

AUTHORIZED PUBLIC SAMPLE



NOVEL III — STRETTO

Voices Rise, Hearts Unite!

50 pages of novel text

German principal text / authorized English literary parallel

Contains major spoilers for the Literary Prelude and Novels I-II.

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THE SCHATTENDORF ECHOES

NOVEL III



Voices Rise, Hearts Unite!

A SUPERNATURAL HISTORICAL COMPOSITION



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

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WORK

Novel III: Voices Rise, Hearts Unite!

EXTENT

50 pages of novel text

SOURCE PAGES

6-55

READING ORDER

Read after Novels I-II when evaluating the sequence's stretto, state pressure, and later historical reach.

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RISING I



THE WORD WACHE AT THE HINGE

On July seventeenth Mayor Seitz's order announced a Gemeindefürsorgekommando headquartered in the Rathaus. Men wearing special armbands were to protect municipal institutions and enterprises, end bloodshed, and restore security in Vienna's streets. Rausch read the key terms in fragments and sounded almost relieved.

“Organ. Confidence of the people. Armbands. Rathaus. Order.” Julia interrupted him.

“If order is necessary, then order must still answer to the blood that made it necessary. If a watch is formed, then it must not become another blindness with a better ribbon.”

Frau Klemper had brought an old white sheet from the linen press. It was too worn for a bed and too clean for rags. She tore it into strips. The sound was not dramatic.

It was domestic and final. A small boy asked for one. She tied it around his sleeve, then untied it at once.

“Not costume. Cloth.”

Hermann cut Wache from the bulletin and lifted the slip to the window. Light around the letters exposed the uneven fibers. Adornfeld entered the date in his ledger and noted the word's several uses: watch, guard, waking. The paste had thickened overnight.

Frau Klemper added a spoon of water and stirred with the handle of a brush Hermann would have preferred to keep for paint.

“Use what is at hand. History will not wait for your best tools.”

They placed Wache at the hinge rather than on the center panel, where the slip would flex whenever the door moved. Hermann pressed it with two fingers until paste rose through the paper and darkened the W. Julia watched the letter change.

"If the word stains when held, then keep the stain."

Afterward, Wache darkened at the hinge while strips of torn armband cloth remained on the table. The arrangement preserved the order without treating protection as innocent.

RISING II



BAUER ENTERS AS PRINT

On July eighteenth Bauer appeared where the record placed him: in the printed report of the Vertrauensmänner assembly, not in the tavern or courthouse crowd. Rausch wanted to stand while reading. Frau Klemper told him to sit.

“Speeches do not need your knees.”

Bauer spoke after the violence of Friday and Saturday, while anger remained immediate and competing accounts were still forming. He asked the movement to recognize its responsibility for the working class and the republic and to prevent reaction from using grief as a weapon. Julia’s voice stayed conditional and severe.

“If he is right, that does not place him in the street. If he is late, that does not make him useless. If he speaks, then he enters as speech.”

Adornfeld placed a small clock beside the paper and set the hands near four, the hour of the assembly notice. It was a pedantic gesture. It was also kind. Hermann mixed a thin blue made costly by the merchant’s bill and brushed it over the previous day’s blank rectangle, leaving the sagging corner visible.

Bauer’s paragraph would run partly beneath the wash and partly above it. Rausch objected.

“You are burying him.”

“No,” Hermann said. “I am preventing him from standing where he was not.”

Frau Klemper laid the brush handle down.

“Do not make cleverness into a monument.”

They pasted a narrow strip from the speech under the blue wash. At an angle, four terms remained legible: responsibility, republic, working class, fate. The small boy asked where Bauer was. Julia answered, “In the paper.”

“Where is the paper?”

Hermann pointed to the hinge.

“On the door.”

By then, the door bore Wache at the hinge and Bauer’s speech beneath blue. The placement admitted his words without presenting him as an eyewitness.

RISING III



THE MIDNIGHT WHEEL

The extra ending the traffic strike specified midnight. The order was not a surrender but a change of tactic that required transport and communications to resume. Rausch read the order: railwaymen, Danube shipping, post, telegraph, telephone to resume at midnight. Work to restart in the other businesses except where the strike continued by instruction.

Street gatherings to stop. No gesture that could continue the bloodshed. Discipline as a form of force. The wooden wheel was retrieved from the shelf.

It had dried blue along one side. The small boy tried to hold it still against the table while Rausch read. Frau Klemper turned it with one finger.

“If a wheel stops forever, it is not a strike. It is broken.”

Julia looked at the clock Adornfeld had left near Bauer’s speech.

“If they resume at midnight, then midnight is not forgiveness. If the wheel turns, it must remember why it stopped.”

Hermann cut the printed word midnight from the extra and laid it beside the wheel mark. The scissors slipped; midnight lost its dot over the i. Adornfeld found the dot on the table and preserved it in the ledger. This was absurd.

It was also the kind of absurdity by which records remain human. The paste had become too thin after yesterday’s rescue. It ran from the back of the slip and made a track down the door, crossing the lower edge of the Wache panel. Rausch reached for the cloth.

Hermann stopped him.

“Let it run.”

“It looks like carelessness.”

“So does history when it refuses design.”

Frau Klemper allowed this sentence only because she was busy catching paste before it reached the floor.

“Say fewer things and hold the saucer.”

They pasted midnight near the wheel mark and hung the toy wheel from a nail below it. The wheel turned when touched but could not spin freely against the door. The next layer joined the darkened Wache, Bauer beneath blue, the running paste below midnight, and a wheel that turned only by hand. Work was resuming without erasing why it had stopped.



RISING IV

BURGENLAND'S AFTER-VOICE

On July twenty-second the Burgenländische Freiheit carried the Vienna events back to the province and began again with Schattendorf: the acquittal, the demonstration, police provocation, the Schutzbund's attempt to clear a way for firefighters, the Gemeindeschutzwache, restored order, and the disciplined border watch. Adornfeld arrived before breakfast with a portfolio under one arm and one side of his hair uncombed. Julia noticed the evidence of haste more than his punctuality. Rausch read the provincial after-voice.

"Not a footnote to Vienna. The border speaking. Horthy's world watching. Levente cooled. Schutzbund disciplined. No provocation."

He stopped, aware he had made poetry of a report, and began again more plainly. Julia touched the east door without pressing.

"If Burgenland returns as aftervoice, then Vienna is not the only center. If the village began it, the village has the right to finish a sentence."

Frau Klemper swept beneath the door. Flakes of paste, dust, one bean, and the missing dot over midnight came out in a small gray crescent. Adornfeld tried to rescue the dot again. Frau Klemper gave him a look that ended archival fantasy.

Hermann prepared the final ground in the studio from scraps: January around the names, never through them; February ribbon fiber; March tally edge; May fold; July poem blur; trial list repair; blank absence; blood headline patched with mismatched type; Wache darkened at the hinge; Bauer under blue; midnight run; provincial after-voice at the bottom where a shoe might scuff it. The small boy asked whether the door was finished.

"Doors are never finished," Frau Klemper said. "They are used."

Hermann lifted the last strip and buried half of Burgenland's after-voice under blue. Not to silence it. To make it ground. The words still rose at the edges when the light crossed them.

Blood reached the canvas without asking to become symbol. Paper accepted paste without becoming truth. Paint covered without acquitting. The wheel turned only when touched.

The hinge held until the next hand came to open it. At that point, the door showed: after-voice under blue, floor swept, chorus enlarged, no borrowed eyewitness, no clean closure. The house had not entered the street. It had stopped pretending the street was elsewhere.

PRESS INTERLEAF



After the city quieted, the papers began the more dangerous work. Immediate blood can silence a room. After-voices fill it. The Tiroler Anzeiger returned from Innsbruck with a grammar that had been rehearsed for months.

On July sixteenth it called the blood in Vienna the harvest of socialist press hatred and described the Schattendorf defendants as men who believed themselves to have acted in just self-defense. Two days later it narrated the recovery of Tyrolean railway stations by state forces and Heimatwehr assistance as the restoration of lawful movement. By the twentythird, the Heimatwehr had become a new factor in the state while Social Democracy was said to be arming for civil war. Julia read only enough to hear the sequence harden.

“It turns the wound into recruitment.”

Adornfeld copied that sentence and then crossed out turns.

“It had been turning before the wound,” he wrote.

The Deutsche Arbeiter-Presse was worse and therefore had to be kept more carefully. Not read aloud in the room. Not hidden. Not used as evidence except evidence of what a wound could be made to authorize.

Its July issues turned blood into police vindication, anti-Marxist fury, antisemitic conspiracy, Bolshevik fear, and the prophecy that civil war had merely been postponed. Frau Klemper sewed a gray cloth cover for those sheets. Rausch objected that covering them gave them ceremony. She handed him the needle.

“Then make a better cover.”

He did not. The Salzburger Wacht brought another after-voice: mourning in Salzburg, the Vienna funeral, anger at police self-praise, then the phrase that made everyone look up: a Tyrolean Schattendorf. Shots at a Social Democratic smallfarmer representative by Heimwehr men. The name of the village had become portable.

“A place becomes method that way,” Hermann said. “Or contagion,” Julia answered.

