

REPORT

Marek Krajewski may already be familiar to the English reader from his cycle of Mock novels set in Breslau. In his new cycle of thrillers Poland's bestselling crime writer introduces us to Commissioner Edward Popielski and locates the action in another city whose national destiny changed dramatically with the Second World War – Lwów. As Poland's borders moved westwards, Breslau was handed over to the Poles and became Wrocław; Lwów, on the other hand, was taken from Poland and given over to the Ukraine. Both cities, therefore, are suffused with a specific atmosphere, an unsettled mélange of minorities. Krajewski draws us into these worlds with macabre crimes. The Erinyes follows The Minotaur in his Lwów series.

The body of three-year-old Henio Pytko is found by a Jewish pharmacist in his lavatory. Covered with thirty stab wounds and slashes of the knife, bones crushed and disjointed, the boy's corpse is strangely clean and free of blood...

The main section of The Erinyes (which follows the prologue) starts word for word like The Minotaur. This appears puzzling – how can two different novels begin with exactly the same text. Surely this is not a massive printing or editorial error? Soon enough we see where Krajewski is leading us. In the first book, the discovery of the brutal murder of Henio Pytko described in the initial pages spurs a flashback. We go back in chronology as Inspector Edward Popielski explains to his cousin why he does not want to take on the case. In The Erinyes, the same event takes us forward. The inspector is provoked to investigate the case. It will be, he says, his very last case; he will undertake it but only on one condition – that he be permitted to collaborate with Kiczales, the king of Lwów's underworld. He is given permission, and promises Kiczales a year's reprieve for himself and his men, in return for the delivery of Pytko's murderer – alive.

As the inspector pursues his investigation – doomed to frustration and a run of dead-ends, Krajewski evokes the specific spirit of a town both beautiful and complex where Poles live alongside Ukrainians and Rusins, where the Jewish element is strong and not always favoured, where criminals live by their own code of honour.

Like Eberhard Mock, Edward Popielski is a forceful character, one not easily forgotten. There are further similarities. Both men studied the Classics – Latin and Greek; both enjoy chess and have a passion for women, drink and good food; and both are brutal. Yet despite his ruthlessness, his fury and quick ability to mete out justice by his own hand, Popielski has vulnerability and a certain softness. He suffers from epilepsy. He has a daughter and eighteen-month-old grandson on whom he dotes. These characteristics make him, perhaps, a touch more sympathetic than his Breslau coun-

terpart (with whom, incidentally, he worked on the case of the Minotaur). It is precisely this grandson, Jerzyk, who all the more ignites the police officer's fury and determination to track down little Pytko's killer.

Without losing any of the action's momentum or suspense, Krajewski develops and describes not only Popielski's character but also that of his cousin, Leokadia, with whom he has shared an apartment for many years, and of pathologist Iwan Pidhirny. Other characters, though not so fully described, are no less vivid – alongside a comment here and there their actions speak for themselves.

The structure of the novel is in itself interesting; Krajewski, as usual, plays with chronology. The main bulk of the narrative is held within a double parenthesis of prologues and epilogues. The first place and date we are given are Wrocław 2008. Here our curiosity is awakened. The next date is 1949, Wrocław again. Then come the main section of the book and a jump to Lwów – but we go back in time to 1939. The epilogues bring us back in place and time to the prologues.

The part which takes place in Lwów is itself divided into three; not, however, chronologically – events now run their course. These three sections come as the three Erinyes. [The Erinyes, in Greek mythology, were the "deities of vengeance or supernatural personifications of the anger of the dead" (Wikipedia). The three main Erinyes were Alecto – unceasing anger; Megaera – the jealous one; and Tisiphone – avenging murder. Their equivalents in Roman mythology were the Furies]. Alecto-anger, Megaera-jealousy and Tisiphone-avenging murder are the driving forces of Krajewski's action.

The Erinyes is a book which could well find its niche on the English-speaking market. Although the percentage of work published in translation in the U.K. is still considerably lower than in many other countries, we have seen a number of original and interesting investigators from Scandinavia and Western Europe but very few from Central or Eastern Europe. Popielski would be a rich addition. Different from the gloomy, soulful and depressed inspectors who have recently filled the market, he is fiery, passionate, no less complex but more direct. His world, too, is different and offers the reader a whiff of the exotic – both geographically and historically. A brief forward or introduction would be useful to explain the geo-political situation of Lwów and Wrocław at the time.

With the influx of emigrants arriving from Central and Eastern Europe, a book such as this would give the English reader an insight into this other world from which these new neighbours come.

The Erinyes is a work well worth offering the English-speaking public.

(Danusia Stok)

SUMMARY

(The Erinyes of Greek mythology = The Furies of the Romans)

Prologue

On a hot summer's day in Wrocław, 2008, a worn and tired woman of about fifty sits in a café, waiting for Andrzej. Some twenty years older than she, his looks far better preserved, he is wealthy and elegant. He has come to meet his ex-wife, who is bitter and resentful, to make amends for the hurt he has caused her. He offers her a story which she, a journalist and director of documentary films, can use as exceptional material: in the mid-'60's a secret shelter was found in a Wrocław cellar. Inside was the skeleton of a man and next to it three thousand copies of a photograph of a child aged about two... Who was the little boy from the photograph?

Wrocław, 1949

As a lorry turns out of a prison the driver throws a roll-up out of the window. A worker picks it up and reads the message hidden within. He knows that a distinguished elderly lady from his native Lwów is waiting for it.

Alecto (the implacable or unceasing anger)

Lwów, 1939

Adolf Aschkenazy, a Jewish pharmacist, finds the mutilated body of three-year-old Henio Pytko in his lavatory off the common yard. The boy had been slashed with a knife and stabbed thirty times, bones crushed and limbs rearranged with force.

It is a case for Inspector Edward Popielski.

Archbishop Bolesław Twardowski summons Father Ignacy Fedsiewicz, a young priest well-liked by students. He is to prevent the pogrom which is likely to follow once the people learn that Pytko's body was found by a Jew. The already popular prejudice and superstition that Jews sacrifice Christian children for their blood will only be reinforced by the crime.

Inspector Popielski signs his resignation giving his reasons as age and difficult family circumstances. (His daughter Rita is still traumatised after being brutally raped by her sadistic husband; see M. Krajewski's previous novel *The Minotaur*). And he wants to spend more time with his eighteen-month-old grandson, Jerzyk.) Word of the inspector's resignation and consequent refusal to take on the case of the murdered child soon gets round. He is shunned and frowned upon, but it is the derision of criminals who, despite their fear and dislike of him, had previously held him in respect which makes him reconsider. He will take on the case provided Zubik, his superior, consents to his one condition – that he be allowed to work with one of the great bosses of the underworld, an Ukrainian Jew, Moshe Kiczales. The condition is granted. Inspector Popielski pays the head of the underworld a visit. A deal is struck

Suffering from epilepsy induced by photosensitivity Popielski works chiefly at night but he is very surprised that Dr Iwan Pidhirny, an eminent pathologist, should break his own regulated schedule and summon Popielski to the mortuary in the early hours of the morning. Pidhirny has performed the autopsy on Henio Pytko's little body – after being stabbed, the boy had been bled and washed while he still alive. Henio had been tortured. Death had finally resulted from his neck being broken. The pathologist confesses that he, too, would do anything to catch the murderer for he – like the censor – has a little boy whom he dearly loves – a bastard son. This is his shameful and closely guarded secret.

Popielski pursues his investigation. Henio Pytko's parents are too broken to help but grandfather Walery gives the Inspector the names of three men who used to visit the tenement and yard.

In the police archives, Popielski comes across one of the names: Anatol Małeckci, charged with beating a child after first having lured him into a game. Found mentally unstable he was hospitalised. With Walery at his side to help identify the man, Popielski visits the psychiatric hospital only to learn that the inmate has been granted leave.

