

The Last Ride of German Freddie

Walter Jon Williams

ECCE homo" said German Freddie with a smile. "That is your man, I believe."

"That's him," Brocius agreed. "That's Virgil Earp, the lawman."

"What do you suppose he wants?" asked Freddie

"He's got a warrant for someone," said Brocius, "or he wouldn't be here."

Freddie gazed without enthusiasm at the lawman walking along the opposite side of Allen Street. His spurred boots clumped on the wooden sidewalk. He looked as if he had somewhere to go.

"Entities should not be multiplied beyond what is necessary,"

said Freddie, "or so Occam is understood to have said. If he is Here for one of us, then so much the worse for him. If not, what does it matter to us?"

Curly Bill Brocius looked thoughtful. "I don't know about this. Occam fellow, but as my mamma would say, those fellers don't chew their own tobacco. Kansas lawmen come at you in packs." "So do we," said Freddie. "And this is not Kansas." "No," said Brocius. "It's Tombstone." He gave Freddie a warning look from his lazy eyes. "Remember that, my friend," he said, "and watch your back."

Brocius drifted up Allen Street in the direction of Hafford's Saloon while Freddie contemplated Deputy U.S. Marshal Earp. The man was dressed like the parson of a particularly gloomy Protestant sect, with a black flat-crowned hat, black frock coat, black trousers, and immaculate white linen.

German Freddie decided he might as well meet this paradigm.

He walked across the dusty Tombstone street, stepped onto the sidewalk, and raised his gray sombrero.

"Pardon me," he said. "But are you Virgil Earp?"

The man looked at him, light eyes over fair mustache. "No," he said. "I'm his brother."

"Wyatt?" Freddie asked. He knew that the deputy had a lawman brother.

"No," the man said. "I'm their brother, Morgan."

A grin tugged at Freddie's lips. "Ah," he said. "I perceive that entities *are* multiplied beyond that which is necessary."

Morgan Earp gave him a puzzled look. Freddie raised his hat again. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I won't detain you."

It is like a uniform, Freddie wrote in his notebook that night. Black coats, black hats, black boots. Blond mustaches and long guns in the scabbards, riding in line abreast as they led their posse out of town. As a picture of purposeful terror they stand like the *Schwarzrei-ter* of three centuries ago, horsemen whom all Europe held in fear. They entirely outclassed that Lieutenant Hurst, who was in a *real* uniform and who was employing them in the matter of those stolen army mules.

What fear must dwell in the hearts of these Earps to present themselves thus! They must dress and walk and think alike; they must enforce the rigid letter of the dead, dusty law to the last comma; they must cling to every rule and range and feature of mediocrity. . . . It is fear that drives men to herd together, to don uniforms, to impose upon others a needless conformity. But what enemy is it they fear? What enemy is so dreadful as to compel them to wear uniforms and arm themselves so heavily and cling to their beliefs with such ferocity?

It is their own nature! The weak, who have no power even over themselves, fear always the power that lies in *free* nature—a nature fantastic, wild, astonishing, arbitrary—they must enslave this spirit first in themselves before they can enslave it in others.

It is therefore our duty—the duty of those who are free, who are natural, valorous, and unafraid, those who scorn what is sickly, cowardly, and slavish—we must *resist these Earps!*

And already we have won a victory—won it without raising a finger, without lifting a gun. The posse of that terrible figure of justice, that Mr. Virgil Earp, found the mules they were searching for in Frank McLaury's corral at Baba Comari—but then the complainant Lieutenant Hurst took counsel of his own fears and refused to press charges.

It is wonderful! Deputy Marshal Earp, the sole voice of the law in this part of Arizona, has been made ridiculous on his first employment! How his pride must have withered at the joke that fortune played on

him! How he must have cursed the foolish lieutenant and his fate!

He has left town, I understand, returned to Prescott. His brothers remain, however, stalking the streets in their dread black uniforms, infecting the town with their stolid presence. It is like an invasion of Luthers.

We must not cease to laugh at them! We must be gay! Laughter has driven Virgil from our midst, and it will drive the others, too. Our laughter will lodge, burning in their hearts like bullets of flaming lead. There is nothing that will drive them from our midst as surely as our own joy at their shortcomings.

They are afraid. And we will *know* they are afraid. And this knowledge will turn our laughter into a weapon.

Ike Clanton was passed out on the table. The game went on regardless, as Ike had already lost his money. It was late evening in the Occidental Saloon, and the game might well go on till dawn.

"It's getting to be hard being a Cowboy," said John Ringo. "What with having to pay *taxes* now." He removed cards from his hand, tossed them onto the table. "Two cards," he said.

Brocius gave him his cards. "If we pay taxes," he said, "we can vote. And if we vote, we can have our own sheriff. And if we have our own sheriff, we'll make back those taxes and then some. Dealer folds." He tossed his cards, onto the table.

Freddie adjusted his spectacles and looked at his hand, jacks and treys. He tossed his odd nine onto the table. "One card," he said. "I believe it was a mistake."

Brocius gave Freddie a lazy-lidded glance as he dealt Freddie another trey. "You think John Behan won't behave once we elect him?"

"I think it is unwise to give someone power over you."

"Hell, yes, it was unwise," agreed Ringo. "Behan's promised Wy-att Earp the chief deputy's job. Fifty dollars." Silver clanged on the tabletop. Ike Clanton, drowsing, gave an uncertain snort.

"That's just to get the votes of the Earps and their friends," Brocius said. He winked at Freddie. "You don't think he's going to keep his promises, do you?"

"What makes you think he will keep his promises to *you*?" Freddie asked. He raised another fifty.

"It will pay him to cooperate with us," Brocius said.

Ringo bared his yellow fangs in a grin. "Have you seen Behan's girl? Sadie?"

"Are you going to call or fold?" Freddie asked.

"I'm thinking." Staring at his cards.

"I thought Behan's girl was called Josie," said Brocius.

"She seems to go by a number of names," Ringo said. "But you can see her for yourself, tonight at Shieffelin Hall. She's Helen of Troy in *Doctor Faustus*."

"Are you going to call or fold?" Freddie asked.

"Helen, whose beauty summoned Greece to arms," Ringo quoted, "and drew a thousand ships to Tenedos."

"I would rather be a king," Freddie said, "and ride in triumph through Persepolis. Are you going to fold or call?"

"I'm going to bump," Ringo said, and threw out a hundred-dollar bill, just as Freddie knew he would if Freddie only kept on nagging.

"Raise another hundred," Freddie said. Ringo cursed and called. Freddie showed his hand and raked the money toward him.

"Fortune's a right whore," Ringo said, from somewhere else out of his eccentric education.

"You should not have compromised with the authorities," Freddie said as he stacked his coin. "Once you were the free rulers of this land. Now you are taxpayers and politicians. Why do you bring this upon yourselves?"

Curly Bill Brocius scowled. "I'm on top of things, Freddie. Behan will do what he's told."

Freddie looked at him. "But will the Earps?"

"We got two hundred riders, Freddie," Brocius said. "I ain't afraid of no Earps."

"We were driven out of Texas," Freddie reminded. "This is our last stand."

"Last stand in Tombstone," Ringo said. "That doesn't have a comforting sound."

"I'm on top of it," Brocius insisted.

He and his crowd defiantly called themselves Cowboys. It was a name synonymous with *rustler*, and hardly respectable—legitimate ranchers called themselves stockmen. The Cowboys ranged both sides of the American-Mexican border, acquiring cattle on one side, moving them across the border through Guadalupe and Skeleton Canyons, and selling them. Most of the local ranchers—even the honest ones—did not mind owning cattle that did not come with a notarized bill of sale, and the Cowboys' business was profitable.

In the face of this threat to law from the two hundred outlaws, the United States government had sent to Tombstone exactly one man, Deputy Marshal Virgil Earp, who had been sent right out again. The Mexicans, unfortunately, were more industrious—they had been fortifying the border, and making the Cowboys' raids more difficult. The Clantons' father, who had been the Cowboys' chief, had been killed in an ambush by Mexican *rurales*.

Brocius now led the Cowboys, assuming anyone did. Since illegitimate plunder was growing more difficult, Brocius proposed to plunder legitimately, through a political machine and a compliant-sheriff. His theory was that the government would let them alone if he lined up enough votes to buy their tolerance.

German Freddie mistrusted the means—he did not trust politicians or their machines or their sheriffs—but then his opinion did not rank near Brocius's, as he wasn't, strictly speaking, a Cowboy, just one of their friends. He was a gambler, and had never rustled stock in his life—he just won the money from those who had.

"Everybody ante," said Brocius. Freddie threw a half-eagle into the pot.

"May I sit in?" asked a cultured voice. Ay, Freddie thought as he looked up, *the plot thickens very much upon us*.

"Well," Freddie said, "if you are here, now we know that Tombstone is on the map." He rose and gestured the newcomer to a chair. "Gentlemen," he said to the others, "may I introduce John Henry Holliday, D.D."

"We've met," said Ringo. He rose and shook Holliday's hand. Freddie introduced Brocius and pointed out Ike Clanton, still asleep on the table.

Holliday put money on the table and sat. To call him thin as a rail was to do an injustice to the rail—Holliday was pale and consumptive and light as a scarecrow. He looked as if the merest breath of wind might blow him right down Skeleton Canyon into Mexico. Only the weight of his boots held him down—that and the weight of his gun.

German Freddie had met Doc Holliday in Texas, and knew that Holliday was dangerous when sober and absurd when drunk. Freddie and Holliday had both killed people in Texas, and for much the same reasons.

"Is Kate with you?" Freddie asked. If Holliday's Hungarian girl was in town, then he was here to stay. If she wasn't, he might drift on.

"We have rooms at Fly's," Holliday said.

Freddie looked at Holliday over the rim of his cards. If Kate was here, then Doc would remain till either his pockets or the mines ran dry of silver.

The calculations were growing complex.

"Twenty dollars," Freddie said.

"Bump you another twenty," said Holliday, and tossed a pair of double eagles onto the table.

Ike Clanton sat up with a sudden snort. "I'll kill him!" he blurted.

"Here's my forty," Ringo said. He looked at Ike. "Kill who, Ike?"

Ike's eyes stared off into nowhere, pupils tiny as peppercorns. "I'm gonna kill him!" he said.

Ringo was patient. "Who are you planning to kill?"

"Gonna kill him!" Ike's chair tumbled to the floor as he rose to his feet. He took a staggering step backwards, regained his balance, then began to lurch for the saloon door.

"Dealer folds," said Brocius, and threw in his cards.

Holliday watched Ike's exit with cold precision. "Shouldn't one of you go after your friend? He seems to want to shoot somebody."

"Ike's harmless," Freddie said. "Besides, his gun is at his hotel, and in his current state Ike won't

remember where he left it."

"What if someone takes Ike seriously enough to shoot *him*?" Holliday asked.

"No one will do that for fear of Ike's brother Billy," said Freddie. "He's the dangerous one."

Holliday nodded and returned his hollow eyes to his cards. "Are you going to call, Freddie?" he asked.

"I call," Freddie said.

