

# NEVER MEET AGAIN

**Algis Budrys**

**Illustration by Kandis Elliot**

The breeze sougled through the linden trees. It was warm and gentle as it drifted along the boulevard. It tugged at the dresses of the girls strolling with their young men and stirred their modishly cut hair. It set the banners atop the government buildings to flapping, and it brought with it the sound of a jet aircraft--a Heinkel or a Messerschmitt--rising into the sky from Tempelhof Aerodrome. But when it touched Professor Kempfer on his bench it brought only the scent of the Parisian perfumes and the sight of gaily colored frocks swaying around the girls' long, healthy legs.

Doctor Professor Kempfer straightened his exhausted shoulders and raised his heavy head. His deep, strained eyes struggled to break through their now habitual dull stare.

It was spring again, he realized in faint surprise. The pretty girls were eating their lunches hastily once more, so that they and their young men could stroll along Unter Den Linden, and the young men in the broad-shouldered jackets were clear-eyed and full of their own awakening strength.

And of course Professor Kempfer wore no overcoat today. He was not quite the comic pedant who wore his galoshes in the sunshine. It was only that he had forgotten, for the moment. The strain of these last few days had been very great.

All these months--these years--he had been doing his government-subsidized research and the other thing, too. Four or five hours for the government, and then a full day on the much more important thing no one knew about. Twelve, sixteen hours a day. Home to his very nice government apartment, where Frau Ritter, the housekeeper, had his supper ready. The supper eaten, to bed. And in the morning; cocoa, a bit of pastry, and to work. At noon he would leave his laboratory for a little while, to come here and eat the slice of black bread and cheese Frau Ritter had wrapped in waxed paper and put in his pocket before he left the house.

But it was over, now. Not the government sinecure--that was just made work for the old savant who, after all, held the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for his work with the anti-submarine radar detector. That, of course, had been fifteen years ago. If they could not quite pension him off, still no one expected anything of a feeble old man puttering around the apparatus they had given him to play with.

And they were right, of course. Nothing *would* ever come of it. But the other thing...

That was done, now. After this last little rest he would go back to his laboratory in the Himmlerstrasse and take the final step. So now he could let himself relax and feel the warmth of the sun.

Professor Kempfer smiled wearily at the sunshine. The good, constant sun, he thought, that gives of itself to all of us, no matter who or where we are. Spring...April, 1958.

Had it really been fifteen years--and sixteen years since the end of the war? It didn't seem possible. But then one day had been exactly like another for him, with only an electric light in the basement where his real apparatus was, an electric light that never told him whether it was morning, noon, or night.

I have become a cave-dweller! he thought with sudden realization. I have forgotten to think in terms of serial time. What an odd little trick I have played on myself!

Had he *really* been coming here, to this bench, every clear day for *fifteen* years? Impossible! But...

He counted on his fingers. 1940 was the year England had surrendered, with its air force destroyed and the Luftwaffe flying unchallenged air cover for the swift invasion. He had been sent to England late that year, to supervise the shipment home of the ultra-short-wave radar from the Royal Navy's anti-submarine warfare school. And 1941 was the year the U-boats took firm control of the Atlantic. 1942 was the year the Russians lost at Stalingrad, starved by the millions, and surrendered to a Wehrmacht fed on shiploads of Argentinian beef. 1942 was the end of the war, yes.

So it *had* been that long.

I have become an indrawn old man, he thought to himself in bemusement. So very busy with myself...and the world has gone by, even while I sat here and might have watched it, if I'd taken the trouble. The world...

He took the sandwich from his coat pocket, unwrapped it, and began to eat. But after the first few bites he forgot it, and held it in one hand while he stared sightlessly in front of him.

His pale, mobile lips fell into a wry smile. The world--the vigorous young world, so full of strength, so confident...while I worked in my cellar like some Bolshevik dreaming of a fantastic bomb that would wipe out all my enemies at a stroke.

