

AUTHORIZED PUBLIC SAMPLE



NOVEL II — DEVELOPMENT AND COUNTER-SUBJECT

Hearts Divide, Voices Fall!

50 pages of novel text

German principal text / authorized English literary parallel

Contains spoilers for the Literary Prelude and Novel I.

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THE SCHATTENDORF ECHOES

NOVEL II



Hearts Divide, Voices Fall!

A SUPERNATURAL HISTORICAL COMPOSITION



L I A N A M A R I E S I V E

About this sample

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WORK

Novel II: Hearts Divide, Voices Fall!

EXTENT

50 pages of novel text

SOURCE PAGES

6-55

READING ORDER

Read after Novel I when evaluating the sequence's development, counter-record, and material descent.

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DESCENT I



THE POEM WITH WET PASTE

The July twelfth issue came during a heat that made paste sour in the jar. Frau Klemper sniffed it and pronounced it usable only if no one expected miracles.

“Paper first. Miracles later. Open the window.”

Hermann opened the window over the east yard. Dust moved, a fly entered, and the skin on the paste trembled. Else Feldmann’s song of life occupied a narrow column among notices printed before the week’s verdict and violence. Rausch read the title twice.

“Das Lied vom Leben. The song of life.”

His voice dropped on the second reading. Julia placed both palms on the table. “If the poem is brought in only because blood follows it, we have stolen it. If it is allowed to remain alive, then it can stand beside the blood without becoming an omen.”

Hermann cut around the poem with the bread knife because the scissors had dulled. The blade snagged the lower line and pulled a fiber from the sheet. A boy from the Thursday hour leaned too close and left sweat from his forehead on the margin. The ink feathered.

He looked stricken. Frau Klemper handed him the gray cloth.

“Blot, do not scrub. You are not burying a beet.”

The blot saved most of Leben and blurred its final stroke. Hermann left the mark; replacing the sheet after the week’s events would have made the earlier page look retrospectively staged. Adornfeld disliked lyric in public records but entered the title in his ledger: July 12, poem. He marked it neither prophecy nor evidence.

Rausch wanted to paste the poem over ERMORDET so life could answer murder. Julia refused before Hermann could.

“If life covers murder, then murder becomes a ground for decoration. Put it beside, not over.”

They placed Feldmann’s poem on the east door’s left stile, where the hinge shadow did not reach. The paste wrinkled the bottom line. Hermann pressed only the corners. Afterward, the door carried the poem beside the murder headline, the blurred stroke in Leben, and paste already souring in the heat.

Nothing on the panel was labeled prophecy.

DESCENT II



JULY FIFTEEN BEFORE IT KNEW ITSELF

The Burgenländische Freiheit of July fifteenth still reported proceedings in the orderly language available before the verdict's consequences were known. Adornfeld cleared the table and wrote three verified names on separate cards: Josef Tscharmann; Hieronymus Tscharmann; Johann Pinter. He had checked the damaged columns and variant spellings before allowing any of them into the manuscript. Rausch read the trial report in clipped pieces.

"Accused. Shooting admitted. Intent denied. Fear alleged. Weapons and ammunition prepared. Bürgermeister Grafl. Schutzbund witnesses. Frontkämpfer witnesses. Erwachen der Magyaren. Courtroom laughter."

He paused between each item. Adornfeld did not quote the transcript. He untied the gray string around the court bundle and set the opened knot beside the inkwell, where a clerk could see that the file had been handled. The heavier pages sagged at their corners.

The clauses recorded an admitted discharge of weapons, a denial of murderous intent, and an appeal to fear. By the time the syntax reached its period, the prepared ammunition had nearly disappeared behind qualifications. A clerk's thumb had smeared one witness name, so Adornfeld held the page by its upper corners. Paper moved against paper and string against nail while Adornfeld read.

The trial reached them through a bundle heavy enough to require both hands and still bend at the corners. Julia listened without sitting.

"If fear is printed after preparation, then the paper must show the distance between them. If the court hears laughter near wounded names, then the room must not imitate the court."

Hermann cut the defendant list from a copy, then stopped. The knife had entered too close to Josef. Not Grössing; not the child; the other Josef, the accused. Even so, the slip had been damaged.

She laid the blade down. Frau Klemper looked over.

"Do not chew names because the court chews them."

Hermann repaired the nick with transparent paper cut from the back of an envelope. The patch shone more than the surrounding sheet, but the name remained whole. The boy had been told to hold the lower margin and managed instead to turn the witness column upside down. This time Adornfeld corrected him with unusual gentleness.



“Witnesses must face the room that hears them.” Rausch began again and read the wounded: Josef Haring, Alois Schmiedel, Josef Wagner, Jakob Stromer, Martin Grössing.

Then the dead: Matthias Csmarits and Josef Grössing. No one asked him to add an adjective. They pasted the trial list below the poem and away from the May slogans, so the eye would not confuse a record of proceedings with a public demand. By then, the door bore the poem, the trial list, a visibly repaired defendant name, and the witness column set upright.

They did not copy the courtroom laughter onto the panel.

DESCENT III



THE BATTLEFIELD WITHOUT BAUER

The news of the verdict did not enter as a page at first. It entered as footsteps in the lane, then as a shouted contradiction, then as three people arriving with the same fact and three different degrees of breath. Rausch reached instinctively for Otto Bauer's name, because a name with a theory can make chaos appear governed. Julia caught the movement.

"If he was not there, do not use him to occupy the street."

Hermann took a blank rectangle of newsprint from the waste pile. No type, no column rule, only the ghost of ink from the page beneath. She laid it on the table. Adornfeld understood before Rausch did.

"Absence?"

"Placement," Hermann said. "A place where he is not shown."

Frau Klemper set the paste jar farther away.

"Do not paste a man where another body fell."

They stated the rule aloud. Otto Bauer had not been at Tscharmann's tavern in January or at the courthouse door in July. He was neither policeman, fireman, Schutzbund orderly, nor a woman searching for her son. He would appear later only where the record placed him, in print and speech.

Rausch disliked the blank.

"The reader will want a figure." Julia answered, "If the reader wants a figure where there was none, then the reader must feel the want." The boy asked whether a blank could be pinned.

Frau Klemper gave him a pin and supervised. He placed it too high, leaving one corner of the newsprint to sag. Hermann left the corner as it was; flattening the blank would have made the omission look decorative. Outside, a wagon wheel struck the rut twice and stopped.

The violence ahead would occur in streets and offices: a verdict carried into the city, police fire, and the Palace of Justice burning. The next layer joined poem and trial to a sagging blank where Bauer was absent. No one borrowed his body for the display.



DESCENT IV

STRÖME VON BLUT

The Mitteilungs-Blatt of July sixteenth arrived unfolded. The messenger held the fresh sheet with both hands. Ströme von Blut sind gestern in Wien geflossen. Rausch read the first sentence and stopped.

He could not reduce the complete accusation to his usual fragments. Frau Klemper put a saucer under the paste jar.

“Blood is not paste. Do not let the metaphor make a mess on my table.”

The bulletin named the acquittal as an injury to the workers’ sense of justice. It named mounted attacks, arrests, firing, pursuit of fleeing people, shots at small groups, at orderlies, even at those trying to help. It admitted undisciplined elements without surrendering the whole working class to police revenge. It moved the weapon away from bodies and toward stoppage: not men thrown against rifles, but wheels made still.

Julia leaned over the page.

“If the bulletin admits disorder, then the novel can admit it too. If it names police revenge, then we must not sand the edge from that either.”

Hermann cut the phrase Ströme von Blut. The paper tore through the second word and made Blut into Blu. The boy gasped. This time the accident could not remain.

Hermann cut a small t from the advertisement column and patched the word. The t was a different typeface. Blood acquired a foreign limb. Adornfeld wrote in the ledger: repaired word visible.

Do not conceal repair. Rausch read the strike order: railwaymen, post, telegraph, telephone; a protest strike for others; exceptions for hospitals, water, bread, gas, electricity, and work that could not stop without grave danger. Those at the table heard a moral machine rather than a slogan. The boy took a wooden wheel from the toy shelf and set it down.

“This one too?” Frau Klemper said, “For one minute. Then someone still has to fetch coal.”

Hermann dipped the wheel’s rim in thinned blue and rolled it once along the lower door panel. It left an uneven circle that flattened at the place where the wood grain rose. At that point, the door showed: life, trial, blank absence, blood headline repaired in mismatched type, wheel mark under it. The descent had not reached hell by going below.

It had reached hell by staying on the same door until the door could no longer pretend to be furniture.

PRESS INTERLEAF



VERDICT WEEK THROUGH FIVE REGISTERS

Verdict week entered the room before the verdict. The Burgenländische Freiheit brought the trial first as a list of bodies and charges. Josef Tscharmann. Hieronymus Tscharmann.

Johann Pinter. The dead: Matthias Csmarits and Josef Grössing. The wounded: Josef Haring, Alois Schmiedel, Josef Wagner, Martin Grössing, Jakob Stromer. The legal language moved differently from mourning.

It did not weep. It arranged. Julia read the names aloud once. Not because the room did not know them, but because legal print had a way of making a name sound as though it belonged to a drawer.