It was a mistake. Holliday cleaned them all out by midnight. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said politely as he headed toward the door with his winnings jingling in his pockets. "I'm sure we'll meet again."

John Ringo looked at the others. "Silver and gold have I none," he quoted, "but such as I have I'll share with thee." He pulled out bits of pasteboard from his pockets. "Tickets to *Doctor Faustus*, good for the midnight performance. Will come with me to hell, gentlemen?"

Brocius was just drunk enough to say yes. Ringo looked at Freddie. Freddie shrugged. "Might as well," he said. "That was the back end of bad luck."

"Luck?" Ringo handed him a ticket. "It looked to me like you couldn't resist whenever Doc raised the stakes."

"I was waiting for him to get drunk. Then he'd start losing."

"What was in your mind, raising on a pair of jacks?"

"I thought he was bluffing."

Ringo shook his head. "And you the only one of us sober."

"I don't see that you did any better."

"No," Ringo said sadly, "I didn't."

They made their way out of the Occidental, then turned down Allen Street in the direction of Shieffelin Hall. The packed dust of the street was hard as rock. The night was full of people—most nights Tombstone didn't close down till dawn.

Brocius struck a match on his thumb as he walked, and lit a cigar.

"I plan to go shooting tomorrow," he said. "I've changed my gun—filed down the sear so I can fan it."

"Oh, Lord," Ringo sighed. "Why'd you go and ruin a good gun?" "Fanning is for fools," Freddie said.

"You should just take *aim*—" "I ain't such a good shot as you two," Brocius said. He puffed his cigar. "My talents are more *organizational* and *political*. I figure if I got to jerk my gun, I'll just fan it and make up for aim with *volume*?" "You'd better hope you never have to shoot it," Freddie said. "If we win the election," Brocius said cheerfully. "I probably won't."

Even the drinking water must be carried to us on wagons, Freddie wrote in his notebook a few hours later. The alkali desert is unforgiving and unsuitable for anything but the lizards and vultures who were here before us. Even the Indians avoided this country. The ranchers cannot keep enough cattle on this wretched land to make a profit—thus they are dependent on the rustlers and smugglers for their livelihood. The population came because of greed or ambition, and if the silver ever runs out, Tombstone will fly away with the dust.

So why, when I perceive these Cowboys in their huge sombreros, their gaudy kerchiefs and doeskin trousers, do I see instead the old Romans in their ringing bronze?

From such as these did Romulus spring! For who was Romulus? A tyrant, a bandit, a man who harbored runaways and stole the cattle—and the daughters—of his neighbors. Yet he was noble, yet a hero, yet he spawned a great Empire. History trembles before his memory.

And now the Romans have come again! Riding into Tombstone with their rifles in the scabbards!

All the old Roman virtues I see among them. They are frank, truthful, loyal, and above all *healthy*. They hold the lives of men—their own included—in contempt/Nothing is more refreshing and wholesome than this lack of pity, this disdain for the so-called civilized virtues. They are from the American South, of course, that defeated country now sunk in ruin and oppression. They are too young to have fought in the Civil War, but not so young they did not see its horrors. This exposure to life's cruelties, when they were still at a tender age, must have hardened them against pieties and hypocrisies of the world. Not for them the mad egotism of the ascetic, the persistent morbidity—the *sickness*—of the civilized man. These heroes abandoned their defeated country and came West—West, where the new Rome will be born!

If only they can be brought to treasure their virtues as I do. But they treat themselves as carelessly as they treat everything. They possess all virtues but one: the will to power. They have it in themselves to dominate, to rule—not through these petty maneuverings at the polls with which Brocius is so unwisely intoxicated, but through themselves, their desires, their guns. . . . They can create an empire here, and must, if their virtues are to survive. It is not enough to avoid the law, avoid civilization—they must wish to *destroy* the inverted virtues that oppose them.

Who shall win? Tottering, hypnotized, sunken Civilization, or this new Rome? Ridiculous, when we consider numbers, when we consider mere guns and iron. Yet what was Romulus? A bandit, crouched on his Palatine Hill. Yet nothing could stand in his way. His will was greater than that of the whole rotten world.

And—as these classical allusions now seem irresistible—what are we to make of the appearance of Helen of Troy? Who better to signal the end of an empire? Familiar with Goethe's superior work, I forgot that Helen does not speak in Marlowe's *Faustus*. She simply parades along and inspires poetry. But when she looked at our good German metaphysician, that eye of hers spoke mischief that had nothing to do with verse—and the actor knew it, for he stammered. Such a sexual being as this Helen was not envisioned by the good British Marlowe, whom we are led to believe did not with women.

I do not see such a girl cleaving to Behan for long—his blood is too thin for the likes of her.

And when she tires of him—beware, Behan! Beware, Faustus! Beware, Troy!

Freddie met Sheriff Behan's girl at the victory party following the election. Brocius's election strategy had borne fruit, of a sort—but Johnny Behan was rotten fruit, Freddie thought, and would fall to the ground ere long.

The Occidental Saloon was filled with celebration and a hundred drunken Cowboys. Even Wyatt Earp turned up, glooming in his black coat and drooping mustaches, still secure in the illusion that Behan would hire him as a deputy; but at the sight of the company his face wrinkled as if he'd just bit on a lemon, and he did not stay long.

Amid all this roistering inebriation, Freddie saw Behan's girl perched on the long bar, surrounded by a crowd of men and kicking her heels in the air in a white froth of petticoats. Freddie was surprised—he had rarely in his life met a woman who would enter a saloon, let alone behave so freely in one, and among a crowd of rowdy drunks. Behan—a natty Irishman in a derby—stood nearby and accepted congratulations and bumper after bumper of the finest French champagne.

Freddie offered Behan his perfunctory congratulations, then shouldered his way to the bar where he saw John Ringo crouched protectively around a half-empty bottle of whiskey. "I have drunk deep of the Pierian," Ringo said, "and drunk disgustingly. Will you join me?"

"No," said Freddie, and ordered soda, water. The noise of the room battered at his nerves. He would not stay long—he would go to another saloon, perhaps, and find a game of cards.

Ringo's melancholy eyes roamed the room. "Freddie, you do not look overjoyed," he said.

Freddie looked at his drink. "Men selling their freedom to become *citizens*" he snarled. "And they call it a victory." He looked toward Behan, felt his lips curl. "Victory makes stupid," he said. "I learned that in Germany, in 1870."

"Why so gloomy, boys?" cried a woman's voice in a surprising New York accent. "Don't you know it's a party?" Behan's girl leaned toward them, half-lying across the polished mahogany bar. She was younger than Freddie had expected—not yet twenty, he thought.

Ringo brightened a little—he liked the ladies. "Have you met German Freddie, Josie?" he said. "Freddie here doesn't like elections."

Josie laughed and waved her glass of champagne. "I don't know that we had a *real election*, Freddie," she called. "Think of it as being more like a *greatbig felony*."

Cowboy voices roared with laughter. Freddie found himself smiling behind his bushy mustache. Ringo, suddenly merry, grabbed Freddie's arm and hauled him toward Josie.

"Freddie here used to be a Professor of Philosophy back in Germany," Ringo said. "He was told to come West for his health." Ringo looked at Freddie in a kind of amazement. "Can you picture that?"

Freddie—who had come West to die—said merely, "Philology. Switzerland," and sipped his soda

water.

"You should have him tell you about how we're all Supermen," Ringo said.

Freddie stiffened. "You are *not* Supermen," he said.

"*You're the Superman*, then," Ringo said, swaying. The drunken raillery smoothed the sad lines of his eyes.

"I am the Superman's prophet," Freddie said with careful dignity. "And the Superman will be among your children, I think—he will come from America."

"I suppose I'd better get busy and have some children, then," Ringo said.

Josie watched this byplay with interest. Her hair was raven black, Freddie saw, and worn long, streaming down her shoulders. Her nose was proudly arched. Her eyes were large and brown and heavy-lidded—the heavy lids gave her a sultry look. She leaned toward Freddie.

"Tell me some philology," she said.

He looked up at her. "You are the first American I have met who knows the word."

"I know a lot of words." With a laugh she pressed his wrist—it was all Freddie could do not to jump a foot at the unexpected touch. Instead he looked at her sternly.

"Do you know the Latin word *bonus*?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "It doesn't mean something extra?"

"In English, yes. In Latin, *bonus* means 'good.' Good as opposed to bad. But my question—the important question to a philologist—"

He gave a nervous shrug of his shoulders. "The question is what the Romans meant by 'good,' you see? Because *bonus* is derived from *duonus*, or *duen-lum*, and from *duen-lum* is also derived *duellum*, thence *bellum*. Which means 'war.'"

Josie followed this with interest. "So war was good, to a Roman?"

Freddie shook his head. "Not quite. It was the *warlike man*, the bringer of strife, that was good, as we also see from *bellus*, which is clearly derived from *bellum* and means 'handsome'—another way of saying *good*. You understand?"

He could see thoughts working their way across her face. She was drunk, of course, and that slowed things down. "So the Romans—the Roman warriors—thought of themselves as good? By definition, good?"

Freddie nodded. "All the aristocrats did—all aristocrats, all conquerors. The aristocratic political party in ancient Rome called themselves the *boni*—the good. They *assumed* their own values were universal virtues, that all goodness was embedded in themselves—and that the values which were not theirs were debased. Look at the words they use to describe the opposite of their *bonus*—*plebeian*, 'common,' 'base.' Even in English—*debased* means 'made common.'" He warmed to the subject, English words spilling out past his thick German tongue. "And in Greece the rulers of Megara used *esthlos* to describe themselves—'the true,' the real, as opposed to the ordinary, which for them did not have a real existence." He laughed. "To believe that you *are the only real thing*. That is an ego speaking! That is a *ruler*—very much like the Brahmins, who believe their egos are immortal but that all other reality is illusion . . ."

He paused, words frozen in his mouth, as he saw the identical, quizzical expression in the faces of both Ringo and Josie. *They must think I'm crazy*, he thought. He took a sip of soda water to relieve his nervousness. "Well," he said, "that is some philological thought for you."

"Don't stop," said Josie. "This is the most interesting thing I've heard all night."

Freddie only shook his head.

And suddenly there was gunfire, Freddie's nerves leaping with each thunderclap as he ducked beneath the level of the bar, his hand reaching for the pistol that, of course, he had left in his little room.

Ceiling lathes came spilling down, and there was a burst of coarse laughter. Freddie saw Curly Bill Brocius standing amid a gray cloud of gunsmoke. Unlike Freddie, Brocius had disregarded the town ordinance forbidding firearms in saloons or other public places, and in an excess of bonhomie had fanned his modified revolver at the ceiling.

Freddie slowly rose to his feet. His heart lurched in his chest, and a kind of sickness rose in his throat. He had to hold on to the bar for support.

Josie sat perfectly erect on the mahogany surface, face flushed, eyes wide and glittering, lips parted in frozen surprise. Then she shook her head and slipped to the floor amid a silken waterfall of skirts. She

looked up at Freddie, then gave a sudden gay laugh. "These *men of strife*, these *boni*" she said, "are getting a little too *good* for my taste. Will you take me home, sir?"

