



## ONE

*Küsnacht, near Zürich, Switzerland, 1982*

It was starting again, the vision a leviathan rising from the depths of fear – inevitable, unstoppable, paralysing, and always the same. But before Liliane could wake herself she was pulled into the vortex, into the last minutes of her mother's life.

The staccato of the pine trees as they flashed past, the weight of the snow beneath the skis, the feel of the wind rushing by her – the stark silence of the vision as petrifying as the inevitability of her mother's death. One tree, two trees, three trees, she counted, the dread a huge lump in her chest; by tree six if Liliane could scream she would, but she couldn't – she was trapped in her mother's body, in a frozen memory that had lived on inside her own consciousness. Tree seven was now in sight, and in that moment it began, as it always began, a shockwave, from the left face of the mountain as if the very air were shuddering. Liliane, looking through her mother's eyes, turned towards the great bank of snow that had peeled away and was now descending



the mountain, a slow, powdery ripple of horrifying beauty. The terror, both her mother's and her own, rushed through her before her mother's body was knocked into a suffocating blackness that grew heavier and heavier until she could breathe no longer—

Liliane woke bolt upright in her bed, the shadowy walls of the bedroom pulling into focus as she gasped for breath – her posters of The Clash, the pouting David Bowie, the side table with the pots of make-up and vinyl records scattered over it, the turntable, the electric guitar leaning up against the wall, prosaic in polished wood and metal struts: normal life, immediately anchoring in its banality. But as she finally relaxed back against the pillow something glinting on the carpet caught the moonlight. She looked over. Her mother's body lay twisted on the floor, her limbs broken and tangled with her skis. At the sight Liliane found herself screaming.

In seconds lamplight flooded the room. Matthias, a tall, angular man in his late thirties, stood blinking in the brightness, his large hands dangling awkwardly by his sides, Liliane's hair a veil as she rocked herself in the bed.

'Liliane, it's me, Papa,' he ventured softly, hating the way these trances of hers transformed her into something alien, a creature he couldn't reach. He waited awkwardly for permission to comfort her, the hesitancy of a father confronted with his adolescent daughter's fragility. She looked so vulnerable, her narrow shoulders shaking, her eyes staring up at him, still unseeing. Then risking rejection, Matthias moved to the bed to pull her into an embrace. Her painfully thin body, initially resistant, folded against him.

'Was it the same?' he whispered.

She nodded. She'd never been able to tell him the truth about what she experienced during these episodes – how, sitting in a playground in Zürich, she'd found herself swept



into the mind of her mother dying on the mountain four years ago, and how those few petrifying minutes then came back again and again, woven into the visions she'd always had, even as a small child. Instead she shut down, nestling her face into his chest like she used to.

'Imaginary phantoms, they can't hurt you.' He tried, and failed, to sound as if he believed it himself.

'If they can't hurt me, why can't I control them?'

Uncertain of the answer, Matthias couldn't return her gaze. Hiding the shame he felt at his own inadequacy, he got up to switch off the lights.

'Go back to sleep, it's not even five.'

He waited until she'd settled back down into the blankets then shut the door behind him. Overcome, he leaned against the corridor wall, face in his hands.

The year before, Liliane had been arrested for possession of a couple of grams of heroin. Because of the family's contacts she'd been released with a warning. She'd told her father drugs were the only way of blocking her 'visions' and since then Matthias had been playing a dangerous guessing game about whether his fifteen-year-old daughter had started taking heroin again, helpless as she wrestled with the hallucinogenic episodes that would suddenly absent her completely from the world.

*Where did I go wrong? It has to be my fault,* Matthias's guilt pounded in his head. But guilty of what? Liliane had always been an odd child, marooned in her own imagination. However, since his wife's death she'd withdrawn even further. Matthias had buried his own sorrow in work and he couldn't help feeling he'd made a fatal mistake not trying harder to help Liliane with her own grieving. With a sigh he stepped away from the wall then re-entered his study to continue the letter he'd begun earlier.

... Marie, I'm frightened I'm failing her ... Liliane's visions seem to be getting worse, but she won't tell me what they are actually of. Yet when I try to talk to our daughter about it she accuses me of trying to rationalise the irrational. I remember you saying that to me once. Am I really that detached when it comes to my emotions? Liliane's so different from me but I think we share the same brittle vulnerability. She has my wary way of approaching a subject and turning it round and round before passing verdict, yet she's got your spontaneous humour. But I can't think when I last saw her laugh ... She's stopped playing the violin and has taken up electric guitar. Punk music, horrible and discordant, fills the whole house when she's practising. And now she hates my own playing. It is as if she's become ashamed of me. I don't understand any of it ...