The Tiroler Anzeiger entered first as a legal notice from June: Josef and Hieronymus Tscharmann, Johann Pinter, an indictment under § 87, an announced jury-court date. The item was brief enough to seem neutral until Julia noticed how much public certainty could fit inside a schedule. The same paper returned during the trial with a child's answer lifted from testimony— religion: red—and made the answer carry an indictment of Social Democratic education. Frau Klemper placed the two clippings apart.

"Same masthead," she said. "Not the same job."

The Salzburger Wacht did not contain itself so politely. Its verdict headline struck the table. The Schattendorf murderers had been acquitted. The jury numbers followed: nine against the first question, six and six, seven and five, not enough, not enough, not enough.

Arithmetic had found a way to say no while pretending only to count. Hermann arranged the verdict papers around the mended strip. The official version was absent from this table, and its absence became another paper. Julia placed a blank card where it would have lain.

"Do not fill that," she said. "With what?" Rausch asked. "With our convenience." They learned the verdict before the city burned: trial list, Heimwehr front room, jury arithmetic, blank official space, names kept separate from the anger that needed them.



PRESS INTERLEAF



BLOOD BULLETIN AND THE CITY ORDER

The first bulletin did not arrive folded. It arrived bent from being gripped. Ströme von Blut sind gestern in Wien geflossen. Rausch read the sentence and stopped.

The bulletin accused police commanders: senseless mounted attacks, arrests pulled from the crowd, armed pursuit of fleeing workers, shots at small groups, shots at Schutzbund men trying to keep order, shots even at medical workers. It did not deny that undisciplined boys and men had entered the crowd and committed acts unworthy of the working class. It refused, however, to let the guilt of a few hundred become permission to punish the whole labor public with bullets.

“That distinction matters,” Adornfeld said. “Then write it where it can be seen,” Julia said.

He did. As a hinge note: guilt is not transferable by crowd, not as a slogan. On the next day Mayor Seitz's order entered: a Gemeindefschutzwache, an organ of the elected municipal government, formed to protect municipal institutions, restore order, and end bloodshed. The word Wache returned, darker than it had been in February.

Guard, watch, police, protection, threat. A word with too many uniforms. Frau Klemper took the paper away from Rausch and put it flat under the water jug.

"A city order curls when it is frightened," she said.

By July eighteenth the trust-men had spoken. Work was to resume in all businesses except transport. Gatherings were to stop. The Gemeindeschutzwache was to be supported.

The traffic strike would continue only as long as needed to prevent reaction from using the bloody situation for its own purposes. Then Bauer entered. It was not from the street, not through the door.

In print. Hermann laid the speech under blue wash until certain words appeared only when the light turned: responsibility, working class, Republic, country, passion, cold-blooded deliberation. Bauer had not been at the tavern in January. He had not been the hand on the courthouse door in July. He was admitted here as speech under pressure.

A boy from the village asked why he could not be painted in the street. Julia answered before anyone else could make a doctrine of it.

"Because he was not there."

No one added anything.

THE MANUSCRIPT BODY

PART I



CHAPTER 1

After Womit

At dawn Hermann opened the east door and found that someone had tried to clean the word away. The mark had not been made with a rag, which would have left a neat square. A sleeve or the heel of a hand had dragged a broad wet smear from left to right and stopped before the final curve. Chalk remained in the grain; the word was legible only to someone who already knew it.

Womit? The W had spread into a pale bruise. The middle letters had lost their backs. The last sign, which had been a question mark, had become a small hook of white at the lower hinge.

A person could pass through the door now and not know that the room had asked anything. Hermann stood with the latch in her hand. The brass was cold enough to sting the crease below the thumb. She had washed twice.

Soap had taken the brown from the nail but not from the cuticle. At the base of the forefinger, where skin had torn while lifting the broken slate, a thread of red reopened when she bent the hand. Behind her, the Gemeindesaal showed the night's failed cleanup. Someone had returned the chairs to rows during the night, though the rows did not quite align.

Three chairs near the south wall faced outward, abandoned midway through a count. Julia's chair was absent. Frau Klemper had put Alex's stool under the table before anyone could decide to leave it at the center. The stove was out.

That, more than the smeared word, made Frau Klemper angry when she came in by the kitchen passage carrying kindling in her apron. She had not slept. Her hair was fastened with two pins instead of four, and one strand had escaped and stuck to her cheek.

"You opened it," she said.

Hermann looked at the door.

"The stove," Frau Klemper said. "Not the wound. The stove. Hold this."

She pushed the kindling into Hermann's arms. It was damp. Last night's rain had found the shed roof and come through in a line no wider than a knife. The wood smelled of cellar, apple crate, and a winter that had not been asked to leave.

Hermann held it badly. Bark fell on her skirt. Frau Klemper knelt. The stove door groaned when she pulled it open.

Ash spilled forward. She looked at it for a moment without expression, then reached in with her bare hand and drew out a half-burned paper twist. It had once been part of a notice. The only word left was LISTEN, blackened at both ends.

“Not enough draft,” she said. “If the room is to be opened this week, and if opened is still the word we are willing to use after yesterday, then the first obligation would seem to be heat,” Hermann said, too long and too carefully.

“Wood,” Frau Klemper answered. “Start there.”

Adornfeld appeared at the outer door with his ledger under one arm. His collar was fastened wrong by one button, which made his precision look borrowed and not returned in time.

“Seven chairs out of line,” he said. “Three cups missing. One slate in two pieces. Stove out. Question partly erased.”

“Good morning,” Hermann said. “Unconfirmed.”

Frau Klemper pointed toward the passage.

“Dry wood. Top shelf. Bottom shelf lies. Remember that.”

They went through the passage past the shelves where cups had been turned mouth-down and the coal scuttle stood with its lid crooked. A bucket caught water under the shed roof. Each drop struck the same place and made the same small pit in the gray dust at the bottom. Outside, morning had begun without giving light.

The village chimneys raised smoke thinly, as if reluctant to confess occupation. A horse coughed in a stable. From the lane came the sound of someone dragging a cart over stones and stopping twice to set the load straight. Frau Klemper lifted the shed latch with her elbow.

“Top shelf is dry. Bottom shelf lies.”

Hermann reached for the top shelf. A sliver entered the ball of her thumb. She did not cry out. Frau Klemper saw it anyway.

“Leave it until the fire starts. Then take it out.”

“A small wound is not improved by being made procedural,” Hermann said. “It is if the procedure removes wood. Carry.”

They carried wood back together. Hermann took too much and dropped one piece at the threshold. Frau Klemper did not bend for it. Hermann did.

When she straightened, smoke from the kitchen chimney came down rather than up and entered her eyes. She coughed, then coughed again until water ran down her face.

“Good,” Frau Klemper said. “Now you look useful.”

In the hall the stove did not catch at first. The first flame took the edge of paper, shone briefly, and went thin as thread. Frau Klemper closed the door too soon. Smoke leaked from the seam and curled along the black iron like writing refusing the page.

Hermann opened the damper, or thought she did. The smoke thickened.

“Other way,” Frau Klemper said.

Hermann turned it. The fire drew in one breath. A stick clicked. Flame came again, this time in the middle, not at the edge.

At the door the erased word waited. The hook of chalk near the hinge seemed smaller in the growing light.

“Do you want it cleaned properly?” Hermann asked.

Julia answered from the threshold before Frau Klemper could.

“No.”

Hermann turned. Julia had entered without ceremony and with mud on the hem of her skirt. She carried the wrapped slate halves in both hands, not like relics, not like evidence, but like two sharp things that must not be allowed to touch. Her hair had come loose at one side.

She had walked part of the road. Frau Klemper looked at the mud first.

“Mat.”

Julia stepped back, wiped her boots on the mat, and entered again.

“Better,” Frau Klemper said.

Julia set the slate halves on the table.

“The chalk should stay.”

“Which chalk?” Adornfeld asked. “What is left.”

Hermann looked at the smeared door.

“If the word is no longer legible to anyone who did not see it, then leaving it may become a private luxury rather than a public mark.”

Julia held out her hand.

“Your thumb.”

“You have not answered.”

“It is a splinter.”

Hermann gave her the hand. Julia did not take it at once.

“May I?”

Frau Klemper stopped with the poker in her hand, and Adornfeld’s pencil halted above the ledger. The stove clicked once.

“Yes,” Hermann said.

Julia bent over the hand.

“Hold still.”

“I am holding still.”

“You are explaining stillness to yourself. Stop.”

Frau Klemper approved this enough not to say so. Julia took a needle from the sewing roll by the shelf, passed it once through the candle flame, wiped it on her sleeve, and worked the splinter up. Hermann watched the top of Julia’s head

because watching the needle would have made the pain official. The splinter came out in one pale thread no longer than a comma.

"There," Julia said. "Keep it," Adornfeld said, and then heard himself.

Frau Klemper turned on him.

"No."

"I meant as record."

"It is wood. Burn it."

Julia placed the splinter on the stove lip. It blackened, curled, and vanished without becoming an archive. Rausch entered late, carrying a paper folded twice. He had run.

The fold was wrong; one headline had been broken through the middle. He began, "Verdict. Court. The city—" Julia cut him off. "Not over the stove." He stopped. He looked at the table, the slate halves, the smeared word, Hermann's bandaged thumb, and the stove door where the splinter had just disappeared.

