tonight, and unless there are two parallel disposal teams wandering around that means it was the Japs who took out Fiske and Grauber. They know what we're trying to do and they're trying to stop us. Whatever their reasons, they want this Jew for themselves. What do we do about it?"

"For one thing, you stay here tonight, I've already posted extra men downstairs." He grimaced wearily. "Then tomorrow we lay this whole fucking time bomb in von Leeb's lap and let him defuse it. There's not much else we can do."

I spent a restless night on a couch in the office next to Kohler's, catching snatches of half-sleep that always dissolved into a mask coming off in my hands, a mask covering a leering bleached skull. The skull was trying to tell me something but somebody always grabbed it from me and ran away to bury it, and I kept wandering around a park trying to dig it up but all I'd find were bodies, Fiske's, a young Jap, somebody in pilot's goggles. Just as

I uncovered the fourth grave I'd always wake up without discovering who was in it. Me, probably.

Kohler mercifully woke me at seven, looking as if he hadn't even tried to sleep. He handed me a carton of coffee and a doughnut, then walked over to the window and stood looking out across the Battery.

"The lab didn't find anything," he said without turning around "Fingerprints have all been surgically removed. No papers or laundry marks, of course, just five thousand marks in cash and some car keys we're trying to trace. I sent a telephoto to Washington but they've got no make on him, he must have come in just for the assignment, probably a trade or diplomatic cover. We're checking that out now, but don't count on anything."

"I'm not." I finished the coffee and got up. "Lend me a razor and then let's get to the *Adlon*."

We drove over in Kohler's battered old Ferrari, and the bright sunny weather gave me a little lift, but not much. The desk clerk was fitted out like an admiral and addressed us down the bridge of his nose until we asked for von Leeb, when he shot to attention.

"Yes, gentlemen, Herr Professor von Leeb is in the *Fuhrer Suite*, I shall escort you personally." He snapped his fingers and a lesser functionary scurried over to take his place behind the reception desk while the Admiral goose-stepped us across the lobby to the elevators.

"It's a great honor to have an *Alte Partei Kameraden* in the hotel," he gushed as we hissed up fifty floors. "A great honor. We had hoped to arrange a reception, invite the mayor and local *gauleiters*, but Herr Professor von Leeb insisted on absolute privacy." The little greedy eyes darted speculatively. "He is, perhaps, traveling incognito? On a matter of state, perhaps?"

"Perhaps." The doors whispered open on a marble-floored reception hall strewn with potted palms and imitation Greek statuary. The Admiral strutted to a door at the far end of the room and pushed a button on the

wall. Inside, chimes pealed out what sounded like the first stanza of the *Horst Wessel Lied*.

"Once, in 1958 I believe, we were honored by the presence of *Reichsmarschall* Goering. It was shortly before his untimely passing, perhaps you remember the parade the city held for him. A truly magnificent occasion, such pomp, such pageantry . . ."

Von Leeb's squeaky voice shrilled from an intercom grill in the wall.

"Ja?"

"Professor, there are two gentlemen to . . ."

"Halder and Kohler, Professor," I cut in.

There was a buzz, and the Admiral swung the door open, then tried to squeeze in after us. Von Leeb stood ten feet away in the sunken living room, staring out the French windows, a shabby flannel robe swirling around his bare ankles. He turned around slowly, and didn't look too overjoyed to see us.

"You may go, Herr Westphall. I wish no calls put through until I notify you."

"Yes, of course, Herr Professor. Is there anything I can do, some champagne possibly . . ."

"You may go." One mottled hand chopped in dismissal, and he turned his back on all of us again.

The Admiral backed out, bobbing his head obsequiously, and Kohler and I walked through the areaway and down three steps into the main room. It was quite a layout, everything done up in the black, red and white of the Party emblem, dominated by a giant crystal chandelier in the shape of a swastika that ended up looking more like a glass fan than anything else. A giant romanticized portrait of the *Fuhrer* on horseback hung over the fireplace, but I wasn't sure if that was décor or if von Leeb carried it around with him everywhere he went. The carpet was soft and white as a fall of fresh snow, and as we padded across the room I had the feeling I should take my shoes off, like entering an Odinist temple. We stopped a couple of feet away from the Professor, but he still

didn't turn around, just stood there staring out across his private roof garden at the Manhattan skyline.

"An ugly city." He sounded tired. "Those skyscrapers, we should have torn them down after Liberation. Jewish architecture, phallic, decadent, the quintessence of nomadic alienation. Aryan architecture must be rooted in the earth, cyclopean but organic, not these steel fingers poking at the sky. . . ."

His words trailed off and creakily, as if it was an effort, he turned around.

"Give me your report."

I let Kohler do the talking, all except the incident with the Jap which I summarized, and von Leeb never said a word. I'd expected him to react with mounting anger, even fear, but he grew increasingly animated as we talked, and at the end he was positively beaming.

"You must sit down, *kamaraden*." He walked over to a gleaming glass and chromium bar that covered half of one wall. "A *schnappes*, perhaps, or a good cold *Wurzberger*?"

Kohler passed, a slight frown on his face, but I took the *Wurzberger*, sucking a long soothing draft through the suds. Nothing about von Leeb could surprise me anymore, even his present eager smile and the way he kept slapping his knee excitedly as he spoke.

"The Japs. The *Japs* have done this. First Grauber, a Party hero and official of the Reich and now you, Lieutenant, my own appointed deputy." Incredibly, he laughed, a shrill gargling noise that didn't do my frayed nerves any good. "Do you realize what this means?"

"It means, Professor," Kohler said carefully, "that the Japs know this Jew exists, and want him for themselves. It also means that to get him they're willing to kill anyone who stands in their way. Like me and Lieutenant Halder, for instance. That's why I think it's vital we end the secrecy on the project, enlist the entire Gestapo, expand our operations to encompass the intelligence apparatus of the Reich. . . ."

"*Nein, nein.*" Von Leeb wasn't even listening. "You miss the true significance, Herr Kohler. Certainly your life is in danger, just as mine has been countless times over the past forty years, but you are front-line soldiers in the service of the Reich and must accept an element of risk." Kohler started to say something, maybe, if he had the guts, that that was easy for von Leeb to say, safely ensconced in his luxury penthouse, but the old man cut him off.

"The significance is double, Herr Kohler. We started out to hunt down the last remaining Jew on earth, and that is still our purpose. It is, I admit, one that affects me emotionally, personally, on a deep human level. I am certainly not prepared to see a lifetime spent cleansing the world of this filth frustrated and mocked by even one survivor." The blue vein on his forehead began to pulse, then quieted down as he perched on the arm of a black leather recliner next to us and continued in a staccato rush of words. "But even I, personally involved as I am in this matter, recognize that there are higher issues at stake in the world than the extermination of one more Jew, however desirable that may be." He crossed his spindly legs and one battered slipper plopped onto the floor, but von Leeb didn't seem to notice. His toe nails were long, yellow and cracked. "Don't you realize what has fallen into our laps in the course of this affair?"

Kohler looked completely baffled and I wasn't far behind him, but von Leeb didn't wait for an answer.

"Of course you don't, and that is excusable because your kind of job does not prepare you, either of you, to take an overview on such matters. But let me tell you, gentlemen, that by seeking to capture the Jew for their own propaganda purposes the Japs have handed us a weapon of incalculable power." He stabbed a yellow finger at us. "They have given the Reich, gentlemen, a *casus belli*. A cause for war." He repeated the words, and his smile was almost beatific. "For war."

"Professor," Kohler interjected, "I don't think I follow you. Our concern here is this Jew, not. . . ."

"Our concern was the Jew." Von Leeb jumped up again and started pacing the room, the robe billowing out behind him. "Oh, we will still find him, Herr Kohler. We must find him, because we must keep the Japs on our trail. Surely you grasp the significance of *that*?"

Kohler shook his head.

"Professor, our purpose in seeing you was to get the Japs off our trail." There was a trace of desperation in his voice. "Lieutenant Halder here was almost killed last night, any of us could be next."

Von Leeb waved a hand in dismissal.

"You Gestapo men always worry too much about your own skins. There is more at stake here than our lives, more at stake than even the life of this miserable Jew."

He wandered over to the French windows again and stood looking out across the horizon, apparently lost in his own thoughts. When he swung around his face was intense, his voice tight with passion.

"I have seen all the dreams of a lifetime fulfilled, Herr Kohler. I have seen Europe fall to our armies, followed by North and South America, the Mid-East and Africa. I have seen the Jewish pestilence scourged, the black baboons bred as domestic animals, the Slavic *untermenschen* reduced to a race of docile slaves. I have realized all my dreams but *one*." He paused, his eyes flickering with some distant vision. "We do not yet rule the world. We have subdued or eliminated the sub-men, we have even reached the moon and someday the stars shall be ours. But a third of the globe lies under the control of the Japanese Empire, a third of this earth festers under the rule of our racial inferiors, from the Home Islands across the Pacific to the Hawaiian Federation, from China to Siam, from India across the entire subcontinent of Eastern Asia." Now the vein was hammering in earnest, a tiny blue snake rippling across his forehead. "And everywhere the Japanese Empire rules you find the same corrupt

and debilitating concepts of so-called humanism and personal freedom that we sacrificed three million men to destroy forever. They tolerate Christians, they encourage liberal thought and philosophy, they even tried to protect the few Jews in their territory until we forced their extradition at the threat of war." His monkey paws were shredding the lapel of the dressing gown. "Gentlemen, I am eighty-one years old. I will not die until I see this foul race of yellow scum wiped from the face of the earth!"

Toward the end his voice had risen to a scream, and now he braced himself with both arms against the wall, trembling, breathing heavily, sweat streaming down his wizened face. Well, there was no longer any doubt the old man was a Contraxist, but what the shit that had to do with the present mess was beyond me. Kohler shot me a quick, worried glance, and then he spoke, slowly, soothingly.

"Professor, Lieutenant Halder and I couldn't agree with you more. We both think the Axists are cowardly traitors, weak-kneed pacifists afraid to face up to the Empire." He was a good ass-licker, I'd give him that. "But for now, isn't our immediate purpose to pursue this investigation in the safest and most efficient manner, to . . ."

"No, no, *no*, Herr Kohler." Von Leeb shook his head wearily, as if at a backward pupil. "Our purpose now is very simple. We have one Japanese corpse in a morgue at Gestapo headquarters, already identified as a *Komeito* agent, and that in itself is almost enough proof. Under the Singapore Treaty, the Empire pledged a policy of total non-interference in the domestic affairs of the Reich. We may not be able to prove they blew up Grauber's plane, but we *can* prove they attempted to kill Lieutenant Halder, a man working under the direct orders of *Reichsminister* Heydrich. That alone would be enough to indict them for a breach of the Treaty, and all that entails. But we shall prove more, far more." His words were tripping over each other, his eyes glowing. "You and Halder will continue your investigation, you will place yourselves

directly in the line of fire, you will *encourage* assassination by Japanese agents." He smiled again, like a paper cut. "With one difference, comrades: You shall capture the next assassin *alive*, and produce him for trial in Berlin." I hoped I was dreaming all this, but either way it was a nightmare. "This could not come at a more opportune time for us. The Contraxists are gaining strength steadily within the Government and Party, but there is still resistance to a confrontation with the Empire. This trial, producing irrefutable evidence of Japanese subversion and murder within the *Reich*—murder and subversion we shall prove to be on behalf of a *Jew*—will irrevocably turn the tide."

He clutched each of us by the arm. "*Kameraden*, you are bait for a trap that will lead to the destruction of the Japanese Empire." Tears gleamed in his eyes, and his voice shook. "When the first atomic bomb hits Tokyo, *you* will be responsible."

We left the elevators in a daze and headed straight for the hotel bar. It was barely eleven o'clock and we were the only ones there except for a hungover hooker who looked too beat to hustle us. We ordered double martinis and sat in dull silence for a moment after the first chill, therapeutic belt.

Finally, I said it.

"He's insane. Ed, he's nuts, if he wasn't an OPC he'd have been lobbed years ago. My God, we're putting our lives on the line for a stark raving madman!"

Kohler just shook his head wearily.

"I wish it were that simple." He held up two fingers for another round and hitched his stool closer to mine. "Bill, von Leeb is sane, and there's a horrible logic to everything he said. Horrible for us, anyway. . . ."

The second martinis arrived and I took half of mine in one gulp.

"Yeah," I said, waiting for a glow that didn't come, "it's horrible all right. The guy wants us to be sitting

ducks for him, just so he can indulge some freudy fantasy about triggering a war with Japan. And all the time he'll be sitting on his scrawny ass in that penthouse contemplating the aesthetics of the Manhattan skyline. Shit, Ed, we'd be crazier than him if we went along with it."

"We don't have any choice." He held up his hand to stave off my interruption. "Wait a minute, Bill, there are some things you've got to understand about this. Von Leeb may be a fanatic, but he's not so wrong about the impact this thing could have if Berlin exploited it right. The way the international atmosphere is now, especially after the Manchuoko Incident, a proven breach of the Singapore Treaty would blow the whole lid off. Von Leeb realized that the minute you told him about the Jap, and there's no way we can persuade him otherwise."

I felt like I was sinking deeper and deeper in quicksand, and the last branch had just broken off in my hand.

"Come on, Ed, so the Japs have overstepped themselves a bit. You and I both know this kind of spying goes on all over the world. We have our guys in the Empire, they've got theirs over here, and don't tell me we've never hit anybody in Tokyo. God, you should know better than that, the Gestapo has a whole assassination bureau, so don't give me any crap about breaches of the Singapore Treaty."

Kohler sighed.

"That would have been true a year, five years ago, but not anymore. Look, Bill, you're a cop, it's not your job to know about international politics. But that's one of our specialties in the Gestapo, and I know a lot of things going on behind the scenes that you've never even dreamed of. For one thing, we are very, *very* close to an all-out war with Japan."

I finished my martini without tasting it.

"Sure, sure, the papers have been saying that for years, ever since Siberia. But . . ."

"No, Bill, it's different now. It's not just a hard-line vs. soft-line debate anymore, it's the real thing. The

stalemate's almost broken, the Contraxists are close to power and Schirach and Speer are on the run. Ever since Milch resigned the *Luftwaffe's* been chafing at the bit, they just can't wait to test their new nuclear missiles on Tokyo and Peking. The General Staff's still holding out, but even there Sepp Dietrich and a bunch of younger officers have swung over to the Contraxists, and they're putting a hell of a lot of pressure on Guederian. Even Schirach's reported to be wobbling, and that leaves Speer all alone in the Cabinet except for von Naumann, and he's never carried much weight anyway. Speer's fighting hard, sure, after thirty years of rebuilding Berlin he doesn't want to see it all go up in a mushroom cloud, but it's anybody's guess how long he can hold out. The *Luftwaffe* brass are telling everybody that a preemptive strike would annihilate the Empire, and they can produce studies to prove our anti-ballistics missiles system will knock out the few nukes the Japs could launch back at us. That's won over a lot of the fence straddlers, and we've heard rumors in Washington that Speer's going to be forced to resign at next month's Party Congress."

This was all way beyond me, but I tried to follow. For some weird reason it looked like my life was intimately tied up in these Party machinations three thousand miles away, so I might as well understand what was going on.

"What about the *Fuhrer*?" I asked. "I mean, he still has the last word, and he hasn't taken any position, I saw him on the vidy toasting the Nip Foreign Minister at the *Duce's* funeral in Rome. So he could still veto the whole thing, I mean, nobody can move without his approval." The thought was consoling. The *Fuhrer* had forged the Axis, he must still be behind it, and that would keep von Leeb's crowd effectively out in the cold. And, hopefully, take the pressure off us.

"That wasn't the *Fuhrer* you saw 'on the vidy."

"What?" Pretty soon I'd be ready for the lobo ward at Bellevue myself.

"It was his double." Kohler looked around cautiously. The bartender was chatting desultorily with the hooker down at the end of the bar, way out of earshot, but he still whispered it.

"The *Fuhrer's* ga-ga. Senile dementia, total and irreversible, for the last five years. He just lays in that eagle's nest on the *Obersalzberg* drooling and crying and screaming he's been betrayed. Everybody in the Party hierarchy and the Gestapo's known it for years, but it's not the kind of thing you tell the great unwashed. I mean, how do you explain to two hundred million faithful that their idol can't even control his bowels anymore? So they use his double for state occasions, funerals, ceremonies, and the *Fuhrer* stays a vegetable in Berchtesgaden."

