

Relative Evil

by [Anthony P. Mayo](#)

He pressed his fingers to the throb in his temple. Not to ease the pain, but to focus on the rhythmic pressure and blot out his sister's insistence. Her unpersuasive words sought to compensate with repetition and emotion what they lacked in evidence and reason.

"Please Randall, if ever family mattered it is really important now." Yes, Rachel, he thought as she talked. I know family matters that is exactly why I am sitting at your kitchen table on a weekday morning. Being part of this family is why his day had detonated from the usual historical exposition to this hysterical exposition. If he were not born a Fleischer, Randall would still be at his desk, working on his next book.

Randall had just finished his daily preparing-to-get-ready-to-start-to-write rituals and was about to fill the computer screen with historical insight when the telephone rang. The first surprise was that the caller was his literary agent. Franklin called for only two reasons, either to report that Randall's latest book had been sold to a publisher or to report that the publisher was impatient to receive the final draft of Randall's latest book. Since Errors of Democracy had been purchased only three months ago, he could not imagine a reason for this interruption.

"Rand, what is your father's first name?"

"Otto. And my mother's maiden name was Calabrisi." Randall was playful. "Is this some kind of identity check, Franklin? Are you going to pass along a secret message to me?"

"I'm afraid it's no secret, friend. Something terrible has happened. The news is filled with reports that your father was... Rand, do you know what your father did during the war?"

After the bombshell exploded in his ear, Randall managed to thank his agent for being the first to contact him. The historian pressed several keys on his computer, instructing it to perform a task requested every few days. The machine telephoned a computer data base of newspapers and other publications to search for stories which contained his name. Today, along with the usual book reviews and citations of his work by other authors, came long articles from the wire services. The headlines alone made Randall feel as though a great emptiness had been created in his groin and all of his intestines were tumbling in knots to fill that void.

The headlines read: NAZI EXPOSED,
DEATH CAMP VILLAIN

IN U.S.A., RHODE ISLAND
FACTORY WORKER KILLED JEWS,

and OTTO FLEISCHER WAS
"EFFICIENT EXTERMINATOR"

As he read the texts, dark and purple spots floated in his eyes obscuring the screen. For a long time he forgot to

breathe, until his damp forehead bowed to the palms of his hands and he sucked oxygen in with thin, hacking breaths.

Finally, Randall channeled all this undirected fear and anger into his most familiar emotion: a relentless need to know the truth. Realizing that the first step toward confronting this situation was to do the sort of historical detective work he practiced every day calmed the writer. True or false, the newspaper articles were only stories until he satisfied himself from the evidence.

"Time to research a few primary sources," he thought as he picked up the car keys. The crates and cedar chests in the attic of the house he grew up in were the first place to look. Which meant Rachel would be the first person he had to face.

"Rachel, have you talked to Dad today?"

"No, I don't even know if he's heard. It took me two hours to get through to anyone at the home. Finally, the switchboard operator told me he went for a drive right after breakfast and she hopes he never comes back. Ever since the news came out her phones have been tied up by reporters." Rachel moved about the kitchen as briskly and pointlessly as a fly in a bottle, re-folding a dish towel by the sink, smoothing a doily on the table, rubbing an invisible stain on the oven door. She gestured broadly toward the telephone, looked down to examine the apron taut across her stout middle, and gazed out the window over the sink as she spoke. "The

administrator is planning a press conference, though I can't imagine what he has to say. Why can't he just shut up until this blows over?" His distraught sister seemed to address this question to the silent television in the next room, as her eyes played over every nearby object except her youngest brother. Long experience had taught her that to look into his perceptive eyes was to face things she preferred to evade. "I wish everyone would just shut-up!"

"Maybe he knows something useful," Randall suggested mildly.

"Useful for what?" she screeched. "He'll probably just drag our name through the mud some more and get himself on TV. The other residents are in a complete uproar, taking votes to throw Daddy out and making signs to wave at the cameras. Someone even set a fire in his room. How can people turn against a friend so quickly, someone they've lived with and known for years?"