"I brought the paper," he said more quietly.

"You also brought breath," Frau Klemper said. "Sit before you spend both."

He sat. The paper remained in his hand. A boy came to the outer door while they were deciding whether the room had enough heat to receive a report. Not Alex.

No one thought Alex except everyone. This boy was smaller, with a cap too large for him and a piece of string tied around one wrist. He did not enter until Frau Klemper told him he was letting the cold in and therefore had already become part of the problem.

"Is the room open Thursday?" he asked.

No adult answered quickly. The mercy failed them this time because all answers seemed to borrow from the dead. Adornfeld consulted the ledger.

"Thursday, children's hour, four o'clock, subject to committee confirmation and stove condition."

The boy stared at him. Julia said, "Yes, if there is heat." Frau Klemper said, "Bring dry socks." Rausch said, "Meeting notices. Two already pasted. One at the halt, one near the bakery. Time uncertain."

"I asked Thursday," the boy said.

Hermann looked at the smeared word on the door. If they answered only with grief, they would make the hall a chapel by incompetence; if they answered only with schedules, they would make it an office by cowardice. They would have to hold both without pretending the choice was innocent.

"Thursday," she said, "the door opens at four. You may come at ten minutes before, because children who arrive exactly on time arrive after the stove has already made its opinion known."

The boy considered this.

“Socks?”

“Dry,” Frau Klemper said.

He nodded and left with the air of someone entrusted with a public institution below the ankle. The stove caught fully then. Not because of the boy. Not because of Julia.

Not because grief had been treated correctly. Fire is not obedient to structure. The top stick shifted, the draft held, and the flame entered the damp wood by a route no one had planned. The heat came unevenly, with damp wood hissing and smoke still escaping at the seam.

Hermann went to the table. The slate halves lay separately wrapped so the broken edges would not rub. She did not unwrap them. Julia loosened the cloth around each just enough for air to enter, then tied it again.

“Like that,” Julia said.

Adornfeld wrote: Stove lit. Splinter removed by consent. Thursday remains. Rausch unfolded the paper only after the fire had stayed for a full minute.

His first fragments came lower than usual.

“Schwurgericht. Freispruch. Vienna. Crowds. Blood not yet in this issue.”

The word Freispruch did not lie flat. The fold ran beneath it, so that the acquittal rose from the table like a ridge in a road. Adornfeld put a spoon on the upper margin to hold it open; the spoon slid toward the defendants’ names and stopped there, bright against poor ink. Whereas the verdict had been delivered according to form, and provided that form could be separated from justice without tearing the page, the report still required a table, a weight, a hand at either edge, and someone willing to read what the fold kept closing.

The stove caught before noon. The room did not become warm. It became available to warmth, which was not the same thing and was all the morning could honestly offer.

CHAPTER 2



Hearts Divide, Voices Fall

The phrase did not wait above a gate. It hung from a nail on the back of a ration-board outside the halt, written on a theatre notice that had been turned over and used because paper had become a citizen with too many occupations. On one side, half a dancer leaned toward a painted moon. On the other, in letters made by a hand that had borrowed seriousness but not practice, stood: HEARTS FALL, VOICES DIVIDE.

Someone had crossed out FALL and written DIVIDE above it. Someone else had crossed out DIVIDE and written FALL below it. The result made the board look like a quarrel between two teachers who had arrived after the lesson. The queue began under the eaves and bent around the pump.

No one knew whether the board assigned numbers, announced flour, or warned against gathering. The string by which it hung had been tied three times, and each knot belonged to a different solution. A woman in a brown coat turned the board around and found the dancer.

"This is old," she said. "Everything is old before we get it," said the man behind her.

"That avoids the question."

"No. It is the line."

Rain softened the ink at the lower edge. One black drop slid through the word HEARTS and lengthened the final stroke until the letter looked as if it were pointing down the road. A boy reached toward it. His mother caught his wrist without looking.

He tried again with the other hand and took a torn corner from the theatre side. He folded it around a pinch of tobacco he had no right to possess. Hermann watched the paper change uses. The dancer lost a foot.

The moon lost a nail. The motto remained, which seemed unfair. Marc stood beside the pump, hat in hand, water shining on his hair.

"There," he said. "A title that has already been miscopied has begun its education." Klimt, under the eaves where the rain could not reach his cuffs, examined the dancer's surviving arm.

"At least she was printed to move. The sentence was printed to command."

"It was not printed," Hermann said.

Both men turned toward her. She pointed.

"Charcoal. Or stove black. See the thumb there."



The board lurched in the wind. A man in a railway cap came out and told the queue to stand closer to the wall. The queue tightened. A woman protested that closer to the wall meant under the drip.

The railway man said the drip was not his office. A second board appeared in his hand, smaller and official. It contained numbers. Those with numbers moved left. Those without numbers remained under the dancer. The man called twelve. No one moved. He called twelve again.

A woman said twelve had gone to fetch her mother. The man said numbers could not fetch mothers.

"Then mothers should not get hungry while numbers stand still," said the woman in the brown coat.

Nobody laughed. The railway man looked at his sheet as if laughter would have been easier to discipline. Hermann found herself holding the loose end of the string. She had not taken it.

The board had swung, and the string had brushed her sleeve, and now her fingers had closed around it. The fiber was coarse, damp, and warm from the wood. She let go. The board turned once more.

For a moment the sentence corrected itself in the wind. HEARTS DIVIDE, VOICES FALL. Then the dancer returned. Inside the halt, a clock had stopped at half past six.

Everyone looked at it when the train did not come. No one believed it. The railway man called thirteen. Two people stepped forward, argued, and discovered that one held thirteen from yesterday and one from today.

The numbers were identical except for the hole punched through the corner. Yesterday's hole had been round. Today's was square.

"A government may be judged by its holes," Marc said.

Klimt smiled.

"And by whether anyone designs them."

Hermann did not answer. The word Womit? had left chalk in the grooves of her mind. With what does one begin: with the heart, with the voice, with the number, with the hole, with the string?

A child cried because the queue moved and he had lost the corner of paper. The tobacco had fallen into the mud. His mother bent to retrieve it and left the child standing in the place where her body had been. The queue closed around him and then opened again, clumsily, ashamed of its own pressure.

The train arrived without steam enough to seem decisive. People with numbers boarded. People without numbers asked whether standing counted as waiting if there was no train to stand for. The railway man had no form for the question.

When the platform cleared, the board still hung from the nail. The slogan had run at the edges. The dancer, seen from the reverse, had become the shadow of a person trying to leave a room through a wall. Hermann did not take the paper.

She took the string after it snapped in the wind and fell at her feet. It left a damp mark across her palm. UE In an earlier arrangement the motto stood above an infernal gate. It has been demoted here to queue furniture.

This may be the only promotion it deserved. Hermann's Note: The string did more work than the sentence. It held the board until rain loosened the ink. I kept it.

A gate would have tempted me to paint an entrance; string leaves only a wet line in the palm.

CHAPTER 3

The Wall

The wall outside the tavern had grown thick with decisions. Under the top layer of paper, older papers swelled and loosened like skin after a long bath. Imperial proclamations, party notices, funeral announcements, prices for oats, a circus advertisement showing an elephant no one in the village had seen, and a warning about unlicensed assemblies had all learned to share paste without agreement. A boy stood on an upturned crate with a scraper in one hand and a bucket of gray glue in the other.

He was too small for the wall and too old to be lifted.

“Take yesterday first,” the tavern woman told him from the doorway.

“Which is yesterday?”

She looked at the wall. The question held. Three notices announced the same evening. Or seemed to.

The first read MEET, but someone had scraped the middle letters and written MOURN in charcoal over the scar. The second read MOURN, and across it another hand had painted MARCH so large that the M covered a date and the H entered the name of the hall. The third had begun as MARCH and had been changed to WAIT by a hand that knew how to make letters official even when working in pencil. MEET.

MOURN. MARCH. WAIT. No one knew which notice had been posted last.

A man with a red scarf said the pencil proved cowardice. A woman carrying onions said pencil proved intelligence, since paint cost money. The tavern woman said anyone who wanted a wall should first scrape one. The boy scraped.

Paper came away in damp curls. The scraper slipped on paste and cut his thumb at the nail. Blood fell into the glue bucket. He stared at it, offended.

The red scarf man reached for a handkerchief. The boy put his thumb in his mouth and kept working. Hermann stood at the edge of the little crowd, not yet seen because the wall had more urgent spectators. Marc and Klimt were not with her.

Without them, nobody supplied a compositional principle. A cart wheel struck a rut behind Hermann and threw muddy water against her hem. The boy pulled away a strip and uncovered SO WÄHLET—then nothing.

The rest remained trapped under MOURN.

“Leave that,” said the red scarf man.

“Take it off,” said the onion woman.

“No one is voting for paper,” the tavern woman said.

The boy looked at Hermann. Perhaps because she was silent, perhaps because she wore a coat that suggested she had once been entitled to useless answers.

“Which one?”

Hermann looked at the notices. The four verbs had begun to enter one another. MEET retained one straight leg. MOURN had the better curve.