For a moment, I almost forgot my own troubles. The *Fuhrer*. It was hard to believe. I'd grown up under his shadow, he was part of all our lives, distant but intimate at the same time, master and father and teacher all in one. And now he was just a senile old man braying at the Bavarian Alps. Shit.

"You can mourn later, Bill." There was no humor in Kohler's smile. "What all this means is that it's up to Berlin whether or not we break the Axis. And it's going to be broken sooner or later, believe me. If von Leeb could produce a Jap assassin for a show trial in Berlin, prove he's been trying to protect a *Jew* and that Jap Intelligence has been systematically liquidating loyal subjects of the Reich—well, that would be the ball game. And don't underestimate the old man, either—he's been around a long time, he was probably in on the Reichstag Fire Trial in '33, and he knows his business. This trial of his would put the Contraxists in the driver's seat overnight, and after that the Japs could either accept disarmament and Protectorate status or risk nuclear war." He polished off his martini, and the glass rattled in his hand as he placed it on the bar. "We've got a tiger by the tail, Bill, and we can't afford to let it go. If we did, von Leeb would snuff us out just as quickly as the Japs. And

maybe not as painlessly."

I could feel the acid pouring through my stomach.

"So you're going along with it. You're going to let us be set up as clay pigeons for the Japs. And all for the greater glory of the war party in Berlin."

Kohler snorted.

"Fuck the war party, I'm thinking about Number One. Look, there's still a chance we could come out of this ahead—sure, von Leeb won't let us alert the Gestapo, but that doesn't mean we still can't use my men as backstops. We'll bait the trap, but I'll have a team of our best field agents following us day and night to spring it. We'll be running a risk, yeah, but if we survive and nab the Jap we'll be von Leeb's fair-haired boys. We'll be heroes of the Reich, for God's sake, you and me, we'll be given more power and honor than you could ever dream of."

"If we survive."

Kohler's momentary euphoria seemed to have dissolved. "Yeah. *If.*"

We sat over our empty glasses for a minute, and I think both of us were equally drained by the sheer immensity of the thing. Finally, Kohler slapped a twenty-mark note on the bar and got up.

"Let's get back to Headquarters, I'm going to phone Washington and have them send a team down by the next jet. And then we've got a trip to make."

"Where?"

"Westchester. There's a guy I want to talk to. He may be one of the few people left in the world who can give us some leads on this goddamned Jew."

"Does the Jew really matter anymore?"

"No, but we've got to act as if he does if we're going to keep the Japs hot and anxious on our trail. The last thing we want right now is for them to lose interest."

"Yeah," I said dully. "That would be terrible. They might even let us stay alive a few more days."

We drove downtown, the traffic bad as ever, and I waited in the car while Kohler went in to call his men and brief Beck on von Leeb's latest *diktat*. He was in there about a half hour, and all the time I kept my jacket open and my sweaty palm on the grip of the Schmeisser. I wasn't going to enjoy my new role of target, that's for sure.

"How did Beck take it?" I asked as we crawled over to the Henry Hudson Drive.

"He didn't like it, needless to say. Who does? But he agrees we've got no choice. He's at the telex now, waiting for reports from all our bureaus on Jap intelligence activity in the United States. There's still a slim chance we might get a make on your karate expert, and he could lead us to the rest of his cell."

"Yeah, sure." That was about as likely as the Manhattan air turning breathable. "Did he get the lab report on Fiske's apartment?"

"Clean as a whistle. These are pros, remember."

"How can I forget."

"By the way, the station house called in, there was a message for you from somebody called the Professor. Not *our* Professor, somebody who runs a sadie parlor in the Village. Do you want to cut over there first?"

"No, it can wait. I left him a dupe of Macri's identikit sketch, and he's hot for his thirty pieces of silver. Probably dug up ten Bowery bums by now who fit the description."

"Yeah. Well, we've got to keep trying."

The Hudson gleamed blue as we hit the Drive, the pollution all under the surface. The new *Bremerhaven* was leaving Fifty-third Street Pier on the second half of its maiden voyage, passengers hurling confetti from the decks, a flotsam of tiny tugs bobbing in its wake, fireboats pissing their hoses against the bows. I wished I was on it, heading anywhere but where I was. I also wished I'd brought a pint of bourbon along for the ride.

We cut off the Drive onto the Goethe Parkway, the

traffic thinning as we got further into the suburbs. The heat was murderous, a hot, prickly blanket of humidity, and Kohler's old heap didn't even have a cooler. I still didn't know why we were heading out to Westchester, and to tell the truth I didn't care much. I was trying to sort out the events of the last three days, without any success. The thing was still so fucking *unreal*.

"We're almost there."

Kohler had left the Parkway and we were in relatively open country now, undeveloped except for a few neat little ranch-style houses with manicured lawns and white picket fences, a change from the bedroom suburbs we'd been passing through with their arid stretches of identical shoeboxes. This was the kind of day a normal guy with a normal family would set out the barbecue in the backyard, mix up a pitcher of martinis and sit in the shade getting quietly stoned with the neighbors. And not a worry in the world, not a thought about Jews or Japs or Berlin politics or nuclear war. *Shit*.

"That's Croton-on-Hudson up ahead," Kohler said. "It's not far now."

You could read the sign from 500 yards, a huge billboard draped with swastika bunting and crested by an Imperial Eagle with the globe clutched in its talons: "Welcome to Croton-on-Hudson. Home of the Final Solution. Visit the Frederick Barbarossa Death Camp, 1 mile ahead, First Right. Admission 35 marks, children Free. No Dogs Allowed. Picnic areas adjacent." Now I understood where we were going, but I still wasn't sure why.

Croton was a pleasant enough little town with a lot of mock-Tudor storefronts all named *Ye Olde* something or other. There weren't many people out on the streets, the heat probably, but a half mile outside of town we pulled to a halt behind thirty or forty lined up cars. I could spot an observation tower shimmering in the heat haze somewhere up ahead, and every minute or so the procession would move forward another twenty or thirty feet.

"Ticket booth," Kohler explained. "Shouldn't take long now."

In fact it took almost twenty-five minutes and the heat was really killing as we crawled along at five miles an hour, losing even the feeble breeze we'd had driving up. My shirt was plastered to me and the sweat was streaming down my forehead, the salt making my eyes burn. I felt queasy, lightheaded, and I needed a drink, bad.

We finally reached the gate, more like a military check-point, set into a high barbed wire fence that stretched off into the distance, studded at regular intervals by observation towers. I glanced at the nearest one and jumped as I made out a guy crouched over a machine gun, aiming right at us. I wiped the sweat out of my eyes and looked again. It was a dummy, the kind you see in store windows, dressed up in the black and silver uniform of the Deathhead SS. The machine gun looked real enough, though. Anything to hook the tourists. The guy at the gate was wearing the same uniform, but it hung loosely on his skimpy frame. He was in his late teens, a local probably, and the only service he'd ever seen was in the Viking Youth.

"Two, Mac? That'll be seventy marks, you pay extra you wanna tour the museum."

The words were barely audible through the wad of gum he was chewing, and the dim eyes were bored. Inside the guard hut a transistor was shrieking the latest hit disc. God, the younger generation, he could at least have put on one of the old marching songs. I've never been one of your gung-ho flag wavers, but shit, the guys who'd worn his uniform had left three hundred thousand dead from the beaches at Southampton to the ruins of London, only to have this punk desecrate it as a promotion gimmick.

"We're here to see Colonel Kastendieck."

"Oh, yeah, he phoned down." There was no interest in his voice, but he checked a clipboard. "Kohler, that your name?"

Ed nodded and the kid waved us through.

We drove along the road at fifteen or twenty miles an hour, not enough to give us back the breeze, and I looked out at the Barbarossa Camp without any great interest. There wasn't really much to see, just a lot of old barracks and endless coils of rusty barbed wire plus a string of road signs from the local Elks and Rotarians greeting visitors: "Croton-on-Hudson, where Four Million Enemies of the Reich Perished." I remember reading that Croton was second only to Auschwitz in its kill ratio, so I guess they had reason for pride, but I didn't care for the commercialization. One big sign was decorated with a blown-up color photograph of an emaciated Jew in the regulation black and yellow striped pajamas of the camps, holding out a tin plate with a piece ofhardtack on it, the drowned eyes luminous with hunger. It was captioned in huge red letters, "If Bread and Water Isn't Enough For You, Visit Schaumberger's Steak House, Rt. 1, 250 yards from the Wesley Overpass." Off to the right loomed a big windowless building, a factory it looked like, topped by four towering smokestacks.

"The crematoria," Ed said. "They were going twenty four hours straight for nearly eighteen months after Liberation. Local residents used to shout about the air pollution, they had quite a smog problem around here in those days."

He pulled the car to a halt behind a cluster of wooden buildings, and we got out.

"Ed," I said as we walked across the gravel parking space, "I don't know about you, but I'm in no mood for sightseeing. What are we here for anyway?"

"To talk to an old friend of mine. I spent two weeks here during field training studying camp administration and termination techniques and I got to know the old commandant pretty well. He's stayed on as curator of the camp museum and archivist for his division, the *Sonderkommando*. Quite a guy, and he just might have some

leads for us. If anybody knows Jews, he does: he killed four million of them.”

I just shook my head. The place was bleak, depressing despite the bright sunshine, and strangely deserted. A few tourists wandered around with their cameras, but despite the line at the gate I couldn't spot many visitors, and if this wasn't Saturday I doubted there'd be any. We headed up a path flanked by dusty rose bushes toward the largest of the buildings but I waved Ed to a stop at a concession stand. I needed something cold to drink, I was feeling worse every minute.

The old man behind the counter didn't sell beer—"I asked for a license for God's sake they tell me this is a national shrine it wouldn't be proper what a load of shit"—and ended up with a *Schwarzenwasser* instead. It only made me feel thirstier, and I left half of it in the bottle and escaped before the guy could sell me some of his pink spun-sugar ovens. "Specialty of the house, pal, people come all over the country for 'em . . ."

We walked up a flight of steps to a door marked Administration and into a small reception hall, bare except for a limp party banner drooping from a flagstand in one corner. There was no sign of human habitation, and dust swirled from the floor as we walked. The stale air was about ten degrees hotter than outside and my stomach started to churn faster than ever, but Kohler was his same fresh, cool self. Adrenalin, probably.

"He'd be upstairs, they only keep a skeleton staff here."

If that was a pun, I could do without it. We mounted a flight of stairs and Kohler led me down a corridor painted in the universal mucous green of the federal bureaucracy, stopping at an unmarked door.

"I think this is it, it's been seven years since I was up here."

He knocked twice, and I started as a voice bellowed from within.

"Enter!"

The guy was impressive to look at, I've got to give him that, despite the rumpled tweed suit and white syntho tunic. Obviously a military man, still not comfortable in civvies. He must have been six-foot-four and over 250 pounds but none of it seemed to have gone to fat yet. I'd have put him at sixty, easy, but the face was unlined and tanned, the gray eyes clear and sharp, and only the snow-white hair, cropped in a Skorzeny cut, betrayed the man's age. He stood ramrod straight behind his desk, and as we entered his heels clicked like a gunshot and he snapped his right arm toward the ceiling in the Party salute. We exchanged *heils* and he waved us into comfortable green leather armchairs. Unlike the rest of the dump, this room was spotless and freshly painted, lined with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, the desk polished to a high gloss and bare except for an ashtray and a marble bust of the *Fuhrer*. There was none of the mandatory Party poster art on the walls, only a single watercolor, a muted pastel skyscape that looked like an original Mussacher. Best of all, a cooler purred softly in the window, bathing me in chill, fresh air. For the first time in hours I began to relax, and the ice-cold *Wurzbergers* our host provided from a small icebox was a further bonus. He and von LeeB had the same taste for beer. I hoped that was all they had in common.

"Colonel Kastendieck, this is Lieutenant Bill Halder of the New York Police Department, he's working on an important case with me. Bill, Colonel Fritz Kastendieck of the *Sonderkommando*, the man who ran this camp for five years. After a few other things, like being the first man into Chicago after the Bomb."

I leaned across the desk and shook the Colonel's hand. His clasp was firm, dry, and the smile he gave us was rueful.

"Ed should be my PR man. I've got to ask him to write the introduction to my memoirs." From the name and rank I'd expected him to be German, but the voice was native American, with a faint Midwestern twang.

"How's the book coming?" Ed asked.

The Colonel sighed.

"Slow. And much, much too long. There's so much to put in, but my God, who's going to want to wade through it after all these years? What I need is a good editor."

Kohler turned to me.

"The Colonel is writing his own life story, combining it with the official history of the *Sonderkommando*. It's going to be quite a book."

"If I ever get through with it." He plucked a cigar out of his tunic pocket and bit off the end, spitting it neatly into a wastebasket at least five feet away. "Now come on, Ed, stop buttering me up with the amenities, you didn't come up here for a social visit. When you called you said you needed my help on something. Let's have it."

Kohler shifted a bit uncomfortably on his chair.

"Fritz, I know I don't need to say this, but I've got to just the same. Can you take what I'm going to say as Clearance Red?"

Kastendieck leaned back in his chair and whistled softly.

"Clearance Red. Haven't had one of those since the Bormann Purge." He puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. "You know the answer to that already, Bill. I'm still a general officer."

Kohler nodded.

"It was a formality, but a necessary one." He paused, and took a long sip from his beer. "I'm not going to tell you everything, Fritz, not because I don't trust you but because I don't want to place you in any more jeopardy than is necessary. So far, a lot of the people involved in this thing have developed a nasty habit—dying. So I don't want to drag you in all the way, but I do need advice, and you're the only guy I can think of competent to give it."

Kastendieck stabbed his cigar in the air impatiently.

"Then cut the bullshit and get on with it."

Kohler smiled. The two might not have seen each other for years, but it was obvious they were friends.

"We've had some information, not conclusive in itself but supported by some pretty persuasive evidence, that leads us to believe a Jew is alive and free in New York City. What are the odds on that?"

Kastendieck's eyes narrowed the tiniest fraction, but his voice stayed the same.

"One hundred to one against. It's impossible." He hadn't touched his own beer up till then but now he took a long swig. "If you were going to ask me about Latin America, say, I couldn't be quite that sure. There, holed out with an Indian tribe or living off the jungle, I'd say there'd be a very, very slim chance. Say, *ninety-eight* to one. But here—never. Security was too tight from the very beginning, and even before Liberation the whole fucking country was computerized. Your Jew would have to have work papers, birth records, food credits, travel permits, the whole bit. Sure he could get a forgery that could last him a few weeks or months, but not the kind of stuff that would keep him alive and functioning for years. Where could he get hold of that kind of identification?"

I'd been asking myself the same question. There was no such thing as privacy anymore, not in the old decadent pre-Liberation sense of the word, and even the most hardened criminal couldn't escape the law once his identity was known to the authorities. So how *had* the Jew lasted for the past twenty-five years?

"Fritz," Kohler asked, "were there any escapes from Barbarossa, or the camps out in Michigan and California?"

"Sure there were. I'd have to check the exact figures, but offhand there must have been over 3,000. There was a mass breakout at Encinido in '48, aided by the local Resistance, and over 500 made it to Mexico. Hell, we had a case right here in the first couple months of my command. There was a Pattonite cell among the camp guards, they were systematically taking Jews out on work

details and shooting them with blank cartridges, piling the bodies into our meat trucks for burial and then smuggling them across the border to Canada. They got over 300 out that way till we got wise, but every one of them was back behind barbed wire within a month. The same at Encinido, Detroit, everywhere. A few got out, sure, no security is foolproof, but we always got 'em back. And none of 'em made it out twice."

"Not even one?"

"*Not even one.*" Kastendieck chuckled. "God, when I think of the trouble we had tracking 'em down, and the flack we got from Himmler, much less the logistics problems we had here at camp, sometimes I used to wish they'd all just disappear and leave me alone. But we had to expend as much time and effort and manpower to get one man back as a thousand. You know the orders, right from the *Fuhrer* himself. They wanted a clean sweep, and a clean sweep we gave them."

"But in the early days," Kohler persisted, "right after Liberation, when the Resistance was still strong, there must have been a lot of subversives harboring Jews, hiding them out in the cellar or attic, that kind of thing."

Kastendieck nodded.

