

# THE ASSIMILATE

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Opening chapter from *Doppelgänger* -- Sequel to *Staretz Encounter*

## Bavaria, 1906

Elias looked up at the sign posted above the entranceway of a long red-brick building: Maxwell-Bavarian Machine Works and beamed. His building. Steel supports, a flagstone base and lots and lots of windows half of which overlooked the rushing tributary which ran to the Iller River in southern Bavaria. With a labor force of over fifty, Elias prided himself in knowing nearly everyone by name.

As he walked into the factory a sensation overtook him that he had never experienced before. He felt larger, felt his being expand, felt his arms extend through the lathes, the presses and assembly line, felt his essence flow out through the windows through the spray of the cataract flowing through the waterwheel beside the massive generator, felt his shoulders rise to the ceiling and his head explode through the roof where it crested above the burgeoning hamlet.



**Elias Maxwell, circa 1908**

From this position, Elias could look north towards Munich, to the east towards Salzburg, to the west to the Swiss Alps, or to the near south, to Kempten, perhaps the oldest town in the region, where his new automobile dealership had just opened up. With a partnership with his wife's uncle, Adolf von Rosensweig, Elias had become an assimilated entrepreneur. He gazed behind him, upstream, past the series of cottages that housed his workers, past the stylish homes where his managers lived, past the long private lane lined with rhododendrons to the hill, his hill where his mansion lay.

Elias Isaiah Maxwell, son of Rabbi Hillel Maxwell, grandnephew of Judah Buruch Maxwell, most venerated cantor, was a capitalist. To the chagrin of his family, he was also a convert. A Protestant.

"We will have the doctor perform the circumcision," Elias proclaimed as his wife lay sweating in her bed, her newborn son, Abraham still covered with afterbirth, suckling.

"He will have a bris, and he will be Bar Mitzvahed, like his father before him, and like his father and grandfather before him. You may try to renounce your heritage, Mr. Elias Isaiah Maxwell, but you

will not..." Debora broke down in tears.

A sense of pity and disgust swept through Elias. "I want a modern wife, Debora. We are no longer in the shetl. It is time for us to become Bavarians. As you know, Jews cannot own property, they cannot hold political office. They live as outsiders, inferiors!"

"Oh, so now my husband, wants to be mayor."

"I would be a good mayor. But with a Jewish son, impossible."

"And your father. You want the rebbi to convert as well?"

"My son will *not* have a bris. Why must you be so selfish? How can you take this great joy from me?" Elias demanded. "You want your new Abraham to grow up with a yoke on his life, a cloud over his head, a stain on his record, when all we have to do is give up pagan beliefs. It's nearly 1907, for Chrissakes! Why can't you wake up to the new world? Do you think I can run my operations and be successful as... as a Jew?!"

Debora felt her son begin to gasp. Aunt Ella, who was midwife, grabbed swiftly, and brought the boy firmly to her chest. Cupping her hand she swatted his back soundly. He hiccupped and burped. In spite of himself, Elias smiled.

Although her hair was messed, and there was sweat upon her brow, Ella still expressed elegant regalness and air of authority. She turned to face her nephew. "You want a healthy son?" she said in Yiddish, her stare deflating the businessman as he shrank back twenty years to his life as an eight-year-old tearing through Tante Ella's kitchen, as she prepared Sedar dinner. Swiping a pastry to her chagrin as she swatted his backside, he would scoot out the door, his mouth half filled with delicious treat.

"May I hold my son?"

Ella looked at Debora who turned away. Elias wheeled and rumbled down the stairs unable or unwilling to take on the two women, at least for now. There would be another day.

From the porch, he looked downstream beyond the factory to the blur of downtown Kempten seven miles in the distance. He felt he could almost read the bright new sign of his automobile dealership. He knew precisely where it was, across from the town square right in the center of the little metropolis.