But what I have is not a bomb, and I have no enemies. I am an honored citizen of the greatest empire the world has ever known. Hitler is thirteen years dead in his auto accident, and the new chancellor is a different sort of man. He has promised us no war with the Americans. We have peace, and triumph, and these create a different sort of atmosphere than do war and desperation. We have relaxed, now. We have the fruits of our victory--what do we not have, in our empire of a thousand years? Western civilization is safe at last from the hordes of the East. Our future is assured. There is nothing, no one to fight, and these young people walking here have never known a moment's doubt, an instant's question of their place in an endlessly bright tomorrow. I will soon die, and the rest of us who knew the old days will die soon enough. It will all belong to the young people--all this eternal world. It belongs to them already. It is just that some of us old ones have not yet gotten altogether out of the way.

He stared out at the strolling crowds. How many years can I possibly have left to me? Three? Two? Four? I could die tomorrow.

He sat absolutely still for a moment, listening to the thick old blood slurring through his veins, to the thready flutter of his heart. It hurt his eyes to see. It hurt his throat to breathe. The skin of his hands was like spotted old paper.

Fifteen years of work. Fifteen years in his cellar, building what he had built--for what? Was his apparatus going to change anything? Would it detract even one trifle from this empire? Would it alter the life of even one citizen in that golden tomorrow?

This world would go on exactly as it was. Nothing would change in the least. So, what had he worked for? For himself? For this outworn husk of one man?

Seen in that light, he looked like a very stupid man. Stupid, foolish--monomaniacal.

Dear God, he thought with a rush of terrible intensity, am I now going to persuade myself not to use what I have built?

For all these years he had worked, worked--without stopping, without thinking. Now, in this first hour of rest, was he suddenly going to spit on it all?

A stout bulk settled on the bench beside him. "Jochim," the complacent voice said.

Professor Kempfer looked up. "Ah, Georg!" he said with an embarrassed laugh, "You startled me."

Doctor Professor Georg Tanzler guffawed heartily. "Oh, Jochim, Jochim!" he chuckled, shaking his head. "What a type you are! A thousand times I've found you here at noon, and each time it seems as if it surprises you. What do you think about, here on your bench?"

Professor Kempfer let his eyes stray. "Oh, I don't know," he said gently. "I look at the young people."

"The girls--" Tanzler's elbow dug roguishly into his side. "The girls, eh, Jochim?"

A veil drew over Professor Kempfer's eyes. "No," he whispered. "Not like that. No."

"What, then?"

"Nothing," Professor Kempfer said dully. "I look at nothing."

Tanzler's mood changed instantly. "So," he declared with precision. "I thought as much. Everyone knows you are working night and day, even though there is no need for it." Tanzler resurrected a chuckle. "We are not in any great hurry now. It's not as if we were pressed by anyone. The Australians and Canadians are fenced off by our navy. The Americans have their hands full in Asia. And your project, whatever it may be, will help no one if you kill yourself with overwork."

"You know there is no project," Professor Kempfer whispered. "You know it is all just busy work. No one reads my reports. No one checks my results. They give me the equipment I ask for, and do not mind, as long as it is not too much. You know that quite well. Why pretend otherwise?"

Tanzler sucked his lips. Then he shrugged. "Well, if you realize, then you realize," he said cheerfully. Then he changed expression again, and laid his hand on Professor Kempfer's arm in comradely fashion. "Jochim. It has been fifteen years. Must you still try to bury yourself?"

Sixteen, Professor Kempfer corrected, and then realized Tanzler was not thinking of the end

of the war. Sixteen years: since then, yes, but fifteen since Marthe died. Only fifteen?

I *must* learn to think in terms of serial time again. He realized Tanzler was waiting for a response, and mustered a shrug.

"Jochim! Have you been listening to me?"

"Listening? Of course, Georg."

"Of course!" Tanzler snorted, his moustaches fluttering. "Jochim," he said positively, "it is not as if we were young men, I admit. But life goes on, even for us old crocks." Tanzler was a good five years Kempfer's junior. "We must look ahead--we must live for a future. We cannot let ourselves sink into the past. I realize you were very fond of Marthe. Every man is fond of his wife--that goes without saying. But fifteen years, Jochim! Surely, it is proper to grieve. But to *mourn*, like this--this is not *healthy!*"

One bright spark singed through the quiet barriers Professor Kempfer had thought perfect. "Were you ever in a camp, Georg?" he demanded, shaking with pent-up violence.