"Damn right there were. Shit, over at the Allegheny Camp we had to gas a hundred and fifty thousand people, all on harboring charges. Too bad too, all good Aryan stock, most of them anyway, some Polacks and Sicilian, but mainly Nordic. Completely perverted by the Jews and Bolsheviks, of course, no room for re-education. And we had to be harsh in those days, we'd only been in power a year and there was still a lot of opposition. What was it the late Doctor Goebbels said: 'Nature is not kind.' That became sort of a motto of ours." He smiled. "I remember right here in the neighborhood, we found ten Jews harbored over in Mount Kisco, that's only a few miles away, one of the men involved had been a guest at the Officers' Club, I knew him personally. We took the Jews out, cordoned the town off with tanks, and opened fire. Wiped

out the whole town and everybody in it, even those who didn't know anything." He took a greedy gulp of beer. "Too bad about them, in a way. The kids in particular, there were a lot of kids, but still, you can't afford to make exceptions, not in wartime. We razed the whole site and macaddamed it over with bulldozers, just like Lidice, took us three days. A fair-sized town, you know. We left it that way as a warning till '56, it's a shopping center now I think, but we never had any more trouble. People got the message, and it was the same across the whole country. Knock off a few towns like that, the innocent along with the guilty, and everybody has his eyes on his neighbor to make sure he's not harboring, or to turn him in if he was. We spared informers, of course, good intelligence incentive."

Kohler seemed interested in all this, but I couldn't see where it was getting us.

"Look," I said, "you say no Jews could have escaped. That's fine, but we believe one did. Just accept that for the sake of argument, and take it the next step—who would be most likely to hide him out, and where?"

Kastendieck frowned. I got the feeling that he considered any discussion of Jewish survival an implicit slur on his professional abilities, but tact was never my strong point. The Colonel took the question at face value, though, and didn't waste any time defending the *Sonderkommando*.

"First of all, Lieutenant, all Jews on the books—and that means anybody listed in the records of the Jewish community itself or identified as Jews by neighbors and government files—were accounted for by 1955. But okay, let's start with the assumption that there was a slip-up, that somewhere along the way there was a Jew we couldn't pinpoint, maybe a Jew adopted by an Aryan family, who changed his name to theirs at an early age. You'd be surprised at how many cases like that we came across, and the parents weren't helpful at all—we had to terminate most of them along with their kids as a matter of

fact, they were completely irrational on the subject. But let's say by some miracle this Jew escaped detection and managed to get by the Nuremberg Racial Classifications, well, then you're up shit creek. Because he *would* be listed in our files, but as an Aryan, and I don't see any way you could prove otherwise. Hell, you couldn't even tell by circumcision—since the early forties half the Aryan kids in the country have been circumcized. I'll tell you quite frankly, this scenario was the one nightmare all of us had during the Final Solution." He puffed on the cigar, his brow furrowed, and then finally shook his head, firmly, decisively. "But no, I still don't think it could happen. Precisely to foreclose that danger we spent two years checking the records of every adoption agency in the nation. I just don't believe it."

His self-confidence, which had flickered for a moment, seemed to return, and he got up from behind the desk and got us all fresh beers from the icebox.

"I tend to agree with you on that, Fritz," Kohler said. "In any case, the make we have on this guy is that he's in his sixties, which would have made him an adult at the time of Liberation. And what's more, he doesn't sound like the type who's been hiding out for thirty years. He wore a *mezzuzah* around his neck . . ."

"One of those religious medals, a little silver tube?" Kastendieck broke in.

"Yeah, we recovered it after an incident in Manhattan."

Kastendieck looked worried.

"That's not good. We took thousands of those things away from the inmates, we had a special smelting process to melt them down, we used to ship the silver to a vault in the *Reichsbank*." Abruptly, he ground out his half-finished cigar in an ashtray. "A *mezzuzah*. God, it could be at that."

"What I was getting at," Kohler continued, "is that a man trained in eluding the authorities would never hold onto something like that. I mean, it's a dead giveaway, a

one-way ticket to the ovens. He'd have to be crazy to wear something like that around his neck."

"Or very brave."

Kohler looked up at Kastendieck in surprise.

"Brave? Jews?"

Kastendieck smiled, a bit grimly I thought.

"Forget the propaganda, Ed, I was here. You'd be surprised how few begged. Not even the kids. A lot of them would go out praying, or singing, they'd sing right to the end. Sometimes, late at night, I still think. . . ."

He broke off abruptly, and I noticed with some surprise that a small muscle was twitching at the corner of his mouth. It was the first break I'd spotted in the Colonel's impressive façade, but he recovered quickly.

"Well, that's neither here nor there. The fact is, I really can't help you. If there is a Jew out there it's a miracle to me how he ever survived. A miracle."

"Fritz," Kohler asked, "the ones who did escape from here, those who reached New York, who harbored them? I mean was it individuals, friends, or an organized group?"

Kastendieck still looked a bit disconcerted.

"Both," he replied. "Friends in some cases, other times they were sheltered by local cells of the Resistance. You were only a kid then, Ed, you too Halder, but we had a lot of trouble right up until the early fifties. Shit, even within the regular Army there were a lot of officers who refused to accept the Ultimatum, even after Chicago and Pittsburgh were A-bombed. I remember right after the St. Louis War Crimes Trials, when they shot Patton and MacArthur, there was a lot of grumbling in the ranks. My own buddies," he said with a trace of dismay, as if the betrayal still rankled. "I had to turn in at least three of them to your boys, Ed. Guys I'd served with." He shook his head. "I know it's hard to believe now, what with the new generation and all, but in those days there were still a lot of people who believed Germany was an *enemy*, and actually thought the Jews were human beings. Human beings mind you, like you and me. Shit, some of

them even thought the same thing about the blacks and Slavs. There probably are still a few nuts like that left, but not many." He took another cigar out and this time he missed the wastebasket. "If I were you, I'd check your Christie files. Those were the ones we had the most trouble with then, and there must be some hanging around who haven't converted or accepted reality."

"That was the first thing I thought of," Kohler said. "I went through every dossier myself, even took a few in for interrogation. Nothing there, just harmless crackpots. And all of them have been under routine surveillance for years."

"What about the Japs?" Kastendieck said. "They've always been soft on Jews, we had a hell of a time getting them to turn over the few thousand in their territories."

Kohler glanced at me.

"The Japs are interested all right, Fritz. But they don't have him. They're looking, same as us."

Kastendieck cocked an eyebrow.

"Ah, the plot thickens. And have our little yellow friends anything to do with all those people who've developed that bad habit of up and dying?"

Kohler forced a smile.

"You don't miss much. Let's just say I wouldn't drop in to your neighborhood sukiyaki parlor for a while."

Kastendieck smiled wryly and finished his beer.

"I only wish I could help you more, Ed. You know, it gets pretty boring sitting around up here all the time poring over old records, shepherding gawking tourists through our museum, watching kids scratch their initials on the ovens. Sometimes I wish I were out on the front lines again, like you and the Lieutenant here."

"Don't," Kohler said fervently. "I'd exchange places with you any day. Particularly today."

The Colonel shrugged.

"Well, you know if I can help out in any way all you have to do is call. I'm just sorry I couldn't give you any leads."

"I didn't expect much, Fritz. But I knew you'd dealt with Jewish escapes in the past, and I wanted to talk it over with you." He glanced at his watch. "We've got to get back to the city. The next time you're in town give me a ring, Dorothy would like to see you and Betsy again. We'll set it up for dinner."

"Will do."

Kastendieck's massive frame heaved out of the chair and we exchanged hearty handshakes. He walked out to the parking lot with us, past a gaggle of kids clustered around the refreshment stand, gobbling up the pink sugar ovens.

"These kids," Kastendieck complained as Ed unlocked the car, "their schoolteachers take them out here for a field trip and all they do is buy a lot of junky souvenirs from the concessions and crack dirty jokes about the mummies in the museum. Shit, I went into the little movie theatre we have over in the annex one day when the senior class from Croton High was visiting, we showed 'em a color film of our best mass executions, and when the lights went on all the little creeps were either necking or jerking off. They think it was all a big joke, a lot of fun, they never think about all the hard work and dedication and sacrifice it took to eliminate four million Jews. *That* means nothing to the spoiled little brats."

Kohler assured him posterity would not forget, and we drove off.

"Hell, Ed," I said after a while, "I needed the beers, but I don't know what else we got out of all that."

"Just call it a background briefing. Old Fritz confirmed a couple of things I've been thinking myself."

"Like what?" I asked as we swung back onto the Parkway.

"Like there's a wrong note to this whole fucking thing, something *off*, if I could just place it. Fritz doesn't believe a Jew could have survived twenty-five years in our society, and I don't believe it either. Especially a Jew crazy enough to wear a *mezzuzah*, crazy enough to bury a Jew skull

like it was a human being. It's wrong, all wrong. That's not survival instinct, which this guy would have to have in spades, that's *suicide* instinct. It doesn't make sense."

"I'm with you there, none of it does. But we're still stuck with the same problem: who is he and where is he? The *how* doesn't bother me, not for the time being at least."

Kohler was silent for a couple of minutes. Then, "You're wrong, Bill. The *how* may be *all* that matters. Because I've got the feeling, crazy as it sounds, that this Jew hasn't been around for twenty-five years. I've got the feeling he's a recent arrival."

"Arrival from where?"

"As God is my witness, Bill, I don't know. I'm not even sure I *want* to know."

Something about the way he said that chilled me, and I stayed silent for the rest of the ride back.

When we reached Gestapo headquarters I went up to Kohler's office and had another of his *Steinhagens* while he busied himself on the phone. I knew I shouldn't drink, keeping alert was a survival mechanism now, but I was too jumpy, I needed something to calm me down. Ever since we'd got back to the city I'd had that prickly target feeling crawling up the small of my back, even though Kohler went through a half-dozen evasion maneuvers between the drive and Centre Street and swore we weren't tailed. I was beginning to know how the goat felt when the white hunter tied him to a tree as tiger bait.

"My men are on the way from the airport," Kohler said, replacing the receiver. "They should be here in a half hour."

"How are you going to brief them without giving the show away?"

"They're professionals, they're not interested in *why* they're doing something. Anyway, I can tell them half the truth—we're out to capture a Jap assassin. They don't need to know anything more."

Beck came in with a sheaf of papers under his arm and sprawled into a chair. He looked as cool as ever but there were little lines of strain around the mouth and eyes, which made me feel a bit better. Maybe he did have a breaking point, just like us lesser mortals.

"I've been in touch with every bureau in the country and checked out all the border controls between Mexico and Canada. None of them has a thing on the Jap, not even a rumor. We've intensified surveillance on Imperial Mission personnel here and in Washington and I've rounded up a couple of dozen known nip sympathizers, but we've got nothing out of them so far."

"None of them have heard anything, a hint of something big in the air, any unexplained shift of agents?"

"Not even a whisper. I took in one of their top couriers, a deep cover man, Engstrom, a cipher clerk at the Scandinavian Mission. We blew his cover two years ago but we've been giving him his lead ever since, waiting to catch him on something big. But he was a blank."

"You gave him the full treatment?"

Beck smiled bitterly.

"So full his ticker conked out halfway through. But by that time he'd told us everything except the first time he masturbated."

Kohler tugged his collar open and leaned back in his chair.

"I want a computer correlation on all known Christies in the metropolitan area, then feed in your nip files and see if there's any overlap."

Beck looked skeptical.

"The Christies are just a lot of aging cranks, Ed, they couldn't be in on anything this big."

Kohler frowned.

"That's what I thought. But we just came back from Fritz Kastendieck up at Barbarossa, and he told us most of the harboring cases he dealt with involved Christies. Maybe one of them is smarter than we think, maybe he's hidden this Jew for twenty years, in the basement or some-

thing. You know, like those priest holes they had in Cromwell's time."

"Yeah, maybe." Beck didn't sound very impressed. "Okay, I'll feed it in. What else do you want me to do?"

"There's not much any of us can do except wait. I took six men from Washington, two for each of us, the best bird-dogs in the Bureau. You won't see them once they're on your heels but they'll be with you every minute of every day. When the Japs move, if they move, they'll be there first."

"You hope," I said unnecessarily.

"I hope," Kohler agreed.

"What if the Japs have got the Jew already," Beck asked, "what if they don't bother with us?"

"So much the better," Kohler replied. "We're off the hook then, even von Leeb couldn't shoot us for *not* being shot. But after the attempt on Bill we've got to operate on the assumption that all of us are prime targets."

"Look Ed," I said, "couldn't we just hole out here till they do find him? That way we could weather the storm and nobody the wiser."

Kohler shook his head.

"You're underestimating von Leeb again. He'd nail us to the wall in ten minutes, desertion under fire or some such shit. I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't importing some more of his own men just to keep tabs on our end of the operation. After all, he'd sent for Grauber before any of us even knew the Japs were involved."

It made sense. Rotten sense, but sense.

"I'll feed that to the computer and check the rest of the interrogations." Beck got up and headed for the door, some of the spring gone from his step. "Just don't hold your breath."

I accepted another *Steinhagen*, though God knows I wasn't getting anything from it, and placed a call to the station-house. The Commissioner had called again, which didn't faze me, and the Professor had left off two more urgent messages. It was a long shot, but what the hell,

I had nothing else going, so I rang the sadie parlor. He answered on the first ring, and his voice was excited.

"Lieutenant, I think I got something for you, something hot. I passed the picture around, just like you said, and Lotte, you know Lotte over at the Crib, she says she thinks she knows this old guy, one of her customers, two, three times maybe he was there. You know Lotte, she's got a sharp eye, this could be what you want, hah? You remember, five thousand marks, that's what you said, five thousand. . . ."

He was breathing heavily. Probably had a hard-on at the very thought of that much dough.

"You'll get the money if it checks out. That's Sixty-fifth and Third, isn't it?"

"Yeah, the second building from the corner, with those two lantern things by the door. Don't forget, Lieutenant, it was me gave you the lead, not Lotte, that's five thousand marks. . . ."

I hung up before he had an orgasm.

"A tip?" Kohler cocked a quizzical eyebrow.

"Not much of one. A grasser who circulated Macri's dupe, thinks he has a make. You never saw the damned thing, it could be anybody, and this guy is so greedy he'd turn himself in for the reward. But I might as well check it out, we've got nothing else on the calendar."

"Wait till my men from Washington get here, I want them glued to your shadow from now on."

I could see the logic of that. I'd just about finished my third *Steinhagen* when they arrived, six carbon copy wonder boys uniformed in lightweight blue suits, white shirts and somber ties. They all must have gone to the same barber, or had the same mother for that matter, and I could hardly tell them apart. Kohler performed the introductions, gave them a fast briefing ending with instructions to shoot to incapacitate rather than kill, and then detached two of the squad as my own personal bodyguards. I grew increasingly uneasy as he talked, and finally I asked him to send them outside for a minute.

"Look Ed, all this bring 'em back alive shit is fine and dandy, except it might be over my dead body. I want those guys to shoot to kill, not just wing the bastard and give him time to finish me off."

Kohler was no more a hero than I am, so he smiled understandingly.

"I had Ordinance equip them with the latest stun gun, it fires a chemical dart that causes instantaneous paralysis. It's even better than a lead slug, Bill, you can nail a guy three times in the stomach with a .45 and he's still able to empty his magazine into you. You just graze his ear with one of these things and he's out cold."

I regarded him dubiously.

"Ed, I just hope your arsenal is better than your computer."

My two tails, whose names I forget, joined me in the hall and followed me to where I'd parked earlier.

"Stay here for five minutes till we bring our car around," one told me, "and then just forget about us. We'll be with you all the time."

Somehow, I didn't find the thought particularly reassuring.

The Crib was a fine old gray brick townhouse, and the "lantern things" the Professor mentioned were two carriage lamps outside the front door. A naked boy of thirteen or fourteen with one gold earring let me in with a come-hither smile and an expert twitch of his pelvis, and ushered me down the hall when I asked for Lotte.

"Right this way," he said, gyrating his satiny buttocks as he opened an old-fashioned sliding door. "She'll be with you in a moment." The tip of his tongue caressed his lower lip invitingly. "Afterwards, my name is Nick. I'm only fifty marks. Just ask Lotte, I'll do *anything*." He ran one hand caressingly over his loins and closed the doors behind me.

I'd never been in the Crib before, though I'd met Lotte a couple of times in different bars around town.