"I—" Freddie felt heat rise beneath his collar. Gunsmoke stung his nostrils. "But Mr. Behan—?"

She cast a look over her shoulder at the new sheriff. "He won't want to leave his friends," she said. "And besides, I'd prefer an escort who's sober."

Freddie looked at Ringo for help, but Ringo was *too drunk to walk ten feet without falling*, and Freddie knew his abstemious habits had him trapped.

"Yes, miss," he said. "We shall walk, then."

He led Josie from the roistering crowd and walked with her down dusty Allen Street. Her arm in his felt very strange, like a half-forgotten memory. He wondered how long it had been since he had a woman on his arm—seven or eight years, probably, and the woman his sister.

In the darkness he sensed her looking up at him. "What's your last name, Freddie?" she asked.

"Nietzsche."

"Gesundheit!" she cried.

Freddie smiled in silence. She was not the first American to have made that joke.

"Don't you drink, Freddie?" Josie asked. "Is, it against your principles?"

"It makes me ill," Freddie said. "I have to watch my diet, also."

"Johnny said you came West for your health."

It was phrased like a statement, but Freddie knew it was a question. He did not mind the intrusion: he had no secrets. "I volunteered for the war," he said, and at her look, clarified, "the war with France. I caught diphtheria and some kind of dysentery—typhus or cholera. I did not make a good recovery, and I could not work." He did not mention the other problems, the nervous complaints, the sudden attacks of migraine, the cold, sick dread of dying as his father had died, mad and screaming.

"We turn here," Josie said. They turned left on Fifth Street. On the far side of the street was the Oriental Saloon, where Wyatt Earp earned his living dealing faro. Freddie glanced at the windows, saw Earp himself bathed in yellow light, standing, smoking a cigar and engaged in conversation with Holliday. To judge by his look, the topic was a grim one.

"Look!" Freddie said in sudden scorn. "In that black coat of his, Earp looks like the Angel of Death come to claim his consumptive friend."

The light of the saloon gleamed on Josie's smile. "Wyatt Earp's a handsome man, don't you think?"

"I think he is too gloomy."

She turned to him. "*You're* the gloomy one."

He nodded as they paced along. "Yes," he admitted. "That is just."

"You are a sneeze," she said. "He is a belch."

Freddie smiled to himself as they crossed Fremont Street. "I will tell him this, when I see him next."

"Tell me about the Superman."

Freddie shook his head. "Not now."

"But you will tell me some other time?"

"If you wish." Politely, doubting he would speak a word to her after this night.

"Here's our house." It was a small place that she shared with Behan, its frame unpainted, and like the rest of the town, thrown up overnight.

"I will bid you good night then," he said formally.

She turned to face him, lifted her face toward his. "You can come in, if you like," she said. "Johnny won't be back for hours."

He looked into her eyes and saw Troy there, on fire in the night.

"Good night, miss," he said, and touching his hat he turned away.

She is a Jewess! Freddie wrote in his journal. Run away from her family of good German bourgeois Jews—no doubt of the most insufferable type—to become, here in Tombstone, a goddess among the barbarians.

Or so Brocius tells us. He says her name is Josephine Marcus, sometimes called Sadie.

I believe I understand this Helen now. She has sprung from the strangest people in all history, they who have endured a thousand persecutions, and so become wise—cunning. The world has tried with great

energy to make the Jews base, by confining them to occupations that the world despises, and by depriving them of any hope of honor. Yet they themselves have never ceased to believe in their own high calling; and they are honored by the dignity with which they face their tormentors.

And how should we think them base? From the Jews sprang the most powerful book in history, the most effective moral law, Spinoza the most sublime philosopher, and Christ the last Christian. When Europe was sunk in barbarism, it was the Jewish philosophers who preserved for us the genius of the ancients.

Yet all people must have their self-respect, and self-respect demands that one repay both good and bad. Without the ability to occasionally revenge themselves upon their despisers, they could scarcely have held up their heads. The usury of which the Jews are accused is the least of it; it was the subtle, twisted, deceitful Jewish revolution in morals that truly destroyed the ancients—that took the natural, healthy joy of freedom, life, and power, that twisted and inverted that joy, that planted this fatal sickness among their enemies. Thus was the Jewish vengeance upon Rome.

And this is the tradition that our Helen has inherited. Her very existence here is a vengeance upon all that have tormented her people from the beginning of time. She is beautiful, she is gay . . . and what does she care if Troy burns? Or Rome? Or Tombstone?

When next Freddie encountered Josie, he was vomiting in the dust of Toughnut Street.

He had felt the migraine coming on earlier, but he was playing against a table of drunken stockmen who were celebrating the sale of their beeves and who were losing their money almost as fast as they could shove it across the table. Freddie was determined to fight on as long as the cards fell his way.

By the time he left the Occidental he was nearly blind with pain. The clink of the winnings in his pocket sounded in his ears like bronze bells. The Arizona sun flamed on his skull. He staggered two blocks—people turned their eyes from him, as if he were drunk—and then collapsed as the cramp seized his stomach. People hurried away from him as he -emptied the contents of his stomach into the dust. The spasms racked him long after he had nothing left to vomit.

Freddie heard footsteps, then felt the firm touch of a hand on his arm. "Freddie? Shall I get a doctor?"

Humiliation burned in his face. He had no wish that his helplessness should even be acknowledged—he could face those people who hurried away; there could be a pretense that they had seen nothing, but he couldn't bear that another person should see him in his weakness.

"It is normal," he gasped. "Migraine. I have medicine in my room."

"Can you get up? I'll help you."

He wiped his face with his handkerchief, and then her hand steadied him as he groped his way to his feet. His spectacles were hanging from one ear, and he adjusted them. It didn't help—his vision had narrowed to the point where it seemed he was looking at the world through the wrong end of a telescope. He shuffled down Toughnut toward his room—he rented the back room of a house belonging to a mining engineer and his family, and paid the wife extra for meals that would not torment his digestion. He groped for the door, pushed it open, and stumbled toward the bed. He swiped off the pyramid of books that lay on the blanket and threw himself onto the mattress. A whirlwind spun through his head.

"Thank you," he muttered. "Please go now."

"Where is your medicine?"

He gestured vaguely to the wooden box by his washbasin. "There. Just bring me the box."

He heard her boot heels booming like pistol shots on the wooden floor, and fought down another attack of nausea. He heard her open the velvet-padded box and scrutinize the contents. "Chloral hydrate!" she said. "Veronal! Do you take this all the time?"

"Only when I am ill," he said. "Please—bring it."

She gasped in surprise as he drank the chloral right from the bottle, knowing from experience the amount necessary to cause unconsciousness. "Thank you," he said. "I will be all right now. You can go."

"Let me help you with your boots."

Freddie gave a weary laugh. "Oh, yes, by all means. I should not die with my boots on."

The drug was already shimmering through his veins. Josie drew off his boots. His head was ringing like a great bell. Then the sound of the bell grew less and less, as if the clapper were being progressively swathed in wool, until it thudded no louder than a heartbeat.

Freddie woke after dark to discover that Josie had not left. He wiped away the gum that glued his eyelids shut and saw her curled in his only chair with her skirts tucked under her, reading by the light of his lamp.

"My God," he said. "What hour is it?"

She brushed away an insect that circled the lamp. "I don't know," she said. "Past midnight, anyway."

"What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be with Sheriff Behan?"

"He doesn't own me." Spoken tartly enough, though Freddie suspected that Behan might disagree.

"And besides," Josie said, "I wanted to make sure you didn't die of that medicine of yours."

Freddie raised a hand to his forehead. The migraine was gone, but the drug still enfolded his nerves in its smothering arms. He felt stupid, and stupidly ridiculous. "Well, I did not die," he said. "And I thank you—I will walk you home if you like."

She glanced at the book in her hands. "I would like to finish the chapter."

He could not see the title clearly in the dim light. "What are you reading?"

"*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.*"

Freddie gave a little laugh. "I borrowed that book from John Ringo. I think Twain is your finest American writer."

"Ringo reads?" Josie looked surprised. "I thought you were the only person in the whole Territory who ever cracked a book, *Herr Professor.*"

"You would be surprised—there are many educated men here. John Holliday is of course a college graduate. John Ringo is a true autodidact—born poor but completely self-educated, a lover of books."

"And a lover of other men's cattle."

Freddie smiled. "That is a small flaw in this country, miss. His virtues surely outweigh it."

The drug had left his mouth dry. He rose from the bed and poured a glass of water from his pitcher. There was a strange singing in his head, the beginnings of the wild euphoria that often took him after a migraine. Usually he would write in his journals for hours during these fits, write until his hand was clawed with cramp.

He drank another glass of water and turned to Josie. "May I take you home?"

She regarded him, oval face gold in the glow of the lamp. "Johnny won't be home for hours yet," she said. "Are you often ill?"

"That depends on what you mean by *often.*" He shuffled in his stocking feet to his bed—it was the only other place to sit. He saw his winnings gleaming on the blanket—little rivers of silver had spilled from his pockets. He bent to pick them up, stack them on his shelf.

"How often is often?" Patiently.

"Once or twice a month. It used to be worse, much worse."

"Before you came West."

"Yes. Before I—before I 'lit out for the Territory,' as Mr. Mark Twain would say. And I was very ill the first years in America."

"Were you different then?" she asked. "Johnny tells me you have this wild reputation—but here you've never been in trouble, and—" Looking at the room stacked high with books and papers. "—you live like a monk."

"When I came to America, I was in very bad health," he said. "I thought I would die." He turned to Josie. "I believed that I would die at the age of thirty-five."

She looked at him curiously. "Why that number?"

"My father died at that age. They called it 'softening of the . brain.' He died mad." He turned, sat on the bed, touched his temples with his fingers. "Sometimes I could feel the madness there, pressing upon my mind.. Waiting for the right moment to strike. I thought that anything was better than dying as my father had died." He laughed as memories swam through the euphoria that was flooding his brain. "So I lived a mad life!" he said. "A wild life, in hopes that it would kill me before the madness did! And then one day, I awoke—" He looked up at Josie, his face a mirror of the remembered surprise. "And I realized that I was no longer thirty-five, and that I was still alive."

"That must have been a kind of liberation."

"Oh, yes! But in any case that life was at an end. The Texas Rangers came to drive the wild men from

the state, and—to my great shame—we allowed ourselves to be driven. And now we are here—" He looked at her. "Wiser, I hope."

"You write to a lady," she said.

Freddie looked at her in surprise. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

"I'm sorry. You were working on a letter—I saw it when I sat down. Perhaps I shouldn't have looked, but—"

Mirth burst from Freddie. "My sister!" he laughed. "My sister Elisabeth!"

She seemed a little surprised. "You addressed her in such passionate terms—I thought she was perhaps—" She hesitated.

