

RESURRECTION

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PROLOGUE

CREDO CREDENS- I believe in Belief.

I accept the uncertainty of human understanding,
which is the first step to the leap of faith (saltafide).

“In the beginning was the deed”

Goethe

BEHIND THE PURPLE DOOR

Solo had to leap to the dock, from his live-aboard sail boat. After tightening the dock lines, he drew a deep breath through his Covid mask. The Hudson River, 79th Street Boat Basin was the start point for his long, sometimes all-day walks to any and all points east. Despite his seamanship course, he never checked the weather radio, not even the weather app on his iPhone.

Ever since the third grade at Saint Anthony's, it was established that Solo's head was in the clouds. Now the clouds opened, just at the point of no return, and suddenly it was as if he was standing in a car wash. He moved under the overhang of a three story tenement in the middle of the crosstown street. The wind bent the rain to follow, like someone was aiming a fire hose. So sudden, so unusual was nature's blast, the thought of Armageddon flashed across his mind, as it would in any mammalian mind, in the first seconds when the sky seems to fall.

"Shit," sparked up to the roof overhang and bounced back like a dog bark, followed by a gurgle of laughter. As Solo looked down at the rising tide around the gunnels of his boat shoes, he heard a door open behind him, the only purple door in the row of

closed shops, black words, INTERSTATE TRAVEL
crudely painted, slightly off center.

A voice slipped through the crack, just audible over the thrash of the rain. It had the same pitch and arrhythmia of Christopher Walken: “You don’t have the umbrella so you can’t be Gene Kelly singing in the rain..... you better come in..... before you drown.’

Solo was not fearful, nevertheless, his New Yorker instinct would normally have declined the kindness of strangers, but he happened to be thinking about that very Gene Kelly movie just before the voice mentioned it, and coincidence was often a beacon for Solo’s strange journey.

The two masked men faced each other in the daytime darkness. A gloved hand pulled the chain of the antique floor lamp which lit the shaft between them. The bent trunk and limbs of the host were covered by a hooded camouflage cape and the face by a tube mask; two rings of brown tinted lenses set off the pupils, like berries left over from the bush’s fall withering. After an awkward silence, words came from the bush, with the measured cadence of a secret society rite. “Now, you are Solo Viavolo,”

Solo’s curiosity was heightened . “Yes, ...and you are?”

“No one really...” The curved back straightened. “.except that I know you need to move back before you can move on.”

Solo stepped back. “Have you seen my website?” The other hook that held Solo was recognition. Try as he might, Solo was still addicted to kudos. He knew enough about Buddhism and Saint Augustine not to crave adulation, and he was constantly working hard on that, but not there yet. Celebrity was as alluring as it was threatening. In this case, the implausibility of his being recognized, especially behind a Covid mask topped by a dripping red hoodie, weighed against the adulation, but deepened the mystery.

Actually, Solo Viavolo was almost never recognized on the street, even before the pandemic. A handful of internet subscribers might have recognized his name from his web site, saltafide.com, or his picture in a corner of the philosophical page, which from time to time, he would take down and then put back.

Neither Solo’s podcasts nor his texts were time bound; he bounced around history’s mysteries like a super ball, from Nero to Nixon, from Trujillo to Trump, and always the well known facts were peppered with little known details and unique insights. It was more than journalism. There was a special section for the puzzles and paradoxes of philosophy and physics.

Solo knew that he could reach a broader audience if he was less philosophical and more entertaining. He had to blow his own horn to be heard, and he could blow, but he feared the blow back. He had already glimpsed the vanity 'Malebolgia' of purgatory, with his short career as a jazz rapper.

For some time his web site had been offering an online PPHD. That's not a typo; it stood for 'Philosophical-Physics- History Dabbler and if you sent your contact info in, you got a pin that said: '*saltafide = leap of faith*' Most of the 150 pins were still in the box they came in.

One fan wore the pin proudly wherever he went as if it were the Croix de Guerre; that was Anthony Viavolo, aka Tony Vi, Solo's dad.

In his day, Tony Vi was a celebrity, very talented, and still very rich. Solo rarely accepted his largesse. Since his teenage years, Solo wrestled with the double edged gelt sword: gelt greed, where you never have enough and gelt guilt, where you have too much. He understood how Saint Francis, of Assisi, Buddha, and Saint Wittgenstein (about to be canonized by Solo) could give it all away, but he was never able to do that himself. He did, after all, own a 44-foot boat and paid by the year for his slip on the Hudson, which turned out to be the cheapest way to live on the most expensive island real estate in the world.

Tony never understood Solo's life style and a lot of other things about his son, There was a rough patch in the past where Solo felt hated by his father. But that was history. Things were completely different now. Solo could get along with anyone, as long as they didn't get too close. Solo was learning that the deepest dives and the tallest climbs are always solitary experiences. Social distancing was made to order for Solo.

Solos's closest friends were piled horizontally on top of vertical stack of older friends, all in one lacquered fruit box attached to the bulkhead behind the nav table. Despite his mastery of Internet, Solo still liked to have a book in his hands. Of course, all those absent friends excluded present company.

Solo's need for intimacy was constantly being trimmed like unwanted hair, or finger nails. Solo still found himself masturbating on rare occasions, usually after periods of sleeplessness. The low mind could waft up from the bilge when the high-mind was off watch, but the low mind never made it to shore. Whenever the chill of solitude became too much, he would intone a two bar jazz lick, each bar with two quarter notes and a drag triplet, to which he had set the Socratic mantra: *'I am... not alone; I am... by myself.'*

Solo's high mind was in a constant state of deconstruction and reconstruction. His scientific rationalism had somehow found a way to coexist with his mystical beliefs, thanks to several of the 'great'

friends who charted a course through the treacherous pass. This crew of pilot captains included Plato, Plotinus, Saint Augustine, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Heidegger, Heisenberg, Schrodinger, Bohr, Einstein, and, of course, Wittgenstein. If anyone doesn't know those names they can just hop over to saltafide.com where those and other physicists and philosophers are presented in a readable digest on one web page for the casual interest and a massive reference library on another, with hot links to Wikipedia, for scholars... (who have yet to discover this new temple of wisdom). Solo would tell you that he took great care not to dumb down the digest while making it readable for a larger audience,... (which also had yet to arrive).

Solo's focus for the past months involved the philosophy of Wittgenstein, including his historical and cultural influences, such as, the Vienna Circle, the Cambridge circle, Judaism, Catholicism, the Austro-Hungarian, and Nazi, empires... and two world wars. To Solo this black hole of forces and the cosmic explosion of philosophical effects could be the big bang of a new philosophy, leaving Solo to wonder whether and how to explore the new galaxy.

Wittgenstein, figuratively and literally, jumped out at him. Solo was attempting to pull out a slim volume on the first Jewish Christians, by the great eighteenth century historian, Edward Gibbon, when the Wittgenstein book literally popped out of its hibernation, like a genie from a bottle, ready to amaze and mystify.

“Careful, that’s a flying carpet.” The talking bush went to search for a towel.

Solo followed, dripping across a weathered Persian carpet. “Really, that’s very kind of you but not necessary... I can get an Uber ... I have my iPhone somewhere....”. Solo fumbled around through his wet pockets. “Oh, I must have left my phone.....”

Solo suddenly noticed that he was standing in an enormous saucer-shaped cavern, which could not possibly fit in this three story tenement building.

“It’s time for a move Apostolo”. The bush voice now had a wizard echo .

“ I think you have me confused with someone else.”

“Confusion is okfor now!”

“Now... what does that mean’?” Solo tried to get a closer look.

“Nothing, nothing; now means nothing... not here...” Arms sprung up under the poncho and remained perfectly still like tree limbs as he spoke without any apparent lip movement. “... While you think of ‘now,’ it’s the future and as soon as you say it, it’s the past.”

An awkward silence followed.

This was not your typical shop keeper. Solo broke the silence. “So what do you do here ... in the shop?”

“Nothing, we’re closed.” The old man put his arms down.

“I know, I mean when you were open?”

“We were never open.”

“What?” Solo’s chuckle demanded an explanation.

“Only for apostles....we create, *connections*.....” He rolled his berry eyes over the word “connections.”

Solo chuckled at the misunderstanding. “I am not an apostle and not a science fiction writer. I have a website but it’s not religion and not science fiction....”

“Religious fiction and science fiction need to be refreshed by historical fiction. That’s why you’re looking back to Vienna, now....”

“Vienna; what made you say that?” Solo was shocked by the mind read.

“Wittgenstein, that’s been burning a hole in your soul, and you gotta find out if you can make a new myth out of this old story.”

“What the...”. Solo was sure that he had yet to make public his new interest in Wittgenstein.

“ It’s OK. Confusion is like a twisted rubber band; you attach it to the propeller and you fly. If you let it go it smacks you in the face.”

“How do you know about Wittgenstein?” Solo demanded

“ I can’t find anything to dry you off. You’ll have to shake it off yourself....You’re all wet and wound up till you feel like taking off.” The old man led Solo to the door.

Before Solo could get another word out, he was back on the sidewalk; the purple door closed behind him, but somehow he could still hear the old man’s voice. “Next time...next time.”

“Next time.... next time.” Out of earshot, the voice still rang in his head, as though coming through his Apple air pods, which had been lost for over a week now.

The rain had stopped but the streets were still puddled and Solo did a squishy hop scotch back to the boat basin.

Solo found his cell phone on the toilet seat just before he sat on it, for his sit-down rinse in the combination head-shower. In the minutes it took to

get the weak flow of warm water working, Solo struggled to turn off the gush of thoughts about the telepathic bush wizard. He needed mind space to rehearse the appointment with his father. The sensation of the warm water on his newly expanding bald spot and neck was distraction enough. Solo wanted some more details about his deceased mother and he had to make sure it would not upset the delicate relationship he had re-established with his father.

They tried to meet for dinner once a month, but not since Sylvio's restaurant was closed because of Covid.

Solo never legally changed his first name which was Solomon, his mother's idea. It might have been her father's name; but it didn't go well with Viavolo and, for sure, he did not want to be known as Sol. He had been Solo since he was old enough to talk in complete sentences, which happened to be just after he came out of the womb.

The last time he and Tony Vi had dinner, before the pandemic, Solo learned that Hildy, his mother, was Jewish. Solo and Tony were her only living relatives, so there was no one else to ask about this, now that she was gone.

Tony said he learned about this at the end of her life. He claims that he only knew she was from Austria and that her parents died when she was a child and that's all she ever told him. Why he didn't press for

details may have something to do with his own self obsession. He wasn't even sure how old she was.

Whether or not his parents purposely hid the fact that she was Jewish, was not clear. Somehow, every one thought Mamma Vi, was Italian. She would lace into her English sentence, a perfectly pronounced Neapolitan bromide with the appropriate matching gestures. For Solo she was an Italian mother on the surface and a secret music coach on the side, secret because of Tony Vi. By the time Solo was old enough to play his guitar, Tony discouraged any interest he might have in performing music. For whatever reason, Tony told his son that music was a fire you could get close to for warmth, as long as you didn't try to get in it. He no longer felt he had to force this 'wisdom' onto his son, because whatever he was now, Solo was not open to paternal advice, especially not from Tony.

Solo was born in Hollywood where Tony starred in his one and only movie. Solo's earliest memories began in New York, where Tony had his own TV show on NBC, featuring musical guests. Solo spent most of his time with Monica a Puerto Rican, nanny. Hildy was a regular on the show, without anyone knowing they were married. Hildy managed the finances right up until the end and still played the piano well enough, at the end of her life, to perform as rehearsal pianist for several off Broadway musicals..

Just as college ended, Tony Vi, now a real estate mogul, practically kidnapped his kid and dropped him

into an Ivy league law school upstate, where Solo used the piano in the lounge more than the law books. He wrote songs and poems instead of briefs. Somehow he did manage to graduate and pass the bar, but then made no effort to find a job. That's when allowances and communication broke off completely. Tony gave up and so did Solo. Solo could not face the "loser" image his dad held of his only son. Tony was actually ashamed of his crazy son, and suggested that Solo might change his last name as well.

It was not until Solo got a faculty position in Rochester, which had nothing to do with law, that he felt comfortable even writing or calling Tony, which he did when it became clear that his mother's cancer was terminal.

Nowadays, the retired Tony Vi was proud of his 'celebrity' son, and appalled if someone never heard of Solo Viavolo. Tony was getting forgetful, but smart enough not to be over bearing. He wanted to spend more time with Solo but that wasn't happening, especially since the pandemic and since Tony became a Trump supporter. The pandemic was a good excuse for Solo to skip several dinners. Now that restaurants were reopening for a small number of regulars, there was no excuse.

On the way to Sylvio's, Solo tried to return his ex-wife's call. She rarely called since she recently came out of the closet and was now living with another woman. He felt compelled to maintain friendly

relations with her and, by and large, it was working. Despite her assurances that she would never disclose any part of their sexual experimentation during the marriage, he still worried about the embarrassment that her disclosures might cause. Sexual gratification was now something that Solo wished to put behind him. Like pastry and linguini, the pleasure was fleeting, and the craving and unexpected consequences, painful and lingering.

At the dad dinner, Solo once again pushed for details about his mom's family and got nowhere. As usual Tony ordered too much and once again, the passion for pasta and pastry slipped past the will for both Viavolo's.

On the solitary walk back from Sylvio's, just as Solo's self flagellation was about to turn philosophical, he noticed, up the street, the mitzvah tank, which had reappeared after a long absence.

A mitzvah tank is a synagogue in a small RV trailer, parked on the street where orthodox Jewish rabbis offer to bring Jews back to the orthodox faith by performing bar mitzvahs right there in the trailer. Solo usually crossed the street to avoid having to deal with them. This night he headed straight toward them.

"Are you Jewish?" The question was more ominous, coming from an unseen aperture between a black yarmulke and Covid mask.

Solo surprised himself by stopping this time. “My mother was Jewish” he blurted.

“If your mother was Jewish, you’re Jewish!”

Suddenly Solo found himself in a dialogue with a masked rabbi. “My father was... is...Catholic, not very religious, and I was raised Catholic.”

“That’s OK - you’re still Jewish.” The rabbi’s dark eyes flashed like Zoro and the aquiline nose stretched the nose pleat in the mask, raising the curtain on the rabbi’s bare chin. Instead of an unkempt beard, the bit of skin Solo could see was a mahogany color.

Solo looked both ways as if he were about to cop some coke or tell a dirty joke. What followed was a shoot out between Judaism and Christianity. The rabbi was no match for Solo. The rabbi’s sound-bite bubbles were easily popped by Solo’s birdshot of pointed paradoxes. So much so, that the rabbi began to stutter. Solo questioned the lack of a confessional in the Jewish religion, and the lack of a hereafter which, quoting Gibbon, he suggested was the very reason so many early jews left their religion to follow Jesus.

The rabbi’s burst dogma lay in a puddle on the sidewalk, evaporating, right there in front of the mitzvah tank. As soon as it became clear that the rabbi was wounded and disarmed, Solo began shooting back at himself.

“Of course where would we be without Jewish ingenuity. Their troubles fueled their triumphs”

“Our...”, the Rabbi interrupted, “our triumphs.”...

“Ok... our...” Solo continued. “All that intolerance ‘we’ had to put up with made us ingenious rugged individualists, scientists and artists and entrepreneurs. Jews believe that success is the only heaven, and you enjoy it right here on earth; and keep it in the family. That’s at the heart of American consumerism.”

“That’s God’s will.” the rabbi chimed in.

“What God? Christ made everyone his family and sacrificed all his worldly pleasures...” Solo was about to continue the debate.

“Bar mitzvah, have you done it?” The Rabbi refocused on the mission at hand.

“No, I had Confirmation in the Catholic religion. I’m half Italian.”

“That’s ok...” The rabbi held up his fist as in the black power (and now the Trump white power) salute. “... a ‘Jewop’ now you can be proud to be part of the chosen people...” The rabbi cautiously moved closer; Solo moved away, pointing to the gap between them as if to invoke the social distance rule. “...You should be confirmed in the Jewish religion,,,,,you’re a Jew.”

“No-one ever called me that... They called me wop but it was not meant as a compliment. Imagine what a world it would be if an ethnic slur was meant as a compliment...” Solo mused, and then added: “That would be a new world, but it could never happen in an old world of ‘chosen’ people’ surrounded by the unchosen.”

“We don’t need the goyum.” The Rabbi flipped his wrist, trying to be funny.

“So who’s gonna pay retail?” Solo surprised himself, with the imitation yiddish accent; with that, he made his exit.

“Hey...” The rabbi called after him.

“Next Time, ...next time”. Solo said, waving as if leaving a standup comedy stage,

The following Saturday, on Solo’s northbound walk, he was still obsessed by the bush wizard’s telepathy. He had to find out more. Even if it turned out the old bush was a nut tree, it might make for an interesting piece, which could include the rabbi and others demonstrating how philosophy emerges inevitably in every relationship and underlies every conversation, even with the strangest street strangers. When he arrived at the purple door, it was open and the old man was standing in the doorway still covered by cloak and hood.

“Tolo! ...” His greeting caused Solo’s brow to knit above the mask. The bush explained. “...the Greek nickname for Apostolo...”

“It’s Solo, and I’m not Greek.”

“We’re all Greek?”

Solo took a step toward the threshold, which suddenly became blocked by the cape. “What’s on your mind?”

“Well as you guessed, Austro- Hungarian, Hapsburg, late 1800’s is something I do wonder about.”

“So you are ready to wander about?”

“I said wonder about. I have been wondering about Ludwig Wittgenstein.....the Vienna of his early life, as you guessed.... somehow. I have wondered about Vienna. I have never been there and now there is no travel because of Covid. I’m sure it’s very different now, anyway, but I do wonder...”

“If you wanna wander instead of wonder, come back New Year’s eve.. I have to work a few things out on the other end first. You have to keep this to yourself; that’s important. I know you like to talk. Talk is cheap... but... we still need it. You can talk to the ‘then’ people about ‘now’, but you can’t talk to the ‘now’ people about ‘then’, till you find a point to the

story.... and then only in writing, and you won't get credit for being there. Come back New Year's eve, if you want the deal.." The old man slipped back inside and closed the door in Solo's face.

Given Solo's life style, old acquaintances were 'soon forgot' long before midnight New Year's eve, and for better or worse, the decision was made to go down this new rabbit hole to find new, 'old acquaintances.' On the brisk evening walk from the boat, Solo was elated with the anticipation and then just as he reached the purple door, the irony struck him: 'I'm looking forward to going backward'.

