

IX

Marta and Madison spent the next forty-eight hours in the Heiligenstadt district, hoping to reduce their chances of being recognized. At the appointed time on Wednesday morning, they drove to the Art History Museum and found the room with the Brueghel series. Not the miniatures to which Madison was accustomed, these were large allegorical paintings, including one that depicted the Tower of Babel.

Egon arrived twenty minutes late, looking like one of Brueghel's peasant caricatures with his bushy hair and wild eyes. He made no effort to conceal himself or his intentions. "You are ready to leave?" he said, in high-pitched English. "We will need your truck and passports."

"Where are we going?" Madison asked, *sotto voce*. There were no other visitors in sight, but he had learned to be careful.

"You want to dispense with me?" Egon squeaked. "Forget it. We're going a pretty long way, and I'll guide you there by memory. You'll know when you arrive. Now, let's move."

They left Vienna through its southern suburbs. Marta drove, with Egon sandwiched in the middle of the cab. Madison noticed his sour odor, even over the truck's smell of gasoline, paint, and moldy rubber. After an hour or so, they reached Graz, Austria's second city, which was dominated by the foursquare fortress of Schloss Eggenberg. They wound through Graz' busy lunchtime streets and then back into the hilly countryside. After another fifty kilometers on narrow roads, they reached the Yugoslav border.

They had no visas, and their documents indicated that they were, respectively, a Turkish woman, a South African Major, and a Viennese of eccentric appearance. They thus made an odd sight at an international checkpoint. But Marta climbed down from the truck and talked quietly to the border guard. When she returned, their passports were stamped.

"What did you tell him?" Madison asked.

"Oh, I dropped some names. People in Yugoslav politics."

"Well done."

The Slovenian landscape was as hilly as the Austrian. They crossed the river Sava, which flowed toward Zagreb, and then left the main highway for unpaved roads that wound over the Dinaric

Alps. When their front tire blew out near the provincial border of Croatia, they had to wait two hours for assistance. They reached Croatia by five o'clock, and dined at a roadside restaurant ten kilometers inland from the Adriatic port of Rijeka.

They didn't travel much further, but the going was slow after dark. At each intersection, they took the smaller road, heading deep into a forest. Only their headlights broke the unremitting gloom, although they occasionally reflected glittering eyes: owls, foxes, and possibly boar. The truck jolted and shook over potholes and fallen limbs. They saw no other vehicles or buildings, and Madison fervently hoped that they would avoid another breakdown.

The road ended abruptly. Egon said, "From here, we walk."

"Where is this?" Madison asked.

"It's an ancient hunting preserve, used for centuries by the Austrian nobility. The locals call it Gorski Kotar."

Signs in Serbo-Croatian presumably warned them that the land was private. Oblivious, they followed a barely discernible path into the wood. Sections of the forest floor lay beneath shallow, algae-covered water, which reflected Egon's flashlight beam. Huge, mossy logs and bushes formed an intricate pattern, through which saplings thrust upward. Above, black limbs reached across the starry sky, clustered so thickly that they blocked almost all of the light. An owl's wings beat past, and leaves rustled constantly in the chilly breeze.

They walked for thirty minutes or longer, gradually ascending as marshland gave way to soft mulch. In the distance, they heard flowing water, and soon they saw a stream. The terrain now sloped steeply upward on either side; they were in a kind of canyon. Pointing to the stream, Egon said, "The Jasla."

As the canyon narrowed, there was hardly any room on the Jasla's bank. The rushing water was surprisingly loud in the echoing glen. Egon led the way up some mossy stone steps, and then pointed toward a series of wooden bridges that followed the course of the stream, zigzagging from bank to bank. On closer inspection, Madison could see that these had been hung from rock outcroppings or tall trees.

Above the roar of the water, Egon shouted, "Vrazji Prolaz. That means 'evil cross' in Croatian. We built these bridges to make

the journey easier. Before, you had to wade.”