"A lover? No. I will rewrite the letter later, perhaps, to make it less strident." He laughed again. "I thought Elisabeth might understand my ideas, but she is too limited, she has not risen above the patronizing attitudes of that little small town where we grew up—" Anger began to build in his heart, rising to a red, scalding fury. "She *rewrote my work*. I sent her some of my notebooks to publish, and she changed my words, she added anti-Semitic nonsense to the manuscript. She has fallen under the influence of those who hate the Jews, and she is being courted by one, a professional anti-Semite named Forster, a man who *distributes wretched tracts at meetings*" He waved a fist in the air. "She said she was *making my thoughts clearer*" He realized his voice had risen to a shout, and he tried to calm himself, suddenly falling into a mumble. "As if she herself has ever had any clear thoughts!" he said. "God help me if she remains my only conduit to the publishers."

Josie listened to this in silence, eyes glimmering in the light of the lantern. "You aren't an anti-Semite, then?" she said. "Your Superman isn't a—what is the word they use, those people?—Aryan?"

Freddie shook his head. "Neither he nor I am as simple as that."

"I'm Jewish," she said.

He ran his fingers through his hair. "I know," he said. "Someone told me."

Bells began to sing in his head—not the bells of pain, those clanging racking peals of his migraine, but bells of wild joy, a carillon that pealed out in celebration of some pagan triumph.

Josie looked up, and he followed her glance upward to the pistol belt above his head, to his Colt, his Zarathustra, the blue steel that gleamed in the darkness.

"You've killed men," she said.

"Not so many as rumors would have it."

"But you have killed."

"Yes." .

"Did they deserve it?"

"It is not the killing that matters," Freddie said. "It is not the deserving." A laugh burbled out, the strange rapture rising. "Any fool can kill," he said, "and any animal—but it takes a Caesar, of a Napoleon, to kill *as a human being*, as a moment of self-becoming. To rise above that—" He began to stammer in his enthusiasm. "—that merely human act—that foolishness—to overcome—to become—"

"The Superman?" she queried.

"Ha-ha!" He laughed in sudden giddy triumph. "Yes! Exactly!"

She rose from the chair, stepped to the head of the bed in a swirl of skirts. She reached a hand toward the gun, hesitated, then looked down at him.

"*Nicht nurfort solkt du dich pflanzen sondern hinauf,*" she said.

Her German was fluent, accented slightly by Yiddish. Freddie stared at her in astonishment.

"You read my journals!" he said.

A smile drifted across her face. "I wasn't very successful—your handwriting is difficult, and I speak German easier than I read it."

"My God." Wonder rang in his head. "No one has *ever* read my journals."

That is her Jewish aspect, he thought, *the people of the Book*. Reverence for thought, from the only people in the world who held literacy as a test of manhood.

Josie glanced down at him. "Tell me what that means—that we should propagate not only downward, but upward."

Weird elation sang through his head. "I meant that we need not be animals when—" He recalled the

decencies only at the last second, "—when we marry," he finished. "We need not bring only more apes into the world. We can *create*. We can be together not because we are lonely or inadequate, but because we are whole, because we wish to triumph!"

Josie gave a low, languorous laugh, and with an easy motion slid into his lap. Strangely enough he was not surprised. He put his arms around her, wild hope throbbing in his veins.

"Shall we triumph, Freddie?" she asked. Troy burned in her eyes.

"Yes!" he said in sudden delirium. "By God, yes!"

She bent forward, touched her lips to his. A rising, glorious astonishment whirled in Freddie's body and soul.

"You taste like a narcotic," she said softly, and—laughing low—kissed him again.

It was an hour or so later that the shots began echoing down Tombstone's streets, banging out with frantic speed, sounds startling in the surrounding stillness. Freddie sat up. "My God, what is that?" he said.

"Some of your friends, probably," Josie said. She reached out her hands, drew him down to the mattress again. "Whoever is shooting, they don't need you there."

Is that Behan's motto? Freddie wondered. But at the touch of her hands he felt flame burn in his veins, and he paid no attention to the shooting, not even when more guns began to speak, and the firing went on for some time.

In the morning he learned that it had been Curly Bill Brocius who was shooting, drunkenly fanning his revolver into the heavens; and that when the town marshal, Fred White, had tried to disarm him, Brocius's finger had slipped on the hammer and let it fall. White was dead, killed by Brocius's modified gun that would not hold the hammer at safety. A small battle had developed between Brocius's friends and various citizens, and Brocius had been slapped on the head by Wyatt Earp's long-barreled Colt and arrested for murder.

The next bit of news was that Marshal White's replacement had been chosen, and that Deputy U.S. Marshal Virgil Earp was now in charge of enforcing the law in the town of Tombstone.

It is like Texas again! Freddie wrote in his journal. It is not so much the killing, but the mad aimlessness of it all. Would that Brocius had been more discriminating with those bullets of his! Would that he had shot another lawman altogether!

The good citizens of Tombstone are overstimulated, and to avoid the possibility of a lynching the trial will be held at Tucson. I believe that law in Tucson is no less amenable to reason than was the law in Texas, and I have no fear that Brocius will meet a noose.

But while Brocius enjoys his parole, Tombstone must endure the Earps, in their black uniforms, marching about the streets like so many carrion crows. It is their slave souls they hide beneath those frock coats!

But I stay above them. I look down at them from my new rooms in the Grand Hotel. My landlady on Toughnut Street did not approve of what she called my "immortality." Though she was willing to accept as rent the gambling winnings of a known killer, she will not tolerate love in her back room. The manager of the Grand Hotel is more flexible in regard to morals—he gives me a front room, and he tips his hat when Josie walks past.

But I must train his cook, or indigestion will kill me.

How long has it been since a woman held me in her arms? Three • years? Four? And she was not a desirable woman, and did not desire anything from me other than the silver in my pocket.

Ach! It was a mad time. Life was cheap, but the price of love was two dollars in advance. I shot three men, and killed two, and the killing caused far less inconvenience than a few short minutes with a dance-hall girl.

Nor is Helen of Troy a dance-hall girl. She cares nothing for money and everything for power. The sexual impulse and conquest are one, and both are aspects perhaps of Jewish revenge. It is power that she seeks. But most atypically, her will to power is not based on an attempt to weaken others—she does not seek to castrate her men. She challenges them, rather, to match her power with their own. Those who cannot—like Behan—will suffer.

Those who act wisely, perhaps, will live. But I cannot be persuaded that this, ultimately, will matter to

her.

"I don't understand," Freddie said, "how it is that Virgil Earp can be Town Marshal and Deputy U.S. Marshal at the same time. Shouldn't he be compelled to resign one post or another?"

"Marshal Dake in Prescott don't mind if his deputy has a job on the side," said John Holliday.

"I should complain. I should write a letter to the newspaper. Or perhaps to the appropriate cabinet secretary."

"If you think it would do any good. But I think the U.S. government likes Virge right where he is."

Holliday sat with Freddie in the plush drawing room of the Grand Hotel, where Holliday had come for a visit. Their wing chairs were pulled up to the broad front window. Freddie turned his gaze from the bright October sunshine to look at Holliday. "I do not understand you," he said. "I do not understand why you are friends with these Earps."

"They're good men," Holliday said simply.

"But *you* are not, John," Freddie said.

A smile crinkled the corners of Holliday's gaunt eyes. "True," he said.

"You are a Southerner, and a gentleman, and a Democrat," Freddie said. "The Earps are Yankees, not gentle, and Republicans. I fail to understand your sympathy for them."

Holliday shrugged, reached into his pocket for a cigar. "I saved Wyatt from a mob of Texans once, in Dodge City," he said. "Since then I've taken an interest in him."

"But why?" Freddie asked. "Why did you save his life?"

Holliday struck a match and puffed his cigar into life, then drew the smoke into his ravaged lungs. He coughed once, sharply, then said, "It seemed a life worth saving."

Freddie gave a snort of derision.

"What I don't understand," said Holliday, "is why you dislike him. He's an extraordinary man. And your two greatest friends admire him."

"You and who else?"

"Your Sadie," John Holliday said. "She is with Wyatt Earp this moment, across the street in the Cosmopolitan Hotel."

Freddie stared at him, and then his gaze jerked involuntarily to the window again, to the bare facade of the Cosmopolitan, built swiftly and of naked lumber, devoid of paint. "But," he said, "but— Earp is married—:" He was aware of how ridiculous he sounded even as he stammered out the words.

"Oh," Holliday said casually, "I don't believe Wyatt and Mattie ever officially tied the knot—not that it signifies." He looked at Freddie and rolled the cigar in his fingers. "I thought you should hear it from me," he said, "rather than through the grapevine telegraph."

Freddie stared across the street and felt flaming madness beating at his brain. He considered storming across the street, kicking down the door, firing his Zarathustra, his pistol, again and again until it clicked on an empty chamber, until the walls were spattered with crimson and the room was filled with the stinging, purifying incense of powder smoke.

But no. He was not an animal, to act in blind fury. He would take revenge—if revenge were to be taken—as a human being. Coldly. With foresight. And with due regard for the consequences.

And for Freddie to fight for a woman. Was that not the most stupid piece of melodrama in the world?

Would not any decent dramatist in the world reject this plot as hackneyed?

He looked at Holliday, let a grin break across his face. "For a moment I was almost jealous!" he laughed.

"You're not?"

"Jealousy—pfah!" Freddie laughed again. "Sadie—Josie—she is free."

Holliday nodded. "That's one word for it."

"She is trying to get your Mr. Earp murdered. Or myself. Or the whole world."

"Gonna kill him!" said a voice. Freddie turned to see Ike Clan-ton, red-eyed and swaying with drink, dragging his spurs across the parlor carpet. Ike was in town on business and staying at the hotel. "Come join me, Freddie!" he said. "We'll kill him together!"

"Kill who, Ike?" Freddie asked.

"I'm gonna kill Doc Holliday!" Ike said.

"Here is Doc Holliday, right here," said Freddie.

Ike turned, swayed back on his boot heels, and saw Holliday sitting in the wing chair and unconcernedly smoking his cigar. Ike grinned, touched the brim of his sombrero. "Hiya, Doc!" he said cheerfully.

Holliday nodded politely. "Hello, Ike."

Ike grinned for a moment more, then remembered his errand and turned to Freddie. "So will you help me kill Doc Holliday, Freddie?"

"Doc's my friend, Ike," Freddie said.

Ike took a moment to process this declaration. "I forgot," he said, and then he reached out to clumsily pat Freddie's shoulder. "That's all right, then," he said with evident concern. "I regret I must kill your friend. Adios." He turned and swayed from the room.

Holliday watched Ike's exit without concern. "Why is Ike trying to kick a fight with me?" he said.

"God alone knows."

Holliday dismissed Ike Clanton with a contemptuous curl of his lip. He turned to Freddie. "Shall we find a game of cards?"

Freddie rose. "Why not? Let me get my hat."

Holliday took him to Earp country, to the Oriental Saloon. Freddie could not concentrate on the game—Wyatt Earp's faro table was in plain sight, Earp's empty chair all too visible; and visions of Josie and Earp kept burning in his mind, a writhing of white limbs in a hotel bed, scenes from his own private inferno—and Holliday calmly and professionally took Freddie's every penny, leaving him with nothing but his coat, his hat, and his gun.

"You don't own me." Freddie wrote in his notebook. She almost spat the words at me. It is her *cri de coeur*, her defiance to the world, her great maxim.