"A camp?" Tanzler was taken aback. "I? Of course not, Jochim! But--but you and Marthe were not in a real lager--it was just a...a...Well, you were under the State's protection! After all, Jochim!"

Professor Kempfer said stubbornly: "But Marthe died. Under the State's protection."

"These things *happen*, Jochim! After all, you're a reasonable man--Marthe--tuberculosis--even sulfa has its limitations--that might have happened to *anyone!*"

"She did not have tuberculosis in 1939, when we were placed under the State's protection. And when I finally said yes, I would go to work for them, and they gave me the radar detector to work on, they promised me it was only a little congestion in her bronchiae and that as soon as she was well they would bring her home. And the war ended, and they did *not* bring her home. I was given the Knight's Cross from Hitler's hands, personally, but they did not bring her home. And the last time I went to the sanitarium to see her, she was dead. And they paid for it all, and gave me my laboratory here, and an apartment, and clothes, and food, and a very good housekeeper, but Marthe was *dead.*"

"Fifteen *years*, Jochim! Have you not forgiven us?"

"No. For a little while today--just a little while ago--I thought I might. But--no."

Tanzler puffed out his lips and fluttered them with an exhaled breath. "So," he said. "What are you going to do to us for it?"

Professor Kempfer shook his head. "To you? What should I do to you? The men who arranged these things are all dead, or dying. If I had some means of hurting the Reich--and I do not--how could I revenge myself on these children?" He looked toward the passersby. "What am I to them, or they to me? No--no, I am going to do nothing to you."

Tanzler raised his eyebrows and put his thick fingertips together. "If you are going to do nothing to us, then what are you going to do to yourself?"

"I am going to go away." Already, Professor Kempfer was ashamed of his outburst. He felt he had controverted his essential character. A man of science, after all--a thinking, *reasoning* man--could not let himself descend to emotional levels. Professor Kempfer was embarrassed to think that Tanzler might believe this sort of lapse was typical of him.

"Who am I," he tried to explain, "to be judge and jury over a whole nation--an empire? Who is one man, to decide good and evil? I look at these youngsters, and I envy them with all my heart. To be young; to find all the world arranged in orderly fashion for one's special benefit; to have been placed on a surfboard, free to ride the crest of the wave forever, and never to have to swim at all! Who am I, Georg? Who am I?"

"But I do not like it here. So I am going away."

Tanzler looked at him enigmatically. "To Carlsbad. For the radium waters. Very healthful. We'll go together." He began pawing Professor Kempfer's arm with great heartiness. "A splendid idea! I'll get the seats reserved on the morning train. We'll have a holiday, eh, Jochim?"

"No!" He struggled to his feet, pulling Tanzler's hand away from his arm. "*No!*" He staggered when Tanzler gave way. He began to walk fast, faster than he had walked in years. He looked over his shoulder, and saw Tanzler lumbering after him.

He began to run. He raised an arm. "Taxi! Taxi!" He lurched toward the curb, while the strolling young people looked at him wide-eyed.

He hurried through the ground floor laboratory, his heart pumping wildly. His eyes were fixed on the plain gray door to the fire stairs, and he fumbled in his trousers pocket for the key. He stumbled against a bench and sent apparatus crashing over. At the door, he steadied himself and, using both hands, slipped the key into the lock. Once through the door, he slammed it shut and locked it again, and listened to the hoarse whistle of his breath in his nostrils.

Then, down the fire stairs he clattered, open-mouthed. Tanzler. Tanzler would be at a telephone, somewhere. Perhaps the State Police were out in the streets, in their cars, coming here, already.

He wrenched open the basement door, and locked it behind him in the darkness before he turned on the lights. With his chest aching, he braced himself on widespread feet and looked at the dull sheen of yellow light on the racks of gray metal cabinets. They rose about him like the blocks of a Mayan temple, with dials for carvings and pilot lights for jewels, and he moved down the narrow aisle between them, slowly and quietly now, like a last, enfeebled acolyte. As he walked he threw switches, and the cabinets began to resonate in chorus.

The aisle led him, irrevocably, to the focal point. He read what the dials on the master panel told him, and watched the power demand meter inch into the green.

If they think to open the building circuit breakers!

If they shoot through the door!