It was barely 9 pm when the old man led Solo into the back room cavern where he handed him what looked like an Apple Watch, except the face was slightly larger and the wristband had the word TIMESPAN written on both straps in different fonts. "Merry Christmas."

"Better late than never." Solo accepted the watch.

"That's a good one; did you make that up? I wonder why late is better than never; then... would early be better than forever?" The old wizard feigned curiosity.

"Look I'm in the dark here....and freezing," Solo held out the watch in his shivering hand.

“You can wear it on either hand. It’s all set for your timespan.”

The watch face just had the word “NOW” on it. Solo laughed out loud “That’s funny, “NOW?”

“Put it on....” The old man commanded. “...tempus fugit. Just act natural; stay open. Go with the flow. You have all the time in the world. It’s all connected, but don’t push it. Don’t rush...don’t worry.... Beat around the bush. Go with the flow.... Don’t rush and don’t worry....find the connection; and find yourself... everywhere.”

Still incredulous, Solo attached the watch to his left wrist. The word ‘NOW’ lit up and changed from green to red and then his pulse diminished and he stopped shivering; the sight of the bush wizard seemed to grey out.

It was like the one time he tried LSD. Solo felt the floor moving beneath his feet. He side stepped to avoid stumbling and groped in the empty space for something to hang onto, until he realized that he was weightless and then he relaxed into the flow. As the entire scene faded, he could still hear the bush wizard’s voice: “Just turn the stem to ‘THEN’”.

“Then what?” Solo’s voice echoed like he was in a subway tunnel.

“I don’t know....” The reply echoed .”... I really don’t know”

Solo felt grounded, the smooth surface beneath his feet changed to rounded cobble stones. He could see the postcard winter scene but somehow he didn’t feel cold.

BOXED INMATES

Solo was standing solidly in front of Vienna's Saint Stephen's Cathedral, more amazed than frightened. For a split second, he wondered about how to get back, but he wasn't about to turn the watch stem back to 'NOW', not now.

Smells and sounds of horse drawn carriages filled the pre-industrial atmosphere. Inside, he felt dwarfed by the columns and transported by the scent of incense and candle wax. He ambled down the center aisle, gawking at the empty pews.



He stopped at one of the confessionals in the West knave. Like a newly arrived tourist, he marveled at the craft and the religious belief systems it took to create this

outhouse for insight.

This confessional was different from the others. Of the three doors, the one nearest to him was open, which seemed to invite him in. Without any plan, he stepped in and knelt on the velvet cushion.

In the dark interior, he could see there was no one sitting in the middle section, where the priest would sit, and beyond that, he could barely make out the shadowy figure of a man kneeling.

“Hello”. His whisper hopped over the empty stall.

The shadow looked up and then across, purposely keeping the right side of his face hidden, which created a left facing, silhouette on the partition screen, like an Egyptian cartouche. “Du bist kein Priester?” The shadow spoke in an aristocratic Austrian accent.

“My German is a little rusty.” Solo knew enough to place the accent in the Germanic social hierarchy.

With the keen musical sense, which just happened to be on both sides of this strange duet, the enclosed darkness provided an aural focus which pronounced the subliminal nuances beneath the whispers for both sets of ears.

“American.....I recognize...also New York...” The shadow’s crisp whisper came across; and then the silhouette turned as if congratulate himself.

“...amazing I could make that out with so few words, ... It’s the vowels...”. The the ‘v’ and ‘w’ of this word ‘vowel’ were almost indistinguishable.

“Whatever you know about New York, you weren’t born there...I can tell by your accent; it’s the consonants.” Solo realized that he might be too forward, but wasn’t sure why.

“No, that is correct. I was in all parts of New York, however,... in my youth, even up where the big apples come from...” The shadow’s tone became almost nostalgic. “... I love America.”

“Why’s that?”

“You need to ask? I can tell by your Brooklyn accent..., no Bronx... you are working class, and yet you can afford the passage to Vienna, but you are not a priest?...” In the next utterance one could detect a conscious effort to create a difference between ‘w’s and ‘v’s’. “...What are you doing here? You are not the priest?”

“No, God, no...” Solo spoke with nervous nonchalance. “...Light’s on; nobody home in the priest department.”

“... Nobody home?” The shadow reacted quizzically.

“Just an American expression. I don’t know what or who is supposed to be in the middle...”. Solo alluded to the empty confessor chair.

“Ah yes, No middle man, then.“ The shadow’s accent magically, almost disappeared.

“What?“ It sounded to Solo like someone else had joined the conversation..

“Middle-man, an American expression...from what I remember that was the original idea... “

“What was.....?“

“No middle man....” The shadow then chanted.
“...’confess yee one to another’, etcetera, etcetera...”

“Are you a priest?“ Solo asked reverently.

The rising glissando made the shadow sound like a reluctant ‘twenty-questions’ contestant. “Nooo”.

Solo could hear hauteur, even behind just the one syllable answer. “Are you a bishop?“

“I’d have to be a priest to be a bishop.... No, not bishop, not knight....” The shadow’s voice dropped to the bottom of its range. “...not queen....”.

“Not pawn” Solo interrupted

“No , not pawn.... “ The shadow said wryly.
“...nothing against pawns.”

“No”

“We need pawns for the production line... “ The shadow said officiously.

“And the front line.” Solo injected sarcastically.

“Yes that too. But they don’t have to stay in the trench or the gutter...” The shadow stopped to listen to himself, and then changed his tone and accent again, sounding more like a stage actor. “..The great news is that anyone can get a break who’s willing to... shake a leg.”

“Curtains up....Sounds like we got a show here... break a leg...” Solo moved to his left to get a better view of what was about to happen.

“Break a leg? No, I said shake a leg” The shadow seemed confused.

“ Oh...sorry, break a leg means good luck with a performance, an American expression, which must have come into vogue after your time..” Solo explained.

“ After my time.....?” The shadow was confused.
“...What’ time is it.... now?”

“ ‘What time is it *now*?...’ Solo wasn’t sure whether, or how, to answer the question; he vamped. “That is a sentence that contains an adverb, which is redundant, and... now ambiguous.”

“ It seems we share an interest in linguistics.” The shadow’s tone was complimentary and then sharpened. “...Now means now. How can ‘now’ be ambiguous?”

“You’ll be surprised.” Solo shot back, still unsure about whether to explain.

“What about ‘here’; what are you doing here?” The shadow was demanding.

“Age before beauty. What are **you** doing here? ... You go first.....” Solo tried not to sound pushy, but his insistence was underscored by a long silence, which the shadow took to mean that he had some explaining to do before he could learn any more about his strange visitation.

Suddenly the shadow voice became sullen. “Well, ... you never think it’s going to end, and then one day you realize that it’s your last New Year’s eve, no more resolutions to make..... I don’t know why I’m telling you all this. I guess I’ll talk to anyone at this point..... sorry, no insult intended”

“None taken. “

“OK...” The shadow opened up. “.... Can you imagine a day when your plans for the new year are to be completed after you’re gone?”

“No I can’t to tell the truth...” Solo was shocked.

“ You sound shocked. That is a shock, all of sudden, it’s you, ... It’s always been someone else....now it’s you...your plans suddenly will not include you, ...can you imagine?”

Solo swallowed to moisten his dry throat. “ No I can’t.... As it turns out no one can. While we are in the process of living our lives, we cannot imagine death, otherwise we would be dysfunctional, like prisoners on death row. Schopenhauer believes that the finality of death is hidden from us because it is not only incomprehensible but also not true....”

“I don’t understand Schopenhauer.”

“Well think about life.. your phenomenal life, the will is a thought pool which goes on after you....”

“Are you referring to family?..... heirs?” The shadow’s tone darkened.

“Could be.”

“Families are full of surprises; not always pleasant surprises. Somehow I do not find that something to look forward to.”

“ I can understand that...What about afterlife?”
Solo stumbled onto something to say.

“Not sure I believe in that.”

“Why come here, then?” Solo wondered.

“ I wandered in convinced, no deluded...I was sure it was an earlier New Year.... I felt lost in time... Suddenly, all of those different people I have been were all in a file as I walked down the aisle ... one New Year self, standing, stolidly like an usher, at each pew. Sixty pews, beginning with a three year old I hardly recognized. Each pew getting taller and more arrogant...a pre-teen choir boy.... On down a few to a dashing young rakeon and on ...At the sixtieth pew, in front of the main altar, was my last New Year; I wore a cape and had silver cognac flask hidden in the inside pocket for my royal guests... I could still hear the Bach organ recital, which I sponsored. Then suddenly the music stopped and I was completely alone. I walked across the altar without genuflecting, and just suddenly ducked into this strange outhouse for cover ... hiding from the stampede of time, and whatever would come next.... What next?”

Solo was stymied. “Well ... I I am not sure. We are together and we can make the most of our connection. That would dodge that time stampede you spoke of.”

“How so?” The shadow demanded.

“Many physicists and philosophers agree with Schopenhauer that there is no past were mind can dwell, and no future. Eternity is masquerading as the present for all the minds yet to appear and who appear to have disappeared. Now is our own illusion, our time to strut upon the eternal stage. ‘All the world’s a stage...’”

“Do you sell these tickets to this eternal show? I can pay well.” The shadow was being facetious.

“I don’t think you can buy in with money...” Solo replied with more conviction.

“I see...”. The shadow resumed his chant voice. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” Is that the gospel truth you are referring to?”

“I am not a priest and not into gospel truths, I did not invent this phenomenal reality, nor do I completely understand it, I must confess...”

“I must confess...” The shadow interrupted again, this time with a more submissive tone. “... I have never been in this or any other confessional, and now here I am, on my knees, before you.....”

“Beside me” Solo corrected, as if to point out that their relationship was horizontal rather than vertical.

The shadow's tone became respectfully curious. " Maybe you should tell me who, or what, you are....age has made its confession, now it's time for beauty to unfold."

" Age before beauty is just an American expression. And I'm sorry I said that because have no idea what it means...I don't know how old you are and I'm no beauty."

"Ok I accept your modesty. What are you, then ?"

"What I am is not as important as 'when' I am."
Solo decided to be a bit more transparent.

"When ?"

" Twenty first century... not sure how far that will throw you."

In the long silence that followed, the shadow almost turned his head but caught himself and reframed the left facing silhouette, as he spoke slowly with a noticeable lump in his throat. "Of course for a realist like me this is going to be hard to swallow... Maybe I'm imagining you."

Solo flashed a reply. "Or I'm imagining you. Either way it's our phenomenal reality for now, I imagine. We have to rise up to the highest peaks for the broadest views."

The shadow was almost frightened. “What if I can’t keep up?”

“ Well then let’s get down! ” Solo exhorted.

“Get down?”

“An American expression. Get off our high horses. ...”

The shadow emphasized the adjective, “High horse, I see...” ; making a conscious effort to constrain his natural arrogance. “... I suppose we are once again drawn, inevitably, to the distinction between cavaliers and pedestrians, I don’t mean to be cavalier, but I’m not pedestrian.”

“Pedestrian is not something you are; it is something you do when you have both feet on the ground.” Solo was mystified by his own words..

“ I’m on my knees... “ The Shadow asserted and then changed his tone to include as much reverence as this voice could manage. “ ...Are you some sort of an angel?”

Solo tried to keep the doubt out of his matter of fact tone. “I’m no angel. I’m on my knees too. We have to just go along with the illusory flow. We have all the time in the world...’here and now’...whatever that means. Why not make the most of it. By some

unexplained magic we're connected in the same place at different times..."

"Yes, I see...". The shadow feigned nonchalance. "... I had some small part in the magic of connecting people in different places at the same time, which is not quite the same."

"Oh?" Solo urged him on.

"By getting a Jew and an Italian together,...."

"Wait a minute..." Solo interrupted, mystified. "... are we talking about my parents?"

"No, Hertz and Marconi are both men...they couldn't have parented anything but an idea." For the shadow, the misunderstanding reinforced the horizontality of the this strange new relationship, making the mysterious visitor more human .

For Solo it added sublimity to his partner. "Oh.... Oh yes.... I see where we are now..... radio waves began here; and you had something to do with that...the age of communication....what...ah...!" In the next breath, for some reason, Solo saw the need to share his own critical perspective, on communication technology. "... I'm sorry to tell you that the appointment with universality has turned out to be a bit of a disappointment."

"What does that mean?"

“ I’m guessing you all expected that the greater bandwidth would bring more truth to the masses. Actually, I’m beginning to think that bandwidth and truth are inversely proportionate...”Solo waited; when no reply was forthcoming, he explained. “...the more bandwidth the less truth...”

“I know what ‘inversely proportionate’ means...” Hauteur slipped back into the shadow’s tone. “...You’re not a priest, not an angel.....but you’re not an ordinary fool.”

“Not all fools are ordinary, not all ordinaries are fools.” Solo was just playing with words, and was surprised, himself, that he might have landed on a philosophical position but once there, he decided to defend it, just for exercise, if for no other reason.

“ You can turn a phrase, like that. That puts you in a special class....” The shadow probed.

“Special class is an American expression that has come to mean a school room for slow learners.” Solo continued to stand up for the underdogs, even though he truly believed they should never be let off the leash.

“Whatever the class, there has to be someone at the front podium handing **down** the meaning... that is **not** a bad thing.”

“Actually, ‘bad’ now means ‘good’ where I come from, which is an example of meaning being handed **up**, in terms of American expressions.” It now occurred to Solo that this linguistic joust was getting in the way.

“Let’s leave aside for the moment who makes them; surely you see that the mass of people can’t think beyond the guidelines set down for them.” The shadow was more serious.

”Can’t or won’t. I think they can, but I agree they choose not to, most of the time.” Solo hoped that would end the joust and maybe now they could finally dismount.

“That’s a fine distinction, ‘can’t or won’t’. With all due respect, I’m not sure that isn’t a distinction without a difference.” The shadow demurred.

“You make a very fine philosophical point and in a second language yet...” The thought crossed Solo’s mind that the shadow might be some Neo-platonic philosopher. “I see that we’re all born stupid, but don’t you think we all have the same chance to change that? This might just be one such opportunity.” Solo was ready to receive.

“ You put chance and change in the same sentence?” The shadow was also ready to receive.

“OK?” Solo waited.

“OK ...?” The shadow waited

A brand new thought came to Solo out of nowhere and leapt from his lips. “... There has to be the same power in every will.”

“Why who made that rule?”

“ Logic did...otherwise we get stuck in the Pauline determinism paradox.”.

“Oh... that sounds sticky. What is it?” The shadow was amused and curious at the same time.

Solo handled the question as if it were pop quiz. “In a word,.... St Paul and Mohamed have God picking the winners in advance. Some think Mohamed might have read Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians before he wrote the Koran. ”

“And?”

“And what’s the point of the race? “

“Race!” The shadows curiosity came across as a challenge.

“The human race. The human race runs on free will. No freedom, no race.”

“What is it you win in this race?”

“Well.... freedom.” That was the best answer Solo could come up with.

Irony and genuine curiosity mixed in the shadow’s tone. “And are you free not to die?”

“Depends on what you mean by ‘you’....” Solo shot from the hip. “.....Anyway I don’t have any final answers, except that predestination makes no sense in light of will power and I do believe in it and free will and uncertainty, which is the ultimate force field which has to be universally accessible.... which all sounds like whistling pass the graveyard, and maybe it is, but even bullshit is ok, as a fertilizer....” It suddenly occurred to Solo that he might not be making sense. “... I don’t have answers. I am trying to understand and that’s ok, according to my current philosophical guide.”

The shadow missed most of the volley, but caught the last two words. “Yes, but even Marx understood that there were leaders and followers....good leaders and bad leaders, but followers, all the same.”

“You know about Marx?” Solo wondered if the shadow might be close to the mark,

“Do I know about Marx? The Opera Ring just outside has never seen a throng so dense- dense in more ways than one. They all know about Marx or think they do. He is the son of a self hating Jew, who descended from a long line of rabbis. I’ve had dealings

with his wife's noble, gentile family. Never met him. His father changed his first name and joined a protestant church...."

Solo was curious about the newly revealed biographic clues, but decided to stay with the philosophy thread. "What about his philosophy?"

"I don't like philosophy, his or any other."

"Not liking Marxist philosophy is a philosophy."

"No, sorry, no philosophy,.... never had time for it." The shadow said apologetically

"Philosophy is as inevitable as it is impossible." Solo felt the learning table turning into a lectern.

"What?"

Solo could not keep from jumping onto the stump. "Consciousness refuses to let you become just a shit machine, turning plants and animals into waste. Searching for meaning is inescapable."

"Well, that sounded like it was coming from the pulpit out there in the center aisle...except for the 'shit' part."

"I borrowed the 'shit' part from Schopenhauer. He treats excrement and death alike. Embalming bodies would be like preserving shit. It makes no sense to

hang on to physical things; it interferes with natural regeneration. There is a metaphysical consolation in letting that shit go, and it sounds like you need that right now. I did not mean to preach. I'm just twisting your own words. You just said the same thing. if you don't have your own philosophy, you follow others blindly... or you kill yourself, and obviously you avoided both those detours."

After an awkward silence the shadow's tone flattened. "Why did you mention suicide.... of all things....Was it Marx's children?"

"Well sorry, I'm making assumptions... I can see you haven't killed yourself, to end your plight, and it sounds like your courage accomplished more than just staying alive."

The shadow became animated, talking over Solo. "But what made you think of suicide at that moment?"

"If I can twist your words one more turn, I would say most people commit suicide either physically or spiritually and you...."

The shadow interrupted. "Spiritually....Are you referring to the Jews?" The shadow jumped to the conclusion.

"No but you are.... Why is that? " Solo's interest was peaked.

“Never mind.” The shadow tried to dodge.

“You mentioned the father being a self hating Jew...” Solo pursued.

“My father....?” The shadow was defensive.

“No I think you were talking about Marx’s father.” Solo remembered not to push too hard.

“That was Marx’s father, yes. And apparently the self hatred skips a generation...” A subtext of deep suffering undermined the shadow’s flat recounting tone. “ ..Marx’s older daughter killed herself with her husband and then later a younger daughter took some poison.... committed suicide with cyanide....” The shadow swallowed back emotion. “... But I don’t know how that would affect his philosophy, or whether it had anything to do with Jewishness.... “ He tried to turn his thoughts away from suicide. “...Jews are more capitalists by nature.”

