

Max Wickert

THE SCYTHE OF SATURN



Stephan P. Wickert, *Angsburg after the Bombing* (1947), watercolor, Collection of Max Wickert

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THE SCYTHE OF SATURN¹

September 1944²

It heaved me backward bodily thirty paces to the door of the privy at the end of the hallway, where the day before my beautiful silver plated jack-knife had slithered from sight beneath a little vortex of water and urine and excrement. It lifted Mutti³ ten inches off the floor, spread-eagled and suddenly very small, pasted flat as a paper doll against the bedroom door. It must have been loud too, because afterwards every window-pane along the house front was smashed as well as most of the good *Rosenthal*⁴ china in the parlor sideboard; and for that matter when it scooped its thirty-foot crater out of the cow pasture a long stone's throw away, it just could not have been silent about it. Yet we never could lay hold of the idea of that stupendous crash except by reconstruction in our heads, even after we all came to and ran out to look up at the swarm of platinum-steel midges now crawling westward high under the afternoon sun, and the stillness was even stiller for their scarcely audible drone, so that even the church bell still ringing the angelus from the other side of Langenau⁵ seemed as unperturbed as Oma⁶ Berta

¹ **Saturn**: not a reference to the planet, but to the character from classical mythology. Saturn (Greek name: Kronos) was chief of the Titans, rulers of the universe in the Golden Age. He was murdered by his son Jupiter (Greek name: Zeus), who exterminated most of the remaining Titans and established the rule of the Olympian gods. Because the Greek name Kronos resembles the word for time (*chronos*), later tradition often thought of Saturn as a kind of Father Time, especially Time the Mower or Destroyer (of life, of fame, of memory).

² The story takes place in the final years of World War Two. Its three episodes are narrated in reverse chronological order.

³ Mutti: a common German pet-name for "mother"; equivalent to "mommy".

⁴ *Rosenthal*: prestige brand of Bavarian porcelain.

⁵ Langenau: an imaginary small village in southern Bavaria.

when something would go *bang!* in my bedtime drowse and she would still be telling her story and I would drift back from a second's waking, not enough to hear her words but enough to realize that nothing can impinge on a grandmother's steady, quiet trickle of night talk once she has turned it on.

Mutz and Evi and Sissi ⁷did not know what it was, but I did, because I was the oldest and understood what Mutti meant when she yelled (not as though it had just happened, but as though it were just about to), "*Stukas*⁸, *Menschenskinden*⁹, *Stukas!*" It wasn't really *Stukas* because *Stukas* would have come ramming down at us till we could see the crazed, dopey eyes of the pilots, not stayed up there so tiny and detached and platinum-glittery in the blue sky. Still, Mutti had as usual the general idea. From that day, B-29's¹⁰ never looked to me as mammoth as I later knew they were. My memory would continue to screw them back into tiny, glinting metal motes that droned in Bavarian-blue expanses of autumn afternoon, with, after a long pause, something going *Nlck! nlck!* --Mutti's mother-hen sobbing maybe after she unflattened herself from that bedroom door to gather her four children (we were still only four), or maybe the sound Grandma Pauline made in Ukrainian to collect that scurry of actual chickens whose eardrums, it turned out, had all been ruptured by the blast so that from that day until they fell one by one under her business-like axe they would never again hear her calling at feed-time.

The chickens, the china, and the pasture were the only casualties, although the Nazi burgomaster of our hamlet insisted on counting himself as one because he had been crossing the

⁶ Oma: German pet-name for "grandmother"; "granny"

⁷ Mutz, Evi, Sissi: nicknames of the narrator's younger sisters

⁸ *Stukas*: short for German *Sturzkampfflugzeuge* 'dive fighter planes'.

⁹ *Menschenskinden!*: German expletive, used for emphasis, meaning something like "for Heaven's sake"; literal translation: "children of men".

¹⁰ B-29: the most commonly used American bomber in World War Two.

road on his way to the *Gauleiter's*¹¹ house when the bomb hit and (as he whimpered afterwards) he saw his whole political future go up in smoke that very moment, which was all he had and so he never really recovered. But the entire village knew by then that he was a walking metaphor, fated for the exegesis of interminable denazification¹² procedures eight months later when the war was over. Wolf and I would see him then, day after day crossing the same road toward the same destination for conspiratorial *tête-à-têtes* with the by then ex-Gauleiter's wife or (as it later turned out) widow. All we understood of him was the meaning that we (that is, we children) attached to the salacious leer on Grandma Pauline's inscrutable peasant face whenever his name was mentioned. And that leer had been no different, if a shade less triumphant, half a year earlier, after each of his visits to her, from which he, accompanied by a wooden-faced man in black uniform, always returned muttering something about filthy Slavic parasites hiding behind their Aryan¹³ in-laws. She would wear that snide expression then, because she knew she was all right so long as her son, my aunt Beta's husband, had some clout in the village. Which he had, and continued to have for years after, even when the Americans had left and he was Langenau's first *Wirtschaftswunder*¹⁴ capitalist.

We were not allowed to approach the crater because, Mutti said, an undetonated bomb might have fallen nearby; so we just gaped at it from a distance and at last Sissi, who was only three at the time, said, "Mutti, tomorrow can we go see the big poopoo up close?" and tittered. It looked indeed like an enormous, concave cow-dropping, as though the bright-emerald pasture

¹¹ *Gauleiter*: Nazi district leader; though merely a representative of the Fascist party, he often held more actual power than the highest local official.

¹² Denazification: an official process to which all German public officials had to submit after World War Two. It involved a detailed scrutiny of a candidate's past connections with the Nazi party.

¹³ Aryan: a Nazi racist classification, supposedly indicating the purest kind of German blood.

¹⁴ *Wirtschaftswunder*: 'economic miracle'; a buzz word for Germany's rapid post-World-War-Two recovery.

had decided to expose its obscene underside, just to set matters straight, so to speak, or for a kind of joke. There was, too, an obscure kinship between this huge sunken pancake of naked loam and the black little holes out of which Wolf and I teased crickets on our lazy afternoons all summer long.

"Can we, Mutti? Can we? Tomorrow?" Sissi was saying, but by this time Mutti was sitting wordlessly on the steps to the veranda and shaking all over, and I knew she was crying under her apron. Grandma Pauline and her son Moritz and Aunt Beta and Oma Berta, and the other uncles and aunts and cousins who had hurried up (there were twenty-three of us evacuated from the city, all living in the same two adjoining houses) were standing around her like random bowling pins in an empty alley, staring out at the pasture and saying nothing for a long time. Then Sissi started to bawl--and when Sissi started bawling, Mutz and Evi always started bawling too.

