

PARTY HEADQUARTERS
by Georgi Tenev

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

Arranged in a square, fifty thousand one-hundred-euro bills—a million and a half—take up an area of one hundred and eighty square meters. Its symbolic, three-dimensional significance, however, can be far more electrifying.

He probably thinks he's pulled a fast one, shoving that much money into my hands. He hopes my heart will soften up, made extra-mushy by the anesthesia of wealth so I'll relent and release a respectable funerary sum. If for no other reason than to prevent him from appearing in my dreams. To leave him alone with the ground, consigned to eternity in a foreign city, as it were.

No, Comrade K-shev, that's not going to happen. I know your plans, I know them *deep down*. And I know, like I said before, I understand very well why you've chosen the cemetery in Hamburg.

Because:

The Elba, deep down, invisibly erodes the slippery abutments along its banks. Down at the foundations, near the concrete, underwater capitals that support the docks' pontoon skeleton—the longest pontoon structure in Europe—there the water finds cracks, twisting into eddies. It sucks down the dust of bodies from the ever-replenished supply of dead buried nearby in the four hundred hectares of the Ohlsdorf Cemetery, the largest burial park on the planet.

He dreams of lying there now, beneath a slab reading K-shev, comforted by the reassurances of gravediggers with traditions that he has found peace for all eternity, and in good company: Elise Brahms, and the great composer's sister; the Africanist Hans Schomburgk; and Karl Hein, the 1936 Olympic gold medalist in the hammer throw.

Like every one else, K-shev, too, will set off along the surges of the river, he'll head north. At Cuxhaven, the continent's exit, he'll take a turn. He'll flow out into the North Sea, along the Island of Neuwerk, frozen at its mouth, plunging deep under the sea's waters in the fairway of the local currents.

Particles of sand, dead epidermal cells, stones from a bladder clogged from years of sedentary living, from kidneys. Deficient red blood globules, the overly enlarged cancer cells of a leukemic circulatory system—the dead, sick man is travelling, swept out in an unknown direction. He slips away from me, away from my revenge—if such a goal still even exists.

Of course it exists!

If I'm not suspicious of K-shev even *in death*, that means I haven't learned anything. And then the whole path up to this point would have been pointless, wasted effort.

The dead man's bones embrace the mournful dust of opera singers and conductors, seafaring merchants and circus owners. Invisible and again omnipotent, he puts the final touch on his plans. He reaches out his hands, spreads his fingers. He takes a hostage, he takes in his death the life and work of the most important Nobel laureate buried in Ohlsdorf Cemetery: Gustav Hertz. Now I'm starting to understand, it's all clear.

Tombstone

Gustav Ludwig Hertz (* 22. Juli 1887; † 30. Oktober 1975)

Born in Hamburg, buried in Hamburg.

The father and pioneer of quantum mechanics, winner of the Nobel Prize. The most important German trophy scientist, exiled by the Red Army to Sukhumi, on the Black Sea coast.

Leader of the Institute for Separation of *Uranium Isotopes*.

Winner of the Stalin Prize, member of the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences.

"Damn," I say to myself—damn!

Only here, only now, do I begin to understand.

The Atomic Alliance

The sun peeks out, having slipped away from the labyrinth of the horizon, wet and radioactive, above the water of the rivers and the northern bays. The Atomic Alliance—a plot, a conspiracy. The enormous single atom, the sun above my head, which recycles its own light in disconsolate timelessness. A sun, displayed so as to signify absolute infinity. And the internal, invisible atoms that have entered into a secret pact with it. The particles that make up the whole, with scrupulous pedantry and sparing no details—the particles that I am made of. The structures in the construction of my body, the parts of the whole. I myself, along with thought, which remains without physical support, am located between them, stretched along the axis between the sun and my body.

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He, the old man, makes love with the body of the motherland. This love gives birth to thousands of children and he organizes them into Pioneer battalions—attention!

about-face!—he gives orders to the skittering legs of the surges, the Comsol, and they all obey his every command. They live on his words and his voice, they hunger to resemble him, to imitate him in everything. But most of all his vices and weaknesses, the negative characteristics from his Party evaluations—it is these very things, the vices and weaknesses, which make the individual unique. Yet the leader's shortcomings, infinitely multiplied, turn the separate faces into a faceless mass. For this reason, he has the effect of an invisible illness, quasi-disintegration—I recognize him precisely because of this scattering.

Okay, it's clear, like we said: truly *nothing* should remain of him.

The Hamburg Crematorium

Part of the publicly traded company Hamburg Cemeteries

Fullsbütlerstrasse 756

22337 Hamburg

Price list and general information (valid as of January 1).

Built in 1965 and equipped with five cremation chambers with filtering systems for smoke collection according to the requirements in Regulation 27 on Gas Emissions in the Atmosphere. Open five days a week, with a twenty-four hour cycle. Duration of a single cremation: sixty minutes at a temperature of 800-1,000°C. Capacity: 18,000 deceased annually. With subsequent storage in urns. Casketless cremations are not permitted. Package price, incl. urn and urn storage (for a maximum of 28 days)—281 euro.

Preparatory chamber—97 euro.

Medical examination in accordance with administrative requirements—51 euro.

Delivery of urn for burial in the neighboring cemetery (Hamburg region)—46 euro.

Total: 475, even though I feel like that's too much for him.

That leaves me with 1,499,525, plus or minus hotel expenses.

Not bad, I figure.