Anatol Małeckci's home is a stinking hovel. Walery identifies the powerfully built man as being the one who used to visit the Pytkos. Handcuffing Małeckci to a horsing built into the wall of the hovel, Popielski searches the reeking room. What he finds confirms his suspicions: a piece of rolled up lard sewn into the litter – used by Małeckci as a vagina-substitute – and a suitcase full of sexualised dolls, genitals drawn on, torsos slashed, heads bent to their chest. As Popielski is just about to deal with the pervert, he is struck over the head. He wakes up in his own bed – twenty-four hours later.

The newspapers shout the arrest of Henio Pytko's murderer and his incarceration in a psychiatric ward. But, the papers write, this was not the work of Inspector Popielski. Furious at the injustice, the injured man parades with the undressed wound on his bald head as if to proclaim that it was he who found the man. It was on Kiczales's orders that the Inspector had been struck and Małeckci arrested by another officer. Why?

Yet with Kiczales's help, he and Walery Pytko enter the hospital where Małeckci is held, arrange to lure him to one of the toilet cubicles and hang him. The official verdict is suicide.

A thanksgiving Mass for the retribution of Henio's death is celebrated in the cathedral. Walery, who had sworn he would go on a pilgrimage if he succeeded in avenging his grandson, publicly kisses the inspector's hand in gratitude.

Popielski happily takes his beloved Jerzyk to the birthday party of his three-year-old friend, Kazio Markowski. Janina, Rita's friend and Kazio's mother, is beautiful and

seductive. Women, apart from alcohol and copious good food, are Popielski's greatest weakness and passion. The inspector leaves the party quickly to satisfy his arousal elsewhere. He takes up Kiczales's offer to enjoy the graces of Irenka, Kiczales's own mistress. As is his custom with the women he pays, Popielski takes Irenka on the sleeper train running to Kraków and back.

When he is at the station buying tickets pickpocket "Mushface" – whose mentor, Edzik Hawaluk, Popielski has put away – notices that the inspector was followed by someone who enquired at the ticket office as to where the police officer was travelling. Mushface steals the man's wallet.

Next morning, as the inspector and Irenka are returning from Kraków the train stops at a passing station and the Inspector is handed a telegram: *Cabby will collect in Lwów. Stop. Will recognise you by bald head. Stop. You go with him to a yard. Stop. In yard maimed child waits. Stop. Want to see child? Stop. You do because you know it well very well. Stop. Will see what hell is. Stop.*

Megaera (the jealous one)

Popielski does as instructed, but believing the telegram refers to Jerzyk, his grandson, he stops at home. No-one is in.

The yard to which he is taken belongs to a defunct paint factory. From one of several barrels standing in the yard comes the squealing of a child. Popielski takes the pick-axe lying nearby and smashes open the container. Inside is little Kazio Markowski, his legs broken and bones dislodged. As the police officer gently lifts Kazio, he hears a voice: "I killed him." Broad-faced with a small moustache, ink-stained fingers and wearing a new bowler hat, the man confronting him sadistically describes how he tortured Kazio, and encourages Popielski to take revenge by killing him. Just as the officer is about to break the murderer's legs and strike with the pick-axe, the wind plays with the windows. They flash with sunlight and Popielski suffers an epileptic fit. He comes to, trouserless, his clothes neatly folded, and wallet between his teeth. Someone had seen to it that he did not foul his elegant clothes.

The inspector forces a confession out of the cabby who admits to being a police stoolie customarily hired by one of Popielski's subordinates. They pass Popielski's tenement; Leokadia, the cousin with whom he has shared an apartment for many years, and Rita call down to him how delighted they are with the new apartment he is preparing for them. That is where they were when he had called for them earlier.

After a briefing with Zubik, the head of the department, Popielski learns from Pidhirny how Kazio had been kidnapped. The information is confidential; firstly, because Pidhirny is Janina's doctor and secondly, the woman had been raped by the assailant's mentally handicapped son and this was sure to drive her already pathologically jealous and abusive husband to beat her

to death. Pidhirny wants to join forces with Popielski and work behind Zubik's back to coax the murderer. Pidhirny's proposal to use Jerzyk as bait – because Jerzyk is whom the murderer wants – sets the two men at odds with each other.

Popielski finds out from where the pick-axe was hired; on the receipt is a name: Marceli Wilk, and an address. The lead turns out to be a dead-end: Wilk's documents had been stolen.

Although Kiczales's men are watching over her, Rita is instructed by her father not to leave the old apartment. Cooped up, she finds it increasingly difficult to put up with a toddler whose energies, unable to run free in the park, channel into mischief and naughtiness.

Zubik's method of investigation is slowly going nowhere, while Popielski's own chase seems to lead to nothing but frustration. But there was something Pidhirny had said a couple of weeks earlier that jolts Popielski's memory. He searches the files for an anti-Semite who had wanted to set light to a synagogue. The same name crops up: Marceli Wilk. The same man!

The inspector visits a prisoner in jail – Edzik Hawaluk, chief of pickpockets and Mushface's mentor. He needs to know who stole Wilk's documents – Mushface.

In a cellar, where it is too dark to see, Popielski meets Mushface who agrees to phone him with the information. The lead takes the police officer to Bernard Garyga and his mentally handicapped son, Staś. But the man is not Herod! (such is the name the police have given the murderer). Furious, Popielski insists Garyga tell him who Herod is. Garyga merely repeats that Herod is someone from the Bible. If Garyga does not give him the information he wants, Popielski threatens he will have him locked up for petty crime then shows him how Staś will be abused as a circus freak. When the inspector calls Staś "synuś" (sonny), the boy recognises the word, one of only a few he knows. "Synuś" is someone with whom he played, someone who looked after him when Garyga, a travelling salesman, was out working. Staś leads the officer to "synuś" Andrzejku and his father, Tadeusz Szałachowski–Herod. The room is empty. Popielski pays a visit to lawyer Ludwik Machl, the rich owner of the tenement, who tells him the story of grandfather Klemens Szałachowski. A wealthy owner of land, breweries and cement-works, he had suffered from obsessive jealousy which culminated in his throwing his own wife and son, Tadeusz, out into the streets calling the boy a bastard. When the son, later appeared to claim his right to an apartment, lawyer Machl read him his father's will. On the old man's death, everything was to be left to an order of monks who ran an orphanage provided Tadeusz died a natural death, and this included suicide and sickness. Should his death be of unnatural causes all would revert to the next of kin, namely the handicapped grandson, Staś. Tadeusz had rented out the hovel downstairs but been thrown out because, suffering from TB and losing his job, the man could no longer pay the rent.

What was Herod's reasoning? If somebody killed him, his beloved epileptic son would be well provided for...

Given permission by her father to go out, Rita takes Jerzyk to their new apartment. She admires one of the refurbished rooms; her toddler runs out into the hall and is abducted.

Tisiphone (avenging murder)

The inspector picks up the telephone. "Zamarstynowski Pond" Herod instructs him. Popielski arrives at the "pond", a bathing pool now empty of water. Instead harrows line the bottom. Perched on a diving board, Herod calls down to the police officer. If he wants to know where Jerzyk is he is to come and get the piece of paper in his mouth. Popielski climbs the ladder. If he kills Herod he may not learn where his grandson is being held and will, himself, be charged with murder... There is a struggle. Herod falls. With disgust, the inspector extracts the phial with the scrap of paper from the murderer's mouth. The paper is blank! There is one more hope – "synuś". Herod's son climbs down and, clutching his dead father, sobs. Popielski lowers his hand on the boy's shoulder; the boy shudders and spasms in a fit of epilepsy. His head, thrown back, is transfixed on a harrow...

