progressions, each year on Kevin's birthday adding a new portrait on top of the one from the year before, he felt the nausea rising in his throat and took a deep breath. It's just another kind of memory, he told himself, defending her.

He, for example, still could not forget the green clock on the kitchen wall that had first reminded him his son should be home from school already. Nor could he forget the pitiless clack of the dead bolt as he had unlocked the door to see if the boy was dawdling down the sidewalk. And he would always remember stepping onto the front porch and catching, just at the periphery of his vision, the first glimpse of the pulsing red light, like a flower bobbing in and out of shadow.

In fact, turning his head in that small moment of uncertainty, he took the light to be just that: a red rose tantalized by the afternoon's late sun but already hatched with the low shadows of the molting elms that lined the street. And he remembered that as he turned toward the flashing light, lifting his eyes over the roses trellised along the fence—the hybrid Blue Girl that would not survive the season, twined among the thick canes and velvet blossoms of the Don Juan—and even as he started down the wooden steps toward the front gate, slowly, deliberately, as if the people running toward the house, shouting his name, had nothing to do with him, he continued to think rose, rose, rose.

I Am Not a Jew

As he descended the narrow staircase into the hotel's tiny lobby, he thought about Ellen reading in bed. She was beginning to look old, tired. They both were.

"Grüss Gott, Herr Anderson."

The young man at the desk, smiling and nodding, took him by surprise. "Ah, good evening." For some reason, he pointed up the stairs and added, "My wife is staying." The clerk cocked his head as if he didn't understand. "In our room . . . while I take a walk," the American tried to explain.

"Wie bitte?"

Anderson knew the expression. He had been forced to use it himself over and over again in the little town, where almost no one, it seemed, spoke English. "Sorry," he had apologized to one shopkeeper after another, "what did you say? *Wie bitte?*" Fortunately, his wife's German was much better than his. She had handled most of the

conversation since their arrival that afternoon, even ordering their dinner at the famed restaurant that was the reason for their detour of nearly a hundred kilometers to Waldheim.

"*Nichts.*" He shook his head, smiling at the boy. "Nothing."

Anderson turned the knob and opened the door. "*Auf Wiedersehen,*" the clerk called.

The boy regarded the man, waiting for a response. "Yes, *Grüss Gott,*" he replied. Then, because it sounded to his ear so strange a phrase, he repeated it in English to himself, "Greet God."

Though it was well after ten o'clock, the light had not yet faded in the lively *Marktplatz,* which the quaint hotels and cafés surrounded, but the alleys leading from the town square were already darkening. Restless, he thought about a bowl of ice cream; earlier, in the window of a crowded shop, he had seen a photograph of *Kartoffeleis,* ice cream molded to look exactly like a baked potato trimmed with all the toppings. And he was tempted by another photo, of what appeared to be a plate of vermicelli and meatballs in tomato sauce—*Spaghetticis.* But the constriction of the satin money belt cinched around his waist reminded him that he had gained too much weight on this trip already.

A fountain halfway down a long alley caught his eye. Out of habit, he looked over his shoulder. The square was bustling with families and flirting teenagers and old couples on benches—no one suspicious. He laughed at his hesitation. *You're not in the States,* he reminded himself.

The fountain was really quite small when he got close to it. On its pedestal, a woman in some sort of native costume stood solidly on two bare feet, pouring water out of a jar she held in her arms. But it was the rim of the fountain that drew him down onto one knee to examine its details more closely. A circle of elegant creatures had been cast in flight, their notched wings and long, severe faces serving as the lip of the bronze bowl that caught the endless stream of water cascading from the woman's jar. He could not tell, in the dimming light, whether they were angels or devils.

Beyond the alley, a quiet street twisted into a modern neighborhood. He did not recognize the trees that overhung the neat row of automobiles along one curb. The housing itself looked cheap but well maintained, with tiny garden plots beside each front door. Postwar, of course, he explained to himself.

He wandered on, surprised by the number of lace curtains pulsing with the blue light of television sets. In one undraped window, he caught a glimpse of a bald man watching M*A*S*H. Then he noticed, in the corner of the same window, a gray cat eyeing him.

