

Introduction

New York City, August 28, 1962

IT WAS THE SUDDEN CLICK of the office door that startled me from what had otherwise been a quiet and delightful afternoon nap. And despite the gnawing feeling that there must have been another reason, in that yawning split-second of confusion, I simply assumed that the postman was late delivering the mid-morning mail. Since the building had a doorman and I was no longer seeing patients, there was little cause for alarm. Leaving my head on the desk, keeping my eyes tightly shut, and continuing my sleep were certainly the more desirable things to do.

Unfortunately, the outer office lights had been left on, prompting me to silently observe, through one sleep-encrusted eye, the dim outline of a woman's silhouette as she stood in the doorway. Rather suddenly, a distant memory came to mind, one that had not been recalled for decades. My eyes widened and my pulse quickened. I sensed the familiarity, the impression that I had once

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known this person quite well - that in an earlier time, we had been intimately connected in some long-discarded way.

Yet, in that bewildering moment of foggy haze, I was unable to understand why she would now be standing before me, other than the unlikely possibility that I continued to remain in a state of dream-sleep. Why today, so many years later, would she suddenly appear in the doorway of my now-shuttered medical office on Park Avenue?

If indeed it was her, a disturbing but increasingly likely consideration, then there must be an explanation. Three decades had passed since the last time we had been in one another's presence. That memory remains clear. The occasion was a cold, rainy, late March morning in 1933 when I saw her off at Berlin's Lehrter Bahnhof. She was taking the train to Hamburg for a five-day visit with her ailing mother.

It was only when she began to speak that I reluctantly raised my head from the desk and turned my ear so I might listen. I immediately recalled the taunting sound of her voice, still demanding and defiant. And then, to my dismay, I was able to finally confirm my disquieting suspicion. After staring at me for quite some time - a look that brought back the worry of other long-forgotten memories, her words were strikingly clear. "Josef Samson, mein Gott, if that is truly you, I thought you were dead!"

Thinking (and silently wishing) much the same of her, as I now was certain that this could no longer be a case of

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mistaken identity, I slowly nodded in response and closed my eyes. Though I hoped to return my head to the comfort of my desk, resuming my dream was no longer a possibility.

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Only much later, after she left that afternoon, did I slowly begin to understand that my carefully constructed house of cards would soon begin to fall. And then I feared there would be little that could be done to prevent its total and immediate collapse.