The place was reputed to be the finest child house in Manhattan, and the Mayor and two of the Eastern *gauleiters* allegedly numbered in her clientele. Myself, to be frank, I preferred adult women, although I had to be a bit discreet about it, being in the force and all that. Not that there's any active prejudice against hetties, the human race having to go on, but it's not exactly a ticket to promotion, particularly in the higher echelons of the State and Party. Back in the Academy I tried to get into the sadie scene to compensate, but I never really got too much out of it. Each to his own, I guess. But comparing Lotte's place to the hettie houses I'd visited it was obvious where the fat cats got their rocks off. The room was elegantly decorated in what I dimly recognized as French provincial style, replete with a delicate little harpsichord in gleaming rosewood and a couple of uncomfortable looking striped silk chaise longues. Richly framed old paintings hung on every wall and the one nearest to me, a sun-drenched landscape, was signed Fragonard, a name that rang a distant bell. The carpet was Persian, a beautiful thing in shimmering yellows and browns, and the wallpaper was a pale peach damask. The windows were draped in heavy red brocade curtains that muffled the street noise to a whisper, and the only light came from a dozen candles in embrasures along the wall, bathing the room in a muted golden glow. The only jarring note was a well-stocked mirrored bar in one corner, which I investigated promptly, but even there half the bottles had exotic names I'd never heard of. I focused on a Scotch that cost ninety marks a fifth and wondered if it was a breach of protocol to pour myself a drink. I'd already decided when she came in.

"Go right ahead, don't stand on formality."

I made it a double, then turned around. Lotte was standing in the doorway, a cocktail in one hand. She was wearing a full-length wine red satin evening gown that almost covered the rosy network of veins and wrinkles around her neck and a diamond necklace that could have

fed half of Queens for six weeks. She was a tiny woman, just a shade over five feet, somewhere in her late fifties, her hair died an expensive but unconvincing platinum, the ravaged face set off by two of the coldest eyes I'd ever seen. They'd fascinated me from our first meeting because they never once seemed to blink; I remember reading that snake's eyes were like that, which didn't seem an unlikely comparison.

"You're looking well, Lotte," I lied, but her eyes stayed dead as ever.

"The Professor showed me a sketch last night." Her voice was soft but grating just the same, sibilant as a sudden hiss in the high grass. "I think I've seen him."

They probably had a deal set up already, Lotte would want at least a third of the 5,000 marks to cooperate. Not that I was very optimistic she had anything to cooperate with, but I might as well go through the motions.

"Is he a regular of yours?"

"No, he's only been here two or three times." Her face stayed curiously immobile as she talked, even the thin red lips didn't seem to move. I'd heard somebody had thrown acid in her face years ago and all the skin grafts had made the flesh stiff and masklike. "Actually, he met one of my girls in the park on her free time, he followed her back here. He didn't even know what the place was. He didn't like it."

"He didn't like it? Why did he pick her up in the first place?"

She took a long sip from her cocktail, the tongue flitting daintily back and forth into the amber liquid.

"He was a talk freak. We get a few like that, he'd just sit in her room and talk to her. Once he took her out for a walk and some ice cream but he had to pay extra for that."

"Nothing else?"

"Not a thing. I watched through the peephole once or twice, he'd just sit there talking. Not even dirty." She shook her sleek fan of phony hair in bewilderment.

"Did you overhear any of their conversation?"

"Just nonsense stuff, once he was telling her some kind of fairy tale I think. Crazy. But his money was good, that's my only concern."

"How did he pay? Cash, check?"

"We don't take checks here, even from regulars. He paid cash."

"Did he ever give his name?"

"It wouldn't have meant much if he did, but come to think of it, no, he didn't. He might have told the kid though."

"What's her name?"

"Penny, a pretty good worker. I bought her down South somewhere, but she never had an accent."

"I'd like to speak to her."

"Of course you would. The Professor said you were paying two thousand marks reward for information."

The Professor wasn't so dumb, after all.

"That's right, two thousand. If there's anything to this I'll arrange a share for you."

She waved her hand dismissively, some of the cocktail sloshing onto the carpet.

"I make twenty-five hundred marks in one hour here. But there is something you could help me with." She sat her drink down on an ormolu encrusted sideboard and motioned me toward the door. "Come with me."

Halfway down the corridor she stopped in front of a door and pressed a button above the lock. A window-like panel slid back to reveal the interior of a room.

"Two-way mirrors. It's standard, so I can check up on what's going on, see the clients aren't overstaying their time, that kind of thing. The peepers like it too. Here, take a look."

I wasn't particularly interested in the proceedings at Lotte's but I walked up and looked over her shoulder. The room was outfitted like a child's playroom, replete with a large dollhouse, shelves of stuffed animals, a miniature fourposter bed replete with canopy and an assortment

of toys. A ribbon-festooned swing was suspended from the ceiling and a little pigtailed girl of eight or nine was riding it, dressed in a frilly pinafore frock, white socks and shiny patent leather shoes. She was swinging furiously, traversing the length of the room with each arc, and a skinny guy wearing nothing but his socks was whipping her hard each time she passed him. He was laughing a lot and seemed to be enjoying himself, although there wasn't much of an erection to show for his labors. The kid didn't look too happy though. She was screaming all the time and the back of her white dress was soaked red with blood. I turned around to Lotte.

"So?"

"So he pays four thousand marks per session, and I could get ten times that if I had some Slavs. We got a house doctor here, he says all the kid can stand is an hour, and she's not good for a week after that, we have to dope her up and keep her in bed. And on top of that the client is frustrated because he can't let himself go all the way. He gets his real jollies beating them half to death and then strangling them at the end, the only way he can get it up. We have a lot like that, the Giles de Rais syndrome the doc calls it, whatever that is. But apart from the non-mortality clause in the kid's contract I can't throw her away in a one-night stand, she's got another ten years of earning power between her legs. So I'm screwed, I'm only getting half my potential fee from clients like him."

I couldn't see what all this had to do with me.

"Look Lotte, I sympathize with your business problems, but. . . ."

"You're going to be more than sympathetic, you're going to *do* something about them. *If* you want to talk with Penny."

So that was it.

"If your protection's off I'll check with the precinct. . . ."

"No, no, it's not that. What I need is Slavs, expendables, at least a half dozen a month, boys and girls between

six and fourteen. I can get up to thirty thousand for one fatal session, that adds up to almost two hundred thousand a month. I'll cut you in for ten percent, plus whatever information you can get out of Penny, so long as you fix it with the breeders."

So now I was a pimp. All part of life's rich pageant.

"Look Lotte, if all the VIPs you get here can't square it why do you think I can? They've got a strict regional quota system, particularly the kids, they keep them on the farms for breeding till they're over eighteen. There's no reason they'd make an exception for me."

She lit a pastel colored cigarette and blew a cloud of perfumed smoke in my direction.

"That's where you're wrong. I asked around after the Professor showed me the sketch, and my contacts say you're involved in something big. A letter of authorization from Heydrich himself, I heard mentioned."

That shit Callender, he'd spread it through half the force by now. Come to think of it, though, I *could* do just about anything I wanted with that goddamned thing. Except, possibly, stay alive.

"All right, Lotte, I'll fix it for you." Inside the room the guy who liked to kill little girls was dragging the moaning kid over to a hobby horse with a large leather phallus built into its back. He hoisted her up on top and rammed her onto the thing then started rocking her back and forth, laughing and cursing as blood began to dribble down over the saddle. He seemed to have gained about an inch in the process. "But I can't do anything before tomorrow, it's too late."

"We have a deal, Lieutenant." She turned and started down the hall. "I'll take you to Penny now." She moved in a supple liquid motion, almost boneless, the long dress rustling over the red and black tiled floor. I wondered if she rattled when she was angry.

We went up a spiral staircase to the second floor and stopped at the first door on the landing. Lotte went

through the mirror check, then stepped aside so I could view the merchandise.

"She's almost through, and she doesn't have another session for an hour. You can take your time, but give her ten minutes to take her bath before you go."

I nodded, and looked through the peephole. Penny was a pretty little girl of eight or nine with long blonde hair. She was dressed up in a little blue and pink sailor suit and looked, intentionally or otherwise, like Shirley Temple in "The Good Ship Lollipop." Right now she was crouched between the legs of an immensely fat nude man, his pendulous stomach enveloping her face as she worked.

"You can have her if you've got time," Lotte said, "on the house. But remind her to brush her teeth before her next client, he's a stickler for hygiene." She turned to go. "Call me tomorrow afternoon about the Slavs. And remember, between six and fourteen, and decent looking too, tell them I'll come up and make the selection myself every month." She paused. "Do they ever make an exception about the tracheotomy?"

"No, it's done at birth."

Lotte looked disappointed. "Our customers like them to scream. Oh well, you can't have everything." She slithered off down the hall and I returned my attention to the mirror. Penny was through now and the man was getting dressed while she perched on the edge of the bed, fondling a floppy teddy bear. He patted her on the head and headed for the door, a pleased smile on his face, so I stepped to one side.

"Goodbye, sweetheart, I'll see you next week." He noticed me and nodded affably. "A little darling, sir, you won't be disappointed. Just like your own daughter."

Penny looked up with a bright toothy smile as I came in.

"Hello. Are you next?"

She had dimples, too.

"No, Penny, but Miss Lotte said I can talk to you. You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh no." Her soft lips pursed in a small frown. "She's funny, Miss Lotte. I don't think she ever has any *fun*."

Lotte wasn't exactly Miss Conviviality, come to think of it. I closed the door behind me and walked toward her.

"Do you mind if I join you?"

"Oh, no." She patted the bed next to her and I sat down. I wasn't very experienced in handling kids, but this one didn't seem to require much ice-breaking.

"This is Peter," she said, holding out the teddy bear for inspection. "He's not really a teddy bear, he's really a prince *enchanted* into a teddy bear. His real name is *Prince Peter*." She added as an afterthought, "I think witches must look a lot like Miss Lotte. Don't you?"

"I'd put money on it. Look Penny, there was a man who used to come here to see you, an old man with gray hair, you met him in the park and all he wanted to do was talk. Do you remember him?"

"Oh, *sure* I do." Her china blue eyes were bright. "He gave me Peter, and he told me all about the enchantment. He knows all kinds of stories like that, about dragons and castles and magic and things. I like him a lot."

"Did he tell you his name, Penny?"

"Oh yes. His name is Papa, he said to call him Papa." Papa. The next one I had to phrase carefully.

"How did he talk, Penny. Was there anything . . . different about his voice?"

"No." She frowned again. "Oh well I guess so, not *that* different, but a little different. Like the Captain."

"The Captain?"

"Oh yes, he talks the same way. He must have looked like a prince when he was young too, he's still very handsome. He has a scar on his face and everything, from a *sword* he told me, just like the knights in armor. And he wears a pretty uniform all black and silver with those things like lightning all over."

I stiffened. God, there might be something here after all. She was describing the uniform of the SS *Fuhrerkorps*,

an elite, all-German division of the *Waffen* SS. If Papa spoke like the Captain, Papa was German. And Pickett had told me the old man who attacked him in the antique shop had a German accent. God, just maybe. Maybe.

"When was the last time you saw Papa?"

She thought about that for a moment.

"I guess it was two weeks ago, yes I think it was two weeks. It wasn't last week because Mr. Zeelan came and then I was sick till the weekend, so it must have been two weeks." She smiled brightly at me. "Are you a friend of Papa's?"

"Yes, yes I am," I said carefully. "Papa called me, he has another present for you, but he can't take it himself because he has a bad cold and has to stay in bed for a while, so he wants me to bring it to you."

She nodded gravely.

"Yes, I have to stay in bed too after Mr. Zeelan comes. That's no fun at all, is it?"

"No, Penny, it isn't. But Papa wants you to get your present and I said I'd pick it up. But do you know what I did then, Penny? I did a very silly thing, I lost Papa's address. So I thought I'd come over and get it from you and then I'll visit him and bring your present back."

She looked miserable.

"Gee, I'm sorry, but I don't know his address. He never told me where he lived, I never asked him. Right here in New York City I guess."

That was a big help.

"Didn't he ever mention a neighborhood, a street? In Greenwich Village maybe? Somewhere in Greenwich Village, Penny?"

"No." She giggled. "He used to say he came from heaven. He'd say, 'Hilde, I came from heaven and I didn't know it till I found hell.' Isn't that funny?"

"Yes, that's very funny. Why did he call you Hilde? Isn't Penny your real name?"

She nodded, her blonde curls bobbing.

"Oh yes. But Papa always called me Hilde. It was

funny you know, he'd call *me* Hilde but then sometimes he'd tell me stories about somebody *else* named Hilde. She was a little girl too, and Papa said she looked just like me. He always looked funny when he told those stories, like he'd gone far away. And he always looked so sad. So I'd kiss him to make him feel good again. I tried to take my clothes off and make him happy but he wouldn't let me. Once I tried real hard and you know what he did? He *cried*."

One thing for sure, Papa was crazy enough to be our boy. But so far nothing she'd said really proved anything one way or another. There were probably ten thousand elderly eccentric men with German accents walking the streets right now, and only one Jew.

"Did Papa ever talk to you about religion, Penny?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Oh yes, he talked about magicians and sorcerers and all kinds of things, and fairy princesses and all wonderful things. He's the only one who ever talked about things like that with me."

I got up and paced the room restlessly. This wasn't going anywhere, I might as well come right out with it.

"Penny, did he ever talk about *Jews*?"

"What are Jews?"

Well, that was it. She was too young and too wide-eyed to be an accomplished liar, so I might as well give up.

"Thank you, Penny. I'm sure Papa will be back to see you soon."

I'd stake out a few men around the place, just in case, but it was a dead end, I was pretty sure.

"Will he bring my present?"

"Yes Penny, he'll bring your present. Goodbye now."

She waved and returned to her teddy bear and I was halfway out the door before it registered. I froze a minute, then turned around and went back in, closing the door slowly behind me.

"Penny, just one more thing. That picture over the

door, what happened to it?" I kept my voice calm, casual, there were a thousand other explanations.

She looked up blankly for a minute, then smiled.

"Oh that was Papa. He hated that picture. He threw it on the floor and kicked it once he was so mad. That was the only time he ever got mad. A lot of people get mad at me, like Mr. Zeelan, but I never saw Papa mad except that one time. He got all *red*."

"Thank you, Penny."

I stood outside in the corridor for a minute, lighting a cigarette with shaky fingers. The picture hanging above the door with its glass shattered, was a 10-mark mass-produced portrait of the *Fuhrer*.

I didn't stop to see Lotte on the way out and kept my foot on the gas all the way back to Centre Street. I couldn't spot my guardian angels anywhere along the way, but they were supposed to be good. It made me feel a little bit better to have somebody friendly at my back, but I hoped those dart guns of theirs were as effective as Kohler said they were.

Beck was tied up with the computer when I arrived so I launched right into the story with Ed. Half-way through, before I even reached the punch line, he picked up the phone and ordered a stakeout at the Crib. "*Anybody* who's over sixty with gray hair, I don't care if it's the Mayor himself." And when I reached the part about the portrait he jumped up in excitement.

"It's him, Bill," he said, leaning across the desk towards me. "It's gotta be him."

"It sounds right," I agreed. "But it still doesn't put us all that closer. He hasn't visited her for two weeks, and it might be another two weeks or two months before he shows up again. But it's a start anyway, the first hard make we've had."

"I'll fill Pete in as soon as he gets up here." Kohler ran a hand wearily through his tousled hair. "God, for the first time we've gotten close to the bastard. And if the

Japs are stalking us, and know as much as we do, they're liable to make their move pretty soon."

That thought didn't exactly fill me with joy, but at least we were dealing with something tangible.

"You know, Ed," I said softly, "up till tonight I could never really believe the guy existed. I mean, I knew all the reasons he *should* exist, the *mezzuzah*, the skull in the park, the way the Japs are behaving, but I could never really believe in *him*. And now, thanks to that little girl, we've finally got a line on him, I can *feel* him now."

"Yeah, all because he likes kids. Never even screwed her, hah?"

I shook my head and started to ask for a drink. But something stopped me, something away at the back of my mind. Something about kids.

"Ed, let me see that original precinct report on the robbery at Pickett's place."

He rummaged through some papers on his blotter and tossed the three foolscap pages across to me. I read it through once, then returned to the part about the skull in the park. Shit, there might be something there.

"Ed, when that woman returned the skull, the one her kids had dug up in the park, we only thought about the guy's reasons for burying it, we were concerned with it only as an indication that he was a Jew. But there could be more to it. What if these kids didn't just dig up that skull by accident? What if they saw it being buried and got curious? What if they were witnesses?"