“I don’t know about that... Engles, Trotsky....”

The shadow dodged with a pun. “I don’t know either, truth to tell. I withdraw my.... RE-MARX.” The shadow set off the last word with a rest beat and then a tone change.

“Good one... re-marx, funny.” Solo responded to the pun but wanted to look behind it. “Tell me more about Marx.”

“He’s your philosopher. I already confessed I don’t know philosophy....”

“He’s not my philosopher. I never said....”

“ You used the words ‘my current philosophical guide.’”

“Maybe so, but I wasn’t talking about Marx.”

“Schopenhauer, then?”

“Neither... it’s a later philosophy to end all philosophy. It’s about the impossible gap between words and meaning..... In a word, words will never be enough....You see the paradox in that statement? Using words to prove that words are not enough.... My guide seems to be a bird that flies up its own asshole.”

The shadow laughed for the first time. “ Is that a standard philosophical analysis?”

“Call it tautology or conundrum or paradox, if you want fancy words. But it’s not the words that makes the philosophy. That’s the whole confusing point.”

“Of course.” The shadow became more sarcastic.

“ I have to get around this, or embrace it, somehow.... It’s a philosophy that is as important as it

is misunderstood. What looks like a mole hill turns out to be a mountain when you get closer.”

“So it’s not your philosophy?” The shadow was more sympathetic.

“It is and it isn’t. Philosophy is like the oxygen mixed into the atmosphere; it belongs to everyone and it doesn’t belong to anyone...it’s part of every breath, and yet no one knows it’s essential, until it’s gone.”

“Well that’s a breath of fresh air.” The taint of irony slipped back into the shadow’s tone.

“This particular breath of fresh air is dizzying and dazzling at the same time.

“Why dazzling?”

“The doubt backfires, and once doubt is doubted the door to faith is open... that’s my interpretation, anyway...” Solo stopped to think.

“I see why that would make you dizzy.”

Solo continued. “The pitfall of thinking in words shakes everything up, even here in church where you came to talk to God in words..... Do you ever think that maybe God doesn’t speak your language... or any language.”

“Not even Latin?” The shadow joked.

“God is a non-responsive communication partner, if you’re listening for words.

“What should you be listening for?”

“According to my interpretation, deeds.”

“Deeds, how do you listen for deeds?”

“Good question” Solo paused

“ ‘Good question’ is still an American expression to cover for a bad answer, ‘nes pas?’” The shadow countered.

“Touché! ...Or no answer.. Deed is a word that wants to be a non word. It could be everyday miracles that we fail to notice. I don’t know. Thinking beyond words is impossible but something we must do.”

“Very interesting....very interesting. I guess I’m glad we had these **words**.....” There was irony in the shadow’s tone.

“ Well, you can thank Wittgenstein for the confusion.” Solo was ready to let the matter drop.

“What did you say?...” A shock wave raised the shadow’s tone almost to a squeal. “...Thank who?”

“Wittgenstein.” Solo answered matter of factly.

After a silence, the shadow gasped. “Say that name again?”

“Ludwig Wittgenstein....” Solo whispered as though trying not to be overheard.

“Stop..... stop, sorry.... Just stop a minute.” The shadow bowed and put his hands together as he put his thoughts together.

Solo was thunderstruck by his next realization. “You’re not Ludwig Wittgenstein?”

When he raised his head, maintaining the left facing silhouette, which continued to hide the right side, the shadow told Solo that he was Karl Wittgenstein, Ludwig’s father, which shocked Solo into silence for a moment and then lit another candle of discovery.

Solo had to explain that he knew all about Karl’s son because he had become, at the same time, both the nemesis and the ‘Rosetta Stone’ of modern philosophy, which fact stunned Karl with a mix of pride and confusion.

Right off, Solo wanted to know about Hitler who was Ludwig’s school mate. Karl did not recognize the name. Solo did the math and realized that, of course, Karl would not know who Hitler was. This new ‘connection had to account for lifespan at each end.

For Solo it would demand careful reflection; for Karl, bold projection.

Karl figured out that Solo would know how Ludwig Wittgenstein's life ended.

Solo could guess why Karl needed to know about Ludwig's end. From his research, Solo knew the dates of all the Wittgenstein suicides, and he put together that Karl, who left his body in 1913, would have known about the suicide of his sons Hans, in 1902, and Rudi, in 1904, and a cousin and an aunt, and a brother-in-law, and all that would leave him wondering whether suicide was a Jewish gene or an Austro-Hungarian epidemic. Whatever it was, it included another suicide in 1916, which Karl could not have known about, a third son, Kurt. But maybe he didn't need to know about that, just now. Solo wasn't sure whether truth trumped kindness in this new relationship, or the other way around. Ludwig's death seemed to tread the line between the two; so, Solo answered Karl succinctly. "Ludwig died in 1951 in Cambridge, England of cancer..."

"Oh.....oh." Karl's first 'oh' was relief; the second remorse.

"...with a Catholic priest and Catholic friends praying for him and buried in a Catholic churchyard." Solo went on.

"Oh?" Now curious

“You’re Jewish, right?”

“Yes?” Karl sounded equivocal.

“You’re either Jewish or you’re not. I recently learned that if your mother is Jewish, you’re Jewish, even if you were raised Catholic, as I was.”

“Yes I am Jewish by blood... but my wife’s mother was not Jewish; that would make her not Jewish and my children not Jewish, by Jewish standards.... but that’s not how gentiles, particularly Austrians, count. All my children were baptized, including Ludwig, but I thought he was an atheist, like me.

“He was that and a lot of other things.”

“ He must have changed his bet.”

“All the time, constantly.... How much did your children know about your father?”

“Not much. I never hid anything, but somethings were best left unsaid. Herman Christian Wittgenstein, my father, was completely Jewish and completely anti-semitic. The ‘Christian’ in the middle of his name was his idea,...like Marx’s father. The Wittgenstein last name was my grandfather’s idea. Apparently it wasn’t kosher to have a Jewish last name, back when Napoleon came to town, demanding that jews find a secular last name; so, grandfather, Moses Maiyer, took

the last name of an aristocratic land owner client, Wittgenstein. My father inherited the self hatred and passed it on. He forbade any of his eleven children to marry jews, and none did, except me. I was half a rebel; I married half a jew. My wife, Poldy's father was Jewish and became an avid Catholic, which is how all my children came to be baptized. That's probably a lot more than you want to know..."

"There is no end to my curiosity."

"I am curious too... You mentioned that you might have some salt in your blood line?" Karl asked gingerly.

"As it turns out, I am half Jewish. I learned that my mother was an Austrian Jew. I learned that after her death, so I have no details."

"Ah ha, your father must be Italian and that's why you thought I might be talking about your parents when I told you about Marconi and Hertz." Karl was pleased with himself.

"Bingo...." Solo acknowledged.

"Bingo?"

"American expression that celebrates a correct guess."

"American is becoming a whole new language...."

“Here’s another one... wop....” Solo continued his biography. “My father is a headstrong, ex-celebrity wop, that means Italo-American.... very controlling self-involved man.... *was*, actually, **was** a very controlling self involved man

“Oh, is he dead?”

“No, just mellowed.”

“Does he live in a palace?” Karl asked

“We can’t use the word palace for American residential real estate...”. Solo turned the table. “... Is that why you came back from New York,... to live in the palace?”

“I had to afford the palace first.” Karl suddenly felt the need to brag.

Solo let him; even though he already had all the facts and figures, he lacked the inside story. “How did you do that?”

“I am self made. I think I can say that, even though my father had money. I made my own..” Karl thought at first he might be an artist or a scientist; he explained how he had to re-direct his talents and discipline, given the economic zeitgeist. He could still admire and respect and enjoy and even support the arts, but not with is hat in his hand, begging for

donations, but from his comfortable patron's box where he could, and did, make a difference.

When he re-established himself in Vienna as a scion of the new industrial age, he had seven grand pianos in his city palace in Vienna and four in the country estate, both of which were salons for major artists and composers. At one point Karl realized that he might be bragging and stopped suddenly.

Solo egged him on. "So you put the horse before the cart, but kept them connected nevertheless?"

"The horse being economics and the cart being esthetics; if that's what your metaphor means, then yes; that's quite correct." Karl was now clearly embarrassed by his own braggadocio.

"But I still don't understand how you got the horse to go so far, so fast and still remain attached to the cart." Solo wasn't ready to leave the hindsight without some insight.

In lieu of a philosophical explanation Karl reframed the acquired American expressions. "There are two answers. Shake a leg and break a leg."

"Luck? You think lady luck had anything to do with it...".

"Yes, truth to tell, but I keep waiting for lady luck to change her escort,...."

“Some say luck is not a lady, but a God. Do you think you were blessed?” Solo asked.

“Blessed ? Which God? A Jewish God might bless you with money; for a Christian God, wealth is a curse. That’s the curse I worry about.”

“Curses are in your head, not God’s.”

“You know what is in God’s head?...That’s prophecy ...” Karl’s tone suddenly became respectful. “...which would make you a prophet.”

“It’s not prophecy but philosophy which would make me human. I absolutely do not know what’s in God’s head, or even if he has a head; that would be blasphemy... no, I was trying to keep you from putting things in God’s head.”

“Prophecy is easier to sell than philosophy...”

“I’m not selling...” Solo interrupted. “No, sorry, flawed philosophy is all I have to offer ... for free..., or even simple arithmetic which you seem to understand. You feel your success might be luck, but luck might be a curse... there is something wrong with the plus and minus signs in that equation.”

“Alright yes.. that’s right...plus and minus... non stop...” Karl’s tone was tortured. “I bounce back and forth between the positive and the the negative poles,

pride of achievement and the fear of retribution, bouncing continuously. If I believe it's dumb luck that could have happened to anyone, then I lose my fragile self respect. If I believe it was something only I could do, then I'm a star all alone in the vast empty sky...That's where the Cuban cigars and cognac come in; I have to stop the loneliness."

"You should try philosophy, if nothing else it wears less on your body and maybe helps your soul. It works for me. We all bounce back and forth; that's what we do. Just keep bouncing; if you keep still, consciousness congeals."

"That sounds more like psychology than philosophy; you sound like Freud." Karl was impressed.

"You know about Freud?"

"He's a friend of my daughters and my son Ludwig as a matter of fact, and I have loaned him money on occasion, but never indulged in his psychoanalysis, I think that is what he calls it now."

"Confess yee one to another.." Solo blurted.

"What?"

"You said that earlier and you obviously know those were the words of Christ?" Solo asked.

“Yes,.... and you think that’s what Freud does...I don’t think Freud would ever give Christ credit for his invention; and besides he insists on a middle man, a doctor with a special license that only he can issue: psychoanalyst. That makes it a sustainable business.”

“That’s the same as the priest, no?”

“Well except you pay this priest by the hour. And this elaborate outhouse....” Karl alluded, by gesture, to the confessional. “... is replaced with a simple more cost effective couch. Leave it to the Jews to build a better mouse trap.”

“I don’t think cost effective mouse traps was Christ’s original idea.”

“I wasn’t talking about Christ I was talking about Jews.”

“Christ was a jew.”

“He was a different kind of Jew....” Karl put in.

“Bingo! Maybe jews should focus more on the the difference within the similarity....” Solo realized his tone was too strong.

“ We did.... “ Karl interrupted, defending himself from the attack. “...We did become Christian, my family. Christians and Catholics. Wasn’t it I quoted the new testament on riches and heaven...and wasn’t it I

who pointed out ‘no middle man, and confess yee one to another...’?

“Yes it was...” Solo was conciliatory. “...which is what we’re doing right now.” Solo urged Karl to continue his inside story.

“ Alright then, I confess.... I felt my Yiddish-a mama would love me less if all I had was papa gelt, or conversely, would love me more if my gelt was bigger than Papa’s.”

“That’s more for the Freud couch...Oedipal.” Solo quipped.

“Whatever the motivation, I passed up and then surpassed my father’s small fortune...” Karl continued. “... which he got from my grand- father; all he had to do to be successful was to be obedient. I chose to be disobedient and poor.”

“So what did you do?”

“ I went to New York, as a poor christian immigrant...played the violin for quarters..... .And for a long time, I was a poor christian pilgrim, in more ways than one...” Karl explained that he played in minstrel shows all over the East Coast, until Lincoln was shot. Then all the shows were cancelled and so he became a starving, singing waiter.

Karl's American experience was the road to self respect and the realization of his own power to change his own life. Karl loved music but he didn't love the social status it accorded him. He had to do something other than music to earn self respect. He began to learn about business and the steel industry. He met Carnegie before he was rich and famous.

He knew enough to know that the big apple might just be too big to begin with, and so he moved from Manhattan to upstate and accepted a teaching position at a Rochester university, while he learned about technology.

“Hold it right there. Hold it!.... what about Rochester?”

“It was a university in Rochester, New York I got a job up there; I can't remember just when, after the Civil War. I was suddenly on the faculty of a university, the Rochester Atheneum, not well known at the time, but nevertheless it was a university and I called myself professor; I had a title...”

“Wow, no way, no way..... no way....” Solo was stunned

“Are you saying it's not true?”

“No, no, that's just an American expression it means amazement, not doubt. This blows my mind.”

“Blows....?”

“Never mind....we are now in the same place at different times. It seems we were also in the same place at different times once before without the conscious connection. At first I thought it was amazing that your son Ludwig spent quality time in the finger lakes at the same university where I was a law student, and now you turn up at another upstate university on the same faculty as I was. They changed the name of the place when I got there, but we were in the same position, internally and externally. How do we explain such coincidences?”

“ Maybe coincidences are meant to beat the clock.”

“ That would become the name of an early TV game show” Solo muttered as if to himself.

“TV?” Karl wanted to know.

“That was the technology I picked up in Rochester. Those waves you helped finance lead to a hypnotic window on an altered reality that turned people into zombies...” Solo reached out for words that might be more hopeful for the underdogs but all he could come up with was imitation Churchill: “...never has so little reached so many so quickly...” And then, in the next breath, he corrected the paraphrase: “...never have so many paid so much to so few for so little..”

“What?” Karl was confused.

“Never mind... back to Rochester.” Solo was more interested in the life crossing coincidence.

“I sent that first letter to my father from Rochester signed ‘Professor Wittgenstein’ which was my ticket back to Vienna.”

“So did I. That is exactly what I did for my adult re-entry...when I came back to my big time City” Solo added to the mysterious parallels.

“So, Ludwig was where in the finger lakes?”

“At Cornell.”

“And you were there in that same place....”

“Decades later....”

“And you were on the same faculty in Rochester?”

“ More than a century later, but who ’s counting? I was on that same faculty, it was RIT then, and that is exactly the turning point in my life where I got my father to finally accept that it might be respectable for me to do something other than be a Wall Street lawyer.”

“So despite natural fathers and father time, mother nature put us on the same lake shore, staring at our different reflections, in the same waters.” Karl mused.

“ All three of us skipped stones into the same lakes and watched the ripples propagate?”

“I loved the lakes.”

“Finger or Great?”

“Both”

“Me too”

“Im sure Canandaigua and Ontario” haven’t changed.”

“You are a bigger fish in the little pond up there. “

“Not so little ...What about Ontario...Niagara Falls? The Great Lakes are not so little.”

“That’s an American expression, having to do with the relativity of status.”

“Oh yes, I see what you mean.”

Next they uncovered that they both skied in the winter and played baseball in the upstate spring and summer. They both marveled over the fact that Rochester for each of them, was a minor league experience, preparing each for his major league game, which for Solo was in its first inning, and for Karl was now in its final inning.

“ There was less anti-semitism upstate, more because of ignorance than tolerance. They had no exposure to Jews. Nevertheless, I new my game was in Vienna....” Karl explained.

“So you did encounter antisemitism....?”

“Mostly, it never came up and when it did I just never mentioned my Jewish ancestors. Americans didn’t care as much about ancestors. But the anti-semitism was there in America, the big cities, and I think it was just as bad, maybe worse in some cases.”

“Worse...really?”

“Well how do you compare levels of hate.... When I came back to Vienna I wanted to marry a half Jew, and my father did not think I was capable of the deception required to dodge the Austrian brand of antisemitism.”

“What’s that brand like?”

“In Austria there was also a counter current of pro-semitism that you couldn’t find in America. The Emperor Franz Joseph liked the Jews; he really believed they were superior, and many Christians knew that Jews were changing the world. Some feared the change...didn’t trust Jews with power, which is understandable.”

“Why?”

“Jews never learned how to lead or follow gentiles without humiliation on one side or the other.”

“Why?”

“Because they were already branded for isolation all the way back to the second century, Bishop Melito... and on through the Spanish Inquisition. In both the Holy and unholy Roman Empires, Jews were forbidden to hold office, or have slaves, which actually meant servants and workers. That’s why Shylock could only lend money to agriculture and industry but never own anything except their debt. Actually I suppose it goes all the way back to the first christian, Christ who threw the money changers out of the temple.”

“Christ may have been anti money changer, but you can’t believe that he was antisemitic.”

“Not even after they condemned him to death?” Karl asked with a sense of irony.

“Forgive them father for they know not what they do” Solo intoned.

“Do you believe in Christ?” Karl asked.

“Do you believe in Christ?” Solo returned the serve.

“Well I thought I had to... it was like wearing a tie, something you had to do on Sunday. Do you believe that Christ was the son of God?”

Solo dodged the question. “ The son of Karl, as it turns out, Ludwig, in his later philosophy, makes love synonymous with Christ, at least, that is how I look at it. Ludwig came all the way from atheism to find Christ at the last minute,...” Solo sounded unconvinced, even to himself. “... Whatever he was to begin with, in the end he was the only hope.”

“Ludwig or Christ?”

“Both discovered that we have to ‘Love thy neighbor,’ or it’s a dog eat dog world..... “

“So there is some doubt about the actual divinity?”

“Always, there is always doubt about divinity, but here’s where Wittgenstein saves the day: even the doubt is doubtful.”

“And where does that leave us.”

“Leap of faith...., and I do believe that it is better practically and spiritually to choose the action that will make the world a better place.”

“Better for whom?”

“For all...”

“The greatest good for the greatest number?” Karl interrupted.

“You’re quoting Bentham, see you are a philosopher.” Solo’s tone was congratulatory.

“The simple fact that I always strive ... we all do... strive for perfection means that there is a perfection which is beyond all creatures otherwise there would be no striving and I suppose no strife.” Karl went on.

“Now you’re quoting Plato, Schopenhauer and maybe a hint of Buddha.”