Having spent so much time with his wife over the last month in the cramped green Renault they had rented in Paris and in a score of tiny hotel rooms across France and Germany, he was relieved to be alone. Savoring the solitude of the summer evening and its fading northern light, he paid little attention as one street yielded to another, until he found himself on the outskirts of the small town. This last street, more of a road, really, wound up a little hill, then veered away from a cemetery that occupied its far slope. Coming over the crown of the hill, dense with trees, Anderson suddenly found himself in the countryside. At the bottom of the hill, more trees obscured the view of what lay beyond. There the darkness had begun to settle among the roots and the trunks. The man checked his watch; it was getting late.

He was about to turn back when he noticed the strange alphabet set into the plaque beside the arched entrance to the graveyard: Hebrew, he realized with a start.

The gate was ajar. In the declining light, a few wrought iron grave markers were visible among the many headstones. Even from the fence, Anderson could see that each framed a portrait of the deceased. Without thinking, he pushed back the iron gate on its rusty hinges and followed the pebbled path from photograph to photograph.

They were the oldest graves, those with the ornate metal markers, the iron fired and hammered into the curlicues and arabesques

popular during the last days of the empire. Some, he found, dated back to the nineteenth century. The headstones were newer, from the '20s and '30s.

The porcelain portraits and hand-tinted photographs had faded within the ovals of thick glass in which they had been sealed, but there was light enough to see the bonnets that fringed the faces of dead infants, soldiers' heads jutting from stiff military collars, patriarchs in yarmulkes, sloe-eyed young women. A lost world, he told himself, buried beneath his feet.

He was fascinated. Though night was advancing up the hill from the woods, Anderson hurried on from grave to grave, intoning aloud each name as he bent before the face of the deceased.

"Steh auf, du Judenschwein!"

The angry growl caught him by surprise. He had not heard footsteps sliding up the gravel path behind him. He turned, still crouched before the grave of a Bella Rosenberg, who had died in 1903 at the age of eleven.

A pimply young man, his head shaved, his black boots studded with silver, leaned over Anderson. Behind the leader, three other boys, all dressed in black with shaven heads and heavy boots, were laughing. One had a crude swastika tattooed on his forearm.

Another of them, the fat one, snarled at him, half jokingly, he sensed. Anderson noticed the boy's yellow teeth, bunched haphazardly behind fleshy lips. He had seen the same thing everywhere he went. Why were Europeans so indifferent to the care of their teeth? he wondered. That thought troubled him only for a moment before a hand with its own swastika raised in scars above its clenched knuckles tightened the collar around his throat and lifted him easily to his feet.

He suddenly realized how deep into the cemetery he had wandered.

"Sprechen Sie . . . ," he began, but it was difficult to talk with the hand at his throat. "Do you speak English?" he whispered.

They ignored his question. The leader took a step forward, pushing him in the chest, hard. He would have fallen if the scarred hand had not held him up.

He thought of Ellen, lying in their bed at the Gasthof Zum Alten Fritz, reading the guidebook to Stuttgart, their next destination.

"Verseuchtes Judenschwein," the young man hissed.

The fear came in waves, shallow at first but each deeper and heavier than the one before. And as each wave broke upon him, the world constricted, like the hand tightening around his throat, until he was alive to nothing but the night birds cawing in the woods at the bottom of the hill, the darkness thickening as if he were sinking in murky water, the boys circling nervously around him, their boots scrabbling on the gravel, their chains chafing link against link, their grunted taunts, the scent of their sweat and of his own urine.

"Schau mal, der Jude pisst in seine Hose," one of the boys laughed, pointing to the damp stain spreading across the front of Anderson's pants.

"Scheisse!" cursed the one that had held the man by the shirt as he loosened his grip and backed away. *"Dreckige Juden."*

"Juden?" At last, Anderson had recognized the word. *"Nein, nicht,"* he insisted. "No Jew, no Jew," he said, pointing to himself.

One of them made a joke. They all laughed.

He continued to defend himself, now shouting in panicked, nongrammatical German, *"Ich non Juden. Ich nicht Juden."* The clicking of the words sounded wrong to him. He fumbled for the verb. *"Ich ist nicht Juden."* And at last, *"Ich bin nicht Juden."*

With great relief, he realized he had it right, or nearly so, and turning from one snarling face to another, calmly repeated the phrase like an incantation over and over again: *"Ich bin nicht Juden."* I am not a Jew. I am not a Jew.