Matthias glanced over ruefully at the flute resting on the music stand in the corner of the study. He daren't pick it up so early in the morning. Music was his way of sorting the chaos of a world he often didn't understand into pristine patterns that would fill the air and float about his head like iridescent butterflies. Once he played to his wife; now he played alone furtively. There was one refrain he liked to play over and over. A dozen notes melded together to make the beginning of a poignant melody. He couldn't even remember where he had heard it. It certainly didn't exist in any of his scored music, and yet he had the feeling he hadn't invented the tune, but that somehow it was embedded in his memory. It had haunted him as long as he could remember.

He glanced back down at the page. Even in death his

wife would not miss the progress of their only child growing up. The letters themselves were a conduit to an imaginary world in which Marie continued to live, and their lives spun on as before, untouched by tragedy. After finishing them, Matthias would burn each page as if reducing the paper to carbon was the alchemy of sending them into that invented afterlife. A pointless ritual, he knew, but he kept writing anyhow.

The thirty-eight-year-old physicist had woken an hour earlier wrestling with the atomic structure of another alloy. He'd lain there with a half-formed equation of elements dancing like cartoon characters on a music score, tantalisingly just out of reach. After a while he'd given up and come to the desk to write the letter. It had been four in the morning. Time does not flow evenly, he observed with a small ironic smile, but stutters forward, like life, like entropy. As if in answer, outside a lone bird started a thin, doubtful piping. *Perhaps he too is uncertain dawn will come*, Matthias thought to himself, yawning.

Beyond the jagged sentinels of the fir trees, the lights of Küsnacht had begun to switch on, one pinprick of yellow after another. Matthias stretched his exhausted muscles, then glanced over at the clock. Five ... The lonely hour, the chasing-mortality-away hour, his wife used to call it, her attempt to excuse her habit of waking and pushing her warm body into his – a prelude to making love whether he wanted to or not. Covering his eyes with his hand, he tried to press his spinning brain back into an equilibrium, away from memories. It didn't work; the void Marie had left was always there no matter how many times he tried to fold his mind over it. When she'd died so suddenly, the epiphany he'd experienced – that he had never been truly vulnerable with her – had been one of his greatest regrets. Her death had made



him realise that it had always been a fear of loss that held him back. But he'd lost her anyway and now he was in real danger of losing his daughter.



Every clock behind the heavy plate glass read the same: five o'clock. *Gadjé* time. The non-gypsy world was divided up into digits and scribbles Yojo didn't understand, and didn't care to. In his world it was seasons, the moon and the rising and falling sun that marked the hours and the years. He looked across at the elegant brass plaque set discreetly to the side of the large oak door. It was simple: a square divided into triangles. To anybody else it was merely a company logo, a cleverly devised symbol that suggested antiquity and a trustworthy quality that was beyond price. To Yojo it suggested something else entirely. He glanced down the cobbled lane. He had chosen the ghost hour, when the Niederdorf would be empty, to come to the small, exclusive showroom. When he'd walked down Bahnhofstrasse, one of the most exclusive shopping malls on the planet, it had been absolutely silent except for a single pealing church bell; even so, Yojo was nervous as he turned into the lanes of the medieval town.

The faint drone of a machine made him swing round; a mechanised street cleaner was slowly making its way down the In Gassen. The driver would be wondering what a gypsy was doing right outside one of the most exclusive watch companies in Switzerland. No, he wouldn't wonder – he would think him a thief. Yojo knew it. He'd lived his whole life trying to stay invisible; sometimes he'd succeeded, but not always. Instinctively, the Kalderash slipped an olive-



skinned hand, hardened by decades working gold and copper, into a jacket pocket to touch the amulet his sister Keja had given him. It wasn't there. Blessed with second sight, she hadn't wanted him to go, but for once he knew he had to ignore her warnings. Without the amulet he felt particularly vulnerable.

Ever since he'd visited the records office two days before, he'd had the uncanny impression his shadow had another shadow skipping just behind, breathing behind his breath. He knew this fear. He knew it from the time of the *gadje* war: the war that had pulled his people into her black mouth, seven hundred thousand of them – seven hundred thousand souls now without a voice.