“ I always believed that we have to leave the world a little better than we found it.....” Karl was revealing some deep truth to himself.

“Now your quoting Kant. You know that Kant’s categorical imperative is about what *not* to do to make the world a better place; well, Wittgenstein’s categorical imperative is about what *to* do to make the world a better place.”

“Really and what might that be?” Karl was genuinely curious.

“ Ludwig says improving yourself is all you can do to make the world a better place.” Solo explained

Karl sighed to hear his son quoted in such august company whether or not he understood completely. “That’s better than Weininger’s Categorical Imperative. Talk about philosophy taking a wrong turn...”

“Weininger?”

“Weininger taught that the only good that a Jew could do for the world was to eliminate himself, which he actually did. Can you imagine....” Karl sighed.

“I can’t.... I can’t I haven’t read this Weininger but I can see where he might have inspired another book I did read, *Mein Kampf*.”

“*Mein Kampf*, my struggle... who’s struggle?” Karl asked

Solo suddenly realized that he needed to step back before turning that page prematurely; he deftly changed the subject. “Was this self hating wide spread among the Austro-German Jews?”

“I don’t know whether the Jews are of one mind. In any case, I could never understand Masada or Vienna. I could never understand why Boltzmann, the great physicist, at the prime of his career, hung himself; my two sons, my cousin, my brother-in-law. Weininger, a philosopher who formalized Jewish self hatred, killed himself. I could never put all this together and I guess I never bothered to try, until now.”

“Go on, you’re on a roll” Solo encouraged.

“ A roll?”

“American for Never mind Continue please.”

“Well alright but I must add that underneath all that, there is, at the same time..... a Jewish enlightenment.”

“ A what?”

“Well the anti-semitism is there, to be sure. At the same time there is a renaissance bigger than the one in Italy, a Jewish enlightenment. Revolutions: Mendelssohn, Mahler in music; Klimt in painting; Boltzmann in Physics with Hertz, Einstein, and Freud who we talked about. All of them needed my support... they might have made it without me, but I knew they were important and I was generous to people I thought could make a difference in science and the arts. I don’t think it was just because they were Jews.... Karl Marx, if I may extend my REMARK,....he was still around in my youth, but no longer a Jew. You must have heard of these people.” Karl asked rhetorically.

“ The whole world has heard of these people. But I never heard it called a Jewish enlightenment.”

“You should be proud if you’re Jewish.

“Half proud, I’m only half Jewish.

“Half a Jew is better than one.” Karl said.

“I believe the expression is: Half is better than none.”

“I was making a bad joke.” Karl explained.

“‘None’ is a worse joke as it turns out...” Solo stopped himself again before prematurely turning the page.

Karl broke the silence. “ If you add it all up, I think your Jews did as much, if not more, than your Italians. The arts and science and industry....how many businesses were started by Italians?”

“Not counting pizza parlors and construction companies.... oh, and Rome and the renaissance? I don’t know. ,,,,” Solo was sarcastic. “...What is it about business that makes you think that’s so important?”

“Survival of the species, comfort, convenience. Who doesn’t respect the power of wealth?” Karl answered

“Jesus..... you sound like my Dad, and he’s not Jewish. ‘Geching’ on the cash register is the only music that matters?”

“Your Dad liked music....”

“Yes, not as much as he liked the money.”

Karl became wistful. “ I suppose I value power, but I also love music. I passed it on to all my children. They said Hans was the musical genius. Paul was good but he played with too much drive, anger really. Music was something they could all play however they wanted, whenever they wanted, but the world’s work has to get done as well. You can’t make it as a sissy artist. I did go to some lengths to toughen them up. The more I tried the more I failed.”

“You’ll be happy to know three of your sons were macho.“

“Macho?”

“That’s an American expression, latin American, a new hybrid language. I was referring to the fact that Paul, Ludwig and Kurt were war heroes. Yes, Ludwig volunteered; he didn’t have to go. I think he was more interested in experiencing the suffering of war than winning for the Emperor; nevertheless, he was a hero. Kurt was having a good time in New York and somehow he got back to Austria and was put in charge of a regiment. Paul was a hero in the war AND an heroic musician. Even with one hand, he was able to become a legend. Famous composers wrote pieces for one hand....”

“One hand?”

“Oh, sorry, of course, you wouldn’t know that..... he gave his right arm in World War I.”

“That’s an American expression? Gave his right arm?” Karl asked hopefully.

“No, no,sorry, no. He actually lost his arm in World War I.”

Karl was shocked and then puzzled. “One???”

“One what?”

Karl wanted to be sure of what he was hearing:
“The **World**’ was at War?”

“Yes.”

“...and such a War has a number?”

“Yes.”

“...and the number is one?”

“Yes.”

How high do the numbers go?”

“Two, as far as I know.”

Karl sighed “Two world wars and, one arm.....” Karl mused.

“The good news is that eventually Jews and Italians got together again, Einstein and Fermi, and other scientists, and they made the bombs so powerful that they could destroy the planet.”

“That’s good news?” Karl winced.

“ Well yeah, because nobody with enough sense to make the bomb is dumb enough to end the planet.” Solo said lightheartedly.

“ I’m not so sure about that.....”

“Whatever God is behind the universe.... Why would...”

“You already said you don’t know what is in God’s mind...He might just be angry at us... he may be punishing the Jews, wait a minute... huh... but what about the Italians....” Karl stopped to puzzle his revelation.

Despite Solo’s cogent philosophical reasoning, Karl was still haunted by the thought that the double suicide of his two sons, Hans and Rudi, as well as the general plight of the Jews was divine punishment. “This good God had a bad temper and a bad memory. Somehow He forgot that this crucifixion was a joint venture between Jews and Italians...”

“Italians?” Solo was taken by surprise.

“They were called Romans, at the time, but yes, Italians had a hand in it, but they got away with it, clean.... oh it just occurred to me... you would get it from both sides if we included the Italians.”

“You can’t be serious.” Solo interrupted. “...If there were such a divine power with a with such memory and an anger management problem, he’s not God. That is creating god in the image and likeness of man which is ass backwards.”

“How could God be anything but angry at those who crucified His son?”

“Because anger is human and he’s not human; he’s God.” Solo answered.

“So why did his son have to beg forgiveness for the executioners? He must have expected his father to be angry.”

Solo had no answer except to refute the authenticity of the same Biblical story he just quoted to support his forgiveness argument. He explained that only Matthew, of all the apostles who wrote the New Testament, held the Jews responsible for not accepting Christ and for his crucifixion, but that was no longer the prevailing Christian belief. Solo suggested that some residual Jewish self hatred might

be keeping these age old “Christ killer” anti-semitic myths alive.

Karl suggested a “thieves fall out” theory, where the one co-conspirator the Roman- Italian- Catholic escaped by pushing all the blame onto the Jews.

It made Solo stop and think, but he knew that road would not lead out to where he wanted to be. “If He’s going to be my God, he doesn’t blame; he doesn’t punish; he loves. Christ’s resurrection and love are inexorably connected.” Solo quoted Wittgenstein again.

Nevertheless, Karl was only half convinced. “You think the Jewish God gets along with the Italian God

“Like father and son?”

“ Not so well, then”. Karl quipped.

“OK if we’re going to talk about Jews and Italians as separate races, I gotta tell you, I think that’s a tennis match without a ball.”

“And without a foreskin...” Karl interrupted.

“You can’t create a meaningful division in the species by slicing off foreskins. I really don’t think Jew and Christian are genetically different.” Solo wished to end it there.

“I always thought circumcision was barbaric. They did that to me but I never did that to my boys. And do you know it divided the early Christians who thought Christ was only for circumcised jews.” Karl added.

“Where did you learn that?” Solo was surprised.

“Gibbon, the historian.” Karl put in.

Solo bubbled. “A great historian.... my favorite.”

“Really what a coincidence. I’m so glad he stood the test of time. You know Gibbon?”

“I love Gibbon”

“I always knew he would last.” Karl was pleased.

“ I wish Gibbon could have been around to apply his insights to history’s bigger problem.”

“What’s that? Karl asked

A couplet sprung into Solo’s mind. The tower babel...Tower Babel, Rouses Rabble”

“That’s really good.... I mean the words.... It’s really bad that it happens, I know it does. Will that ever end?” Karl asked.

Solo thought this might be the right time to tell Karl about Kurt. “I have to tell you that from what I

read about Kurt's suicide, it was not directly related to your paternal pressure."

"What?" Karl swallowed. "My Kurt.....he was the most stable... how... what happened?"

"I read that Kurt was in command of a troop in Italy during the World War..."

"Two?"

"No, one.... he was ordered to send his men into what would have meant certain death for all of them. Millions had already been killed and the war was lost. Either he refused, or they refused. There are different accounts of the incident. In either case they left the battle field and Kurt remained to face either the disgrace of becoming a prisoner of war or a court martial. He knew his brother Ludwig had been captured by the Italians and his brother Paul had been captured by the Russians. Kurt shot himself. "

Karl remained silent after breathing a deep sigh, he went on. "What about Paul? You said Paul gave his right arm....Who took his arm? "

" The Russians. "

" Why?"

"Just after you left, Archduke Ferdinand was shot in Sarajevo."

“So what! Why would that start a war with the Russians?”

“ No good reason - the whole empire and the idea of aristocracy was about to come apart anyway, and the wolves were at the door. France, Italy, Russia and England too (Queen Victoria’s royal grand children on both sides of the fight) World War I,, and eventually America jumps in. And your German engineers and your industrial foundries made it like no other war before. Death was no longer on horseback. It came from the sky and from small machines that sprayed bullets, and flame and poison gas, and there were large machines that rolled over horses and trees. Millions and millions of your countrymen died.”

“Millions?” Karl interrupted incredulously.

“Thirteen million and millions maimed and imprisoned including your own hero sons. In the end the train tracks you laid, that connected the empire, were twisted and overgrown with weeds. Disconnected new countries broke off starving for dignity and food, which created the opportunity for.. ...”. Solo stopped himself again before turning the page.

“How could Paul play the piano with one hand?” Karl asked.

“Like a devil with two hands. In fact major composers like Benjamin Britten, Paul Hindemith, Sergei Prokofiev, and Richard Strauss all produced pieces for him, to name just a few. It was for him Maurice Ravel wrote his 'Piano Concerto for the Left Hand', which became more famous than any of the other compositions.”

Karl was almost giggling with approval. “This is someone I tried to turn away from music, but it has a happy ending in spite of me...Are you sure about this turn of events?”

“From what I read, sure....”

“Do you know what will happen to my fortune?”
Karl asked

“By all accounts, you had more money than anyone in Europe... billions....that’s incredible for your time, or any time.”

“Really?” Karl’s feigned modesty reminded Solo of Jack Benny.

“You must tell me how you did that.” Solo peeled away the veneer.

“Well it’s nice of you to notice my talents...” Karl decided not to brag. “...obviously none of it rubbed off onto my sons.”

“I don’t know about that..., look at the ones who became famous world class musicians and philosophers.”

“And did the others become infamous, Rudi and Hans?”

“Well no, not many know.... I happened to know because of my research.....Hans had an extraordinary musical talent and the discipline to become a world class performer and composer, based on no less than the opinion of Johannes Brahms.”

“Well yes... Hans is short for Johannes. I named him after my friend Johannes Brahms....” Karl sounded as though he, himself, didn’t believe what he was about to say, but he said it anyway. “... I hoped that music could become a satisfying hobby for Hans after he became a prince of commerce.... “ Karl felt a need to change the subject. “....And did you know that Kurt, the least talented musician, became a company director.”

“Why do you think the palace you provided wasn’t enough?” Solo asked in earnest.

“I don’t know.... Why do people hate themselves, rich or poor, hate themselves.”

“What about you” Solo asked.

“That it is something I had struggled with.”

“And somehow you managed....?”

“...to keep struggling.” Karl finished Solo’s sentence.

“Maybe it’s original sin.”

“Jews don’t have original sin, but then again my sons were raised Catholic, maybe we can blame the Catholics.”

“Actually there is much less suicide among Catholics....” Solo explained. “...the waters of Baptism are supposed to wash away the original sin.”

“My sons were Baptized, maybe the water was cold...” Pain soured the witty undertone. “...Why,.why, for heaven’s sake?”

“Only they know.” Solo felt Karl’s anguish.

“I wish you could ask them.”

“Maybe I can....” Solo flashed a look at his watch, and made a plan in his head.

“ Maybe you’ll discover that the Catholic God just likes to play tricks.” Karl was dour.

“That gets you nowhere. A trickster god is worse than no god..”

Karl confessed that he once met Nietzsche in Basil, and he was not able to choose between Nietzsche and God, but the one thought that stayed with him was Nietzsche's idea that God was a comedian with an audience too afraid to laugh.

Solo knew that Nietzsche's divine comedy had nothing to do with Dante's. It could, however, have been another way of restating Plato's disparity between divine truth and flawed human belief systems. Solo's Nietzsche was a bit rusty but he did recall his mandate that a philosopher must preach by example (as reported by Albert Camus). Solo then applied Nietzsche's mandate to Nietzsche's philosophy: his example would make his preaching a scream from the barred window of the asylum; not something you want to set to music.

Karl seemed to accept the detour around Nietzsche, but went on to explain that, inspired by Nietzsche, he encouraged the secularism in his three older sons, in the selection of their tutors. He wanted to be sure that they became tough-minded realists 'ubermench', supermen, which was the only way to succeed in business at that time.

Karl went on to tell Solo that, although he kept it to himself, he knew about his son's homosexuality; he liked to believe that it was a disease but could not escape the fear that it was part of the divine revenge. He talked about this with Freud, who said that everyone was bi-sexual to start with and that

homosexuality was the result of developmental difficulties with heterosexuality.

He could almost see the glow of a blush on Karl's dark silhouette as Karl told him about the servant girls who were hired to develop his son's heterosexuality. While it sounded like white slavery, it must have been more than that. One, Rosalie, stayed on to become an heir to Karl's estate, a member of the family, and almost a mother to the younger sons Paul and Ludwig.

Embarrassing orgy scenes with his ex-wife flashed through Solo's mind while Karl was speaking. If sex was natural, why was it so naturally embarrassing? Solo wondered in silence, and then recalled Ludwig Wittgenstein's vacillation on sexual pleasure; everything from sin to a divine gift. Solo, on his own, once tried to get around Augustinian chastity and wrote a pornographic, nude jazz ballet where all the taboos on sexual pleasure were defused and everyone did whatever they wanted, wherever and with whomever. Of course it was never performed....not publicly. Once he became more philosophical, he was unable, to his own satisfaction, to justify lust in a Kantian or Platonic sense, and so abandoned the project, and, at about the same time, abandoned the idea of sharing his life with a woman. He left out the embarrassing polygamy/polyandry details in discussing this with Karl.

Karl could not see how anyone could live without commitment to one special woman. If not a curse, it

was the greatest misfortune that none of his children found this simple natural Adam and Eve balance. For Solo, the idea of love and marriage was always considered a valentine card sentiment. For the first time, now, Solo was listening to credible wisdom about the deeper joy of traditional monogamy. Solo began reassessing his own wobbly celibacy in silence.

Freud and Rosalie may not have helped Hans and Rudi, but at least they convinced Karl that homosexuality had nothing to do with being Jewish, contrary to what Weininger wrote about Jews being effeminate by nature.

Karl believed that foppery and sensitivity could be hardened into the thick skin needed for survival. It worked for Kurt and Paul apparently, and maybe Ludwig.

Solo unconsciously sidestepped the monogamy manhole and refocused the suicide cause quest back onto the papa-gelt trap. He told Karl about Ludwig divesting himself of his inheritance, “Do you think your sons might have been better off if they side stepped your fortune... like you did with your father?”

Karl turned the question around. “Speaking of papa-gelt, is your father rich?”

“Yes” Solo answered matter of factly.

“Do you ever think of becoming richer than he is?”
Karl asked

“Not with money...I live on boat not in a palace”
Solo answered.

“A palace doesn’t make you a bad person...”

“And a boat doesn’t make you a good person...”
Solo was quick to recant. “... I didn’t mean to imply...”

Karl, with Plato on his side, justified the coexistence of wealth and virtue. “ Franz Josef has provided a long peace and silly as he is, he does create an atmosphere for progress in industry, science and the arts. I know him; I rode with him. We both love horses: cavaliers, don’t you know. He visited my factories...”Karl thought more deeply about his royal friend. “...even if you think he’s an idiot, it’s easier to convince one idiot to do the right thing than millions of fools.”

“Schopenhauer would agree...You don’t have to convince me... your life is evidence enough of how much good a rich man can do. You remind me of a rich man in my time zone. Bill Gates, who is one of the richest men in the world is, at the same time, one of the most enlightened and is making a difference.....”

Karl accepted the kudos with the requisite humility. “They offered to make me Von Wittgenstein. I turned it down.”

“Why?” Solo asked politely

“I guess I already saw the hypocrisy of this title business. I liked the American aristocracy which is based more on what you do and not as much on what your ancestors did, like your Gates fellow. But even with the best at the top, the rest get restless. How do we connect the best and the rest?”

“A few months ago I would have said free and fair elections, but not any more. I have serious doubts...”

“Why?”

“Some real monsters have come to power by popular demand..... duly elected by the people, as Plato warned us.”

“Well royal bloodline is no guarantee either....” Karl said ruefully. “...What happened to our empire; does it go on?”

“The Emperor died a few years after you left, and his heirs were bunglers, an epoch died, as well, with all its elegance, grace, hypocrisy, errors, oppression.....”

“Maybe a game of chance would be the way to select rulers.” Karl said half in jest. “...Cards, why not? As long as there is a rule that anyone can win, everyone can accept the hand they are dealt. ‘Square

Deal', that's an American expression that has changed history."

"That's Teddy Roosevelt's idea, but there are still disconnected losers. What do you do about them?" Solo added to the thought experiment.

"There has to be some kindness for losers.... a safety net." Karl suggested.

"There was another Roosevelt who came along later bearing gifts; he called it the New Deal.

"Square Deal plus New Deal all from one family, good. Then can we say, beating the card game metaphor to death, hearts and diamonds make up for the clubs and spades..." Karl mused.

"Meaning?"

"Spare the *clubs* on the backs of those who wield the *spades* and have a *heart* when it comes to sharing the *diamonds*."

"Good one."

"You should write that down." Karl joked.

"I will. Who needs Karl Marx when we have Karl Wittgenstein." Solo said warmly.