It was then I remembered my silver-plated jack-knife again and could think of nothing else, especially since I had not yet told Wolf about how I lost it. Wolf was my age, the son of a widow from the *Sudetengau*¹⁵ who had arrived in February, the first of a long stream of Eastern refugees, bringing with her also a mangy-looking German shepherd and Wolf's older brother Siggie, a cow-eyed half-wit who was forever drooling and who never spoke. The *Gauleiter* had quartered them on a resentful farmer on the eastern side of the river. I didn't like Wolf's mother, a thin, yellow woman with absurdly pointed breasts who perpetually whined about having lost everything, everything to the sadistic Czechs; but Wolf and I became inseparable, especially after we entered grade-school together. In our Bavarian bumpkins' class, Wolf's Prussian accent made

¹⁵ Sudetengau: an ethnically mixed German border region near and in present day Poland and the Czech Republic. It had been taken over by the Germans, who settled it (like a kind of West Bank) and started ethnically cleansing it, but it was overrun by the victorious Russians, who returned all property into Polish or Czech hands and killed or evicted the entire German population. A sizable number of refugees from the area was quartered on households in southern Germany.

him an outsider. They were always picking on me too, since I was a city-boy and something of a coward to boot. For Wolf I became the one person he could talk to, and he, though the shortest boy in the class, savagely fought every bullying clodhopper who offered either of us injury, including especially the burgomaster's beefy scion whose ultimate word of contempt, not infrequently applied to Wolf himself, was "*Bolschewik!*"¹⁶ When, a few weeks earlier, Wolf and I had sworn blood-brotherhood, I gave Wolf my illustrated *Book of Martyrs*¹⁷, the most beautiful thing I had (at least I thought it was mine, though Mutti thrashed me terribly when she noticed it was gone), and he gave me his silver-plated jack-knife, after we had cut our fingers with it and watched our mingled blood curl carnation-pink through the glass of milk we drank. The jack-knife had to be a secret because Mutti said I was too young to have one, and because, when Mutz and I were playing Kasperl-and-Crocodile¹⁸ on Saint Nicholas' Day, I had used our long kitchen knife and Mutz had been a clumsy crocodile and got hurt in the arm. Oma Berta was the only other person who knew about my jack-knife, because she caught me fondling it under the covers during my bed-time story. But she never betrayed me, not even to Mutti, her own daughter. I had to hide the knife from everyone else, especially from my sisters, who always ganged up to tease me or to tell on me. Thus when I was not alone with Wolf, the only really safe place where I could play with it was the toilet.

A few years later, I probably would have been more careful. By then I would be in First Communion¹⁹ Class, and Father Hagenau would tell us about the Sixth Commandment²⁰ and

¹⁶ *Bolschewik*-. used as a term of abuse, as Americans might use the word *Commie*.

¹⁷ *Book of Martyrs*: Collections of stories about Christian saints who suffered death for their faith were common in pious German households; they often had gruesome illustrations.

¹⁸ Kasperl-and-Crocodile: Kasperl is the equivalent to Punch in German puppet theaters; in a standard Punch-and-Judy show, he always kills a puppet-crocodile.

¹⁹ First Communion: in Catholicism, the first time a child is allowed to partake of the Eucharist in the Mass; in Europe, always a major event in a child's life, prepared for by intensive religious instruction. Since the sacrament of Confession had to precede Communion, moralistic

about unclean thoughts and unclean actions. It was then to occur to me that his injunctions had a practical side. But now I loved my silver-plated jack-knife with all the pure, symbolical passion of my six years, and I was restlessly inventive in ways of playing with it. It was not at all like the kitchen knife in the accident with Mutz; it scarcely even seemed an instrument for cutting, though it pleased me to open and close its two shiny blades and miniscule cork-screw. The best thing about it was the sensation of the cool, smooth metal on my skin when I felt it through the tiny holes in my pocket or dropped it down the neck of my shirt, letting it inch its way, the silver surface slowly warming to body heat, down my chest and belly, until I fished it out again under my shirt-tail or the cuffs of my short pants. Sometimes it would slide along my peter or else I would wriggle to work it around back to my buttocks. But because I did not yet know about the Sixth Commandment, I would take chances and try risky variations. Once I even opened it and let it slither blade first. It nicked the ridge of my bare foot, but didn't hurt at all.

The day before that squadron of American B-29's, returning from a raid on Wendlich²¹, bequeathed its surplus bomb²² to Langenau, my carelessness came to its unavoidable climax. The jack-knife had fallen in before I knew it. I stared down the porcelain chalice of the toilet from which it glittered up at me, fragmented in tiny metallic refractions through an unspeakable broth of ordure and water. I did not need Father Hagenau to tell me then about uncleanness in order to hang suspended between my plangent hope of retrieval and my clammy horror of pollution. While I shifted from foot to foot in an agony of indecisiveness, my head whirled with

clergymen seized the opportunity to preach sexual purity to children who were mostly too young to act in "impure" ways, and who inevitably associated sex with excretion.

²⁰ Sixth Commandment: "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery"; broadened in most narrow-minded Christian settings to "Thou shalt Not Commit Sex, nor Shalt Thou Speak of It, nor Shalt Thou Think About It."

²¹ Wendlich: the narrator's native city (the name is imaginary) in Western Bavaria; his family has been evacuated from Wendlich to nearby Langenau.

²² surplus bomb: Allied planes were not allowed to return from a mission with bombs aboard. They therefore often dropped unused ones on targets of dubious military significance, including all-civilian villages.

contradictory impossibilities. Somehow I threw myself at last at the hope of a desperately ingenious plan: all might yet be well if a quick pull of the chain could be coordinated with an even quicker subsequent plunge of the hand, which could then emerge unsoiled in the instant of flushing. My timing had never been good and the memory of a treasure forever gone rode piggyback to inanition on the yet more yearning memory of a sinister and final splurging rush.

Of course, on the day of the bomb Wolf never came, since nobody in Langenau dared even cross a road until the rumor of hidden time-bombs had been dispelled--and Wolf had to cross not only two roads to get to my place, but the stream at the bottom of the pasture and the railroad tracks and the pasture itself. The next day was Sunday. When Wolf finally appeared in the afternoon, I found I could not even admit to him that I had lost the knife, much less what place I had lost it in, and least of all what I was doing that led to my losing it. My inhibition should not have surprised me, though it did, since our confidences, however intimate, were always chaste; besides, he perhaps had a head start on me on the Sixth Commandment. Our talk drifted now to the *Book of Martyrs*, especially to the illustration in it of a kneeling and headless John the Baptist, the blade of Herod's²³ henchman slanted beneath a neatly sliced cross-section of neck, from which two needle-fine jets of brutal scarlet spurted in elegant parabolas. Wolf and I had often watched Grandma Pauline do execution on chickens, the business end of her axe an object of our pious attention. In our violent imaginations, we yearned with intensely deliquescent Catholicism toward our own eventual baptisms of blood²⁴. Wolf was at the time determined to become a missionary, and if I had regretfully abandoned the idea of accompanying him, this was

²³ John the Baptist, Herod: St. John the Baptist, who hailed Jesus as the Messiah, was executed by beheading at the order of King Herod of Judea, at the instigation of Herod's lustful niece Salome. Depictions of this episode, partly related in the Christian Gospels, partly legend, abound in European medieval art.

²⁴ baptism of blood: According to conservative Catholic theology, nobody (not even a completely innocent person) goes to heaven unless baptized, but an exception to this rule is made in favor of recent converts to the True Faith, who are executed for their beliefs prior to baptism. Their martyrdom is called a "baptism of blood."

only because I had already promised Oma Berta that I would grow up to become a priest and an architect, combining the two functions to erect and inhabit a private chapel in her garden. This would save her the daily six-kilometer walk to seven-o'clock Mass, on which I accompanied her on school days.