"I own nothing," I replied calmly. "Nothing at all." Close enough to the truth. I must find someone to lend me a stake so that I can win money and pay the week's lodging.

I argued my points with great precision, and she answered with fury. Her anger left me untouched—she accused me of jealousy, of all ridiculous things! It is easy to remain calm in the face of arrows that fly so wide of the mark. I asked her only to choose a man worthy of her. Behan is nothing, and Earp an earnest fool. Worthy in his own way, no doubt, but not of such as she.

Ah, well. Let her go. She is qualified to ruin her life in her own way, no doubt. I will keep my room at the Grand—unless poverty drives me into the street—and she will return when she understands her mistake.

I must remember my pocketbook, and earn some money. And I must certainly stay clear of John Holliday, at least at the card table.

I think I sense a migraine about to begin.

"Freddie?" It was Sheriff Behan who stood in the door of the Grand Hotel's parlor, his derby hat in his hand and a worried look on his face. "Freddie, can you come with me and talk to your friends?"

Freddie felt fragile after his migraine. Drugs still slithered their cold way through his veins. He looked at Behan and scowled. "What is it, Johnny?" he said. "Go away. I am not well."

"There's going to be a fight between the Earps and the Clantons and McLaurys. Your friends are going to get killed unless we do something."

"You're the sheriff," Freddie said, unable to resist digging in the spur. "Put the Clantons in jail."

"My God, Freddie!" Behan almost shouted. "I can't arrest the *Clantons*!"

"Not as long as they're letting you have this nice salary, I suppose." Freddie shook his head, then rose from his wing chair. "Very well. Tell me what is going on."

Ike Clanton had been very busy since Freddie had seen him last. He had wandered over Tombstone for two days, uttering threats against Doc Holliday to anyone who would listen. When he appeared in public with a pistol and rifle, Virgil Earp slapped him over the head with a revolver, confiscated his weapons, and tossed him in jail. Ike paid the twenty-five-dollar fine and returned to the streets, where he went boasting of his deadly intentions, now including the Earps in his threats. After Ike's brief trial, Wyatt Earp had encountered Ike's friend Tom McLaury on the street and pistol-whipped him. Now Tom was bent on

vengeance, as well. They had been seen in Spangenburg's gun shop, and had gathered a number of their friends. The Earps and Holliday were armed and ready. Vigilantes, were arming all over Tombstone, ready for blood. Behan had promised to stave off disaster by disarming the Cowboys, and he wanted help.

"This is absurd," Freddie muttered. The clear October light sent daggers into his brain. "They are behaving like fools."

"They're down at the corral," Behan said. "It's legal for them to carry arms there, but if they step outside I'll—" He blanched. "-I'll have to do something."

The first tendrils of the euphoria that followed his migraines began to enfold Freddie's brain. "Very well," he said. "I'll come."

The lethargy of the drugs warred within Freddie's mind with growing elation as Behan led Freddie down Allen Street, then through the front entrance of the O.K. Corral, a narrow livery stable that ran like an alley between Allen and Fremont Streets. The Clantons were not in the corral, and Behan was almost frantic as he led Freddie out the back entrance onto Fremont, where Freddie saw the Cowboys standing in the vacant lot between Camillus Fly's boarding house, where Holliday lodged with his Kate, and another house owned by a man named Harwood.

There were five of them, Freddie saw. Ike and his brother Billy, Tom and Frank McLaury, and their young friend Billy Claiborne, who like almost every young Billy in the West was known as "Billy the Kid," after another, more famous outlaw who was dead and could not dispute the title. Tom McLaury led a horse by the reins. The group stood in the vacant lot in the midst of a disagreement. When he saw Freddie walking toward him, Billy Claiborne looked relieved.

"Freddie!" he said. "Thank God! You help me talk some sense into these men!"

Ike looked at Freddie with a broad grin. "We're going to kill Doc Holliday!" he said cheerfully. "We're going to wait for him to come home, then blow his head off!"

Freddie glanced up at Fly's boarding house, with its little photographic studio out back, then returned his gaze to Ike. He tried to concentrate against the chorus of euphoric angels that sang in his mind. "Doc won't be coming back till late," he said. "You might as well go home."

Ike shook his head vigorously. "No," he said. "I'm gonna kill Doc Holliday!"

"Ike," Freddie pointed out, "you don't even have a gun."

Ike turned red. "It's only because that son of a bitch Spangenburg wouldn't sell me one!"

"You can't kill Holliday without a gun," Freddie said. "You might as well come back *to* the hotel with me." He reached out to take Ike's arm.

"Now wait a minute, Freddie," said Ike's brother Billy. "*I've* got a gun." He pulled back his coat to show his revolver. "And I think killing Holliday is a sound enough idea. It'll hurt the Earps. And no one 'round here likes Doc—nobody's going to care if he gets killed."

"Holiday and half the town know you're standing here ready to kill him," Freddie said. "He's heeled and so are the Earps. Your ambush is going to fail."

"That's what I've been trying to tell them!" Billy Claiborne added, and then moaned, "Oh, Lord, they'll make a blue fist of it!"

"Hell," said Tom McLaury. The side of his head was swollen where Wyatt Earp had clouted him. "We've got to fight the Earps sooner or later. Might as well do it now."

"I agree you should fight," Freddie said. "But this is not the time or the place."

"This place is good as any other!" Tom said. "That bastard Earp hit me for no reason, and I'm going to put a bullet in him."

"I'm with my brother on this," said Frank McLaury.

"Nobody can stand up to us!" Ike said. "With us five and Freddie here, the Earps had better start praying."

Exasperation overwhelmed the exaltation that sang in Freddie's skull. With the ferocious clarity that was an aspect of his euphoria, he could see exactly what would happen. The Earps were professional lawmen—they did not chew their own tobacco, as Brocius would say—and when they came they would be ready. They might come with a crowd of vigilantes. The Cowboys, half unarmed, would stand wondering what to do, would have no leader, would wait too long to reach a decision, and then they would be cut down.

"I have no gun!" Freddie told Ike. "*You* have no gun. And the Kid here has no gun. Three of you cannot fight a whole town, I think. You should go home and wait for a better time. Wait till Bill Brocius's trial is over, and get John Ringo to join you."

"You only say that 'cause you're a coward!" Ike said. "You're a kraut-eating yellowbelly! You won't stand by your friends!"

Murder sang a song of fury in Freddie's blood. His hand clawed as if it held a gun—and the fact that there was no gun did not matter; the claw could as easily seize Ike's throat. Ike took a step backwards at the savage glint in Freddie's eyes. Then Freddie shook his head, and said, "This is folly. I wash my hands of it." He turned and began to walk away.

"Freddie!" Behan yelled. He sprang in front of Freddie, bounding on his neat polished brown boots. "You can't leave! You've got to help me with this!",

Freddie drew himself up, glared savagely at Behan. Righteous angels sang in his mind. "You are the sheriff, I collect," he said. "Dealing with it is your job!"

Behan froze, his mouth half-open. Freddie stepped around him and marched away, down Fremont to the back entrance to the O.K. Corral, then through the corral to Allen Street/Exaltation thrilled in his blood like wine. He crossed the street to the shadier south side—the sun was still hammering his head—and began the walk to the Grand Hotel. At Fourth Street he looked south and saw a mob—forty or fifty armed citizens, mostly hard-bitten miners—marching toward him up the street.

If this crowd found the Clantons, the Cowboys were dead. Surely Freddie's friends could now be convinced that they must fight another day.

Freddie turned and hastened along Allen Street toward the O.K. Corral, but then gunfire cracked out, the sudden bright sounds jolting his nerves, and he felt his heart sink even as he broke into a run. A shotgun boomed, and windows rattled in nearby buildings. He dashed through the long corral, then jumped over the fence, ran past the photography studio, and into the back door of Camillus Fly's boarding house.

John Behan crouched beneath a window with his blue-steel revolver in his hand. The window had been shattered by bullets, and its yellow organdy curtain fluttered in the breeze, but there was no scent of smoke or other indication that Behan had ever fired his pistol. Shrieks rang in the air, cries of mortal agony. Freddie ran beside the window and peered out. His heart hammered, and he panted for breath after his run.

The narrow vacant lot was hazy with gunsmoke. Lying at the far end were the bodies of two men, Tom McLaury and Billy Clanton. Just four or five paces in front of them were the three Earps and John Holliday. Morgan was down with a wound. Virgil knelt on the dry ground, leg bleeding, and he supported himself with a cane. Holliday's back was to Freddie—he had a short Wells Fargo shotgun broken open over one arm—and there were bright splashes of blood on Holliday's coat and trousers.

In Fremont Street, behind the Earps, Frank McLaury lay screaming in the dust. He was covered with blood. Apparently he had run right through the Earps and collapsed. His agonized shrieks raised the hair on the back of Freddie's neck.

Of Billy Claiborne and Ike Clanton, Freddie saw no sign. Apparently the unarmed men had run away.

Wyatt Earp stood over his brother Morgan, unwounded, a long-barreled Colt in his hand. Savage hatred burned in Freddie's heart. He glared down at Behan.

"What have you done?" he hissed. "Why didn't you stop it?" "I tried!" Behan said. "You saw that I tried. Oh, this is horrible!" "You fool. Why do you bother to carry this?" Freddie reached down and snatched the revolver from Behan's hand. He looked out the window again and saw Wyatt Earp standing like a bronze statue over his wounded brother. Angels sang a song of glory in Freddie's blood.

Make something of it, he thought. Make something of this other than a catastrophe. Make it mean something.

He cocked Behan's gun. Earp heard the sound and raised his head, suddenly alert. And then German Freddie put six shots into Earp's breast from a distance of less than a dozen feet. "My God!" Behan bleated. "What are you doing?" Freddie looked at him, a savage grin taut on his face. He dropped the revolver at Behan's feet as return fire began to sing through the window. He ran into the back of the studio, out the back door, and was sprinting down Third Street when he heard Behan's voice ringing over the sound of barking gunfire. "It wasn't me! I swear to Mary!" Mad laughter bubbled from Freddie's lips as he heard the crash of a door being kicked down. Behan screamed something else, something that might have been

"German Freddie!"—but whatever he was trying to say was cut short by a storm of fire.

A steam whistle shattered the air as Freddie ran south. Someone was blowing the alarm at the Uzina Mine. And when Freddie reached the corner, he saw the vigilante mob pouring up Allen Street, heading for the front gate of the O.K. Corral. He waited a few seconds for the leaders to swarm through the gate, and then he quietly crossed the street at a normal walking pace. Despite the way he panted for breath, Freddie had a hard time not breaking into a run.

He had never felt such joy, not even in Josie's arms.

By roundabout means he walked to the Grand Hotel. Once he had Zarathustra in his hand he began to breathe more easily. Still, he concluded, it was time to leave town. There were any number of people who could place him near the site of that streetfight, and possibly some of the vigilantes had seen him stroll away.

And then a thought struck him—he had no horse! He was a bad rider and had come to Tombstone on the Wells Fargo stage. The only way he could get a horse would be to stroll back to the O.K. Corral and hire one, with the lynch mob looking on.

He laughed and put Zarathustra in his coat pocket. He was trapped in a town filled with Earps and armed vigilantes.