'If my time has come, I cannot fight it, it is written,' he whispered in Romanes. The sentence hung in the light of the setting moon then vanished with his courage. Easy to talk, hard to act – Yojo tried to stop his old heart from beating like that of a frightened stallion. *I am here for her*, he told himself; *she belongs to my people; my father was murdered protecting her*.

Yojo looked back down the street. The cleaning machine had come closer, the driver obscure behind a cloudy shield of plastic, the brushes whirling madly against the cobblestones.

He reached up to the panel beside the entrance and traced the logo with his fingers. He knew the clue to finding her lay somewhere inside this building, but where? *In the past, present and future*. The answer seemed to be spun from the very air itself, as if She, the Goddess, had answered him, as if Time itself had begun to collide with Memory.

A wise gypsy would run now, but he didn't want to be wise, he wanted to be brave. He'd waited too many years. But the heavy door with its many locks was impenetrable.



He needed another way of getting in, a trickster's way. Just then he heard a slight sound and, before he had a chance to turn, the bullet went cleanly through the side of his head. He fell heavily, the yellow kerchief stained with blood, one arm stretching out, the tattooed number on the inside of his wrist clearly visible.

The cleaning machine came to a halt and the assassin disembarked casually, whistling as he strolled to the body. He knelt and carefully laced a raven's wing between the middle finger and the forefinger of the dead gypsy's left hand. After a few minutes the machine disappeared round a corner. The assassin didn't even bother to accelerate.



By the time Matthias turned off the Rämistrasse and into the quiet backstreets it was seven o'clock and the sky was the dull metallic grey of a winter dawn. Looking forward to losing himself in his research and escaping Liliane's troubles, he parked his battered Citroën outside the nineteenth-century building that housed the laboratory he'd set up ten years earlier.

Sanctuary, he thought. One would never guess the classic bourgeois Swiss building with red-tiled turrets and large windows contained a research facility and this anonymity was exactly what Matthias wanted, even though setting up the laboratory with its expensive equipment had forced him to become dependent on financing from the family's company. It was a dependency he loathed, knowing it gave his father control.

Matthias had staffed the facility with the brightest physics graduates he could find and in ten years the Kronos Laboratory had discovered six alloys that were superconductive at higher





and higher temperatures – a superconductive material at room temperature being the ultimate goal. And despite being the heir apparent to one of the most successful watch dynasties in Zürich, Matthias was determined to be the first in the world to break through the temperature barrier.

Only two days to go to the big pitch, he reminded himself as he grabbed his briefcase. The laboratory was to give a press conference – part of a fundraising campaign the physicist had embarked upon to underwrite the next round of research and begin to free himself financially from his father. It was essential he demonstrated to potential backers that he was on the brink of discovering a superconductor at room temperature – a discovery that would immortalise him as well as free the world from a dependence on carbon-based fuels. As one of the leading scientists in the field he knew it wasn't far from becoming a reality.

From a light in a window to the right of the front door Matthias could see that Jannick Lund, his Danish assistant, must have worked all night. He'd known Lund, ten years his junior, was competitive when he hired him, but he'd underestimated the Dane's hubris and impatience. Jannick felt success wasn't earned as much as fought for and at first this had served Matthias's methodology and the two scientists complemented each other. But Jannick had grown tired of the methodical and endless retesting of potential superconductors, a job allotted to the underlings of the laboratory. He was ambitious and was keen to break away from Matthias's ideas and try out his own. Ironically, his ambition had been the reason why Matthias hired him in the first place, but lately Matthias had sensed resentment from the younger scientist.





The doctor, a Romanian in his late thirties, pumped the rubber band wrapped around Keja's arm and read her blood pressure. Latcos, her son, watched anxiously; it hadn't been easy to persuade the doctor to visit the small ghetto of twenty or so homes that had housed the Kalderash family and its extended relatives in the tiny suburb of Timișoara since the Communist regime. But the doctor, who'd had a Rom grandfather, finally came after Latcos told him who his mother was – Keja the poetess – a gypsy whose songs had touched even the *gadje* world.

Latcos stood just behind him, worrying that the doctor might inadvertently violate the strict hygiene beliefs of *marime*. The doctor himself was considered unclean – it was testimony to the intensity of Keja's illness that Latcos had brought him into the house at all. A slim, handsome man of twenty-eight, Latcos peered out from under his black hat, his light green eyes startling against his dark skin, his four-year-old son Zarka peeping up at the doctor. Keja had fought against the visit – herbs and amulets had always been enough, but since Yojo's disappearance her defences had crumbled. Her brother was lost, she'd known first thing that morning when a wave of light shot through her, when she'd felt the moment his soul left the earth. She was sure he was dead, but no word had reached the family yet. Distracted, Keja had blamed herself. She should never have given Yojo the name, summoned from those terrible memories she'd kept buried for so many decades. But her brother had reminded her of the stories of the miracles, of how the holy relic could cure as well as destroy, and so, in a moment of weakness, she'd given him the first signpost to a path that could either destroy or enrich the family.