Both were true. On the next sheet, the wounds themselves became an argument: what kind of ammunition had made so many wounds fatal? The body had become forensic. The archive no longer asked only who fired.

It asked what entered flesh, what the police had been given, and who had considered that acceptable. Hermann took the after-voices to the studio. She did not paste them on the front of the door. She tore them into ground.



Tyrolean state rescue, Nazi prophecy, Salzburg mourning, forensic wound, Burgenland after-voice: all entered the lower layer of Plate XIII, where paint would have to lie over them without making them innocent.

PRESS INTERLEAF



INSIDE PLATE XIII

Inside the painting, the archive lost its shelves. The papers did not disappear. They behaved as weather. A corner of the Wiener Zeitung moved like a pale cloud behind a chair.

The Arbeiter-Zeitung headline darkened whenever someone tried to call it only metaphor. A strip from the Mitteilungs-Blatt stuck to Hermann’s sleeve and would not come off until she stopped pulling. UE arrived with an index and found the numbers rearranging themselves. AFW arrived with an axe and found there was no outside wood to cut.

Rita arrived without drama and asked who had moved the bucket.

“There are no leaks in infinity,” Dollberg said.

Frau Klemper, who had also arrived, pointed to the floor. Water had collected under the chair that refused Hermann’s weight.

“Then infinity is lying,” she said.

Bach entered as a delayed line that let another line breathe. Liszt entered as wrist strain. Wagner entered as a curve that became dangerous the moment it promised destiny. Schoenberg entered as twelve pressures, none privileged, none permitted to rule the others by beauty or grief.

Bauer did not enter as a man crossing the street. He entered as a folded speech under blue wash. Seitz entered as a municipal order. The police entered as reports, bullets, thanks, denial, and wounds.

The dead entered by name or not at all. Hermann asked whether the painting had become the room. Julia answered from the other side of the canvas, “No. The room has run out of excuses.” Inside the painting there was no outside: not for art, archive, theory, or the citizen who preferred a clean room while the street bled.

Practice began with the hand already stained.

THE MANUSCRIPT BODY

[illegible]

CHAPTER 1

Voices Rise

The rags had hardened in the jar overnight. Hermann found them before dawn, standing upright in the turpentine as if some small animal had died there and kept its posture. One corner of blue cloth leaned against the glass. Another had dried against the lip of the jar and would not come away without tearing.

She worked a knife under it and felt the cloth give in threads. The studio was colder than the house. That had been true for years. The house had old methods for holding warmth: carpets, curtains, servant-passages, walls thick enough to confuse summer, rooms closed long enough to keep a season for themselves.

The studio had light, and light was a poorer servant. It arrived late in winter and left before the hand had finished learning what the eye wanted. The canvas stood where she had left it, facing the high window. It was unfinished, though not in the ordinary sense.

A work in progress ordinarily reveals where the next mark may enter. This canvas had been approached so often that some areas still took paint cleanly while others resisted the overworked ground. Hermann had not yet taken up the knife. She touched the lower edge with two fingers.

Dry. She moved to the fifth place. There the surface dulled under her hand. It had the tired, rubbed feel of skin under a bandage changed too often.

She had laid color there three times. Three times she had scraped it back before the oil set. The knife marks remained, thin and crossing, not visible from the door but felt under the thumb. She set the lamp closer.

The lamp smoked.

“No,” she said.

The smoke continued upward, making a small black hesitation above the flame. On the stool beside the easel lay a bill from the color merchant in Vienna, folded once, then flattened with the handle of a brush. The lower corner bore a smear of ultramarine from yesterday’s hand. Under the amount due, written by a clerk who had distrusted artists on principle, stood the words:

“payment expected before further delivery.”

The clerk had underlined further. Hermann had underlined nothing. She turned the bill over and used the back to test a line of blue. This morning’s blue was not Marc’s.

His color entered the world with the confidence of an animal that had never signed a receipt; Hermann’s had been thinned, stretched, and made answerable to

cost. It came out paler where the oil failed, so she ground more pigment and added less oil than she wanted. On the wall above the table, Franz Marc's horse hung crookedly. The reproduction had been pinned there after the hall opened, though no one in the room agreed on when opening had ended.

Two tacks held. One had browned and pulled slightly out of the plaster. The horse leaned toward the window as if the weather had made an argument from outside. Hermann had meant to fix it.

Several things in the studio had survived because she had meant to fix them. The stool where Julia had once refused to sit. The drawer that opened if pulled upward and to the left. The latch that held in dry weather and lied in rain.

The strip of canvas cut from an earlier work and used now to keep the window from knocking. A saucer with dried gold along one side. Three brushes with their hairs splayed like old men caught in a wind. Delays had accumulated around the painting until Hermann could mistake them for preparation.

She took the palette. At the upper left, a line entered late behind another line and did not apologize. It did not chase. It waited half a measure, then came in under the first, carrying it rather than correcting it.

Below it, a red-brown passage shifted the same figure down, then down again, until the shape could no longer claim to be the same and yet had not become another. The passage had cost her the wrist. She flexed it now and felt yesterday's ache wake in the tendon. Near the center, a repeated curve had once tried to bind three figures into one historical inevitability.

She had cut it with the knife. The fragments remained, useful only where broken, making memory attractive again. At the lower right, twelve small intervals of color sat without privilege. None repeated.

None led. None yielded. They were nearly unbearable in their fairness. The field had taken longest to make and least long to distrust.

Equality in paint was colder than equality in law. It made room, but it did not warm it. The fifth place lay among them. The fifth place was not empty; emptiness would have been easier.

It retained residue from all four regions: gray delay, red in the scraped tooth, the shine left by the removed curve, and twelve colors stopping in a disciplined row at the right. Hermann mixed blue again. The knife found a clot in the paint. She pressed it flat.

It split into two darker specks and one pale streak.

"Of course," she said, and then regretted speaking.

She had begun speaking aloud while she worked. The small exclamations did not echo; they simply lingered in her memory of the room. On the far table lay the

visitor list from the Gemeindesaal, copied in Frau Klemper's hand because Rausch's version had included categories and Frau Klemper distrusted categories unless they required sweeping.

"children; mothers; committee; rail men; two from church; one unknown, boots bad; Rausch, late; Dollberg, no hat; Julia, if she comes."

The last line had not been in Rausch's version. Hermann read it more often than the others: Julia, if she comes. No one had said whether Julia was coming. The post had brought no letter.

The public roads were unsettled, and the private roads were worse, because private roads carried expectation and therefore became impassable before weather touched them. Hermann set the list face down. The back contained a pencil sketch of the room's stove. Frau Klemper had drawn the hinge badly but the crack exactly. Beside the crack she had written: "not dangerous unless admired." Hermann smiled before she could prevent it. The smile did not last long enough to become comfort. In the hall below, a door closed.

Another door closed farther away, and then the house settled. In an old building, one closure often disturbed the next hinge. The Mansion had governed by such chains of reaction before anyone in it learned politics. Hermann waited.

No steps came. She returned to the fifth place. The brush touched the scraped ground and dragged. Not far.

Less than an inch. Then the hairs separated and left four lines instead of one. She lifted the brush. The mark lay there, ugly and informative.

She wiped it off with the torn rag, but the rag had hardened at one edge and scratched the ground. A small thread from the cloth remained caught in the wet paint. She reached to remove it, stopped, then removed it anyway. Not every accident deserved preservation.

The thread left a finer line behind, almost white where it had lifted the blue. That line held. Hermann leaned closer. It held because it had not been painted.

She heard Marc laughing, or remembered a laugh she had given him in order not to be alone with the mark. The distinction mattered less before breakfast. Klimt would have gilded the scratch. That was the danger with Klimt: he could make damage look chosen without quite lying.

Marc would have called the lifted line an animal path and been wrong enough to help. Rita would have asked who had been lost. Hermann set the brush on the table. Outside, the first cart crossed the road beyond the wall.

Its wheel struck a stone once, then again after a longer interval. The second strike came softer because the wheel had learned nothing, but the road had. Somewhere a woman called to a boy. The name did not carry.

A dog barked as if correcting her. The studio window had fogged along the lower edge. Hermann rubbed a space clear with her sleeve. The glass showed the village in a reduced grammar: roof, chimney, smoke, road, field.

The Gemeindesaal's eastern windows were still dark. One had a pale square where paper had been pasted from inside to cover a crack. The paper had loosened at the lower corner. It lifted when the wind moved and settled when the wind forgot.

Voices rise, hearts unite. The phrase stood on the exhibition notice folded under the pigment bill. It had once sounded like a title. Then like a demand.

Then like a mistake too public to retrieve. Now it looked like work someone had assigned to objects without asking if they had hands. She unfolded the notice. The print was large, official, confident in the way public type becomes confident when it has not paid for the room.

Beneath the title, smaller letters promised an address, a demonstration, a showing of recent work, and, in the last line, refreshments if conditions permit. Someone had crossed out refreshments. Hermann had not crossed it out. The pencil line was heavy and practical.

Frau Klemper, probably. Conditions did not permit much, and refreshments invited speeches from people who had arrived for cake. Hermann folded the notice again along a different crease so the title broke after Voices. Voices Rise, Hearts Unite!