Wrocław, 1949

Popielski, a political prisoner in jail in Communist Poland, plays chess with a new cell-mate, Ber Hoch, a criminal who used to work for Kiczales. They do not have much

time together because the next day the old censor is to be a free man. Ber Hoch tells him what had happened. Lawyer Machl had hired Kiczales to abduct Jerzyk but no harm was to come to him. Tadeusz Szałachowski was indeed to be killed but his son was to survive, be given a regular sum by Machl, and be well looked after. The remainder of Klemens Szałachowski's fortune was to be divided between Machl and Kiczales.

Wrocław, 1950

Ludwik Machl wakes in total darkness with a wet wound on his head. Through the barred Judas-hole he hears a long-forgotten voice. It tells him how Rita ended up in a psychiatric hospital then in '42 was led off with other inmates to be shot by Germans. Now every single day Machl would receive a photograph of an eighteen-month old toddler...

Wrocław, 2008

Andrzej has taken his ex-wife to the cemetery where he finishes his story. When in Kiczales's care, Jerzyk had once more been abducted – this time by gypsies who, before they themselves were shot by the Germans, had sold him to a childless peasant couple. He had been well looked after. Andrzej is Jerzyk; the name on the grave where they lay flowers reads: Edward Popielski (4 IX 1886 Borysław – 24 III 1973 Wrocław)

(Summary by Danusia Stok)

THE ERINYES

by Marek Krajewski

IV

The town did, indeed, already know about the inspector's resignation. The first journalist to appear before Popielski was Konstanty Mrazek from *The Polish Word*. Informed over the telephone by Mr Hirk, he dashed with a photographer from his nearby editorial office on Zimorowicz Street and plunged into the Scotch House just as Popielski was raising his second glass of vodka to his lips. The photographer aimed the lens at him and Mrazek already pictured the newspaper headlines in front of his eyes: "What does the inspector do instead of tracking down Henio Pytko's murderer? Drink as if nothing has happened!" and beneath, a photograph of the police officer holding a glass to his lips. The editor's dream, however, did not come true. Popielski lifted his glass and sluiced its entire contents straight at the camera and the photographer's face. He then leapt from his seat, pressed his hat on his head and ran towards the exit.

When he got there his face blazed in the light of several flashes at once. He saw the features of journalists he had long known to be polite and humble in conversation. This time they showed no signs of either of these virtues; they were insistent, unyielding and aggressive. This town was beginning truly to despise Popielski.

"Please give us your real reasons for resigning!" editor Matusz of *The People's Journal* demanded sharply.

"The whole of Lwów is counting on you! How do you justify your desertion?" Szarota from *The Evening Gazette* was relentless.

"Are you afraid of nationalistic riots?" Czubytyj from *Dziła* touched a sore point.

"Have you chickened out? Fear got the better of you?" Krzyżanowski from *The Moment* shouted over him.

"Who's going to catch the murderer if not the slayer of the Minotaur?!" yelled Fajerman from *Das Naje Tugblat*.

Popielski's face seemed to be growing ever paler in the flashlights. He removed his hat and wiped the sweat off his brow. The brightness of the flashes cut his numerous portraits both in profile and en face. To the gawpers gathered on the pavement outside the Scotch House it seemed as if Popielski's bald head was multiplying and parting from his body.

"Hairless, you son-of-a-whore!" a crook suddenly yelled from the crowd. "Lwów ain't gonna let it go!"

Popielski, hearing the nickname given him by madcaps from Kleparów and Łyczaków, felt his flesh crawl. It had always awoken a peculiar pride in the inspector because the bandits said it with hatred but also with respect. His bald head was the object of many a joke, the best known being: "When does guv Popielski have a fringe 'bove his eyes? When a pussy sits on his head". For years on end his head had been compared to an egg, a battering ram or a penis. In all these jokes and comparisons there was a bandit's particular respect. But not

now. Not today. Now there was as much revulsion in it as in the word "cockroach". Previously the nickname had attacked him with its hiss full of hatred as it came from a hiding-place; nobody ever dared to throw it straight into his face. There was a sort of linguistic taboo – never utter the nickname in the presence of the man to whom it belongs or you'll regret it! Best do it covertly otherwise you'll lose your teeth! But that is how it was until today. Now some dirty street urchin glared mockingly at Popielski and his threats were louder than all the journalists' impudent questions.

"Kiddies from Kliparów ain't gonna forgive you this, Hairless!"

The urchin's stare overpowered the inspector. Popielski turned on his heels and made to the back of the premises, towards the toilet. He knew that there was a small yard outside the window which would lead him safely to the gate on Łoziński Street from where, following the narrow Senatorska Street with its tall buildings he could get to the "old uni". There, in the silence of the mathematics reading-room familiar to him from his last case, he would calmly collect his thoughts. He pushed aside the photographer who, still blinded by the vodka, was making his way towards the water-closet, hurled inside, locked the door with the hook, and opened the window washed over with white paint. Pigeon fluff billowed up all around. Popielski climbed onto the dirty sill and jumped, filling the inner yard with the noise of his leap. It was quite a height; he lost his balance and fell. He looked with repulsion at the baggy knees of his brand new trousers covered in a layer of guano. He glanced to the side and saw a pair of shoes with gaiters. He knew to whom the shoes belonged. Gaiters had not been in fashion for a good many years but the chief of the Department of Investigation of Regional Police Headquarters, sub chief inspector Marian Zubik had never cared about fashion.

Popielski's boss stood legs far astride, clasping his subordinate's application to resign. His waistcoat was bursting over his huge belly and his swollen red neck barely fit within the hoop of his collar. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. His scarce hair was intricately combed and plastered down over his skull.

"The page from the Scotch House was very fast" – smiled Popielski before Zubik could open his mouth. "He got to you quickly, sir. The lad deserves his złoty."

"And I deserve my recognition, too," The chief's hiss did not predict anything good because this apoplectic usually filled the entire Department of Investigation with his loud shouting. "I know the lay-out of these tenevents as well as if I'd build them myself."

"I've never been sullied by pigeon droppings before." Popielski examined his trousers with concern. "You don't know what to clean them with, do you, sir? The suit's from Jabłkowski's!"

“What are you bullshitting about, Popielski?” Zubik returned to his role of the choleric well known to his subordinate. “You know what I’m now going to do with your application to retire? This.” The sub chief inspector grasped the sheet as if he were about to tear it to shreds.

“Well, go on, sir, tear it!” Popielski had never spoken so impudently to his boss. “Go on, damn it, tear it and I’ll write out another application! And I’m going to go on writing while you go on tearing. And that’s going to go on for days on end... While in the meantime the Jews...”

“Listen, man” – Zubik came closer to Popielski and snorted straight into his face. “You think I won’t manage without you? You think I need some dandy in dark glasses who’s coming up to sixty and works when he feels like it? You think I don’t know what you get up to on trains with those lowest of hussies? You think I care about your resignation? I can tear it or back it up just as I please, just as I want – either this way or that – understand? It’s all the same to me!”

“So please back it up.” Without turning Popielski indicated the toilet window with his thumb. “And then announce your decision to them! Tell them, sir, that ‘Hairless’ is leaving and you agree!”

The journalists were banging at the toilet door. The faint protests of restaurant staff and furious yelling of the assailants could be heard. Popielski felt cold. Again he heard the crook’s baleful voice and his own nickname.

“What do you want from me? What can I do to make you stay?” Zubik removed his hat again and fanned himself with it. The whites of his eyes seemed to turn redder.

“I have to talk to someone, that’s what I want.” With disgust Popielski leaned towards his boss’s ear overgrown with red hair, and whispered something for half a minute.

Zubik closed his eyes. Somebody kicked the door so hard the hook practically gave way. Zubik opened his eyes.

