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Where should he begin? With anti-Semites? A subject locked in his heart? His veins?

He could open with the champion of civil liberties, the guardian of animal and human rights, the illustrious man renowned and admired the world over as a strict humanitarian.

From the pile of books on his desk, Marcus Weiss picks *Down and Out in Paris and London* and again goes over the hateful passages he has marked with a pencil.

It gets to him every time. The impeccable righteousness, the snub-nosed indignation of the young, well-bred Englishman. The nasal, clipped staccato, the distaste, the haughty aversion to everything Jewish: “The shopman was a red-haired Jew, an extraordinary disagreeable man. . . . It would have been a pleasure to flatten the Jew’s nose.”

The Jew. The perennial Jew. The infamously famous, the infamously culpable nose. The Jew, like a pest, is not to be rid of. A shifty, nasty lowlife who unscrupulously swindles the jolly, unsuspecting citizens about him. Just look at his eyes, his bulging Jew-eyes, his dark eyeballs, how they dart in their holes. Is it any wonder one thinks of rats when confronted with a Jew, his bushy eyebrows? One can tell, instantly, the Jew is up to something, cooking some unholy, yet kosher, scheme.

With two fingers, his heart filled with contempt, Marcus lifts the paperback by the edge of its cover and holds it over the wastebasket. How easy it would be to just drop it—a profanity of sorts, but how

else can he settle accounts with Mr. Orwell? Mr. Orwell who had been his idol.

How painful the shock, the disbelief, when he first came across these passages.

He aches to dump the book, but knows he won't. He tells himself he might need it later on, for further quotes, but the truth is he could never bring himself to destroy a book. Not even a *Mein Kampf*.

He puts Orwell back in the pile.

These are words. Words on pages bound by a cover.

Dangerous words. Words that incite and legitimize hatred.

How he detests them, those who detest him. He regrets not believing in hell. If he believed in hell, he could wish Orwell to burn there, with the rest of them, for all eternity.

He is not a fanatic; he is just seeking justice. The Jews specialize in seeking justice.

Marcus takes off his reading glasses and rubs his eyes, the bridge of his nose. What is it about the nose that irritates them so? His own nose isn't large; it's aristocratically aquiline, as a matter of fact, if on the long side.

He likes his nose. Gina likes his nose. She has said, after cunnilingus, that she finally understands why Jews are so endowed, why they were chosen at Mount Sinai.

Gina is a Jewess who likes Jews, particularly the males, if only because they're good in bed, and are circumcised. She says Jews, born responsible, are reliable lovers, punctual in their needs and desires.

Aesthetically speaking, and she is qualified to speak—aesthetics is her business—a circumcised penis is more pleasing to the eye. In her opinion, this must be the naked truth behind the ritual. It was probably a woman, Gina is convinced, who had come up with the idea to cut away the excess skin—a swift and practical solution. And man saw that it was good, but later clothed the truth in verbiage.

When Gina talks about Jews, everything she says is like succor to his soul; it calms him.

Succor, he thinks, is such a Yiddish word.

Because of their special history, Marcus says, Jews have developed a talent for *mitleid*, compassion. From an early age he himself has taken on his shoulders the suffering and injustice inflicted on his people, and has carried in his heart their pain, their afflictions. They call to him from the grave: they want to reclaim their unfinished lives, the lives of their children.

He tells Gina: “We Jews don’t love ourselves enough. We’re insecure. We could never be successful enough. No matter how hard we try, we’ll never be *them*. And we want so much to be them, although we don’t want to. When it comes to PR we fall behind, we can’t be bothered. Our martyrs do not acquire the status of saints—imagine all the saints we could have had! Millions of them. Those who died for *kiddush hashem*, and those who died because born into the wrong faith. But we do excel when it comes to holidays. Festive holidays, filled with songs that defy the goyim: ‘In every generation they stand up to destroy us, and God saves us from their hand.’ In our homes, our synagogues, how we love to sing these songs. Such harsh words, such catchy tunes. We remember them from our youth, when we learned to shout them at the top of our lungs.”