No. She folded it back. The paper had begun to weaken where the creases crossed. A small white star appeared in the middle of the title. Paper, when asked to carry too many futures, developed stars of exhaustion.

She placed the notice under the pigment bill. The fifth place waited. The ground would not take blue. It would not take gray.

It would not take the red-brown that had carried the transposition across the lower field. It would not take gold. It would not accept the little sequence of twelve colors because those belonged to the right-hand structure and had already performed their fairness. She mixed a smaller amount.

No oil this time. Pigment, a trace of medium, the dirt of yesterday's palette because she had not cleaned the edge. The knife moved slowly. The sound was low and granular.

It made her think of salt on a plate, though there was no salt in the studio. The paint thickened under pressure. She gathered it on the brush and set it down not in the fifth place but beside it. The mark held.

Beside. The mark remained beside the scraped patch rather than within it. A thread-wide strip of unpainted ground separated them, making the fifth place less

empty by refusing entry. Hermann stepped back; the arrangement looked different.

Only slightly: there was no revelation, and nothing in the canvas moved. The unfinished blue mark near the lower margin remained exactly where it had been. But the fifth place no longer demanded paint from the center. Something had been given beside it.

The scraped patch could remain scraped for the morning. A knock came at the door. She did not answer at once; before eight, the brush still had more authority than visitors.

The knock repeated.

"Come."

Frau Klemper entered carrying a coal scuttle in one hand and a chipped cup in the other. The scuttle was empty. The cup was not.

"You forgot tea," she said. "I did not begin tea."

"That is one way to forget."

She crossed the room without looking directly at the canvas. Frau Klemper had learned, or perhaps had always known, that unfinished things resent being greeted too soon. She put the cup on the table beside the pigment bill and lifted the scuttle with her other hand.

"Empty," she said. "Yes."

"I brought it empty."

"Yes."

"So you would see it."

Hermann looked at the scuttle. It had a dent on one side from the winter before Alex died. No one had mentioned the dent in months or needed to. The dent belonged to the room's lower weather.

"Are we out?" Hermann asked. "Not out. Lower."

"Lower is not out."

"Tell that to the bottom."

Frau Klemper looked then at the painting. Not at the whole. At the fifth place, or rather at the space beside it, where the new mark had held.

"You stopped painting the middle," she said. "This morning."

"Good."

Hermann waited for the practical objection. Frau Klemper usually carried one, folded in the apron or in the wrist. It came.

"The hall needs two chairs from the west room. Not the good ones. The ones that complain but stand."

"Take them."

“I did.”

“Then why ask?”

“So you can remember you agreed.”

Frau Klemper took the cup she had brought and pushed it closer to Hermann. The tea was weak and oversteeped. It had a skin at one edge. Hermann drank. Below, another door opened. This time voices entered with the cold. Not many. Enough to make the house alert.

“Who is there?” Hermann asked. “Rausch. Two others. One woman from the school. A boy with a note he will not give me because it is for you and boys enjoy rank when it costs nothing.”

“Is Julia—” “No.”

Frau Klemper set the word down rather than let it fall. Hermann nodded. Frau Klemper moved toward the door. At the threshold she stopped and turned back, not toward Hermann, not toward the canvas, but toward the scuttle.

“When the coal comes,” she said, “do not let Dollberg carry it first.”

“Why?”

“He carries empty things better.”

She left. Hermann stood with the cup in her hand until the tea cooled enough to become honest about itself. Then she wrote on the back of the pigment bill, under the test line of blue: The fifth place will not take paint today. Too much scraping. Let it dry badly. She looked at the sentence. It was almost useful. She added: Beside may be more truthful than into.

Then crossed out truthful. Then crossed out the whole second sentence. The bill held the merchant’s demand, one line of blue, a note about bad drying, and the crossed-out second sentence. That would do.

AFW: WET GROUND FIRST. Hermann did not hear them. She had turned back to the canvas.

RISING V



Germany Enters Twice

Germany entered the Mansion twice.

The first entry had no army.

It came in Marc's wet coat before the war, in letters from Munich, in arguments over blue, animals, music, form, and whether a house might become a place of beginnings without acquiring the people who entered it. It came as a guest who altered the arrangement and left the title deed where it was. It came again after Marc's death because unfinished friendship does not observe borders well and because the dead painter had never mistaken cultural nearness for ownership.

The second entry arrived by newspaper, wireless, poster, rumor, and men who had learned to stand as one body before any German uniform crossed the Austrian line.

On 30 January 1933, Hitler entered the German Chancellorship.

The date came into the Gemeindesaal on a damp paper folded under Rausch's arm. He did not raise it. The room had learned that waving a headline grants it tempo. He placed the page beside the water pitcher and read the appointment in a voice smaller than the type.

No one spoke at first.

The room knew enough not to pretend the appointment was a distant event. Austrian Nazi organizers had already used the same grammar: one people, one leader, one national body wounded by enemies and borders, one movement whose energy excused what it had not yet been permitted to do. Alistair's border pamphlet had made the local version. Hitler gave the form continental scale and state office.

Marc stood near the window.

Someone had hung his blue horse reproduction there after the colony opened. The upper nail had loosened again. The horse leaned toward the paper.

Rausch said, "The conservatives believe they can contain him."

Adornfeld answered, "Men often call the instrument contained when their own hand still touches the handle."

Dollberg said, "Then the hand deserves what follows."

Julia looked at him. "That is retrospective courage."

"It is present disgust."

"Then use the present tense carefully."



Frau Klemper brought in bread and set it over the lower half of the report. Hitler's name remained visible above the loaf.

"Eat before making Germany inevitable," she said.

They ate.

The bread did not make the news smaller. It prevented the news from becoming the only body at the table.

Hermann looked at Marc. "What does it mean for you?"

He laughed without humor. "You ask a dead German to explain a living one."

"I ask the guest what happens when another guest claims the house."

"He is not a guest."

"Not yet here."

Marc went to the window. "That is how incorporation speaks before arrival. It turns cultural relation into advance possession. Shared language becomes proof that the boundary is artificial. Shared music becomes evidence that the smaller political body is incomplete. History becomes a deed prepared in the larger body's name."

Klimt appeared in the mirror over the stove. "And Austria assists by calling itself only remainder."

Hermann looked at the crested key and the Gemeindesaal key lying apart on the table.

The prelude's warning returned: recognition makes Hermann more present. Annexation promises Austria wholeness through disappearance.

No equation.

One surface. One edge.

Alistair entered through the east door carrying a German newspaper.

He had removed the Austrian Nazi emblem from the visible fold, but the ink had transferred faintly onto his glove. Julia saw it.

"You approve?" Rausch asked.

Alistair put the paper down. "I approve of movement where the republic has offered waiting."

"You have not answered."

"It is the answer history recognizes."

Marc turned from the window. "History recognizes corpses very efficiently."

Alistair looked at him. "The German guest objects to German unity."

"The dead guest objects to ownership disguised as kinship."

"You were born under one empire and killed under another flag. You imagine borders possess more moral reality than peoples."

“No. I imagine no people is made singular merely because a leader requires one mouth.”

Alistair opened his paper. A photograph showed Hitler before a crowd. Individual faces dissolved in distance. The mass looked like texture arranged around one central figure.

Klimt studied it. “Effective surface.”

Marc said, “Do not admire it.”

“I said effective, not true.”

Hermann saw the structure immediately. The rally was the anti-fugue. Voices did not enter distinctly, answer, alter, and return. They were beaten into one apparent will. The leader did not participate in the interval. He occupied the place from which the interval was abolished.

Rita entered with the drum and placed it face down.

“Who may stop the beat?” she asked.

Alistair answered, “Not the person who wishes the people weak.”

“Which person is that?”

“The one who refuses unity when enemies gather.”

Julia said, “Then every refusal proves the enemy.”

“Every refusal reveals a choice.”

“No. It reveals that another voice exists.”

Alistair looked toward Hermann. “And how long will your Trill survive a marching column?”

Hermann answered honestly. “Not by beauty.”

“Not by dialogue.”

“Not by dialogue alone.”

“Then you have discovered force.”

“No. We have discovered that force must be organized without becoming the permanent tone.”

Alistair smiled. “A gun with a committee.”

“Better than a people made into one gun.”

The exchange pleased the room too much. Hermann felt it become theatre and stopped.

Frau Klemper pointed to the bread. “The argument has eaten nothing.”

Alistair did not eat. He folded the German paper and placed it inside his coat.

At the threshold Marc said, “You are not Hitler.”

Alistair turned.

“No.”

“You are the hand that teaches his form the local door.”

“And you are the German who teaches Austria to pretend guesthood is politics.”

Marc looked at Hermann, the colony rooms, the public key, the torn canvas, the multilingual notices, the people still eating under disagreement.

“Sometimes it is,” he said.

Alistair left.

The room retained two German entries.

Marc’s entry altered the house without acquiring it.

Hitler’s entry, still mediated by print and Austrian adherents, claimed the house was incomplete until ownership arrived.

Between them stood Austria’s boundary: not a wall against relation, but the edge that kept relation from becoming incorporation.