"You know," Wolf said, "sometimes the heathens don't just cut off your head, because that hardly hurts at all, and besides the Holy Ghost²⁵ makes the pain feel good."

"Sure," I agreed, "if your faith is strong enough."

"Sometimes they sew the backs of your heels to your shoulders and hang you belly-down over a fire, so that your peter burns."

"Only if you're not a citizen, like *Saint Peter*²⁶," I counter;" otherwise they've got to cut off your head. It's the law."

Wolf was still pondering his image. "I think if they bent me backward like that, my spine would break in two, and so I'd die first anyway."

"What if it didn't and you started hurting so much that you'd give in and worship their idols?"

"I wouldn't, because then I'd go to hell and be hurt even more."

"But what if you did, anyway?"

²⁵ Holy Ghost: In Catholic theology, the Third Person of the Trinity, considered the aspect of God who inspires all good thoughts, motives, and feelings; often called The Comforter.

²⁶ Saint Peter: Saint Peter, who was not a Roman citizen, was executed by crucifixion, the usual punishment for slaves; Saint Paul, as a citizen, could claim the right to be executed by beheading, a quicker, less socially humiliating, and considerably less painful death.

"I tell you, I wouldn't!"

"But what if? What if?"

"Aw, cut it out. What do you say we tickle some crickets?"

We knew almost all the cricket-holes in the pasture. Most of them were in the dry spots next to the road. On a good day, you could stick a straw down any of them and minutes later a brownish-black, bullet-sized demon would scuttle out, antennae twirling, a panicked outrider from a miniaturized Acheron²⁷. We would quickly cover the hole and, squealing half in terror and half in delight, dare each other to pick it up. Because we could not tell whether it could bite, we would have to catch it by the back. It made curious gritty sounds under the pressure of our trembling fingers, and sometimes it drooled from its mandibles, just like Siggie, except that the drool was yellowish instead of clear. But today the hunting was bad. Perhaps every cricket in the meadow was lying at the bottom of its tunnel, blasted into insensibility by the concussion of the bomb. After a while we grew bored by our quest and, greatly conscious of our audacity, drifted toward the crater. It no longer looked like cow dung because the sun had dried the fresh loam to a dusty ochre. Scattered here and there in it were miniscule, jagged scraps of metal, some of them glinting like silver, some with an azure-green sheen, like bluebottles. They seemed the last faint, visual echo-vibrations of the deafening, cataclysmic crash which we both knew we had witnessed from opposed sides of the village, but which neither of us had really heard, having to depend for our aural image of it on a confused sense of stunned crickets, of the worried looks of grownups, and of the uninterrupted tolling of the *Angelus*²⁸ from Langenau's onion-domed

²⁷ Acheron: a mythological river in the classical underworld, often (as here) used as a name for the underworld itself.

²⁸ *Angelus*: a prayer to the Virgin which used to be recited at vesper time every evening by god-fearing European Catholics; the parish church would ring a special bell to remind them. In a day before universal wrist-watches, you could tell it was 6 p.m. by the sounding of the *Angelus* bell. (This was also quitting time for most manual labor).

steeply. Perhaps we felt obscurely that these tiny, sparkling objects were, had to be of use to us, sometime, somewhere, for we began quietly pocketing them, until I heard Mufti's voice, shrill and peremptory, from the veranda: "*Menschenskinder!* You boys get away from there this minute! Steffi, you say goodbye to Wolf now and come in and wash your hands." Oma Pauline had sacrificed one of her chickens for supper.

Thus I did not tell Wolf about the jack-knife that day, nor the next, nor any day thereafter--not even after the American tanks came, nor when I had made my First Communion, nor when Father came back from the prisoner-of-war camp, nor when Uncle Moritz got his factory started. It was the beginning of the end of our comradeship, though I was sensible of having betrayed no one, and having been betrayed by no one, either. Not having told Wolf, I could not tell him about the one person I did tell. It was Oma Berta who had witnessed my dash from the toilet into the kitchen, which contained our only sink with running water, where I proceeded with somewhat frantic ablutions.

"Well, I'll be!" she chuckled. "If it isn't Steffi washing his hands on his own account! Will wonders never cease!" It took her one glance to see she had taken the wrong tone, for in truth I was near tears. She whisked me to the sanctuary of the music-room, where we children were almost never allowed. "But how?" she asked, after, perched on the piano stool, I had blurted out my loss; "how did the knife get in the toilet?"

"It slidded through the hole in my pocket," I wailed. It was only half a lie, since my pockets did have holes, though not big enough to lose the knife through.

"But I still don't understand. Were you sitting on the toilet with your pants on?"

There was no evading the logic of this. I had to fib again: "Evi and Mutz and Sissi were teasing me. I had to be alone to think."

Perhaps only the infinite tact of grandmothers prevented her from pressing her point to ask why I needed to wash my hands after thinking. She merely nodded with quizzical neutrality: "Ah, Steffi, you were always a little philosopher. Now let's see if we can't think of something to make you feel better. How would you like me to speak with Grandma Pauline about letting you have one of her rabbits all to yourself?"

I was neutral on the subject of rabbits, but I had to pretend mollification now, even grateful enthusiasm. (I eventually got the rabbit, though they might as well have tagged it with my name and never told me about it, for all the attention I paid to it, except after it fell victim, like all our other livestock, to Grandma Pauline's axe and I ate my part of it, without qualms, at Christmas dinner.) Right now Oma Berta kept hovering not far from me for the rest of the afternoon, worrying me with her wisdom and her concern. My show of improving spirits over the rabbit was the symbol which validated her consolation, and the effort of it absolved me from my feeling of hypocrisy. It was, you might say, the beginning of my political career. At bed-time she was by my side again, in her usual role, telling the tales that I heard as one hears stillness, but to which I never could listen. I snuggled under the covers, my hands warm and moist between my thighs, still feeling for the jack-knife which I hardly noticed was no longer there, and I drifted toward sleep. Once or twice something in my head would go bang!, but not loudly enough to jerk me into more attention than it took to let Oma's night-talk re-establish its presence without proclaiming its content. The next day, I had forgotten all about the jack-knife, and didn't even think of it when Wolf failed to show up at the berry patch. I was still forgetting it when I came home in the afternoon, and when I turned at the head of the hallway because

Mutti was by the bedroom door, telling me to call in Mutz and Evi and Sissi from the potato-field in back, since the *Angelus* had started to ring, and when, looking eastward over the pasture, I saw glistening in the gentian sky an oddly geometrical formation of droning midges the color of platinum and steel.

February 1944

If Herr²⁹ Hartewig had been home, instead of being called to his colors³⁰ three months before, he would surely never have let her listen to that crazy brother of hers. A lot of nerve I thought he had, and so I told her. But she gives me a funny sort of look, half bossy and half worried, so I knew I was in for it, no matter how much of a fight I put up. For her, of course, it all turned out for the best in the end, because in those days it was the crazy ones who were often right, though I didn't believe it, and I'm still glad I didn't.