They walked in single file: Egon, then Madison, then Marta. The bridges swayed under their combined weight. Spray from the Jasla made the air cold and damp. Holding a handrail, Madison pulled his collar tight.

The bridges continued into the distance, but Egon led them up a defile to one side of the stream. They scrambled over wet boulders, climbing perhaps 100 feet. Then the terrain flattened into a small plateau. Before them stood a dead oak, contorted and sinister, and a gothic archway. A half moon was swallowed by scuttling clouds, and then reemerged to shine its light on the outline of a ruined building. The cut stones were pure silhouettes, as black as ink.

Egon crossed himself before he passed through the archway. Madison looked above to where its slender columns met: a rose had been carved in the center of a Greek cross. He noticed, too, that the ruined walls formed a cruciform pattern, and in the middle was a raised altar. Although moss had covered it, he could decode a few Latin letters on the sides. On the top, another rose had been depicted in bas-relief. Madison saw the remains of stone chairs arrayed around him -- seven on each side -- and he shuddered briefly as he pictured hooded monks seated there. The image was uncannily vivid, as if their presence lingered.

Egon had reached the ruin's corner, where a bastion still stood one story high. A large stone tablet lay to the side, inscribed with a long list of names. Egon had reached a small wooden door that was studded with ancient ironwork. He inserted a key and admitted them to a spiral staircase. Looking up, Madison saw the moon beyond one turn of the stairs. The spiral also wound downward into the earth.

Egon led the way with his flashlight. One story down, the stairs ended at a corridor, which seemed to head back under the ruin.

“Christian Rosenkreutz, preserve our souls.” Madison started at Egon's voice, which sounded deep and hollow. Egon had paused before opening another door. He switched off his flashlight, and Madison could see a faint blue glow before him. Egon crossed himself again, kneeled, and muttered some words in Latin. Then he led the way into a large covered vault.

Over their heads and beneath their feet, phosphorescent triangles glowed. Their pale light revealed an intricate pattern of marble panels and mosaic -- here inscribed in Latin, there carved with elaborate charts from kabbalah. The vault had seven sides, which met at a pointed apex. Directly below was a brass-covered altar. Madison approached it and read, "A.C.R.C. *Hoc universi compendium unius mili sepulchrum feci.*" He translated: "Christian Rosy Cross. During my life, I made this compendium of the universe to be my tomb." Each side of the grave bore a different motto, circumscribed around an allegorical figure. "*Nequaquam vacuum,*" Madison read: "Nowhere is a vacuum." Then, "*Legis Jugum,* the yoke of the law; *Libertas Evangelii,* the freedom of the gospel; and *Dei gloria intacta,* the glory of God Entire."

Egon shouted, "Blasphemers, they have stolen the *Vocabularium* of Theophrastus Paracelsus of Hohenheim!"

"Paracelsus, eh? You used to own his *Vocabulary*?" Madison looked up to see Egon prancing around.

"Yes, and the book called *T*, our *Thesaurus occultus.*"

"I bet that was quite something."

"It was our treasure."

Meanwhile, Marta had been looking inside the stone portals at the bottom of each wall. She said, "Maybe they've taken some items away, but they've also added something. Look at these."

She pointed at some large steel canisters, marked O₂, SO₂, N₂O, and so on. Behind the same door, Marta had also found a modern laboratory table, complete with bunsen burners, test tubes, and flasks.

"I told you they couldn't steal our chemical samples," said Egon.

"Show me, then," Marta said.

Egon pointed into the narrow chamber above Marta's head. A complex lattice of cast iron had been built against each of its walls: a pattern of straight lines connecting nodes. In places, concentric circles and other flat shapes had been welded onto the lattice. Madison said, "This chart is based on the *sephiroth* of kabbala, but there are also neoplatonic, alchemical, and Christian elements. Look, there's a Greek cross; and that's a rose. Here, if I'm not imagining things, is a human form with a sun for its head. And that's the solar system, I believe."