"They aren't sure they know him at all."

"Well, I'm sure. I just wish I could find him and help him. Randall, what are we going to do? Our father needs us. His family is all he has to depend on. I can just see him, driving alone out there. A refugee forced out of his country again, at his age." She stooped to pick some lint off the shiny floor, placing it absently in her pocket. "Don't you know someone who could straighten this out?"

"Dad can take care of himself, Rachel. He always has. Until we hear from him,

I'm going to go into the attic and look through his things." Rand stood up and started toward the stairs. "I might learn something useful."

Rachel grabbed his wrist, having moved across the room with startling quickness to place herself between Randall and the door. "Looking for what? Are you wondering, too? Isn't it bad enough that every cop and reporter in Rhode Island is picking over our father? Can't you turn off your proud curiosity long enough to help your family? We're being attacked. My children had to leave school and hide with my mother-in-law. Daddy is missing and the Israelis want to hang him. This is an emergency and all you're interested in is poking around for facts. This is driving me crazy. Help me."

"Look, Rachel." The big man sat and looked directly at his sister. He moved her hand from his wrist and cradled the plump fingers between his palms. "I'm not a lawyer and I'm not a psychologist. The only thing I know how to do is research. Searching his things from Germany and Argentina will give us more to go on."

The pale housewife pulled her hand from his caress and backed away. "To go where, the police? How can you even wonder if it true? He's your father."

The historian's head began to throb as his sister raved, implored, wept. She hammered him with loyalty, family, and the need to pull together. His requirement to know more had no impact on her need to regain the status

quo ante. All of her anger at the people "out there" who had stirred this up was vented toward her brother. Her brother who could not trust, who had to probe, check, and sit in independent judgment. Randall pressed his temple while waiting for her to get it all out. She would have to rest eventually, then he would inject some sense into the discussion.

"I haven't expressed any opinion. What are you so worried about?" Randall was the professor now, abandoning brotherly warmth for cool Socratic probing.

"If you are sure, why are you afraid to look???"

A few tears rolled down her stricken face. "Daddy needs us now."

"His needs have no claim on my brain! I'm going into the attic." As Randall stood and took a step toward the stairs, his sister grabbed the nearest weapon and blocked his path. The chubby matron stood in the doorway. With feet apart, tear moistened jaw set, and both fists holding the corn stalk broom diagonally, left shoulder to opposite knee, she looked every inch the royal fusilier determined to guard the gateway.

"If you won't act like family," she whimpered, "you have no business in this house." With words and reason his only weapons, Randall knew he must retreat before one so well armored against them.

Walking toward his car, Randall saw the idle smoke stack of the mill where his

father worked from the time he arrived in the United States. The mill is not manufacturing anything now, he noted, but has been converted into a discount "factory outlet". Where can today's refugees go for a second chance, Randall thought? Today we pay armed men to patrol the same borders where, during America's years of growth, immigrants with eager hands were welcomed to share the load. No wonder, the historian concluded, these mills which once employed thousands and produced new wealth by the railcar load now hawk damaged goods to ragged shoppers.

When Otto Fleischer worked there a dozen accents buzzed as industrial parts were forged and machined. Lithuanian peasants, Balkan shepherds, and Chinese fishermen—all American workers now—learned English, earned houses, and educated thoroughly American children, like Randall and Rachel. Offspring who appreciated this country's greatness sometimes less and sometimes more but always differently than their parents who had saved them.

The mill was polyglot but no German accent was heard at the kiln Randall's father supervised. Otto had thoroughly expunged from his Language all traces of the country he escaped, eliminating systematically any barriers between himself and his adopted life. His family might eat "liver sausage and pickled cabbage" but never "liverwurst with sauerkraut". He attended no Oktoberfests and coldly dropped the friend who invited him to join the German Club. "I

was born in Europe," he often said, "but we are an American family now."