"It's not for you to judge, Fräulein³¹ Lerche," she says; "about this sort of thing. Dr. Bauer³² has never been wrong. All I want to know is whether you think we can manage by ourselves."

"It's not whether we can, Frau Hartewig," I says, "but whether we ought to. Two women alone with four little ones, and no heat in the house on a cold February day, and ever so much heavy stuff to tote down four flights of stairs--it's hard enough, sure; still, we can do it. But all

²⁹ Herr: German for Mr.

³⁰ called to his colors: drafted into the army.

³¹ *Fräulein*: German for Miss. Before modern mechanical household slaves like the washing machine, every middle-class family (even if not well-to-do) absolutely needed a servant, usually a lower class girl, who received free lodging, cast-off clothing, a modest stipend to send back home, as well as a contribution to her hope chest, in return for assuming the bulk of the household chores and looking after the children. Such maids characteristically stayed with the same family from age fourteen until marriage, and often became near-equal partners to their mistresses and mother figures to the children. Miss Maria Johanna Lerche, the narrator of this section is the Hartewigs' maid and nanny.

³² Dr. Bauer: Bertold Bauer, elder brother of Steffi's mother.

because some crackpot of a brother has a notion it will be tonight, when there has never been a raid on Wendlich at all . . ."

"I knew I could count on you, Maria Johanna," she says then and reaches for the telephone. Whenever she called me Maria Johanna, that was usually the end of the discussion, but I had to give it another try.

"He's got his doctorate in chemistry, not astrology," I says. But by then she already had him back on the line. "We'll come, Bertold," she says, and so it was settled. Never do I hope to have such another day, even if for her it turned out for the best in the end.

It was six-thirty in the morning, but little Steffi was already up, playing with his locomotive, naturally. His "second motive" he called it, because he hadn't forgotten (and how could he) the first one, a gift on his fifth birthday in June. Ever so prettily Herr Hartewig, who was a real artist, had done that one up, hand-decorated it with silver paint and little inlaid pieces of mirror and blue lacquer, till it looked less like a windup toy from Schocken's *Generalkaufhaus*³³ than a little sky-chariot from the Thousand-and-One Nights. Always improving on things Herr Hartewig was, especially around the house and for the children. But that first locomotive lasted barely a month before Steffi dropped it from the fourth-floor window. I've been in service with three families, but never have I seen a child carry on like Steffi did after that, what with tantrums and whining all day long, and waking us up with his nightmares in the dead of night for weeks after, and, even when he quieted down some, spending most of the time just sitting, listless and puffy-cheeked, egg-headed and snot-nosed, on the floor. Then Herr Hartewig had the argument with his wife, because she says why not buy the boy a new one, and he says this

³³ *Generalkaufhaus*: department store

locomotive didn't fly out that window on its own steam, and I says I agree with him, and they both turn on me with "You stay out of this, *Fräulein* Lerche."

Then Herr Hartewig was called to his colors early in December, and, come Christmas, there was the second locomotive under the tree. Of course, it was just plain black, but it had a flint in its chimney that sparked after you wound it, and it made a lot more noise than the first one. When Steffi saw it, he just stood there for a spell, looking like Saint Helena³⁴ in the Minster³⁵, in the picture of the Finding of the True Cross. "*Menschenskinder!*" Frau Hartewig says. "I think it'll work!" And it did, with a vengeance. Because now it was February and the locomotive was still the only Christmas present Steffi had even so much as touched.

He would be no trouble as long as he had it, but we couldn't take the risk of Mutz and Evi and Sissi getting underfoot. So I had to bundle them up first thing and rush them off to Friedfort³⁶ on the eight-o'clock train and rush back to Wendlich on the nine thirty-five, while Frau Hartewig wrapped up her husband's paintings and sculptings and started carrying them down to the bomb-cellar. Before I got back to help, I also had to stop at my sister Emma's in town, to let her know where I was going to be if she needed me. She just laughed in my face when I told her about Dr. Bauer's "intuition" and I never guessed that I would remember that laugh of hers till my dying day. So I didn't get back to Frau Hartewig's until about eleven, and she had already wrapped half of the good Rosenthal china in newspaper. I helped her pack the rest and take it down.

³⁴ Saint Helena: *Fräulein* Lerche is thinking of a painting she has seen in church, depicting Saint Helena, the mother of Rome's first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great (fourth century). According to legend, Helena experienced a series of ecstatic visions that motivated her to undertake an expedition to Jerusalem to discover the cross on which Jesus had been crucified. After many trials and false leads, miracles and prophecies led her to find it buried in a pit, to prove its authenticity (more miracles), and to bring it to Rome. This story, the Legend of the True Cross, was enormously popular in medieval art and literature.

³⁵ Minster: a church of near-cathedral status

³⁶ Friedfort: small town near Wendlich where Dr. Bauer resides.

Some of the other tenants guessed what we were doing by then and gave us odd looks. Frau Von Klempke, who lived on the second floor and whose son was a big Nazi, threatened to report us for "defeatism" and "hoarding"—both Jewish traits, she says. We ignored her and kept breaking our backs on trip after trip down those four long flights. We emptied the kitchen first, where we left Steffi on the bare floor with his locomotive and a box of *zwieback*.³⁷ Then we did the bedroom closets with all the good linen and the clothes, except what we could cram into the four suitcases to go to Friedfort with; and then the hand-painted peasant chairs from the dining room, and even the table, and so on, from room to room, until we had cleaned out the whole flat except for the beds and sofas and the two big credenzas and Herr Hartewig's upright piano. Frau Hartewig sprained her ankle about the twentieth trip and I ripped half the sleeve off my dress when we tried to force the big toy-chest, which Herr Hartewig had hand-designed and painted, past a tight corner. But we finally did it.

At seven o'clock we were dragging the last rug into the cellar compartment with what seemed our last ounce of strength, when we heard the sirens. "Good God," I thought, "it *is* going to happen." Before I could finish the thought, Frau Hartewig was half-way up the stairs, and before I could drag myself to the cellar exit, she was back down again with Steffi in her arms.

The sirens were still screaming when the other tenants started filling up the cellar, staring at us suspicious-like, except Frau Von Klempke, who seemed suddenly very friendly. Then everything was still as a church, until the anti-aircraft began going *pok! pok! pokpok!* After a while the all-clear sounded and Frau Von Klempke started being less friendly and everybody else a little more so. It must have been just another reconnaissance plane.

³⁷ *Zwieback*: a kind of dry biscuit.

We could hardly stand when we reached the railway station. By that time, it seemed everybody in Wendlich was off to a February vacation. They were packed like kippers in the compartment of the train to Friedfort; we had to ram into it like wedges, suitcases in both hands and Steffi clinging to my legs. The train was already moving when we noticed that the boy was crying; it was almost in Friedfort when Frau Hartewig finally got the reason out of him. "You made me forget my second motive," he sobbed. My heart would have gone out to him, but even my heart was too weary to do anything but knock at my ribs.