“I consent,” he said slowly. “Have a word with him. And yes, if you like I’ll give my consent in writing.”

“And for the sake of accuracy, sir, I’m fifty-three, and the girls with whom I travel to Kraków are of the highest order. Well then ... But what are we still doing here? Let’s go!” “And where to?” asked Zubik rubbing his eyes.

“You want to hold a press conference here? In a yard behind the lav?”

They entered Łozińska Street by way of the gate. A weak draught scattered the torn pieces of office paper with the request for resignation. A moment later they lay littered in pigeon shit.

V

The town hall clock was striking eleven as Popielski left Atlas restaurant. Slowly he strode towards Diana’s fountain. It was a glorious May night. Youngsters, shouting over each other and swearing ruthlessly, milled around the fountain. One of them climbed the plinth and clutched the Roman goddess by the breast. From their cocky expressions and ill-fitting clothes Popielski deduced that

they had just finished their final school exams and, for the first time in their adult lives, had drunk an excess of alcohol. He recalled his own final exams in the Classics secondary school in Stanisławów – Livius’s text on Horatius Cocles, the fragment from Plato’s “Ion” dialogue, the exalted expression of the priest who also served as a math’s teacher, and claimed God was a sphere and every being a point on that sphere. He recalled, too, the furious glare of the loathed biology teacher who demanded the subtle differences between the cytoplasmic and non-cytoplasmic parts of a cell. He also remembered the alcohol they had drunk after the exams, and how they had earned their grades in manhood at a Jewish brothel. This last recollection was not, in fact, inarguably pleasant since he had not gained his grades immediately but only after two shameful false starts. However, the lady who had partnered him that evening had been very sympathetic towards his unsuccessful and helpless efforts, and gently, exquisitely had led him over to the shore of manhood, imprinting herself so firmly in his memory that he still had a permanent weakness for women with Jewish looks even now.

Popielski shook his head and cast out the memories he had of Stanisławów which contrasted strongly with his present, gloomy state of mind. He increasingly feared he was becoming a comical satyr, an incurable, dull sybarite. This feeling always came over him when he experienced the fullness of ecstasy, when he woke in the beds of ever new harlots, when he could not remember what had happened the previous evening, when his throat was hoarse with the dozens of cigarettes he had smoked. He then saw increased concern in the eyes of his cousin Leokadia, and especially in those of his nineteen-year-old daughter Rita. One look from her was like a burning shame, like the howling of a bad conscience in the sleepless night. Under the influence of these eyes Popielski turned from sybarite to ascetic. He fasted, poured what was left of his alcohol down the sink, and avoided bawdy houses by a wide detour. Right now such a time was approaching. The sinusoid of hedonism was heading towards the minimum but had not yet arrived. For this he needed one more incentive. Rita’s eyes would do. He had not, however, seen her for two weeks nor was he at all sure his daughter wanted to see him. With disgust he thought about his sumptuous supper at the Atlas, washed down with several glasses of vodka, about the broad hips of a certain Miss Władzia with whom he had earlier found himself in a hotel pied-à-terre, about his liver which weighed on him like a stone, and about his stomach which still hurt after jumping down into the yard behind the Scotch House lavatory. Yes, Popielski needed an incentive to ascetism.

He felt a gentle touch. In front of him stood what was probably still a teenage girl, resting her hands on her hips and grinning broadly. Popielski instantly sensed the anger he felt at sybaritism fill his mouth like bitter bile. He would have like most of all to vomit – right there, now, by the town hall.

“*Cium*, sweetheart.” The girl’s grin was even broader. “On Ormiańska street by the Four Seasons there’s a car an’ it’s gonna take you sir real fast...”

Before he had time to react, the girl ran off. He did not even try to chase after her with his heavy stomach in which he had pulled something when jumping into the Scotch House yard. A new Lancia did indeed stand on Ormiańska Street by the Four Seasons tenement. Popielski opened the door and without a word of greeting got into the car. He was sure the chauffeur had not had a single lesson in savoir vivre and that his "good evening" would have gone without a reply. He preferred, therefore, to say nothing.

They passed the Uspieńska Orthodox church, the Arsenal and the Galician Governor's Building then turned into Łyczakowska Street. Popielski found himself on familiar territory surrounded by two or three-storied tenements. He had been in those yards late at night often enough and had frequently heard the hiss of his nickname as lads on the look-out warned their patrons who lay low in dens and hide-outs. Once past Łyczakowski Cemetery the chauffeur accelerated and a moment later left Lwów. On the left stood the thick wall of a forest. A quarter of an hour later it grew sparser and they found themselves in Winniki. The Lancia turned left and stopped in front of an old, large, timber house behind which rose a thicket of pine.

Moshe Kiczałes sat on a two-seater swing suspended on the veranda and smoked a cigar. The remains of caviar, the herrings and sweet delicacies on the table were evidence that his choice cigar was but the culmination of an equally choice supper. A young blonde, so beautiful that Popielski immediately forgot about his resolution regarding ascetism, huddled up to Kiczałes tenderly. A blanket of tiger's skin protected the girl from the cool of the May night. Her companion obviously was hot because he was not wearing a jacket, and his legs thrown far astride, his hat askew, his loose necktie and unbuttoned shirt lent him the appearance of a crook resting after a drunken night. The wide, gleaming scar running across his cheek could have come from the slash of a knife during a drunken brawl. The resemblance, however, was only apparent. The king of Lwów's underworld hardly ever drank alcohol and the scar was a memento of a brawl in a Russian prison.

He kissed the girl on the cheek and whispered a few words into her ear. She stood up, said "good night" to Popielski and went inside. The inspector did not reply, did not even offer her a glance. Only with the corner of his eye did he register the presence of her slender figure in the unlit window. He knew very well that she would be eavesdropping on their conversation, maybe even at her lover's request. By not reacting to the girl's courtesy he had committed a conscious faux pas. But everyone knew that Kiczałes was pathologically jealous of his numerous harem and it was better not to even look at any of his slaves if one did not want to lose his favour. He knew, too, that in the darkness of the night, the ringleader of the demi-world would perhaps not even notice his lustful looks but would certainly ask the many Cerberi dispersed across his property, who hid behind trees carefully observing their boss's guest, about the new arrival's behaviour. He preferred, therefore, the risk of being con-

sidered a boor rather than a philanderer who dribbles at the sight of someone else's mistress.

The inspector was not mistaken in his swift reckonings. The host obviously considered Popielski's behaviour to be decent because he smiled rather amicably and indicated to him the wicker armchair by the table.

"Do sit down, inspector. You say what brings you to my humble abode and I listen, I listen." Kiczałes blew out a cloud of smoke.

"You're hosting me in your own home." Popielski tapped a cigarette against his cigarette-case. "That shows you trust me. I thank you for it."

"Without the pretty words." The host once more smiled beneath the thin moustache of a paramour. "If this was my home, 't would mean you're a fine guy. But in this shack I can receive even old serfs."

Popielski grew thoughtful. Kiczałes had not offered him a bite, cigar or drink. That showed distance. Then he had compared him to a serf. That showed hostile distance. The police officer got to his feet, pulled the *Evening Gazette* from his pocket and threw it on the table in front of the man who addressed him. The branches and bushes around the house abruptly moved. Kiczałes raised his hand and once more there was silence, broken only by the chirping of crickets.

"Find the murderer of this child and hand him over to me," said Popielski quietly, pointing to the paper on the front page of which appeared his photograph.

"You think like all the others, no? That a Jew killed a Christian kiddo for matzos, no? And that's why me, a Jew, am to look among my own, eh? You want to get me against the grain, eh? 'Fraid of riots, are you, a pogrom on the Jews?"

"I don't care about the murderer's ethnicity, you understand, Kiczałes," Popielski answered coldly. "I'm turning to you not as a Jew but as a governor, understand? A governor!"