*If I was wrong!*

Now there were people hammering on the door. Desperately weary, he depressed the firing switch.

There was a galvanic thrum, half pain, half pleasure, as the vibratory rate of his body's atoms was changed by an infinitesimal degree. Then he stood in dank darkness, breathing musty air, while whatever parts of his equipment had been included in the field fell to the floor.

Behind him, he left nothing. Vital resistors had, by design, come with him. The overloaded apparatus in the basement laboratory began to stench and burn under the surge of full power, and to sputter in Georg Tanzler's face.

The basement he was in was not identical with the one he had left. That could only mean that in this Berlin, something serious had happened to at least one building on the Himmlerstrasse. Professor Kempfer searched through the darkness with weary patience until he found a door, and while he searched he considered the thought that some upheaval, manmade or natural, had filled in the ground for dozens of meters above his head, leaving only this one pocket of emptiness into which his apparatus had shunted him.

When he finally found the door he leaned against it for some time, and then he gently eased it open. There was nothing but blackness on the other side, and at his first step he tripped and sprawled on a narrow flight of stairs, bruising a hip badly. He found his footing again. On quivering legs he climbed slowly and as silently as he could, clinging to the harsh, newly sawed wood of the banister. He could not seem to catch his breath. He had to gulp for air, and the darkness was shot through with red swirlings.

He reached the top of the stairs, and another door. There was harsh gray light seeping around it, and he listened intently, allowing for the quick suck and thud of the pulse in his ears. When he heard nothing for a long time, he opened it. He was at the end of a long corridor lined with doors, and at the end there was another door opening on the street.

Eager to get out of the building, and yet reluctant to leave as much as he knew of this world, he moved down the corridor with exaggerated caution.

It was a shoddy building. The paint on the walls was cheap, and the linoleum on the floor was scuffed and warped. There were cracks in the plastering. Everything was rough--half finished, with paint slapped over it, everything drab. There were numbers on the doors, and dirty rope mats in front of them. It was an apartment house, then--but from the way the doors were jammed almost against each other, the apartments had to be no more than cubicles.

Dreary, he thought. Dreary, dreary--who would live in such a place? Who would put up an apartment house for people of mediocre means in this neighborhood?

But when he reached the street, he saw that it was humpy and cobblestoned, the cobbling badly patched, and that all the buildings were like this one--gray-faced, hulking, ugly. There was not a building he recognized--not a stick or stone of the Himmlerstrasse with its fresh cement roadway and its sapling trees growing along the sidewalk. And yet he knew he must be on the exact spot where the Himmlerstrasse had been--was--and he could not quite understand.

He began to walk in the direction of Unter Den Linden. He was far from sure he could reach it on foot, in his condition, but he would pass through the most familiar parts of the city, and could perhaps get some inkling of what had happened.

He had suspected that the probability world his apparatus could most easily adjust him for would be one in which Germany had lost the war. That was a large, dramatic difference, and though he had refined his work as well as he could, any first model of any equipment was bound to be relatively insensitive.

But as he walked along, he found himself chilled and repelled by what he saw.

Nothing was the same. Nothing. Even the layout of the streets had changed a little. There were new buildings every where--new buildings of a style and workmanship that had made them old in atmosphere the day they were completed. It was the kind of total reconstruction that he had no doubt the builders stubbornly proclaimed was "Good as New," because to say it was as good as the old Berlin would have been to invite bitter smiles.

The people in the streets were grim, gray-faced, and shoddy. They stared blankly at him and his suit, and once a dumpy woman carrying a string bag full of lumpy packages turned to her similar companion and muttered as he passed that he looked like an American with his extravagant clothes.

The phrase frightened him. What kind of war had it been, that there would still be Americans to be hated in Berlin in 1958? How long could it possibly have lasted, to account for so many old buildings gone? What had pounded Germany so cruelly? And yet even the "new" buildings were genuinely some years old. Why an American? Why not an Englishman or Frenchman?

He walked the gray streets, looking with a numb sense of settling shock at this grim Berlin. He saw men in shapeless uniform caps, brown trousers, cheap boots and sleazy blue shirts. They wore armbands with *Volkspolizei* printed on them. Some of them had not bothered to shave this morning or to dress in fresh uniforms. The civilians looked at them sidelong and then pretended not to have seen them. For an undefinable but well-remembered reason, Professor Kempfer slipped by them as inconspicuously as possible.