It was pitch dark when we got to Dr. Bauer's. His entire zoo of a family was bedded down in his cellar. He had fitted the huge shelves that lined a whole wall with mattresses and railings, so they looked like the Pullman berths on the Orient Express³⁸ that used to pass through Wendlich twice a week before the War. As we came in, the light of a candle in front of the blacked out window-vent shone back from thirteen pairs of eyes staring down at us from the shelves. These were Dr. Bauer's nine children and his Russian DP³⁹ housemaid, Dzhenya, and Mutz and Evi and Sissi. Frau Bauer and her mother-in-law, whom the kids called Oma Berta, were sitting on a crude bench opposite. I says, "I've got to take a load off my feet," and sat down with them. Nobody else said a word while Frau Hartewig heaved Steffi in one of the top berths. I noticed that her right ankle was terribly swollen. She limped back toward us and sort of crumpled next to me.

The children, of course, were over-excited and restless, even the bigger ones. Dr. Bauer was tyrannical in his notions of discipline; he even still used a leather strap on his boys. But now his mind was elsewhere and the kids took advantage. The army blankets on the shelves started

³⁸ Orient Express: a famous railway train operating between Paris and Istanbul.

³⁹ DP: displaced person. Russian civilian refugees caught by the advancing Nazi army were often sent into Germany for forced labor. If they were women, they could be made to serve as maids in German households. Dzhenya is one of these.

bobbing up and down over their small behinds; braids were pulled, and the cellar filled with whispers and half-stifled squeaks or giggles. You would think it was Christmas Eve they were looking forward to, not an air-raid.

Then it started. At a distance of fifteen kilometers, you could hardly hear the sirens at all, and when you did it was more like two or three mosquitoes in the room. But the *pok! pokpok!* of the anti-aircraft batteries sounded the same as smack in the middle of Wendlich; when we heard that, we braced ourselves for the impact of the first bomb. We never even noticed it, because what we finally did hear wasn't what we were listening for. None of it sounded the least like a crash. At the loudest, it was like the way a paper sack full of water hits a wet lawn when a naughty boy drops it from a high window. Sometimes it was more like the popping of a heavy rubber balloon, or maybe the thud of a half-spent snowball against a wooden window-shutter. Or else it would make a thump like a cat pouncing upstairs. Other times it would come like a quick wobble of static on the radio. The weirdest part was when there came no noise at all that we could hear, only the faintest quick vibration underfoot, as when your train is held up at the station and you know they have just switched the engine; or else the blue, still flame of the candle would suddenly tremble and just as suddenly be still again. After a while too we heard a steady, deep, vicious drone, which must have been there all along, and we knew that squadron after squadron of Allied bombers was passing overhead.

It just seemed to go on and on forever, much longer than any of us could have imagined. None of the adults moved--Oma Berta just sitting as though carved in stone, Frau Bauer lisping her rosary, Frau Hartewig sullenly nursing her swollen right ankle on her left knee, and me tearing at my already torn sleeve and pretending to mind the kids. Dr. Bauer was standing at ramrod attention, solemn as the uniformed beadle during high mass at the Minster when the

bishop raises the host⁴⁰--but also with a strange expression flickering round his smudge of a mustache, scandalized sort of, or maybe thinking "I told you so!", or maybe both. Perhaps he stood like that when they gave him his diploma in chemistry, *summa cum laude*⁴¹.

The children on their shelves, their eyes glowing, their cheeks flushed with excitement, start making a game of it then, at first greeting every little thump with oohs and aahs, and before long trying to guess the size of the building hit by the noise of each little kerplunk. So there is that endless menacing drone like a blanket over the heavens, and the irregular, stuttering *pokpok!* *pok!* of the anti-aircraft, and the kids all tense and concentrated, and then a little thud or several, followed by a confused chorus of competing little voices.

"Pow! That must have hit the Minster!"

"No, it was bigger, bigger!"

"The City Hall, then!"

"Listen to this one! It must have blown up the *Maximiliansbrücke*⁴²!"

Pok! pokpokpok! mmpb! thump!

"Wow! Two of them!"

"NO, three!"

⁴⁰ host: the Eucharistic wafer used in the Catholic mass. At the most solemn moment of the mass, the priest raises the host after he, repeating the words of the Savior at the Last Supper, has pronounced it the real body of Christ.

⁴¹ *summa cum laude*: "with highest distinction," an exceptional academic honor.

⁴² *Maximiliansbrücke*: Emperor-Maximilian-Bridge

"Will you listen to that? That was the Minster, for sure!"

"Yeah!"

"Yeah!"

Somehow, Steffi gets the most carried away of all, maybe because he is the only boy there who lives in Wendlich itself, knowing more of the landmarks and therefore not about to run out of names. Even the bigger Bauer kids--Reinhold, who is almost twelve, and Polli and Magda and Agatha, all of them already parsing Latin⁴³ in school--take to following Steffi's lead, and since he has never been a natural leader, this makes him more overwrought yet, screechy almost. If a kindergarten teacher were to put on the *Apocalypse*⁴⁴ as a school play, Steffi would have made the perfect Angel of Judgment, kneeling on his army blanket on the top shelf as on a black cloud, his head almost hitting the basement ceiling, his face shining, fevery-like, and his blue eyes open wide and glinting dark as coals, straining to hear, with his palms splayed on either side of him, and then trumpeting or crowning fire and brimstone over schools and churches and stores and towers.

So it goes on, as if outside our cellar all clocks had stopped forever, until Steffi's expression changes suddenly and completely to a sly grimace, and he says "Yeech!", and there is a little pause and then Agatha says "Yeech!", and all the other kids in chorus, even little two-year-old Anselm, giggle and squeal "Yecch! YECCH!", and than we adults smell it too, because

⁴³ parsing Latin: In old-fashioned German public school, children began learning Latin at age nine; "parsing" means identifying grammatical structures in Latin sentences.

⁴⁴ *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, last part of the Christian Scripture, a prophetic vision of the End of the World and the Last Judgment, prior to the unveiling of the Eternal Jerusalem.

Sissy has fouled her mattress, she being too embarrassed to use the chamber pot in the corner behind the makeshift partition.

So it happened we never heard the all-clear at all. Much later we noticed that the droning and the anti-aircraft guns had stopped, and Dr. Bauer figured that the radio silence was now broken, and he switched on the set so we could hear how right the kids had been. They were fast asleep by then. It was just as hard to believe the radio announcer as it was the kids, because we hadn't seen it yet.

There was a huge empty fair-ground an hour's walk west of Friedfort towards Wendlich. After every night that the enemy reconnaissance planes flew over the city to be shot at by our anti-aircraft, that crazy Dr. Bauer used to send his six older kids out there after school, with Dzhenya, the Russian DP, watching over them, to collect the fragments of flak that had dropped during the night. "It keeps them occupied, and besides it's fun for them," his wife said. Some flimsy excuse that was, since what the little ones found, Dr. Bauer kept. Ugly, vicious-looking, jagged lumps of raw, busted metal they were, some of them as big as your fist, with shiny, dangerous spikes. And he hoarded them in his shop, the way he hoarded lengths of string and pencil stubs and the extra rationing coupons he got for his baker's dozen of a family. I'd like to know what he planned to do with them: a chemistry experiment, maybe? (Herr Hartewig said, when he was home on furlough, "That's your brother Bertold for you!" and you could tell he was mad enough to say a lot more, except that Steffi was listening.) Wouldn't you know that the morning after the big raid, Dr. Bauer sent his kids to the fair-ground as if nothing different had happened, though you couldn't tell where the sun was rising, since the west was redder than the east, and a nasty, cold drizzle falling too. I almost gave him a piece of my mind, but Frau Hartewig just says "Maria Johanna!" sort of warning-like, and I guess it was his own business.

