

In this novel of mystery and suspense, murder and foul play, the zeal for understanding the human condition collides head-on with dimensions of spiritual and ethical experience that are intellectually unfathomable.

Darkness Withdrawn or The Eclipse of Nietzsche's Shadow

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DARKNESS WITHDRAWN
or
THE ECLIPSE OF NIETZSCHE'S SHADOW

Edward Fotheringill

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Author's Note

This is a work of fiction that draws, on occasion, from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Short quotes have been taken from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and *Twilight of the Idols*.

The scientific theories expressed in the book are inspired by the thinking of John Dobson.

In this world of space and time, oddities abound. Mystery upon mystery floats beneath the horizon of life. Sometimes hints of what might be called knowledge are revealed. Look at the hints closely enough, and they disappear like fading clouds into deeper mysteries beyond the reach of the human mind. Once beyond the mind, once beyond space and time, one experiences a solace, a peace, that when reintroduced into the worldly realm is recognized by a few seekers as holiness. This holiness, known only to the holy themselves, is none other than complete indifference. A happy indifference? Is there such a thing? Yes. The holy live with happy indifference. There is truly no other kind.

Chapter 1

Durango, Colorado. An abandoned farmhouse. The overnight rain has stopped. Dark clouds, swirling in the open sky, turn purple at dawn's first light. The farmhouse is enveloped in silence, save the redundant trickling of rainwater making its way through the porous roof and down the redwood rafters. As morning unfolds, the sky brightens and time is marked by the rhythmic peening of a woodpecker entranced by the teeming life hidden beneath the bark of a nearby blue spruce.

His eyelids flutter nervously in an attempt to open. A dull ache cascades through his skull and neck. The chirping of birds moves in and out of awareness, as does the smell of something foul and putrid. Finally, his eyes pop open. A bright light scorches his first glance. He squints at the rafters of the vaulted farmhouse roof. The light stinging his eyes is from the sun rushing through a series of horizontal windows high above him. He carefully moves his neck, his shoulders, his arms. He sits up. Pain darts through his midsection. Leaning back, supporting himself with the palms of his hands against the hardwood floor, he winces as the mayhem comes into focus. Not two feet away lies a body. Flat on its back. Lifeless, cold, gray. The face is unrecognizable. Battered to a pulp. The hair, splayed out like an Asian fan beneath the head, sticks to the floor amidst the splatter of partially dried blood.

Marcus Roberts slowly gets up. Pain knives through every cell of his body. He senses his brain running an injury scan on his limbs and internal organs. He is okay. Badly beaten, but okay. He limps out of the farmhouse. The hot sun burns his bruised and lacerated face. His aching, swollen hands feel like lead

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weights dragging him down into the bowels of hell. He climbs, gingerly, into his old Pontiac Bonneville, starts the engine, swerves around the Dodge Ram pickup blocking the driveway, and drives off. Some twenty minutes later, as the Bonneville zooms across the southwest plain, a cloud of dust mushrooms from its tail. Looking in the rearview mirror, Marcus sees the dust rising like dense fog. It all seems like a dream.

Chapter 2

~ *Two Years Later* ~

Innsbruck, Austria. A cold gray sky gives way to midmorning sunshine. Snow-covered mountain peaks disappear into the blue-gray clouds. The quaint town with its bustle of insulated activity harbors itself snugly between mountain ranges.

Walking south on Maria-Theresien-Strasse, Jason Cole paused to gaze at the Triumphal Arch at the far end of the street. The imposing arch, modeled after those in Rome, was constructed in the eighteenth century by order of Empress Maria Theresa to commemorate the death of her husband, Emperor Francis I, and the marriage of her son, the Duke of Tuscany. The architectural monument, anchoring the old-world town of Innsbruck, was like some strange beacon of hope for Jason Cole. He could not articulate why, but the feeling was palpable nonetheless. Closing his eyes, he inhaled the cool and precious air of freedom.

From the stone sidewalk bordering Maria-Theresien-Strasse, Jason pushed open the heavy, ornate oak door and heard the familiar creaking of its hinges. Moving through the doorway and entering the shop, he happily inhaled the blended, multifarious aromas of tobacco and aged paper. “Good morning, Hans,” Jason said. “How was the symphony last night?”

Hans Einenger, a short, squat man with a friendly, cherubic face, carefully knifed through a strip of packing tape and pulled a book out of the box that had just been delivered. “Ah, just

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lovely. An entire evening of Mahler.” Hans smiled as he gazed at the cover of the book. “Look at this! Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. I haven’t seen this book since my university days.”