MARCH possessed the wall by force. WAIT, pale but stubborn, survived because pencil sank into scratches paint could not fill.

“Start where the paste is loose,” she said.

The boy did. A policeman crossed the square without stopping. Everyone looked away from the wall before he looked at them. After he had passed, they looked back and found that no one had held the same opinion in his absence.

The red scarf man now wanted the third notice left. The onion woman wanted only the dates. The tavern woman wanted the boy off the crate before he bled on the threshold. A second boy arrived with fresh paste.

He was carrying the bucket too far from his body. It swung and struck his shin. He cursed in Czech. The tavern woman answered in German.

The two languages did not quarrel. They did not understand each other well enough to quarrel before noon. Hermann took the old scraper when the first boy jumped down. The handle was slick.

She climbed the crate before anyone could stop her and reached toward the corner of the M in MARCH. The paper resisted. Under it, something older tore. A face appeared: an emperor’s beard, one eye missing, the mouth replaced by a date.

Someone laughed once, then stopped because the laugh did not know whose side it had taken.

“Careful,” the red scarf man said. “Of what?” Hermann asked.

He did not answer. That was the wall’s talent: it made everyone afraid of damaging the wrong past. When the work was done, nothing was clean. MEET had lost its M. MOURN had no date.

MARCH remained in patches. WAIT was the only word whole, and only because the pencil had gone into the torn fibers. The boy pressed his wounded thumb against the new notice to smooth it. Blood marked the corner.

The paste took best there. By evening, rain would come. By morning, another hand would have written over it. Hermann left before anyone asked her to sign anything.

On her sleeve, where the wall had brushed her, a small piece of paper clung backward. She did not notice until she reached the lane. It read EET. Only EET remained—not meet, not yet a word.

By noon the wall had three bare patches and one place where the paste had dried over nothing. The boy with the cut thumb returned carrying a second bucket, because his father had told him to finish what he had bloodied. He scraped more slowly now. Every time the knife caught brick, he flinched before pain could arrive.

A woman passing with eggs stopped to read the fragments left behind.

“MARCH,” she said. “That one is old,” the boy answered. “Old things sometimes wait.”

He shrugged. The gesture was too young to carry the sentence she had offered it. He scraped the M away and left ARCH. For one minute the wall promised architecture instead of action.

Then the wet paper folded and fell into the bucket.

CHAPTER 4

The Pawnshop

The pawnshop bell made no sound when Hermann entered. A strip of felt had been tied around the clapper.

“Noise spends faster than money,” the clerk said without looking up.

He had a narrow face and two ink stains on the side of his neck, as though he had once turned too quickly while holding a pen. On the counter lay three watches, a silver spoon black at the bowl, a child’s coat with the buttons cut off, and a wedding ring wrapped in paper. The ring was not gold enough to be sentimental, which made it harder to sell. Gold has the courtesy of announcing betrayal.

Thin brass leaves everyone to guess. The man at the counter wore his hat in both hands. He had removed it before entering and then forgotten what hands were for. His hair was flattened across his forehead.

Rain had darkened the shoulders of his jacket but not the elbows, which were already dark from work.

“I need the coal account returned with the ring,” he said. “Then you should not have wrapped the ring in the coal account.”

“I did not know she had written on it.”

The clerk held the wrapped ring between two fingers.

“People always write on the side that later becomes necessary.”

Hermann had come in only because the rain at the halt had turned cold and the pawnshop door stood open. She had not intended to buy, redeem, witness, or pity. She stood near the shelf of musical instruments no one had played in years. A violin lay there without strings.

Beside it, a clarinet mouthpiece rested in a cracked teacup. The clerk unfolded the paper. On one side, in a supplier’s hand, stood the coal account: date, amount, delivery uncertain, payment partial. On the back, in a child’s pencil, arithmetic occupied the margins.

Twelve divided by three. Twelve divided by four. Eight divided by two. A column of crooked figures descended toward a sentence written more firmly than the sums: If Anna eats the crust, Otto must stop saying he is still hungry.

The man saw Hermann seeing it. His hand moved fast and late. The clerk had already set the ring on the scale.

“That paper stays with me,” the man said. “The paper is waste.”

“Then waste stays with me.”

The clerk looked at the ring.

“The ring brings less if I cannot wrap it.”

“Then bring less.”

For the first time the clerk looked directly at him. There was no drama in the look. It was the exhausted respect one man gives another when both know the arithmetic has no mercy and neither man invented it. He weighed the ring without paper.

The little brass weight tilted the scale, hesitated, and settled. The clerk named a sum. The man flinched but did not argue. Bargaining requires the belief that a number can be persuaded.

This number had arrived already ashamed. Hermann reached into her coat. The man saw the movement and stepped back.

“No.”

She stopped.

“I did not ask.”

“I know.”

“Then do not answer.”

The clerk pushed coins across the counter. One rolled, struck the spoon, and came back. The man gathered them and put them in his pocket without counting. He folded the coal receipt carefully, not along the old creases, but across them, making a smaller square.

The pencil sentence disappeared inside. A woman entered with a parcel under her shawl. She saw the man and waited outside again. In the street, water ran along the curb carrying straw, ash, and a blue thread that caught briefly on the wheel of a cart.

“The coal was delivered?” Hermann asked the clerk after the man had gone.

“Depends who asks.”

“I am asking.”

“Then no.”

He wrapped the brass ring in a page torn from a catalogue of farm tools. On the visible side was an advertisement for a plough. The horse in the drawing leaned into the harness with the serenity of an animal that had never met mud. Hermann bought the clarinet mouthpiece because it cost less than apology.

Outside, the man was gone. The woman with the parcel had come in behind her. The felt-bound bell lifted and fell without sound. That evening Hermann wrote the sentence from memory and got it wrong.

She wrote: If Anna has bread, Otto must not call hunger justice. She crossed it out. She tried again: If Anna eats the crust, Otto must stop saying— The rest

would not come. She left the line unfinished and rubbed the pencil mark until the paper thinned.

Hermann Note Do not take another household as evidence when it has not asked to testify. Hermann saw the man again outside the pawnshop after the rain turned sharper. He had no ring now. His left hand kept closing as if the finger objected to vacancy.

He did not see her at first. When he did, he nodded without deciding whether she had witnessed shame or transaction.

“Your paper,” Hermann said, then stopped.

She had no right to want the receipt. He put the folded coal receipt deeper into his coat.

“Not mine.”

“No.”

“My daughter writes on what lies still. Receipts lie still.”

He looked toward the pawnshop window, where rings and watches rested on velvet as if time and marriage had agreed to be quiet for display.

“If I bring it home, she will ask whether the sum is right.”

“Is it?”

He shook his head.

“No. But she corrected her brother first.”

INTERMEZZO 1



Rita's Clinic of Names

Prince Rita received Hermann in a room whose clinical purpose appeared only when Adornfeld attempted an inventory.

"Chair, table, drum, mirror, shelf," he said. "You have named furniture," Rita answered. "You have not named the room."

Dollberg lay on the floor with one boot on the table leg.

"A room that resists inventory is flirting."

Rita did not look at him. She had placed the blue-threaded drum between herself and Hermann, not as ornament, not as warning. A child might have set it there to remember not to touch. The thread around its rim had loosened at one knot.

Hermann sat with her hands in her lap. The splinter from the shed remained in the thumb. She had meant to remove it after the stove caught. She had not.

The skin had closed over one end, making the splinter less visible and more present.

"What did you bring?" Rita asked.

Hermann opened her palm. In it lay the damp string from the ration board and the clarinet mouthpiece from the pawnshop. Dollberg sat up.

"Excellent. A noose and a mouth."

"No," Rita said. "You haven't looked."

"I heard you name them. That was enough."

Adornfeld reached for his notebook. Rita put one finger on the drum. She did not strike it. Adornfeld withdrew his hand.

"A string," Hermann said. "A mouthpiece."

"What do they do?"

"The string held the board until it failed. The mouthpiece belonged to an instrument that had lost the rest of itself."

Rita turned the mouthpiece over.

"Can it still make sound?"

"Not alone."

"Then it has learned politics."

Dollberg laughed. Adornfeld wrote anyway, though no one had permitted him. The mirror behind Rita showed Hermann as if the light had arrived from two directions and chosen neither. Public record kept one grammar; the mirror kept another.

Hermann did not correct it. Rita watched the watching.

"A name is not the same as a sound," Rita said. "Wittgenstein would not like that sentence," Adornfeld murmured. "Wittgenstein is not here."

"People often pretend he is absent. He returns anyway."

Rita lifted the drum and placed it on the floor between Hermann's shoes.

"You may strike it only after asking."

"Asking whom?"

"That is the first name."

Hermann looked at the string, the mouthpiece, the drum, and her own hand with the buried splinter. She did not ask. Rita did not hurry her. In the intermezzo, time had better manners than history.

Rita brought out a shallow dish filled with water and placed Hermann's damp string in it. The string darkened at once and sank in the middle while both ends floated. Dollberg leaned over it as if an execution might occur.

"A poor bridge," he said. "A bridge that admits wetness," Rita said.

Adornfeld took from his pocket a slip on which someone had written Herr in a clerk's quick hand. The ink had smeared where Hermann's thumb once passed over it. He offered it to Rita as evidence. She did not take it.

