I.
GRAND CENTRAL STATION, NEW YORK,
Thursday, September 20, 1945

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It was late September when Peter saw the woman who looked just like his mother, sitting in the Oyster Bar near one of the grand architectural columns that reminded him of the Hotel Adlon in Berlin. She was eating something Peter's mother would never have put in her mouth because it was *treyf*—a shrimp salad. Peter quite liked it, as he liked most things forbidden by his mother's childhood teachings. He cleared the woman's dining companion's soup bowl—the remains of the restaurant's nominal dish, oyster stew, pooling tepidly in the bottom—then stopped, the bus tub held at his waist level, and just stared. Despite her consumption of shellfish, this woman had to be Jewish. She was, to use the English idiom for it, a dead ringer for Peter's mother. Salt-and-pepper hair braided around her head. A rose-colored dress. Pearls. A fur stole, although the day outside was quite warm and the air in the Oyster Bar soupy. The woman's nose was the delicate blade of a fish-boning knife, her

exquisitely ruched skin the texture of a peach the day before the fruit rots and its mortal sheath slides off. The term in German was *Doppelgänger*; it meant "double goer," one's exact counterpart, and in literature, Peter remembered from his university days, a confrontation with one's *Doppelgänger* signified imminent death. But what did this mean, spying not his own ghost but his mother's?

The woman, sensing Peter's stare or his lingering presence next to the table, looked up and over, and Peter saw with deepening shock and fear that the woman even had his mother's eyes, his own eyes, deep set and blue green. Peter fully expected her to say, "Ach, Petel, your beautiful hair! It's far too long," and then to reach over, brush the locks off his forehead, and say to her friend, a corpulent man with black-rimmed glasses, "Did you ever see such golden curls on a boy? A gift from my mother, so wasted on him. Isn't he the lucky one," and then she would sigh dramatically and smile at Peter with greatest tenderness. This *Doppelgänger*, however, did nothing of the kind. Her face, at first inquiring, tightened into an irritated expression. She looked him up and down and seemed on the verge of saying something sharp when her traveling gaze fixed on Peter's left forearm. Peter himself glanced down, although of course he knew what was there. The bus tub had pushed up the sleeve of his white shirt, unbuttoned in the heat of the kitchen, to expose the small, crooked greenish line of death camp numbers.

The woman looked quickly away from the tattoo, then back, then at Peter's face. She forced a smile that sat ill on her features and angled forward to say something to her dining companion, the dead fox face of her fur stole dangling perilously close to a little silver tureen of Thousand Island dressing. Peter sneaked his hand onto the table to retrieve this just in time and shifted the bus tub to better conceal his number. The woman and her dining compan-

ion were both examining him now, trying to look as if they weren't looking while their glances ticked from Peter's arm to torso to face to legs, checking for visible infirmities from the camp: missing teeth, perhaps, or broken, ill-set bones; a lopped-off ear; the blue nails and protruding ribs of malnutrition.

Peter rehearsed in his mind what he would say next so it would emerge in perfect English, with only the slightest taint of German—*You mean to tell me this kid's a Jew who talks like a Kraut?* one of Cousin Sol's friends had said recently at the country club. *Now that just beats all!*

Peter reached for the woman's bread plate, smattered with crumbs and butter.

"May I clear this for you, madam?" he asked.

II.
LARCHMONT, NEW YORK,
Thursday, September 20, 1945

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After his shift was over, Peter took the New Haven line back to Larchmont, to the house in which he was living now—Cousin Sol's. Sol's Tudor mansion in Westchester was similar enough to Peter's childhood home in the affluent Charlottenburg suburb of Berlin to make Peter feel as though he were in a dream in which