"Ach," said the leader with a kindly smile, *"du bist nicht 'die Juden'?"*

"Nein, mein Herr," he managed gratefully, *"nicht die Juden."*

"Then maybe you're a stinking Arab," the leader continued.

"Nein, nein. Amerikaner. Ich bin ein Amerikaner." And then, realizing

he had been addressed in English, he repeated, more quietly, "I'm American."

The leader turned to his gang. *"Das Schwein ist ein Amerikaner."* Then he added sarcastically in English, "He says he is not the Jews."

The fat one stepped up to him. "Ah, an American. But not a Jew, eh?"

Frightened, he answered in German. *"Sie haben recht. Amerikaner. Nicht Juden."*

They laughed, and the one with the tattoo said, "Well, perhaps you should go back to America, don't you think?" and pushed him down the path. He lost his footing but caught himself as he went down, his hand skittering over the small, sharp stones. Then, suddenly, without thinking, he was running on the loose gravel. He could hear their hoots. One shouted after him, *"Auf Wiedersehen."* Their laughter hung in the air like smoke.

HE LOOKED BACK as he reached the gate and saw them kicking over tombstones and spraying something in paint across the desecrated graves. He kept running.

Stumbling through darkened neighborhoods, Anderson tried to retrace his route to the square, but he recognized nothing as he hurried on. The houses, with shutters drawn and windows unlit, did not resemble those he had earlier passed. Twice he heard a car approaching, and both times he hid. The hand that had broken his fall in the cemetery was throbbing; the gravel had raked his palm with a dozen raw cuts, crusted with dirt. He began to think he had taken a wrong turn somewhere. Too frightened to turn back, he pushed on. Finally, though uncertain, he followed a long, looping street that reminded him of where he had begun his walk over an hour ago. Then, just as it seemed that he might be going in circles, he recognized, down an alley, the glow of the *Marktplatz*.

As he crossed the emptying square toward the Gasthof Zum Alten Fritz, where Ellen had by now fallen asleep waiting for him, he heard his name.

"Mr. Anderson." It was Ziegler, the owner of the hotel, sitting alone at the table of an outdoor café. He had introduced himself when the couple checked in that afternoon. "Mr. Anderson, will you join me?"

Out of breath, he managed, "Good evening, Herr Ziegler."

"Please," the old man insisted, gesturing toward the empty chair at his table.

Anderson could feel his damp shorts still clinging to his flesh. He dropped his hands in front of his pants. "I really should get back. I told my wife I'd only be gone a little while."

"Just one drink." Ziegler turned to the waitress, who was cleaning another table. *"Ein Altbier und ein Pils, bitte."* Then turning back to his guest, he smiled. "So you've been looking around, *nicht?*"

Anderson saw he could not refuse the old man. "I took a walk," he said as he sat down. Maybe it was a good idea, he told himself, to have a drink before he went back to the room. Beneath the table, his hands were still trembling with the dregs of adrenaline.

"*Ja*, I walk at night sometimes, too—when the leg doesn't hurt so much."

Anderson noticed the wedding band on Ziegler's bony right hand. Everything was different here, he reminded himself, everything was reversed. He tried to make a little joke. "We're lucky to have wives who let us out at night, you and me."

"No, Margarete died long ago. Very long ago. It's just me."

The American sighed. "I'm sorry."

"No, no, it was very long ago. No matter."

Anderson could think of nothing to say, but Ziegler did not seem to notice the silence as he finished off his beer.

"Here she is." The girl put a mug of dark beer and a glass of light on the table, along with a slip of paper, and took away the empty mug in front of the old man. Ziegler added the receipt to others under the ashtray. "Now you take your choice, Mr. Anderson. The old beer or the pilsener?"

The American reached for the pilsener.

"You don't like black beer, eh?"

"I'm not used to it."

"It's all I drink," the old German told him. He took a sip. "*Sehr gut.* And yours?"

Anderson tried the golden beer in the long, thin glass. "Lovely, very good."

"So what do you think of our little town?"

The American began to lie, but then the story of his humiliation in the Jewish cemetery spilled out of him. "I was all alone," he explained. "There was no one else there, and it was getting dark."