He grappled at what he saw with the dulled resources of his overtired intellect, but there was no point of reference with which to begin. He even wondered if perhaps the war was somehow still being fought, with unimaginable alliances and unthinkable antagonists, with all resources thrown into a brutal, dogged struggle from which all hope of both defeat and victory were gone, and only endless straining effort loomed up from the future.

Then he turned the corner and saw the stubby military car, and soldiers in baggy uniforms with red stars on their caps. They were parked under a weatherbeaten sign which read, in German above a few lines in unreadable Cyrillic characters: *Attention! You Are Leaving the U.S.S.R. Zone of Occupation. You Are Entering the American Zone of Occupation. Show Your Papers.*

God in heaven! he thought, recoiling. The Bolsheviks. And he was on their side of the line. He turned abruptly, but did not move for an instant. The skin of his face felt tight. Then he broke into a stumbling walk, back the way he had come.

He had not come into this world blindly. He had not dared bring any goods from his apartment, of course. Not with Frau Ritter to observe him. Nor had he expected that his Reichsmarks would be of any use. He had provided for this by wearing two diamond-set rings. He had expected to have to walk down to the jewelry district before he could begin to settle into this world, but he had expected no further difficulty.

He had expected Germany to have lost the war. Germany had lost another war within his lifetime, and fifteen years later it would have taken intense study for a man in his present position to detect it.

Professor Kempfer had thought it out, slowly, systematically. He had not thought that a Soviet checkpoint might lie between him and the jewelry district.

It was growing cold, as the afternoon settled down. It had not been as warm a day to begin with, he suspected, as it had been in his Berlin. He wondered how it might be, that Germany's losing a war could change the weather, but the important thing was that he was shivering. He was beginning to attract attention not only for his suit but for his lack of a coat.

He had now no place to go, no place to stay the night, no way of getting food. He had no papers, and no knowledge of where to get them or what sort of maneuver would be required to keep him safe from arrest. If anything could save him from arrest. By Russians.

Professor Kempfer began to walk with dragging steps, his body sagging and numb. More and more of the passersby were looking at him sharply. They might well have an instinct for a hunted man. He did not dare look at the occasional policeman.

He was an old man. He had run today, and shaken with nervous anticipation, and finished fifteen years' work, and it had all been a nightmarish error. He felt his heart begin to beat unnaturally in his ears, and he felt a leaping flutter begin in his chest. He stopped, and swayed, and then he forced himself to cross the sidewalk so he could lean against a building. He braced his back and bent his knees a little, and let his hands dangle at his sides.

The thought came to him that there was an escape for him into one more world. His shoulder-blades scraped a few centimeters downward against the wall.

There were people watching him. They ringed him in at a distance of about two meters, looking at him with almost childish curiosity. But there was something about them that made Professor Kempfer wonder at the conditions that could produce such children. As he looked back at them, he thought that perhaps they all wanted to help him--that would account for their not going on about their business. But they did not know what sort of complications their help might bring to them--except that there would certainly be complications. So none of them approached him. They gathered around him, watching, in a crowd that would momentarily attract a *volkspolizier*.

He looked at them dumbly, breathing as well as he could, his palms flat against the wall. There were stocky old women, round-shouldered men, younger men with pinched faces, and young girls with an incalculable wisdom in their eyes. And there was a bird-like older woman, coming quickly along the sidewalk, glancing at him curiously, then hurrying by, skirting around the crowd....

There was one possibility of his escape to this world that Professor Kempfer had not allowed himself to consider. He pushed himself away from the wall, scattering the crowd as though by physical force, and lurched toward the passing woman.

"*Marthe!*"

She whirled, her purse flying to the ground. Her hand went to her mouth. She whispered,

through her knuckles: "Jochim...Jochim..." He clutched her, and they supported each other. "Jochim...the American bombers killed you in Hamburg...yesterday I sent money to put flowers on your grave...Jochim..."

"It was a mistake. It was all a mistake. Marthe...we have found each other..."

