

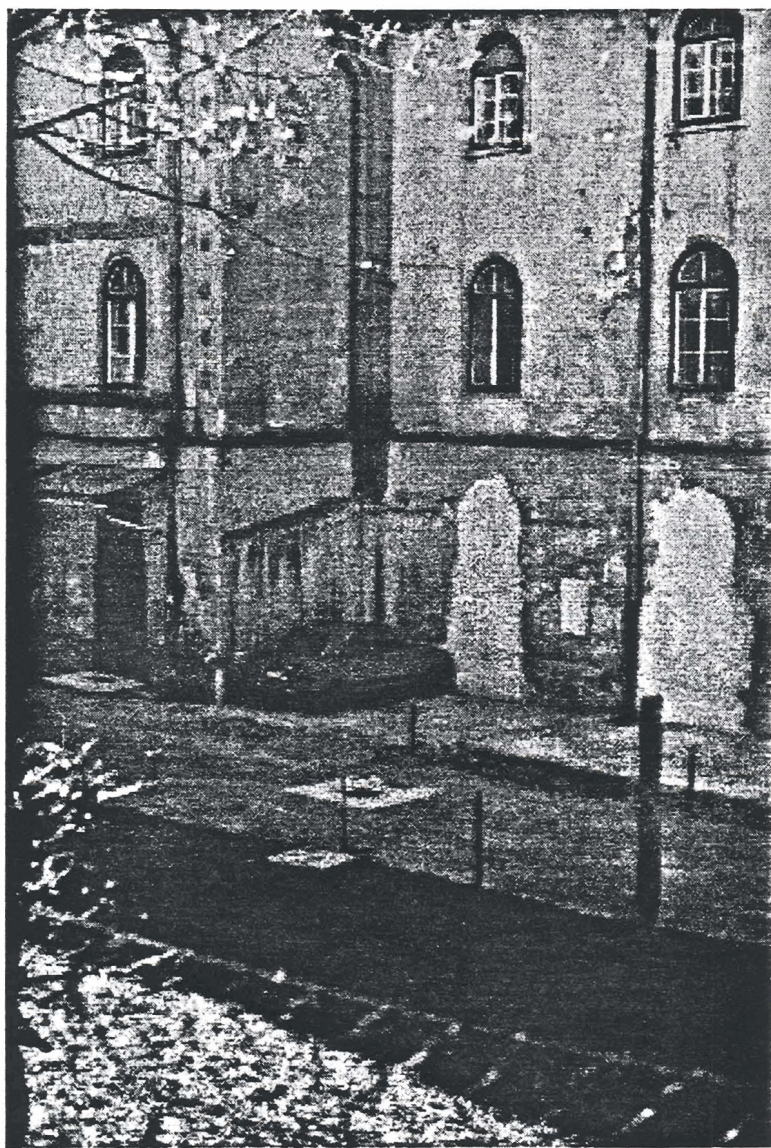
Things That Require Collecting



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Cheb

The **professor's** hand was bathed in a pale green haze **as** he reached for the cigarette lighter. His rented **Mercedes felt** like the inside of a dimly **glowing** submarine sinking into the night. Too **many** buttons and little dials stared back at him. Lighting a cigarette would be **one** thing; finding the window controls while watching the **road** would be another, and the professor was not used to performing more than one manual task at a time.

An hour before, he had driven cautiously out of the renter's lot and turned halfway into the street before he **realised** the parking brake was still engaged. Grabbing and pulling at **levers** below the steering wheel released the hood, and the professor held his breath, praying that it wouldn't **fly** up in the middle of traffic. He **imagined** the rental clerk **snickering** in the car park. I would rather have a simple car, he thought, a **Volkswagen** or an Opel.

He lit the cigarette and exhaled heavily, spilling a thick stream of smoke across the windshield where it formed a looping cloud to be sucked out by the wind. A **Janáček** melody **drifted** sleepily through the car and was drowned out periodically with the up and down of

the window. How appropriate, he thought, and watched for the Czech border.

The professor was the last scholar of German Romanticism at the university. His colleagues had retired and were replaced by young theorists in an English department that was expanding to include the study of American popular culture. Though far from retirement, the professor saw himself as the last refuge for idealism, much to the delight of his new colleagues who used every opportunity to banter him into the 21st century.

Last night, when he made a rare appearance at a popular bar, Mr. Richter and Mr. Werner invited him to sit and celebrate the end of the term. Conversation soon turned to academic matters and his associates politely consoled him on the loss of three more students to the English program. "You must get away from Germany for a while," suggested Mr. Werner. "Yes, take a trip East," Mr. Richter added brightly. "Have you been to Prague recently?" Mr. Richter was chair of the department for Eastern European Studies and a self-proclaimed 'true Bohemian'. The professor slowly sipped his beer and murmured that he liked Germany perfectly well. He had a great deal of reading to do, affairs to organise for the upcoming term, and besides, he didn't speak a word of Czech. "Don't be absurd!" they laughed. "Throw a copy of The Castle into the air and you're bound to hit someone who speaks German or English! There's more to life than the University!" The professor tried to share in their good-natured laughs and he raised his glass with them in a toast: "Prost! To your big trip!"

Now, the professor poked at the ashtray with his cigarette, shifting his eyes nervously from the embers to the road. The border-crossing loomed ahead, and he slowed to meet the