"What? How?" The king of the underworld was confused. Not hiding his astonishment, he stared at the guest.

"The world of the underground, the world of thieves and bandits, that's your province and you're its governor. Only you rule that province. Your men are men of honour! No pickpocket's going to rob a pregnant woman, no bandit's going to attack a child, no pro is going to harm either an old woman or a madman. Such are the laws in your province, am I right?"

"Well, yes." Amazement did not disappear from Kiczałes's face.

"And this son-of-a-whore" – Popielski slammed his hand down on the paper – "murderer of a three-year-old child broke all the laws of your world. Are you going to allow such a pervert to act on in your province? Don't you care? You have your own police, your own minister of internal affairs who know every hole in which this animal could hide! Aren't you going to set your powers of coercion working?"

Kiczałes wondered for a moment whether Popielski's question did not indicate impermissible imper-

nence. There was Hairless standing him up against the wall and telling him what to do! How dare this cowardly cop who just today had wanted to resign, force him to reveal his plans or even co-operate?! Lost in thought, Kiczales opened Popielski's cigarette case and extracted a cigarette. He lit up and scrutinised the inspector's bald head, barely visible in the feeble glow of the paraffin lamp hanging on the porch. This cop's too smart to come here, he thought as he drew on the scented smoke of an Egyptian, and simply demand something from me. He wants to give me something in return.

"Go on, inspector, I listen, I listen," he said as he leaned back on the swing.

"I want to combine our strengths to find Henio Pytko's murderer."

"You go on, you go on! It's very funny! But why all this? Am I a court of justice? Am I the police? What's in it for me?"

"If thanks to your informers you find the criminal and deliver him to me, I forget about your province for a year. Every pro who says he's from Kiczales will sleep soundly. I'll immediately set them all free. Unless any of them does something like this murder on Żółkiewska Street. Then I'll kill him." Popielski extinguished his cigarette. "That's my proposition. I forget about you and your businesses for a year. In return I get the child's murderer. Alive!"

"And what happens" – the king of the underworld smiled again – "if it's not me but you who catches him? I waste my time, pay my men, my stoolies get to work and what? You catch him and not me? And I get nothing out of it!"

"Yes" – the wicker chair creaked beneath Popielski – "then you'd get nothing out of it. The agreement's very straightforward and doesn't involve any appendix just as the notion of honour and shame is straightforward. Either you catch him and have a year's reprieve from me or you don't catch him and we go on being adversaries. But adversaries with honour – as always, as up until now and to the end of the world! What do you say?"

Kiczales rose and started to pace the veranda. His shod shoes rang against the floorboards. Popielski was relieved – he had said everything. He gazed at the Winniki forest. Henio Pytko's case would be his last. Really his last. He would then retire – to a forest just like the one by Winniki. In the evenings he would read the ancient classical poets or resolve exercises in linear algebra. Just this one investigation. Just one more spur into action. Just one more bout of asceticism during which he would hunt the dead-end streets of the town. He now keenly felt his approaching old age – his gastric juices were fermenting under a thick layer of food, his veins were growing over with fat, his lungs calcifying from nicotine. He closed his eyes and – strangely, contrary to the late hour – felt drowsy. The ringing of shoes stopped short in front of him. He opened his eyes. Kiczales held out his hand to him. Popielski shook it. This alone acted as a spur.

A quarter of an hour later, the king entered his bedroom. His mistress was wearing stockings, suspenders

and a transparent peignoir. She unfastened his trousers.

"My governor," she said.

A moment later she was not speaking anymore.

VI

The university pathologist, Doctor Iwan Pidhirny, loathed an irregular life and any sort of surprise. He divided his days and nights into three parts, four hundred and fifty minutes each. He called them tierces. The first seven and a half hours he spent at the Jan Kazimierz University Department of Medicine on Piekarska Street and the other two at home – accordingly – a tierce for the family and a nocturnal tierce. Family matters, with time, had become less and less absorbing because Pidhirny's three sons had gone their own ways which, incidentally, the father did not accept. The one and a half hours left to complete the twenty-four hour cycle Pidhirny spent walking from Tarnowski Street where his villa stood next to Professor Leon Chwistek's house, to the mortuary and back. He was proud of his ordered life. Besides, he made this pride known to all and sundry with as much persistence as he did his views on the discrimination of the Rusins in state employment of which he, himself, was a blatant, living contradiction.

In the secrecy of his heart he also divided his life into tierces. He arbitrarily allocated twenty-five years to each. The first he spent studying. He was born in 1875 in the village of Ostrożec between Mościska and Lwów. There, little Iwan, the exceptionally bright son of a poor peasant, caught the eye of a Greco-Catholic priest who, after the boy had finished village school, entrusted him to the mercy of Mr Onufry Sosenko, an Ukrainian lawyer and activist in the educational "Ruska Besida". This man decided, of his own accord, to finance the boy's education in the Franz-Joseph Secondary School and then find a more serious patron. Iwan Pidhirny's exceptional abilities, especially in the field of natural sciences and classical languages – with a quiet word from Sosenko – drew the attention of the Greco-Catholic Metropolitan Sylwester Sembratowicz himself. This patron of poor and gifted Ukrainian youth financed the final years of Pidhirny's secondary schooling and then allocated him a grant thanks to which the young man undertook medical studies first in Lwów then – by order of the Metropolitan – in Czerniowice. At the university there, in 1900 he was handed his diploma of medicine with the beautiful annotation: *summa cum laude*.

And here began the next stage of the doctor's life – the professional and family Lwów tierce. Its milestones were marriage, a career first as a doctor then academic, and the births of his three sons each of whom in turn disappointed their father in his hopes. The first of them, Wasyl, died fighting at Petlura for the independence of Ukraine. The second, Serhij, rather than of independence dreamed of proletarian dictatorship and, as a member of the Communist Party of West Ukraine, landed in pris-

on in Równe then, as a result of an exchange of prisoners found himself in Soviet Russia. In that land of his bygone dreams he was soon murdered by the NKVD. The third and youngest son, Iwan junior, on the other hand, disappointed and hurt his father most. He denationalised himself and after studying law in Lwów changed his name to "Jan Podgórný". He then went to Warsaw where he began a brilliant career as a lawyer and politician in the circles of the *sanacja* regime, Piłsudski's followers. In the balance of his life, Doctor Iwan Pidhirny counted the second tierce as a failure and in its second half – as a form of recompensation – he had allowed himself a certain madness which he kept a closely guarded secret. Besides, it quickly came to an end and now the pathologist was his usual self – a querulous, irritating, acutely intelligent man and brilliant specialist in his field. Having known him for many years, Popielski was very surprised when the latter agreed to depart from his trichotomic system and meet in the mortuary late at night. The inspector took this to be Zubik's success, who – when he only wished – could be so helpful and effective that he could break even Pidhirny's sacred principle of three self-excluding tierces. Popielski told Kiczales's driver to take him to Piekarska Street, to the Jan Kazimierz University Department of Medicine. It was coming up to midnight when he found himself in the courtyard surrounded on three sides by two-storied neo-classical buildings whose new functions were described in Latin: *chimia medica – hygienia – pharmacologia, physiologia – anatomia – histologia and pathologia – anatomia pathologica – medicina forensis*. The building carrying the last words was on Popielski's left.

The figure of a lone man swiftly crossing the medical campus did not go unnoticed by the beadle who, holding back a large Alsatian on its leash, barred the nocturnal guest's way. He immediately recognised this frequent visitor to the mortuary and greeted him politely. Popielski tipped his hat, slalomed past the flowerbeds of blooming tulips and pansies, turned left behind the wing of the building and entered by its side door. A moment later he was making his way down empty, dark corridors the walls of which were impregnated with the distressful smell of death and decay. He tripped over some metal vessel. The rattle resounded all around. In the distance, midnight struck. He thought he heard whispers and laughter. It did not surprise him – what else could he expect in a mortuary at the witching hour?