The doctor began packing up his equipment, avoiding



her gaze, as if he had a secret to hide, as if her death might be an obscenity.

Shutting him out, she closed her eyes and drifted away from the constant gnawing at her abdomen, taking herself back to a camp they had once made in the time after the dark years, when she was happy, when her Rom were still travelling and she was with her husband and Latcos was barely walking.

The doctor watched his patient's face. Although she was just over fifty, the gypsy poetess looked like an emaciated seventy-year-old. Sighing, he gestured to the son that they should talk outside.

'Your mother is holding on through sheer will, but given the agony she's in, it might be better for her to let go now,' the doctor said quietly. 'All her symptoms point to a cancer that has spread through her body. I could arrange for her to be taken to a hospice—'

'My mother would wish to die among her people.'

The doctor nodded solemnly. 'I understand.' He reached into his bag and pulled out a small package, a syringe wrapped in cloth. He held it out almost shyly. 'Morphine, for when the pain gets unbearable. My wife's father is a member of the Communist Party – I can get most things but you know how much I risked by coming out here.'

'Thank you,' the young man mumbled stiffly, but the doctor didn't let him finish.

'It is out of respect; your mother was a great poet. I only wish she was not suffering so.'

Wasted muscles strained under the paper-thin skin as Keja pulled herself up to a sitting position and gestured for her son to draw closer. Latcos stood, as he had as a small child, at the end of his mother's bed, trying to hide his fear, his

confusion at seeing such a strong force of nature felled in this way. Even Zarka fell silent, sensing the solemn occasion.

‘I know I’m dying,’ Keja began, in her story-teller voice, as if she had already begun to see herself in the third person, as a character she had begun to look at, rather than inhabit, ‘and, in truth, I would die now if I could, except I can’t give up my spirit until I find my firstborn.’

Shocked, Latcos stepped forward, convinced he must have misheard; he’d always assumed he had been her only child – to Keja’s great shame there had been no more pregnancies after him. This had made him the *capo* of his family, the eldest and only son of the eldest son – there could be no usurper.

‘But *dej*—’ he began, assuming Keja had lost her mind with the pain. Instead, with a jerk of a painfully thin wrist she halted him.

‘Stop! You must listen. Soon I will have no words left and I must tell you about how I survived, how in 1945 I managed to walk out of Buchenwald.’ She paused, taking a breath, reedy, whistling. ‘I was twelve when he took me. For two years our people had been running, careful to make ourselves part of the forest, but we were betrayed. They came early, while the horses were still out in the field, two trucks full of soldiers, some of them not much older than me . . .’ She faltered, the panic of that moment, the barking of dogs, the sound of her mother screaming, filling her head. Latcos leaned forward.

‘You don’t have to tell this; it is Past. We are Now. We exist. Nothing else is important.’

His words echoed behind her remembering, but she couldn’t be torn away from the camp.

‘They killed your grandparents, your uncles and your

aunts, and they stole our gold and our heirloom. They took her too. Of our Rom, only your uncle Yojo got away, to be captured later . . . your grandfather was shot trying to protect the heirloom that had been in our family as long as time. My other brothers and sisters, even Zeleno, who was only four, all perished – but I survived, at a price much worse than my honour or my soul. There was an SS officer, the one who organised the raid, who stole the heirloom . . .’

‘*Dej*, this is not for me to hear!’ Latcos protested, lurching away.

‘You *must* hear, you *must* know the truth. He saw me and chose me to be his woman.’ Her statement hung, burning like light. Latcos, flushed with shame, looked to the ground; he wanted to silence his mother, to run and yet she kept talking.

‘I begged him, kill me, anything but not this, but he locked me up for himself. He was careful; there were no knives, not rope, just smooth walls, nothing, not even enough cloth around my body to hang myself with. Many nights I would lie there, wishing for death, for an escape for my spirit; in some ways I was dead already. Instead I became with child. I was thirteen.’

‘No, no, Mother, stop! You brought shame to the family – *manaj lazav*, *manaj khanci* – without honour you are nothing! Better you killed yourself!’