At each node in the pattern, there was a small iron box. Several of these had been ripped off the wall and opened on the lab table. They contained powders, crystals, or vials of dark liquid. Madison pocketed one for a souvenir.

"Someone's been doing some basic chemical analysis," Marta said.

"Can you figure out what they've learned?"

"I don't know. There's some kind of log book, but it's very cryptic." She held up a modern album, in which numbers, letters, and diagrams had been entered in pen.

"See what you can figure out," said Madison.

Egon was anxiously circling the central tomb. "I'll go upstairs and keep guard," he said. "I don't know how often they come here, but dawn is near. They'll kill us if they find us."

"All right," said Marta. "If you see anyone, shout and we'll slip away."

"Don't hurt our samples," Egon said, leaving.

Marta lit the bunsen burner and examined some modern flasks on the table. "The standard acids and bases," she said. "Good. Now, let me see if I can figure out what this powder is; then I'll try to find a corresponding entry in their log."

As she poured a chemical into a narrow tube, she asked, "What are you looking at?"

"Many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore." Among other works, Madison had found a vellum-bound copy of the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, a book that the Germans had probably left behind because it was neither rare nor valuable. He began to read, hoping to find helpful information. Meanwhile, Marta dissolved a powder in water and added chemicals to it. She started over with a fresh solution, and then showed Madison blue crystals that had formed at the bottom of the test tube. "This could be copper hydroxide," she said. "That would make the original substance a copper salt. I dissolved it in an alkaline solution and this is what precipitated."

A voice behind them said, "Precisely. You have made $\text{Cu}(\text{OH})_2$."

It was the Comte de Saint-Germain. He was surrounded by men in high boots, baggy trousers, and leather coats: SS Regiment 89 from Vienna. The Count wore a cowl that gave him a vaguely

clerical look, in contrast to the generic military costumes of his companions. They all carried submachine guns, which they had leveled at Marta and Madison. Behind them, hopping from one foot to the other, was Egon.

Marta raised her hands above her head, and Madison copied her. They were quickly surrounded by men who frisked them until they had found Marta's revolver. The Count's voice echoed in the vault as he spoke. "Isn't this place magnificent?" he said. "I wasn't able to visit it at all between the years sixteen ninety-four and ninety thirty-five. You are lucky to behold it once before you die. It is indeed a compendium of the universe."

"Are you planning to kill us?" Marta asked, calmly enough.

"You're lucky to die where Christian Rosenkreutz finally laid his bones. Of course, *your* bodies will be tossed in the Jasla."

"Before you do anything rash," Marta said, "we may be able to negotiate something. We have documents that you would love to see."

"You mean those silly poles with runes copied from my negatives? Fool, I have the originals."

Two of the Count's men carried a lit charcoal brazier into the vault. Three more brought a wooden frame made of solid pine beams. They placed their equipment near the altar and stoked the fire.

Madison said, "But you don't have the manuscript that the Baal Shem Tov hid at Okopy."

"Neither do you," said the Count. "You sent it to Jerusalem, where my men collected it."

"How is that possible?" The question had come involuntarily to Madison's lips.

"I had a little chat with your friend, Dr. Halberstam. We were watching him, of course, and so we were delighted when you appeared at his house."

"He didn't tell you anything voluntarily," Madison said.

"Of course not. It's a shame you didn't read the Czech papers the other day: there was a most intriguing story on the front page: 'Rabbi Discovered Bound Over Coals, Chest Burned Through. Police Have No Suspects.'"

Egon squealed, "Is that what you're going to do to them? Burn their chests out?"

"To them?" said the Count. "Yes, to them and you as well. Seize him."

Egon's hands were bound behind him. Amid loud wailing, he cried, "How can you do this? We agreed: one thousand schillings for the American, twenty-five hundred for the Communist spy."