Doctor Pidhirny, in a tight-fitting apron, stood bent over a dissecting table illuminated by the glaring light of an operating theatre. He rested both hands by the small, cramped remains of a child. A cigarette smoked in the physician's lips, irritating his eyes and inducing tears.

"Good evening, doctor" – Popielski took off his bowler hat. "Thank you for agreeing to meet at such an irregular hour for you."

"Good evening, inspector." The physician spat the cigarette out into the empty box, threw it all on the floor and crushed it with his shoe. He looked up at Popielski with watery eyes. "You're very kind but please don't turn

facts around. I did not agree to any request for a meeting, I requested it myself knowing you work at night."

"I didn't know." Popielski suddenly realised how important the matter was and mentally castigated himself for constantly thanking everybody. His politeness had been spurned by both Pidhirny and Kiczales that day. "I thought it was Inspector Zubik who had persuaded you to meet me at night but..."

"We haven't got time for such speculation," Pidhirny interrupted. "Please listen to me carefully. I did an autopsy on the little child's body this afternoon without an assistant. Nobody knows what I know. And the other person's going to be you. That's why I wanted us to meet secretly, late at night."

Popielski stared at the child's sewn-up corpse. But he was not focussing either on his swollen cheeks, hard as if covered with a thin layer of brown caramel, or on the red, tear-like wounds and marks of straight cuts visible over the entire body, or even on the limbs, twisted and limp like the broken wings of a bird. Popielski was still wondering why Pidhirny who usually referred to the bodies on his dissecting table impersonally and with no emotion, was now using such diminutives as "little body" and "little child".

"This boy was methodically subjected to thirty stabs and slashes of a knife." The doctor touched one of them on the shoulder. "But they weren't deep and none were fatal. Yet when found, the little body should have been covered in blood. It should have been a brownish red or covered in glistening clots. But we know it wasn't. It was as clean as if it had been washed..."

"Yes, washed," Popielski repeated mechanically and stared at the stitches on the stomach such as had never been done as carefully by Pidhirny before. "Washed after it had been bled. Some madman stabbed the child, waited until the blood ran out and washed it."

"And all this time it was alive," the doctor said hollowly.

"You know, doctor, how much I value your skill." Popielski loosened the collar beneath his tie. "Your expert opinion is worth every meeting – wherever and whenever, even at dead of night in a cemetery. But please tell me – what are the grounds for you saying that the little one was still alive when bled?"

"He was stabbed with iron, hence the swellings and brownish hardening on the cheeks." Pidhirny touched the boy's face.

"You didn't answer my question!"

"This child died as a result of its cervical vertebrae being broken!" It was as if the physician had not heard the admonition.

"How do you know it was still alive?"

"The wounds and burns had been inflicted perhaps twenty-four hours prior to the internal haemorrhage in the neck which occurred after the boy's neck had been broken! That little child lived a good many hours before its neck was broken. Do you understand?!"

Pidhirny threw himself at Popielski and grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket.

“Do you understand, that little boy was tortured!”

The inspector gently moved away from the doctor, far enough for the latter to let go of his jacket. He walked up to the sink and carefully washed his hands even though he had not touched anything in the mortuary apart from door handles. “The Jews are locking themselves in their houses,” he said as if to himself drying his wet hands on his trousers. “An unemployed man with a can of paraffin was locked up at the police station on Kurkowa Street. He was caught by the Golden Rose synagogue. We’re pressed for time, doctor. You couldn’t have chosen a better hour for our meeting. None of us has time to sleep.”

“You think I chose this meeting because of a civil concern for Jews?” Pidhirny stood motionless and stared at the floor.

Popielski pulled out his cigarette case and counted how many cigarettes were left. Only two. And morning was far away.

“I haven’t got time to sleep,” he repeated pensively as he mechanically shuffled the cigarettes in their case, “when someone who murders children is roaming around Lwów. I’ve got an eighteen-month-old grandson.”

“And I... Have a two-year-old son.” Pidhirny did not lift his eyes even as he spoke. “You’re the third person to know. Apart from me and his mother.”

Popielski extracted the two last cigarettes. He put one of them between the physician’s lips and lit it. The second he lit for himself. Then he turned and left the mortuary.

VII

The loud knocking on the door woke carpenter Walery Pytko. In the room next door a child stirred and cried in its sleep. Apart from the four children their parents always slept there, too – Walery’s son, Ignacy, and the son’s wife, Stefania. Always, but not now. Now they both sat at the kitchen table with motionless faces and open eyes. They did not react to the knocking. They did not react to anything after the evening before last – ever since the moment they realised that instead of their five children only four would be sleeping in the bedroom now. They sat motionless. They were not drunk; they were not tearful; worse – they were fully conscious.

Walery got up from his couch in the kitchen which turned into a carpenter’s workshop in the day, and drew back the lace curtain from the window. In the meagre light of the only streetlamp which swung over the miniscule yard exploding with greenery at 46 Niemcewicz Street, he saw two men standing on the small gallery beneath his window. One of them was pressing a police badge against the glass. Walery opened the door for them then indicated the couch as he removed his bed-linen. They sat next to each other – squashed and awkward – two police officers and an old carpenter. One of the police officers removed his hat and wiped the sweat off his bald, shaven head. The younger one blinked vacantly and yawned. Two o’clock in the morning was clearly not his favourite time.

“Inspector Edward Popielski from crime police,” said the older of the visitors then pointed to the younger one. “And this is my deputy, detective inspector Stefan Cygan.”

Walery Pytko nodded, not knowing what to say. Whether he should introduce himself, smile or be afraid that the *pulicya* might find the underground communist pamphlets which his neighbour had entrusted to him for safe-keeping. He sat next to the inspector, wriggled around helplessly and bent back his fingers calloused from hard work.

“These are the parents of the poor Henio, are they?” asked Cygan, nodding at the motionless couple. “And who are you?”

“*Richtig*, those be his parents,” replied Walery. “And I the granddad.”

The name of the murdered child was like the fuse to a bomb. The boy’s mother swayed and her head fell to the table. Her quiet wailing was thin and piercing. She pressed her fat fingers into hair pinned back with a bone comb. Tears rolled down her wrists and poured right down to her naked elbows. She howled quietly, thinly and piercingly. Like a scalpel, like the knife which cut into her child.

The builder Ignacy Pytko rarely cried – not in physical or in mental pain. He had not shed even a single tear when he fell from the Capuchin church he was building fully aware that the canvas of his trousers was silently splitting under the sharp edge of a bone which had first pierced his skin. He had not even cried when after a dance in The Magpie beer-garden his fiancée, the beloved Wilhelminka, had died as, choking on a bee’s sting, she suffocated. Nor did he cry that day as he identified the body of his son in the mortuary. It was only the name “Henio” which he had given to the child contrary to his wife’s wishes that triggered a reaction he could not remember since childhood. He felt a burning bitterness in his throat, then no more was he the man he had always been – he was now a shred of desperation, not the full-blooded rascal from around St Elizabeth Church.

First he shed the tears silently but then they fell broken by a sound over which he had no control. He no longer saw the police officers, nor his wife or even his youngest son, Zygmus, who had just woken up and stood in the kitchen clinging to his father’s trouser leg. Of all the children, he most looked like his dead brother whose the little corpse now lay in the mortuary.

Nor did Ignacy Pytko hear his father’s conversation with the police.

“Who else visited you?” asked Inspector Cygan, jotting down another name in his notebook. “But apart from family and neighbours!”

The old carpenter clouded over.