“Look at our parents,” Gina says. “The humiliations they suffered. And still, they counted themselves lucky. For the Jews in Europe, the word *lucky* took on a special meaning. My parents, you know, fled Romania on foot. You and I,” she accuses, “never knew our grandparents. A whole generation deprived of its cushion, its security blanket. For a sense of self, parents are not enough. When I was little, my most fervent wish was to know whether or not my grandmother had been pretty, whether or not she had painted her nails red. My mother would say, Yes, of course she was pretty. Yes, of course she had painted her nails red.

“Our parents,” Gina says, “were not the Wandering Jews; they were the running Jews.”

Shoes, Marcus thinks. Jews and shoes. His parents, too, had to flee, with him, still a baby, in a satchel. They fled Germany, and never again, not even once, repeated a word in their mother tongue.

At his desk, Marcus looks up the term, the Wandering Jew.

According to a medieval legend, the Jew had insulted Jesus and was therefore condemned—conveniently, one might add—to wander the earth until Judgment Day.

Who was it that said that trees have roots, Jews have legs.

He dials the New York Public Library; he needs to find out when and where the term *anti-Semitism* originated. He wonders how it happened that such a fancy term is applied to something so base. What's wrong with the simple and direct, anti-Jewish?

The line is busy. Marcus tries again—it's still busy. Of course, he reasons, anti-Jewish is too overt and, in modern times, one needs to camouflage and elevate his hate. It feels more respectable, even authentic, to be called an anti-Semite; it sounds progressive, scientific. What's more: it is cleansed of the mention of the Jew.

Marcus pushes the redial button. A sleepy male voice comes on the line, and Marcus, in the gentlest of tones, inquires about anti-Semitism. He thinks he detects a quick intake of breath on the other end, but knows he might be mistaken, it could be his overworked imagination; he is overly touchy, sensitized, always on the alert. When he reads, his trained eye spots, involuntarily, all the capital J's on the page. The word *jewel*, invariably, gives him a fright, and he has to stare at it for a while before he lets go. Only when he knows the author is Jewish, he relaxes his guard. Mostly he feels proud that a Jew writes about Jews—openly, without excuses. And even when he disagrees with the content, at least he doesn't feel he's been abused or violated.

Gina says he is not a true American, he takes most things too much to heart. He hasn't learned, she says, to ignore, with equanimity, the inevitable shortcomings of others. He tortures himself with questions, he doesn't know when to stop.

"Hold the line, please," says the librarian, and Marcus thinks: If he lets me hang on for an inordinate length of time, then I'll know for sure . . .

He gazes out of the window at the stark branches of the trees in the courtyard below. In the building across the way, all the windows are shut and draped. A shudder, a chill, runs through his body, as if

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to corroborate the information just processed in his brain: it is cold outside. It is warm and cozy in his study; it feels like a womb.

He is still holding. He puts the call on the speakerphone, to let the man know he hasn't been sitting there, like a schmuck, holding an empty receiver to his ear.

He wonders about librarians—what makes them tick.

He drums his fingers on the desk. During the summer, the windows he faces are friendlier: the drapes are pulled aside, and he gets to see a chair, a table, an elaborate lamp. He may reach for his binoculars and scan the windows for movement. He himself is on the twelfth floor, which affords him a full view of about forty windows. He doesn't expect much, just a stranger in a room, moving about, watering a plant or straightening up. When he catches someone in his lenses, he remains with them until they leave; then he waits for them to return, reflecting how oddly empty, deserted, a room seems after one has left it.

"Hullo?" his speakerphone interrupts his musings, and Marcus, suddenly remembering who he called and why, grabs the receiver, thankful that the librarian has come back on the line without disconnecting him.

The librarian is very helpful. The term, Marcus learns, first appeared in 1879, in an anti-Jewish pamphlet written by a German, an apostate half-Jew.

So there, he thinks. That's where he might begin.