"Put it beside the mouthpiece."

He obeyed and looked irritated by the accuracy of his obedience. The slip curled in the damp air. Herr became less legible at the middle first. The H and the final r held longer, two posts after the bridge between them had gone soft.

Hermann watched the paper fail in stages. She wanted to rescue it and did not know whether rescue meant drying the title or drowning it properly.

"Do nothing," Rita said. "Is that advice?"

"It is an instruction for this dish. Do not use it elsewhere without asking."

Dollberg laughed from the floor.

"Even your silences require permits."

Rita set the clarinet mouthpiece near Hermann's knee.

"Blow."

No sound came. Hermann felt only the foolishness of lips around an object made for an absent body. She tried again. The mouthpiece clicked against her tooth.

"There," Dollberg said. "A confession."

"A tooth," Rita said.

Hermann lowered the mouthpiece. The mirror behind Rita showed a woman with a string in water, a title softening, and a mouthpiece that could not sing alone. The mirror did not assemble them. It left them near one another and let the room do the harder work.

CHAPTER 5

The Canteen

At the canteen, soup arrived before politics and was therefore given the better table. The room had once been a storeroom for sacks of flour. Flour remained in the cracks between the floorboards, pale where feet had not reached it, gray where boots had ground it into the wood. A stove in the corner boiled water for coffee no one ordered because soup cost less and lasted longer in the mouth.

The windows sweated. The coats on the hooks gave off wool, rain, tobacco, and iron. There were no empty tables. That circumstance brought the two men to the same bench.

One wore a red badge turned inward so only the pin showed. The other had a small black cross on a chain, which he tucked under his collar when he sat. The waitress, Marika, put a bowl before each of them and did not ask whether they objected. Her apron had a burned place near the pocket.

She had learned to carry bowls with the thumb outside the rim because men noticed every other arrangement and mistook it for invitation.

"I was waiting for someone," said the man with the hidden cross.

"So was he," Marika said, nodding toward the red badge.

"Now you have each other until you eat."

The table had been covered with newspaper because one leg was short and the paper beneath it needed replacing every hour. The top sheet came from the Easter supplement of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. The central figure had been folded under. Visible near the salt dish was the lower corner of a tomb, a list of reforms, and, on the reverse where the paper curled, an advertisement for cabbage at a price already false by morning.

The red-badge man noticed the paper first.

"You put that under soup?"

Marika placed bread between them.

"I put paper under soup. If resurrection wanted a clean table, resurrection should have come before breakfast."

The hidden-cross man made the sign of the cross so quickly it looked like scratching.

"That picture is blasphemy."

"So is watery soup," said Marika.

Hermann sat at the end of the next table with Marc and Klimt opposite her. She had not intended to remain. The smell of soup had stopped her. Hunger, even when not one's own, can take a sleeve between finger and thumb.

Marc stared at the visible corner of the print.

"They have made a body into a program."

Klimt lifted his spoon.

"All bodies are programs. Some are better drawn."

"No," Marc said. "A body is the animal fact before the program."

A drop of soup fell from the hidden-cross man's spoon and landed not on the raised arm, which remained folded under, but on the cabbage advertisement. The ink spread through the word *günstig* until the price became unreadable.

"Now it is neither blasphemy nor policy," Marika said. "Now it is table."

The red-badge man laughed before he could prevent himself. The hiddencross man looked at him, found no cruelty there, and turned back to his soup. For several minutes they ate. The room's argument became spoons against enamel, bread torn, steam leaving bowls, a cough at the stove, the scrape of a chair as a woman made room for a child too sleepy to sit straight.

Then someone at the far wall began speaking about the verdict. Someone else said the word police. The red-badge man's hand tightened around his spoon. The hidden-cross man put his spoon down.

Marika refilled both water glasses before either could rise.

"Drink first," she said. "You cannot pour peace," the red-badge man said. "No. But I can make you hold glass."

He held it. So did the other. Hermann watched the paper under the table leg darken with spilled soup and condensation. The tomb corner softened.

The reforms blurred. The cabbage price vanished entirely. On the reverse, where the paper touched the uneven leg, ink transferred faintly onto the wood. Not Christ.

Not slogan. A number. Three and a half, perhaps, or thirty-five. Something to be paid.

A child crawled under the table to retrieve a marble. He paused and read the letters he could see.

"Aufer—" he said, then stopped because the rest had folded away.

"Eat," said Marika, though he had no bowl.

The hidden-cross man pushed half his bread under the table without looking. The red-badge man saw, said nothing, and tore his own piece into two smaller pieces, as if division could make generosity less visible. Hermann left before the argument resumed. Outside, rain had stopped.

In the lane, cabbage leaves lay flat in the mud, green reduced to use and trampling. That night she remembered not the raised arm, which she had barely seen, but the soup stain on the false price and the child under the table pronouncing only the first half of resurrection.

CHAPTER 6

The Office

The office had three clocks and no time. One clock stood above the door and had stopped at eleven. One hung behind the clerk and ran too fast, gaining a minute each time someone looked at it. The third was in the pocket of a man who had been waiting since morning and opened it every quarter hour to prove to himself that his complaint possessed a witness.

A woman stood before the counter with a permit form for her brother's cart. She had braided her hair too tightly, perhaps because loose hair invited comment in offices. Her name on the form was Marija. On her baptism paper it was Mária. On the clerk's list it had become Maria. The difference lay in a mark no larger than a fly's leg, but the clerk had placed his pencil exactly there.

"It must agree," he said. "With which one?"

He looked at the papers as if they had disappointed him personally. The counter separated the office into those who could sit and those who could shift weight from foot to foot. A strip of green felt lay under the inkstand. Beside it, a rubber eraser had gone black at the corners.

The clerk wore gloves with the fingertips cut away. His nails showed through like witnesses the gloves had failed to exclude. Hermann, waiting for a travel endorsement she no longer knew whether she wanted, watched the pencil descend. The clerk rubbed out the accent.

The paper furred. He blew eraser dust across the counter. Some of it landed on Marija's sleeve. She did not brush it off.

"Now it agrees," he said. "With what?"

"With the file."

"The file is wrong."

"Not after correction."

A man behind Hermann laughed into his hand. Marija turned once, not to shame him, only to know the direction from which sound had come. He stopped laughing. A policeman entered with damp boots and laid a separate file on the counter.

The clerk straightened before he meant to. The policeman did not ask to go first. He went first by existing near the counter with a file. Marija stepped back.

Her fingers left half-moons in the wood. The file concerned a meeting permit. The policeman wanted the location changed from hall to yard because halls collected people and yards dispersed them after rain. The clerk wrote yard in ink.

No pencil was required for force when force brought its own boots. When the policeman left, the clerk returned to the cart permit.

“The cart may pass?”

Marija asked.

“On Tuesday.”

“It must pass today.”

“Today has no stamp.”

She put both hands on the counter. They were worker’s hands, cracked near the knuckles, but the nails were clean.

“My brother cannot carry the sacks on his back.”

Outside, her brother waited beside the cart. Two sacks were already loaded and three stood on the ground. One wheel had been lifted from the axle; the cracked pin lay in his lap while he scraped mud from the hub with a knife. The horse had lowered its head against the rain.

Its harness had been repaired with a strip of blue cloth. The clerk looked toward the door, perhaps expecting a superior to rescue the rules from consequence. No one came. The fast clock behind him gained another minute.

“The permit belongs to the person as written,” he said. “Then write standing.” He did not understand and disliked her for making that visible. He took the pencil again.

“Temporary correction.”

“How long is temporary?”

“Until the ink version is approved.”

“By whom?”

He pointed upward, not to heaven but to the second floor. The pencil restored the accent in a gray stroke that did not cover the rough place left by the eraser. Then he wrote the baptismal spelling in ink beneath the clerk’s version. The paper now carried Marija, Maria, and Mária: the name she had brought, the name the office preferred, and the name made by damage between them.

He pressed the stamp into the pad, then onto the corrected form with such force the blotter jumped. The mark fell crooked. Half the eagle took ink; half remained suggestion.

“There,” he said.

Marija took the permit and did not thank him. Hermann’s endorsement came next. The clerk read her name, paused at the pronoun already printed beside it, and did not pause visibly enough to be accused. His pencil hovered.

Hermann watched his cut-off glove, the exposed fingertips, the blackrimmed nails.

“Leave it,” she said. “I have not altered anything.”

“Then continue not altering.”

For a moment he looked at her with a hatred too small to become politics. Then he stamped the paper. The eagle landed better on hers. Outside, Marija stood under the lintel and rubbed the erased place with her thumb.

The paper did not smooth.

“If I draw it back,” she said, not to Hermann exactly, “will the police see it?”

“They will see what they need.”

“That is not sight.”

“No.”

Marija took a pencil from her pocket and drew the accent again, darker than before and too large for the office’s preferred proportion. Then she folded the paper so the mark lay inside. She handed the permit to her brother before helping him fit the wheel back on. The cracked pin held for the length of the street.

Then it slipped again and the cart leaned into the gutter. The permit, which had done everything required of it on paper, remained dry inside Marija’s coat.