“Mr Pytko,” said Popielski. “My men have already questioned the children from the yard with whom Henio had been playing that day. The children stated that they’d played hide-and-seek in the nearby yards. One of the girls said that Henio had hidden in the yard behind the greengrocer’s on Queen Jadwiga Street. It was the afternoon,

warm. The people living there gather in the yard to play cards and draughts. Henio must have come out from behind the garage with somebody he knew well. He'd have torn himself away from a stranger, and screamed. Someone would have heard him; someone would have seen the boy struggling. Give me all the names, Mr Pytko, that come to your head! Of all those who have ever visited you here. Whom Henio might have known!"

"*Bih me*, I don't know," answered the old carpenter and pressed cheap tobacco into cigarette paper and thought about his communist neighbour.

"Stop him rolling that tobacco," whispered Popielski to his deputy. "Give him a cigarette, Stefi. And me, too."

Ignacy Pytko stopped sobbing and put his arm around his wife. Little Zygmus, on the other hand, sadly groaned as if the family's entire misfortune had now befallen him.

"Well then, sir, write *zusammen* three all in all," Walery said to detective inspector Cygan, deciding not to betray his communist neighbour after all. "Tadzio Jójku, decorator, Mundziu Orfin, mason, and Kaziu Sitkiewicz, grave-digger. Oh, and Tolku Matecki, bricklayer like my Ignac. They all worked with Ignacy once for some Yid on the Wulka. And after the grind they'd come 'ere and play cards, tucked away at pretzels and drank a bit o' alky. But all with style."

"Tadeusz Jójko, you say?" Cygan made sure. "A bricklayer, right? Repeat the others because I didn't get to write them down! Dolku or Tolku Matecki?"

"Do I know?"

"Concentrate. There's a big difference. Dolku is Adolf and Tolku is Anatol."

Popielski had stopped listening to Cygan. Zygmus was still crying and nobody comforted him. His parents sat silent. Popielski approached the boy and pulled out some mints from his pocket. He knelt down and stretched his hand with the sweets towards the little lad. Zygmus hid behind his father and stared distrustfully. Cygan shut his notebook, got to his feet and rubbed his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. The inspector stretched his bones and fastened his jacket. He waved for his colleague to hand the notebook over to him. Analysing the list of names a while, he nodded as if counting them. He passed the book over to Cygan and pointed to one of the names. The gesture signified: he's my man! They left and the Pytko family were left alone with their despair.

On the gallery the scent of lilac blossoming in the yard embraced the police officers. They breathed with relief, expelling the stuffiness of the dwelling from their lungs.

The door on the gallery slammed. Walery Pytko limped up to Popielski.

"Inspect'r, sir," said the old carpenter. "I swear to God I'm gonna kill that son-of-a-whore who killed our Henio. Then it's on foot to Czestochowa for me..."

"You're going to go to Czestochowa, Walery? On a pilgrimage? Are you sure?" asked Popielski looking at his shabby shoes full of holes.

"For *sicher*" – the old man eyed the police officer steadily. "To thank for killing the vermin. Kill then thank the Blessed Lady."

"You sure?"

"For *sicher*."

"Well then I'll buy you a good pair of shoes for your pilgrimage!" replied Popielski and stepped down from the gallery.

VIII

It was four o'clock in the morning when Popielski found himself on the corner of Sapięha and Potocki Streets. He rubbed his eyes and looked up at the pale streak already clearly visible over the Citadel. Before long this timid harbinger of day would turn into a warm, bright morning. Usually at this hour he would be returning to his apartment on Kraszewski Street to smoke his last cigarette on the balcony before sleeping, while he listened to the chirping of birds in the Jesuit Gardens. Then he would go to sleep so as to get up, as always, in the early afternoon. But now he behaved in an entirely different manner and rejected the thought of cool, clean bed linen and birdsong lullabies. He did so not out of any feeling of duty and not from fear of any scruples. Comfort did not allow him to go home. He was too great and too refined a sybarite to permit himself a sleepless night. Yet he knew that this is precisely what awaited him if he did not check out certain information.

He strode briskly, then, towards headquarters passing on his way an enormous lorry with the sign: "Forwarding and Transport Enterprises „Jupiter & Son”, from which two workers were unloading buckets of flowers. He entered the building "on Łacki", returned the night porter's greeting with a tip of his hat and asked for the key to the archives. The beadle knew, as everybody did, that night-times were when the inspector worked. He also knew that Popielski could use the archives and files without permission or discreet supervision from the head of archives, Mrs Antonina Ferdynowa who, by the by, always protested, vehemently and in vain, about the inspector's particular special powers.

Taking the key Popielski went down to the basement where the archives were located. He opened the door, switched on the fierce white light and to protect his clothes against the dust, pulled on an overly tight housecoat. He raised his head and, walking between the shelves carefully noted the letters beautifully handwritten above each segment. He quickly found the letter for which he was searching. The files he needed were on the top shelf. He pulled closer the ladder, the wide rungs of which had been polished by hundreds of army and police shoes. He climbed to the very top causing the chain which prevented the support-legs from sliding apart, to rattle. Standing on the last rung he reached for the necessary file. For a moment he wrestled with its hook then abruptly opened the file. A cloud of dust enwrapped the police officer's head and partially settled on the folders as he pulled them out. After a minute of blowing and snorting at the dust he found what he was looking for. In the folder were index cards, envelopes and loose pag-

es. He read one slowly; his face turned red and his legs began to shake.

[REPORT] According to the statement of underage Haliński Czesław, the suspect, aged 34 (yes!), was playing hide-and-seek with the children. During the game he struck the above-mentioned 8-year-old Haliński Czesław several times and wounded him with a flick-knife. The accusation made by the brother and legal guardian of the above-mentioned child, citizen Haliński Marcei, aged 20, worker, is hereby accepted for further investigation and conveyance to the appropriate bodies. The suspect is being held until further procedures as set down in the relevant paragraphs p.c. [REPORT].

Below was a note.

[REPORT] Refer the suspect to detailed psychiatric examination. Jezierski. [REPORT]

Popielski knew well the above-signed investigative judge as a scrupulous man whose instructions were always carried out. He was not wrong. Now he had in front of him a piece of paper stamped at the top with: "Communal State Hospital in Lwów, Clinic for Mental Disorders".

[REPORT] The patient suffered an accident two years ago when he was knocked down by a cart the consequences of which may be as follows. It has been ascertained that the patient displays strong destructive tendencies and a lack of instinct for self-preservation which is especially evident when he falls headfirst to the floor without cushioning the fall with his hands, simply like an automaton, a snowman. On his head between the frontal and occipital bones, in the place of the sutura sagittalis, there is a deep indentation of half a centimetre. The sides of this indentation are steep and the bottom hard. A connection between this post-trauma characteristic with mental aberrations is highly likely. His singular imagination, namely that he is a child playing with children like himself could indicate strong mental irregularities which require hospitalisation and detailed examination especially as his behaviour towards children is aggressive and, what is worse, underscored by a sexual imagination. It has not been ascertained that this last despicable behaviour is a result of the above-mentioned accident but perhaps a permanent characteristic of the patient which along with the general degeneration of his mental health has succumbed to strong manifestations. Immediate placement of the patient in a closed institution for the mentally ill is advised since he may be a danger to the public. Dr Antoni Sucher, Senior Registrar. [REPORT]

The stamp on the last sheet was very familiar to Popielski: "Prosecutor's Office of the District Court, Secretariat of Inquiry and Investigation". Below appeared a brief, neatly written note: [REPORT] Procurator's action has been suspended until such time as the suspect, now held at the clinic of mental disorders in the hospital on Pijar Street, is deemed to be of sane mind. Dr Juliusz Prachtel-Morawiński, Vice-Prosecutor. [REPORT]

Popielski glanced at the date of the last document: 21st January, 1939. Lack of any later documentation would tes-

tify that the man suspected of striking a child was still being held in the psychiatric hospital. His presence in a place of isolation served him as an excellent alibi. But Popielski did not give in easily. He put all the papers away into the grey envelope on which Mrs Ferdynowa had typed out: [REPORT] Anatol Małecki, builder, son of Teofil and Zofia, born 14 XI 1904 in Lwów, residing ibidem 25 Berek Joselewicz Street, tenement no 1. [REPORT]

He climbed down the ladder with such energy that the chain clanged loudly. Throwing off his housecoat he switched off the light and left the archives.