Keja clutched at her son’s hand. ‘You think I didn’t try? But there was no way! Then, when the baby was born, when he was still lying between my legs in the dirt, the three Fates, the *Vuršutarja* came to me, and I could hear the three sisters arguing. One spoke of his bad fate, of the difficulties the child would face, how he would grow up among strangers, the loneliness he would feel but not understand; the second disagreed, speaking of the child’s greatness, of

how he would reveal secrets the whole world would benefit from; then the third said that if the child was allowed to live he would live many years and would bring *barvalimos* and *baxt* – wealth and luck to the whole *familiya*. Then the baby cried and looked up to me with those eyes the colour of the forest. So I weakened. It was three months before he was taken from me. He had a birthmark like yours on his shoulder, and I managed to give him a Rom baptism in running water and left an amulet, the same as you wear, around his neck, before they took him.’

Outside an old car rumbled past, but Keja was back in the tiny cell of a room, one bed, one chair, a wooden cross on the wall, and the baby reaching up toward her with one blind fist, the new-birth scent of him still clenching around her heart.

‘Not even your own father knew this. A few weeks after they took the child I was taken to Buchenwald. I never saw the Nazi officer again.’

‘Is he still living, *dej*?’

‘I feel that he is. This child – he is *mine*.’ She dropped back against the pillow, exhausted. ‘I will not let go until my conscience is clear.’

Latcos lurched forward. ‘This is not a child! This is vermin! He has nothing but bad blood; he is worse than *gadjé* – he belongs nowhere except with the people who took him. You must see this!’

Keja watched his outrage, the sharpness of her pain imprisoning her like a tower, from where she looked down at him.

‘Son, I am *phuri dej*. You forget who I am – you forget I am a curse-maker as well as a *mule-vi* – one who has reached into the world of the dead.’ Her anger gave strength to her voice, then, seeing his shocked face, she reached out and took his hand into her own.



‘Listen, Latcos, when Uncle Yojo left it was our holy relic he was looking for; he thought she would cure me. Now something terrible has happened. I know it in my bones. You must find Yojo and find your half-brother. The woman who took my baby was called Katerina Wattenstein . . .’ She pulled Latcos towards her across the bed with a desperate strength so that he was forced to look into her eyes, all of her power gathering in her gaze.

‘On your life, Latcos, swear you will take me to my first-born?’

Holding his gaze steady, he replied, ‘I swear.’





## TWO

Sipping the excellent whisky sitting in the holder beside him, the first quality liquor he'd had in months, Destin Viscon waited until the lights had been dimmed and the drone of the plane had lulled his fellow first-class passengers to sleep. Then he reached into his jacket pocket to pull out the thin brown envelope that had been left for him at Abidjan airport. The heat and chaos of that city was finally beginning to lift from his shoulders, the stench of his last hit evaporating from his soul – *if I have a soul*, he observed with a certain amount of bitterness. With his other hand he pulled out the penknife he always carried with him in his civvies. He had security clearance from five countries he could name that allowed him to carry any weapon he liked onto a flight. But he chose to travel light except for the small blade he now used to cut open the envelope, almost as if he were already slitting open the target. Once a soldier, he had turned freelance, a special ops agent renowned for his skill at extracting industrial secrets – information private corporations were willing to pay huge amounts of money for, as long as the methodology remained secret. From oil to nuclear –





from the Ivory Coast to Helsinki – Destin had worked them all. And now there were rumours of a potential breakthrough – one that could make a company very powerful if it was the first to capitalise.

Inside were two black-and-white photographs with two sheets of paper clipped to them. Simple, clean information, the kind he liked. The first photograph – obviously taken clandestinely outside a school gate – was of a tall, attractive blond man, late thirties, opening the door of a Citroën for a black-haired girl of about fifteen dressed in school uniform. The physicist and his daughter, Destin surmised, running the tip of his finger down the figure of the young girl, sullen in her dark adolescence. There was a certain grace to her that appealed to him. *An Achilles heel, such a creature*, he thought, smiling in the twilight of the cabin. *Beautiful prey, the best kind*. The information attached was two short typed paragraphs listing characteristics of both individuals: the addresses of home, school, work: the punk club – Rote Fabrik – and the record store – Baph Records – the daughter frequented; her history of drug abuse, the father's laboratory details and research achievements. *A flute-playing work-obsessive widower and a resentful daughter who is promiscuous and impossible to control: should be an entertaining mission*, Destin concluded. With the gift of a photographic memory, he had the information embedded in his brain within seconds.