"You betrayed your friends, and now I betray you. *C'est la vie, mon petit ami*. I am more than three thousand schillings the richer for my trick. And, if I know him, Satan will be glad to chew on your broiled heart."

The Count's man laughed, the sound reverberating between the marble walls. To his surprise, Madison found himself laughing, too, although not with mirth. It must be intense fear, he thought.

Egon's captors dragged him toward the brazier, strapped his feet to the frame, and began to attach his hands. Madison now had a pounding headache. Everything seemed to move in disjointed steps, and his eyes swam. He watched as the Germans stripped Egon's shirt, revealing ribs and white skin. Two more men had seized Marta; one held her head so that she faced the brazier. The Count said, "Egon first. I hate that idiot least, so let him get his suffering over with."

Madison could hear his own breathing. He felt a strange sense of detachment, as if he were recollecting the scene before him. He even heard his own voice say: "Marta was struggling, but she couldn't escape from three men. The Count was laughing. Egon's bare legs were terribly skinny."

Wait, Madison thought, this is all happening *now*. He dragged his mind back into the present, just as Egon was dragged toward the fire. He heard himself say, "Then the Germans lowered that poor guy over the coals, and he started to scream. He looked crucified. Meanwhile, St.-Germain was doing some magical nonsense on the altar."

No, he thought, this is happening in the present. I am going to die. His head still pounded and he was completely winded -- gasping for breath, sucking oxygen into his lungs. His captors, too, were panting. Their grip on his arms slackened, but he could hardly manage to stagger away. Inside his head, he heard: "St.-Germain had passed out, I think. I was feeling pretty droopy myself. I heard the sound of screaming, but it was interspersed

with moments of silence. I was awfully dizzy.”

Madison’s consciousness closed to a point before his eyes, opened again, and then vanished altogether. The next thing he knew, there was a rhythmic roar in his ear: his own breathing, he realized. He raised his head from the floor and forced his eyes open. German soldiers lay all around him, their submachine guns at their sides. Madison’s eyes still stung and the room seemed to tilt back and forth. He crawled toward the spot where he last remembered seeing Marta.

There was an awful smell. “It was some kind of burning,” he heard himself say, switching back into a strangely detached past tense. “I realized that they must have left Egon over the fire. I tried not to look -- just kept crawling. Nobody else was moving, as far as I could see.”

Again, he forced his mind into the present. “I still haven’t found Marta,” he thought. “I wonder if she’s conscious. I know that she was somewhere near the altar. I clambered between two prostrate soldiers. A German had begun to stir to my left, but he wasn’t acting coherently -- just blinking and twitching.”

A figure in dark grey loomed before Madison. It was St.-Germain, tottering on his knees. He and Madison grappled, struggling weakly. Madison felt as if he were watching a film with a broken projector: the action stopped and started in short bursts. He noticed that the Count was laughing, and his eyelids looked very heavy. His hands were around Madison’s neck. They didn’t seem to hurt: in fact, Madison could hardly feel anything, but he sensed that strong fingers were squeezing his adam’s apple. “I think he was strangling me,” Madison’s voice said, in the tone that he would use to recount a story.

The Count tipped over to one side, shards of glass strewn over his head. Marta stood behind him, tilted strangely. “Let’s Let’s go,” she said. Madison couldn’t tell whether she had stuttered; the whole world was still moving in jerky steps. He tilted his head so that she seemed vertical, but then the floor sloped high to his left. He crawled after her, his hands wide apart for balance.

In the corridor, he found that he was giggling. “What happened in there?” he asked, clambering to his feet.

“I left the nitrous oxide on.”

“How come you weren’t affected?”

"I was, but when I woke up, I inhaled some O₂ from a canister. Look, try to run. The Germans are recovering."

As they climbed the stairs, Madison heard a steady drumming sound. More sober now, he realized that it was rain. Indeed, the pre-dawn sky was completely obscured by black torrents, and water skipped off the ground on impact. Marta took his hand and led him away from the river.