He called Gunther, his manservant, on his new intercom, and had him bring the new Royce roadster up to house and park it by the front door. Donning riding gloves and goggles, he pushed past and stepped into the driver's seat, commanded Gunther to "crank it up" and put the automobile in gear.

"I expect my shoes to be polished by the time I return."

"Yes, sir," Gunther said.

Steering the Royce around the semi-circular driveway, Elias put his arm out of the window the way he had been taught to make a signal, then he made a right turn and sputtered down the dirt lane. It was late spring. The first purple buds of crocus were beginning to peep throughout the lawn, the rhododendrons were also beginning to bud.

A brood of pheasants crossed in front of him, as the driver instinctively braked to a slow crawl. Watching the strutting mother followed by a trail of six chicks, Elias felt a sense of pride since he considered them part of *his* estate, when suddenly, out from nowhere, the male swooped, fluttering dangerously close to his head, warning him off, causing him to duck, as the brood disappeared quickly into the brush. The vehicle lurched and rumbled over a moving object. Elias cut the wheel and slammed the auto into a maze of branches.

Picking rhododendron buds from his windshield, the driver shook his head to get his bearings. Removing his goggles, he loosened his collar as he watched the cock reappear to attack the animal he had just run over. A red fox lay smashed in the center of the driveway, its neck broken, eyes still open, pecked at by the regal ring-necked bird. Elias would later swear that this bird had looked squarely at him in the eye to tell him that he too should protect his flock.

Debora sat up in bed and began to sob. "It's all right," Tante Ella said, handing her back the boy.

"Why is he so stubborn?"

"He wants to be a success. Is that really so hard to understand?"

"But is it worth the price of our heritage?"

“There is nothing new here, Debora,” Tante Ella said. “Rabbi Sinschwartz has told us that intermarriage is as high as 40% in Hamburg, over 25% in Berlin.”

“What will happen to our essence?”

“There are still many good Jews. We have survived for thousands of years.”

“But what can I do, deny my son a bris to placate his pigheaded father?”

“Appeal to a higher authority, my dear.”

Alone in the garden, Elias listened to the plaintive melody of his great uncle’s voice swirl out the sitting room and echo down the hill. Because of the fame of this renowned cantor, his father, Hillel, the cantor’s nephew, now a new grandfather, was able to gain a post at Ben Zion Temple in Weissenbach, just over the border in Austria. It was the largest synagogue in the region.

Well aware that he was part of the educated aristocracy, Elias knew he had grown up with a silver spoon. But he also knew that it was not his father who “built a machine shop from scratch to turn it into a major industry.” Elias mumbled as he paced outside. “Nor did my father erect a complex to house my workers. And he did not negotiate with goyim to obtain a lot in the town square to start an automobile dealership....”

“Are you coming in?” von Rosensweig nudged as he came out to fetch his reluctant business partner. “Or do you want your brother to hold the boy when the rebbi makes the cut.”

“My brother! If Simon so much as touches....” Elias spouted, throwing his cigar down, he joined his wife’s uncle and marched inside. Von Rosensweig led him to the crib. There before them stood the whole clan. They numbered over forty. Although his mother was no longer alive, Elias’ father appeared vigorous and self-assured. He stood arm and arm with his sister, Tante Ella, beside Debora, their eyes aglow with images of this new and “perfect child.” And like a Goliath, also stood Great Uncle Judah.

“Eli, you been pissing in the woods?” the cantor cajoled, loud enough for the entire forty to hear.

Shrinking beneath the comment, the convert did his best to hide his revulsion as he watched the relatives break into laughter. He gained some comfort to see that his younger brother did not smile with the others, but rather, came forth to pat him reassuringly on the back.

“Congratulations,” Simon said.

“Thank you, brother,” Elias replied.

The moile looked Elias in the eye. With a disdainful air of resignation, the new father reached for a yalmuke and plunked it on his head.