"It is time to be bold," he said aloud. "It is time to be cunning."

He washed his hands, to remove the reek of gunpowder, and changed his shirt.

It occurred to him that there existed a place where he might hide.

He put his journal in another pocket, and made his way out of the hotel.

Oh, she is magnificent! Freddie wrote in his journal a few hours later. She hid me in Behan's house while Behan lay painted in his coffin in the front window of the undertakers—Ritter and Reams are making the most of this opportunity to advertise their art! I rested on Behan's bed while she received callers in the front room. And then, at nightfall, she had Behan's horse saddled and brought to the back door.

"Will I see you again?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," I said. "Destiny will not permit us to part for long."

"Do you have money?"

I confessed that I did not. She went into the house and came back with an envelope of bills which she put in my pocket. Later I counted them and found they amounted to five thousand dollars. The office of sheriff pays surprisingly well!

I took her hand. "Troy is afire, my Helen. Do you have what you desire?"

"I did not want this," she said. Her fingers clutched at mine.

"Of course you did," I said. "What else did you expect?"

I rode to Charleston with her kiss burning on my lips. Charleston is a town ruled by the Cowboys, and so I knew I could find shelter there, but it is also the first place a posse will come.

It will be a war now—my bullets have decreed it. I welcome that war, I welcome the trumpet that will awaken the new Romulus. Battles there shall be, and victories. And both those who die and those who live shall be awarded a Tombstone—what an irony!

I am curiously satisfied with the day's business. It is a man's life that I'm leading. Were I to live these same events a thousand times, I would find no reason to alter the outcome.

"There are more Earps than before," John Ringo observed from over the rim of his beer glass. "James and Warren have come to town. You're creatin' more Earps than you're killin', Freddie."

"Two hundred rifles," Freddie urged. "Raise them! Make Tombstone yours!"

Curly Bill Brocius shook his head. "No more shootings. The town's riled enough as it is. I don't want my parole revoked, and besides, I've got to make certain that our man gets in as sheriff."

"Let us purge this choler without letting blood," Ringo said, and wiped foam from his mustache.

"Still these politics!" Freddie scorned. "Who is our man this time?"

"Fellehy."

"The laundryman? What kind of sheriff will he make?"

Brocius gave his easy grin. "No kind," he said. "Which is *our* kind."

"He will be worse than Behan. And it was Behan's bungling that killed three of our friends."

Brocius's grin faded. "I don't reckon," he said.

Freddie had made good his escape and met Ringo and Brocius in the Golden Saloon in Tucson. He was not quite far enough from Tombstone—Freddie kept his back to a wall and his eye on the door, just in case a crowd of men in frock coats barged in.

"So when may we start killing Earps?" Freddie asked.

"We're going to do it legal-like," Brocius said. "Ike Clanton's going to file in court against the Earps and Holliday for murder. They'll hang, and we won't have to pull a trigger."

Disgust filled Freddie's heart. "You are making yourself ridiculous," he said. "These men have killed your friends!"

"No more shooting," said Brocius. "We'll use the law's own weapons against the law, and we'll be back in charge quick as a dog can lick a dish."

Freddie looked at Brocius in fury, and then he laughed. "Very well, then," he said. "We shall see what joys the law brings us!"

You could play the law game any number of ways, Freddie thought. And he thought he knew how he wanted to bid his hand.

"Ike Clanton said he was going to kill Doc Holliday," Freddie testified. "His brother supported him, and so did the McLaurys. Claiborne and I were trying to talk sense into their stupid heads, but Ike was abusive, so I left in disgust."

There was stunned silence in the courtroom. Freddie was a witness for the prosecution, but was handing the defense its case on a plate.

The prosecution witnesses had agreed on a story ahead of time, how the Cowboys had been unarmed, and the Earps the aggressors. Now Freddie was blowing the case to smithereens.

Price, the district attorney, was so stunned by Freddie's testimony that he blurted out what had to be absolutely the wrong question. "You say that Ike was *intending* to kill Mr. Holliday?"

Freddie looked at Ike from his witness chair. The man stared back at him, disbelief plain on his face, and out of the slant of his eye he saw Holliday look at him thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes," Freddie said. "But Ike is too much the drunken coward to actually carry out his threats. He ran away from the streetfight and left his brother to die in the dust."

Bullets or nothing, Freddie thought. *We shall honor valor or honor shall lie dishonored.*

"You son of a bitch," Ike Clanton said in the Grand Hotel's parlor, after the trial had adjourned for the day. "What did you say those things for?"

"Because they're true," Freddie said. "Do you think I would lie to protect a worthless dog like you?"

Ike turned red. "You skin that back, you bastard! Skin that back, or I'll settle with you!"

Freddie wiped Ike's spittle from his chin with his handkerchief. "It's Doc Holliday you hate, is it not?" he said. "Why don't you settle with him first?"

"I'm gonna get him! And you, too!"

"Do it now," Freddie advised, "while you're almost sober. You know where Holliday lives. Perhaps if you work up all your courage you can shoot him in the back." Freddie reached into his pocket, took hold of Zarathustra, and thumbed back the hammer. Ike's eyes widened at the sound. He made a little whining noise in his throat.

"Don't shoot me!" he blurted.

"You can kill Holliday now," Freddie said, "or I will shoot you like a dog where you stand. And who will take *me* to court for such a thing?"

"I'll do it!" Ike said quickly. "I'll kill him! See if I don't!"

"I believe you checked your gun with the desk clerk," Freddie reminded him.

Freddie followed him to the front desk and kept his hand on the pistol. Ike cast him frantic glances over his shoulder as he was given his gun belt. He made certain his hand was nowhere near the butt of the

weapon as he strapped it on—he did not want to give a man with Freddie's murderous reputation a chance to shoot.

Freddie followed Ike out into the street and glared at him when it looked as if he would step into a saloon for some liquid courage. Ike saw the glare, then began to walk faster down the street. Freddie pursued, boots thumping on the wooden walk. At the end of the long walk, when Fly's boarding house came into sight, Ike was almost running.

Freddie paused then, and began a leisurely stroll *to* the hotel. Gunfire erupted behind him, but he didn't break stride. He knew Ike Clanton, and he knew John Holliday, and he knew which of the two now lay dead.

"The legal case will collapse without a plaintiff," Freddie said that evening. "The district attorney may file a criminal case, but why would he? He knows the defense would call me as a witness." He laughed. "And now, after this second killing, Holliday will have to leave town. That is another problem solved."

Josie stretched luxuriously in Behan's bed. She was wearing a little transparent silken thing that Behan had bought her from out of a French catalogue, and Freddie, lying next to her, let his eyes feast gratefully on the ripeness of her body. She seemed well pleased with his eyes' amorous intentions, and rolled a little in the bed, to and fro, to show herself from different angles.

"You seem very pleased with yourself," she said.

"I have nothing against Holliday. I like the man. I'm glad he will be out of it."

"You're the only man alive who likes him. Now that Johnny's killed Wyatt." A silence hung for a moment in the air, and then Josie rolled over and put her chin on her crossed arms. Her dark eyes regarded him solemnly.

"Yes?" Freddie said, knowing the question that would come.

"There are people who say if was you who shot Wyatt," she said.

Freddie looked at her. "One of your lovers shot him," he said. "Does it matter which?"

"Did you kill for me, Freddie?" There was a strange thrill in her voice. "Did you kill Wyatt?"

"If I killed Wyatt," Freddie said coldly, "it was not for you. I did not do it to make you the heroine of a melodrama."

She made as if to say something, but she turned her head away, laying her cheek on her hand. Freddie reached out to caress her rich dark hair. "Troy burns for you, my Helen," he said. "Is it not your triumph?"

"I don't understand you," she said.

"I am in love with Fate," Freddie said. "I regret nothing, and neither should you. Everything you do, let it be as if you would—as if *you must*—do it again ten thousand times."

She was silent. He reached beneath her masses of hair, took her chin in his fingers, raised her face to his. "Come, my queen," he said. "Give me ten thousand kisses. And let us not regret a one of them."

#

Ten thousand kisses! Freddie wrote in his journal. She does not yet understand her power—that she can change the universe, and all the universes yet to be born.

How many times have I killed Earp, in worlds long dead? And how many times must I kill him again? The thought is joy to me. I crave nothing more. Ten thousand bullets, ten thousand kisses. Forever.

Amor fad. Love is all.

"Sir." Holliday bowed. Not yet healed, he stood stiffly, and supported his wounded hip with a cane. "The district attorney is of the opinion that Arizona and I must part. I thought I would take my adieu."

Freddie rose from his wing-backed chair and offered his hand. "I'm sure we'll meet again," he said.

"Maybe so." He shook the hand, then stood, a frown on his gaunt face. "Freddie—," he began.

"Yes?"

"Get out of this," Holliday said. "Take Josie away. Go to California, Nevada, anywhere."

Freddie laughed. "There's still silver in Tombstone, John."

"Yes." He seemed saddened. He hesitated again. "I wanted to thank you, for your words at the trial."

Freddie made a dismissive gesture. "Ike Clanton wasn't worth the bullets it took to kill him," he said.

Holliday looked at Freddie gravely. "People might say that of the two of us," he said.

"I'm sure they would."

There was another hesitation, another silence. "Freddie," Holliday said.

"John." Smiling.

"There is a story that it was you who killed my friend."

Freddie laughed, though there was a part of his soul that writhed beneath Holliday's gaze. "If I believed all the stories about *you*—," he began.

"I do not know what to believe," Holliday said. "And whatever the truth, I am glad I killed that cur Behan. But it is your own friends—your Cowboys—who are spreading this story. They are boasting of it. And if I ever come to believe it is true—or if anything happens to Wyatt's brothers—then God help you." The words, forced from the consumptive lungs, were surprisingly forceful. "God help all you people."

Sudden fury flashed through Freddie's veins. "Why do you all place such a value on this *Earp*? I do not understand you!"

Cold steel glinted in Holliday's eyes. His pale face flushed. "He was worth fifty of you!" he cried. "And a hundred of me!"

"But *why*?" Freddie demanded.

Holliday began to speak, but something caught in his throat—he shook his head, bowed again, and hastened from the room as blood erupted from his ruined lungs.

Why was I so upset? Freddie wrote in his journal. It is not as if I do not understand how the world works. Homer wrote of Achilles and Hector battling over Troy, not about philosophers dueling with epigrams. It is people like the Earps whom the storytellers love, and whom they make immortal.

It is only philosophers who love other philosophers—unless of course they hate them.

If I wish to be remembered, I must do as the Earps do. I must be brave, and unimaginative, and die in a foolish way, over nothing.

"Why do I smell a dead cat on the line?" Brocius asked. "Freddie, why do I see you at the bottom of all my troubles?"

"Be joyful, Bill," Freddie said. "You've been found innocent of murder and you have your bond money back—at least for the next hour or two." He dealt a card faceup to Ringo. "Possible straight," he observed.

John Ringo contemplated this eventuality without joy. "These words hereafter thy tormentors be," he said, and poured himself another shot of whiskey from the bottle by his elbow.