"Shouldn't we use those bridges? We could cut them down behind us."

Marta shouted, "Do you have a knife? I didn't think so. So come, we'll hide in the woods."

They slid on the muddy earth and wiped rain from their eyes. After a few steps, they were among saplings, and then the forest closed over their heads: an evergreen canopy through which water fell in drips and rivulets. Their feet seemed silent on the needle-covered floor. They looked back and saw only darkness. The terrain sloped steeply upward, turning rocky.

Madison bruised his shin when he slipped on a wet boulder. Marta had been tugging his hand, but now she stopped and panted. Just ahead was a sheer face of glistening basalt, higher than the trees. They walked beside it until they saw that it curved back toward the ruined monastery. They turned around and walked the other way, but once again the cliff seemed to hem them in.

"This is quite a formation," Madison said. "It hardly looks natural."

"I'd be more interested in the geology if I weren't afraid for my life." Marta's drenched curls hung low over her puffy face. Madison reached out to hold her, but she wanted to keep moving. "We'll have to try to climb the cliff," she said.

"Or one of these trees." Madison examined a tall pine that stood quite close to the rock. Its resinous bark was slick from the rain, but he could clutch the whole trunk between his arms and knees. In this fashion, he began to ascend. His body was tense from anxiety, for he knew that he had a poor grip on the wet bark. Twice he began to slip, but by digging his fingers into the trunk, he stopped himself. At last he reached the first branches, which made climbing easier. The higher ones reached toward the cliff like the soggy paws of Irish setters. From what he could see, the rock face was craggy at this height, and should be climbable.

He ventured a dizzy glance below, the first since he'd begun his ascent. He was about to shout for Marta, but he saw her just in time. She had her hands in the air. A single soldier with a submachine gun was leading her away.

This man's cap was almost directly beneath Madison. Despite his dizziness, he managed to reach into his jacket pocket and remove the iron box that he'd found in the Vault. He flung it at the soldier. It seemed to hang still for a moment, and the illusion made Madison's head spin; but then the German went down. Madison whispered, "Sorry."

It took Marta a moment to realize that she was no longer being followed. She bent over the soldier, then looked toward Madison.

"Can you come up here?" he called.

She started to climb, but the trunk was too wide for her to hold tightly. When she was about a man's height off the ground, she looked behind her, lost her grip, and fell. She picked herself up and brushed pine needles off her back.

"Use his scarf," Madison shouted. Seated on a branch, he mimed how to climb with a piece of cloth. Marta took the soldier's blood-stained scarf off his neck and put it around the back of the tree. Hanging from it, she climbed a few feet. When she had a firm grip, she raised the scarf and repeated the process. Madison watched nervously until she'd reached the lowest branch.

Clinging simultaneously to two shaggy limbs, he inched toward the rock face. The rain was heavy at this height, and the pine needles stabbed his hands. Sheets of water ran up his sleeves. As he moved away from the trunk, the branches sagged alarmingly. But they reached all the way to the cliff face, and he was able to lower himself onto a substantial fissure.

Marta followed him onto the cliff and then toward its summit. They found themselves on flat ground, with the curving line of the cliff behind them and streaks of light in the morning sky.

"That must be a volcanic crater," said Madison, pointing downward.

"Or else a hole made by a meteorite. A falling asteroid made a crater in Siberia that's simply vast."

"That's interesting," Madison said, "because alchemists must have prized meteorites. Where else would the Philosopher's

Stone come from, if not from the starry heavens above?"

All morning, they hiked through rugged woods. Madison felt sorry for Marta, who seemed terribly bedraggled; but he guessed that he looked about the same. She said, "I suppose this forest could go on forever."

"It's not Yellowstone," said Madison. "We'll find a road or a village soon."