Oma Berta stayed with the babies, while the rest of us piled in Dr. Bauer's DKW⁴⁵ truck to ride into Wendlich, since naturally the trains weren't running, because the station had been hit. We took Steffi along. "If the house is still standing," Frau Hartewig says to me, "he can at least have his 'second motive' back."

When the Wendlich skyline came into view, it looked like some kid had drawn it and not got it quite right. The steeple of Saint Matthias was missing and you could see right through the cupola of the opera house. Wavering horizontal smudges of purple and orange light and vertical smears of sooty atmosphere lined the horizon. We drove along the south bank of the river and when we got to the *Maximiliansbrücke*, some of it was lying sideways in the muddy water, so we couldn't cross to my sister Emma's part of town to check on her. The suburbs were so badly hit you couldn't tell where the streets ended and the fields of rubble that had once been houses began. Everywhere huddled shapes scurried, like rats in the stubble after a harvest, poking in the hills and valleys of smoking debris, which we later (when some of our sense of humor came back) called Hitler-landscapes⁴⁶, after the grass covered them in the spring. Here and there, half a building was still standing, charred rafters sticking out and smoking, or hissing and steaming as the cold rain hit. What with detours around blocked quarters of the city and long waiting in streets congested with evacuees, it took us two hours to get to the center of town.

"Thank God!" Frau Hartewig says when we reached the apartment house; it's still standing!" And so it was, the front of it anyhow, with only the windows punched out. But when we went to look at the inside, most of it wasn't there. The bomb had ripped a huge funnel right through all four stories. It must have smashed through the flat roof into Frau Hartewig's empty

⁴⁵ DKW: short for *Deutsches Kraftwagenwerk*, a leading auto manufacturer.

⁴⁶ Hitler landscapes: *Hitlerlandschaften*, a term derisively applied to bombed-out sites by civilians who did not share Hitler's enthusiasm for the War.

kitchen, where Steffi had abandoned his locomotive, and continued in its path through the other three kitchens one by one till it buried itself in the basement. Because it exploded near the bottom, the funnel got smaller at the top. The bomb-shelter part of the cellar, though, was toward the front of the house, so that the other tenants, who had gone there at the start of the raid, had been sealed in by the explosion, but had none of them been seriously hurt. When we arrived, the civil defense people had already dug them out by tunneling in from the crater.

The first person we met was frumpy Frau Von Klempke. She was pointing up to the gaping hole in the roof, near which we saw the quarter of the Hartewig's living room floor that remained slanting toward us a little, with Herr Hartewig's upright piano outlined against the grey sky, teetering crazily right on the edge. Most of the belongings we had lugged to the bomb shelter twenty-four hours earlier were right where we left them, though the good oriental with which we had covered the whole pile was badly water- and smoke-damaged, and looters had taken a few things, including the large silver punchbowl. We went to work quickly and silently, forming a cordon from the crater to the street, and started loading the stuff into the DKW. Frau Hartewig would duck down the crater, her ankle now like a blue bowling ball, and be back limping and groaning with some heavy thing to be passed from Dr. Hauer to his wife to me, who did the loading, Steffi pretending to supervise and looking mighty pleased with himself. Every now and then we had to go for cover while a little avalanche of mortar or broken plaster came crackling down, or when a splintered and charred beam above us would creak dangerously and sag a few more centimeters.

We were just getting to Herr Hartewig's paintings, when I heard Frau Hartewig give a shrill cry and saw her diving out of sight. Dr. Bauer was rushing toward his wife with a surprised look on his face, and I threw myself at Steffi. Four flights up, the piano started slowly tilting and

something cracked and its strings started humming. Then it tumbled over the edge. The sound of that piano hitting the hole the bomb had made was the loudest thing I heard during the entire War, and in the long echo of it I can still see little Steffi's surprised expression--his mouth greedy and trustful and open as a fledgling bird's, his eyes big as saucers, and his skin so pale that it shone.

Frau Hartewig was badly shaken, but all right. An hour later our work was done. We were standing near the smashed harp of the piano frame, when I noticed a curious black-and-brown metal object peeking from a muddy little depression right inside the crater. I recognized it right away. "Steffi," I says, "look what I found!" It was what was left of the second locomotive. With its chimney twisted forward like a snout and some springs from its windup mechanism sticking out like antennae, it looked for all the world like a big insect that's given up the ghost at the entrance to a hole in the ground.

Now here is a funny thing: When Steffi saw it, he didn't laugh and he didn't cry and he didn't have a tantrum. His eyes didn't even light up. He just stared at it, indifferent-like--and him unable to live without it two days before! From what I heard later, he never again mentioned it or (for all I know) even thought of it. I didn't have long to think of it either, because I was still pointing at it when I noticed, out of the corner of an eye, Frau Von Klempke whispering with one of the volunteer air-raid wardens who had just arrived, and then running up to Frau Hartewig and whispering with her. Then Frau Hartewig walks toward me and says "Maria Johanna!" in an odd, throaty tone, because they had just heard that my sister Emma had been killed in the raid. Emma had laughed at Dr. Bauer's "intuition" and I thought she had been right to laugh and I still think so, even though it's now a laugh I'll remember to my dying day.

After that, of course, I wasn't much good to the Hartewigs for a while. What with grieving and helping my mama and poppa grieve, I left their service that same day. I didn't see them again until long after they had left Friedfort and moved to old Oma Berta's in Langenau. By the time I got back to them, the GIs had come, and Herr Hartewig was back at last from the prison camp, and crazy Dr. Bauer was prophesying World War Three and urging everybody to emigrate to the United States of America.

July 1943

Because the Boy is precocious for his five years and has already learned how *Stuka* is short for *Sturzkampfflugzeug* (a baroque linguistic pretzel wreathed around the idea of a dive-bomber), has learned it in the park under the horse chestnuts from the glossolalia of the big boys at whose rough play he stared from a distance with mesmerized awe--grasping how in their heads the War had long ago exploded, even as it had these three dreamy years saved for last their green Bavarian city; because the Boy has been waiting for his never-to-be-born little brother ever since after his first sister and then his second and his third arrived at year intervals, like diminishing echoes of the same sharp disappointment; because the Mother is singing Schubert⁴⁷ next door, the Father accompanying her on the upright piano, while the somnolent July afternoon slants in gorgeous pomp through the barred windows of the nursery; because the maid is carefully washing the good Rosenthal china after the *Kaffeeklatsch*⁴⁸ with Frau Von Klempe from downstairs, who had been invited up, not out of friendliness, but out of an instinct for self-preservation engendered by the fact of her maternity to a certain dangerous

⁴⁷ Schubert: Franz Schubert (1797-1828), great Austrian composer, beloved in Germany especially for his *Lieder* (classical art songs with piano accompaniment). Before the advent of TV, home entertainment meant home performance; singing and playing Schubert's songs was a favorite form of it in cultivated middle class households. (Almost all middle-class households at least pretended to be cultivated.) The German verse quotations in this section of the story are all from the texts of *Lieder* that Steffi's mother is singing.