Hermann lifted the newspaper from beneath the bread. A grease mark crossed the photograph’s lower crowd.

She did not wipe it away.

CHAPTER 2

The Civil Weather

By noon the weather had learned to use messengers. The first was a boy from the baker, too old to run without shame and too young to walk with authority. He came through the Gemeindesaal entrance with flour along one sleeve and a red mark on his chin where he had wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. The mark might have been jam.

It might have been blood from a cracked lip. Frau Klemper looked at it, decided the distinction belonged to him unless it worsened, and took the folded paper he held out. The paper had been a flour sack label. On the printed side a mill promised purity in three languages.

On the blank side someone had written that the bridge road was closed. The handwriting leaned forward as if it had been made while standing. Beneath the sentence another hand had added: not closed, watched. Hermann read both versions.

“Who wrote this?”

“The baker.”

“Both?”

The boy looked insulted by the size of the question.

“One before breakfast. One after.”

Rausch wanted the notice posted. The schoolwoman wanted it copied. Frau Klemper wanted to know whether the road mattered for coal. No one wanted to say that the road mattered for escape, because the room had not yet admitted it might need such a word.

At the window a man stood across the way with no parcel and no evident errand. He had discovered the posture of someone waiting for a person he would not name. He stamped once, then stopped, because stamping made watching too visible. Dollberg, entering with damp hair and no apology, saw him at once.

“That one counts.”

“Counts what?” Rausch asked. “Us.”

Rausch stepped toward the window. Frau Klemper caught him by the sleeve.

“If you want to be counted, stand still. It saves him labor.”

The man outside looked at the Gemeindesaal door, then at the upper windows, then at the road. He did not write anything down. This made him more troublesome. A clerk with a notebook could be opposed as a clerk.

A man remembering was already inside. Hermann folded the flour label twice and put it near the stove, not in the fire. Paper with contradictory roads should not be burned before dusk. A woman with two children asked whether she might leave a blanket under the bench until morning.

The blanket was gray and had a blue border that had once been cheerful. Frau Klemper said yes, but only if the woman tied a string around it and wrote her name. The woman had no string. Rausch offered red twine from the notices.

“No,” Frau Klemper said.

She found kitchen string instead. The difference between red twine and kitchen string was not discussed. It held. Late in the afternoon the same boy returned, now carrying a loaf wrapped in yesterday’s programme.

The programme announced a lecture that would not happen. Through the paper, warm bread softened the ink until the words WORKERS, FAMILY, ORDER, and EVENING blurred into one dark thumbprint.

“The baker says the bridge is open if you do not ask at the bridge.”

“Then it is not open,” Adornfeld said.

The boy shrugged.

“He said bring back the paper if you decide anything.”

Hermann looked at the loaf.

“And if we do not?”

“Then bring back the cloth.”

No one had given him cloth. Only then did everyone understand that the message had arrived before the object it required. The first rumor reached the Gemeindesaal before the post. It arrived in the sleeve of a woman who had walked from the lower road and held her arm against her body as if the cloth there had been bruised.

The sleeve was wet to the elbow, though it had not rained in the village. She said Vienna was quiet. Then she said no one should travel. Frau Klemper gave her a cup and did not ask which sentence she wished to keep.

By nine, three other reports had come in, each with its own weather. A railman carried ash on the brim of his cap and swore the ash was snow until he tried to brush it off and blackened his thumb. A boy brought a note from the schoolmaster saying lessons were suspended only for the morning; the note had been written on the back of a timetable that cancelled the afternoon train. Rausch arrived with no hat and two newspapers under his coat, both folded so their headlines faced inward.

Hermann came down from the studio late. The blue at the base of her thumb had dried in the line of the nail. She had washed, but color held better than soap.

“Roads?” she asked. “Some,” Frau Klemper said. “Which?”

“The ones no one needs.”

The hall had changed its breathing. In summer it held dust high near the windows. In winter it kept smoke near the stove until a door opened and gave it a reason to move. That morning the air waited low, near knees and chair legs, where people touched it by walking.

Blankets lay under the lecture notices. Hermann noticed them only because one corner showed: gray wool, army issue, frayed at the binding. Frau Klemper saw her seeing.

“Children come cold,” she said. “The notices?”

“They read better if a child can sit.”

Rausch unfolded one of his newspapers and smoothed it on the table. The ink had transferred to the inside of his sleeve. He wanted a statement. He wanted the hall open in the name of the room, the workers, the village, the dead, the living.

He had brought four names and asked which could stand over the door. Frau Klemper pointed to the coat pegs.

“First tell me where wet coats go if the hall fills.”

“This is not a cloakroom.”

“No,” she said. “That is precisely the difficulty.” Hermann read the note from the schoolmaster.

The handwriting weakened after the third line, not because the man had become uncertain but because his pen had run thin. At the bottom, where there should have been a signature, he had written only S., then pressed the nib too hard and made a black star. Outside, a cart stopped by the gate. No one entered.

The horse blew once and stamped. Hermann turned toward the sound and saw, through the eastern window, a man standing across the road with his hands in his pockets. He did not look into the hall. He looked at the door.

“Has he been there long?” she asked.

Frau Klemper did not turn.

“Long enough not to be waiting.”

Adornfeld would have called the moment surveillance. Dollberg would have called it opportunity. Hermann watched the man shift his weight from one foot to the other. His right boot was better than his left.

The left heel had a crescent missing at the back. That detail made him harder to hate and no less dangerous. A child came in then, not one Hermann knew. His nose ran and he wiped it with the back of the hand that held a piece of bread.

He asked whether the room was open for reading or for hiding. No one answered at once. Frau Klemper took the bread from his hand, broke off the part his nose had touched, gave him the rest, and pointed to the bench by the stove.

“For sitting,” she said.

That held for the morning. At noon the telegraph office sent nothing and thereby frightened the village more than a bad message would have done. The clerk there was a young man with ears that reddened before his face. He came to the hall because the office stove smoked and because, he said, the instrument had begun to sound like weather.

Frau Klemper gave him soup and made him sit near the door so his official damp did not spread.

“No message?” Rausch asked. “Messages require permission now.”

“Whose?”

The clerk held the bowl with both hands.

“That is the message.”

Hermann watched him lower his spoon. He had ink on the side of one finger where the telegraph paper had been cut too short and he had held the strip in place with his hand. His left cuff was frayed. The official world, when it entered the hall, often brought signs of having been mended by a mother.

A child woke under one of the blankets and asked whether school had ended forever. The question was too large for the hour. Frau Klemper told him to put on his left shoe, then his right. By the time both shoes were tied, forever had retreated. The man across the road remained. Julia, who had come no further than the corridor, watched him from behind the half-open door. She did not ask why he was there. She asked whether anyone had eaten.

The question passed around the room and changed the temperature more than the rumor of rifles. Hunger could be acted upon. Rifles could not, unless one had them. Hermann took the visitor list and added the telegraph clerk.

She wrote clerk, no message. Then crossed out no and wrote with silence. Then crossed out with silence because it sounded like something Zeitblom would save. She left: clerk.

The reduction pleased no one and helped the book. By nine, the rain had turned the road outside the hall into two roads, one of mud and one of reflection. People chose the mud. Reflection showed too much sky and too little footing.

Frau Klemper sent Rausch to spread ash near the entrance because anyone who slipped there would curse politics first and the weather second. A woman from the school came with two boys and a bundle of slate pencils wrapped in newspaper.

The school had closed, she said, but only until things were quieter. She said quieter as if quiet were a district official who might be persuaded to sign a form. One of the boys carried a tin lunch pail without lunch in it. He had put chestnuts inside so the pail would sound occupied when he walked.

"Take those out," Frau Klemper said.

The boy held the pail tighter.

"Not theft. Rolling. A hungry person can fall on a chestnut as well as a rich one." He looked at Hermann, then at the stove, then put the chestnuts on the window ledge. They were wet from the pail. One had split and showed a clean pale interior that did not know anything about February. The telegraph clerk returned before noon.

This time he had a message, but not the message anyone wanted. The slip had been folded so often that the word Vienna broke at the crease. He set it on the table and kept one finger on it until Frau Klemper looked at him.

"For whom?" she asked. "For the hall."

"The hall does not read."

"Then for whoever thinks the hall can answer."

Rausch reached first. Frau Klemper put the stove hook across his knuckles lightly enough not to injure him and heavily enough to keep him honest. Hermann took the message. It said travel should be avoided unless necessary.

Necessary had been underlined by someone at the office, or perhaps by rain finding pressure in the paper.

"Necessary for whom?" the school woman asked. The clerk shrugged. He had delivered the grammar and considered himself empty. Hermann placed the message beneath the visitor list, not over it.

Names remained above instruction. This did not improve the weather. It did keep Rausch from turning the paper into a speech while the boys shook rain from their sleeves onto the floor. Outside, a cart stopped at the gate, waited, then moved on without unloading.

The driver did not look toward the hall. He had the look of a person who had decided in advance that whatever happened in a room he had not entered could be called inevitable by people who had stayed dry.

A half-peal would have meant meeting. One strike meant the man pulling the rope had remembered too late that every sound now owed an explanation. The silence after it worked harder than the bell. Three women came from the far side of the village carrying laundry in baskets because the washhouse had closed when someone said the road past it was unsafe.