From a distance, she had not changed very much at all. Watching her move about the room as he lay, warm and clean, terribly tired, in her bed, he thought to himself that she had not aged half as much as he. But when she bent over him with the cup of hot soup in her hand, he saw the sharp lines in her face, around her eyes and mouth, and when she spoke he heard the dry note in her voice.

How many years? he thought. How many years of loneliness and grief? *When* had the Americans bombed Hamburg? How? What kind of aircraft could bomb Germany from bases in the Western Hemisphere?

They had so much to explain to each other. As she worked to make him comfortable, the questions flew between them.

"It was something I stumbled on. The theory of probability worlds--of alternate universes. Assuming that the characteristic would be a difference in atomic vibration--minute, you understand; almost infinitely minute--assuming that somewhere in the gross universe every possible variation of every event *must* take place--then if some means could be found to alter the vibratory rate within a field, then any object in that field would automatically become part of the universe corresponding to that vibratory rate....

"Marthe, I can bore you later. Tell me about *Hamburg*. Tell me how we lost the war. Tell me about Berlin."

He listened while she told him how their enemies had ringed them in--how the great white wastes of Russia had swallowed their men, and the British fire bombers had murdered children in the night. How the Wehrmacht fought, and fought, and smashed their enemies back time after time, until all the best soldiers were dead. And how the Americans with their dollars, had poured out countless tons of equipment to make up for their inability to fight. How, at the last, the vulture fleets of bombers had rumbled inexhaustibly across the sky, killing, killing, killing, until all the German homes and German families had been destroyed. And how now the Americans, with their hellish bomb that had killed a hundred thousand Japanese civilians, now bestrode the world and tried to bully it, with their bombs and their dollars, into final submission.

How? Professor Kempfer thought. How could such a thing have happened?

Slowly, he pieced it together, mortified to find himself annoyed when Marthe interrupted with constant questions about his Berlin and especially about his equipment.

And, pieced together, it still refused to seem logical.

How could anyone believe that Goering, in the face of all good sense, would turn the Luftwaffe from destroying the R.A.F. bases to a ridiculous attack on English cities? How could anyone believe that German electronics scientists could persistently refuse to believe ultra-shortwave radar was practical--refuse to believe it even when the Allied hunter planes

were finding surfaced submarines at night with terrible accuracy?

What kind of nightmare world was this, with Germany divided and the Russians in control of Europe, in control of Asia, reaching for the Middle East that no Russian, not even the dreaming czars, had seriously expected ever to attain?

"Marthe--we must get out of this place. We must. I will have to rebuild my machine." It would be incredibly difficult. Working clandestinely as he must, scraping components together--even now that the work had been done once, it would take several years.

Professor Kempfer looked inside himself to find the strength he would need. And it was not there. It simply was gone, used up, burnt out, eaten out.

"Marthe, you will have to help me. I must take some of your strength. I will need so many things--identity papers, some kind of work so we can eat, money to buy equipment..." His voice trailed away. It was so much, and there was so little time left for him. Yet, somehow, they must do it.

A hopelessness, a feeling of inevitable defeat, came over him. It was this world. It was poisoning him.

Marthe's hand touched his brow. "Hush, Jochim. Go to sleep. Don't worry. Everything is all right, now. My poor Jochim, how terrible you look! But everything will be all right. I must go back to work, now. I am hours late already. I will come back as soon as I can. Go to sleep, Jochim."

He let his breath out in a long, tired sigh. He reached up and touched her hand. "Marthe..."

He awoke to Marthe's soft urging. Before he opened his eyes he had taken her hand from his shoulder and clasped it tightly. Marthe let the contact linger for a moment, then broke it gently.

"Jochim--my superior at the Ministry is here to see you."

He opened his eyes and sat up. "Who?"

"Colonel Lubintsev, from the People's Government Ministerium, where I work. He would like to speak to you." She touched him reassuringly. "Don't worry. It's all right. I spoke to him--I explained. He's not here to arrest you. He's waiting in the other room."

He looked at Marthe dumbly. "I--I must get dressed," he managed to say after a while.

"No--no, he wants you to stay in" "No--no, he wants you to stay in bed. He knows you're exhausted. He asked me to assure you it would be all right. "Rest in bed. I'll get him."