"*Das ist schrecklich.* Terrible, terrible," the old man nodded, as if he had heard the story before. "They are just hooligans, those boys . . . isn't that your word, 'hooligans'?"

But Anderson was not finished. "I was so frightened I didn't even think. I just started shouting, '*Ich bin nicht Juden. Ich bin nicht Juden.*' "

"*Kein Jude,*" Ziegler corrected, then added gently, "You had no choice. What else could you do?"

The weary American did not try to resist the old German's formula. "Yes, of course, what else could I do?"

"Anyone would have done the same thing. Who could blame you?" The affable owner of the small hotel tried to change the subject. "*Ach,* you know we have a saying: *Wenn einer eine Reise macht, so kann er 'was erzählen.*"

Anderson couldn't follow the German. "*Wie bitte?*"

The old man drained the last of his beer. "When one makes a trip . . ." His English was starting to falter. "When one makes a trip . . ." But then he had it. "When one makes a trip, he comes home with stories." Shrugging in sympathy, Ziegler opened his mouth in a smile. His false teeth were white and perfectly straight.

The American emptied his glass. "You are right, Herr Ziegler. What else could I do? Anyone would have done the same thing."

"It's terrible, yes, but who could blame you?"

Now Anderson sounded almost like a man who had been offended. "Yes, who? I'm not a Jew. Is that my fault?"

"Exactly."

The American nodded, returning the old man's smile. Then he called the girl over. "Two black beers, *bitte.*"

Overhead, the vague churring of machinery and the creaking open of iron doors atop the town's ancient bell tower passed unnoticed by the men. Unseen, a bronze axman trundled out onto the ledge of the tower, pausing just before the face of the great clock. Jerking his head ominously toward the now nearly deserted *Marktplatz* forty feet below, the woodsman raised his axe and brought it down, again and again. In daylight, the hour was tolled with each fall of the axe. But darkness had descended, and no bell echoed the twelve blows that fell silently above the sleeping town.

NEITHER THE NEXT MORNING over their breakfast of *Brötchen* and tea, nor during the long drive through Germany and France back to Paris, nor even on the airplane home to Cincinnati did Peter Anderson tell his wife about the incident in the Jewish cemetery. But like a lump beneath the skin one pretends to ignore, the terror of that encounter called attention to itself with greater and greater insistence the more he tried to forget.

Anderson could not glimpse a headline of a new peace accord between Palestinians and Israelis, could not inadvertently tune the radio to an opera in German, could not pass a cemetery at twilight without the copper tang he had first tasted that night in Waldheim leaching up his throat. To his surprise, though, he felt anger not at the skinheads who had bullied him but at Bella Rosenberg, the dead child before whose faded portrait he had been kneeling when they accosted him, and at all the Jews in that little graveyard. He was ashamed, of course, to blame the victims rather than the vandals—and he forced such ignoble sentiments down with the bile that rose from his gut—but if he was honest with himself, he had to admit that it felt to him as if the Jews were at fault, in some sense, at least, for what had happened.

And it was not only for his humiliation in the cemetery that Anderson needed someone to blame: he was slowly discovering he had returned from Europe a different man. When, for example, their first week back, Ellen had suggested after dinner they catch a movie downtown at one of their favorite theaters, her husband told her of the murder behind an office building on Fourth Street he had read about in the *Enquirer;* perhaps they should wait for the weekend and see the film at the mall in Kenwood, he cautioned. Then, picking up some groceries at Kroger's, he annoyed his wife by circling the lot until a spot near the door opened up. "What are we—old people who can't walk a few steps?" she complained. Anderson had no answer for her; he didn't know why he had passed up all the slots in the outlying rows. But the most disturbing change revealed itself in their bed.

Though deeply disappointed when, early in their marriage, they had learned they would never conceive a child, the couple discovered that the freedom from birth control allowed a spontaneous and vital intimacy that often verged on the daring. It was their secret pride, the intensity and imagination of the sex between them. But for the first time, Anderson found himself sometimes impotent in the arms of his wife. She explained it away as simple exhaustion from the long trip they had taken, but he felt it as another pang of the shame to which he had awakened each morning since his night in Waldheim.