Wet sheets were heavier than politics and less patient. Frau Klemper cleared two benches and told Rausch to take minutes somewhere else.

“Minutes of what?” he asked. “Of the benches losing their purpose.”

The women hung sheets from the window hooks. The room became partitioned by damp cloth. People had to speak around cotton. The school boys liked this and immediately turned one sheet into a curtain for a puppet no one had brought.

Julia, watching from the corridor, moved the puppet-hand herself when the younger boy began to make the voice of a policeman.

“Not that one,” she said. “Which one?”

“A baker. Bakers can enter rooms without making everyone stand.”

The puppet became a baker and sold imaginary bread until the sheets began to drip on the floor. Then the game ended because water has no respect for character. Near dusk the flour arrived in a sack marked for a bakery that had not ordered it. The cart driver said he could not take it back.

Taking things back required roads that returned to themselves, and the southern road had been closed twice by two different men, neither of whom had the courtesy to use the same reason. Frau Klemper examined the sack. The flour had taken damp at the seam but not yet spoiled. That word, yet, stood between them and supper.

They carried it into the hall on a door lifted from its hinges in the cloakroom. The door had been intended for privacy and now served as a stretcher for grain. Rausch objected to removing a door from any room during danger. Frau Klemper told him to stand in the doorway if he missed it.

Two women from the school sifted the flour by lamplight, not because sifting was necessary at once, but because hands doing useful work frightened children less than adult listening. A boy sneezed into his sleeve and apologized to the sack. Julia tied the open seam with twine from a poster-roll. Hermann watched flour dust settle on the table where the visitor list had lain.

Names disappeared under white. When she wiped them clear, the cloth left streaks and the names returned unevenly: mothers, rail men, one unknown. The rest stayed pale until touched. Outside the watcher across the road had gone.

His absence made the road look less safe, not more. A watched room at least knows which window to distrust. At supper the first bread made from the wrong sack was heavy, under-salted, and eaten quickly. No one called it providence or called it theft.

The sack had crossed the wrong road and fed the room for one night. Before locking up, Frau Klemper found one chestnut still on the window ledge. It had

dried with a pale split along the side and a little mud at the base. She put it in the empty pail and handed the pail to the boy without comment. He shook it once. The single chestnut made a smaller sound than his pride preferred. He carried it anyway.

POLITICAL INTERLEAF I



Three False Wholenesses

The movement's committee met forty-eight hours after Dollfuss's offer and spent the first hour deciding whether the meeting could decide.

The office had been offered to Hermann, but the state had named her movement as the reason. If she answered alone, she would prove the state's theory that the movement possessed one symbolic center. If every participant claimed a veto, delay would become another person's unanswerable authority. If they voted by simple majority, a decision about public capture would acquire the appearance of clean consent. If they refused to decide, Dollfuss would decide what the refusal meant.

Adornfeld proposed a procedure.

Dollberg proposed a deadline.

Rausch proposed a speech.

Frau Klemper proposed potatoes.

Julia proposed that each person first state what material consequence the office would alter for someone other than Hermann.

That began the meeting.

Pál said it might protect transport routes from police closure.

Marika said it might give the movement access to coal and also give the police a list of every room needing it.

Zeller said it might preserve schools and public lectures, or make teachers appear grateful to the government for rights they already held.

Rausch said it might carry the Gegenprotokoll into the state, or teach the movement to speak only in language acceptable to ministries.

Dollberg said it might provide information about armed threats, or make protection depend on the same police command that classified meetings as disorder.

Adornfeld said it might create review, documentation, and named responsibility, or create a second filing cabinet inside the first.

Frau Klemper said it might keep doors open, or replace keys with permits.

Rita said nothing until asked.

"What do you see?" Hermann said.

"A prepared chair."

"Whose?"

"Yours. That is the danger."

Julia stood beside the torn Symphony on Canvas. The destroyed work had been moved into the meeting room because rain threatened the colony roof. One flap showed Marc's blue. Another Klimt's gold. The split butterfly remained at the lower corner. The work's totality had failed, but its fragments still attracted arrangement.

"There are three promises of wholeness in the room," Julia said.

She wrote on the slate:

GERMANY.

THE STATE.

THE MOVEMENT.

"Germany says Austria becomes whole by entering the larger German body."

Marc, near the window, said, "By disappearing as a political person."

"The state says Austria becomes whole by suppressing the divisions that make it appear weak."

Dollfuss was not present, but his folder lay on the table.

"The movement says Austria becomes whole when voices rise and hearts unite."

Rausch objected. "That is not what we mean."

"It is what the title can do without us."

Hermann looked at the three lines.

Hitler offered unison through absorption.

Dollfuss offered conducted harmony through command.

The movement risked offering emotional unity around Hermann while calling the result plurality.

All three could claim emergency.

All three could say the alternative was weakness.

All three could turn relation into proof that one center had become necessary.

The difference had to exist in practice before it could be trusted in language.

Adornfeld drew three columns.

Under GERMANY: one people, one leader, one political body, enemies removed, Austria incorporated.

Under THE STATE: one Austria, one executive direction, factions disciplined, emergency powers, plural institutions narrowed.

Under THE MOVEMENT: many voices, answerable authority, distributed tasks, right of refusal, practical consequence, preserved boundary.

Dollberg pointed to the third column. "That is how we describe ourselves."

"Yes," Julia said.

"Then why place it beside the others?"

"Because description is where command hides first."

Frau Klemper cut a potato in three unequal pieces.

"Which one is the republic?" Rausch asked.

"None. This is lunch."

She distributed the pieces according to who had eaten earlier, not equally. Schoenberg's formal equality objected from the lower right of the torn canvas. The body won.

Hermann said, "If I enter office, the movement needs conditions that continue when I am absent."

Julia answered, "It needs them whether you enter or not."

They drafted protections.

No organizer's name to be given to the state without that person's knowledge except under immediate threat to life, and any exception to be recorded by two people.

No government money accepted without a public account of its use and the conditions attached.

No movement meeting chaired by Hermann while she exercised state office.

No speech by Hermann to be treated as binding unless the relevant taskbearers accepted it.

A second key held outside government custody for every room receiving state support.

Independent storage of the Gegenprotokoll in multiple places.

A named person authorized to stop movement activity when weapons, routes, or civilian safety changed materially, with immediate review afterward.

No permanent armed body under Hermann's personal command.

No use of Alex's name, image, or questions in state publicity.

No official reproduction of Symphony on Canvas or the final painting without Julia's and the colony's approval.

At the last rule Hermann looked at Julia.

"You should have the right alone."

"No."

"Why?"

"Because then you make me custodian of your ethics and your daughter at once."

"Who, then?"

"Two hands. One cannot be yours. One cannot always be mine."

They assigned a rotating art committee including the printer, Frau Klemper, one colony artist, one public-room user, and Julia when she chose to serve. Klimt said the arrangement would destroy taste. Marc said that was not its purpose. Both remained offended.

The hardest question was whether Hermann could resign.

"Of course," Rausch said.

Adornfeld replied, "Resignation can become a theatrical act that leaves others carrying consequences."

Dollberg said, "Office that cannot be left is captivity."

Julia said, "Office left without a transfer is abandonment."

They wrote: HERMANN MAY RESIGN. THE MOVEMENT DOES NOT RESIGN WITH HER. BEFORE RESIGNATION, SHE MUST NAME WHAT POWERS, RECORDS, ROUTES, AND RISKS CHANGE, AND ANOTHER PERSON MUST HOLD THE KEY TO THE TRANSFER.

Frau Klemper underlined another person.

Rita finally struck the drum once.

The sound was not approval. It marked that a rule had acquired a bearer beyond Hermann.

Then came the vote.

Not yes or no.

Each participant answered three questions:

May Hermann negotiate acceptance under the published conditions?

What condition cannot be surrendered without returning to the movement?

Who will bear the consequence of your answer?

The responses did not align cleanly. Several supported negotiation and distrusted acceptance. Two opposed the office entirely. Dollberg supported it for information and force. Julia opposed acceptance but supported negotiation because refusal without testing the terms would permit Hermann to become a martyr to purity. Frau Klemper said yes to negotiation if the potatoes in the Chancellery were counted as state property and returned after meetings. No one knew whether she joked. The line was entered.

Hermann listened without seeking a majority that would absolve her.

At the end Julia asked, "What do you want?"

The question sounded private and was not.

Hermann looked at Hitler's photograph, Dollfuss's folder, the movement title, the torn first canvas, the second key, and Alex's twenty-seventh question.

"I want to believe an interval can be held inside the state."

"That is not the same as wanting the office."

“No.”

“Do you want it?”

Hermann answered after the delay became costly.

“Yes.”

The room changed.

The desire had been named and could no longer masquerade as sacrifice.

“Why?” Julia asked.

“Because I have spent my life outside rooms whose grammar governed me. Because I think I may prevent harm. Because I am vain enough to believe the state will hear what the house heard. Because I am afraid that if I refuse, others will close the rooms. Because Germany has made command look like history and Dollfuss will answer command with command. Because I want to prove a different office can exist.”