Kohler squeezed his eyes shut.

"Good God, we never even talked to them."

He grabbed his jacket from the back of the chair and headed toward the door.

"Take the report, it's got the address."

It was past six by the time we got to Washington Square but the sun was hot as ever and the humidity was hovering somewhere around the ninety degree mark. The Arnold Gellerts lived in a comfortable six-floor apartment

building overlooking the park, and Mrs. Gellert was polite enough, if a bit baffled. "I'm sorry, officers, but my husband isn't back from work yet." She was a fairly attractive woman, in her late forties but with nice skin and the legs of a twenty-year-old.

"It's about your children, Mrs. Gellert," I said, and her calm expression told me they were right there in the flat. "Do you remember when they dug up that skull and you returned it to the antique shop?"

Understanding dawned on her face and, belatedly, she invited us into the airy living room. We all sat down and Kohler refused an offer of refreshments, though God knows I could have used a cold drink. Alcoholic, preferably.

"Yes, the proprietor, Mr. Stickett or something, told me it had been stolen. And to bury it like that, what a crazy thing to do. Tommy and Bob spend so much time in the park, it does worry me to think that characters like that are hanging out there. I tell them not to talk to strangers, but at that age it's so difficult to do anything with them. . . ."

"Do you know if your children ever actually saw or spoke to the man who buried this skull?" Kohler cut in.

A shadow of worry flickered across her face.

"Oh my no, at least I certainly hope not, I was just speaking generally. What happened, they brought this skull home one day, said they'd found it in the park, and when I saw the price tag I just assumed someone had lost it and I returned it to the store the next day, thinking the owner might return or they could trace it through a sales slip. But I never suspected it was stolen till Mr. Stickett told me, I just assumed the children had found it by accident, they dig a lot out there, burying their pets and that kind of thing. . . ."

"Could we speak to your children, Mrs. Gellert?" Kohler asked quietly.

"Oh yes, yes of course, they're at home, it's too hot for them to play outside."

She led us into another room decorated with model planets and poster blow-ups from the Torture Master series on vidy. Two curly-haired kids in shorts were nailing a hamster to a sheet of plywood in one corner, the little animal writhing and mewling as the nails pierced the pink underside of its paws, and Mrs. Gellert marched over to them angrily.

"You boys promised me you'd keep this one for a week, they cost five dollars apiece and you are *not* going to have another this month."

"Ahhh, Ma," the younger boy whined, "it's almost a week, we wanta have some fun."

His older brother, around nine I'd say, dropped his hammer and scrambled to his feet.

"Yeah, Ma, and this one'll stay alive another couple days anyway, we give him water so he keeps on making noises."

"If he's around by Friday we may talk about it." She turned to us with an embarrassed smile. "We can't keep a cat around here for two days, you know what boys are. But it's a healthy outlet for their aggressions, they say."

"Yes, I'm sure it is," Kohler said. "Now if you wouldn't mind, Mrs. Gellert, if we could speak to the boys. . . ."

She looked flustered.

"Oh yes, I'm sorry. Tommy, Robert, these gentlemen are police officers, so you just cooperate and answer their questions now, or you know what'll happen to you." She backed out the door. "I'll be in the kitchen, officers, just call me if you need me."

The two boys regarded us without much awe.

"*You know what will happen to you!*" The younger one laughed, a little high-pitched snarl that reminded me of von Leeb. "She must think we still believe in the bogeyman. What a dimmie." The close-set little eyes regarded us directly for the first time. "What do you want to talk to us about?"

"Do you remember that skull in the park you found. . . ."

"You see!" the older boy cut in, darting a triumphant

look at his brother. "I told you there was more to that, I told you somebody would come around." His voice grew a trifle more respectful. "How can we help you?"

Kohler smiled benignly on them.

"First of all, that was damned good police work, son. We may arrange a special citation for you."

The older kid smirked, and his brother turned to the hamster in disgust and started to drive in another nail. It was surprising how much noise such a little animal could make.

"But," Kohler continued meaningfully, "first we need some more information. Did you actually see the man who buried it?"

"Oh, sure," the older kid said, and I could feel an electric thrill of tension along my spine. "He was an old guy with gray hair, we saw him around the park a lot. In fact, he burried the thing in a hole Bob and I dug for one of our hamsters. He had it under his coat and all of a sudden he shoved it in and covered it up with dirt. We were finishing the hamster off behind a tree, I guess he didn't see us, there was nobody else around."

"You say you saw him around a lot." Kohler's voice stayed even. "Did you ever talk to him?"

"Oh sure, he used to give us candy, those peppermint things, you know, in balls. He used to give all the kids candy. Probably wanted to take us behind the bushes and stuff chicken."

"Did this man ever actually make any advances toward you?"

"Nah, he was an old creep, probably couldn't even cut it no more." One grimy finger tunnelled into his nostril and extracted a greenish glob of mucous which he contemplated briefly before wiping it off on his shirt. "He just wanted to talk a lot, dumb stuff, tell us stories, that kind of shit. A real weirdo. We just told him to fuck off, especially after he tried to give us a hard time."

"What did he do?"

"Oh some of the kids and us had been having some

fun with a puppy, we had Ma's shearing scissors, and he stopped us right in the middle and killed the thing off with a stone. What a drag. He had this crazy thing about animals, he thought we shouldn't have no fun with 'em. A real nut case. We was just foolin, around, it wasn't even crying loud enough to bother nobody at the tables."

"What tables?"

"The chess tables, those stone chess tables where all those old creeps go and play. That old turd plays there all the time."

Kohler glanced at me, his eyes elated. God, this could be it.

"You say he plays there all the time," Ed said, deliberately sounding a bit bored so the kid wouldn't sense his interest and try to exploit it. "Is he out there today?"

"Nah, he hasn't been around for a couple of weeks. Maybe he croaked, who knows. Let's hope so."

Shit. Two weeks since he'd visited Penny, two weeks since the kids had seen him in the park. The bastard must know we were on to him, he must be hiding out somewhere. Kohler looked just as disappointed but he kept on trying.

"He hasn't been back even once in that time?"

"Well, we haven't seen him and we're out there most every day unless it rains. His friend's still around though."

"His friend?" Ed couldn't help himself, he spat out the words, and the kid looked up at him with an appraising look in his eyes.

"This is pretty important, hah?"

Kohler just nodded, probably fighting back the urge to take the little brat by the neck and wring the truth out of him.

"So if I tell you about his friend, and maybe where to find him, I'll get that citation, right?"

"That's right, son," Kohler said with saintlike patience.

"And maybe a thousand marks reward, too, hah?"

Kohler must have been gritting his teeth by now, but

he nodded. The kid was quiet for a minute, apparently considering the offer, and then he jumped to his feet.

"All right, buddy, you got yourself a deal. Just follow me and I'll take you right to him, he was out there at the chess tables an hour ago, he should still be there."

His younger brother looked up from the wriggling hamster.

"Hey, how about me, I saw him too."

"Fuck you, Bob, this is my operation."

The other boy spat after us and, for nothing better to do, drove a nail through the pulsing pink belly of the hamster.

The chess tables were over on the eastern edge of the park off MacDougal, shaded by a row of leafy old elms. "He's still there." The kid whispered it, even though we were fifty feet away. "The second table. The guy with the dirty blue shirt."

"You're sure?" Kohler asked.

"Course I am," he sneered. "You think I'd take any chances with a thousand marks?"

"All right, you wait for us here. Come on, Bill."

We ambled over, looking like two guys out for a pleasant dinnertime stroll, and stopped by the table beside a cluster of kibbitzers. I didn't know anything about chess, but I could tell our boy was winning by the number of pieces of a different color he'd cleared off the board. Kohler and I positioned ourselves on either side of him, casually, keeping our eyes on the board like true aficionados. He was a guy of medium build, in his late sixties or early seventies, with white hair that looked like it'd been cut by a lawnmower and a scraggly goatee. He wore an old sweat-stained blue denim work shirt over khaki slacks, and his bare feet were thonged into those cheap leather sandals you find in the artsy-craftsy shops along Eighth Street. They could have used a good washing, too, but then so could the rest of him. I was downwind, in a position to know.

"I'm afraid your rooks are forked," he said, pushing a piece across the board, and then Ed and I each had him by an arm and were dragging him to his feet.

"Police," I said, loudly, pulling the Schmeisser out with my free hand and waving it melodramatically in the air. If the Japs were around and waiting to make a play, now was the time, and I hoped our invisible tails were really out there and not holed up in an air-conditioned bar somewhere. But all that happened was that the little knot of onlookers broke and eddied as we shoved through, swinging the old guy along between us, his feet scraping the ground. He didn't say anything throughout, no protest, nothing, and we got him into the car with no trouble outside of a few surprised exclamations from passersby. The kid ran along after us, and when I'd prodded the old man into the back seat and angled in after him, the gun cocked all the time and trained squarely on his belly, the little snot tried to squeeze into the front seat. Ed shoved him out into the street unceremoniously, but he kept at it.

"Hey you guys, when am I gonna get my thousand marks, we made a deal. I want it now, just like ya promised . . ."

Ed leaned lazily out the driver's window and backhanded him across the face, hard. The kid sprawled into the gutter, blood spurting out of his mouth.

"Never try to con a con man," Kohler told him equably. "There was no citation, and there isn't going to be any thousand marks."

Ed must have felt as elated as I did over our first real breakthrough, and maybe that was his way of showing it. A good release for aggression, as Mrs. Gellert would put it.

"Where are we taking him?" I asked as we pulled out into the traffic. The old man wasn't cowering or begging, in fact he wasn't doing much of anything, just sitting in

the corner staring out the window, as if he were on a Sunday drive.

"Where do you live?" Kohler asked when we stopped for a light at Sixth. He said nothing, and I prodded him in the ribs with the Schmeisser.

"The man asked you a question."

"At 285 West 12th Street, off Hudson."

The voice was deep, resonant, and didn't sound frightened. Maybe he was a pro, maybe he just had guts. Maybe both.

"Let's take him over to his place and check it out," Kohler said, cutting into Bleecker on Sixth. "Before anybody else beats us to it. You never know what we might find there."

The same thought was in both our minds, which was why we kicked the door down in the crummy fourth-floor loft, threw the old man ahead of us and went in crouched and with our guns ready. But there was nothing there but some crummy furniture and an assortment of junk that must have taken years to collect, ranging from one of those old bubble vending machines that used to dispense gum and candy to an ancient sundial. Empty pint bottles of cheap whisky and raw muscatel were strewn over the floor and the place smelled like a cross between a distillery and a locker room. The bed was just a soiled mattress, and Kohler and I picked the old man up from the floor where he'd fallen and threw him onto it.

"If this guy is a Nip agent," I said *sotto voce* as we propped the door back into place, "he's either acting his part well or the Empire's fallen on hard times."

"He could be just an acquaintance of the Jew. The kid said they played chess together, maybe that's all there is to it. But we've got to act on the assumption he knows something, and try to get it out of him."

We walked over to the mattress and stood over the old man, who was rubbing his shoulder tentatively.

"Look, mister," Kohler said in a friendly tone, "we're not going to hurt you if we can help it. In fact, if you're

clear on this there's some money in it for you, enough to keep you in decent booze for six months. So just cooperate, and we'll get along fine."

He dragged over a rickety kitchen chair and straddled it backwards, facing the old man. I stood back and at an angle, covering them and the door both, just in case.

"Now, what we want to know. . . ."

"There's a pint of bourbon inside the stove. Would you get it for me?"

His eyes were gray, I noticed, the pupils bloodshot. They were not frightened eyes. And that, I thought, was wrong. Anybody should be frightened when he's dragged at gunpoint from a public park and kept a prisoner in his own flat. Anybody that is, except somebody who's accepted such risks as part of the game. Which, appearances notwithstanding, brought us back to the nips. I remembered the panhandler disguise of the *Komeito* agent who tried to kill me, and that was every bit as believable as the image of the kindly old chess-playing alky projected by the guy on the mattress. Until the mask came off, it was.

"Get him the bourbon, Bill."

That surprised me, but I walked over, still not putting my back to the door, and rummaged through the rusty old pot-bellied stove till I found a pint of Early Times. The seal was still intact and when I handed it to the old man he screwed off the cap with a strong twist of his hand and took a long slobbering gulp from the bottle.

"Feeling any better?" Ed was playing it easy, for the time being anyway.

"Yes, considerably. I assume you *are* officers of the law, and not unscrupulous sundial thieves willing to go to any length to purloin my treasure?"

Kohler frowned, and I seconded the expression. The slightly pedantic voice was educated, intelligent, and the sense of humor didn't fit the circumstances. To say the least.

"My name is Kohler, Ed Kohler, and this is Lieutenant

Halder. We represent a combined task force of the Gestapo and the New York police." That sounded impressive enough to me, but our captive didn't even blink. "Now to complete the amenities, why don't you tell us your name."

The old man smiled, which also didn't fit.

"Connor. Francis X. Connor. I'd offer you a drink, gentlemen, but I think my need is the greater and this is the last bottle in the place."

The flippancy might or might not hide fear, but I didn't like it.

"Connor," Kohler said, "whether you know it or not, you're in real trouble. We want your cooperation, and if we don't get it you won't be seeing a drop of whisky for a long, long time. Now, we're looking for a friend of yours, at least an acquaintance, someone you've played chess with on several occasions . . ."

Connor held up a hand.

"Why not spare me the preliminaries, Lieutenant. I know why you're here, I've expected you for some time. You're looking for the Jew."

You could have cut the silence with a knife. Shit, he'd come right out with it, admitted it. Which meant he had to be with the nips. But that was wrong too, why the hell would he blow it like that, before we'd even touched him? Kohler must have been just as confused, I'd seen the expression on his face when the old man said it, but he tried to carry on naturally.

"So you know about the Jew. For how long?"

"Oh, from the very beginning. From the day he arrived."

Arrived. The same word Ed had used in the car coming down from Croton.

"From where did he . . . arrive?" I could hear the sudden tension in the words, but Connor just smiled.

"You'd better ask him that. I met him in Washington Square Park, which as you may have guessed is my local stamping ground. He was wandering around in a dazed state, I thought he was ill, either physically or mentally.

At first he couldn't talk coherently but finally I got him back here and forced the last of my drinkable brandy down his throat. Then he talked, all right. Dear God, he talked and talked, we went right through the night." He took another pull at the bourbon. "I haven't talked like that to man or beast for twenty-five years."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, many things. Crazy things I thought they were at first, then I wasn't so sure. And now I know he's the sanest man I've met in a long, long time. He stayed on with me here, I fed him and gave him money. I have some, you know, appearances notwithstanding, from a white sheep brother in Scarsdale who sends me a check each month so long as I never darken his split-level doorstep. The Jew had no money of his own, or at least none that would be negotiable here. After awhile he had the courage to go out again, though I stayed with him most of the time at first. It was never easy for him, God knows."

"Where is he now?" Kohler almost breathed the words.

"I haven't seen him for two weeks."

Two weeks. Two fucking weeks, in every case. I think both of us groaned out loud at the same time, but Kohler wasn't ready to give up that easily.

"And all that time you knew he was a Jew, he'd admitted it to you?"

"Yes, of course." God, he was a cool one.

"You realize that harboring a Jew is still on the books as a capital offense? You realize that under the Emergency Regulations, which are also valid, I have the right to execute you on the spot?"

"Yes, Mr. Kohler, I do." Suddenly the urbane mockery was gone from his voice, and the bleary eyes were hard. "And you will, in one way or another. I knew from the moment I saw you that I would die today."

I wondered if that was just bravado, or if he was already reconciled. I knew one thing, I certainly wouldn't have wanted to be in his shoes at that moment.

"You'll die, Connor, in due time." Kohler's voice was savage now, the gloves were coming off. "But first you'll tell us what safe house you've got the Jew in now, and who the other members of your nip cell are. If you talk fast, we might even keep you alive a while longer, whatever you saw in my eyes."

Far from being intimidated, Connor just burst out laughing at this. I had to give the man credit, he had guts.

"Do you really think I'm a Japanese agent, Mr. Kohler?" he asked after a moment, gesturing at the debris around him. "Does this really look like the lair of an international spy-master?"

Kohler seemed as baffled by his attitude as I was.

"Look, Connor, you're just making it hard on yourself. You're going to talk, and it's up to you whether it's hard or easy. We've got all the time in the world to get it out of you." That wasn't exactly true but I suppose it was good psychology. Not that it seemed to impress the old man.