AFW

The glove is not a symbol. It is a way to touch paper without touching the person who brought it.

CHAPTER 7

The Printer

The printer received the order after supper. He had already washed his hands once. Ink remained in the creases of the palm and under the nails, where soap reached only the idea of cleanliness. His wife had put cabbage on the stove and bread on the table.

Their youngest child slept on two coats under the window. The apprentice, who should have gone home, sat on the floor sorting type into wrong boxes because the lamp made the letters shine falsely. The order came folded in official paper and carried by a man who apologized before stating why he had come. Apology did not improve the order.

It only made the room more crowded. Six verbs were to be removed from tomorrow's notice. Meet. Mourn.

March. Listen. Strike. Bury.

The printer read the list twice. His wife lifted the cabbage pot from the stove and set it farther from the edge. No one had asked her to clear space for censorship. She did it because the table was small.

"Remove means leave nothing?" the apprentice asked. The man with the order looked relieved to have a question with grammar in it.

"Remove means remove."

"Letters or spaces?"

The man looked at the printer. The printer folded the order along its old crease.

"Spaces cost nothing."

"That is not the instruction."

"It is also not forbidden."

The man opened his mouth, discovered that he had not been authorized to discuss spaces, and closed it. He took no cabbage when offered. This made him look more official than refusing the chair. After he left, the printer reset the form.

He took out MEET and left four picas of blank. He took out MOURN and left five. MARCH left a long wound, because the original word had been wide. LISTEN left narrow silence.

STRIKE left an absence with teeth. BURY left the smallest space of all, which angered his wife when she saw it.

"You made bury easy to miss."

"I made it the length it had."

"People miss what is small when they are afraid."

He looked at the chase, at the locked metal frame holding the page's obedience in place. Then he added one thin space. The apprentice pulled the first proof. The missing verbs made the notice limp.

Sentences approached the blanks and came away altered. A meeting without meeting, mourning without mourning, marching without march. The notice looked polite from a distance. Up close it stuttered.

The apprentice read it aloud and filled each blank differently. Where MEET had been, he said pray. Where MOURN had been, he said sing. Where MARCH had been, he said wait.

His ears reddened at STRIKE and he said work instead.

"No," said the printer's wife from the stove.

"Which one?"

"All of them, perhaps. But especially that."

Hermann arrived with Marc after the second proof. She had come because the print shop stood behind the baker's and the smell of flour entered the alley even at night. Marc had followed because animals were drawn to warm doors before men remembered pride. The printer did not ask why she had come.

He handed her the proof. She read the spaces first. The words remaining around them seemed embarrassed.

"They will know," she said. "Some will."

"Will that be enough?"

The printer looked at his hands.

"Enough is a word officials use before lowering the measure."

Marc walked to the type cases and touched none of them.

"A missing word can pull harder than a written one."

The printer's wife laughed once.

"Only if someone has eaten. A hungry man reads bread into every blank."

The apprentice had mixed several letters from different fonts. In the final line, the word order contained one letter too tall. It stood above the others, a small rebellion no censor had requested. The printer noticed and reached to replace it.

His wife caught his wrist.

"Leave one thing that happened by accident."

He did. When the sheets were hung to dry, the blanks shone faintly where wet ink did not. The apprentice moved among them carefully, as if walking between beds. Hermann stood until the lamp smoked.

Outside, in the alley, Marc said, "You see? Suppression creates counter-form."

Hermann pressed the proof inside her coat. The paper was still damp.

"Do not make cleverness out of his risk."

Marc looked toward the dark window of the shop. The printer's wife had pulled the curtain. Behind it, the cabbage smell remained. The apprentice dreamed that night in letters.

Not words, letters. E, R, N, T, S, each too large to pass through the doorway. He woke with ink beneath his fingernails and found one missing verb in his pocket: the metal slug for BURY, wrapped in a thread from his cuff. He brought it back before dawn.

The printer's wife was already awake, boiling coffee she could not afford to drink strong. She took the slug and weighed it in her palm.

"This one does not go back," she said. "But the form—" "The form has enough graves."

She placed BURY in a box used for broken type. It lay among letters with chipped feet and cracked faces. Later, when the censor counted the locked cases, no absence appeared. Some removals leave no hole because the hole has been distributed.

INTERMEZZO 2



Julia in the Unreal City

Julia dreamed of Vienna as a room with too many doors and no wall willing to admit responsibility for them. She walked with the blue-threaded drum under one arm. No one noticed because everyone carried something: umbrella, newspaper, bread wrapped in newspaper, flowers wrapped in yesterday's verdict, a child's shoe, a violin case, a petition, a cabbage, a shutter torn from a window. The city had become an inventory and refused to be counted.

At a corner where no street agreed to continue, she saw Prince Rita standing before a shop window full of hats.

"You are late," Julia said. "Only if you began without me."

"I did."

"Then I am exactly as late as you made me."

Julia hated her for that and loved her for not apologizing. In the glass, Rita wore the cardboard crown from the trunk, but the word Prinz had been written backward. Julia touched the window. Her finger left no mark.

"Are you mine?" she asked. "No."

"Hermann's?"

"No."

"Then whose?"

Rita turned from the hats.

"Lost people borrow me. Children name me. Adults misplace me. None of that is ownership."

The drum shifted under Julia's arm. She had not struck it since the twelfth beat. She had tied thread around it because sound, once made, should have to answer for itself.

"If I strike it here, who hears?"

"Who did you ask?"

Julia looked at the street. A tram passed without tracks. Men inside read newspapers with blank fronts. A woman chased a glove blown by wind.

The glove had no hand and moved more confidently than most people.

"I don't know who to ask."

"Then carry it."

The glove turned into an alley beside the hat shop. Julia followed because the drum had grown heavier and because following was easier than deciding. The alley

smelled of wet straw and oranges crushed under cart wheels. At the far end a girl knelt beside a dog with a ribbon in its teeth.

"Is it yours?" Julia asked.

The girl shook her head.

"It follows people who drop food."

The dog looked at the drum and sneezed. The ribbon in its teeth was blue once, now gray where spit had entered the thread. Julia nearly laughed. The dog made tragedy difficult by being busy with its own mouth.

"You could beat that," the girl said, nodding at the drum.

"It would come."

"Who?"

"Whatever is lost."

Julia tightened her arm around the rim.

"It does not work that way."

The girl considered this.

"Then it is a bad drum."

Rita, who had appeared beside a drain without announcing herself, said nothing. Julia disliked the mercy of it. An answer would have allowed her to refuse it. The glove lay in a puddle near the drain.

Its fingers were filled with water and looked briefly alive. Julia picked it up by the cuff. The water ran out of the fingers one by one. It made five little strikes on the stone.

The girl counted them.

"Too soft."

"Yes," Julia said.

She did not strike the drum. She gave the wet glove to the girl, who put it over her own hand and laughed because the fingers were too long. For three steps the child looked like an adult badly translated. Then the glove slipped off and the dog took it.

Julia let it go. The drum under her arm had not become lighter. That, she thought, was fair. Julia woke with one arm numb beneath her and the word carry in her mouth.

In the real room, the drum did not lie beside her bed. Under its cloth in the hall, it kept the place she had given it. No dream had permission to enter there. By the following morning, the paper showed a thumbprint near the fold.

The print did not help anyone read it. It did make the page harder to pretend clean. A hand reached for it and stopped after Frau Klemper coughed. The cough did no philosophy.

■■■■■■■■■■■

CHAPTER 8



The Train Compartment

The train was already moving when the argument began. It did not begin loudly. Loudness would have allowed the compartment to choose sides too early. It began with a man folding his newspaper smaller than necessary and saying to the woman opposite him that she had perhaps mistaken the carriage.

The woman looked at her ticket.

“No,” she said.

The man smiled with half his mouth.

“These things happen.”

“Not this one.”

Hermann sat by the window, facing the direction from which they had come. Rain ran across the glass and pulled the fields backward. Her own papers lay in her inside pocket. She had checked them twice on the platform and once after sitting down.

Each check had made them less trustworthy. The woman held a small suitcase tied with cord, a prayer book wrapped in cloth, and an orange in her lap. The orange was bright enough to seem imported from another century. Its smell entered the compartment whenever the train lurched and pressed it against the prayer book.

A conductor opened the door. He looked at the man first. Men who complain arrange rooms in advance. Then he looked at the woman.

Her ticket was correct.

“This compartment is crowded,” he said.

There were two empty places.

“My ticket,” the woman said, offering it.

The conductor punched it. The metal jaws closed with a small clean sound. He handed it back. The hole made argument harder.

Not impossible. Harder in the way a locked drawer makes a letter less alive.

“You may remain until the next stop,” he said. “And then?”

“We will see.”

The train entered a cutting. The windows darkened. For several seconds everyone in the compartment saw themselves in the glass instead of the fields. Hermann saw the man with the newspaper looking at himself not looking at the woman.

She saw her own face doubled by rain. She saw the woman’s hands retie the suitcase cord though it had not come loose. At the next stop no one entered. The conductor did not return.

The woman remained. The man unfolded his newspaper again. On the back page, an advertisement promised cough syrup with a doctor's endorsement. He read the advertisement with more attention than his face deserved.