In fact, it was an hour before they reached a narrow dirt road, and another forty-five minutes before they walked into the village of Crni Lug. By now, they had a plan for the immediate future. They spent the rest of the day and night recovering at an inn, and then rode a series of country busses toward Karlovac and Zagreb. The busses, old Fords, carried chickens and goats as well as peasants, and they jolted terribly over the mountain roads. Madison and Marta were very relieved to reach the comforts of the Croatian capital.

From the station hotel, Madison sent a telegram to Milan and waited for the prompt reply. Then they strolled across the street to the station.

In French, Madison said, "I'd like a compartment for two on the Orient Express. We're going to Paris."

"There's no room on tonight's Express." The ticket clerk seemed happy to impart bad news.

"I beg your pardon," said Madison. "Compartment sixteen is always kept empty for emergencies. You have received a telegram from the Line Director in Italy. He has alerted you to prepare for my arrival."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the clerk, handing Madison two tickets. "I didn't realize."

The train waited at the platform, steam billowing from its smokestack and from under the locomotive's wheels. Madison showed the porter a telegram instead of passports. "Très bien," said the porter. "Monsieur wishes to travel incognito. I had been warned that he and Madame would have no luggage."

"Merci, Michel."

"How did you arrange that?" Marta muttered, as they boarded and followed Michel down the corridor.

"My family has an interest in the company," Madison admitted.

In the Pullman car, wood panelling and brass fixtures glowed warmly beneath tasseled lamps. Compartment sixteen was richly upholstered in Art Deco patterns. A table, a bed, a desk, a bureau, and a pair of armchairs had been cunningly designed to stow away when not in use.

There was a knock on the door: Michel had brought pajamas and a nightgown, courtesy of the Line. He also carried an indigo silk dress that had been abandoned, he said, by a Russian gentlewoman on her way to London. As the train pulled out of Zagreb, Marta changed into the dress, which was too long for her but simple enough that the poor fit was hardly noticeable. Madison looked less reputable in his muddy trousers and open shirt, but he followed his companion toward the dining car. As she walked, he watched the lustrous white skin of her back and neck, framed by black ringlets and dark silk.

Their seats were overstuffed and satiny, and the elaborate table-setting gleamed. It was dark outside; only an occasional light reminded them that they were traveling across the Yugoslav countryside toward Trieste, instead of tunneling under the earth. At nearby tables, men in evening dress dined with ladies in fancy hats. There was no menu, because the chef was versatile enough to prepare almost any dish. When Marta looked dismayed by the lack of guidance, Madison ordered *cochon de lait, farci à la Trébizonde* and *ragoût de veau aux champignons*. They put their heads together and talked quietly.

At one point, Marta said, "At least we have a clear goal: to find out *where* the Germans are sending their occult material. We haven't learned that by pursuing Arab mysticism, kabbalah, or Rosicrucianism, but we may be more lucky with the Tarot. Meanwhile, I'll see if I can ask one of our moles in Paris to infiltrate the German embassy in Teheran. He may be able learn where the Nazis send their diplomatic pouches."

Madison said, "But this guy's in Paris, isn't he? How can he find out about an embassy in Asia?"

"He's a diplomat. He'll wire his colleagues in Persia and ask them for a report."

"How do you spies wire one another? I mean, can't anyone just read your telegrams?"

"We don't use Morse code, you fool. Every night, in every

embassy around the world, a radio operator climbs to the top floor and starts broadcasting coded messages through the sky. He taps them out with a little key. Of course, the enemy services can receive the same numbers. But they can't decode them -- at least, not usually. So even as we sit here, secret electrical messages are passing through our bodies, back and forth: tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, tap." She patted her spoon with a slender finger.

"It sounds almost occult, doesn't it?" said Madison.

"That's your department. In any case, I shall want to see the mole alone. I'll be the first Soviet agent to contact him since he went undercover. That's why he won't know that I'm a traitor. I'll pretend to have direct instructions from Moscow. If an American professor is with me, it may plant misgivings in his mind."