"You have very little time, Mr. Kohler. All of us have very little time."

Ed jumped to his feet.

"All right, we've played enough games for now. Where is the Jew?"

"He's gone," Connor replied calmly. "And he won't be back. I'm only talking to you now because I know nothing I say can help you. You may find him, but not through me. All the time he was here, the days I *could* have betrayed him, I carried a small vial of poison with me wherever I went, just in case. Suicide is a mortal sin in my faith, but I'm sure the blessed mercy of Christ would have encompassed and forgiven me."

Kohler nodded.

"A Christie." He glanced at me with a trace of self-satisfaction. "I told you and Pete this afternoon, Bill, check out the Christies. And I was right."

"I'm not a 'Christie' as you put it, Mr. Kohler. I am a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, ordained in 1946,

one year before what you people call Liberation. I've surrendered my self-respect and my humanity over the years, but never my faith."

"A priest. A whisky priest to boot." Kohler looked contemptuously around the filthy bottle-littered loft. "You're a credit to your calling, *Father*."

Ed was trying to get him angry, trigger a hot and potentially revealing response, I knew the technique well. So, apparently, did Connor.

"You needn't try to provoke me, Mr. Kohler." He was as unruffled as ever, his voice calm and contemplative. "I couldn't hate you as a man because of my principles, and I don't even despise you as a symbol. You, your Gestapo, your whole omnipotent Reich have become a juggernaut spinning out of control, hurtling on your way to destruction, just like a cancer that burns itself out when it kills off its host. You've scourged all the dignity and gentleness and compassion from this world and now your cancer has nothing left to feed on but itself. I pity you, Mr. Kohler, I pity what you've become, all of you." He looked down at the bottle in his hand. "And what I've become, of course."

Kohler walked over to the mattress and stood directly over the old man.

"*Where . . . is . . . the . . . Jew?*"

"I don't know."

He cracked him across the face with the palm of his hand, twice, and the old man rocked with the blows. But when he looked up his voice was firm.

"I know you won't believe me, but I honestly don't know. I can see your dilemma, of course, because if I did know I would never tell you."

Ed walked away and motioned me to join him by the doorway.

"He could be telling the truth," he said in a low voice. "He might just be a Christie fanatic who stumbled on the Jew and harbored him."

I had my doubts.

"He's awful cool, Ed. I'd lay odds he's a pro."

Kohler frowned.

"I tend to doubt it. He spilled too fast, he's not behaving like a trained agent confronting interrogation. He's more like a martyr itching to face the lions. He's ready to die, I think he almost welcomes it. I'd give you ten to one he doesn't know where the Jew is."

I guess I'd built my hopes too high, because I could feel that sick feeling in my gut at Ed's words. Shit, this thing was becoming a game of musical chairs, we were going around in a perpetual mind-numbing circle.

"Where do we go from here, then? He's the only lead we've got, and the Jew has obviously confided in him. Isn't there *anything* he can tell us?"

"That's what we've got to find out. I'm going down to the car, I'll get the field interrogation kit and we'll go to work on him. Who knows, maybe I'm wrong, maybe he is with the nips. Just don't count on too much. And while I'm gone try to soften him up, I'll play the heavy."

I nodded, then put the gun in my belt and walked over toward the old man, still keeping a safe distance between us in case he became another instant karate expert.

"Look, Connor," I said in a friendly tone, "I'm just a city cop, I don't know what's behind all of this and I don't care. But that Kohler, he's a mean bastard, I've seen him take people apart and it's not a pretty sight. Why not spare yourself a lot of grief and level with me, then I can take you into custody and keep you away from the Gestapo. Just tell me where the Jew is, make it easy for yourself."

Instead of taking the bait the old man just veered off into another tangent.

"Do you know why I carried that vial of poison with me all the time the Jew was here, Lieutenant?" His voice was soft, and he didn't wait for an answer. "Because in 1949 I broke under torture and betrayed my entire resistance cell to the SS. That was in Philadelphia, 'The Cradle of Liberty' I think they used to call it. Seven

people, two laymen, three priests, a seminarian and a nun. They were all executed. The commandant had a sense of humor, he made me watch the execution. They didn't blindfold any of them and they all saw me there, in his Mercedes staff car, sitting next to him. And I was too afraid to even cry out, to beg them to forgive me, to try and join them. I sat there doing nothing, and all their eyes were on me, right up to the end. I'll never forget those eyes, Lieutenant." He took another long swig from the bottle and then looked up with a strange, crooked smile. "So you see, there's really nothing that terrifies me in the Gestapo's bag of tricks, nothing at all, not after twenty-five years of living with that day. Your ingenious instruments can only give me relief, Lieutenant."

Kohler entered, carrying a black attaché case. He looked at me expectantly, but I shook my head. "He's freudy, Ed." I didn't bother to lower my voice this time. "Either that or one hell of a good actor."

Kohler pulled over a battered table and set up the attaché case. He tossed me some nylon rope and I tied the old man's hands and legs together, removing the sandals first so his feet were bare. Kohler strolled over with a thin leather pouch in one hand and looked down at Connor.

"In a few minutes we're going to hurt you badly. It's not something I enjoy doing, and I'd prefer not to do it at all. So I'm going to ask you a few final questions, and if you answer them truthfully none of this will be necessary."

"I've been telling you the truth, Mr. Kohler. I think you know that."

Ed did, or at least he was more or less sure, but a reasonable certainty isn't enough in this kind of business. Unfortunately for Connor.

"Where did the Jew go when he left here?"

"I've told you, I don't know. He didn't tell me he was leaving, he just went out one afternoon and never came back."

"Did he leave anything here?"

"No, but he had nothing to leave. His only wordly possessions were the clothes on his back, a watch and some personal papers. The only thing he left was a small gift he'd given me earlier."

"Do you have that in your possession?"

"I do. It's inside the rim of the sundial."

Well, maybe we were getting somewhere. I stumbled through a mound of old books, rubbish and dirty linen and looked inside the sundial. It was there all right, whatever it was, a silver coin or medallion of some sort, the same approximate size and weight as a hundred pfennig piece. I handed it over to Kohler and he cupped it in the palm of his hand, frowning.

"It's a fifty-cent piece, they haven't been in circulation since Liberation."

He turned it over.

"The mint date says 1966. And who the hell is John Fitzgerald Kennedy?"

Connor laughed again.

"You wouldn't know the man, Mr. Kohler. You might ask the Jew when and if you catch up with him."

"Anybody can forge a coin," Kohler said. "You're not going to throw me that easily, *Father*. Now, where did the Jew tell you he was going?"

"He didn't."

"What other friends did he have, what other people could he rely on?"

"No one."

Kohler sighed.

"All right, Connor. I'm sorry, I really am."

He opened the pouch and extracted a long gleaming needle. I crouched on the mattress next to the old man and held him while Ed went to work on his fingernails, but he didn't crack. He screamed a lot, of course, nobody can help that, it's as involuntary as a muscle spasm. But he didn't beg. Finally, Ed let him rest a minute, then repeated the questions.

"I really wish there was something I could *not* tell you, gentlemen," he said in a labored voice, "it would make withholding it a greater source of satisfaction to me. But then, that would be the sin of pride, I suppose. The punishment is enough, it is cleansing."

Kohler shrugged and we rolled him over, then pulled his slacks down and inserted the cylindrical tube with the butane torch attachment up his anus. The screams were constant now and if there was anybody in the lofts below they would have been hammering on the ceiling or calling the cops. Ed stopped it after a minute and let him lie there, gasping for breath, then picked up the bourbon bottle from the floor and pressed it to his lips. Half of it poured over onto his shirt but he must have gotten some down because his eyes spasmed open and he managed to pull himself up against the wall.

"Thank you." The strong voice was just a raw croak now, barely audible.

Kohler sat next to him and talked quietly.

"This can all stop right now, Connor, and we'll get you immediate medical attention. All you have to do is tell me where the Jew is and who else is helping him escape."

The old man made a little noise that could have been a laugh or a sob.

"You always ask all the wrong questions. You never ask me *who* the Jew is, and that's all that's important."

Kohler leaned closer.

"All right, who is he?"

He started to answer, then collapsed into a fit of wracking coughs. Kohler held up the bottle again and he got the last of it between his lips.

"Tell me who he is, Connor, tell me if it's so important."

"This is what I feel, not what I know. I think the Jew is a messenger, an observer." His voice was raspy, barely audible. "Sometimes history goes wrong, it takes a wrong turning point at some crucial crossroads and careens off the rails. The pendulum swings unnaturally far between the polar forces of the universe, between good and evil,

yin and yang, negative and positive. The cosmic balance is disrupted, there is a breach in the fabric of time and space and for a second the curtain is parted and the Others peer in, the Others who write our destinies like words in a book." His voice grew stronger as he spoke, fueled by some inner passion. "This is beyond my own faith, beyond all man's knowledge perhaps, but I saw it through his eyes, fragments of it, something vast and beautiful and terrifying. Norse mythology glimpsed it vaguely, the Runes, the spinners of Man's fate, the weavers of the cosmic tapestry. And when there's a fault, a tear in the tapestry, it's corrected, just as the last act of a play is rewritten or a painting changed. Somewhere, sometimes, somewhere, the Others will doubt a future of their making and test it and perhaps destroy it, snuffing out a sun, scratching a universe, and starting all over again. And they see us through the eyes of their craftsmanship, sometimes through the eyes of an old Jew from another time and another place and another world. And they find us wanting. Wanting."

He broke into a fit of coughing again, bubbles of blood-flecked foam frothing over his lips, and Ed and I looked at each other in despair.

"He's clear round the bend now," I said. "Should we finish it?"

Kohler looked down at the old man.

"Something might come out, even in delirium. We have no choice."

The coughing had stopped and Connor looked up at us, almost expectantly. Kohler held up a long thin flexible wire.

"If I remember my mythology, priests weren't overly concerned with their sexual prowess. But you're still a man. Don't make me do this."

"It doesn't matter," he whispered. "Get it over with."

"All you have to do is tell us where the Jew is."

He said nothing.

"All right, Bill, hold him down."

Kohler crouched over Connor's groin.

"Shit, it's like threading a needle . . . ah."

The old man's body thrashed and heaved and the scream rang in my ears, almost deafening me. Kohler withdrew the wire and bent over, placing his ear close to the old man's mouth, which was emitting little burbling noises.

"Tell me where the Jew is, Connor, and it'll all be over. The Jew."

The words were barely distinguishable, and I leaned close.

"Ed, he's trying to say something . . ."

Kohler waved me to silence, listened closely for a moment, then grimaced in disgust.

"Shit, it's Latin. The old fool's giving himself the Last Rites. C'mon, hold him down again."

The wire gleamed briefly in Ed's hands and then Connor spasmed in my arms. But there was no scream and within seconds the body was limp and still. Kohler checked the pulse, then stood up abruptly and walked over to the card table.

"He's gone." He started packing away the instruments. "And we didn't get a fucking thing except some mystical gibberish. He was telling the truth all right."

"Let's get out of here." The old man had voided his bowels and the place stank like a privy. For some reason I thought of the Blackfight at the Garden, the big buck sizzling on the grid. At the end, all you leave behind is shit.

The fresh air outside tasted good, hot as it was, and we sat in the car for a minute debating what to do next. Unless the Jew walked into our stakeout at the Crib we still were no closer to him than ever.

"I think we'd better brief von Leeb," Kohler said. "We haven't got much, but we've got something." He slapped his pants pocket. "Maybe the old boy will spot some

significance in this medallion thing. Who knows, maybe it's in some kind of Jew code."

The manager at the *Adlon* spotted us before we were out of the swinging doors and scurried over, an anguished expression on his face.

"A terrible thing, we've been in touch with the Mission. . . ."

Kohler and I looked at each other simultaneously.

"We have all his effects here, of course, we'll hold them for. . . ."

Kohler's voice was hoarse.

"When did it happen?"

The manager plucked anxiously at the braid on his right sleeve.

"The Professor left standing instructions to bring afternoon tea at four o'clock. The waiter found him, and we dispatched our doctor immediately. It happened sometime during the morning, a peaceful passing, the heart of course. I suppose at his age one could not expect. . . ."

We left him prattling on and walked back to the street.

"Do you know that old rhyme, 'Ten Little Niggers'?" Kohler asked quietly as the doorman brought our car around.

I nodded absently.

"Well, now there are two."

Beck was waiting for us back at Gestapo headquarters, looking disgustingly crisp and rested. We tramped into the empty canteen and sat at a corner table over black coffee while Kohler told him the latest developments, Von Leeb's death overshadowing our leads from Connor, such as they were. It was obvious there was no great love lost between the two of them, but as long as Beck was the only other agent involved he had a right to know. He was a target too. But when Kohler finished, Beck looked unruffled as ever.

"I think you're worrying needlessly. With von Leeb out of the way our troubles are over."

Kohler and I just stared at him.

"My God, man," I sputtered, "with von Leeb gone we've no protection, no authorization, and we've already set ourselves up as clay pigeons for the Japs."

"Hold on, Halder, don't panic." Beck smiled coldly, condescendingly, and I could understand why Kohler didn't like the bastard. "Even assuming the Japs are still after us, von Leeb's death closes the case, at least for the time being. We've all been working directly under his instructions, and until fresh orders arrive from Berlin I think we should just sit and wait."

"For what, a bullet?" Kohler slammed his coffee cup down on the table. "Haven't you understood one goddamned word of what I've been saying?"

Beck's even, empty smile didn't flicker.

"I understand that you've both been going at this for forty-eight hours straight and may be losing your perspective." He held up one hand to stave off Kohler's angry retort. "Listen, von Leeb's death gives us all an escape hatch. We just sit tight and let the Japs have the Jew if they can find him. As long as we're not in their way, we're no longer a threat. We're *safe*, Kohler, all of us."

I knew in my guts that it couldn't be that easy anymore but I couldn't find a ready answer. I turned to Kohler for help, but he was regarding Beck appraisingly now, his anger gone.

"I think he may just have a point, Bill." He leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers thoughtfully. "Possibly a very good point." He turned to Beck. "Go down and check the computer findings again, I want to talk to Halder."

Beck nodded affably and ambled off.

Kohler leaned over and spoke softly, intensely. "Look, what did we agree last night? That our only concern now was staying alive, right, not this Jew or von Leeb or

Heydrich or all the political in-fighting in Berlin. Well, Beck isn't so thick. He's given us a way out."

This was all going too fast for me.

"I don't follow you. How . . ."

Kohler clutched my sleeve.

"Beck said we were working for von Leeb, and he was right. Well, von Leeb is dead, so we're no longer working for him. It'll be certified a natural death, don't worry about that, there's a half-dozen drugs they could've used, insulin o.d., massive dose of adrenalin, take your pick. So nobody's going to raise a stink over that end of it. All we have to do now is fold our hands and sit tight and let the whole thing blow over. If the Japs or anybody else want this Jew, let them have him, they can make him Emperor for all I care, so long as he's off our backs."

"But Berlin, they sent von Leeb, they'll send somebody else . . ."

Kohler shook his head.

"I doubt it, I doubt it very much. This was von Leeb's baby, and he pushed it for all it was worth. Shit, he's been killing Jews all his life and now there aren't any more Jews left, he must have felt lost. They probably gave the assignment to him in the first place as some sort of occupational therapy. But do you think any of the big boys really care that much anymore? They're on the verge of war with the Japanese Empire, that's enough to keep them occupied."

"I don't know, maybe you're right on that end of it. But the Japs, how can we be sure they'll call things off when we do and not just keep on till they make a clean sweep of it? Of us."

"They're professionals, Bill, if we're not a threat to them, they're not a threat to us. Stop the investigation now and both of us are safe. Keep going and we'll be in danger every minute of every day."

I nodded, though reluctantly. Everything Kohler said

was reasonable enough, but this whole business had very little to do with reason.

"Okay," I said finally, "I guess we don't have too many options. But how do we let the other side know we're getting out of the game? Go up on the roof of Gestapo headquarters and wave a white flag?"

Kohler smiled, and some of the tension seemed to leave his face.

"That's pretty much it." He drained his coffee and got to his feet. "Get back to the precinct right away. Don't worry about a tail, I'll take you out through a special corridor we use for informers, it leads into the federal courthouse next door." He looked at his watch. "An hour from now I'll call you and we'll do a little number about how relieved we are this thing is finally over with, now we can get back to normal work, you know what to say. They'll have bugged our phones from the beginning, they're too good not to, and we'll give 'em an earfull. That's our white flag."