Jason hung his overcoat in a narrow cedar closet behind the tobacco case. “That must be the order from Blackwell’s. I thought I’d beef up the philosophy section.”

“Fine by me.” Hans gazed out the front window. “Hey, Jason, here comes old Harry.”

The door to the shop creaked open ever so slowly. A thin, frail man, looking older than time itself, shuffled through the doorway.

Jason leaned over the tobacco counter. “Hey, Harry. I’ll get your blend together.”

Harry Swartz. A regular at the B&B Book and Tobacco Shop. Twice a week, without fail, Harry would come in to fill his tobacco pouch and browse through the books. No one knew how old Harry was, and he himself couldn’t remember the date he was born. As Harry told it, he had joined the Austrian army as an adult at the outbreak of World War I. One day, his infantry unit was under heavy artillery attack, and he caught the force of an explosion to the right side of his head. Blew out the hearing in his right ear and all memory of the first third of his life.

Harry leaned over the tobacco counter and handed over his pouch. “Well, Jason, I think I’ll take some of that EB and Point Four: equal parts.”

Jason smiled and cast a laughing eye toward Hans. "Coming right up, Harry."

Jason and Hans loved the fact that Harry said these very same words every Tuesday and Friday morning. Only God knew how many hundreds of pounds of EB and Point Four (equal parts) Harry had consumed in his lifetime.

Harry shuffled slowly across the floor. "What have you got there, Hans?"

Hans smiled widely with nostalgia. "Harry, what I have here is something I read at university many years ago. Heidegger's *Being and Time*."

Harry leaned his head back and pursed his lips. "Well, isn't that something? Did you know I met Heidegger? It was just before World War II."

"No kidding?" said Hans, suddenly intent on knowing more. "How did that happen?"

Harry smiled and straightened the collar of his jacket. He liked being the center of attention. "I was living in a village just outside Freiburg. One fine summer evening, Heidegger gave a lecture at the Society for Fine Arts at the University. He was a mesmerizing speaker. When he talked, he put everyone in a kind of trance. I've never seen anything like it."

Harry unzipped his jacket and fiddled with the clasp on his suspenders. "These damn things don't fit right. Shouldn't have bought them." Harry looked up and his thoughts resurfaced. "Well, at any rate, after the lecture, Heidegger was strolling to

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the train station, and I caught up with him. I invited him to have coffee, and - what do you know? – he accepted. We sat in this little tavern by the train station. He never did drink coffee, though. All he wanted was gin martinis. He was quite a nice guy. Never would have imagined he was all caught up with the Nazis.”

Hans froze with expectation. “God, Harry, what did you and Heidegger talk about?”

Harry shrugged his narrow shoulders. “It’s been so long, I don’t know anymore. All I remember about the whole conversation was Heidegger talking about a woman. Her name was Hannah. I think he was in love with her.” Harry scratched at the top of his wool stocking cap. “Ah, martinis make you talk that way.”

Hans pulled another book out of the box from Blackwell’s. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel. “Harry, you’re quite a guy.”

Harry pulled at his suspenders. “Ah, just an old man who’s seen some things.”

Jason leaned over the tobacco counter. “Here’s your pouch, Harry. I’ll put it on your tab.”

“Thanks, Jason. See you guys on Tuesday.”

Hans and Jason stood at the window and watched Harry slowly meander north on Maria-Theresien-Strasse. Harry knew every shopkeeper on the street and stopped to chat with each one. It took him literally all morning to walk a quarter of a mile to Universitatstrasse, where he would lunch at the Grauer Bar Hotel.

When Harry disappeared from sight, Hans began shelving the new books. "Have you ever met any famous scholars like Heidegger?"

Jason laughed longingly. "No. You?"

"Nope."

Jason returned the jars of EB and Point Four to their proper shelves. "I had a friend in college who lunched with the Dalai Lama's brother. Does that count?"

Hans laughed and fired up a Schimmelpenninck cigar. "Not really. So what are you doing this weekend?"

Jason inhaled the cigar smoke filtering its way through the shop. He could feel a pleasant tickle in his nostrils.

"Considering our conversation with Harry, my plans are apropos. I'm going hiking in Sils Maria."

Hans knowingly raised his eyebrows. "Ah, so you're going to the Nietzsche House."

"Yeah. I want to walk the mountain paths just as he did."

Hans nodded. "I've done it myself. It's beautiful. Nietzsche said Sils Maria is the loveliest place on earth. He just may be right."

Hans began breaking down the empty book box for disposal.

"Going by yourself?"

"Yeah."

"That's the best way."

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