Each time Secretary of State Kissinger appeared on the news, Otto brutally ridiculed him for cultivating an accent. Randall had considered their difference as merely practical, that on the Harvard Campus a Deutsche remnant like Kissinger's sounded erudite, but in the post-war mills of Pawtucket it just meant "Kraut". Now he wondered if his father's anger was toward a fellow immigrant who refused to assimilate or a former Nazi's attack on a Jew who had helped to occupy Germany.

Mining his memory was frustrating and circular for Randall. Had his father been eager to be an American or afraid to seem German? Had he sincerely shared with his children a love of individual liberty or duplicitously concealed his totalitarian ambitions? Was it possible for a man to have lived a lie so thoroughly for forty years? To succeed, Rand knew, meant to act on principle. What principle could allow a person to be, in turn, a devoted Nazi and a typical American? His philosophy must show somewhere, if subtly. So, my father has been wrongly accused. Or is it possible for a man to become so thoroughly a conforming part of U.S. society, following all the rules, who had once given allegiance to a monstrous cause? When you have only disconnected scraps of fact they can be flipped and rotated to cover any hypothesis. Rand did not have enough evidence reach any verdict.

Turning onto the street where he lives, Randall sees that he is driving right behind his brother's convertible sports car. Hank must have heard the news and come to find me, he decides. Randall honks once and waves to the sunglasses reflected in Hank's rear-view mirror. Following the low red car, Randall notices the colorful parking permit for the local Army base where his brother is a reserve officer. His plate spells out "DRILLER" in bold, dark letters. Not that Hank was ever an army drill instructor. He is a dentist. The license plate frame displays two American flags and the principle "My country, right or wrong." This reminds Randall to dread the conversation to come, since he has no doubt Hank will make the same mistake of choosing loyalty over justice for "My father, right or wrong."

As they approach Randall's home Hank uses his turn signal, slows gently and pulls over to the curb so his younger brother can go around and head up the driveway first. Upset, as he must be, Randall notes, Hank is still considerate. It seems no one can describe him without the sentence, "He's such a nice guy."

Randall walked toward the other car as it parked beside his, and saw that Hank had come hurriedly from his clinic. He still wore the pale blue smock he worked in, but his usual smile and open expression were replaced by a look of anger and violence. As Hank pulled himself up from the low seat he demanded of his brother, "Have you heard about the attack?"

For a moment Randall was confused. He had been thinking about the Army insignia on the car and Hank's part-time military career. He asked in alarm, "What? Is your unit being called up?"

"No, dammit, but I almost wish this was a regular fight. Then I'd know what to do." Hank made involuntary fists while he talked, forcing the veins to stand out from his taut throat. "I'm talking about this shit they're saying about our father. So, you haven't heard?"

"Yes, I know all about it." Randall confused his brother by looking relieved. He, at least, was glad there was no shooting war. "I just came from Rachel's house. Let's go inside and figure this out."

They went in the house together and walked to the living room. Randall noticed rapid flashes from the answering machine, indicating many messages, but went right by it to settle in an easy chair. He pointed toward the sofa, but Hank chose instead to march about the room as he spoke.

"I had to cancel all my appointments this afternoon. I couldn't face anyone. It's been bad enough over the years when a few people knew my name translated to 'Dr. Butcher' and asked if I was some kind of surgeon. Now, everyone who reads a newspaper thinks we're murderers. And I have a muster of the reserve tomorrow. How am I supposed to review those kids tomorrow? They'll probably be goose-stepping." The athletic forty-year-old grimaced and

spread his arms wide, fingers apart in a pathetic, imploring gesture toward the large window, through which he seemed to see endless ranks of mocking cadets.

"Even when he is exonerated everyone will just remember the charges. Being cleared won't be the local news feature for a month the way these foolish accusations will be." Hank turned to face the seated man directly, the threatening squint of a boxer in his eye. "Why did that fucking Jew do this to us?"

Rand responded coolly. "You'd be smart to avoid such phrases. The suburban slurs your friends accepted yesterday might make them see blood on your hands today. Besides, Frankfurter, hasn't done anything *to* you. He's just presenting the best evidence available. I understand his research is very meticulous and that he is completely discrete. He took it to the State Department, you know, not the newspapers."