"What about our back-up teams?"

"I'll have to send them back to Washington. If we're kept under surveillance and they're spotted, the Japs will know we're not acting in good faith. It's a gamble, but not a big one. The Japs won't risk their lives nailing us unless we're in their way. Once we quit the game they'll forget all about us."

It all figured, but somehow I didn't feel any better. As I left Kohler at the courthouse entrance I wavered, and almost went back after him. But hell, what choice did either of us have? And if it didn't work, we probably wouldn't be around to complain.

I hailed a cab on Chambers Street and got back to the station in twenty minutes. Nygard was on the duty desk, and he called me over excitedly.

"Jeez, Lieutenant, where you been? I got a dozen messages for you, the Commissioner's office called three times, Warren's been trying to get hold of you, and Kearney stopped in from the lab, he says that place you

wanted him to dust on Fifth, it's no go, burned down last night. Nothin' left, he said, the owner and a couple of guys next door went up too. And then Macri, he wants to know if you need any dupes on . . ."

I walked away, thinking of little dapper Leonard Pickett. No white flag for him. The bastard didn't even know he needed one.

Kohler called dead on time, and we both did our best to convince our unseen audience that as far as we were concerned von Leeb's death closed the investigation. They'd have missed their hit man by now, so I asked what he'd learned about the crazy Jap who'd tried to kill me, and Kohler smoothly said it must have been connected with my part in the Toronto cleanup, probably some fanatic nip Christie thirsting for revenge. So the books were closed on that one too. I ended the conversation by telling Kohler I was going to take a few days leave to recharge the batteries, and he said he'd probably do the same. Too bad about old von Leeb, but the thing had been a wild goose chase from the start anyway. And see you around. All in all, a pretty convincing act, I thought. I hoped.

I sat there for a few minutes after the call, willing my hands steady, then glanced at my watch. Almost noon. Even if this all worked out as planned, there'd have to be some kind of time lag before the tappers could report our conversation back to whoever ran their show, so I decided to sit tight in the precinct house for the rest of the afternoon. I ordered some lunch sent in from Sweeney's, told the switchboard I wasn't taking any incoming calls unless it was the Gestapo, and opened a bottle of twelve-year-old Scotch I'd been saving for a special occasion. Like now. I'd have to call the Commissioner if I wanted to keep my job, but he could wait till tomorrow. It was unlikely Centre Street knew about von Leeb's death yet, and anyway I still had the letter from Berlin, so for a little while longer I could pull rank on Gunther. A week ago the idea would have made me come in my pants, but

I can't say it did much for me now. I couldn't shake the feeling that Kohler's ploy to get us off the hook was too neat, too easy, and I still had a prickling sensation on the back of my neck, as if somebody was lining me up in the crosshairs of a telescopic sight. Come to think of it, they might very well be doing just that. I got up and pulled the shades on both windows.

With a rubbery hamburger and three shots of silken Scotch under my belt I felt a little more optimistic, but not much. Shit, I'd be lucky if I came out of this without an ulcer. On second thought, I'd be lucky if that's all I came out of it with. I lit a cigarette and leaned back in the swivel chair, enviously contemplating the life of a plumber.

After a few more Scotches the combination of exhaustion and nervous tension began to catch up with me, so I took one more stiff drink, locked the door and sprawled out on the couch. But wiped out as I was, sleep still wouldn't come. I kept running the whole thing over and over in my mind, trying to find the fatal flaw in Kohler's plan. The phones had to be tapped, and our little duet was bound to call off the hounds. And yet . . . I finally forced myself to think of something else, but when I eventually drifted off it was just a replay of the night before, a smiling skull beneath the mask, a grave-strewn park, the words of warning whispering on the fringes of my consciousness, the rotting bodies dug up one by one. Men I'd never seen in life but knew now, Fiske, Junger, and then the fresh graves, today's graves, von Leeb, the Jap, Connor, Pickett. Pickett, shriveled into an anonymous hunk of carbon by the flames, as black and dead as the big buck in the Garden ring. Pickett. . . .

I broke out of sleep in a cold sweat and sat bolt upright on the couch. Pickett. It was Pickett who was all wrong, who'd been gnawing away at the back of my head ever since Nygard told me. Fisk, Grauber, even von Leeb, they'd all been killed to stop our investigation, to let the Japs beat us to the Jew. Or so we'd thought. But

Pickett had *already* told me all he knew when they burned him to death, he wasn't an obstacle or a threat anymore. Sweet Freya, Pickett wasn't killed because of what he could do, but for what he *knew*. The Japs weren't preventing, they were silencing. Pickett was silenced, they all were silenced, anybody who knew anything about the case, from a nothing like Fiske right on up to von Leeb himself. Which meant that Kohler was wrong, we couldn't buy immunity with that phone call, because on or off the case we still knew too much. And for some crazy reason, the Japs had decided the price of that knowledge was death.

I lurched to the desk and called Kohler's office number at Gestapo headquarters, but there was no answer. I glanced at my watch. It was almost eight-thirty, I'd slept longer than I'd thought. I tried Beck's extension with no more luck, then rang the duty officer. I got the same guy who'd checked me in last night, which helped, but it still took me five minutes of wheedling to get Kohler's home number and address. He should be there by now, he had to be. Our one chance was to follow our original plan and let the whole goddamn Gestapo in on this. If that didn't buy us immunity, nothing would.

I'd already dialed the first five digits when I realized his private number would be under *Komeito* surveillance too. Shit, I might as well call up the Imperial Mission. Kohler lived way out in Brooklyn, Bay Ridge, but I could get there in an hour and with any luck he could alert a dozen sub-agents tonight and rope the rest in first thing tomorrow. I felt a little stirring of hope, but not much. Things were spinning out of control, badly out of control.

I checked the Schmeisser's action, slipped an extra clip into my side pocket, and went down to the squad room. Touhy and Henderson were playing cards and swilling beer, both of them far too short. A patrolman I knew by sight was filling out his duty roster in the corner, a shade taller than me but he'd have to do. I ordered him

to strip, and Touhy and Henderson stared at me like I'd gone freudy. But Callender had spread the word about my authorization so neither of them said anything, and when the bewildered rookie tried to put up an argument I just pulled rank fast and hard. Ten minutes later I left the precinct swinging my nightstick, cap pulled down as far over my forehead as it would go, just another-uniformed cop changing shifts. At least, I hoped that was the way it looked to whoever was watching for a plainclothes detective named Bill Halder.

The minute I reached Fifth I hailed a cruising cab, hoping for the best. I'd told the desk to dispatch an unmarked car to the corner of Eighty-fifth and First and just to be on the safe side I changed cabs twice on the way, leaving the first one at Amsterdam and Sixty-ninth, then ducking in and out of the Seventy-second Street subway station and grabbing another by the Seventy-third Street exit. When I took over the plain blue Porsche from Tolloffson I was sure I'd managed to shake any tail, but as an added precaution I took evasive maneuvers along a half-dozen nearly deserted East Side streets. Nobody stayed even close. For the first time in two days I could be sure I was on my own. It was a good feeling.

I took the Horst Wessel Drive down to the bridge, still clogged with homebound traffic, and crawled across to Brooklyn. The sun was going down over Jersey, shrouded in a murky haze of pollution, and it was as muggy as ever. A few fat raindrops dribbled sluggishly from the overcast sky, and there were angry thunderclouds rolling to the west. The weather suited my mood, if nothing else.

On Flatbush I pulled up next to a cabbie and got directions to Bay Ridge, out through Prospect Park and across Ocean Avenue into the Himmler Parkway. It took me less than twenty minutes but then I made the wrong turnoff and got screwed up around Dyker Heights, which cost me another half hour, and by the time I pulled up around the corner from Kohler's tree-lined residential street it was almost ten. The rain had started to fall in

earnest, which didn't help any, and I had to walk two blocks to find a pay phone. As I searched through my water-logged pockets for a five-pfennig piece, I prayed Kohler was in. He wasn't.

"No, I'm sorry, I don't expect him back for a while yet." Her voice was high, a bit nasal. "Who did you say this was?"

I hadn't, but somewhere a little monkey-faced Jap with earphones would be anxious to know.

"Beck, Pete Beck, Mrs. Kohler," I lied, hoping she didn't know his voice. "I'm calling from headquarters. Ed and I are working on a case together and I need to check something out with him. . . ."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Beck, my husband has spoken of you. Well, he should be home in an hour or so, but if it's important you could ring him at Ernie's, that's a little bar here in the neighborhood, he went over about nine for a few drinks." Her voice grew querulous. "I do wish you people wouldn't work him so hard, Mr. Beck, I've really never seen Edward so tired, and edgy at the same time . . ."

I tried to hide my impatience. "Do you have that address, Mrs. Kohler?"

"Well no, no I don't but it's in the book, just a few blocks from here over on Shore Road."

I thanked her and hung up, then scabbled anxiously through the Brooklyn directory. Hell, I could understand why Kohler wanted a drink, a bottle for that matter, but why couldn't he stay put tonight of all nights? I found Ernie's, thought of calling, then decided to go directly over. I just hoped to hell he wasn't soused yet.

The rain was letting up a bit by the time I found the joint, but I was already soaked to the bone. And my luck wasn't running any better. The bartender said Kohler had just left.

I got into the car and cruised slowly back along the way I'd come, finally spotting him on the same corner where I'd parked earlier. He was walking slowly despite the rain, a brown paper bag tucked under one arm. Booze,

probably, to help sleep come. Poor Ed, he really believed he was off the hook.

As he started to cross the street toward his house I got out and followed him, calling out his name, softly at first, then louder when he didn't turn around. We were about thirty yards apart when he finally looked back, squinting against the rain, and the headlights caught him square, pinning him like a moth. Before I could even shout, the car hurtled out of the shadows and struck him head on, flinging his body up and over the hood to land with a dull thud ten feet behind. He lay there in a crumpled heap, unmoving, but the car reversed slowly, and then with a sudden burst of speed backed over his body. There was a sickening crunch that I could hear from thirty yards away, then another as the car ground forward across what was left of him and screeched off up the street. As it cornered I could see the driver's face briefly but clearly in the yellow pool from the street lamp, mouth tight, eyes boring straight ahead. They didn't turn in my direction as the car sped off, and I lowered the Schmeisser. The driver was Pete Beck.

It was pure reflex that sent me back to the car and after him, nothing more, and I would have lost the trail quickly if he hadn't been returning to Manhattan by the same route I'd followed coming over. Even then it was a sloppy tail, and the only thing I had going for me was the bastard's own self-confidence; Beck must have been doing the following, and the killing, for so long now he just couldn't imagine the tables being turned on him. The rain helped some too, but it obscured my visibility as well as his, and I lost sight of him a half-dozen times before I caught a glimpse of the black Mercedes Rommel cutting off the Drive at Eighty-sixth Street. From then on it was fairly easy, and I kept a safe two cars behind until he pulled up on the corner of Ninety-eighth and Lexington, a block of fairly expensive townhouses. I sat hunched over the wheel, keeping a low profile, as Beck got out

and headed up the street, stopping to look back and around, but only perfunctorily.

The rain was coming down hard again, drumming on the sidewalk and covering my footsteps as I followed him, and the only real risk came when he was opening the door of the old reconverted brownstone in the middle of the block. I had to cross the street before he could get inside so I ran then, quickly but softly, and he was pulling the key out of the lock when the butt of my Schmeisser slapped him hard over the right ear, the force of the blow sprawling him forward into the entranceway. I shut the door quickly and stood over him with the gun, listening for any signs of activity inside the house. There was nothing but Beck's low, guttural groaning. I bent over him expecting anything, but he was in no shape to make trouble. Blood gurgled from an open wound on his head and he began to retch convulsively, spewing a little puddle of bile onto the parquet floor. I relieved him of his gun and frisked him, but there was only the one weapon, a bulky Walther P38 automatic. The groans were trailing off now and he started to crawl across the floor, breathing shallowly. When he managed to pull himself to one knee I waved the Schmeisser in his face.

"The safety's off, Beck. Who else is here?"

He looked up at me, dazed, and slowly bewilderment began to give way to hate in his eyes. He said nothing.

I shoved the gun butt into his mouth, shattering the front teeth, and held it there, my other hand grabbing the back of his neck and shoving his mouth along the length of the barrel in an obscene parody of fellatio. He started to gag helplessly.

"You've got one more chance."

I withdrew the barrel till it was just resting on his lips.

"Nobody." He choked out the words, spitting blood.

"Nobody but me."

I stepped back and looked quickly around, keeping the Schmeisser leveled on Beck's face. To my right was a large living room, richly carpeted and curtained but un-

furnished except for a sofa and one straight-backed chair. The whole place smelled musty, unlivid in, but if it were Beck's safe house there could be some of his men around. I moved closer to where he crouched on the floor and lowered my voice.

"What's upstairs?"

"Nothing." The words were garbled by his broken mouth but they still came out too quickly. I'd have to check the place out, but that meant immobilizing Beck. Renegade or not, he was still Gestapo, and that meant his hands and feet were deadly weapons.

"Rope," I said softly.

He shook his head as if trying to clear it.

"Not here. . . ."

I leveled the gun on his right kneecap.

"Then I'll have to cripple you." It was only half bluff; if necessary I'd risk the shot and then nail anybody coming down the stairs.

"There's . . . wire. In the kitchen." Beck's voice was flat, hopeless. Which didn't mean a thing. He'd still try to get the drop on me the first chance he had. Hell, what did he have to lose?

"Lead the way."

He started to get to his feet, but I stabbed the gun at him.

"Crawl."

I kept a safe distance between us as he dragged himself crablike across the lush Oriental carpet and through a swinging door into the kitchen. A thin layer of dust lay over the ultra-modern fixtures, and an unpleasant aroma of rotting food clung around the fridge. Whoever lived in this place had left in a hurry.

I waved Beck into a corner and quickly scanned the room.

"Where is it?"

He pointed to a cupboard above the sink and I backed over, never taking my eyes off him. There was a small

coil of baling wire on the second shelf, and a tool kit. I extracted a pair of pliers and tossed the lot to Beck.

"Do it. Until I can see the bleeding."

He said nothing, and didn't reach for the wire.

"You're no good to your bosses dead," I said reasonably enough, and suddenly, unexpectedly, Beck's torn lips twisted into a semblance of a smile.

"You really surprise me, Halder." Still squatting on the tiles he picked up the wire and started winding it around his ankles. "I don't suppose it would do any good to say you're making a mistake?"

I shook my head.

"I was out by Kohler's. I saw it happen."

"Ahh." Beck nodded. "I figured that must have been it." He snipped off the ends of the strands with the pliers and held out his hands. "You'll have to do the rest."

I approached him warily, the Schmeisser trained on his chest.

"It's hair-trigger," I said, taking the coil from him. "You wouldn't have time."

Beck's voice was calm as ever. "I know."

I had to use my left hand and it took around five minutes before he was secure, the wire biting deeply into both wrists. I ordered him to turn over so he couldn't try a *savatte* kick and checked the wire around his feet. It was loose, as I'd expected, not enough to effectively hamstring him. I clamped down with the pliers till ribbons of blood started to ooze from each ankle, but Beck didn't cry out.

"You can walk." I stepped back and looked down at him. "Get up."

He struggled to his feet.

"You realize this will effectively cut off my circulation within forty-five minutes." Still cool, I had to hand him that much.

"If I decide to keep you alive any longer, I'll loosen them." I raised the gun. "Upstairs, and quiet."

He half-hopped across the living room like a guy in a

potato sack race, and I went up the elegant spiral staircase backwards, keeping him three steps below and in front of me all the time. At the top of the stairs he lurched and sprawled onto the landing, hard and loud, and he almost got it right there. I flung myself back against the wall and aimed the gun down the passageway, but there was no sign of life.

"Try that again and you're dead," I grated, my guts churning.

"It was an accident," Beck said levelly.

"Sure."

I shoved him ahead of me and we checked out the two master bedrooms, bath and study, but there was nothing but a lot of sheet-shrouded furniture squatting ghostlike in the gloom.

"Is there an attic?"

"No, look for yourself. This is it."

Maybe so. I had time to find out one way or the other.

"Downstairs."

In the living room I sat on the edge of the couch, keeping five yards between us. Even with the wire there was no sense taking any chances.

"On your knees."