"Ok, deal" Karl's tone warmed, as well.

“I don’t know if we ever get another square deal...”

“Why what’s wrong?” Karl sensed deep concern in Solo’s remark

“Wild cards. Sharks who pull wild cards out of their sleeve. They *trump* every trick.” Solo emphasized the word ‘trump’ even though he knew it would be lost on Karl.

“Yes the pawns, can be manipulated. You can fool some of the people some of the time but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time. You know who said that?”

“Yes, of course, that has become a very famous Lincoln quote.” Solo answered.

“I knew it would.” Karl was pleased.

“But it turns out you don’t have to fool all of the people to to rouse the rabble. Once you get it started it snowballs.”

“Sounds like I’m missing something.” Karl was perplexed.

Solo decided this was the time to turn the page. He lowered his voice and began slowly: “There is a tyrant, probably the most famous one, who was duly

elected after the royal blood line failed in your empire...”

“Yes and who is that?” Karl was curious.

“That boy I asked you about who was in Ludwig’s Realschule class, Hitler?...”

“I don’t know who he is, but yes ...I sent Ludwig to Realschule in Linz, instead of keeping him home with tutors like his older brothers.” Karl waited for Solo to continue.

“Hitler blamed what you called the Jewish enlightenment for shattering the Germanic Austro-Hungarian empire. Hitler wanted Anschluss to bring it all back together again...this time without the Jews. He wanted to eliminate all the Jews, and he built a war machine that made everything else look like sling shots.”

“World War I?”

“No Two...”

“This Hitler babble roused the rabble?”

“Big time It boggles the mind to see how many and how roused. No one has been able to explain it.”

“Tell me, by now have all the Jews converted?”

“You mean my now...Oh no”. Solo answered. “... Now we have synagogues in the nicest neighborhoods. Being jewish is no longer something that needs to be hidden. Anti-semitism is what is hidden now.”

“It’s still there?”

“Not like it was in the holocaust.”

“Holocaust? Karl was ready to be filled in.

“Holocaust is the name given to what happened to the Jews. Hitler and the Nazi s got millions to go along with exterminating the Jews...

“Exterminating? That’s a word used for roaches and vermin.... My God! You still think He wasn’t angry at the jews....what about the Italians?”

“They were reluctant perpetrators but not victims, which goes along with your theory. Their Fascists and the German Nazis dehumanized the Jews. Nazis managed to get ordinary people to step out of their humanity and kill six million of their neighbors.” Solo waited for a reaction to the bad news, and then, misinterpreting the silence; he went on, prematurely, with the good news. “The aftermath had the effect of uniting the diasporas all over the world, and giving the Jews their own country. I’m not just talking about Hollywood; I’m talking about Israel.”

“Six million?” Karl was stuck on the bad news. Karl was able to connect the unbelievable events to the believable patterns he felt in the decades before any of the world wars. There was Wagner, and the Pan-German Aryan movement, which Karl knew about, and the rash of Jewish self hatred, which Karl deplored. It all fit together, but he could never have predicted what he was hearing now.

“That may be why Leopoldine (Poldy) saw to it that all the children were baptized in the Catholic Church.” Solo surmised.

“Not at all. No, Poldy’s parents were devout Catholics, including her father who converted from Judaism. Jews are not in fear of their lives, not yet anyway...” Karl paused and then asked. “What will happen to my daughters?”

Solo breathed a sigh as he put together a most complex and painful array of historical facts. “Once Austria became Germany, Paul and Ludwig decided (each on his own) that it wasn’t safe to be German Jews. Ludwig became an English citizen and Paul became American. Your three daughters, however, decided that it would be safe to remain in Vienna, in the Palace. They knew that in the new Germany, Jewish wealth was confiscated and Jews were being rounded up, but they didn’t believe it would affect them.”

“They could live very comfortably in any number of countries. Most of my fortune was not in Austria; why would they...”

“They thought that Austrian Jewish blood was so blended, it would be impossible to sort out. They never guessed that the Nazis could mount such a thorough census, using American IBM computers, scientists, and an army of bureaucrats. And when the decision was reached that they were Jewish, they tried to forge documents which got them in more trouble, and finally they alleged that your father, their grandfather, Hermann Christian Wittgenstein, was an Aryan bastard adopted by the jew, Moses Maiyer, which, if believed, would make them one quarter jewish instead of three quarters. That would allow them to live in the palace and not be sent to the camps. For the Nazi's to accept their fictional aryan ancestor, they had to turn over the fortune that was outside Germany. Ludwig did everything he could to help them. Paul objected vehemently and never spoke to them again.”

“They stayed?”

“Yes”

“And the money?”

“Most of it, to the Nazi's. Probably enough to build the the Luftwaffe and a fleet of U boats.”

“My God!” Karl gasped.

“They could never have guessed how that would play out. No one could have guessed that one maniac could spark a global insanity, but it all comes right in the end. The good guys are still here.”

“And the bad guys?”

“Bad guys are good guys, running on empty. We just need to pump in some goodness, and they’re not bad anymore.”

“My God that’s a rosy picture.”

We can paint the picture any color we want. Rosy makes as much sense as gloomy. Look at Germany and Japan today... “

“You look and tell me what you see.” Karl interrupted

“They are now the good guys. They came around.” Solo continued

“They did?”

“Yes...We do seem to figure out how to improve... continuously. That’s Hegel which I don’t know too well.” Solo was apologetic.

“The evidence that we improve with time seems to be there, but it could be an illusion.”

“We are free to choose our illusions?” Solo put in. “And I choose to look on the bright side. Even the covid menace will bring new solutions in the physical and social sciences and bring the world closer politically, even though we can’t see that now in our panic ...”

“Covid? An American expression?”

“No that’s the microbe. Covid is the scientific name aka Corona virus...”

“Virus?”

“Virus is the name for mankind’s newest most threatening enemy. They are microbes we know little about. Corona happens to be the name of beer as well. I called Corona, the virus, not the beer, ‘an invasion from inner space by little bastards’”

“Little bastards?” Karl was amused.

Little because they, and their microscopic planet, are too small for us to grasp, and ‘bastards’ because they have no natural parents; instead, they hi-jack living cells to procreate, which turns out to be devilishly more efficient. The micro-enemy appears to be ingenious enough to have turned our strength, ‘togetherness’, into our weakness. They have

weaponized human contact. They use friends and family as their foot soldiers and the alarmist media as their war drums to create panic.”

“Sorry I’ll have to miss that.” Karl was facetious. “... sounds preposterous.”

“It is preposterous and that’s what makes it so dangerous. No one can believe that a microbe can bring the world to its knees; millions and millions infected in all the countries, rich and poor alike. It’s a pandemic that has reached every country in the world in less time that it took Hitler to conquer Warsaw. My web site calls it the invasion from inner space...”

“Do you write books?”

“No...”

Karl interrupted. “I thought not. Most prophets never write books.”

“I am not a prophet....I ‘blog’ and sometimes ‘tweet’...”

“Whatever they call it now, you have obviously been chosen to do it.”

Solo changed the subject. “People have screens in every room and in their shirt pockets. Those Jewish/Italian waves you brokered connect just about everyone and everything. It might be an antidote to

TV. It's called internet and I have a place in it called a web site, where people can visit, virtually, anytime from anywhere

"Virtually?"

"Yes they can send only their minds and leave their bodies in another space."

"Your pulpit is in the virtual temple".

"At first we thought it would enlighten the public now it seems it's used primarily to exploit the public. The money changers have already set up their booths... anyone can have a web site."

"You're not anyone."

" Exactly, no one knows I'm there. Billions come every day to millions of sites mostly for sex, money and fun. They have to be lured and I can't do that. "

"Why not?"

It's philosophy and I can't sugar coat it; and I can't force philosophy on everyone. You have to be ready for it"

"You do have to be ready for it, I agree." Karl added

"Exactly."

“But how do you get ready for it if you don’t know it’s there?” Karl asked.

“Good Question...” Solo was ready to change the subject. “We have already established that good questions have no answer.”

“But they must continue to be asked. I see now why you’re here. I see that I am, for some reason, allowed to look ahead through your eyes. At first I wondered whether it is a punishment or a reward,....”

“Maybe it’s neither...”

“I shall join your virtual thing....if only in spirit. If your temple is virtual and so is my presence, I can attend.”

Solo humored Karl. “Great then...”

“What is your sermon on the molehill, this day?”

“Ok you asked for it. You thought the angry God mindlessly sought revenge on the chosen people, the jews giving the Italians a pass; now it appears the anger is directed at all humans, which includes Italians. What if in His anger, God has decided we humans are not the chosen species; these ‘little bastards’ are now the chosen species... the universe belongs to the microbes ?”

“That’s a scary thought.” Karl put in.

“Exactly, it’s a thought, just a scary thought, a belief we made up ourselves. We are time blind bats, hanging upside in Plato’s cave. Ends and beginnings could be part of our upside down misunderstanding. Here we need another sip of the Platonic tonic to remind ourselves that those beliefs are not absolute truths.”

“So maybe nothing we believe could ever be true?”

“The proposition that ‘nothing we believe is true’, if it is true, falsifies itself.... There you see philosophy at work.”

“Which leaves nothing... a vacuum?” Karl asked.

“Not a vacuum but a force field. And now I have to take off my philosophy hat and put on my physics hat. Quantum physics, the new science founded by our Jews and Italians, Einstein, Fermi and others Bohr, and a man called Higgs, who came later, to prove scientifically that there is no such thing as a vacuum also proved that there is no such thing as nothing. There has to be something even if it’s only an energy field we can never understand. On some level, even for physicists, it has become clear that the line between matter and energy is blurred. I call the mystery field ‘mattergy’. We are all mattergy and mattergy is all we are.” Solo wasn’t sure Karl was ready for this.

“Mattergy, good one. Like dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return? Only now we can say... unto mattergy thou shalt return?”

“Yes, I guess you could say that.”

“Will you be comfortable dissolved in the mattergy?”

“ The words ‘you’ and ‘comfort’ are aberrations from the matter world which doesn’t matter in the mattergy field. ‘You’ and ‘me’, ‘matter’ and ‘energy’ are just meaningless words, nonsense puzzle pieces outside of the illusive Wittgenstein frame, which is the same foggy realm of Plato’s aberrant human beliefs.”

“May I try my hand at philosophy?” Karl asked politely.

“Of course.”

“ Plato was human?”

“Yes of course.”

“And his proposition about foggy human beliefs was itself a human belief?”

“Yes”

“So it cannot be absolutely true.”

“Aha yes. I **believe** that would be true, but then again like Plato, I am only human and I can't say for sure.” Solo waited for a response.

Karl let out a guffaw. “Hoisted on my own petard”

Solo acknowledged the quotation. “Shakespeare, was a philosopher...”

“More in in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio” Karl added

“Exactly”

“Where does that leave us?” Karl wondered out loud.

“We all have a choice....”

“My choice up to now has been between unbelievable truths and untrue beliefs.....”

“Exactly...and I use the term loosely”

“Where does that leave us.” Karl asked again.

“God only knows.”

“And we can't be sure of what God knows?”

“We can be sure it's more than you or I know, or all of science.”

“You don’t condemn science?” Karl asked rhetorically.

“No but we can’t allow science to condemn God either.”

“Oh, and how will we prevent that?” Karl wanted to know.

“The judicious logic of the supreme court of the universal consciousness, where the rules of evidence apply, which include the burden of proof. In the previous trial the scientific atheist has displaced the philosopher on the judge’s bench while keeping his seat at the prosecutor’s’ table, and so, the burden of proof was foisted onto the theist, to wit: If God exists.... produce God in open court, why don’t you. Why wouldn’t God just come out of the closet. Why wouldn’t He appear to everyone and end the doubt?”

“Well yes why?... that would end the trial.”

“God not showing up is equated with non existence. The trial ends by default”

“Seems to make sense, no?”

“No...” Solo almost shouted and then contained himself. “... If I didn’t show up for breakfast, would you assume that I didn’t exist. That violates common sense as well as the laws of evidence and logic.”

“We must appeal.”

“Yes and the appeal must take judicial notice of the laws of nature. Science cannot exist without the laws of nature, the discoverable order in the universe, and that stipulated order establishes a prima facie case which shifts the burden of proof.”

“So now we get a new trial where the other side would have to prove that God does not exist.”

“ Yes... If they succeed in proving that there is no God, there is also no order and no Science...they eliminate themselves as well as their argument. They either sustain the burden of proof or they fail; in either case they loose. and God continues as does universal order.

“ But.... your verdict is still a human belief and so there must still be some doubt?” Karl added.

“Yes, and here is where I call to the stand Ludwig Wittgenstein, the only credible expert on doubt, who would explain the effect of doubting doubt which in my own summation comes out as a new leap of faith. I rest my case.”

Karl, after some silent thought, then added. “Did you just baptize me?”

“I’m not a priest.”

“I never received Confirmation or bah mitzvah”

“I”m not a rabbi either.”

“So you leave me unconfirmed?”

“And therefore philosophical.... Welcome to the club.”

“Is there anything to drink in this club?” Karl’s tone lightened.

Solo feigned the voice of a carnie barker. “Well, if I can interest you in my secret elixir, duty free, no strings, we might not need a priest or rabbi or psychoanalysis... it’s made of mixed up philosophy. It’s brand new but also ancient. I found out you cannot make anything out of philosophy without Plato. So the bubbles are provided by the Platonic tonic...”

“That’s got a nice ring to it....Platonic tonic...” Karl interrupted.

“You gotta believe it works, or it doesn’t. ...shake well before using”

“So it’s shaky beliefs?”

“Yes, shaky is all we have...but the more you shake it the better it gets.

“Is Ludwig’s philosophy in the mix?” Karl asked

“Yes, you could say that... yes, I’m pretty sure.” Solo’s tone, was becoming so mushy with sentiment, he didn’t recognize his own voice. He was already missing Karl, even though they were still together; he swallowed his sadness and the weight of the next diatribe flattened his tone.

“Wittgenstein philosophy is all over the place: books, notes, letters diaries... Twenty thousand pages and fewer than one hundred actually published. You have to pull it together yourself. Maybe he planned it that way. We mystics don’t need to push too hard to connect the new Wittgenstein mysticism to a universal consciousness. His idea of the underlying context or framework as the platform for meaning also implies a universal consciousness. Words, like puzzle pieces, make no sense until they are fitted into a frame. The same in music, where the underlying platform is an entire culture, like a river bed, which guides the flow of notes.”

“I hear the river music.” Karl put in

“The most important Ludwig Wittgenstein idea that stuck in his mind and in mine is found in a letter he wrote to his friend Malcom at Cornell about a line in Ludwig Anzengruber’s play. The sense of the line was that whether you are six feet under the grass or standing on top of it to face a thousand more lifetimes, nothing can happen to you because you belong to all of it and all of it belongs to you.... His use

of the personal pronoun 'you' is impersonal; it is a universal You." Solo paused.

"So you see, he knew about the mattergy pool." Karl sighed digesting what he was hearing. "But he put it out in pieces and snatches. Ludwig always tended to hop from one thing to another."

"Yes, it is not a well plated, gourmet meal, and that bothered me at first too, but think about itall the philosophers before him tried to get it all on one plate and and it spilled over. He saw that. I think he knew that Kierkegaard's Christianity and existentialism omelet would not stay together, and that Schopenhauer's reheated Kantian leftovers were still cold, and Nietzsche's soul sandwich made out of Schopenhauer's cold soup would dissolve. Every philosopher mixes in and mixes up morsels of truth but never a whole meal. Wittingly or unwittingly, Wittgenstein is telling us to serve ourselves at this buffet of human belief systems. So... yes, he leaves it for you to put together..."

"He left it for **you** to put together..." Karl breathed a sigh of relief; "You are sent.... I might even say, finally....for the first time, heaven sent..."

"I have as much of heaven in me as any other poor soul." Solo demurred.

"I'm glad that I can imagine your existence even though you came after I left..." Karl said wistfully; he

paused for a powerful thought to hatch and then went on, sounding like a prophet himself. "...It's never too late for philosophy. My God if only everyone could understand that.... Tell everyone who will listen that I discovered the arc of the covenant in the outhouse of consciousness, at the last minute. This eternal insight has been under my nose all along. Finally, thanks to philosophy, and you...."

"I must confess, this was not my idea. All I know is that this isn't all there is. I don't know how or why this connection was made.... Only that it was...is.... I wasn't playing God..."

"Why not?..." Karl interrupted. " You criticized me for the 'ass backward' emulation of creating God in the image and likeness of man, and now we set it aright where you ..."

"We...". Solo knew where Karl was going.

"...we...." Karl accepted the correction. "... we see that we are created in the image and likeness of God."

"Bingo !" Solo said softly with a sense of profound gratitude.

" 'Bingo', as a word, must be reclassified if we are to be philosophically consistent. " Karl added with mock erudition in his tone.

“Bingo’ could be our password...” Solo’s voice cracked with emotion.

“Password?”

“Password is an American expression for a word that is important for what it does and not for what it means....” Solo’s last word floated across the gap on a gasp: “...Bingo.”

“Bingo!...” Just as Karl repeated the word a riot of bells began to toll midnight.

New Years eve had ended; the old year was talked away. In the midst of the din, Solo turned the watch stem back to 'Now'.

Solo found himself alone just behind the purple door in the cold dark space. When no one answered his calls, he walked to the back door that previously led to the cavernous hanger. That door now led into a parking lot; there was no cavern, and no sign that anyone had been in the shop for a long time.

Solo was almost frozen when he arrived back at the boat. The river was kicking up a fuss; he had to grip the hand rail to get down the companion way. He turned on the electric heater and wrapped himself in a blanket. Somehow, the book with Karl's biography lay open on the nav table. Solo calculated the material math of their connection, i.e. Karl died when Solo was spread across the gene pools of eight great grandparents, four in Austria and four in Italy. In the matter world Solo had not come together before Karl came apart and yet they were connected. Connection is a miracle however it occurs.

Solo sat at the nav station most of the night impervious to the rocking and the squeal of fenders on the dock side. He read books and searched the internet. He made notes on the adventure which he would upload at some later date to his web site, or

maybe (the thought suddenly occurred to him) he might have a book to write about the experience.

Out through the companion way of his boat he could see the sun peek up over Manhattan skyline. Solo lost track of the days and deduced that it was Sunday from the lack of traffic sounds.