"Spare me your professional admiration! He is raking over muck that settled a lifetime and a half-ago and spreading it over innocent people on the other side of the world. That little troll with his wisps of white hair and medieval forelocks is no historian like you. Your bestsellers entertain people and teach folks a little about the past. His charges are like a hand from the grave disturbing real lives being lived today. I don't know why the Belgians put up with his poking around. I was perfectly happy before I heard about this, this screw-up of his."

Randall does not bother explaining to his brother how much Hank misunderstands the purpose of his studies. He knows that Hank is incapable of understanding. Hank assumes that being an independent historian is a clever way to set your own hours and make a conformable living while deducting a lot of travel as business expenses, just like he loved dentistry because being called doctor and having your own office is a great way to impress girls and golf three afternoons a week. Instead of arguing, the seated writer just slowly drew in a deep breath through his mouth, expanding his chest as he willed his pulse to slow and the adrenaline to dissipate. He knows becoming as agitated as the rest of the family will not move them closer to the truth. Randall re-directed the conversation, "Have you heard from our father?"

"No, I've gotten nothing but busy signals from the home and Rachel seems to have given up answering the phone. How is she?"

"Rachel is devoting all her energies to tears and tirades. She spoke to the switchboard operator this morning, but they're deluged with calls from reporters. Dad left for a drive this morning, so no one knows where he is or if he's heard. Rachel threw me out of the house when I tried to look through Dad's things in the attic."

"You did what?!" Hank took a brisk step toward his brother and leaned forward, head cocked, presenting an exaggeratedly quizzical expression to the

seated man. "Have you gone over to the other side, conducting your own investigation? You aren't buying this shit, are you?"

"Hold it, Hank." Randall sat forward and checked the advance by placing a firm grip on the man's shoulder. "Don't go making rash assumptions about my conclusions." He looked directly in Hank's eyes and tried to speak more calmly. "The way I see it, we have two choices until we talk to our father. We can use our eyes to find out what's what or we can lock ourselves away with Rachel and her crying towel. I say, 'Let's go back home and see what's there before someone else does.' Okay?"

The sharp comparison to the weak sister stung Hank's martial pride. "I'm ready for a little recognizance. Let's saddle-up."

Seated next to his brother, traveling through their childhood neighborhood, Randall Fleischer once again researched his memory. As his hands guided the car toward Rachel's house, his mind scanned his own childhood for clues about Otto Fleischer's character.

Hank and Randall had been bright and energetic boys. Hank used his wit and élan to engage and please everyone. Rand was happy to please himself. Hank was not merely conscientious, athletic, and gregarious; he was an Eagle Scout, team captain, and class president. There was no conflict between the boys, only a contrast. Rand always loved his brother, everyone did, but never shared his need

to fit in everywhere. Randall needed everything he observed and learned to fit together, to make sense. One brother worked so the world would accept him, the other accepted that the world worked.

Like most bright children, Randall had bubbled with questions. He remembered the picnic when he asked, "Where do grasshoppers come from?" "What do they eat?" "How do they jump so high?" "Why are their legs like that?" His mother, as usual, had given patient answers to the limit of her knowledge. But Randall's questions had no limit. Finally, in exasperation, Mother had said, "God planned it that way." Randall's eager young mind exercised itself by considering a super being designing grasshopper legs, planning food chains, spinning the earth, forming and placing stars, and inventing jigsaw puzzles so complex even He couldn't solve them. Plus this invisible creature always knew that one day a bright boy would see a particular grasshopper and think about a spirit that knew one day a bright boy would see a particular grasshopper and think... Even to a child, this god seemed like a lot of trouble to explain a bug.

Randall's curiosity survived such exasperated responses, public school conformity, and collegiate attacks on the human intellect. In college, he was attracted to history because, "The past is real, the facts exist. I don't need to depend upon some professor's whim to determine whether my answers are right." History became his career, first,

because he wanted to know how the great errors had happened, second, because he believed men could learn from these mistakes; if only the reasons were cogently and vividly exposed. He established himself as an in-dependent historian, avoiding the stifling academic establishment by bringing his analysis directly to individual minds, via the bestseller lists.