The orange rolled from the woman's lap when the train jolted. It crossed the floor, struck Hermann's boot, and stopped there. Hermann bent to pick it up. The woman said, "Please."

Not thank you. Please. As if even retrieval required permission from the room. Hermann gave it back.

Their fingers touched. The woman's hand was cold.

"I have papers," Hermann said quietly, surprising herself.

The woman looked at her.

"So do I," she said.

They both understood that this settled nothing. At the next station the conductor returned and opened the door.

"You can change here."

"Can," the woman said.

The word did not move. No one helped with the suitcase. Hermann stood too late. The woman had already lifted it.

The cord bit into her palm. She carried the suitcase, the prayer book, and the orange into the corridor. The man with the newspaper shifted his knees just enough to make passage possible and not enough to be generous. When the door closed, a strip of orange peel remained under the bench.

Not hers. Someone else had eaten earlier and left it there. It released a faint, bitter smell each time the carriage warmed. Hermann sat down.

Her papers pressed against her chest. She did not take them out again. At the border of the next field, a scarecrow wore a conductor's cap. The train passed too quickly for anyone to decide whether it was accidental.

The conductor's punch made small moons in the tickets. Each moon fell into a brass cup fixed to his belt. By the end of a morning the cup filled with paper crescents, all destinations made weightless and mixed together. Hermann watched him punch a woman's ticket and thought of graves reduced to paper shapes.

She distrusted the thought and looked instead at the woman's suitcase cord. The cord had been repaired with a shoelace. One end was brown, one black. The knot sat too close to the handle and cut into the woman's fingers when she lifted it.

No one offered to carry it. Offers on trains often came with opinions. The accusation began with a newspaper. A man in a green collar wanted space for it and shook it open too wide.

The paper touched the woman's sleeve. He folded it back with visible care.

"This compartment is marked," he said.

The woman looked at the number above the door.

"So is my ticket."

He turned to the conductor.

"There are arrangements."

The conductor held out his hand. She gave him the ticket. He read it slowly, although the numbers were clear. The train rocked.

An orange peel slid from someone's lap and came to rest against Hermann's boot.

"Valid," the conductor said.

The man in the green collar smiled as if valid were a small word that had never stopped him before.

"Then perhaps the other carriage."

The conductor punched the ticket. That changed the room. Before the punch, the question still had paper in it. After, the hole became fact.

The conductor could not unpunch without admitting the first act had belonged to him. He handed the ticket back.

"Stay," he said, not kindly.

The woman sat. Her fingers returned to the suitcase cord. The shoelace knot tightened under her grip. At the next stop a child entered with a basket of eggs and stood because no seat opened.

The woman moved her suitcase from the bench to her knees. The child sat beside her and placed the egg basket between their feet. The man in the green collar lifted his newspaper again and found no room for it. He folded it smaller.

An egg cracked when the train lurched. The child opened the basket and looked at the yellow spreading into straw.

"Only one," the woman said. "It was for my aunt."

"Then tell her the train ate it."

The child considered this and nodded. The conductor passed again and did not collect the crescent from the woman's ticket. It remained in his brass cup with everyone else's destinations, indistinguishable there and nowhere else. At the border of the district, the woman rose to leave.

In the previous version the orange peel was made to stand for everything the compartment refused to take in.

That is sufficient. When the woman left the train, the orange peel remained under the bench. Hermann almost picked it up and did not. The conductor passed later, saw it, and stepped over it with professional disgust.

At the next station a child climbed in and found the peel. He held it to his nose, inhaled, and smiled. His mother slapped his hand lightly.

“Dirty.”

He put it in his pocket anyway. The ticket punch had left small half-moons in the woman’s paper. Hermann saw them when the conductor stacked the used slips. Each hole was clean.

The paper around them had torn where his hand pressed too hard. Procedure had not needed hatred to leave marks. It had needed a tool and permission to use it without listening.

CHAPTER 9



The Cobbler's Stall

The cobbler's stall stood where the alley narrowed and the rain could not decide whether to fall or hang. Leather strips dangled from a nail above the bench. Most were too thin. Some were not leather at all but belt, satchel, harness, book cover.

The cobbler sat with one shoe between his knees and an awl in his hand, listening to a man explain Monday as if the week might be persuaded.

"I do not need them for Monday," the man said. "I need them for Sunday night."

"I know," the cobbler answered. "Then lend Monday less."

The boot on the bench had opened at the sole like a mouth tired of keeping a secret. The man's other boot remained on his foot. It was not much better, but it had the dignity of still being worn. His socks showed at the toe.

The socks had once been black. Water had taught them several colors. Hermann stood under the overhang with Klimt. Marc was late, or absent, or refusing this circle out of pride.

The absence suited the stall. Nothing here wanted a blue horse. The cobbler searched beneath the bench and brought out a child's school satchel. Its strap was broken.

On the flap, a name had been scratched away with a knife. The remaining letters might have been IL or LI or nothing.

"No," the man said. "It will hold one shift."

"That was someone's school."

"Now it can be someone's sole."

The man looked at the satchel as if refusing it might return the child who had carried it to a room with dry windows. The cobbler waited. He did not persuade. Persuasion costs time, and he had three pairs behind this one.

Klimt touched the edge of a hanging strap.

"Surface remembers form after use abandons it."

The cobbler looked up.

"Do not touch what you cannot pay for."

Klimt withdrew his hand. Hermann stepped forward.

"May I?"

"If you mean buy the boots, no," the man said. "I meant hold the lamp."

The cobbler handed it to her. The lamp was hot at the handle and smelled of paraffin. Hermann held it where he pointed. Light entered the open sole and showed wet grit packed into the seam.

The cobbler cut the satchel slowly. The knife stuck once where the leather had thickened near the corner. He freed it and cut around a place where a child had drawn, in pencil, a small house with smoke from both chimneys. He did not use that part.

He stitched the patch with thread pulled through wax. Each pull made the boot twitch like an animal resisting cure. The man watched with both hands on his knees. He had not sat.

Sitting would require removing the other boot. When the patch was done, the cobbler drove in three nails, then stopped.

"Four," the man said. "Three. The fourth splits the patch." The man said nothing. The cobbler put the boot on the floor. The man changed in the alley, balancing on one foot with a hand against the wall. His bare foot touched the wet stone. He inhaled through his teeth but did not curse.

When he put on the repaired boot, he stood and sat three times. On the third standing the patch held.

"How long?" he asked. "Sunday night."

"And Monday?"

The cobbler put the bent fourth nail in his mouth and tasted rust.

"Come back Monday if it tears."

The man paid with coins too warm from his pocket. He walked away unevenly, but not slowly. At the corner, he did not look back. Marc arrived after he had gone, carrying a blue postcard of one of his horses that rain had softened.

He saw the scraps on the bench, the satchel flap with the child's house, the waxed thread, the cobbler's mouth still holding the nail.

"You missed it," Hermann said.

Marc looked at the patched boot prints leading toward the street.

"No," he said. "It is still walking."

The rain began before the corner was empty.

CHAPTER 10

The Lamp Room

The station platform held its breath for a train that arrived without the person expected. Hermann had come because a letter from across the border said: I will be on the morning train unless they ask again for proof I no longer know how to supply. The signature had run in rain. It might have been L., or Ludwig, or a clerk's mark mistaken for intimacy.

She had folded the letter into her notebook and unfolded it twice on the way, not to reread but to test whether paper changed its mind when warmed by the hand. The platform roof leaked at both ends. In the middle, where the roof held, people stood too close. A porter smoked beside a crate tied with customs cord.

The crate bore three destinations: one painted, one pasted, one written in chalk after the pasted label had failed. None named the station.

"You cannot leave that here," the stationmaster told him.

"I cannot take it farther."

"Then it has not arrived."

"It is on the platform."

"The platform is not arrival."

The porter took his cigarette from his mouth and looked at the crate.

"Tell that to its weight."

Hermann stood under the leak because the dry place had filled with families. Someone had handed her an umbrella while tying a child's shoe and had not returned for it. The umbrella was brown, repaired twice, and too short on one rib. She held it closed against her leg for twenty minutes before understanding that its owner had boarded the wrong train or no train at all.

Marc paced near the track, impatient with waiting because animals do not wait for borders; they cross or are stopped. Klimt examined the crate's cord.

"There is a beauty in a knot that must persuade strangers."

"There is a cruelty in making rope speak," Marc said.

The train arrived late and too quickly, as if ashamed of both facts. Steam blew along the platform and entered the roof leaks, making weather inside weather. Doors opened. People descended with bundles, infants, cages, one rolled carpet, two violins, and a live hen in a basket.

Hermann watched every face before admitting the one she expected was not among them. A customs officer came down last. He carried a stamp pad wrapped in cloth. The pad had leaked blue onto the cloth and then onto his fingers.

He inspected the crate.

“Receiver?”

“No one,” said the stationmaster.

“Then sender retains responsibility.”

“Sender is across the border.”

The officer looked down the track, as if the border might appear and accept blame.

“Then it remains sealed.”

“Where?”

“Where sealed things remain.”

The stationmaster opened his mouth and closed it. There was no room for crates in the office. The lamp room had a lock. Everyone looked toward it at once.