Once he left the marina for his walk, he retraced the path of the earlier walk. No Mitzvah tank; no rabbi standing out front. The Sabbath for jews was over, that was the Saturday ritual. The Sunday ritual took place in Chinese restaurants all along upper Broadway. This was a longstanding custom for reform jews, certainly not the orthodox jews, like the rabbi. Nevertheless Solo looked in the window of Hong Fat and was surprised to see what might be the rabbi, sitting alone staring out into space. Solo tapped on the store window. The rabbi recognized the red hoodie and waved, inviting him to come in. He had his mask off and Solo could see his whole face. If he had a pony tail and a feather he definitely could be on the Indian head nickel.

Each of them took a moment to absorb the other's facial features. Both men smiled as they registered the features which were hidden up to now.

“ I can't stay. I just want to find out why the change of plans today“ Solo said.

“I'm a fraud.”

“A fraud?”

‘Yes, I told you because your mother was a Jew, you’re a Jew.’

“True, true”. Solo wasn’t sure himself whether he was affirming that the statement had been made or that it was true.

“Well then, that makes me not a Jew.”

The rabbi told Solo that he had recently been watching a TV talk show where a woman told the story of how she had been abducted from the Navajo tribe and taken to a Jewish family in Manhattan with a fake birth certificate. She knew it was false because a number of these birth certificates were on file all listing the birth to have occurred at St. Elizabeth’s, all from unnamed Jewish mothers, all represented by Morris Levenson Esquire, who then arranged the adoption with wealthy Jewish families. She was never told that she was adopted and that was part of the deal. As an adult she was hospitalized and her blood type indicated that she could not possibly have been related to her parents. Her private investigator discovered that the registry number, which was supposed to be sequential, on her birth certificate, 65708 was the same on all of the Levinson adoptions for several years. It turns out Navajo children were removed from their so called unfit parents and imported to Manhattan over the objections of tribal

elders. Eventually it was shown that it was not so much the unworthiness of the tribal parents as the worth of the land they sat on, which was the motivation for this legal kidnapping. There were court cases and legislation.

“That is an amazing story and it should be told, but right now I am being dragged by another tail.” Solo was apologetic.

“Levenson was a friend of my Dad’s... or the Jew I thought was my Dad. I’m not giving you a tale. It’s the story of my life. I’m not who I think I am.”

“That’s the story of my life too. Maybe it’s the story of everyone’s life.”

The rabbi stood up and looked away. “I checked my birth certificate 65708, St Elizabeth.... I’m a fucking Indian.... What does that make me now - a medicine man?”

Solo tried to console with a reference to the mysterious integration of DNA strands; which might explain such things as the facial resemblances between Navajos and Jews, which then led to a quip that was supposed to lighten the mood, but didn’t. Solo held up a fist just like the rabbi did when he suggested the ‘jewop’ hybrid. “Navajews, the lost tribe of Israel.”

“I just had soup. Thanks for listening.” The rabbi put some money on the table and left.

On the walk back to his boat, the rabbi’s plight was occluded by the dark cloud of the suicide paradox, which Solo promised to look into, for Karl. Those who succeed at suicide are not normally available for comment, but Solo had this secret space/time hall-pass into consciousness. He remembered the bush wizard’s ominous instructions. He wondered about operating the Timespan watch without any manual or tech support. After a snack of pickles and raw cauliflower, he decided take the leap. He looked up coordinates on Google maps for Chesapeake Bay and entered them in the watch with a date in 1902, which he already knew. When he turned the watch stem to “Then” his radio suddenly began to crackle.



Solo heard a voice coming through his radio with an unusual background of cosmic static.

“Yes...yes by my reckoning, I’m more than six miles from the transmitter.... can you hear me?” Then a pause; then the voice continued. “This is as far as I go. I have to be leaving now. I’m sorry..... I’m through.”

“Break break... Is this who I think it is?” Solo pressed the call button on his radio unsure of where or when his transmission would land and what the communication protocols would be. “Hello I just need to know who this is.” Solo spoke into his mike slowly and distinctly.

“Who?...how many crystal receivers did CIS make... who else could it be ... dummkopf.... Who is this?” After a silence the voice came back on “.....Roamer to Carnegie Institute of Science base station.... Hello can you hear me?” The German accent crackled through the static.

Solo put together the few known historical facts and created a possible scenario for what was at the other end of the radio connection. At this time ‘then’, 1902 (on his watch calendar) Carnegie would have recently funded his new Institute and with his

relationship with Karl and Karl's relationship with Marconi there might have been a prototype radio being tested under the auspices of these two magnates. This would have been a decade before the ship's radio on the Titanic.

The involvement of the Wittgenstein's oldest son would have been welcomed by the Carnegies, in testing this Austro funded Italian invention. This would explain Hans being on a boat, but the puzzle was missing one large piece. Solo knew that Hans left against his father's wishes and that no one knew where he was. So if it was Hans, he would have to have gotten involved without Karl's knowledge or consent. Would that have been possible?

But of course that was possible. He could simply have lied to the Americans about his rupture with the family back Vienna. Maybe the second eldest brother, Kurt, who was in New York managing the money was also taken in. Maybe Hans went through brother Kurt to the radio experiments, before he was completely lost; before that black cloud of despair rolled in. He runs away from his father and then joins in his father's scientific developments? Could be. That would have been a pleasant surprise for his father. Ludwig went to aeronautic school to please his father before descending into philosophy. That might be what Hans was doing before descending into despair. The family in Vienna would still be in the dark. There was no telephone and no way they could know anything

about Hans or Kurt in America except by snail mail, and the snail moved much slower in 1902,

Solo took a shot. He picked up the mike. "Hans?"

"Who else???" The voice came back mystified, since there could not be any other receivers in this space/time.

"Are you trying to reach Hertz or Marconi? They're not in right how at the Carnegie... ah, whatever" Solo realized how ridiculous that ruse sounded as soon as the words left his lips.

"Who is this?" Hans's voice came back.

"I am Well, who I am is not important. I am from the future..... no, wait... shit... Let me start again..." Solo wasn't sure that message was heard, let alone understood.

"I'm from the past..." The radio voice was sarcastic. "...And I'm not playing this game anymore. The present has my undivided attention and I have to say goodbye now, soGoodbye, whoever you are."

"I know what you are about to do.... could you hang on just a bit longer. I just have a few questions." Solo said into his microphone.

"Who are you?"

“Who is not important.... but I really am from the 21st century.”

After a long silence the voice came back. “And why should I answer your questions?”

“Because I care about what happened to you; we all do”

“Am I imagining this?” said the Hans voice as if he were talking to himself.

“Either that, or I’m imagining it....”. Solo’s replied, and then added, “...or we’re both imagining it, or someone else is imaging both of us, but it doesn’t matter now, since ‘now’ is always imaginary... we are connected whenever, however; let’s make the most of it”

“ I am not connected to anyone... understand?“
The voice was petulant.

“You need to connect for me to understand that you’re disconnected, doesn’t that raise any questions?”

“Who are you?.....” The Hans voice demanded, and then took a guess. “... did my Father send you?”

“Well in a way, yes..., your brother has a lot to do with why I’m here, as well, but ...

“Kurt sent you?”

“No I don’t know Kurt; I know about him... Is he involved in what you are doing.... Not what you are about to do... I mean in what you were doing with the radio test?”

“What brother were you referring to?” The Hans voice demanded.

“I know most about Ludwig but I can’t really say he sent me.”

“Ludwig is 13 years old, How old are you?”

“Where I am it’s later than you think. Ludwig became a famous philosopher which is how I know him. I’m an adult living in the 21st century, and wondering about you...”

“I’m wondering about you too... this is preposterous.”

“Yes but so is everything else.... What can it hurt? I am in a position to tell you some things about the future which you might be wondering about.”

“And what might that be?”

“Where the ripples from your splash go...” Solo wished he hadn’t said that. “...Can I take that back?”

“I don’t care what anyone thinks, can you understand that?”

“ Once again, if you need me to understand that, then you do care what anyone thinks. Everyone cares about everyone it is in our nature.”

“Are you a priest?”

“No and I’m no angel.... Just another mind connected to yours for now.”

I’m not connected to anyone.” The voice was now sorrowful.

“ That’s not possible....Think about it.... If you saw a child about to pick up a stone that had just rolled out of a fire, you would not be able to restrain yourself from stopping her.... what you know would be sucked into what she didn’t know, no matter who she was and no matter who you are. The point is we’re all connected and if you don’t see that..... well.....it must be awful.... Is it?”

After a long silence the Hans voice came through the speaker again: “ You say you are from the future? “

“Yes”

“What future?”

“21st century”

“Are you a little green man?”

“No. I look pretty much like you. I understand you’re better looking”

“Are you queer?”

Solo pondered the question and suddenly something he said to Karl, back in the confessional, came to him with powerful clarity. It had to do with the confusion of the verb to be and the verb to do. How much suffering can be laid at the feet of the epic misconception: ‘You are what you do’? It is an existential frost that freezes out free will. This simple minded word-cross has fixed millions of life styles, changed political parties, built buildings and separate neighborhoods for cultural, religious and sexual practices, which is as tragic as it is silly, as silly as Lilliput going to war with Blefuscu over differences in how to crack an egg. (Swift’s, Guliver’s Travels.) Sex is something you do, not something you are. Are you still a pedestrian when you get in a car; are you a swimmer when you leave the beach? How many souls have been sandwiched in hard roles: soldier, foe, criminal, father, gay, straight, son, liberal, jew, christian, caucasian, poor, student, king?

Solo thought about sharing this thunderous game changing insight with the Hans voice, but it seemed

pointless to put this tiny beaver damn in the mighty Nile. Nevertheless, the 'be-do entanglement' would be set out as a crucial existential blunder, which causes behavior to be mistaken for existence. and the Hans tragedy would be set out as a prime example, even if for philosophers' eyes only or maybe....your eyes only.

Solo's clenched jaw kept back the flood of words, and as his finger hit the 'talk' button, a simple answer to the question **are** you queer broadcast itself across the air waves:

"The only thing I **am** is free to choose"

"Are you a Martian without a dick?"

"We got to Mars, but did not land. No I am human with all that goes with it.... "we did land on the moon."

"Did you find cheese on the moon?"

" No just rocks"

"You got what you deserve..." The Hans voice sounded as if it might sign off, again.

Solo tried to appeal to his vanity to keep him talking. "A musical genius like you must have felt the sublime connection with the harmony..."

The Hans voice interrupted. "You don't know me and you don't really care. I don't know why you're doing this... and I don't care."

“With all your vision, what amazes me is that you can’t see through your disappointment.”

“Disappointment with what?”

“Not sure. Let me guess.... Could it be with your family?”

“There was no disappointment with my family and no expectation. As you so eloquently pointed out, everyone of them cares.....cares about themselves.”

“ And you care enough to make a big splash to get their attention..... Sorry about the splash jokes.”

“ Is that why I didn’t leave a suicide note?” The Hans voice was sarcastic.

“We can’t change what happened but we might add to our understanding of why...This might be a chance for us to rectify that oversight”

“Who says it was an oversight.?”

“Of the three brothers....one brother left two notes...two brothers left no notes...”

“What brothers?” The Hans voice was suddenly more interested,

“Oh yes, you wouldn’t know that a couple of years from now, your brothers followed your lead. No, wait, maybe that’s not fair. I don’t believe that you could lead.”

“Ludwig?”

“No, he became a famous philosopher. But I already told you that.”

“Paul?”

“No he thought about it, but struggled on and became a famous one handed pianist.”

“What does that mean?...It can’t be Kurt he’s too stupid and happy with his new motor carriage, and it can’t be Rudi, he would never have the courage...”

“ Both actually.... Rudi left the notes....” Solo spoke with the fake compassion of an undertaker. “...Why do you suppose Paul and Ludwig decided to play on?”

“Paul and Ludwig are another generation... look I don’t care about any of that now...” Hans’ feigned indifference could not hide his shock.

“ Well you might be interested to know that history has dedicated to Ludwig numerous books, and to Paul sonatas.... and there are several books about this amazing family history in which you are but a footnote. “

“Amazing?...” Hans could be heard to scoff through the crackle. “...And did you know that the name Wittgenstein was made up by an antisemitic jew?”

“Yes I did. And I must ask, are you an antisemitic jew?”

“In the sense that jews are God’s chosen sacrificial lambs, yes I am.”

“Did you get that idea from Weininger, did you know about him?”

“What does that have to with anything?”

“Just curious about whether any philosophical thinking is part of your choices. I take that back.... Choice is not the word to use.... You got tired of choosing and chose to end choices that’s the end of philosophizing. That’s what Weininger did.”

“I don’t know Weini... whatever, but if he hated jews he was right.”

“What if all the jews killed themselves, as Weininger suggests, where would be?”

“ Better off. Is this visitation my reward or my final punishment?”

“Funny, your father asked the same question.”

“How do you know my father?”

“I connected with him.... Yeah I guess you could say I know him pretty well; maybe better than you know him”

“Oh you think so.... Did you you know that he was the re-incarnation of Attila the Hun trying to end western civilization?”

“And your mother?”

“She was a camp follower”

“And your brothers?”

“Stooges”

“Sisters?”

“Witches”

“Did you know your sister Hermine’s friend Sigmund Freud

“He was a weird pompous ass.”

“His weirdness became famous. He thought we are all bi-sexual, and heterosexuality is somehow blocked, in some men who become homosexuals. He didn’t quite understand freedom and his followers had to

add to his theories so that propensities and compulsions could be offset by will power otherwise what would be the point of his analysis, if there was no free will to change.” Solo caught himself going back to the ‘be-do entanglement, and stopped himself.

The Hans voice broke the silence. “Propensities and compulsions? Oh you must play with yourself a lot. And that’s why you need to play God.”

“We all get to play God, but if you understood that we would be all in the same boat and we’re not...” Solo’s unexpected rejoinder was followed by a longer silence.

“You think your boat will get you to God?” The Hans voice asked.

“I can’t know for sure, but I know I can’t get there following my dick.” Solo said

“That’s funny...” The Hans voice laughed. “You’re not from Mars; you’re from New York...very funny. Why have a dick then, and why does it point?”

“I don’t know.”

“Of course you don’t know. That’s what makes you so funny.”

“Funny?”

“You are a funny clown for God. God has a sense of humor, don’t you know?”

“Oh... tell me about your God.” Solo asked patiently

“Imagine if that stone you mentioned rolled out of the fire and you watched your pet monkey trying to fuck it. It would make you laugh. It’s funny. We’re God’s pets and we make him laugh. Why else would we be set up to fuck up in this cuckoo clock of a world?”

“Cuckoo clock? You think the world is a Cuckoo clock?”

“No... it’s a circus. Yes a Circus. We are in the Circus for the divine amusement. Trapeze, high wire, lion taming.”

“ A circus?” Solo was groping for a comeback.

“No , no .it’s a cock fight.”

“ A cock fight?”

“The Gods love to watch a cock fight. It’s all a joke for Gods’ sake.”

“Are you joking?” Solo asked

“No God is joking”

“I confess that I am mystified by the fact that life does seem to be a test.... But I know it’s no joke.”

“Nietzsche said that God was a comedian for an audience who was afraid to laugh..... “

Solo interrupted. “Did you get that from your father? I must tell you that he may not have thought Nietzsche was so funny in the end.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not laughing.”

“Why not?”

“Because I see the joke is on me.” Hans ended the thread there.

“You have a choice whether or not to be a clown.....”

The Hans voice interrupted. “ No..I was chosen as the musical clown with the bent horn....the broken violin.” The voice was full of sorrow.

“ You would not have felt that way in my time zone. You might have found a meaningful relationship....”

“Women are bitches....”

“Gender aside, there has to be lovenot just lust...”

“Does your dick point to where the love is for me?”

“You have to think beyond your dick.... You must know that or you couldn’t play...”

“You sound like my grand father.” The Hans voice interrupted.

“What does he have to do with dicks?”

“ He would have extended the circumcision rite to castration, if it were allowed .”

“So you blame your grand father? “

“My father tried to make sure we were masculine.”

“So you blame your father as well?”

“He pulled on our ears to make us tough and hired servant girls to pull on our dicks to make us virile.”

“Tell me a bout Rosalie.”

“Oh, did she become famous? I think she invented blow jobs, but not as good as R... ” The Hans voice stopped himself.

“She was very important to your younger brothers. They worshipped her. Would you like to know what became of Rosalie?”

“No..”

“She became like a mother to your younger brothers.”

“Good we needed a whore to become a mother to replace the mother who became a whore.”

“ That is so” Solo caught himself becoming judgmental, and flattened his tone. “... Poldy was a whore? Your mother?”

“Not a sexual whore, a musical whore. My mother wanted to be a musician so bad and was willing to sell her children and do anything.... Never mind...”

“So. let’s see if I got this right: in this circus, cuckoo clock, cock fight, in which you are the helpless victim, we have to blame, grandfather, father, mother, and God”

“ That’s right. She had no time for children she pawned me off to her father who heard from God; he’s the one who told me that my penis was the devil’s tail.” The Hans voice was agitated.

“Your God told you that?”

“No my grandfather.”

“ Did it ever occur to you that you had a choice about what to do with your tail ?”

“Yes just this afternoon, in fact.”

“Before this dark day you must have felt loved; you are just forgetting.....”

“I am remembering.....no one really cares.....no one ever gave me anything.....”

“Love is not something you expect; it’s something you give.” Solo almost scolded.

“Tell that to your God.” That last transmission was punctuated with an audible splash.

Solo was visibly shaken. He was motionless for a time, the microphone frozen in his hand. Finally he put the microphone down and rolled the watch crown back to ‘Now.’

Solo struggled with the irony that Hans's final bid for love ended the possibility of his ever receiving it. The paradox spilled like an overturned ink bottle onto the white page of faith; that black blot was his first experience with blinding despair. What saved him from falling into the blackness was 'wondering' about it, and then theorizing and then philosophizing about consciousness. Somehow just conceptualizing despair summoned another layer of consciousness; the black blot became a black dot, a smaller part of a bigger picture; the bigger the picture, the smaller the black dot. Now there was space for the will to go on. Solo made a conscious chose to step off onto the dock side rather than into the raging river.

Magically, once the will was re-established, psychic energy returned.

A few blocks from the river on the east bound side street, the bakery aroma flavored the cold air that reached Solo' nostrils. It drew him into the shop where he bought a fresh pretzel still warm from the oven. He spotted a counter display left over from Halloween, bubble makers in the form of a long Indian peace pipes. He bought two on his way out of the shop.