Julia nodded once. “Now we can decide with the appetite visible.”

The committee authorized negotiation, not acceptance.

Hermann signed the mandate. Julia signed beside her. Frau Klemper held the page while the ink dried. Adornfeld recorded the dissent. Rausch read the conditions aloud. Dollberg carried a copy to the outer archive. Rita retied the blue thread. Marc and Klimt remained on separate fragments of the ruined canvas.

No one called the decision unity.

CHAPTER 3

Julia Returns Without Forgiveness

Julia crossed the yard without looking up at the windows. A glance might have carried accusation, curiosity, contempt, or pity; it could have been met, returned, or avoided. By refusing to look up, she withdrew from the house its claim upon her gaze. The windows became glass again.

She knocked at the Gemeindesaal door. Not at the family entrance, not in the kitchen court. The public door opened a finger's width, then gave all at once and made Julia stumble forward before she had decided to enter.

"Careful," Frau Klemper said.

"I was careful."

"Not careful enough for this door."

Julia set down her case. The leather had darkened at the corners. One buckle was fastened with black thread that did not match and therefore made the repair visible.

"It is the wrong door for me," Julia said.

"It is the public one."

"I know."

Frau Klemper brought a chair that belonged to none of the old rooms, ugly enough to be neutral. Julia sat without thanking her. Notices tied with kitchen string lay on the table. She undid the badly made knot. Beneath the stove rules was a child's drawing: a horse too long in the body and too short in the legs.

"That does not belong there," Frau Klemper said.

"Then why is it there?"

"Because no one has carried it away."

Julia placed the drawing beside the cup. Not an archive. Not adoption. A place. Hermann stopped on the last stair. Old houses teach people to pause above rooms and look down into them like owners.

Julia saw. "Come down before you speak."

Hermann came down. A coal collapsed inward in the stove.

"Good," Frau Klemper said. "It was leaning badly."

Only then did Hermann say Julia's name.

Julia did not answer. She folded her bare hand over the gloved one and looked at the stair behind Hermann.

"You have learned to open rooms," she said. "Do not confuse that with having opened this one."

Hermann offered tea. Julia refused. Hermann offered a chair. Julia remained seated as though the offer had been made to someone else.

"Why did you come?" Hermann asked, and regretted the shape of the question.

Julia unfolded the exhibition notice: VOICES RISE, HEARTS UNITE! Beneath it someone had written in pencil: if the roads permit.

"Am I in it?"

"There is no portrait."

"That was not my question."

They went to the studio. Julia put her gloves on the floorboards, not on a table. She looked first at the fifth place. In a room, unfinished work often tells the truth first.

"You scraped it away."

"Too often."

"I know that."

In the wet ground near the lower margin, a figure had begun to gather where Hermann had intended no face: the angle of hair, defiance in an unfinished cheek, an empty room behind it. No likeness. Theft all the same.

"You remembered the wrong thing," Julia said.

She did not go far. In the corridor the wallpaper had loosened along the upper seam. Julia laid one hand against it. The paper gave, and dust remained beneath her thumb.

"This house is shedding its skin."

"All houses do."

"Not all of them ask to be thanked."

Downstairs she placed her case beside the public exit. No one called that hospitality.

Julia spent the afternoon in the hall without belonging to it. She refilled water, lifted a bench for a lost marble, corrected Rausch's spelling on a public notice, and did not sign the correction.

Toward evening she put her counter-manifesto on the table, folded it again without reading, and took a parcel from the case.

"Open it," she said.

The knot had been made by someone who considered knots a form of distrust. Inside lay a stranger's exercise book, a folded cloth, two unmatched buttons, and the wheel of a toy cart. None had belonged to Alex. For that reason alone, their hands moved carefully.

The exercise book had belonged to a girl named Lotte. On the final page RISE stood in large letters, surrounded by eights that widened and tightened as the pencil grew blunt. Julia did not show Hermann the word. She showed her the seven shoes drawn on the page before it.

“You would have kept the word.”

“Perhaps.”

“I kept the shoes.”

The wheel rolled against the bread knife. Frau Klemper set it inside an empty cup.

“Now it can be useless without rolling away.”

Julia laughed. The sound belonged to no reconciliation.

Then she asked to see the cellar.

Halfway down, her skirt caught on a nail working its way out of the wall. Hermann pressed it in with her thumb. It came out again.

“Leave it,” Julia said. “Cover it. Do not pretend you can make the wall young.” Alistair’s labels remained in the cellar: APPLES. CANDLES. LINEN. RIFLE OIL. The last word had been scraped, not removed. A sewing box held three needles, rust at the hinge, and blue thread wound around a button card. Julia took the thread.

Upstairs she placed it beside the drum strap without tying anything. She ate a piece of bread standing up, the heel first. As a child she had traded heels away.

“Did hunger teach you that?” Hermann asked.

“Trains. Save the soft part and it is gone before you sit.”

Frau Klemper moved the case clear of the hinge and tested the door. The hinges complained.

“I will oil them tomorrow,” she said.

“Do not,” Julia said.

No one knew whether she meant the hinge or the hope. The door did not latch behind her. It remained open a crack until Frau Klemper closed it.

CHAPTER 4

Rita in the Main Narrative

The knot was wrong. Julia saw it before Hermann. That followed: Julia had not invented this thread or this drum, but she had invented the thought that a thing might be held by a knot which also admitted it wanted to open. Children tie such knots of contradiction before adults teach them that a knot must either work or fail.

The blue thread had loosened near the left rim of the drum. No break. One loop hung slack; another remained stiff, like a sentence whose mouth refused the verb.

Julia reached for it. "May I?"

Hermann nearly answered as owner of the studio. The nearly showed in her face. Julia waited until it died.

"Yes."

Julia lifted the drum. Dust lay in the skin; at the rim was the crescent of a wet finger, not Alex's finger.

The knot would not open. Julia's right forefinger had split beside the nail. When she pulled, the skin opened again. She put the finger in her mouth and did not look at Hermann.

Rita entered there without light, music, or change in temperature. The sentence merely knew before the women did that the thread had to be loosened from below rather than pulled from above.

Julia turned the drum over. "There."

Adornfeld began in an uninvited margin: The child's method survives as unconscious procedure. Dollberg wrote beneath it: The knot is appetite postponed.

AFW crossed out both sentences.

Julia tied it again. The knot looked weaker. It held because it left the skin room to breathe beneath the thread.

"Better," she said.

"Will it hold?"

"Today."

No one improved the answer.

A boy with a split shoe stopped beside the table. The sole opened at the ball of the foot. He raised it as though submitting a small petition.

"Frau Klemper," Julia called.

"No one calls me for shoes while the roof still leaks."

“The roof still leaks.”

“Then the shoe belongs to the majority.”

The boy looked at the drum. “Does the prince mend shoes?”

Julia’s face closed and opened differently. “The prince asks who is lost. The cobbler asks where the water gets in. Until Tuesday we have neither.”

The sentence was too tidy. The boy saved it. “Is Tuesday before supper?”

Frau Klemper found leather in the mending drawer. For ten minutes the drum strap and the shoe lay on the same table. Both needed a hand. Neither explained why its need was greater.

The leather did not match. It was too stiff. After the repair, the boy limped more. Julia walked with him across the hall. He exaggerated the limp to test whether pity was waiting.

“Walk as if no one were watching,” Frau Klemper said.

He did, badly at first, then better.

The blue loop came loose again during supper. No one confessed. Children, Dollberg, Hermann’s sleeve, the work itself: every cause was possible, and none deserved privilege.

Julia carried the drum to the window. The strap required both hands. She took the thread between her teeth.

“Do not,” Hermann said.

Julia drew it from her mouth. “Everything here stains.”

No one reached too quickly for the drum. Julia worked with the bad hand. The knot slipped. She swore. The ordinary curse did the room good.

A smaller boy asked whether princes tied knots differently.

“Princes ask first.”

“Ask the knot?”

“Ask the person holding it.”

The boy went away dissatisfied.

Hermann kept her hands at her sides. Julia doubled the thread back and tucked it beneath the leather. The strap held badly and honestly.

A red line of thread showed on Julia’s finger. She wiped it on her sleeve before Hermann could offer a cloth.

The drum was not struck.

CHAPTER 5

The Butterfly Signature

The first wing failed. It failed quietly, with no drama useful to painters. The blue looked adequate while wet, then flattened as it dried, losing the animal depth Marc had once called a color's breathing room. Hermann scraped it back before anyone else saw it.

The mark beneath remained, a faint crescent near the lower margin, the ghost of a wing too polite to live. Marc came after that. He did not enter by the door. The reproduction of the horse shifted on the wall as the loose tack gave another fraction, and the blue animal leaned farther toward the worktable.

The tilt was enough to irritate the eye. Hermann had learned to distrust useful irritation. It often arrived as instruction wearing bad manners.

"You are making the butterfly explain itself," Marc said. "I am making a signature."

"Signatures are explanations that have grown vain."

"Then you should have painted fewer horses."