As Randall turned his car into the familiar driveway, he knew it was time to apply this well trained curiosity to the most emotional mystery of his career. The brothers saw the ruffled living room curtain flutter as Rachel moved from observing their arrival to opening the front door. The moment they were in the house Hank walked toward his distraught sister with consoling arms. "Hank, thank God you're home." Rand felt that she did not even notice his presence. No surprise, he thought, my sister has always been adept at disregarding the disturbing. This time, instead of disdain her evasion he exploited it to go directly up to the attic.

As he stepped through the door, Randall was immediately transported to his childhood by the familiar smell of warm, dry wood. He had played and explored in this large, crowded space under the sun-broiled roof a thousand times. The smell and taste of the air was the same but all the familiar objects had become toy-sized. A dresser the child had climbed, the adult now looked down upon. The blind maze of cliffs and buildings was now just a jumble of crates and old furniture. The late

afternoon sun traced oblique shafts of light across the attic, like those Randall remembered dodging as imaginary death rays or searchlights. He had often stared at these beams while swirling the shiny dust motes with a hand movement or puff of breath. As the child sat still and watched the activity of the specks he had wondered if any scientist had yet figured out how to know which one would float left while another flew right. The man who had never accepted chaos as a state or chance as a motivation turned on the electric light.

Randall found tacked to a post a yellowed watercolor he had painted as a child. He, Rachel, Hank, and their mother stood in a row holding hands. In the center, his father towered above them. His large round shoulders spread over all of them, like a protective umbrella. Rand tried but could not feel again the security and warmth that had inspired this image. That trusting child was gone. The probing historian had come to learn.

He started with the cedar scented documents. He found brittle and dusty deeds, mortgages, and report cards. He examined old photograph albums, birth certificates with seals, and letters tied in ribbon. He opened boxes, books, and bureaus of clothes. He saved the tall metal toolbox for last because it was covered with grease.

As he pulled out the first drawer of wrenches, jelled in ancient oil, Rachel and Hank entered the attic. Rachel dabbed her eyes and whimpered, "Why

do you have to put me through this?
What do you expect to find that matters
anyway?"

Randall put the drawer on top of the cabinet. "I would like to find some document proving that our father was in Argentina all through the war, as he always said. These are the tools he used as a machinist there. Maybe we can find a sales slip or a pay stub with his name and a date."

"That's pretty obscure," Hank offered. He stepped toward the cedar chest and said, "Why don't you look in his files for a visa or his passport?"

"I have, Hank."

"That's not possible. You know how meticulous Dad is." Hank opened the chest and picked up a box of papers. "You can't spend seven years in a country without leaving a trace."

Rand looked directly at his brother, seeking strength and comfort, while he shared his growing fear. "Not unless you try."

Hank saw something behind Rand that caused him to drop the papers. He walked briskly to the tool chest and moved the drawer on top to lie even with the front edge. "Look at this." At least four inches of red cabinet top was exposed beyond the depth of the drawer. "Why would they leave all that space behind the drawer?" Rand pulled a wood lath off of the wall and pushed it carefully all the way inside the cabinet

where the drawer had been. Keeping his fingers in place to mark the depth he withdrew the stick and placed it along the outside of the tool chest. There was no doubt: a four-inch compartment was concealed between the inside and outside rear walls of the cabinet.

Rachel refused to notice. "We should be looking for our father, dammit, not playing with dirty old boxes. Why won't you listen to me?"

The brothers were already cutting off the metal back with tools from the cabinet when Hank answered her. "Don't you see, Rachel, there may be something important in here. I think we ought to be the first to see it." After breaking several welds with chisels, Randall used a crow bar to pop off the entire sheet of metal. The contents so revealed would have chilled them in any context. Today, in their home, hidden by their father, these were the most frightening objects on earth.