Professor Kempfer sank back. He looked unseeingly up at the ceiling until he heard the sound of a chair being drawn up beside him, and then he slowly turned his head.

Colonel Lubintsev was a stocky, ruddy-faced man with gray bristles on his scalp. He had an astonishingly boyish smile. "Doctor Professor Kempfer, I am honored to meet you," he said. "Lubintsev, Colonel, assigned as advisor to the People's Government Ministerium." He extended his hand gravely, and Professor Kempfer shook it with a conscious effort.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance," Professor Kempfer mumbled.

"Not at all, Doctor Professor. Not at all. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Please." He watched the colonel touch a lighter to a long cigarette while Marthe quickly found a saucer for an ashtray. The colonel nodded his thanks to Marthe, puffed on the cigarette, and addressed himself to Professor Kempfer while Marthe sat down on a chair against the far wall.

"I have inspected your dossier," Colonel Lubintsev said. "That is," with a smile, "our dossier on your late counterpart. I see you fit the photographs as well as could be expected. We will have to make a further identification, of course, but I rather think that will be a formality." He smiled again. "I am fully prepared to accept your story. It is too fantastic not to be true. Of course, sometimes foreign agents choose their cover stories with that idea in mind, but not in this case, I think. If what has happened to you could happen to any man, our dossier indicates Jochim Kempfer might well be that man." Again, the smile. "In any counterpart."

"You have a dossier," Professor Kempfer said.

Colonel Lubintsev's eyebrows went up in a pleased grin. "Oh, yes. When we liberated your nation, we knew exactly what scientists were deserving of our assistance in their work, and where to find them. We had laboratories, project agendas, living quarters--everything!--all ready for them. But I must admit, we did not think we would ever be able to accommodate you."

"But now you can."

"Yes!" Once more, Colonel Lubintsev smiled like a little boy with great fun in store. "The possibilities of your device are as infinite as the universe! Think of the enormous help to the people of your nation, for example, if they could draw on machine tools and equipment from such alternate places as the one you have just left." Colonel Lubintsev waved his cigarette. "Or if, when the Americans attack us, we can transport bombs from a world where the revolution is an accomplished fact, and have them appear in North America in this."

Professor Kempfer sat up in bed. "Marthe! Marthe, why have you done this to me?"

"Hush, Jochim," she said. "Please. Don't tire yourself. I have done nothing to you. You will have care, now. We will be able to live together in a nice villa, and you will be able to work, and we will be together."

"Marthe--"

She shook her head, her lips pursed primly. "Please, Jochim. Times have changed a great deal, here. I explained to the Colonel that your head was probably still full of the old Nazi propaganda. He understands. You will learn to see it for what it was. And you will help put the Americans back in their place." Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "All the years I went to visit your grave as often as I could. All the years I paid for flowers, and all the nights I cried for you."

"But I am *here*, Marthe! I am here! I am not dead."

"Jochim, Jochim," she said gently. "Am I to have had all my grief for nothing?"

"I have brought a technical expert with me," Colonel Lubintsev went on as though nothing had happened. "If you will tell him what facilities you will need, we can begin preliminary work immediately." He rose to his feet. "I will send him in. I myself must be going." He put out his cigarette, and extended his hand. "I have been honored, Doctor Professor Kempfer."

"Yes," Professor Kempfer whispered. "Yes. Honored." He raised his hand, pushed it toward the colonel's, but could not hold it up long enough to reach. It fell back to the coverlet, woodenly, and Professor Kempfer could not find the strength to move it. "Goodbye."

He heard the colonel walk out with a few murmured words for Marthe. He was quite tired, and he heard only a sort of hum.

He turned his head when the technical expert came in. The man was all eagerness, all enthusiasm:

"Jochim! This is amazing! Perhaps I should introduce myself--I worked with your counterpart during the war--we were quite good friends--I am Georg Tanzler. Jochim! How *are* you!"

Professor Kempfer looked up. He saw through a deep, tightening fog, and he heard his heart preparing to stop. His lips twisted. "I think I am going away again, Georg," he whispered.

***Story copyright © 1957 Royal Pub. Inc.  
Art copyright © 1998 Kandis Elliot***

TomorrowSF Vol. 10.3 August 26,1998