⁴⁸ *Kaffeeklatsch*:- "afternoon coffee-and-cake"; a German social institution, especially for women, somewhat like British "high tea."

eminence; because it is the babies' nap-time; because the Boy's happiness is skating on the thin ice of boredom and silence; and because the topaz square of sky above the geraniums in the window is repeated by the blue of die lacquer on his elaborate toy locomotive, he picks it up without thinking and, raising it above his head, begins to describe swooping circles with it in the air.

*Fremd bin ich eingezogen,
fremd zieh' ich wieder aus*⁴⁹ . . .

Because the American chief-of-staff at GHQ, London, is a connoisseur of the late-Renaissance architecture so appositely exemplified by the Elias Holl⁵⁰ facades in Wendlich, facades that survived almost miraculously the sack of the city at the hands of Gustavus Adolphus⁵¹ in 1632, for three-hundred-and-twelve years thereafter suffering no violence greater than that of the architectural "restorer"; because despite his weakness for Counterreformation culture, the General has been apprized of certain hard facts (item, the existence in Wendlich of a major railway junction, through which the Orient Express passed twice a week without stopping before the War; item, the presence in the same city of a branch of the Messerschmitt⁵² airplane works; item, the potential blow to Axis⁵³ morale, at some yet unspecified future point, by an incursion of Allied airpower into unexpected transalpine sectors); because the smoking-lounge

⁴⁹ "*Fremd bin ich* [etc.]": From the opening song in Schubert's song cycle, *Winterreise* (*Journey in Winter*). The two quotations from this song translate: "As a stranger I arrived, / As a stranger I am leaving again. . ." and "For my journey, it is not up to me / To select the right moment".

⁵⁰ Elias Holl: celebrated German architect of the Renaissance.

⁵¹ Gustavus Adolphus: Swedish king and general, whose campaigns on behalf of Protestantism helped to devastate southern Germany during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).

⁵² Messerschmitt: chief manufacturer of German military aircraft during World War Two.

⁵³ Axis: the formal alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan during World War Two.

of a Kensington⁵⁴ club has been declared off-limits to all unauthorized personnel to give the General an opportunity, in the unusually stifling heat, to peruse at leisure a top-secret document labeled Contingency Plans XRV 44 / Secondary Targets / Central European Theatre; and because, really, the General has no choice, he has already reached for page three of the document and initialed it.

*Ich kann zu meiner Reisen
nicht wählen mit der Zeit . . .*

Because today the Grandmother is not here for her usual Tuesday afternoon visit, having been called to her country house in Langenau to confer with that village's unsavory burgomaster, whose rustic cunning is even now taking the measure of her vulnerability; because she has been widowed for thirteen years, but has not been and is never going to be convinced that her refusal to take the safe path of other wealthy widows into the bosom of the Party⁵⁵ must mean the necessary sacrifice of half her apple-trees to the lumber mills of the WHW⁵⁶; because she will emerge victorious from her struggle with the burgomaster, though it will mean making use of her knowledge of his adulterous entanglement with the Gauleiter's wife; because even now her cancerous lesions, unsuspected still and fated not to burst into lethal bloom until 1949, are enervating her enough to force her to snatch a brief slumber; and because therefore she will not arrive at her daughter's until evening, it will be too late then to forestall what her favorite grandson is about to do.

Will dich im Traum nicht stören,

⁵⁴ Kensington: a once elegant district of London, here supposed to be the site of a secret HQ of the American air forces.

⁵⁵ the Party: the *Nationalsozialistische Partei* (Nazis). Membership was supposedly a privilege, not an obligation, but people who had money or land and persistently refused to join easily fell under suspicion.

⁵⁶ WHW: *Winterhilfswerk* (Winter Assistance Program), a massive Nazi government attempt to mobilize civilians to volunteer money, labor and goods for the support of German forces in Russia, especially after the German defeat at Stalingrad.

*wär' schad' um deine Ruh'*⁵⁷ . . .

Because the Mother, having carried the clear joy of her soprano through the conservatory in Munich and through a successful goiter⁵⁸ operation, was snatched from the portals of incipient concert-hall fame by the death of her titan father, and later by the seduction of her husband-to-be's bohemian mustache; because that husband's letter of induction to the infantry is already lying in a drawer and she is crowding back a confused dread of inevitable separation; because Frau Von Klempke has been a dreadful bore; because the *Knödel*⁵⁹ for supper can wait a little while yet, the afternoon weather being so deliciously lazy and serene; because her eyes are now lingering with fond worry over the thin lines of disappointment already etching themselves next to the Father's stern mouth, belying the effortless elegance with which he is touching the keys; because, though her own preferences among Schubert's songs are "*Liebesbotschaft*" and "*Frühlingsglaube*"⁶⁰, she gladly and proudly yields to his more classical tastes and turns the page to "*Fragment aus dem Aeschylos*"⁶¹; and because this summer, for the first time in years, she is not pregnant again, she feels once more almost virginal as the opening arpeggios⁶² of the song give her cue.

So wird der Mann, der sonder Zwang gerecht ist,

⁵⁷ "*Will dich im Traum . . .*" : still from Schubert's *Winterreise*: "I don't want to disturb your dream, / It would be a shame to interrupt your rest".

⁵⁸ goiter: chronic enlargement of the thyroid gland, caused by iodine-deficiency in the diet; a grotesquely disfiguring, but not dangerous enlargement of the Adam's apple results from it, which was sometimes removed surgically. Goiter was common prior to the routine addition of iodine to household salt.

⁵⁹ *Knödel*: large Bavarian-style dumplings

⁶⁰ *Liebesbotschaft* and *Frühlingsglaube*: "Message of Love" and "Faith in Spring", both titles of well-known *lieder* by Schubert.

⁶¹ *Fragment aus dem Aeschylos*: a somber text from Greek tragedy, translated by the classic German poet Friedrich Schiller and set to music by Schubert.

⁶² *arpeggio*: a harp-like chord performed on an instrument.

*nicht unglücklich sein, versinken ganz in Elend kann er nimmer*⁶³ . . .

Because the Father has not touched a paint-brush in months, except to decorate toys or refurbish the dining-room chairs, because the professors at the *Technische Hochschule*⁶⁴ had used words like *gleichgeschaltet*⁶⁵ to blast and wither his youthful dream (born of the canvasses of Franz Marc or Emil Nolde⁶⁶) of splendid artistic dedication, prodding him instead to eke a petty-bourgeois living from instructorships in design at pseudo-aristocratic boarding schools; because the vain hope of indefinite draft-deferments had compromised him away even from that into the technical drawing division of the Messerschmitt training workshop; because in another few months, even that vain hope would evaporate, and all he would have for revenge was the sheaf of savage caricatures he had secretly drawn of Goering and Himmler⁶⁷, as well as of Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin⁶⁸, which, locked in his desk, were safe to show to no one and which he would prudently, if regretfully, burn before leaving for the Italian front⁶⁹, where he was luckily to arrive too late ever to fire his weapon; and because he is ashamed of the courtesy he has been forced to show, even in front of his dreamy little son, to the Von Klempekes, he now continues to attack the piano with specially angry fervor.