Rachel fell heavily to her knees as her brothers gaped silently at the dress uniform of an SS officer. Grinning skulls mocked their faith in Otto Fleischer, staring eyelessly from the silver death's head buttons. These American children looked at their father's collar displaying the proud SS lightning bolts, his sleeve decorated by the red embroidered signature of Adolf Hitler. The historian ignored the ceremonial sword and Luger in white calfskin holster to reach for the passport. It was a leather VIP passport containing their father's photograph and a stranger's name. Colored stamp

impressions recorded travel throughout occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945. The last endorsement was for entry to Argentina in September 1945.

Rand dropped the passport when he was startled by a command delivered in the tone of a Nazi officer, "Get away from that, schnell!" Otto Fleischer came through the attic door and strode over to the exposed mementos.

Rachel's head swam as she felt her emotional supports being torn up from their roots, roots that had never been real but only a surface display. "Damn you," she cried, "Damn you for making me see this." No one who heard this curse knew whether she was speaking to her father for being a criminal or to her brother for exposing him. She hated herself for having witnessed the truth.

Otto seemed mesmerized by the Nazi remnants as he reached into the cabinet. He was dazed by the shock of seeing his two worlds collide. Standing in his American home while handling his 88 holster was too large a contradiction for his old knees to bear. He slumped slowly to the floor and leaned against the open tool chest, presenting to his children the bizarre tableau of their father with a Luger in his hand framed by a Nazi uniform. He calmly checked the gun's action and began to load a clip. The old man's mind was somewhere else now and the accent his children had never heard was back.

"Zo, my clever son has discovered a secret." He lifted the uniform sleeve with

his free hand. "Vill you now hand zis to the Jews to make your father's noose?" He snapped the loaded clip into the pistol and extended his arm to aim at Randall. "Perhaps I should use this?"

Randall felt the blood leave his face and his scalp tingled. He saw a gun in the same hand that had taught him to walk, but it was obscured by the blood of a thousand victims. The old Nazi slowly bent his elbow until the gun was pointed at his own head. "Better I should go zee vay of Rommel und mein Fuhrer."

"No!" Rachel cried, "We'll burn it and hide you. No one has to know."

"I'll know," Hank spoke. "No matter what, you son of a bitch, I'll always know. How could you lie to us for so long?"

"Vhat, you would rather we had discussed zis when you were babies, maybe? Or I should have gotten myzelf hanged at Nuremburg zo you would never have been born?"

"You should never have done these things."

"Vhat do you know, Mr. Hank Goody-Two-Shoes? How can you understand the choices I faced? I raised you in nice safe Pawtucket-Amerika, so you joined Boy Scouts and went to dentist school. I ate food from gutters in Berlin, zo I joined Hitler Youth and became storm trooper. Are we so different my son? We both did the best we could where we were."

Randall saw Hank blanch. He knew his brother was seeing himself in that black uniform, shouting "Seig, Heil" with the same enthusiasm he felt in the home team stadium. Hank folded his arms and fell in upon him-self as he confronted the realization that he had never faced a fundamental moral choice, certainly not one he could decide without guidance from his team, troop, or neighborhood. Was his life just chance, lucky to be born in a good country? He had no answer. He no longer knew where to look for answers.

"That's wrong." Randall stood up. "You had choices."

"Sure I had choices, avenging angel, and I made some. When the Third Reich was destroyed I came to America to make a new life. The Nazi you despise is long dead." His accent was gone. Their father was back.

"For forty years I am Otto Fleischer. Look, Randall, at the exemplary life I've lived since the war. I am a hard worker who loves his children, bothers no one, hates no race, and seeks no privileges. I have been the perfect American for forty years. So you see, I have changed. Why punish this typical

American for events which a child was caught-up in long ago and far away?"

Randall was incensed. "You have not changed. Not fundamentally. Not morally. You have merely donned another costume to act in the same farce. You take your outward appearance from

the environment you live in, like an invader covering his helmet with native foliage. This new disguise does not change you; it only allows whatever culture you find yourself in to determine your appearance. You try to take your identity from the society you are in; instead you let society take your identity from you. You surrender your character, so whatever evil you're in you become."