A little girl touched the customs cord. Her mother slapped her hand. The sound was louder than the train had been. The girl did not cry.

She put the hand under her arm and held it there. Hermann opened the wrong umbrella when rain came harder. It would not open fully. One rib bent inward, making a small cave over her shoulder and leaving the notebook wet.

The letter inside blurred further. The unless remained legible. The name did not. The crate was carried to the lamp room by four men, none of whom had authority to receive it.

The porter led. The stationmaster held the key. The customs officer followed with the leaking stamp pad, leaving blue marks on the handle of the lamproom door. When they shut it, the crate became a rumor with weight.

Marc said, “International isolation.” Hermann shook her head.

“No. A thing arrived and no person did.”

Klimt took the wrong umbrella from her and tried to mend the bent rib with a pin from his cuff. The pin broke. He looked almost offended. The train left.

On the platform remained a cabbage leaf, three cigarette ends, the blue thumbprint on the lamp-room handle, and Hermann with another person’s umbrella. She waited until the next train also failed to bring anyone. Then she walked back carrying the umbrella closed, because opening it now would have made it hers. The crate stayed in the lamp room all afternoon.

Through the slatted door Hermann could see one corner and the customs cord tied in a knot so elaborate it looked ashamed of fastening wood. The porter checked it twice. Responsibility grows more nervous when it has no owner.

At five, a boy came with a message in the wrong language. The stationmaster held it at arm’s length as if distance might translate it. Hermann recognized two words and mistrusted both. The porter said the crate could not leave without a signature.

The boy said the person who signs had gone to the border. The stationmaster said borders were invented to make absence official. The lamp room smelled of oil and wet rope.

By evening the wrong umbrella had dried in Hermann's hand. The crate in the lamp room turned out to contain school slates. No one had ordered them. Or someone had ordered them from an office now moved to a town now outside a useful arrangement.

The label bore two stamps, one Austrian, one Hungarian, and a third that looked like an animal track because rain had taken the border before bureaucracy could. The stationmaster would not release the crate to Hermann because Hermann had no paper proving need. The schoolteacher had paper proving need but no permission to collect freight. The porter had permission to move freight but no need at all.

The three of them stood around the crate while trains came and went without resolving the matter. A boy asked whether a slate could belong to the child who wrote on it first. The stationmaster told him not to introduce philosophy near customs. The lamp room smelled of oil and metal dust.

It had shelves for wicks, a broken red lantern, two umbrellas, a sack of sand, and an old timetable from before the war showing connections that no longer existed. Hermann traced one route with her finger and found it crossed three new absences.

"Do not touch the map," the stationmaster said. "It is not current."

"Then it is more delicate."

The teacher opened her satchel and showed a list of children waiting for slates. The names were written in two languages where families insisted and one where the office did. Some children had been translated without consent. One name had a question mark because the teacher had not yet learned whether the boy preferred Josef or Josip and refused to let the office decide by habit.

The stationmaster read the list and looked at the crate.

"If I release it to you, the freight office objects. If I keep it, the children object."

"Which objection can read?" the teacher asked.

He disliked that enough to find it persuasive. They opened the crate in the lamp room rather than on the platform, so official custody could pretend not to see itself ending. Inside, the slates were wrapped in straw. One had cracked along the corner during travel.

The teacher set it aside for herself.

"Teachers can write around cracks," she said.

The boy who had introduced philosophy carried the first slate out under his coat. It was too large and made him walk stiffly. On the platform, rain had begun again. The wrong umbrella Hermann still held from earlier dripped at her side. She finally opened it over the boy and the slate. No one knew whose umbrella it was. For three minutes, it belonged to the route between lamp room and school.

CHAPTER 11

The Flue

The soot came from the upper flue. Everyone knew this by the second hour, which made the third hour worse. If the source had remained mysterious, hope might have spent itself on investigation. Instead, the cause stood above them in brick, cracked where the pipe entered the wall, needing a sleeve, two screws, and a ladder long enough to reach without breaking a neck.

The ladder belonged to the school that week because a window on the second floor would not close. The sleeve had been ordered. The screws were said to be in a drawer at the carpenter's, but the carpenter's son had taken the drawer to sort fishing hooks and had not returned it. The flue smoked when the wind came east. The wind had come east. The Gemeindesaal floor had been swept at seven. By eight, a crescent of black dust lay beneath the stove. By nine, it had lengthened toward the first row of chairs.

Frau Klemper set a damp rag at the edge of it and told everyone to step around. They did not. A man carrying water stepped in it first and apologized to the rag. A woman moved a chair and dragged one leg through the soot.

Two children, instructed to remain outside, came in to see why the adults kept saying outside and left four small prints before being turned around. By ten, the floor looked as if someone had begun drawing a map and lost faith in roads. Hermann took the broom after Frau Klemper's shoulder began to stiffen.

"Wrong end," Frau Klemper said.

Hermann turned it.

"Not that wrong."

She turned it back halfway and found the grip. The broom was older than several theories of government and had survived by losing straw evenly. She swept the soot into a dustpan. The soot lifted, escaped, settled again behind the pan. Her wrist ached. She had painted for days without pain. Sweeping found muscles art had flattered by ignoring. Rausch came in with a notice under his arm and stopped at the door.

"Assembly called. Four o'clock. Delegates first. Others waiting outside."

"Not on this floor," Frau Klemper said. "It concerns the hall."

"Then it can help clean it."

He looked at Hermann holding the broom and, to his credit, did not smile. He put the notice on the table, took off his coat, and asked where the second broom was. There was no second broom. He took the dustpan instead.

For twenty minutes they worked without conversation. Sweep. Hold. Carry. Empty. Return. The wind shifted once and the flue coughed a fresh fall of soot onto the place they had just cleared. Rausch swore under his breath.

Frau Klemper heard and nodded, granting the word temporary citizenship. Marc stood near the window, useless with both hands visible. Klimt removed his cufflinks before offering help, which made Frau Klemper roll her eyes so openly that even he understood the instruction. He carried chairs instead.

One leg left a black arc on his sleeve. He examined it as if a line had chosen him.

"Do not admire it," Hermann said. "I was not."

"You were about to."

He set the chair down. At noon the floor was almost clean. Then the upper flue dropped a clot the size of a fist. It struck the stove pipe, broke, and scattered over the front row.

No one moved for three breaths. The soot lay there with complete sincerity. Frau Klemper took the broom from Hermann.

"Eat first," she said. "It will spread."

"Eat first."

They ate bread and pickles standing because the chairs had been lifted onto tables. Rausch shared an apple cut into pieces too small to satisfy anyone and too precise to refuse. One piece had soot on it. He wiped it on his sleeve and gave it to himself. After eating, Hermann reached for the broom again. Rausch took it first. He swept badly but with concentration. Frau Klemper let him.

Not all errors required correction while they were still useful. By evening the floor had been cleaned five times. The flue remained cracked. The ladder remained at the school.

The sleeve remained on order. The drawer remained missing. Frau Klemper leaned the broom against the wall instead of returning it to the cupboard.

"It will be needed," she said.

No one disagreed. That night, when the hall was empty, the broom slipped and fell. The sound was small. Hermann, crossing the passage, heard it and did not go in.

The broom lay there until morning. The carpenter's son returned the screws after supper in a tobacco tin. He had sorted his fishing hooks first and included two by mistake. Frau Klemper poured them into her palm and separated metal from metal with one finger.

"These are hooks," she said. "They hold," he answered.

She gave him one look. He took them back. The sleeve for the flue arrived the next morning wrapped in newspaper and already dented. The repair took forty minutes.

The soot stopped falling. This annoyed everyone who had prepared themselves for endurance and instead had to accept repair. By afternoon, another seam smoked near the elbow of the pipe. Hermann laughed once.

Frau Klemper did not. She went for the ladder.

INTERMEZZO 3



Adornfeld's Missing Ledger

Adornfeld arrived in the intermezzo carrying a ledger that had no pages.

"Impossible," Dollberg said. "Even your emptiness prefers columns."

"The pages were removed," Adornfeld replied. "By whom?"

"A responsible hand."

Rita sat by the drum and untied one knot of blue thread, then tied it again differently. She did not look at the ledger. Hermann did. The covers were stiff, the spine cracked, the corners worn where hands had held it through years of being trusted.

Inside, only thread remained, little vertical scars where paper had once been sewn.

"What did it contain?" Hermann asked. "That is not the first question."

"It is mine."

Adornfeld closed the ledger.

"Then it is early."

Dollberg took it from him and held it upside down.

"A book without pages is finally honest."

"No," Rita said. "A book without pages may also have been robbed."

Hermann felt the splinter in her thumb, the soot in the nail fold, the place where the train ticket woman's fingers had touched hers. The intermezzo arranged sensations as if they were evidence and then refused to identify the court.

"Can a missing page still accuse?" she asked.

Rita placed the ledger on the floor beside the drum.

"Only if someone wanted it gone."

A sound came then, but not from the drum. It came from the ledger's spine: a dry click, thread tightening without paper. Adornfeld reached for it. Rita shook her head.

"Do not repair absence before it has finished being absence."

Dollberg smiled.

"That is almost a politics."

"No," Rita said. "Politics would ask who has the needle."

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