Debora’s eyes sparkled. Were those tears of joy or sorrow? Elias could not tell. A voice inside took over as he recited in Hebrew by rote the appropriate prayer. As he did so, he felt a large hand on his shoulder. Wheeling, he glimpsed clearly the ghost of his dead mother and the ghost of her father as well. “Wake up, schmuck,” whispered the dead Grandpapa Izzie.

During this strange interlude, Elias looked over to the living, his father Hillel and granduncle Judah, who appeared to be dovening in his direction.

Tante Ella’s soothing voice and gentle hand smoothed Baby Abraham’s shoulders. The little one lay on his back, in the crib. A smile of contentment.

The moile took center stage, stating that this tradition would not interfere with young Abe’s ability to marry and reproduce when he reached proper age.

“May I say something,” Elias found himself saying, the images of his dead relatives still powerfully hovering in his psyche, “that is, before the surgery begins?”

His father nodded assent, which halted the procedure for a moment.

Elias moved his gaze from his father and granduncle to his wife. “I know I have come from a blessed family, and I know I have not been a religious man. But I am a good man, and I respect my father and his uncle, my wife and her wishes. Abraham Maxwell has been born the religion of his mother, and he will be circumcised in a matter of moments in accord with a tradition that is thousands of years old. There is no easy answer for someone of Jewish ancestry in this world. The real world. I only wish the best for my son.” He nodded to proceed.

The moile chanted the sacred prayer as he brought out the cutting instruments. Capping the boy’s

penis with a little metal hood, he took out a small very sharp blade, held it next to the protected phallus, and sliced off a ring of foreskin.

Baby Abraham pierced the room with his shriek, as the family applauded and the feast began.

"Thank you," Debora said to her husband. She stood in deference by his side, her eyes still welled with tears.

"I know I'm an ass," he whispered as he gave her a kiss. "I'm only trying to survive in an unforgiving world."

"I know," she said. Their lips met. It was the first time they had kissed in nearly two weeks.

## BIOGRAPHY

Marc J. Seifer, Ph.D. is author of the new book *The Definitive Book of Handwriting Analysis* (Career Press) which has been called "THE BEST BOOK ON THE TOPIC IN A DECADE" by Dr. Robert O'Block, founder of the American College of Forensic Examiners. A college teacher for over 30 years, Marc has taught courses on dreams and consciousness at Providence College, and currently teaches Psychology and Forensic Graphology at Roger Williams University. A handwriting expert, Dr. Seifer has worked as a consultant for 60 Minutes on the signatures of Al Gore & George Bush, has appeared on the History Channel on the Howard Hughes Will, on AP International TV on Osama bin Laden's signature, on NPR and Coast to Coast radio. He has lectured at the United Nations, West Point, LucasFilms Industrial Light & Magic, Federal Reserve Bank Boston, Brandeis University, in Jerusalem, Zagreb, Belgrade, Toronto, Vancouver, at Oxford University and also Cambridge University in England. Featured in The Economist, Cosmopolitan, Scientific American, The Washington Post, New Scientist, MIT's Technology Review, Rhode Island Monthly and a full-page article in The New York Times, his publications have appeared in Cerebrum, Wired, Civilization, Nature, Hands On Electronics, Psychiatric Clinics of North America, New Dawn and Engineering Dimensions. Listed in Marquis' Who's Who in the World, his works include *Mad Scientist of the Gilded Age*, *The Lost Wizard* (screenplay, co-author Tim Eaton), *Hail to the Chief* (screenplay), *Staretz Encounter* (novel), *Inward Journey: From Freud to Gurdjieff* (psychology text), *Justice: Broward Style* (courtroom thriller), and *Transcending the Speed of Light*. His book *Wizard: The Life & Times of Nikola Tesla* (Citadel Press, translated into 4 languages) has been called "REVELATORY" by Publisher's Weekly, "A SERIOUS PIECE OF SCHOLARSHIP" by Scientific American, and a "MASTERPIECE" by Nelson DeMille. *Wizard* is "**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**" by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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