"No!" Hank moaned. His fear turned to anger and he pushed his brother back down. "That can't be true," he sobbed, then mumbled, "I was always good."

"I'm not accusing you, Hank. I can see the difference between the American uniform you wear and that reaper's shroud." Randall pointed to their father's SS tunic. "But do you see it? How do you know you've been good? Can't you even convince yourself? Have you ever questioned the rules or determined with your own mind why virtue is necessary for human life? We can't get morality by osmosis. Each of us has to earn it. And no one can evade responsibility," he turned his angry eyes on the Nazi, "by going with the crowd, no matter how big the mob, no matter how hungry you are."

"So what do we do, Rand? Call the police and let them take our father?"

Otto snapped the hammer of his gun into firing position and waved the weapon from Hank to Rand. "I do not believe that decision is in your hands."

"Please, father, don't make this any worse for us." Hank was exhausted, "Turn yourself in and stand trial."

"Ha! And let the damn Israelis put me in a glass box for a side show? I'll not dance on the end of a rope to entertain that scum! Soon, I will take zee soldier's way out." He pointed the Luger at his temple and made a click with his tongue.

"A coward's way out, you mean." Rand was back on his feet, in the stance of a prosecutor. "You're a coward in the fundamental sense: afraid of the truth, evading reality, running from life. A trial is not an option for you. Go out like Hitler and Brutus, all you bullies die rather than face the consequences of your actions. To support a dictatorship over democracy is to choose violence over volition. By controlling men with the sword you have forsaken argument. When the tide of opinion turns against you there is no recourse left to evidence and logic. A courtroom is the temple of reason and you do not dare cross its threshold. So kill yourself and cheat the lawyers, but don't pretend to be noble doing it."

"Randy, how can you turn on me like this?" He spread his fingers and extended his arms, imploring. But the loaded gun was still in one palm.

Rachel was moved by the supplicant. "Get off your soap box, Randall. This is our father. He's in trouble and he needs us now."

"Needs us for what?" Randall demanded of her. "To continue this charade, as bit players in his distorted vision of the world? I won't play a witting part in any person's fakery of what IS! It's already sickening that I was blind enough to act in his farce for this long."

"But you're my son. I MADE you." Otto pointed the gun at Randall's head and yelled, "You're mine!"

"You played the part too well, perhaps. The Otto Fleischer you invented tried so hard to raise me as an American that it worked: I love reality and demand justice. Now that your motives are revealed, the results of your actions are unchanged: I remain the righteous citizen your lies fostered. The fact that you lied does not demean me any more than having a virtuous son exalts you. The founding fathers were right, so I accept more than just their politics but their metaphysics and ethics, too. I have made my choices based on reason and reality, so am free to live in the world as it is. You made yours based on the rage of the moment, and you can't live with it anymore." He stared coldly past the barrel of the gun into his father's eyes.

His father looked away. "Don't point those eyes at me. Damn your eyes. Hunting all your life like wolfs, probing to find the weakling in the herd, tearing at the veneer of white lies normal people use, *need* to cover their ugly little flaws. Why are you the righteous predator, exposing everyone's weaknesses? Are hidden sins so important to your damned eyes? Do they feed on the world's sins?"

Would you kill your own father for a portion of truth?" The Nazi caught Rachel's gaze one more time and shot himself.

Rachel shrieked, "Is this justice?" and lunged to cradle her dead father. Randall felt tears welling as his knees weakened. He collapsed heavily to slump on a crate, tearing his childish watercolor from the post with a forlorn gesture. The painting of a sheltered family fell to the floor between his feet. Hank was drawn to console his hysterical sister, but instead kneeled beside his brother. The big man put an arm around Rand and whispered, "Thank you for opening my eyes."

Randall Fleischer did not weep for the dead man in the attic but instead for the loss of his childhood memory, a constructed image of fatherhood that can never console him again. He watched the obsolete image of the family protected by a giant father through crying eyes. His heavy tears melted the watercolors and the huge umbrella shoulders smeared off the page.

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