On Sapieha Street he whistled down a droshka and asked to be taken to 46 Niemcewicz Street. It was coming up to five but for the next hour he would have to do without sleep. Just like a certain old carpenter who had made an oath to Our Lady of Częstochowa.

Popielski did not knock on the Pytko's door this time for he met Walery on the gallery just as the latter was leaving the toilet. The old craftsman swayed as he gripped the long-johns he had not managed to tie by their straps. The grey, hard stubble, hair standing out in all directions, the rotting breath and red rings around his eyes made him a repulsive figure. The inspector wracked his brains how in less than two hours Walery Pytko could have turned into a complete sloven. He did not know that that night the carpenter had had another guest. His communist neighbour had collected the pamphlets and appeals which the old man had safe-guarded for him, thanking his benefactor with a quarter litre of spirits. Pytko did not wait a moment with his alcohol; he drank it quickly, keeping it a secret from his son. As a result he now staggered dangerously towards the gallery banister and mumbled something incoherently.

"What's this, Walery?" Popielski asked, worried. "Where did you get so sloshed?"

"Aaaayyyy..." Pytko blubbered, shut up and grinned broadly. "Aaaayyyy..."

Popielski knew that in such a state Walery Pytko would not recognise anybody. It was doubtful that the old man would be able to make any sense when asked, for example, even about his own name and age. Resolving the question whether the builder "Dolku" or "Tolku Małecki" whom he had mentioned two hours ago and "builder Anatol Małecki" from the police files were one and the same person would, for Walery, be as obvious and clear now as Ancient Greek aorists. Popielski could have waited until the murdered boy's grandfather sobered up or asked the boy's parents about Małecki. But the inspector was, by nature, a very impatient man.

IX

Leokadia Tchorznicka met her cousin, Edward Popielski, when he was three years old. It was on Christmas Eve in 1889. Little Eduardo, as the affected aunt Zofia Popielska née Tchorznicka called her only son, came to Stanisławów with his parents from nearby Borysław so as to spend their first Christmas with the large

Tchorznicki family. This had never proved possible before because Edzio's father, engineer Paulin Popielski, employed by the oil-mining enterprise "S. Stern" in Borysław, was constantly being sent – as if out of spite over Christmas – on various geological surveys to distant and exotic lands, mainly Turkey and Persia. And the faint-hearted aunt Zofia was not sufficiently courageous to undertake what was, after all, a short journey with a small child. Their little cousin did not make the best impression either on Leokadia or on her four siblings. He was, in their eyes, a nasty whelp, a typical spoilt only child who blackmailed everybody with his screaming. He stuffed himself with cakes and chocolate, tormented their little mongrel, Miki, and – in order to annoy his own mother – once climbed onto the highest shelf in the pantry and lay there quietly for hours eating honey and jam. Meanwhile aunt Zofia who was going out of her mind, the annoyed uncle Paulin and even her own father, a generally calm secondary school professor who had studied philosophy, Klemens Tchorznicki, searched the house and garden for the missing boy. Their cousin had finally got bored of his game and clambered down from the pantry. Having spent two hours in the cold place, he obviously caught a cold and, to everybody's relief, ended up in bed. The relief, however, was short-lived for the sick boy demanded ever new entertainment from his hosts. For the sake of peace his aunt read him endless stories, his cousins set up a theatre and even her father played the mandolin for him. Therefore, when the Popielskis finally left the hospitable Stanisławów home and took the yelling brat with them, everybody sighed loudly with relief. All the Tchorznickis later prayed for the "S. Stern" company to send the engineer on various distant delegation towards the end of December.

Their prayers were heard because the Popielskis appeared in Stanisławów only six years later, in the August of 1895. The nine-year-old Edward in no way resembled the unruly little boy of six years ago. Well-built and developed beyond his age, taciturn but happy, he was curious of everything but not intrusive. He most enjoyed spending his time in professor Tchorznicki's study over the chessboard or geographical atlases. He also loved to carefully write various hieroglyphs and encode secret messages, written in Polish but using the Greek letters he had mastered even before going to secondary school. At that time twelve-year-old Leokadia, observing her cousin, realised for the first time in her life that human nature is not immutable and nasty brats grow into well-balanced young men.

Not only was their cousin's behaviour unusual but also the reason for their uncle's and his family's arrival towards the end of those hot summer holidays in 1895. The Bergheim & MacGarvey company had bought a refinery in Baku and offered engineer Popielski the position of director. The proposition was accepted with joy and the newly appointed head of the refinery made important decisions. Having no trust in Russian schooling he left his son in the care of his in-laws until he himself had settled in Baku and found appropriate tutors for Edward. Cousin Edzio parted from his parents unwillingly especially

as his mother suffered such great spasms on the station in Stanisławów as if she were seeing her child for the last time. Unfortunately her intuition proved true. A few days later came terrible news which was to change their cousin's life entirely. His parent's train had been attacked by a drunken gang of Steppe murderers. His father, protecting the mother's virtue, was brutally killed and the mother hanged herself a few days later. From a calm and smiling boy Edek turned into a tenacious, silent moper. A few days later he suffered his first attack of a disease which was to become his inseparable companion. After one supper – under his uncle's and aunt's very eyes – he became an inert, shaking body which exuded various secretions through all its orifices. Luckily, Leokadia and her siblings did not witness this sad, humiliating and alarming scene. Late at night Edward awoke from a long and fitful sleep. At his bedside sat Leokadia with her mother. The cousin, seeing them both, suddenly burst out with unexpected, wild, hysterical laughter.

"I can't understand my cousin," Leokadia whispered to her mother. "Why is he behaving like that?"

Nor did she understand his behaviour now at six o'clock on the sunny May morning when he struggled in the hallway with some drunken scruff and pressed a pair of his best shoes onto his feet. She could even understand Edward coming home in the morning with a companion and wanting to continue their libation at home. It happened sometimes but never when she was at home, not to mention his daughter, Rita. Only their maid, Hanna, the caretaker of the tenement and outraged neighbours would later whisper about it to her. She suspected that even when a drunken friend accompanied him he was never in such a state of intoxication as this old man. She could also understand that Edward might try to nurse and sober up an acquaintance by throwing him into the bath, filling him with coffee, wiping his vomit and shoving a phial of ammoniac under his nose just as he was doing now with this old man. She could not, however, understand that once he had managed to stand the nursed man up on his own two feet, he was dressing him in his old yet still presentable clothes and squeezing his excellent, over-ankle brogues from the first-rate "Derby" store onto his feet!

She later watched the veins in Popielski's bull-like neck swelling as he threw the drunkard into a droshka, holding the man by his trousers with one hand and by the collar with the other. During this endeavour, the drunkard caught his trouser leg on the wheel and tore it a little. In normal circumstances Popielski would have flown into a fury or at least examined the damage carefully. Now, however, he did not react as his suit from the Brothers Jabłkowski's store was spoilt! I can't understand my cousin, thought Leokadia Tchorznicka and went back into the apartment. She did not know that over the next few hours her cousin was going to surprise her even more, not to say, deadly alarm her.

(Trans. Danusia Stok, February 2010)

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