Beck fell clumsily to the floor in a praying position, his hobbled feet almost sprawling him face forward onto the carpet. I kept the gun level with his belt.

"When did you sell out, Beck?"

He said nothing.

"How much did they pay you? What's the going price on traitors these days?"

Beck just sighed.

"Halder, you dumb bastard, you've stumbled into something you don't understand and you're in way over your head. Get out now and go back to your cops and robbers games, forget all about this. I won't bother you again, you can count on it."

"Like you didn't bother Ed Kohler?" My finger involuntarily tightened on the trigger but I forced myself to

ease off. I needed him alive, at least for now.

"Kohler was an unfortunate necessity." Unemotional, distant. "He was an intelligent man, a trained agent, I couldn't be sure he really intended to stop. You?" He smiled again, contemptuously, blood still dribbling from the corner of his mouth. "I'll write you off, as of now."

What bull. To make him talk freely I'd have to get him back to the precinct and requisition the equipment, and that could prove sticky. He was still a Gestapo agent and despite my letter of authorization I was just a cop. Hell, Beck could claim I'd killed Kohler, I'd been out there too, and it would be his word against mine. No, I'd have to settle this here and now, and on my own.

"Have you found the Jew, Beck? Is that why you're trying to silence us, me, Kohler, von Leeb?"

"Halder, you don't . . ." I stiffened and waved him into silence. I could hear something, faintly at first, then louder, the sound of footsteps, footsteps coming from below us. Shit, I'd been a bloody fool. A basement, there was a basement. A door groaned open in the kitchen and suddenly Beck dropped the act and reeled to his feet, screaming an incoherent warning just as an old gray-haired man shuffled into the room. Beck seemed to crumple where he stood then and a strangled noise croaked between his lips. The old man looked back and forth between me and Beck uncomprehendingly, then caught sight of my gun. Slowly, wearily, he turned to Beck.

"Is it . . ."

"Yes, Felix. I'm sorry." Beck's voice was dead, defeated. "I'm terribly sorry." He turned to me swaying slightly, his voice barely above a whisper. "Halder, meet Felix Hirsch. I found him two weeks ago."

Even after everything that had happened, it was still hard to accept. I stood there gaping, trying to square the chubby little old man in front of me with my childhood image of a hooknosed international banker, but either our school books were exaggerating or this one had gone through some fantastic plastic surgery. He was just an

ordinary looking guy in his mid-sixties, fairly close to Macri's anonymous composite, with a tired, deeply lined face, thinning grey hair and startlingly blue eyes. Something else Jews weren't supposed to have.

"Move over next to Beck," I said finally, fighting back a mounting sense of unreality. "Then empty your pockets, carefully, no fast moves."

He moved slowly, like a man walking under water. When he'd strewn the floor with a lot of junk, scraps of papers, a briar pipe, a couple of pens and a plastic tobacco pouch, I told Beck to back away and walked to within a foot of the old man.

"Hands in the air." He obeyed, in that same dazed slow-motion, and I patted him down. Nothing.

"Both of you, down on the floor, cross your legs and put your hands in your pockets." Beck groaned involuntarily as he struggled to his knees and I could see the blood welling from underneath the wire around his wrists. The Jew—shit, the Jew!—settled silently to the carpet, his eyes fixed dully on the gun in my hand.

"All right, Beck, how did you find him?"

He was silent for a while, his eyes squeezed shut, but after a minute or so he looked up, his old self again, the shock of failure apparently assimilated. Beck was resilient, all right, and still dangerous.

"I had a head start." He smiled drily. "Five weeks' head start, to be exact, from the minute I saw a dupe of Fiske's report in Washington. It had already been forwarded to Berlin, so I knew we had to move quickly."

More blood was running from under his trouser leg. I had to give the bastard credit, he wouldn't beg.

"How many Jap agents are there in the Gestapo?"

"A few. Enough."

I shook my head.

"How do they pay you, Beck—a fixed salary, or so much per murder?"

"I don't do it for money." His tone was still calm,

almost patronizing. God, I'd love to get some electrodes on the son of a bitch.

"An idealist?" I forced what I hoped was a scornful laugh. "I didn't notice any slant to your eyes."

Beck looked up at me.

"I'm not a mercenary." There was a sudden, fierce throb of pride in his voice. "I hate this filthy system of yours and everything it stands for. I've been fighting to destroy it for years."

"That's why you work for the Japs then—"the enemy of my enemy is my friend?"

"Yes. And for other reasons." His eyes were fixed on the floor, the only sign of strain a slight tightening of his facial muscles. "The Empire is a feudal, autocratic system, but it's still on a human scale. It robs men of their territory, just like the Reich, but at least it leaves them their souls."

What hypocrisy. I snorted, and turned to the old man.

"And you—you really are a Jew?"

He didn't answer. I thrust the gun forward.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes." The faintly accented voice was barely audible.

"Yes, I am a Jew."

"How does it feel, Halder?" Beck asked bitterly. "How does it feel to see the last of a species? You might as well be standing in front of a golden condor, or a Kodiak bear, or a snow leopard." His composure vanished as his voice rose, taut with barely repressed fury. "How many men, women and children did you butchers slaughter to make him the last, Halder? How much blood is on your hands?"

This was getting out of control.

"Just quiet down, Beck, I'm only a policeman, save your lectures for somebody who makes policy." I got up, still keeping a safe distance from the two of them. "I've got more questions, but first I want to talk about me." I aimed the gun at his gut.

"Who took over from the Jap I killed? Who else have you got on my trail?"

Beck looked at me with something close to contempt. "I would have taken you out myself, Halder. The Japs wouldn't have known anything about it."

I looked at him blankly.

"But then why. . . ."

"Halder, you still don't understand. The Japs don't know I've got him, nobody knows. This is my own show, the rest of my agents are still searching Manhattan for him, I've kept them compartmentalized from the beginning. I had to call in the *Komeito* to help eliminate Grauber and Fiske, and I made the mistake of giving them a crack at you, but I handled everything else myself. I was just as worried about my own agents finding the scent as you and Kohler."

This was losing me.

"Wait a minute, Beck, you're working for the Japs, why. . . ."

"I told you, I'm working *against* the Nazis." He paused for a moment, then looked up at me and spoke softly, intensely. "I don't suppose my motives would mean anything to you, Halder, you're just another one of their programmed zombies. But I've been fighting this foul system all my life. My father was with the Resistance in '46, one of the regular army officers who defied Eisenhower over the Ultimatum. The collabos hanged him with Patton and the rest after the Chicago A-bombing." That same fierce look gleamed in his eyes again. "I was weaned on bitter milk, Halder. I've never lost the taste."

I listened to him with fascination. I'd known there were some Patties still hanging on in dark corners, but I never would have believed they could penetrate the Gestapo.

"My mother and a small circle of friends carried on after Federation," Beck continued. "I was groomed to enter government service from the very beginning. I put on a good ideological front and I was already a district leader in the Viking Youth when the Japs recruited me. That was back in the fifties when they were contacting a

lot of Resistance survivors to build their network here. They needed us because they were too damned visible on their own, and we needed them because they were the only force left opposing the Reich. They may have been doing it for their own imperial reasons, but along the way they managed to preserve some of the values that've disappeared in the rest of this madhouse world." He paused. "But my first allegiance is to those values, not to Tokyo. That's why once I found the Jew and talked to him, I wasn't going to let him out of my hands. Not for anything."

This was getting deeper every minute.

"How the hell *did* you find him?"

"The same way you did, through the skull. Although you were one up on me there, I never thought of the kids as witnesses. I came to New York on my own from Washington the day after I saw that first report. I alerted our apparatus here and went to see Fiske, and then Pickett. That was why they both had to die once you started—either of them could have blown me if you'd ever started asking the right questions. Pickett gave me a description, not very good, but enough to start on." God, I'd never even asked Pickett who he'd talked to before me. "And then I thought, was it pure accident that he buried the skull in Washington Square Park? Was he just passing by and decided it was as good a spot as any? Or was there some connection, some specific reason he chose that location. It was a long shot, but I hung out in the park day after day, striking up conversations with every gray-haired elderly man who seemed to be a habitué of the place, looking for anything off-beat, anything furtive or suspicious. I must have gone through around sixty possibilities before I found him. Playing chess, maybe even with that poor old priest you knocked off. I followed him, waited till he was alone, and then pulled him in."

It had been that simple. "And you managed to keep it a secret from your own men?"

"Yes. At the beginning I just planned to wait a few

days, talk to him, find out how he'd escaped. That's when I took him here, for secure interrogation. Then I would have got him out of the country and into Japanese territory. After all, he'd have been safe there, and the Imperial psy-war people could have made an idiot out of Heydrich, maybe even blackmail him with it, pressure him to tone down his demands for parity in Southeast Asia. No, I planned to hand him over, I would have allowed him to be used as a political pawn as long as it would hurt the Nazis or delay the Contraxists' war plans. But only until I talked to him. Then everything changed."

"Why, for God's sake? You had him in your hands, you said yourself he would have been a great propaganda plum for the Japs . . ."

Beck just shook his head wearily.

"You don't understand, Halder, you probably never will. What happened was that I learned the truth, the same truth the old priest tried to give you before you murdered him. Felix is not a survivor of your camps. He comes from a different society, a different plane of existence, a parallel space-time continuum if you will. And in his world the Nazis *lost* the war in 1945!"

I looked back and forth between the two of them in bewilderment. Either they were crazy or I was. Or all of us.

"Tell him, Felix," Beck urged. "Tell him."

Hirsch looked at me, his eyes anguished. "It is true. How it happened or why I do not know. My memories of my own world are blurred and distant, when I try to remember it's like walking through cobwebs. There was another city, another New York, a city I fled to forty years before to escape the Nazis." He laughed bitterly. "To escape. And there was Rachel, and Hilde, but I can no longer see their faces. Father Francis asked me so much, at the beginning I could still remember things, but now it's all vague, unreal, insubstantial. My last memory, I was lying in bed, Rachel was there but I cannot remember . . . And then it was like a great hand, clutching at

me, wrenching me away, and then cold and black and a billion stars like eyes . . ." His voice broke. "When I awoke the first things I saw were the Nazi flags on the buildings, the men in Nazi uniforms. To a Jew in my world they were only a terrible memory. Here, suddenly, they were reality." He ran a trembling hand across his forehead. "Reality. I'm no longer even sure my world ever existed at all, outside my own mind. Sometimes I wonder if I exist myself. Perhaps it is all a dream, a nightmare. Perhaps I am already dead." He paused. "God knows, I must have gone a bit mad at that moment of awakening in your asylum planet. I did not recover my senses until Father Francis took me to his loft. Father Francis, the man you murdered."

His eyes fixed on mine, then fell away.

"You poor innocent monsters, you do not even see your own evil. But Francis did. Of all the people I might have stumbled upon, he alone could have restored my sanity. And did. He thought it was no accident that I was brought to him, he believed all of this was part of some vast cosmic plan. So does Peter in his own way. I do not know. Perhaps I have just died and been plunged into gehenna, the hell of my people. What better devils than you?"

Beck spoke quickly, desperately.

"Don't you see, Halder, this man is a key, a gateway to another life, another world. If we learn his secret, if he can just grasp and control it himself, we can penetrate the secrets of the universe!" His eyes gleamed hotly, fixedly, and I suddenly realized he was more than a little mad. "Perhaps I can leave this butcher's world with him, part the veil of time and space, find a place that isn't drenched in blood, that doesn't revel in sadism and suffering . . ."

Hirsch only sighed.

"Poor Peter, he is a prisoner of his hatreds as much as all of you. He sees me as some magic carpet to Utopia." He smiled gently at Beck. "I'm just a lost old man, Peter,

a Kasper Hauser thrust into an alien world. I'm not your savior. There is no going back for me."

"*No!*" Beck almost screamed the word. "There must be a way, there must." He turned to me, holding out his hands. "Halder, you can come too, all of us can escape. When Felix was with the priest they studied history books together, they traced the dividing point between our worlds. It was only 1934, Halder, just forty years ago. Here, Giuseppe Zangara assassinated President Roosevelt, Huey Long won the Presidency in 1936, and America stayed neutral until Germany had developed the atom bomb and conquered Europe. Then it was too late for us, we were forced to accept the Ultimatum. But in Felix's world Zangara missed Roosevelt and killed another man named Cermak. Roosevelt lived and went on to lead America in a successful war against Germany. Long was never elected, instead he was assassinated himself in 1936. Don't you see the symmetry, the threads linking the two events? Our worlds must still be close together, there must be portals, keys, Felix must be one himself. . . ."

"No, Peter. I will never return, I feel that. My life is over." He regarded me closely, without fear, then touched Beck lightly on the arm. "And I think yours is also. The Lieutenant cannot afford to spare either of us."

He was perceptive. With the two of them out of the way, it was unlikely the Japs would ever bother me. In fact, it looked like Beck had been my main antagonist all along. I turned to him, as it suddenly dawned on me.

"You were never authorized to kill Grauber, were you? Or von Leeb? Or me? You did it all on your own, didn't you?"

Beck nodded. His sudden passion seemed to have drained away.

"Tokyo would never authorize assassination of Reich officials on Reich soil. Not even such small fry as you, Lieutenant. I issued the instructions to *Komeito* in my capacity as New York station chief and they were followed unquestioningly, just as they had been in the past.

But they were never approved by higher authority. When Tokyo learns what's happened of course, they'll try to liquidate me. Right now they can't afford any international incidents."

God, so von Leeb had been wrong. It wasn't Tokyo that was taking chances, it was Beck.

"Then you're a dead man either way, aren't you?" I asked coldly.

His voice was desperate now, the pale eyes bulging. "Not if you'll help us, Halder. Listen, we can hide Felix, somewhere in the country, they'll never find us, we'll discover the key to his world, together Halder, together. . . ."

"Together," I repeated, and shot him through the right eye. The blood squirted into the air and he fell to the carpet with a soft plop. I turned to the old Jew.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I don't know who you are or where you come from, all this stuff about other worlds is over my head. But as long as you're around I'm going to be in the eye of the storm. I could hold you for Berlin, but with von Leeb gone that would just create a thousand new problems, and the more important they think you are, the more likely it is they'd decide to shut me up permanently. Anyway, it would be no kindness to you."

"No," he said quietly, "no, it wouldn't." The blue eyes fixed on mine. "There is nothing for me here. My only moments of happiness were with a little girl who resembled my daughter, my daughter as she was many years ago. And that little girl was a whore. Yours is a world of ice and fire, Lieutenant. Perhaps Father Francis was right. Perhaps you are being judged in some way I cannot understand, perhaps your script is being rewritten. And perhaps I have some role in that. I am sorry for you all."

I shot him neatly through the forehead, and I don't think he felt any pain. When the Japs found out what Beck was up to, they'd trace him here and find them both. The case would be closed, for all concerned. I'd have some explaining to do to the Commissioner, but I still had

von Leeb's letter and that should spare me most of the flak. And I could go to sleep for once without wondering if I'd wake up in the morning. It was a pretty good feeling.

It's the day after now and I'm dictating all this on a Uher I requisitioned from Communications. I'm going to have to hand in some kind of report, but this is strictly for my own files—if and when there is an official inquiry I'm going to be prepared. But with Kohler and Beck out of the way it should be fairly easy to keep my hands clean, so long as Berlin doesn't press for a full report, and that seems pretty unlikely after this morning's headlines. Heydrich has just purged Speer and Schirach from the Council and handed the Empire a forty-eight-hour ultimatum on Siam and Indochina, which means the Contraxists are firmly in the saddle and war isn't far away. There's talk of evacuating the civilian population to the Catskills, and if that's really on, the Department will be working us to death for the next few weeks. When Nygard came in with the tape-recorder he told me all leaves had been cancelled and there was talk of fifteen-hour shifts.

I'm telling you, a cop's life is hell.

EPIGRAPH

"If the Nazis had won, of course, things on the surface would eventually have settled down to an appearance of normality. The milkman would deliver his milk in the morning, the policeman would enforce the law, the doctor would cure the sick, people would still worry about their jobs, fight with their wives, save for a new car. But they would be living in a nightmare, buried in a graveyard of human hope and dignity, trapped in a hell they would never recognize, much less question. The long dark night would have begun, and finally man would not even remember the light."

—From an interview with Albert Speer done by the author for *Playboy* magazine.

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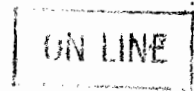
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