



THE MAZE

The day is to be rainy. While in the streets of the strange city life is slowly awakening, a man rushes along the boulevard. The lawyer is followed by two men. Contract killers. That is, at least, the statement uttered by a blind man who helps the lawyer to escape into an

unimpressive alley – an alley that no one enters voluntarily. However, it is the only imaginable loophole. Suddenly aware of hovering between life and death, the lawyer acts on the blind man's advice.

Indeed, the killers don't follow him. For the moment, the stranger feels in a safe place, especially as the friendly residents provide him with their support wherever they can. He is showed the way and informed about everything that is forbidden, dangerous, or yet impossible on this location. The reverse is equally impossible as to leave the alley because there is - if at all - only one way out of it, namely into the alley. The stranger has no time to waste. He must leave the alley in order to be in time for the plane that will take him back to his normal life.

Those weird fellows he comes constantly across, however, are delaying his progress unduly and supply him with unwanted suggestions at every inappropriate opportunity. The stranger prefers to rely on himself and decides not to listen to their patter any more. But even close-mouthed they still seem to encourage him and, inexpressively standing around, they are nodding invisibly. The strangest thing at all is – and that is uncanny for him – that they always seem to know what he himself wants to find out.

Even the buildings give reason to feel danger: they are high enough to create an impression of burdensome narrowness. Bricked front doors indicate that they may be uninhabitable. Nobody enters nor leaves them. Their façades are meant to keep from view the ruins behind. And when he notices apparitional shapes in the dark hollow windows, he no more escapes the impression of being under observation. Instantly, it becomes clear that the real menace doesn't come from his pursuers. It is lurking in the houses, in their interiors, in the minds, in

everything hidden behind those seemingly kind frontages: hidden agendas and perfidy. Of course, he is told that those humans are completely harmless, for their only purpose in life is watching the lives of other people.

But it's not looks only that follow the stranger. The contract killers did lose their interest in him not at all. While they always appear only as shadows on the horizon, but it seems that they never lose sight of him. Driven by an increasing distrust, the stranger gets further and further into the interior of the alley. So he's gliding down to a maelstrom of occurrences and encounters that he tries to master by the superiority of a smart lawyer, but is never able to cope with.

Although the people in this alley are becoming stranger and stranger to him, he can't help but think that he already met some of them before – which admittedly may be due to the fact that they all resemble each other to a great extent. It is their exaggerated friendliness that has deformed their facial features so much that he cannot see any differences between them anymore. Since he himself doesn't have this essential trait of standardization, he has to admit that he is the only stranger among those strangers.

This impression is strengthened when he meets a man who has conformed to his environment so perfectly that he can't be distinguished from it any more. Accordingly, he introduces himself as an "assimilated one", and he tries to prove the advantages of integration. He explains that the stranger can achieve this objective just by abandoning his own stance which, being a distinctive



feature, evidently results in social exclusion. Everything else he needs to know is to be learned at the integration office. While the precise location of that office cannot be identified, nevertheless, it is not to be missed because it will be on his route anyway.

As the stranger neither intends to integrate nor to abandon his attitude he uses the first opportunity in order to go astray and enters a path out. Any stranger turned off so far, the residents call while blocking the access behind him. The byway - anyway so narrow that it only can be gone alone - tapers more and more. The stranger is trapped between high walls and defencelessly exposed to the increasingly growing loud whispers of the others. Now the echoing voices confess distinctly what he has feared all along: They want something from him. Though those people don't even know what they could desire to get from him, so much the better they know that the stranger obviously has to possess something they want to have themselves.

When he is abducted by some tourist guides to the premises of an insurance group, begins to fulfill what the voices prophesied: Although they assure him that henceforth he will be under the protection of the organization, but also confiscate some of his valuables, because - as the CEO - in this alley they have no value anyway. His gradual expropriation seems to be in accordance with the local law: Some highwaymen justify their mugging of him by a democratic majority decision he cannot reject because they doubtlessly outman him; and a "lecturer of free will" feels compelled to take away his identity card, because he himself doesn't possess an own identity. So the stranger loses not only his belongings but, at least, his arrogance.

As the stranger wants to register the loss of his documents, he is arrested, because he is unable to prove his identity. Unexpected he turns up again in a prison, where there are neither cells nor grating. The captives domiciled explain their voluntary presence on the deeper insight that freedom cannot be tied to prison bars. Since the stranger's identity cannot be ascertained, the officers conclude that he does not exist at all, and must not be here at all. Nevertheless, before his release, he shall pay a detention fee, and because he isn't capable of it, they admonish him to settle his insolvency. All that still remains to him after that is a street dog that doggedly runs after him, because he had thrown his prison fare to him.

Henceforth followed by this true companion, the stranger is straying through a maze of paths and corridors whose assumed exits

constantly either turn out to be blind alleys or simply lead to nowhere without ending at all. As a matter of course, any byway infallibly directs him back to the alley, except that the way back is impassable, as it exists in his memory only. He is caught within a world that evidently doesn't allow the slightest chance for escape. Therefore, he forfeits his destination as well as his hope to ever get out of this alley. Simply the recognition that the only important thing is keep on moving, deters him from resignation. By now, his maxims, of course, already have fallen by the wayside, and his seemingly fixed and stable conception of the world, meanwhile is well-nigh turned upside down.

Congruously, the approved experts in world explanation (religion, philosophy, and science) have to fail, although they keep on offering their services: A clergyman promises him a hope to be drawn from belief; the Lord was to shepherd him out of the alley. But the Lord's mysterious ways end in a red-light district this time. In front of the local nightclub "Paradise" a bouncer is carrying out his duties by evicting a flock of drunkards. They pretend to be philosophers, and confess to have lost orientation because they had to realize that this world cannot be unravelled with rationality. The only way out they see in intoxication and in love. As they maintain a close relationship with numerous ladies of easy virtue, they recommend one "Cherie" warmly to the stranger. She is to be his companion on the last part of his way.

Once again hope is rising when Cherie leads him to a scientist who acts as a coyote in the underground and takes refugees across the

border. The scientist warns of the incalculable risks associated with the entry into the border area. As the border is under heavy guard and also equipped with a device of natural self-protection, which requires that you indeed may approach it but never reach it, escape out of the alley although would be possible in theory, but in practice still no one succeeded. Being aware of the risks, the companions decide to penetrate into the boundary region ... and pay for it with their lives. Only the stranger survives.

Himself hit by a bullet, the stranger approaches the exit. The last steps are hard for him, especially since he has to take them alone, and he cannot take them but as a man who doesn't have anything of his own any more. In the course of his odyssey he has forfeited not only his belongings, but also his illusions, his hopes, his prior beliefs, his destination, and at last the certainty of his own existence. When, finally, he discovers the exit, the stranger has already been estranged totally from himself. Seeing his pursuers standing motionless by the exit of the alley, he realizes that he himself has been totally irrelevant to them all the time, and that they never have persecuted, but just have expected him. Contemptuously he passes them and enters a vast countryside which doesn't constrict him anymore, and in which there are no other people, no pursuers, no buildings, no walls, no alley, and no world any more, but only himself and the nothingness he can no longer be distinguished from. He is drowning in this bright landscape until he has merged with it completely, until he has been absorbed in the light, until he has vanished as if he never had existed.