The mitzvah tank was back but this time in the parking lot at the head of the block; the door was closed. He banged on the door. The door opened and

the rabbi greeted him in a sweatshirt. He invited Solo to sit on a vinyl stool by the door a safe distance away, so that masks could be removed. Solo threw the the Rabbi one of the pipes and put the other in his mouth. "It's a peace pipe."

"Bubbles?"

"Peace is a delicate thing... easy to blow." Solo joked.

They filled the pipes and both blew bubbles for a few minutes, watching them flourish and vanish.

Once the soapy solution was depleted, the two men left together. They walked further East on a broad crosstown street with no destination in mind prioritizing the world's newest problems before they undertook to solve them. The rabbi chose to confide in Solo that he was thinking of traveling to the Navajo reservation to look for his family. They were his tribe now by the same biogenesis that made him a jew. Solo would have him join the larger tribe, humankind, but he kept those thoughts to himself and let the rabbi do his own thinking.

"What if this Trump gang decides to make America white again, this could be another holocaust for native Americans this time...." All of a sudden the rabbi was no longer white.

“What you are and what you do...” Solo wondered if this was the right time for the be-do sermon; before he could decide the rabbi changed the subject.

“And what if the vaccine loses it’s way to these Americans...”

“That is all possible, and it is something you can do something about. But what you do has nothing to do with what you are...”

“But I have to go and find out.”

“That is true...” Solo remembered Karl’s monogamy testimonial which suddenly became advice for his new friend’s new life. “... Maybe you should look up that woman you saw on the TV talk show and take her with you.”

“The Navajew squaw?”

“Why not?”

“I did find her phone number...”

At the end of their walk, they found themselves in German town on the upper East side. The rabbi invited Solo to have some ‘fire water’ in the Wursthau German tavern. The rabbi would never have thought about entering a tavern let alone a German tavern in his old persona, but now he was a ‘brave’ and eager to test the new boundaries. Solo went along. They sat at

the bar. Before they ordered, Solo mentioned what he had heard about the Indian intolerance of 'fire water' (alcohol); not sure if it was chemistry or a cowboy myth.

"A Navajew and Jewop walk into a bar...." The rabbi said to the stone-faced bartender, as if he were setting up a joke and then ordered two steins of larger and two schnapps. Since Solo wasn't drinking, the rabbi downed all four drinks in rapid succession.

In the course of the conversation that followed, Solo asked the rabbi what the talmud said about suicide.

"Very bad, very serious. No services, no mourning you give all that up if you commit suicide."

"But that would not be a deterrent to someone who has already committed the act. ...In the end, it's more of a punishment for the family. It's like holding them responsible." Solo suggested

"Well I never looked at it that way, but yes. It's their problem too, why ask? You're not..." The rabbi was suddenly worried.

"No, no," Solo interrupted. "It's just a bit of history I'm trying to digest."

"That'll give you indigestion." The rabbi quipped

“I wonder what the Navajo think about suicide.”
Solo mused.

As the discussion continued, the rabbi became more serious, while at the same time sounding more and more comical, like a TV drunk. “From your lips to Gause ears.....I gotta go pack my tomahawk. You’re like Ssssocrates”. The rabbi said, slurring the s’s.

“Why does everyone think I’m Greek?” Solo mused

As the rabbi staggered out, hunched over in a mock Indian rain dance, he patted his mouth and hooped and whooped. He looked back at Solo as he reached the exit. “You should have been the rabbitt.”
He burped

“Rabbit?” Solo chuckled.

“The rabbi laughed at his own malaprop and chanted the Bugs Bunny theme. “ Da tera da ta ta ta... That’s all Folks”.

Solo sat alone at the German tavern for a time thinking about the ancient human practice of trying to change inner life with chemistry. The decor got him thinking about Berlin and a particular cocktail in the Wittgenstein story. He took a deep breath as if he were about to enter a burning building, and entered an address and a date in 1904 on the watch calendar.

SNUFFED

Suddenly Solo was sitting at another German bar next to a man hunched over an empty glass.

The juke box morphed into an upright piano where a plump old man was playing what sounded like Bertol Brecht songs.

When the bar mate sat up in full view, Solo guessed that the movie-star handsome, young man was Rudolf Wittgenstein. Rudi ordered a drink to be sent to the piano player and then went over and whispered a request.

When he came back he motioned to the bartender who came and stood peering into Rudi's blue eyes.
"Vas?"

"Milch" Solos answered before his bar mate could speak.

"Ver bist du? " Rudi looked Solo up and down.

"My German is a little rusty... sprechenzi..."

"Yes, I speak English..." Rudi answered before the question was finished. "...Where are you from?"

“I’m from the future.” Solo thought to himself, he would have to find a better opening line.

Rudi pulled a snuff tin from his pocket, as if he heard nothing, and opened it. Just then the bartender arrived with a glass of milk.

“If you put that snuff in your drink, what do you expect to happen?” Solo asked ominously.

“Yes, it’s a specially relieving sneeze it gives you.”

““Maybe not as relieving as you think. This is kind of like the last act of a badly written play, where you’re expecting a happy ending and you are suddenly left with nothing.”

“You saw the play?” Rudi asked

“Which one?”

“Die Buchse der Pandora”

“That means Pandora’s Box?”

“Yes”

“What’s in Pandora’s box”

“That’s what you get for brotherly love ...”. Rudi stopped

“Get for what?” Solo did not understand.

Rudi signaled the Piano player. The piano player finished his song with a premature ending and began playing another tune.

“ I’m not sure how you say it in German. Isn’t that tune called “I’m lost?”

“Verlassen, verlassen, bin ich...”. Rudi poured the powder into the milk.

“How long have you been carrying that cyanide around?” Solo asked

“How do you know what this is? And what business of yours is it, what I put in my milk of inhuman kindness? “ Rudi turned away.

Solo spoke to the back of his head. “That’s poetic... sounds like you have been thinking about this for a while.”

“ Who are you?” Rudi turned.

“I am from another time, and unfortunately I cannot change what you do. All we can do is share thoughts bout why.”

“Why?” Rudi shrugged as if to say who cares, and then a second thought changed his expression from chagrin to discovery. “Did my father send you?”

“You could say that. I know your father. I know he was very upset about your last sneeze.”

“He’ll say Gesundheit and go right on being Lorenzo Di Medici, the magnificent patron of the arts.”

“ Interesting, your brother called him Attila the Hun.”

“That too..... which brother?”

“Hans”

“You knew Hans?”

“Not as well as I know your father.”

“Did you know Hans killed himself?”

“Yes....I can tell you he couldn’t see the difference between what he does and what he is.”

“What he does is disgraceful, which is why he didn’t leave a note?” Rudi was now trembling.

“You left two notes that contradict each other; one saying you had no choice and the other that this is your choice. Why?”

“Why talk to me? You don’t even exist and what I’m doing has already happened.”

“And keeps happening...”

“Prost.” Rudi’s pretended nonchalance was peeled away; his fake smile became a grimace and his eyes widened with horror as if he suddenly realized for the first time what was about to happen.

Solo had to resign himself to this accidental suicide and the horror in Rudi’s wordless expressions.

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As Solo turned the watch stem back to NOW, he found himself sitting back at the ersatz German bar on the upper east side, just where the rabbi had left him. The bartender had changed; he was now an old man in a tube mask and without Solo asking he brought over a glass of milk.

“Is that for me? I don’t recall ordering milk.”

“Don’t worry there’s no cyanide in this one.” The old man sounded just like the bush wizard. He continued. “Look, but don’t touch; you’re getting too close.”

“He had no idea what he was doing...why?” Solo was shaken.

“Everyone always thinks that what they’re doing will make things better.”

“Why?” Solo demanded an answer.

“You’re asking me?....” The bartender responded with irony. “Ask...your friends....Ask Hana Arendt a jew who asked Heidegger a turncoat Catholic Nazi; ask Wittgenstein, and you find out he asked Augustine; ask Augustine and you find out he asked Clement of Alexandria, ask him and you find out he asked Irenaeus, who asked Plotinus, who asked Plato...” I don’t know and you don’t know.... And maybe they don’t know. Are you sorry you asked?

“No.”

The river had quieted down by the time Solo got back to the boat. He thought about the Wittgensteins. Three of five brothers committed suicide, and two did not; only one, who lived the longest, married and had the insulation of monogamy. They all shared genes; they all shared Karl's powerful influence; they all shared Poldy and music; they all shared the Germanic Zeitgeist at different decades. Those who took their own lives had no direct experience with death. Two who chose to live had been in two wars and had seen death up close. Kurt was in one war, had seen death up close, as well, but Kurt killed himself. Why?

Solo climbed into his dinghy ready to wander. He entered the geo-coordinates of an alpine river and a date, on the 1916 watch calendar.

THE RIVER PIAVE

Kurt found Solo stepping out of a small boat onto the banks of the river Piave in the Italian Alps.

Kurt puzzled over the strangely clad figure before him and then drew his pistol. Solo raised his hands, smiling broadly as if they were children playing soldiers.

“Nicht Austrich...Sei Italiano?” Kurt pointed the pistol menacingly.

Solo raises his hands higher and confessed jokingly. “Im half Italian and half Jewish.”

“American?...from New York...” Kurt was somewhat relieved but still confused. “...What are you doing here?” Kurt’ spoke English with a slight germanic accent.

“The New York accent doesn’t usually come in handy...” Solo quipped, “...How did you know I was from New York?”

“I lived there Park Avenue , until What are you doing here in this mess’ If US has decided to fight on

the other side, why aren't you in uniform? Are you a foreign correspondent?"

"In a way, I am foreign and I hope to correspond, but not the way you think." Once again Solo groped for an opening line.

"So what are you doing here?" Kurt was still baffled but no longer threatened. He lowered the pistol.

"What I'm doing will be almost as hard for you to believe as how I got here." Solo held his wrist out so that Kurt could see the watch.

Kurt pointed the pistol at the watch, and then backed away. Solo softened his tone. "I'm traveling back from the future to talk to you. I know what you are about to do with that gun, and there is nothing I can do, with this watch, to stop you. But we can share some last thoughts."

"What?..." Kurt was incredulous, but then accepted the strange circumstance without so much as a question. "You know what I was just thinking before you came?"

"No."

"'arma virumque cano'...". Kurt paused for a reaction and then explained. "...I sing of men and arms..."

“I know what it means.... Virgil . Are you feeling like Aeneas?”

“I know nothing about Aeneas, really. I had a latin tutor and I remember that line because of the meter....dada darada dada...”

“Rhythm does give words an afterlife, but maybe not so much for the meaning. Sing to me then of your men and arms.”

“ I don’t sing well. I play.....

“Play piano or soldier?”

“Both, but not very well... I’m the ungifted one...”
Kurt waved the pistol like a wand around the battlefield. “... This wasn’t my idea.”

“Oh I know that, but I would like to know why you went along with it.”

“Are you an angel?”

“Your father asked me that same question. No I’m no angel.”

“No... you couldn’t be an angel if you’re half Jewish and why would you have a Bronx accent?...You knew my father?”

“And your brothers...”

“Which brothers?”

“Hans and Rudi.”

“You know what happened to Hans and Rudi ?”

“Yes, and so do you. Does that have anything to do with what you are about to do?”

“ Why would... I.... No, no not at all.”

“What about the Weininger philosophy, have you read.....”

“I only read books with pictures..... You know what happened to Hans and Rudi?”

“Yes, I do.” Solo reasserted his answer.

“How do you know Hans and Rudi?”

“I was in their virtual company....”

“Are you queer?”

“Not the way you mean it, no.” Solo decided that there was no room here for the ‘be-do entanglement’.

“You know Ludwig and Paul?”

“I know about Paul and I have studied Ludwig extensively but as yet...”

“Ludwig has been captured by the Italians.” Kurt pointed his pistol down river.

Solo looked down the river, shading his brow with right hand. “Yes I know,.... You might like to know that he goes on to become British and a world famous philosopher.”

Kurt pointed the pistol, the other way, up the river. “Paul has been captured by the Russians.”

“Yes ,but he goes on to become American....” Solo held up his left hand as he turned and looked up the river. “...and a famous left-handed pianist. Does the capture of Ludwig and Paul have something to do with what you’re about to do?...” After an awkward silence, Solo went on. “...Weininger believes that what you are about to do has something do with your being Jewish.”

“Im only part Jewish, like you... I just learned that. ...” Kurt turned suddenly and confronted Solo. “...I can’t believe you would just blurt that out like that.... to someone in a German uniform.”

“Actually you are a little more Jewish than I am, but where I’m from it’s not something you have to hide... and I’m a little surprised to find you on this side of the fight...” Solo explained.

“In your future world do they ever let jews into the New York Athletic Club?” Karl turned away and then continued. “... jews wouldn’t fit in...anyway.”

“Problems for Jews gets worse than club membership.”

“In New York or Vienna?”

“Well both, but Austria is the beginning of a nightmare for Jews.”

“What kind of nightmare.”

“What you’re doing now will come to be called World War One....”

“One?” Kurt spoke as if he was starting a count.

“Well, there’s a World War Two where your German friends tried to conquer the world and fit all the Jews of Europe into ovens?”

“Ovens? What kind of ovens?.” Kurt was wide eyed.

“Six million jews were killed.”

“Ovens?” Kurt gasped.

“That’s only Jews. You’re a numbers guy; multiply that by thirteen, for the other humans killed in World War II.”

Kurt did the math in his head. “Eighty million?”

“ Yes, correct, give or take a few, yes.”

“Eighty million... how much of an increase is Two over One?” Kurt was puzzling over the math.

Solo divided 80 by 20 in his head. “Four times”

“That’s a lot...at that rate there won’t be anyone left for World War Four?”

“Were you looking forward to World War Four? You know who Einstein is, right... he says he doesn’t know what the weapons will be in World War three but he can predict that World War Four will be fought with stones.”

“Why would they throw stones when they already have guns and bombs... that’s ridiculous.”

“I’ll let Einstein know.”

“You know Einstein?” Kurt turned away.

“Not personally, no.” Solo answered curtly, trying to get the conversation back on track.

“But you can talk to him with that watch, right?”

“I want to talk to you now about World War One... what...”

Kurt interrupted. “This wasn’t my idea...I try to keep my men safe, even though they don’t like me.My men are safe.... My men have left the field.”

“Did they leave because of you or in-spite of you?” Solo asked trying not to offend.

“It’s hard to command anyone when they know you’re rich and they’re poor..... to do anything, let alone give up their lives for a stupid cause.”

“Why are you still here?” Solo asked

“I was ordered to fight on. We thought terms of surrender were being negotiated with the Italians, and then suddenly they continued to fight grabbing guns and taking prisoners, including my brothers.... You can’t trust Italians...”

“Is that right?”

“They don’t fight by the rules.”

“Who’s rules?”

“I don’t know...” Kurt suddenly changed the subject. “... how do you know Paul and Ludwig... is it through that watch?”

“Only what I read. They are both famous, Ludwig more so than Paul. For Paul, fame was a left-handed compliment; for Ludwig fame was in doubt. They both make it through the World Wars one and two and the holocaust, which I won’t have time to explain and even if I had the time, wouldn’t, no couldn’t Let’s just say. Ludwig dies in Cambridge England: Paul becomes a New Yorker and dies there much later.”

“I really like New York. Paul and Ludwig were just kids when I left for New York.”

“ Your two youngest brothers decided life was precious and so pushed on to make every minute count. Those Wittgensteins who pushed on are legends; the ones who killed themselves are statistics.”

“What about the rest of the family?” Kurt was completely accepting of Solo’s augury.

“ Cancer took all of your family who didn’t kill themselves. That’s the story in a nutshell.”

“It’s nuts alright.”

“Nutshell’ is just an American expression which refers to the shell more than the nuts... probably came around after your time for whatever reason.”

“There will be time after my time?”

“Yes. I’m here to tell you ... yes..”

“So, in your story, everybody dies. You gave my family a choice: kill yourself or die of cancer.” Kurt shook his head, looked at the pistol.

“That’s not my idea.”

“Who’s? Is it God’s.... Can you talk to God with that watch?”

“No, but I think he leaves people free to do what they want?”

“If he doesn’t like something, why doesn’t he stop you?”

“That’s an ancient philosophical paradox?”

“What does that mean?”

“Maybe He wants you to stop it.”

“You mean killing or dying?’ Kurt asked innocently.

“Well you can’t stop dying so what’s left?”

“I didn’t invent killing..... Before this I only killed animals, like everyone else. I did some hunting. I like shooting. I spend some time upstate...”

“You too!” Solo blurted.

Kurt became nostalgic. “... up there are wild turkey, like you wouldn’t believe....you have to shoot straight and cook them just so and they can taste great”

“How do people taste?”

“What?.... that’s disgusting. I don’t eat people.”

“So why shoot them?”

“Well some one is shooting at me.... What am I supposed to do? I shoot back, yes, naturally..... Ok, if you must know, I’m not a uniform kind of guy either. The last thing I would ever do is join the army, especially fighting for the Kaiser and the Emperor. Jesus that is the dumbest thing I ever did. Sure it bothers me, but as you can see everyone is doing it.”

“So you think killing is natural?”

“Darwin said it.... Nature’s teeth and claws are all red.”

“Actually it was Tennyson’s poem “Nature is red in tooth and claw”.

“So what...” Kurt became defensive. “... it doesn't matter who said it. Everyone does it everywhere...” Kurt pointed the pistol at a buzzard circling in the sky just above them. “See that crow circling up there, with his hawk eye. He's put here to eat what we kill.”

“So your war is for the birds?” Solo could not resist a pun, even knowing it would fly right over Kurt's head.

“What?” Kurt turned and faced Solo

“Never mind... and American expression.”

“What about, the birds...?” Kurt demanded

“ They don't have an army... ”

Kurt interrupted. “Yes they do...” Kurt's face lit up with discovery, “...it's called a murder?... a murder of crows is a flock.” He grinned smugly. I remember that from I forget where”

“I'm impressed with your vocabulary, but that's a buzzard.”

“So what... same thing.”

“They don't do the killing”

“So what ... oh and what about wolves, they kill... oh yes and they have armies.... Wolf packs.”

“That’s what the Nazi’s called their U-boats, wolf packs.” Solo mused.

“So, you have heard of wolves and buzzards...”

“Never heard of a wolf or a buzzard killing himself.”
There was a tense silence.