He flipped over to the second photograph. This was of Matthias von Holindt and his young assistant Jannick Lund, again taken without their knowledge, in the laboratory. The young Dane standing behind the older man bore an expression of faint discontent. It was all Destin needed.

He slipped the photographs back into his inside pocket,

then checked his watch – four hours before they landed in Zürich: plenty of time for another drink or two, then the hunting would begin.



Matthias studied the back of his father's head, his thick white hair uncharacteristically mussed up, as if his nurse had forgotten to smooth down the spot upon which he had been sleeping. It made this once omnipotent man mortal, painfully so.

The wheelchair was facing the window and the view beyond – an oblong of snow fringed by linden trees, their black gnarled arms a yawning plea for spring.

It was the garden Matthias had played in as a boy and he knew every inch of it. *Do you share the same memories, Papa?* he wondered. *Do you remember Mutti standing by the pond with me aged eight, holding my hand in that awkward manner of hers as if she never quite knew how to touch me? It was cold and you were trying to make us both laugh as you took the photo. The terrible argument we had down by that tree when I was eighteen after I told you I intended to study science and not work for the company . . . Are these the same after-images that linger or are your memories entirely different? Why can't I ever tell?*

'Papa . . .'

Without turning, the old man held up a hand to silence him. A second later the four eighteenth-century box clocks, originally commissioned by Marie Antoinette and now lined up on a side table, began chiming the hour. In the middle of this melodic chorus Christoph von Holindt, patriarch of the Holindt Watch Company, swung round, his face bathed in bliss.

‘Hear that, Matthias? With that last chime we are both already a little nearer death,’ he announced gleefully.

‘Good to find you so cheerful, are you still winding the clocks?’ For as long as Matthias could remember, Christoph had wound these clocks every week himself, caressing each as if it were an extension of his own flesh.

‘Naturally, but a little slower – you think a little stroke would stop me? Isn’t that right, Bertholt?’ Christoph barked at his assistant.

A desiccated man in his late sixties, Bertholt Tannen had sacrificed his personal and private life to his employer and since Christoph’s stroke five months earlier, had become his unofficial nurse.

‘Sir does his best,’ the assistant replied tactfully before they were interrupted by the sound of the front door bell. As Bertholt left to answer it, Christoph turned back to Matthias.

‘Matthias, we have to have a serious chat . . .’

Matthias settled into the chair opposite. ‘Good, because I need to talk to you about our latest round of funding—’

‘Actually, there is something more urgent,’ Christoph cut in impatiently. ‘The doctor left earlier: as usual he was full of good news. If I’m careful I have maybe another year.’ He kept his voice emotionless, then leaned forward. ‘The company needs new, younger leadership. There’s a revolution coming, a wave of cheaper electronic watches of high quality that could destroy our market. I know we are luxury watches but the zeitgeist is changing. We need to redefine ourselves to survive, and you are perfectly placed.’

It was yet another moment when Matthias missed Marie. His wife had always been the peacekeeper. They’d met at a Jethro Tull concert and fallen in love, after which she ended up working as the financial officer at the watch company.

Initially Christoph was against a Holindt – an aristocratic family with its own *schloss* and summer villa – marrying the daughter of farmers, but Marie, intelligent, beautiful and diplomatic to a fault, won the patriarch over. More than that, she'd provided a bridge between father and son, persuading Christoph to finance Matthias's research – a bridge that had been destroyed with her death.

'There are better-qualified people on the board, Papa. Wim Jollak, for example. He understands the industry. He's a visionary in terms of the market—'

'I am not going to hand the company over to Herr Jollak! The position belongs to a Holindt; this is what I brought you up for!'

'Superconductivity at room temperature would revolutionise the energy industry. You know I'm closer than anyone else in the world.'

'But you haven't got there yet, have you?'

'I'm close, maybe weeks away.'

'I've heard that before. The company needs you now. I could very well be dead this time next year.'

'You can't expect me to give up the lab?'

'There is no one else.'

A silence fell on the two men, stretching out the tension. Outside, on the Zürichsee, someone started up a motorboat, the faint put-putting of the engine a distant sound. Finally Matthias broke the impasse.

'It would be professional suicide for me to stop my research now.'

'Then I have no choice: from this point on, any further Holindt funding for the Kronos Laboratory will cease. You will be entirely on your own.'