"I have been solving your problems, not adding to them," Freddie told Brocius. "I have solved your Wyatt Earp problem. And thanks to me) Doc Holliday has left town."

Brocius looked at him sharply. "What did you have to do with *that*?"

"That's between me and Holliday. Pair of queens bets."

Looking suspiciously at Freddie, Brocius pushed a gold double eagle onto the table. Freddie promptly raised by another double eagle. Ringo folded. Brocius sighed, lazy eyelids drooping.

"What's the *next* problem you're going to solve?" Brocius asked.

"Other than this hand? It's up to you. After this last killing, your Mr. Fellehy the Laundryman will never be appointed sheriff in Behan's place. They'll want a tough lawman who will work with Virgil Earp to clean up Cochise County. Are you going to call, Bill?"

"I'm thinking."

"The solution to your problem—*this* problem—is to remove Virgil Earp from all calculations."

Ringo gave a laugh. "You'll just get two more Earps in his place!" he said. "That's what happened last time."

Brocius frowned. "Entities are not multiplied beyond what is necessary."

Freddie was impressed. "Very good, Bill. I am teaching you, I see."

Brocius narrowed his eyes and looked at Freddie. "Are you going to solve this problem for me, Freddie?"

"Yes. I think you should fold."

Brocius pushed out a double eagle. "Call. I meant the *other* problem."

Freddie dealt the next round of cards. "I think I have solved enough problems for you," he said slowly. "I am becoming far too prominent a member of your company for my health. I think you should arrange the solution on your own, and I will make a point of being in another place, in front of twenty unimpeachable witnesses."

Brocius looked at the table and scratched his chin. "You just dealt yourself an ace."

"And that makes a pair. And the pair of aces bets fifty." Freddie pushed the money out to the middle of the table.

Brocius looked at his hole card, then threw it down.

"I reckon I fold," he said.

"Oh, they have bungled it!" Freddie stormed. "They have shot the wrong Earp!"

He paced madly in Behan's parlor, while Josie watched from her chair. "The assassin was to shoot Virgil!" Freddie said. "He mistook his man and shot Morgan instead—and he didn't even kill him!"

"Who did the shooting?" Josie said.

"I don't know. Some fool." Freddie paused in his pacing to furiously polish his spectacles. "And I will be blamed. This was supposed to occur when I was in the saloon, playing cards in front of witnesses. Instead it occurred when I was in bed with you."

She looked at him in surprise. "Ain't I a witness, Freddie?" she said in her mocking New York voice.

Freddie laughed bitterly. "They might calculate that you are prejudiced in my favor."

"They would be right." She rose, took Freddie's hands. "Perhaps you should leave Tombstone."

"And go where?" He put his arms around her. The scent of her French perfume drifted delicately through his senses.

"There are plenty of mining towns in the West," she said. "Plenty of places to play poker. And almost all have theaters, and will need someone to play the ingenue."

He looked at her. "My friends are here, Josie. And it is here that you are queen."

"*Amorfad*," she murmured. He felt her shoulders fall slightly in acknowledgment of the defeat, and then she straightened. "I had better learn to shoot, then," she said. "Will you teach me?"

"I will. But I'm not a very good shot—my eyesight, you know."

"But you're a—" She hesitated.

"A killer? A gunman?" He smiled. "Certainly. But all my fights took place at a range of less than five meters—one was in a small room, three meters square. But still—yes—why not? It can do us no harm to be seen practicing."

"What is the best way to become a gunman?" Josie said.

"Not to care if you die," Freddie said promptly. "You must not fear death. I was deadly because I knew I was dying. John Holliday is dangerous for the same reason—he knows he must in any case die soon, so why not now? And John Ringo—he does not value his own life, clearly."

She tilted her head, looked at him carefully. "But you weren't dying at all. You may live as long as any of us. Does that make a fight more dangerous for you?"

Freddie considered this notion in some surprise. He wondered if he now truly had reasons to live, and whether the chief one was now in his arms.

"I am at least experienced in a fight," he said. "I'll keep my head, and kill or die as a man. It is important, in any case, to die at the right time."

Small comfort: he felt her tremble. *Treasure this while you may*, he thought; *and know that you have treasured it before, and will again.*

In the event it was not Freddie who died first. Three days after James Earp was appointed sheriff, Curly Bill Brocius was found dead on the road between Tombstone and Charleston. Two friends lay with him, all riddled with bullets. The only Earp not a suspect was Morgan, with a near-mortal wound in his spine, who had been carried into the county jail, where he was guarded by a half-dozen of the Earps' newly deputized supporters.

The other three Earp brothers, and a number of their friends, were not to be found in town. For several days the sound of volleys boomed off the blue Dragoon Mountains, echoed over the dry hills. Apparently they were not all fired in anger: most were signals from the Earps to their friends, who were bringing them supplies. But still three Cowboys were found dead, shot near their homes; and the Clanton spread

was burned. A day later John Ringo rode into town on a lathered horse, claiming he'd been chased by a half-dozen gunmen.

"And Holliday's with them," Ringo said. "I saw the bastard, big as life."

Freddie's heart sank. "I was afraid of that."

• "His hip's still bothering him, and Virgil's leg. Otherwise they would have caught me." He blew dust from his mustache and looked at Freddie. "We need a posse of our own, friend."

"So we do."

They called out their friends, but a surprising number had made themselves scarce. Freddie and Ringo assembled a dozen riders, all that remained of Brocius's mighty outlaw army, and hoped to pick up more as they rode.

Josie surprised everyone by showing up in riding clothes at the O.K. Corral, her new pistol hanging from her belt. "I will go, of course," she said.

Freddie's heart sang in praise of her bravery, but he touched his hat and said, "I believe that Helen should remain on Ilium's topless towers, where it is safe."

She looked at him, and he saw the jaw muscles tauten. "Those towers burned," she said. "And I don't want to survive another lover."

Freddie's heart flooded over. He kissed her, and knew he would kiss her thus time and again, for infinity.

"Come then!" he said. "We shall meet our fate together!"

"Let slip the dogs of war," Ringo commented wryly, and they rode out of town into a chill dawn.

They followed a pillar of smoke, a mining claim that belonged to one of the Cowboys. No one had been killed because no one was home, but the diggings had been thoroughly burned. From the mine they followed the trail north. After two days of riding they were disappointed to discover that the trail led to the Sierra Bonita, the largest ranch in the district. Ringo and his friends had been running off Sierra Bonita's cattle for years. The place was built like a fort against Apache raids, and if the Earps and their friends were inside, then they were as safe as if they were holed in Gibraltar.

"*Hic funis nihilattraxit*," Ringo muttered. This line has taken no fish. Freddie hoped he didn't smell Brocius's dead cat on the line.

The posse retreated from the Sierra Bonita to consider their options, but these narrowed considerably when they saw a cloud of dust on the northern horizon, a cloud that grew ever closer.

"Looks like we've been outposse'd," Ringo said. "Their horses are fresh—we can't outrun them."

"What do we do?" Freddie gasped. Two days in the saddle, even riding moderately, had exhausted him—unlike Josie, who seemed to thrive once cast in the role of Bandit Queen.

Ringo seemed almost gay. "They have tied us to the stake, we cannot fly." Freddie could have wished Ringo had not chosen *Macbeth*. "I think we'd better find a place to fort up," Ringo said.

Their Dunsinane was a rocky hill barren of life but for cactus and scrub. They hid the horses behind rocks and dug themselves in. Within an hour the larger outfit had found them: the Earps had been reinforced by two dozen riders from the Sierra Bonita, and it looked like a small army that posted itself about the hill and sealed off every exit. The pursuers did not attempt to come within gunshot: they knew all they had to do was wait for the Cowboys' water to run out.

Ringo's crew had a smaller store of water than their enemies probably suspected, and one night on the hill would surely exhaust it. "We shall have to fight," Freddie said.

"Yes."

"Few of those people have any experience in a combat. Holliday and Virgil Earp are the only two I know of. The rest will get too excited and throw away their fire, and that will give us our chance."

Ringo smiled. "I think we should charge. Come down off the hill first light screaming like Apaches and pitch into the nearest pack of them. If we run them off, we can take their horses and make a dash for it."

"Agreed. I will have to follow you—otherwise I can't see well enough to know where I'm going."

"I'll lead you into the hornet's nest, don't you worry."

Freddie sought out Josie, lying in the shade of some rocks, and took her hand. The sun had burned her cheeks; her lips were starting to crack with thirst. "We will fight in the morning," he said. "I want you to stay here."

She shook her head, mouthed the word *no*.

"You are the only one of us they will not harm," Freddie said. "The rest of us will charge out of the circle, and you can join us later."

The words drove her into a fury. She was in a state of high excitement, and wanted to put her pistol practice to use.

"It is not as you think," Freddie said. "This will not be a great battle, it will be something small and squalid. And—" He took her hands. She flailed to throw off his touch, but he held her. "Josie!" he cried. "I need someone to publish my work, if I should not survive. No one else will care. It must be you."

She was of the People of the Book; Freddie calculated she could not refuse. At his words her look softened. "All right, then," she said. He kissed her, but she turned her sunburned lips away. She would not speak for a while, and so Freddie wrote for an hour in his journal with a stub of pencil.

They spent a rough night together, lying cold under blankets, shivering together while Cowboys snored around them. As the eastern sky began to lighten, all rose, and the horses were saddled and led out. The last of the water was shared, and then the riders mounted.

Ringo seemed in good cheer. Freddie half expected him to give the Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V*, but Ringo contented himself with nodding, clicking to his horse, and leading the beast between the tall rocks, down the hill toward the dying fires of the Earps' camp. Freddie pulled his bandanna over his nose, less to conceal his identity than to avoid eating Ringo's dust, then followed Ringo's horse down into the gloom.

The horsemen cleared the rocks, then broke into a canter. They covered half the distance to the Earp outfit's camp before the first shot rang out; then Ringo gave a whoop and the Cowboys answered, the high-pitched yells ringing over the dusty ground.

Freddie was too busy staying atop his horse to add to the clamor. His teeth rattled with every hoofbeat. He wanted a calm place to stand.

Other, better horsemen, half-seen in the predawn light, passed him as he rode. A flurry of shots crackled out. Freddie clutched Zarathustra tighter. Startled men on foot dodged out of his way.

Abruptly the horse stumbled—Freddie tried to check it but somehow made things worse—and then there was a staggering blow to his shoulder as he was flung to the ground. He rolled, and in great surprise at his own agility rose with his pistol still in his hand. A figure loomed up—with dust coating his spectacles Freddie could not make it out—but he shot it anyway, twice, and it groaned and fell.

The yells of the Cowboys were receding southward amid a great boil of dust. Freddie ran after. Bullets made whirring noises about his head.

Then out of the dust came a horse. Freddie half raised his pistol, but recognized Ringo before he pulled trigger. "Take my hand, Freddie," Ringo said with a great grin, "and we're free." But then one of the whizzing bullets came to a stop with a horrible smack, and Ringo toppled from the horse. Freddie stared in sudden shock at his friend's brains laid out at his feet—Ringo was beyond all noble gestures now, that was clear, there was nothing to be done for him—Freddie reached for the saddle horn. The beast was frightened and began to run before Freddie could mount; Freddie ran alongside, trying to get a foot in the stirrup, and then the horse put on a burst of terrified speed and left Freddie behind.