He laughed, and the laugh helped because it was not wise. On the table, the pigment dish held blue in two consistencies: one thick, nearly dry; one thinned with oil until it spread too willingly. Hermann mixed the two with the end of a brush handle, not the knife. The handle left a ring in the paint each time it turned. The brush hovered above the wing and did not land. Hermann set the brush beside the dish. She took instead the smallest knife, the one with the broken wooden grip. The grip had split where the rivet entered.

She wrapped it with thread from an old rag and held it between thumb and second finger. The cut near her nail complained. This time she did not paint the wing. She drew the body first, a thin dark place almost too narrow to hold color.

Then she made the left wing from a pressure outward and back, not a shape but a leaving. Blue gathered at the base. Toward the edge it opened into paler weather. A small streak, almost white, appeared where the knife lifted.

She left it. Another pressure drew in a softened red. A green speck entered from dirty paint still clinging to the blade. Violet appeared when she cleaned the knife badly on a cloth that had held previous work.

The wing did not become a flag. It became difficult to name. Good, Hermann thought, and distrusted the thought because it arrived too soon. Marc moved closer.

"What kind of animal is it?"

“One that survives being looked at.”

“No animal survives that fully.”

“Then it should survive partially.”

He accepted this. Dead painters were generous when the living did not ask them for permission. At the door Frau Klemper paused with a broom.

“That fly?”

“Butterfly,” Hermann said. “If you say so.”

Frau Klemper swept pigment dust away from the table leg and did not look again. The wing improved under that neglect. It stopped performing for the room and became something small enough to sign with. The horse on the wall leaned farther by noon.

The rusted tack had surrendered a little more plaster, and Marc’s blue animal tilted toward the window as if weather, not death, had been waiting to claim him. Hermann stood on the stool to fix it and nearly put her thumb through the reproduction. The paper had gone soft at the place where the horse’s flank met the field.

“Leave him crooked,” Marc said.

The voice came from no place in the room and therefore from all the places that still carried blue. Hermann did not turn.

“You would say that.”

“A horse that leans has learned something about standing.”

“Too quotable.”

“Then paint badly.”

She climbed down without fixing the tack. On the canvas, near the lower right margin, a small form had been waiting for weeks. It was no larger than a child’s thumbprint. At first it had been a mark left by accident when blue touched the end of a dry brush.

Then wings had suggested themselves. Then Hermann had avoided it because suggested things, if obeyed too quickly, become decoration. She mixed the blue again. Marc’s blue first.

Always that. Not because blue was pure. Purity had done more harm than mud in Austria. Blue came first because her hand knew it before thought began to apply for authority.

The left wing took the blue cleanly. The right resisted. The brush caught on a raised bit of ground and skipped. The skipped place left a pale cut through the wing.

Hermann reached for white, then stopped. White would make the cut too clean. She touched the palette where yesterday's rose had dried beside a gray made from too many corrections. The wing accepted both badly.

A little rose. A little chalk-white. A colder blue. A line of red thinned almost to memory.

Green where there should have been none. Orange at the edge, then violet where the orange dragged. None of the colors arranged themselves into a declaration. Declarations need borders.

The wing had nerves instead. Julia appeared at the door while Hermann was still mixing.

"The horse is crooked," she said. "Yes."

"That was not my complaint."

Hermann stepped aside so Julia could see the small mark. Julia looked at the butterfly, then at the leaning horse.

"You are signing with a thing that changes," Julia said. "Perhaps."

"Or with something that dies if handled badly."

The brush came to rest on the rag. Marc's voice did not answer. Perhaps Marc knew when the living had earned a silence. Julia crossed the room and lifted the reproduction just enough to press the loosened tack back into the plaster.

She did it without ceremony. The horse straightened, then sank a fraction to the left after she withdrew her hand.

"Better," Julia said.

It was merely less obviously falling, which was sometimes all repair gave. Hermann returned to the butterfly. The blue held the wing together only where it failed to dominate. At the center she left a speck of unpainted ground because the brush could not reach it without spoiling the edges already there.

Hermann's Note: Blue first. It begins without asking permission from the other colors. Then it must learn not to rule them.

Marc returned in the afternoon with mud on his imagined boots. He had no boots, of course. He had died years before and arrived now through pigment, reproduction, memory, and the arrogance of blue. Yet Hermann saw mud at the edge of him because the village yard below had mud and because living rooms lend dirt to the dead when the dead become too clean.

"Butterflies are not horses," she said. "No. They know more about weakness."

"You prefer strength."

"I painted animals because humans had become too proud of theirs."

The line was almost noble. Then the tack holding the horse reproduction slipped again and struck the table. The reproduction leaned hard to one side, and the noble line lost its balance. Julia laughed from the doorway.

It was Julia's first laugh since arriving, neither forgiving nor kind but directed at paper and failure. It lasted less than a second, and several people seized on it too greedily.

"Fix your horse," Julia said. "It is Marc's."

"Then he has had years."

She crossed the room, lifted the fallen tack, and pressed it into the plaster with the heel of a hairpin. The hairpin bent. She swore quietly. Marc, who had no right to enjoy this, enjoyed it.

The butterfly waited. The paint at one wing edge had begun to skin. Hermann touched it with the back of the brush. It resisted, then broke.

Under the skin the color was brighter. A day-old wound of paint. She adjusted the wing, not to perfect it but to let the broken skin remain visible. The butterfly looked less designed afterward, more caught.

"Better," Julia said again.

This time it almost was. Marc's horse did not remain straight after Hermann fixed the tack. The plaster around it crumbled, and the tack entered a softer place. The horse hung level for the length of one cup of coffee, then lowered its head again by the thickness of a breath.

Marc would have liked that. Hermann did not. She took the reproduction down and found dust in the shape of its absence. The wall behind it had preserved a brighter rectangle, not because the paper had protected the plaster but because neglect distributes light unevenly.

She wiped the rectangle with her sleeve. The sleeve came away gray. Under the dust, a blue fiber had lodged where the tack had been. It might have come from the old cloth around the pigments.

It might have come from something Julia had once worn. Hermann did not ask it to decide. When she returned to the butterfly, the wing had dried along the outer rim. The inner color remained wet.

She added no new pigment. She pulled what was already there outward with the dry brush, thinning the blue until other colors looked as if they had been waiting underneath rather than added. The result was less brilliant than the first attempt. Less proof.

Better for that. Julia came in while she was doing it and did not stop at the door.

"You took the horse down."

"It fell almost."

“Almost is one of your busier rooms.”

Hermann held the dry brush above the wing.

“Should I put it back?”

Julia looked at the brighter rectangle on the wall.

“Not today. Let the wall know what it looked like without him.”

Later, Frau Klemper came to ask for a nail. She saw the empty wall and said only, “Good. Now I can reach the hook.” She hung a wet apron where Marc’s horse had been, and for the afternoon the blue animal’s place belonged to a cloth smelling of onion and rainwater. Hermann did not paint that either.

After the apron dried, Frau Klemper forgot it on Marc’s hook. For two days the Blue Horse’s place on the wall smelled faintly of onion. Marc did not complain. Hermann, who complained for him internally, became embarrassed by the habit.

A boy from the hall came up to return a brush he had borrowed without asking. Its hairs were stiff with whitewash. He had used it to mark boxes for storage and had improved neither brush nor boxes.

“This was for oil,” Hermann said. “It worked on lime.”

“Badly.”

“So did the lime.”

He left before she could decide whether to be offended. The brush, ruined for fine work, made a beautiful rough mark when she dragged it across scrap canvas. Marc would have called it alive. Julia would have asked what it cost.

Hermann used it on the butterfly’s lower wing. The mark tore the blue into ragged veins. For a moment the wing looked damaged. Then it looked capable of weather.

A moth entered with the evening wood. It was neither butterfly nor blue, only a dusty moth with one torn edge and no gift for emblem. It came out from between two logs when Frau Klemper dropped them near the stove and sat on the wall above the kindling box, moving its wings with the tired persistence of something that had mistaken warmth for weather. Marc would have preferred a horse.

Klimt would have preferred anything with a better wing. Hermann watched it because it refused preference. The children wanted to catch it. Frau Klemper said no with a flatness that ended the sport.

Dollberg held out one finger and the moth did not come to him, which improved several people’s opinion of the insect. Julia cupped her hands beneath it only when it slid down the wall and nearly touched the stove.

“Now?” a child asked.

“Now,” she said.

She carried it to the door and opened her hands. The moth remained in them. Outside was colder than its first mistake. Julia waited.

Her breath made a small cloud over her wrists. At last it lifted, struck the doorframe, fell, lifted again, and disappeared into the dark with no grace worth keeping. Hermann returned upstairs and looked at the butterfly mark on the canvas. It was already too willing to be loved.

She took a dry brush and roughened the lower wing. A few grains of blue lifted. Under them the wing became less certain and more alive to weather. The moth had given nothing symbolic.

It had only left her unable to tolerate a perfect edge. Hermann's Note: Butterfly must remember moth. Blue must remember dust.

CHAPTER 6

The Final Surface

Klimt arrived as a torn edge. The gold leaf had been wrapped between sheets of paper so thin they feared the hand. Hermann opened the packet badly. One square folded over itself and could not be persuaded flat again.

Another broke when her breath touched it. A third clung to the dry skin near her thumb and shone there, ridiculous and accusing, until she wiped it on her apron.