That shame was most rawly felt when he recalled the sensation of his underpants dampening. It was ridiculous, he knew, but the warm, wet cloth clinging to his belly, the acrid smell of his own urine, the surreptitious gesture of dropping his hands over the stain, and then back in the room balling up the moist shorts in the bottom of the trash can so Ellen wouldn't find them in the morning—that childish mortification of wetting his pants, more than any other, unnerved him.

As Anderson cowered under its taunts, the memory of his humiliation goaded his increasingly bitter outcry against the Jews. After all, he reasoned, those four ignorant thugs in the cemetery hadn't invented the swastikas tattooed on their bodies. They themselves hadn't fixed on the Jews as the source of their unhappiness. No, he reassured him-

self, those boys had simply repeated curses thousands of years old. And what was it, after all, about the Jews that had provoked the hatred of their neighbors century after century?

These feelings festered for weeks before he mentioned the incident in Germany offhandedly as he and Ellen drove home from an afternoon of shopping.

"But why didn't you tell me?" his wife asked, dismayed as much by his silence about it as by his story.

ON COUNTLESS OCCASIONS in their marriage, the man had deferred to his wife: to her gift for languages, her sense of direction, her memory of recipes, her insistence on one imperative or another. He knew enough of himself to recognize that his confidence in the woman sometimes withered into intimidation. So Anderson was not entirely surprised when Ellen questioned him over dinner about the events he had recounted on the way home. He had hoped for her sympathy, her unhesitating support. Instead, she probed the circumstances of the incident: why he had taken a walk to the outskirts of town so close to nightfall, what exactly the boys had said, how he had responded.

He was annoyed by her interrogation and resorted to Herr Ziegler's reasoning when she pressed him for further details. "I had no choice. What else could I do?"

"I know, you must have been very frightened."

"No, not frightened," he objected, stung by the word. "But I had to be realistic. We were all alone. It was just me and those Nazis."

He paused, waiting for Ellen to agree.

"Anyway," he continued, irritated by her silence, "what would have been the point?"

Still she didn't answer him.

"Would you rather I'd been beaten?"

"No, of course not," she sighed. "But did they actually say they were going to beat you?"

"Well, what the hell do you think they were going to do with me?"

"I don't know. It's just—"

"You're my wife, for Christ's sake. You ought to be damn glad I got away. They could've killed me."

"I'm just trying to understand what you did."

"What I did? You ought to be worried about what they did, those punks."

"I just never imagined my husband, you—"

"I'm not a Jew. Is that my fault?" he interrupted indignantly. She had been sharp with him since Germany, he felt, even growing testy of late over the waning of their intimacy.

The woman was not finished, but he shied from her scrutiny. "Anyone would have done the same thing," the man insisted vehemently and pushed himself away from the table.

The couple avoided each other the rest of the evening, but as Ellen lay in bed that night watching her husband undress, she returned to his story. "You lied, you know."

"To whom—to you? It's all true, every word of it."

"No, not to me. You lied to those Nazis in the cemetery."

"How was that a lie? I'm not a Jew." He was tired of talking about it and cross with her for bringing it up. *"Ich bin nicht Juden."*

Ellen stared at him over the bed. *"Wir sind alle Juden,"* she whispered.

"Wie bitte?" he sighed with exasperation, playing her little game.

"We are all Jews."

Anderson looked at her uncomprehendingly.

"After Hitler," his wife explained almost tenderly, "what choice do we have? We have to be Jews, all of us."

The man scoffed at her sentimentality. "So what was I supposed to do? There were four of them."

"I don't know," Ellen admitted. "But one way or another, you wound up on the wrong side."

Now he was angry. "You're making this too complicated."

"No, it's really very simple," she continued, stiffening. "In the cemetery that night, they split the world into Jews and Nazis. And you weren't a Jew."

Long after Ellen had fallen asleep, her back to him, Anderson lay awake, rehearsing in his memory those few minutes of terror he had endured on that darkening German hilltop of skulls and bones, refining the little drama with each rendition until his own role was reduced, in the end, to the simple formula that had saved him: "I am not a Jew."

He mouthed the words.

The bedroom's silence, riffled only by the fluttering breaths of his sleeping wife, shamed him.

"So what should I have done?" Anderson appealed to the darkness. But he waited in vain for the solution to offer itself.