“So what...” Kurt broke the silence and then softened his tone. “We’re different, we think about things.”

“What things?”

“Things....things that make you think.”

“Were you concerned about what your father would think if you stayed out of the war?”

“No, no. My father was dead....” Kurt flashed look at Solo which said ‘you should have known that,’ and then resumed his life story. “ I did everything that King Midas expected of me and I had my rewards...”

“Attila, DiMedici, King Midas.... Everyone has a different name for him. Did anyone call him Dad?”

“My father was not a ‘dad’ kind of guy. More of a king kind of ... But no, it was not my father; it was my mother’s letter, if you must know...” Kurt looked away.

“ I know less about your mother than any of your other family members. I know that she was a pretty good musician...”

Pretty good? No, very good.”

“Oh.”

“I’m proud of her and I want my mother to be proud of me.” Kurt was almost tearful. “...She loves music. I never was able to play as well as my older brother Hans, but that didn’t save him from himself. We think he killed himself; we know Rudi did..... My mother didn’t shut me out, but I was definitely not in the front row. After her Hans and Rudi were gone and after her husband died, I suddenly became the man in her life. I managed the money, even far away in New York, she leaned on me.....”

“Tell me about the letter.”

“She made me feel small when she wrote that Paul and Ludwig had joined up to defend our way of life. It wasn’t so easy to leave America, and come back to fight for this stupid empire. Franz Joseph was a friend to the family..... maybe we owed him something..... This was the greatest mistake of my life, made to please my mother. And now” Kurt fell silent.

Solo had to remind himself that his connection was immaterial and that he had no connection with the physical world of events and could not change

anything that happened. Still it bothered him greatly to hide the end of the story where Poldy, Kurt's mother spent the rest of her life in torment, blaming herself for Kurt's pointless demise.

The buzzard was suddenly joined by others, who seem to come from no where. Solo looked up to follow their flight circle. Before he could change his focus, he heard Kurt say:

“Tell her that I died a gentleman rather than a prisoner of war or a coward.”

While Solo's gaze was still fixed on the buzzards, a shot rang out.

As he walked back to the river bank, Solo never looked down until he got back to the dinghy and spun the watch stem back to 'NOW'.

Back on his own river, the buzzards continued to haunt Solo, as he stared up at the sky, walking dangerously close to the edge of the dock, and then turning his gaze down to the transom of a neighboring boat, he observed her name 'LOVE,' painted in an arc above the rudder.

Solo stood on the dock frozen like a statue. In the stillness, his lucid imagination recreated a drowning; he conjured up the actual sensations of the lungs filling with water and the thoughts that must have accompanied Hans' last breath. He imagined Rudi's stomach cramp, when the cyanide took effect and what his brain experienced when the contaminated blood stream swamped it like a tsunami. Last but not least, he imagined that final sensation when a bullet crashed through the temple of Kurt's consciousness.

Suddenly a monk in Franciscan garb emerged from the companion way of the Love boat and stood on the dock sniffing, as if in a monastery herb garden.

Solo accepted the bizarre occurrence as an omen and, almost without thinking, as though this was his cue, headed for the monk.

Before Solo could speak, the monk turned and headed off in the other direction.

"Brother, can you help me with my doubt? I'm just asking.." Solo's shout chased the monk down the dock. The monk was already out of earshot when he responded with a whisper which could not possibly have been heard at that distance and yet was heard with crisp clarity: "Doubt is a shout; Faith a whisper."

Solo puzzled over the strange line as he peered into the open companionway of the Love boat which appeared to be empty.

Back on his own boat, Solo took out his guitar. He decided to set the Monk's whisper to a 'Monk' jazz lick. Thunderous, dissonant, Thelonious Monk, descending, flatted-fifth chords underlined the words 'Doubt is a shout' and then soft diminished chords sprinkled over 'Faith is a whisper.' After almost an hour with the guitar, Solo continued to work on the tune in his head, as he set out on his walk.

Suddenly he found himself at the rabbi's RV. The rabbi appeared to be about to leave, but let Solo in. He was dressed in comfortable sweats and had a back pack at the ready.

"How will you get to Arizona? Solo asked moving away as he removed his mask.

"The Navajew squaw is driving me...." A burst of joyful laughter came bubbling out as the rabbi removed his mask. "...Together we shall explore the connection between chosen tribes and choosing God's."

Solo was glad to see the rabbi's toothy smile. The trailer door had been left ajar while Solo sat on the stool a safe distance from the rabbi. The rabbi shared with Solo his research on the pantheism of the Navajo. Neinilli could make it rain if your dance was done correctly. Johonea the sun god could make many things happen. "Nitsi controls the wind." As the rabbi spoke about the wind god, the trailer door blew open.

The two men looked at each other and then laughed out loud.

Solo quoted a line from a play which Wittgenstein often quoted to the effect that some part of each of us was connected to everything, every flower, rain drop, molecule of air every bit of dirt and dust.

“ It’s so funny I tried to convert you, a prophet... Oiy Vey... talk about a twist of fate...”

“Stop, stop right there. I am just a friend who knows that philosophy is in our nature and now you do too.” The two men tapped elbows and went their separate ways.

Solo thought about the rabbi and his Navajew squaw, and all the failed relationships with women in his own life.

Just as Solo entered the Old Toad, an English style pub on Amsterdam, he wondered about the women in the Wittgensteins’ lives. Only Paul’s marriage seemed to provide the strength for him to live through some amazing challenges, and, yes... Karl and Poldy... He thought about Ludwig and wondered about whether he ever found the love of a good woman. He ordered a light ale and sat in a corner booth, with a high oak back next to a row of similar booths each separated by a planter.

While he was still in the process of entering the coordinates for a pub in Cambridge, England, and a date in 1951, a woman's voice came over the high seat back.

LAST PORT OF CALL

The upper crust British accent always fascinated Solo. She ordered two ports. Solo could tell from the banter with the waiter that this had happened on a number of occasions, at 6 p.m. in the same booth. From her remarks and tone, Solo deduced that she was making an effort to lighten the gravitas on either side of the moment.

Before the pandemic, Solo was in the habit of eavesdropping on strangers' in restaurants. He would imagine what they looked like, where they came from, where they had been and what they might do or say next, but he would never peek at the actual parties. It was a solitary game he played many times. This time, history was playing the game with him, history and some dendrite of the universal consciousness which magically connected what Solo was thinking to what Solos was hearing from next booth.

Just after the drinks arrived, Solo could hear the woman chuckle as a man's scrawny hand reached back and poured one of the ports into the aspidistra plant that was between the two booths. Solo gathered that this was also part of the ritual, and wondered whether

this was done for botanical, medical or philosophical reasons.

The chemical 'vinosynthesis' effect of the planted port somehow brightened the male voice. He seemed seemed more cordial.

From what Solo read, the woman would have been the wife of doctor Bevan, who lent Wittgenstein his home to die in and his wife as primary caregiver. The relationship started out rough at first but became something very special for both the port pals. Ludwig had chosen to spend his last moments on earth with this woman, all of them. They were inseparable. One could hear their thoughts blending as though they had been man and wife for decades, with all those joys packed into these last few days, but nonetheless joyful.

The male voice had a slight German accent like Karl's and Kurt's but more British; the pacing had an arrhythmia which lent it drama, like the bush wizard. It was, of course, Ludwig Wittgenstein's, voice. Solo recognized the mind behind the words from the first few sentences.

The biographies painted Wittgenstein as a combination of shy Adonis and bold Socrates. His story was a filigree of intriguing enigmas. Instead of being tutored in the palace, like his older brothers, Ludwig Wittgenstein was sent to the Linz Realschule in Austria where he and another student of the exact

same age met in their first year. However they did not share the same classes for long since Ludwig was allowed to skip a year and the other student was kept back a year. That other student was Adolph Hitler. Hitler mentions Ludwig in his *Mein Kampf* (according to one of the books Solo read), but Ludwig never mentioned Adolf, which is strange given his historic infamy.

Ludwig volunteered to fight in World War I for the Hapsburg Empire and the Kaiser as, did Hitler. There's no evidence that they ever met after grade school. They both chose to suffer horribly for a lost cause which neither of them supported. The same set of causes had dramatically different effects on each of them.

Ludwig was a communist fighting against the the social experiment he most admired, the Russians; and his British enemies included his closest friend (lover) and several intellectual allies. He was a Jew fighting on the side of a nascent anti-semitism. He was also a Christian; he was Buddhist. He was an existentialist and maybe a Platonist. He was a homosexual; he was a heterosexual; he was an a-sexual. He was a gardener; he was a grade school teacher; he was a Cambridge professor. He was one of the richest men in Europe who lived in self imposed poverty, having given away all his money. He was a prisoner of war who declined a ransomed release unless all his cell-mates also could be released. He was Saint Francis of Assisi, in World War I and Florence Nightingale in

World War II. He doubted the Catholic Church while he applauded their basic beliefs in confession and love. He was a leader, a follower; he was a trooper; he was a loner, a hermit with a dedicated circle of loving friends. And now, as a terminal patient, he set a new world record for interminable patience.

Somehow he managed to completely ignore any physical pain or side effects of his cancer, like a zen master, so much so that he could leave his death bed and walk to the nearby pub every evening for the good cheer afforded by good company and good port which he never drank.

Solo overheard the couple cancel Ludwig's plans to go to Norway and also to join the Black Friars monastery which father Conrad had arranged. None of that would be possible now, in light of the impending deadline. They chatted casually about the the variety of death bed guests that had come from near and far, including, philosophers, a monk, Catholics, Buddhists, students, colleagues, all came as if to Golgotha.

Just as Solo wondered whether they would wait around for a resurrection, he heard the answer to his inner thought come across the divide in Wittgenstein's own words: "If we decide not to believe in the resurrection, then Christ was just an important teacher, and we have locked ourselves in the tomb....We have roofed out heaven and we are left in a

sort of hell with only our wisdom and our speculation... a loveless hell.”

Then Mrs. Bevan put in. “I would not have guessed that you would buy into the myths of an institutional religion, what with your belief that God is in your belly”

“Yes...”. Wittgenstein beamed. “...we need love to believe in the resurrection and Christ’s resurrection redeems love. It was Christ that gave us love; it was love that gave us resurrection.”

In the next breath Wittgenstein wanted to make sure that they had found a Catholic priest who was not a philosopher. Mrs. Bevan assured him that Father Conrad was not a philosopher and that he was Catholic.

Solo heard them talk about the fact that his Catholic friends would pray for him as he received Catholic ‘last rites,’ and that he would be buried in the Catholic Church Cemetery, all with the cheerful undertones of a couple planning a holiday.

Solo knew, and the eavesdropped conversation confirmed, that Ludwig would continue until his last breath, dictating his last thoughts to be published by his apostles (Philosophical Investigation, and On Certainty), including to Mrs. Bevan and whoever else was within earshot (actual or virtual). Solo wanted to ask about Wittgenstein’s ideas on scientific

‘uncertainty’. He wanted to ask whether Ludwig knew Werner Heisenberg or knew of his theory of ‘uncertainty’ in physics and how it applied to Wittgenstein’s notion of philosophical ‘certainty’. From different vantage points, both men climbed the Cartesian Everest, between the inner senses and outer reality.

Just as Solo was thinking about how unseemly it would be for him to divert the flow of this last scene to his own interest in the uncertainty of principle, Mrs Bevan excused herself and left for the ladies room. Wittgenstein, sitting alone, went on a rant about ‘scientism’. He was telling no one and everyone that scientists were not high priests; they were observers and their measurements were terms and terms were words and all the names of particles were words that had to be defined by other words and eventually quantum mechanics would unwittingly build a concept collider that would spin the concepts of matter and energy into each other and the implosion would result in the nuclear fusion of mind and matter, and a new energy field.

Solo had never heard or read anything else like this. This was a brand new idea born of the collision of two older ideas. The collision of a thesis and antithesis resulting in new synthesis naturally brought Hegel to mind, and just as Solo entertained that thought, Wittgenstein words came across the divide. “I would never propose that I had a theory of how concepts change; that would be nonsense. I am showing ‘what’

not telling 'how'. If I knew 'how,' I would be lying and that would lead to idolatry. The same idolatry of scientism which I deplore and would not want for philosophers. I don't want to be an idol."

Solo clearly heard Wittgenstein's disapproval of Hegel's historical hopscotch: Thesis - antitheses - synthesis (actually borrowed from Fichte), but he found some new meaning in the intersection of concepts. Applying the quantum physics of 'superposition' which was the result of Schrodinger's astounding equation, Solo now saw the resulting collision of thesis and antitheses as a superstate of continuous vibration. instead of a steady state synthesis. The superposition of this new flux could bring together the Platonic fields of belief and truth; the Wittgenstein fields of words and meaning; the Saltafide fields of human consciousness and universal consciousness. (Solos would have to add his own footnote about Schrodinger's belief that consciousness cannot be pluralized and therefore is a singularity.)

The vacillation of Wittgenstein provides the energy for this new belief. Wittingly or unwittingly, Wittgenstein changed philosophy from particles to waves and created a new understanding of belief as vibration. Truth was vibrating beyond word particles. It wasn't a shaky philosophy; it was vibrant.

There was no direct authority for Solo's new hypothesis. Wittgenstein's work dazed the great minds

of the Vienna Circle and the Cambridge circle, including, to name a few, Martin Heidegger, Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, Maynard Keynes, Gilbert Riles and even Alan Turing. None of them could tell you what Wittgenstein thought about the sublime, about the divine.

Solo saw that Wittgenstein used the elusiveness of words to end elusiveness; he used doubt to doubt doubt and make positivity out of double negativity. Word puzzlement was only a game, which could be side stepped, leaving only deeds in the real world. Wittgenstein often quoted Goethe 'In the beginning was the deed,' which would become the inscription in Solo's book, if he ever found the courage to write it.

Solo could see that he was one of the few apostles, maybe the only one, who could translate the Wittgenstein vacillation into a new speculative philosophy. 'Quantum philosophy,' came to mind as catch phrase for the new do-it-yourself philosophy. The fusion of Wittgenstein, Schrodinger and Heisenberg would create a new philosophical molecule.

The thought of Solo writing a philosophy book had some major hurdles. There would be no general interest readers, and the philosophical establishment would not daunt to open the cover because of Solo's lack of credentials. Nevertheless, however these thoughts came to Solo, he now knew he had to frame them in his own words and find some way to share

their meaning. 'Mens virumque cano-' He had to sing of men and minds and show anyone or no one the dazzling puzzle of particles in the mattergy of universal consciousness caused by implosion of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

Solo could point out, maybe for the first time, that it was the Wittgenstein implosion that was not only the end of philosophical explanations, but also the big bang beginning of faith; and it was the act of faith, not the words, that led to the God Wittgenstein found in the end, which gave him a life after death.

In Wittgenstein's own words, the love of resurrection was the resurrection of love.

Solo wasn't sure about whether he could move backward from one 'then' to another without touching back to 'now' first, like stealing third base without tagging up on second.

Nevertheless somehow, he had to have a last chat with Karl. Staring into the froth of his mug of ale, he entered the date first- 1913- and then coordinates for an address on Aleegasse street in Vienna. Google was smart enough to correct to the address which is now Argentine Street 16. The Palais Wittgenstein in the 4th district of Vienna was built by architect Friedrich Schachner in 1871-1873. It soon became the property of Karl Wittgenstein.



SWANSONG

Solo found himself outside the master bedroom suite. He heard voices behind the solid mahogany doors, from which he deduced that servants were helping Poldy and Karl get dressed. Karl greeted Solo through the crack in the heavy, carved double doors. “You’re back.”

“Yes... I had to come back to ...”

“You should know that I no longer feel hung out to dry between Moses and Jesus thanks to you..... and as for my sons...any answers?”

“You have the answer.”

“I still have the question.”

“What question?”

“Why fathers hobble their sons...”

“You didn’t hobble your sons.” Solo said softly.

“ I kept the older three from going to school. I handpicked tutors for them. I thought we’d all be safer inside the palace, learning what we needed to know to stay in the palace...I did push, that was my sin... I did push...”

Solo interrupted “Your pushing was not the sin...”

Karl interrupted. “ Your solace is important to me...”

“It’s not solace...” Solo’s words gained power as he lowered his voice “... it is philosophy which has always been part of you all along...”

“Thank for that.” Karl was grateful.

Solo went on. “... If there is no choice, for all the the sons who become fathers, then when does anyone become responsible. We must, each of us take responsibility from the moment we have a choice. Fathers, sons, you, me and everyone. We can choose to do good or bad, to live or die.

Your sons were responsible for themselves; even though they did not accept that and blamed others. That’s the only sin and it was theirs, not yours.”

Karl whispered so as not to be overheated. “Now that I’m a philosopher, I must say that makes as much sense as the alternative which makes us all puppets on Pauline strings...You see I was paying attention? “

“Yes and we don’t need to explain the strings to enjoy the freedom dance we puppets do.” Solo said.

“Freedom dance for puppets’... brilliant...”...I can just hear the music... minuet.... That’s my choice; we’ll end the puppet show with a freedom dance.

The grand salon was lit with gilded standing lamps, walls covered with paintings and tapestries, except for one entire wall taken up with a massive pipe organ. Just beyond the life size marble sculpture of Beethoven, two Bosendorfer Imperial grand pianos faced each other. Where once Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler sat, now Poldy sat, at the one facing away, with Karl standing in the crux between the two piano curves, facing the doorway where Solo stood.

Solo's first sight of the duet brought to mind a bizarre Hieronimus Bosch poster, with Poldy's hunched back and gnarled fingers addressing the piano keys and Karl's Stradivarius violin tucked under his left chin, finally exposing his hidden, right side, with missing chunks of chin and neck taken by Cuban cigars and unsuccessful cancer surgeries.

Then suddenly the image was transformed into a sublime perfection by the vibration of strings, hammered and bowed, guided by the timeless notes from no era and all eras.

As the music faded, Solo's watch turned itself back to 'NOW'.

The dazzling duet was still sparkling in the froth on the mug of ale in Solo's booth at the Old Toad when a voice came from behind the high oak back of the booth.

"Bingo"

Solo's startled response, brought stares from nearby patrons . "Good Christ!"

"Yes"

"Jesus!" Solo exclaimed with a start.

"Yes"

"Is this the bush wizard?"

"Yes"

"Is this Karl?"

"Yes"

"Is this Wittgenstein?"

"Yes"

"Is this me talking to myself?"

"Yes"

THE END