Er ruft, von keinem Ohr vernommen,

⁶³ *So wird der Mann . . .*: "Thus a man who behaves justly without compulsion / Will never be unhappy, can never altogether sink into misery".

⁶⁴ *Technische Hochschule*: a university-level Institute of Technology.

⁶⁵ *gleichgeschaltet*: "equalized, democratized"; term used by Nazi theorists of art to argue that the "folk" art and propagandistic realism favored by Hitler were as good as, or better than, the "elitist" and "decadent" masterpieces of modern art.

⁶⁶ Franz Marc, Emil Nolde: German expressionist painters active in the first decades of the twentieth century; later, progressive young Germans admired their work, though it was officially frowned on by the Nazis.

⁶⁷ Goering and Himmler--two notorious Nazi politicians and war criminals. Herman Goering founded the Gestapo and created the first concentration camps; Heinrich Himmler headed the SS and secret police, and masterminded the holocaust.

⁶⁸ Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin: Herr Hartewig's probably caricatured the Tehran Conference of 1943, during which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the US, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Britain, and dictator Josef Stalin of Russia decided how to slice up Germany if they won the War.

⁶⁹ Italian front: Herr Hartewig is lucky not to have been sent to Russia.

kämpft in des Strudels Mitte, hoffnungslos.
Er ruft, er ruft,
*kämpft in des Strudels Mitte, hoffnungslos*⁷⁰ . .

The Boy is safe in the nursery. Though the window is open, there are bars in front of the brilliant geraniums. The gauze curtains lazily billow inward. He holds high in his hands his motive, his glistening, blue-and-silver sky-chariot. He is dancing in widening spirals. Alone with the *ostinato*⁷¹ of Schubert's "*Gruppe aus dem Tartarus*"⁷², he is murmuring "*Stuka! Stuka!*" He has danced up to the window sill. If he stretches, he can crane his head far enough between the bars and over the flowers to look down to the pavement from his four-story height. His small arm can be seen from below, reaching out into the air, describing slowly accelerating arcs and grasping the bright engine of his imagination. "*Stuka! Stuka! Vrrree000mmm!*" His blue eyes glow darkly above the red blossoms when he releases his dream and watches it shrinking as it hurtles down. Then he waits, tensely, cocking his ears for the crash . . .

folgen thränend seinem Trauerlauf,
*seinem Trau-er-lauf*⁷³ . . .

Eternities later his outraged wail of disappointment and ire will bring the Mother rushing into the room, clutching at her throat, crying, "*Menschenskinder!* what is wrong here?" She will not be able to console him, so that when the Grandmother will arrive at last for supper, he will sit quietly sobbing at the table, while the grown-ups, sober-faced, will be talking among themselves.

⁷⁰ "*Er ruft [etc.] . . .*": "He cries out, heard by no ear, / struggles hopelessly in the whirlpool's center./ Cries out, cries out, / struggles hopelessly in the whirlpool's center . . .". (from Schubert's "*Fragment aus dem Aeschylus*," describing the fate of the man who is *not* just).

⁷¹ *ostinato*: a musical passage involving the insistent repetition of a theme at the same pitch.

⁷² *Gruppe aus dem Tartarus*: "A Group from Tartarus" (words by Schiller). Tartarus is the equivalent of Hell in the classical underworld. Schubert's song (normally sung by a baritone, not by a soprano like Frau Hartewig) evokes a vision of the damned in the underworld. All the remaining verse quotations are from it.

⁷³ ". . . *folgen thränend [etc.]* ": "weeping follow its dismal current".

The Mother will tell the Grandmother about the induction notice. There will be a long silence, during which the maid will refill all plates except the Boy's with *Knödel*. At last, the Grandmother will say to her daughter, "But how on earth are you to manage?" at which point the Boy will let loose another inconsolable howl. So that the Grandmother will turn to her son-in-law and chuckle, "Well, I'll be! You'd think the boy imagined it's himself as has started the War!"

But now the Boy is by the window sill, waiting, waiting with relentlessly mounting anxiety for the consummation of his crash, a consummation which will never come.

*Fragen sich einander ängstlich leise
ob noch nicht Vollendung sei?
ob noch nicht Vollendung sei?*⁷⁴

The appropriateness of the Mother's refrain is completely accidental. The "first motive" is falling. The cupola of the opera house is glinting under the sun. Cigar smoke is clearing in a locked room in Kensington. The poppies are growing back in Stalingrad⁷⁵. The crickets are singing in the pastures of Langenau. "Mairzy dotes, and Dozy dotes, and little Lamsydivey."⁷⁶ The deep, cool cellars are waiting. Expropriated Czechoslovakian peasants are streaming back into the Sudetengau. In the funeral parlors of the United States of America, the small bodies of 1200 polio⁷⁷ victims, many of them in zoot suits⁷⁸, are lying in state. Warsaw is forgetting itself.

⁷⁴ "*Fragen sich [etc.]*": "Anxiously and in whispers ask one another / if it were not over yet?"

⁷⁵ Stalingrad: city in Russia, site of the disastrous German defeat which turned the tide of World War Two. Poppies traditionally flourish on former battlefields.

⁷⁶ "Mairzy dotes [etc.]" : first line of an American popular song with dotty nonsense lyrics; one of the hits of 1943.

⁷⁷ polio: aside from the War, the most newsworthy item during the early 1940's was an epidemic of poliomyelitis which killed over a thousand American children and put countless others in iron lungs. It was this epidemic which spurred the research during which Jonas Salk discovered his vaccine.

⁷⁸ zoot suit: a snazzy African-American outfit, apparently invented in 1943, which mimicked, with ironic exaggeration, the double-breasted, shoulder-padded business suit worn by successful whites.

Modern chemistry is heralding another metallurgical advance. Women riveters⁷⁹ are tightening the final bolts on a consignment of B-29's. Saint Helena is staring ecstatic, at two charred wooden beams still half buried in the ground. At Wendlich, a bright soprano is lifting tremendous tones through the thunderous chords of the upright piano into the blue heavens of July:

*Ewigkeit,
Ewigkeit schwingt über ihnen Kreise,
bricht die Sense des Saturns entzwei.
Ewigkeit,
Ewigkeit schwingt Kreise,
bricht die Sense des Saturns entzwei,
bricht the Sense des Saturns entzwei.⁸⁰*

⁷⁹ Women riveters: because able-bodied men were fighting the War, the workers in American armament factories were mostly women. "Rosie the Riveter" became a popular phrase, signaling a new phase of women's emancipation.

⁸⁰ "*Ewigkeit [etc.]*": "Eternity, / Eternity sweeps in circles above them, / smashes the scythe of Saturn in half. . ."