Christoph's features were mask-like, his blue-grey eyes narrowed in anger. It was almost as if he were ashamed of his

son. *Yes, that's it, Matthias thought to himself, he is ashamed of me; he has been all my life. It's as if whatever I achieve it will never be enough. He wants me to be independent, yet he wants to control me.*

But there was something else . . . a disconnect, a constant sense that he was not like his father, that, despite their shared ability to become obsessive, they were quite different individuals and this was the real reason why Matthias was always doomed to disappoint.

'Forget it. I'll raise all the money I need at the fundraiser.' Matthias stood, anxious to leave but was interrupted by Bertholt's reappearance in the doorway.

'There is a Detective Klauser to see you, sir – he insists he needs to talk to you,' the assistant informed Christoph.

'Right now?' Christoph's fury was evident.

'Apparently there was a death outside the Altstadt show-room early this morning.'

'Anyone I know?'

'I doubt it, sir; the dead person in question was a gypsy.'

'A dead gypsy? In that case why does he have to see me? Send him away!'

'I've tried, sir, but he was most insistent.'

'Idiot! He obviously doesn't know how close I am to the chief inspector.'

Johann Engels was the chief inspector of the Kantonspolizei, Matthias remembered. His father, Hans Engels, a well-known figure in the political police during the Second World War, had been one of Christoph's closest friends. When Liliane had been detained for heroin possession Christoph had called upon Johann Engels to ensure a discreet release of his beloved granddaughter. The friendship had paid off.

'Would you like me to remind him?' Bertholt asked without irony.

‘No, I’d better deal with him myself.’ Christoph swung back to Matthias. ‘And you stay where you are!’

Detective Helmut Klauser glanced round the high-ceilinged reception room. It was ornately decorated, designed to intimidate through wealth and status, but as a good Lutheran of working-class background, Helmut Klauser was not impressed; he knew too much about Christoph von Holindt. He knew that the von Holindts were Swiss aristocrats with family branches that extended well into Germany. Christoph, a larger-than-life figure, known for his generous charity donations, was on the board of one of the most prominent football clubs in the canton, the FCZH. His stroke five months earlier had made the national papers and caused shares in the Holindt company to drop temporarily. By comparison, his only son and heir shunned publicity, although Matthias was famous in his own right as a scientist. Yes, there was no doubt Christoph von Holindt was as well-connected as one could be in the canton, with powerful friends. *But charming as he might appear, the pussycat has claws*, Klauser thought to himself, staring at a blandly benevolent portrait of the company director. Just then von Holindt’s assistant came to usher him into the inner sanctum. Standing, the detective brushed ash from his shirtfront and repressed the urge to stub out his cigarette on the marble-top coffee table.

Christoph swung his wheelchair round so that he could face the detective fully. ‘I’d stand, but I’m a little incapacitated. I’m sure you don’t mind my son attending this little chat, detective?’

‘That is up to you, Herr von Holindt.’ Klauser shook hands with the two men then walked in a large semi-circle to an empty chair, taking his time to examine the wood-

panelled study. The set of clocks caught his attention. Exquisitely crafted, they appeared to have faces based on the four elements: Water, Fire, Air and Earth. Appropriate, Klauser decided, given that the Holindt patriarch himself was a force of nature. Without asking permission, the detective drew up the chair to face Christoph, then sat down and pulled out a tattered notebook.

‘Lovely place you have here – a little showy for my tastes but I’m sure it works for some.’

‘I’ve yet to have an ancestor complain,’ Christoph said, but a nervous tic appeared below his left eye.

‘So can you tell me where you were, Herr von Holindt, between the hours of four and six in the morning today?’

‘Riding in the Tour de France, what do you think? I’m paralysed down the right side – that rather limits my options,’ Christoph snapped back.

‘My father is nearly eighty, detective, and obviously not a well man. Is this necessary?’ Matthias interjected.

‘A man has been killed – murdered – so I’m obliged to investigate all angles,’ Klauser replied calmly, then turned back to Christoph. ‘Sir?’

‘I was in my bed, regrettably alone and I have a habit of not rising until seven. You can confirm this with my housekeeper. But what has that to do with the dead tramp?’

‘The dead tramp was a gypsy. We have reasons to suspect he was a Kalderash – a gypsy from Romania, a coppersmith, judging by the calluses on his hands. He was a long way from home.’

‘So, he was a gypsy; they like to travel. He was not a Swiss citizen. It is an unfortunate incident but one that surely the Zürich authorities should not be wasting the taxpayers’ money on?’