Rage and frustration boomed in his heart. He swiped at his spectacles to get a better view, then ran back toward the sound of shooting. A man ran across his field of vision and Zarathustra boomed. The man kept running.

Freddie neared a bush and ducked behind it, polished his spectacles quickly on his bandanna, and stuck them back on his face. The added clarity was not great. The Earps' camp was in a great turmoil in the dust and the half-light, and people were shouting and shooting and running about without any apparent purpose.

Fools! Freddie wanted to shriek. *You do not even know how to live, let alone how to die!*

He approached the nearest man at a walk, put Zarathustra to the stranger's breast, and pulled the trigger. When the man fell, Freddie took the other's gun in his left hand, then stalked on. He fired a shot at a startled stranger, who ran.

"Stop, Freddie!" came a shout. "Throw up your hands!"

It was Holliday's voice. Freddie froze in his tracks, panting for breath in the cold morning air. Holliday

was somewhere to his right—a shift of stance and Freddie could fire—but Holliday would kill him before that, he knew.

Troy is burning, he thought. *You have killed as a human being. Now die as one. Freely, and at the right moment.*

"Throw up your hands!" Holliday called again, and then from the effort of the shout gave a little cough.

Wild exhilaration flooded through Freddie's veins—Holliday's cough had surely spoiled his aim. Freddie swung right as he thumbed the hammer back on each of the two revolvers. And, for the last time, Zarathustra spoke.

The Earp posse caught up with Josie a few hours later as she rode her solitary way to Tombstone. John Holliday shivered atop his horse, trembling as if the morning chill had not yet left his bones. He touched his hat to her, but she ignored him, just kept her plug walking south.

"This was Freddie's, ma'am," Holliday said in his polite Southern way, and held out a book bound between cardboard covers, Freddie's journal. "You figure in his thoughts," Holliday said. "You may wish to have it."

Coldly, without a word, she took the worn volume from his hand. Holliday kicked his horse and the posse rode on, moving swiftly past her into the bright morning.

Josie tried not to look at the bodies that tossed and dangled over the saddles.

What have I found to cherish in this detestable land? Josie read when she returned to Tombstone. Comrades, and valor, and the woman of my heart. Who came to me *because she was free*. And for whom—*because she is free*—Troy will burn, and men will spill their lives into the dust. Every free woman may kill a world.

She will not chain herself; she despises the slavery that is modern life. This is freedom indeed, the freedom to topple towers and destroy without regard. Not from petulance or fear, but from greatness of heart! She does not *seek* power, she simply wields it, as a part of her nature.

Can I be less brave than she? For a gunman, or a philosopher, to live or die or scribble on paper is nothing. For a girl to overturn the order of the world—to stand over the bodies of her lovers and desire only to arm herself—for such a girl to become Fate itself—!

This Fate will I meet with joy. It is clear enough what the morning will bring, and the thought brings no terror. Let my end bring no sadness to my darling Fate, my joy—I have died a million times ere now, and will awake a million more to the love of my—of my Josie—

The words whirled in her mind. Her head ached, and her heart. The words were not easy to understand. Josie knew there were many more notebooks stacked in Freddie's room at the hotel, volume after volume packed with dense script, most in a frantic scrawled German that seemed to have been written in a kind of frenzy, the words mashed onto and over one another in a colossal road-accident of crashing ideas.

There was no longer any reason to stay in Tombstone: her lovers were dead, and those who hated her lived. She would take Freddie's journals away, read them, try to make sense of them. Perhaps something could even be published. In any case she would not give any of the notebooks to that sister Elisabeth, who would twist Freddie's words into a weapon against the Jews.

She had been Freddie's fate, or so he claimed. Now the notebooks—Freddie's words, Freddie's thoughts—were her own destiny.

She would embrace her fate as Freddie had embraced his, and carry it like a newborn infant from this desolation, this desert. This Tombstone.

AFTERWORD TO "THE LAST RIDE OF GERMAN FREDDIE"

It is appropriate that Friedrich Nietzsche be the subject of an alternate-worlds story, as his theory of Eternal Recurrence posited an infinity of universes, though these worlds were not, strictly speaking, *alternate*: instead the theory insisted on all the universes being alike, with the same people repeating the same actions again and again. It is not within my competence to judge whether Nietzsche actually believed this, or whether he used the theory as a metaphor to make the larger point that we should do nothing that we would regret doing over and over again, unto infinity.

"The Last Ride of German Freddie" sprang fully armed from my head in a discussion on the online forum Duelling Modems, in which I suggested that it might be fun if someone wrote an alternate history story in which Nietzsche went West and tested his theories of destruction at the O.K. Corral. No sooner had I suggested this than I realized that I should be the one to attempt the story.

All the characters actually existed, from German Freddie and Josie to Fellehy the Laundryman. Aside from introducing Freddie as a witness and eliminating some characters (like Bat Masterson and Texas John Slaughter) who had no effect on the action, I have followed history very precisely up till the moment of Freddie's intervention in the O.K. Corral gunfight.

In creating this story, I found that the chief obstacle was not in overcoming history but in overcoming the cinema. Most people gain their knowledge of the Old West from the movies, and the movies are romances, not history. Gunfights are presented at the climax of films, but the O.K. Corral fight was in reality the beginning of a war, not the end. Even the name "The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral" is the title of a film: until the film's release, the battle was known more simply as "the streetfight in Tombstone."

Another conception given us by the movies is that "gunfighter" was a job description: in reality, no one was ever paid for being a gunfighter. John Holliday was a gambler; Billy the Kid a ranch hand; Wyatt Earp a lawman; John Ringo an outlaw; Bat Masterson a sports writer and entrepreneur. I have chosen to make German Freddie a gambler, on the theory that a teetotaler with a good mind could earn a good living playing poker in saloons with drunks.

The story does not solve the central mystery of Wyatt Earp: why he is remembered and revered when others, equally well known in their day, are forgotten. Bill Tilghman was a more successful lawman; Clay Allison a deadlier shot; and Dirty Dave Rudabaugh more colorful. But only Wyatt Earp rides forever in the movies. Everyone who knew Wyatt Earp seems to have agreed that he was an extraordinary man, but none of them bothered to record why.

I have no answers to the question of Earp's fame, and so I have transferred my own lack of understanding to Freddie, making it a part of Freddie's character and an element in what motivates him.

For anyone whose knowledge of the events in Tombstone is limited to the movies, I include a brief summary of the lives of the principal characters.

Friedrich Nietzsche left the University of Basel in 1879 as a result of ill health, and devoted himself to writing, producing most of the works for which he is famous, including *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *The Anti-Christian*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, and *Ecce Homo*. He suffered a breakdown in Turin in 1889, probably as a result of an old syphilitic infection, and remained insane until his death in 1900. His unpublished works fell into the hands of his sister, the notorious anti-Semite Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche, who edited and altered his works and who controlled access to his manuscripts. As a result of Elisabeth's tampering, Nietzsche's works gained a reputation that made him the intellectual darling of Imperial Germany and Hitler's Third Reich.

Josephine "Sadie" Marcus left Tombstone in the aftermath of the Earp-Clanton feud and lived briefly with her family until she again encountered Wyatt Earp. Though there is no record that they ever married, Josie lived with Wyatt until his death. She died in 1944.

Virgil Earp was ambushed after the O.K. Corral fight by the Cowboy faction, as a result of which his arm was paralyzed. Despite the handicap he lived a full, adventurous life, and died in 1905.

Morgan Earp was ambushed in a Tombstone pool hall by the Cowboy faction, and died within hours. It is possible that his killers thought they were shooting Wyatt. His death prompted the Vengeance Ride by the Earp faction, in which their posse killed or drove the principal Cowboy leaders from Tombstone.

Curly Bill Brocius remained the leader of the Cowboy faction until he and his gang attempted to ambush Wyatt Earp and a group of his friends at Iron Springs, near Tombstone. Wyatt Earp killed him with a shotgun.

John Ringo may have been the last victim of the Earp-Clanton feud. "The Hamlet among Outlaws," as Walter Noble Burns called him, was found dead near Tombstone with a pistol in his hand and a bullet in his brain. The wound may have been self-inflicted— there is evidence Ringo was a depressive. Wyatt Earp, however, claimed to have killed him, though Wyatt may have been in Colorado at the time. Ringo left behind a small library of classic works, including some in Latin, giving him a posthumous reputation as a frontier intellectual. It is unlikely that he ever attended university, and he seems to have been self-educated.

Ike Clanton fled Tombstone in the aftermath of the war he had done so much to start, but did not alter his belligerent, drunken ways, and was killed by detective J. V. Brighton in 1887.

John Behan, unable or unwilling to stop the violence in Tombstone, failed to win reelection as sheriff. Thanks to his political contacts he became warden of the Yuma prison, though there were those who claimed he should have been on the other side of the bars. ,

John Holliday continued to roam the West, usually with his Hungarian companion "Big Nose Kate" Elder, until his death from tuberculosis in 1887. Despite his long illness and hazardous life, he outlived all the men who wanted him dead.

Wyatt Earp never acted as a lawman after his spell in Tombstone, and instead became a gambler and entrepreneur. Traveling from one Western boom town to the next, he made and lost many fortunes, and in his later years became the friend of Jack London, William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Charlie Chaplin, and the film director John Ford. He lived happily with Josie Marcus until his death in 1929, and was buried in a Jewish cemetery near San Francisco.

Walter Jon Williams is an author, traveler, kenpo fiend, and scuba maven. He lives with his wife, Kathleen Hedges, on an old Spanish land grant in the high desert of New Mexico, and is the author of nineteen novels and two collections of shorter works. After an early career as a historical novelist, he switched to science fiction. His first novel to attract serious public attention was *Hardwired* (1986), described by Roger Zelazny as "a tough, sleek juggernaut of a story, punctuated by strobe-light movements, coursing to the wail of jets and the twang of steel guitars." In 2001 he won a Nebula Award for his novelette "Daddy's World."

Walter's subject matter has an unusually wide range, and includes the glittering surfaces of *Hardwired*, the opulent tapestries of *Aristoi*, the bleak science-tinged *roman policier* *Days of Atonement*, and the pensive young Mary Shelley of the novella "Wall, Stone, Craft," which was nominated for a Hugo, a Nebula, and a World Fantasy Award.

The fantasy *Metropolitan*, which was nominated for a Nebula Award, begins a sequence continued in a Nebula- and Hugo-nominated second novel, *City on Fire*.

Walter has written numerous works of alternate history, featuring Edgar Allan Poe ("No Spot of Ground"), Mary Shelley ("Wall, Stone, Craft"), Elvis Presley ("Red Elvis"), and the Empress Dowager of China ("Foreign Devils"). He has also contributed to the alternate history science fantasy series *Wildcards*.

Walter has found time to earn a fourth-degree black belt in kenpo. When he's not at his desk, he is to be found in various exotic parts of the world, often underwater.

Walter's web page may be found at www.walterjonwilliams.net.