Madison chewed a bite of veal and said, "Meanwhile, I'll look up Madame Sosostris."

"Will you ask her to read your palm?" Marta took his hand and traced the lines. "What do you think she'll see?"

"I hope she'll be more serious than a palm reader."

Marta let his hand go, sighed, and said, "What's serious about the Tarot, Dr. Brown? I need a lesson."

Madison asked, "Have you ever had a reading?"

"Not that I'll admit to."

"Well, the usual theory is that your unconscious mind chooses the cards. It knows your true desires; perhaps it also knows your future. So a Tarot reading is like hypnosis -- it's a journey into the unconscious. The subliminal minds of the reader and the subject meet as he chooses the cards and she interprets them. But if Madame Sosostris believes any of that hocus-pocus, I'll be disappointed in her."

"Then what do you expect her to believe?"

"Something more like the occultists' theory. Once upon a time -- they claim -- mankind possessed true knowledge of nature. Then some kind of Fall or Expulsion from the Garden occurred, and most of this wisdom was lost. But wise men made three attempts to save some of what they knew. First, they founded secret societies. There's supposed to be a continuous tradition of these societies, passing from the gnostics and Egyptian alchemists to the Arab mystics, especially the Assassins; then by way of the Crusades to the Templars, the Rosicrucians, and the Freemasons.

All these groups teach fragmentary knowledge to their initiates.

"Meanwhile, the wise men established public rituals and sacred texts. What we call religion is the *cultus* that they created as a cloak for occult meanings. Therefore, you can learn something by studying the Christian rites of communion or Jewish prayers; also the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Revelations, and the Apocryphal Gospels, the Indians' *Rig Veda*, the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, the Masons' *Legend of Hiram*, pagan oracles, and so on. However, the ultimate truth is hidden and unitary, so it can only be perceived by synthesizing these texts.

"Finally, the wise men gave knowledge to each nationality. Wisdom was handed down from parent to child, although no one truly understood it. In the West, two nations still possess unusual amounts of occult wisdom. One is the People of the Book, the Jews, who meticulously preserve their sacred scriptures. They don't really understand the Bible, for its words have been shuffled out of order; but they keep it undamaged. According to gentile occultists, Jews possess the letter of the law, but not its spirit.

"At the opposite extreme is the other wondering nation of Europe, this one as illiterate as the Jews are bookish. I'm talking about the gypsies, who cannot read at all, although they have complete grasp of the occult *spirit*. Most of their wisdom is oral and secret, but they also have a book: the oldest in the world, some say. They brought it with them into Europe around the fourteenth century. It isn't bound; its pages aren't numbered; and it contains no words. It's the Tarot deck."

"And this is what you want to discuss with Madame Sosostris?"

"Exactly. I want to figure out how to synthesize the Tarot with the Torah -- or some such thing. Marta, tell me something."

"Yes?"

"The SS is making a list of Hitler's mortal enemies, right? Who's on the list?"

"Well, communists and other anti-fascists. There are also SS departments devoted to Jews, gypsies, freemasons, homosexuals, and the infirm."

"Leave aside the political enemies and the last two groups. All the others are supposed to possess occult knowledge."

"Apparently."

"What will the Germans do to these people, do you think?"

"I wouldn't rule out liquidation. It's an option now."

"Could the Nazis want a monopoly on occult knowledge? First, they'll collect all the data, and then they'll exterminate those who possessed it."

Marta flushed. "Don't make light of mass murder," she said. "When the Turks rounded up *my* people, they weren't thinking about Tarot cards."

"I'm just trying to explain their motives."

"Well, I can interpret Nazism perfectly clearly without recourse to that kind of mystical nonsense. Like every ruling class in the modern world, the fascists must rationalize poverty and suffering amid progress and wealth. We communists say: 'It isn't for long, the revolution's coming.' You capitalists say: 'It's healthy, because it will select the fittest.' The Church says, 'Riches shall be had in the hereafter.' And the Nazis say, 'Blame the Jews.' Hitler and his gang are exploiting the usual scapegoats in order to postpone the inevitable socialist revolution. Their motivation, of course, is economic."