‘Gypsies like to travel but not usually to Altstadt and not usually across the Iron Curtain. I suspect he was not shopping for a watch, at least not at five in the morning. Also whoever killed him was professional – it was obvious by the precision of the hit. He ... or she ... left a signature, another indication it was a professional – many of them are vain and like to tease. The signature was a distinctive one: a black feather placed between the index and middle finger of the left hand.’

‘How poetic. But I can’t see what this has to do with me?’

The detective ignored him. ‘We found this in the victim’s pocket.’ Klauser unfolded a grubby piece of paper. It was a crude pencil drawing of the Holindt Watch Company’s symbol. Matthias sat up; it seemed completely illogical. Why would an impoverished gypsy carry a sketch of the emblem of one of the most exclusive watch companies in the world in his pocket? Was he planning to burgle the premises?

‘I have absolutely no idea what any of this is about, but you know gypsies – they love watches, the more gold on them the better,’ Christoph joked. Klauser was not amused. ‘Have you checked the video surveillance camera?’ Christoph continued. ‘It would probably have footage on it. The manageress of my showroom will be able to help you with that.’

‘I’ve already spoken to Frau Jools. Apparently the video camera stopped working from ten p.m. the night before until ten a.m. – a strange coincidence, don’t you think?’

Now the old man looked rattled. It was obvious to Matthias that his father had been taken by surprise – he made a mental note not to underestimate the intelligence of the rather uncouth detective before him.

‘I’m sure further investigation will bring up some





connection. In the meantime I would like the names and addresses of all your current employees,' Klauser said.

'Bertholt will assist you with that.'

It was a signal that it was time for the detective to leave. Smiling, Klauser scraped back the chair he was sitting on with a great clamour, then rose to shake hands again. When Christoph ignored his outstretched hand, Klauser turned, unperturbed, to Matthias.

'I'll walk you out,' the younger von Holindt offered.

Just before they reached the door Klauser turned back. 'Oh, I almost forgot. Another interesting fact, Herr von Holindt, was the number we found tattooed on the victim's wrist, a number indicating he had once been a prisoner at the Buchenwald concentration camp. They had gypsies there too, did you know?'

A tiny ripple of anxiety ran across Christoph's face.

'Indeed? Do give my regards to Chief Inspector Engels – his father was a close friend of mine.'

'He was with the political police, wasn't he? Hans Engels, quite the unsung war hero, if you believe the stories,' the detective retorted.

Choosing not to reply, Christoph angrily swung the wheelchair back to the window.

Under the ornate marble portico, Klauser stamped his feet to keep warm.

'A real character, your father. Must be hard for a man like that, used to being in control – though, of course, some would argue he still is.' Klauser stole a look at Matthias, gauging his reaction. 'This murder of the gypsy outside the company store – it is not just an arbitrary coincidence, Herr Professor.'

'If there's anything I can do to help the investigation ...

I would hate to think the family is implicated,' Matthias said.

'Naturally, but then all families have at least one skeleton in the cupboard.' Klauser reached into his pocket and held out his card. 'Even yours ...' he added enigmatically. Slightly perplexed, Matthias took it. 'I will be in contact,' Klauser said. 'I hope you don't mind.'

'Not at all. And it would be better if you questioned me rather than my father – he is not a well man.'

*'Danke schön, tschüss.'*

The patrol car was waiting for him beyond the sweep of snow-covered lawn, his deputy at the wheel. It hadn't been a completely wasted journey, Klauser concluded. He'd liked the son; Matthias von Holindt seemed less arrogant than the father – or was he just playing naive?

Back in the patrol car he turned to his deputy. A twenty-six-year-old with a pregnant wife and recently promoted, Timo Meinholt was eager to prove he was worthy of the position. Tall, broad-shouldered and a little overweight, the young detective would have made an intimidating figure if it wasn't for his unfortunate protruding ears. *Looks like Dumbo*, Klauser noted a little ungenerously. A more intimidating co-worker would have been useful.

'Congratulations, you've just landed your first mission.' Klauser turned the heater up.

'Sir?'

'You are to monitor the movements of Christoph von Holindt for the next forty-eight hours. I want to know where he goes, who he calls, when he shits.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And you are to melt into the walls, understand?'

The young officer grinned. He'd fought to be assigned to



Klauser, whose reputation for an unorthodox methodology often produced unexpected results and made him exciting to work for.

‘Oh, I can do that.’

‘Well, it won’t be easy with those ears, but if you don’t, we’re both fucked.’

