"*That* is what *I* say, Löew."

Then, more kindly, “I am sorry. You know I have as much choice as you in this. That’s how it has been from the beginning.”

It was hard to make out anything in the dingy room, but Löew liked to imagine that if there did exist some great being with power to penetrate the ever-present darkness, one that took an interest in mortal affairs, then it would have seen a subtle relaxation in the not-quite-urbane features of his companion, a tell-tale sign that marked the end of every meeting.

“Contact as always,” and that was that. The lack of recognition only served to fuel the fire of discontent that had been patiently kindling amidst his chest, and even their omission of the Vote of Thanks to the Chancellery could not raise his spirits. That, he thought, was unusual because he normally got a rush of exhilaration at their blatant acknowledgement of rebellion, casual admittance of high treason.

He exited the house, no longer such a common sight, and stepped out into the rain. The weather had been particularly miserable or some time now, and an optimist would have no doubt attributed his disposition to it. Then again, when the sky was not dark with clouds it was dark with smog and Löew was no optimist, which was strange, he reflected wryly, as he still managed to cling the misbegotten hope that the rebellion would succeed and his life would have the meaning that is so often sought but rarely found.

It was becoming increasingly harder to muster the courage to hope.

Success had seemed so sure at first, but that had been long ago, and their goal was ever further away. Even Claus had of late been lacking his usual intellectual determination, seeming altogether distant from the cause. Yes, thought Löew, there had been far better days.

Their first meeting had been chance entirely, but even with Löew a labourer and Claus an unimportant paper-pusher, all it had taken was the construction of a new office block to unite them. Forced together by the crowds in the makeshift cafeteria, their rebellion began in the seconds-long gap at the end of their conversation, moments before they both rushed to give thanks.

The next day that had merely sat together, both aware that they were quite possibly the only men for kilometres who were aware of the hollowness of their pseudo-society, and both thankful to chance for their meeting.

Their differences were greater than that of station, though, something that became obvious weeks later when they were at last approached by a member of the shadowy resistance. Not that either were privy to information of any particular importance; they were too careful for that, but Claus was the dreamer, full of schemes of rebellion and plot, while Löew was content just to do his part, unquestioning.

Or had been. It had been months since they began, and as much as his mind realised that two men could do little against a regime that now sent colonies into deep space, his heart had always clung to a seed of hope, a seed which had slowly blossomed into a constant reminder of their failure to accomplish anything.

It was funny, he mused, how hard it was to see what he was fighting for. He could not even define it himself, really, more that he seemed to *know*, instinctively, that his life should have some innate value, that some days, the sky should show blue through the smog, and that marriage was for more than producing three more workers for the economy. Claus had once spoken of liberty and freedom, but Löew merely wanted more than what he had - a life that meant something.

And so they had finally come to their present arrangement; Claus dealt with bigger issues, liaising with other members of the resistance, while Löew dealt with the little obstacles that occasionally arose. It was a system that had worked well for a time, but lately Löew was becoming increasingly frustrated and Claus increasingly distant.

And that was why Löew was out in the pouring rain, stalking through the narrow alleys that twisted their way through the dingy concrete forest that was every city in or, presumably, off the world. He had been slightly surprised when he heard his targets name that night; it was, in fact, the man who had introduced them to the resistance. It wasn’t unheard of for someone to turn back, but Löew had seen the devotion in the man’s eyes when they first met and had been sure that he would never abandon the cause.

It was done. The small portion of his mind that rose in protest was ruthlessly quashed, and as Löew walked he was, as always, busy encasing his cumulative guilt in layers of false assurances. It was easy, to kill. But to take a life, that was something, and the fact that there wasn’t a human on the planet who had anything more than a facsimile of one wasn’t quite enough for his troubled conscience.

He should go see Claus, he thought. Try and remember why he was doing this, get back to old times. He would be irritable at the unorthodox visit, but surely he would appreciate the chance, too. The more he thought the more he became entranced by the idea, and then he turned and walked into the dark.

No one was out to see him, despite there being no curfew. It was merely accepted that to be outside late at night was to attract attention, and everyone knew that to be bad thing. He paused as he finally came to the edge of the concrete towers that were most of the city, taking a second to find his destination.

Walking towards the house, he could see two figures through one of the windows, silhouetted against the dull light of the interior. The door wasn’t locked - crime being one of the few vices that their society wasn’t affected by - so Löew entered, heading for the room that he knew Claus to be in. The slam of the back door came synonymous with Löew’s entrance to the room, and he knew that he had seen something he shouldn’t have.

Claus smiled apologetically. “I’m sorry you had to see that.”

“Explain. Now”

“I realised the error of my ways, Löew. I’m sure you’ve had similar thoughts - It gets to you eventually, doesn’t it? How could we possibly compete with a power that controls the planet?”

“Get to the point,” he snarled.

“When you think about it - not that I expect you to do that - you realise that no one would voluntarily force our society on anyone without good reason. And so I found that there was one. It wasn’t that hard to move from there, really. I was pointed to point you where you’d be useful, and I passed on what I knew.”

“Hold on,” Löew almost spat. “Where I’d be useful? You mean that he was innocent?”

“Innocent? He was a traitor - much like the rest of them. It’s sad that so many have to die for their misguided beliefs. So much easier to just see the error of their ways.”

“And you expect me to accept that? To condone murder and oppression?”

“Not at all - I expect you to make the correct judgement. That’s not too much, surely?” His mocking smile was infuriating.

“You see, Löew, the human race is determined to perpetually blunder onwards, but unfortunately, the path we can take eventually just stops. There are some distances too great to travel, and some ideas simply beyond our grasp. And when we cannot move forward, we are forced to go back. So we keep society in its state of regression, a treadmill, if you will, to stop the human race realising its great failure. We send colony ships into space, we rediscover old ideas, and people are content. That, in the end, is what really matters.”

“You’re a fu-“ Claus raised a finger to interject “-lunatic if you think people are content. We were unhappy enough to resist, why wouldn’t others feel the same way? Or do you think everyone feels differently?”

Claus smiled again, his hands toying with something metallic that, amidst the shadow and gloom, Löew could barely make out. “*Content*.”

“You have much to think about, Löew. Contact as always.”

Löew was barely conscious of himself leaving the house, his mind elsewhere occupied as he strode into the rain. Around him he could see nothing but darkness, and after a time, he stopped.