"Maybe you're right," said Madison, not wanting to prolong the argument. The look on Marta's face suggested that she had not entirely convinced herself. Anger turned to puzzlement, and then a smile spread on her face.

"Back to Tarot," she said, "or something like it. I know a way to read cards and interpret your subconscious. I only need an ordinary deck. I'll ask Comrade Michel for one."

Again she led the way down the corridor, using one arm to catch herself when the train jolted. With the other hand, she held her long skirt above her ankle, and Madison noticed that her feet were bare.

She pulled down the folding bed and sat next to Madison. Michel arrived with a pack of cards, which Marta shuffled and placed between them on the bed.

When Michel was gone, she said, "Look at me and hold the cards." She placed her hands over Madison's and met his eyes. "The deck is registering your desires and mine -- or rather the union of yours and mine. It will tell us only what we want it to say."

He watched her lips as she spoke, fascinated by the motion

of her mouth. She said, "If you're comfortable, we'll begin. We will have to draw many hands to do a complete reading, and each will require five cards. Let's draw the first, but we mustn't look yet."

She removed the top card and placed it between her palm and Madison's, squeezing it gently. Then she lay it face down on the bedcover. "This," she said, "is the tempo card. It reveals how fast we want to travel. It doesn't show your choice of speed, nor mine, but the tempo that results when our minds meet. We both know where our journey will end; this shows us how fast to begin."

She turned the card over: it was the nine of clubs. "Good," she said. "It seems that we want to start a bit slowly. The king of hearts is the fastest card, *prestissimo*; the ace of spades is the slowest, *molto largo*. Clubs are the second slowest suit, so this means *adagio ma non troppo*."

She returned Madison's hand to the deck of cards. The train went clackety-clack as it sped toward Italy, and the chintz lampshade vibrated in time to the noise. "Concentrate," Marta said. "This is the dominance card. It tells us who must lead until the next draw. The cards run in order from the queen of hearts, which gives me utter control, to the king of spades, which does the same for you. Express your wishes silently as you kiss the card."

She held it between her hands so that he actually kissed her skin. "Now hold it the same way for me." After she had gently kissed his hand, she lay the card face up next to the first. "No surprise," she said, grinning. "The four of diamonds gives me a slight edge."

"As in life," said Madison.

"As in life. Now, the third card is the sign of passion. It does not measure intensity, for our passion is infinite. The question is, what form shall it take? Is it bittersweet, tender, sensual, or fervent? Those moods correspond to the suits: clubs, spades, diamonds, and hearts. Let us play the card, but first we must impart our wishes to it."

She stroked the face of the card against the skin of her neck and arms. Then Madison held it between his hands and pressed them to his lips. Thinking his wish, he lay the card on the bed.

"The jack of spades," said Marta. "That means: great tenderness. It seems that we will play *adagio ma non troppo e molto soave*, with me leading. But before we start, we must deal two more

cards. Although our minds and spirits are conversing, their medium is the body. Which part of my body will attract our attention for the time being? Draw."

Madison drew the ten of diamonds. Marta pointed to various areas of her face, counting silently. "As I expected," she said: "my lips. All the diamonds point to the head. Now I'll draw for you."

She placed the fifth card face up next to the others. "The hearts indicate your chest. So, my lips and your torso -- what a lovely combination."

She gently pushed Madison back on the bed and unbuttoned his shirt, kissing each button and the skin below. When the shirt was open, she pulled it off his shoulders and kissed him methodically and tenderly from neck to navel. In this way they played their first hand -- and then another and another -- as the coals blazed and the steam hissed, the engine strained and the wheels spun, and the cards fell to the floor like leaves.