“Waste,” Julia said from the doorway.

Klimt’s smile, when it came, was not visible in the room. It came through the way the torn leaf refused to behave like money once ruined.

“Gold is always waste before it is surface,” he said. “That sounds like someone selling gold,” Julia said.

Hermann did not defend him. The crack in the canvas ground ran through the upper field, near the space where Bach’s delayed line approached Liszt’s lowered passage. It was not large. That made it harder to respect.

A large crack can be honored as damage. A small one invites correction. Hermann had tried size, sanding, a wash of white, a thin veil of blue. Each made the crack look like a secret badly kept.

Klimt handed her the soft brush.

“No.”

“Not over,” he said. “Along.”

She laid the gold beside the crack, not across it. The brush barely touched. The leaf tore and caught only on the raised edge of the ground. It did not hide the break. It gave the break weather. Light found it from the side. Julia moved closer despite herself.

“It looks expensive.”

“It is.”

“Then it should pay rent.”

That ended Klimt’s smile. Hermann left the torn excess on the table. Later, when she returned from washing the brush, she found the smallest scrap stuck to the underside of Julia’s glove. Julia had not noticed.

Or had noticed and refused the kind of noticing that would make the room theatrical. Hermann did not tell her. By evening the scrap had fallen somewhere. No one found it.

The floor held many lost surfaces. This was one more. Three days later, the gold receipt came due, folded around two samples of cheaper leaf. The cheaper leaf had a greenish undertone and smelled faintly of metal and false economy.

Frau Klemper touched it at once.

"This one bends more."

"It is inferior."

"So are most useful things."

She carried a strip downstairs and used it to patch the edge of a torn notice where rain had lifted the paper. It failed within an hour. The gold curled, exposed the tear, and clung to a child's sleeve when he leaned against it. Julia peeled it off him carefully.

The scrap stuck to her damp finger. Klimt looked away first. Frau Klemper put the failed notice on the studio table.

"This is what happens when repair wants admiration."

They used brown paste instead. The notice stayed on the wall. It did not shine. On the canvas, the real leaf remained beside the crack, caught only on its raised edge.

It did not hide the break. It kept it in daylight.

CHAPTER 7

Adornfeld's Fear

Adornfeld's register required a larger table than Hermann owned. He brought the library table, found it too high for the studio chair, fetched another chair, and objected to its shortened leg because someone had understood balance without respecting geometry. By the time table, chairs, string, cards, letters, and pencils were in place, the afternoon had passed into preparation and considered itself necessary.

"Necessary," Adornfeld said.

"No one accused you."

"You were about to ask whether there was tea."

He wrote headings:

SCHATTENDORF JULIA RITA PAINTING POLITICS MUSIC MAN- SION

The card marked NAME stayed blank for five minutes. Then he wrote NAME and underlined too hard.

A receipt for gold went under PAINTING, then under POLITICS because it had been paid from hall funds, then between them. Julia had written: Prepare nothing. Adornfeld placed the note beneath JULIA. Hermann moved it to MANSION. Adornfeld moved it back. There it remained, wrong and unavoidable.

Frau Klemper came in carrying three chair legs.

"Do you need those?" Adornfeld asked.

"They need themselves."

She took two cards from the table, folded them, and slid them beneath the short leg. The chair stood.

Adornfeld rose. "The cards were in use."

"So was the chair."

That evening Adornfeld placed a card marked JULIA / RELATION / DAMAGE under the low corner of the table. The table steadied. He hated the steadiness. Hermann's pigments, one cup, a page from Bauer, and Julia's tack lay above it. If he pulled the card free, they would tilt.

On a fresh card he wrote SUPPORT IS NOT CONTROL. He turned it over, drew a table leg badly, and slid it beneath another chair. The chair kept wobbling. He allowed himself that.

The injury done by the files did not leave. It merely weighed less than the table. After the rain, the index box began to smell damp. There was no mold yet. Adornfeld spread the cards beside the window and weighted them with brushes, a spoon, a stone, and a screw too long for no known duty.

In daylight they looked foolish: DAUGHTER beside a spoon, SCHATTENDORF beneath a brush, I beneath a useless screw. Adornfeld moved the screw. The card turned over. On the reverse was a shopping list: vinegar, starch, lamp wick, blue if cheap.

He did not know the hand. The room had used his system before he had finished it. For ten minutes he tried to decide whether blue if cheap belonged under color, economy, or grace.

Dollberg said nothing. He could not have tormented Adornfeld more fully. Adornfeld found the missing page while looking for the missing date. It listed objects carried from the west room into the Gemeindesaal: three chairs, a cracked stool, an umbrella stand without its insert, a small table with a burn mark, and two cushions unsuitable for children. Two copies contradicted one another. The original was missing and made the copies rivals to a ghost.

Adornfeld accused Dollberg first. It was quick and unjust.

Dollberg emptied his pockets: bread crumbs, string, a nail, and Adornfeld's card PROCEDURE. He had taken it, he said, because it looked lonely.

Frau Klemper found the original page beneath a chair leg in the school corner. It had been folded twice, stained with milk at one corner, and carried on the back a child's face with three teeth.

Adornfeld read the list. Two cushions, not three.

"Will you correct the copies?" Hermann asked.

"Yes."

"And the original?"

He looked at the drawn face. "It goes back under the chair."

"Why?"

"Because it carried the truth there before I found it."

CHAPTER 8

Dollberg's Hunger

Dollberg cut bread as if bread had insulted him. The loaf was yesterday's, hard at the lower crust, still soft enough in the middle to pretend at generosity. He pressed the knife through with too much force and made slices thick enough to shame the table. Frau Klemper watched from the stove.

"Thinner."

"Hunger does not respect thinness."

"Hunger respects tomorrow if tomorrow has bread."

He made the next slice thinner and looked wounded by obedience. Rausch entered while Dollberg was buttering one heel end with the back of the knife. There was no butter. There was lard in a dish, gray and cold.

Rausch saw Dollberg eating and began a sentence about discipline. Frau Klemper handed him a basket of coal chips.

"Carry those to the hall."

"I was going to speak."

"Bring them warm enough and you may speak over them."

Dollberg laughed with his mouth full. Then Frau Klemper handed him the second basket. He stopped laughing. The rumor about rifles came with the third man, a rail worker whose cap had gone soft from rain.

He said men were gathering beyond the bridge, then corrected himself: not gathering, standing. Then corrected himself again: standing as if waiting for a word that had not yet been sent. Dollberg listened. He put down the bread.

What frightened Hermann was not Dollberg's hunger but the accuracy that sharpened in him when danger approached. He sensed force before politics named it and recognized the moment when separate people might become a crowd.

"How many?" Adornfeld asked. "Enough if counted badly," the rail worker said.

Dollberg looked toward the window.

"Close the public door."

"No," Rausch said. "Then count who comes through it."

"No."

Frau Klemper set down the poker.

"Both of you. Coal first."

Everyone stayed where they were. She picked up the smaller basket herself. That did what argument could not. Rausch took the larger one.

Dollberg, after a pause in which appetite and pride discussed the insult, took the coal scuttle from Hermann's hand. The scuttle blackened his cuff. He looked at the mark for a long moment. Then carried it.

For six steps, force learned the shape of a handle. Hermann watched him go and felt the old unwelcome knowledge: usefulness can humiliate a dangerous man, and humiliation is not the same as disarmament. Dollberg returned without the scuttle. His cuff was black.

He did not speak for nearly a minute. Frau Klemper threw him a rag.

"Wipe your cuff before you philosophize on my table."

He obeyed. The soot smeared rather than lifted. She sent him to the back room to count the blankets. He returned with the correct number and one wet blanket, which he hung near the stove without being thanked.

At night he returned the bread knife. It had been sharpened badly but with effort; one side took more edge than the other, and the handle smelled faintly of coal oil. Frau Klemper tested it on the heel of the loaf. The slice came away clean and uneven.

Dollberg sat without asking and ate the smaller piece. Later Frau Klemper sent him for potatoes. He returned with turnips. This would have been comedy in a kinder week.

The kitchen received it as arithmetic. Frau Klemper counted the turnips, then counted the people who had expected potatoes, then looked at Dollberg as if numbers themselves had brought charges.

"They had no potatoes," he said. "They had turnips?"

"They had a man guarding turnips."

"Did he sell them?"

"Eventually."

There was mud on Dollberg's cuff and a scratch along his jaw. He had not won the argument cleanly. He had, however, brought food. This disturbed everyone who preferred their useful people morally legible.

The turnips were small, furred with roots, and smelled of cellar. Julia washed them in two basins, first dirt water, then cleaner water that immediately ceased being clean. Hermann peeled beside her. Dollberg watched until Frau Klemper handed him the knife with the broken handle.

"You fetched them," she said. "Now remove their childhood."

He peeled badly. Too much flesh came away under the skin. Frau Klemper showed him once, not kindly. He improved by the third turnip and became proud of the improvement.

Pride made the fourth worse. At supper no one praised him. He ate last because he had peeled slowest. Hunger accepted the demotion, though not with grace. Later, Hermann noticed the scratch on his jaw had opened again. He had wiped it with potato water. The wound looked annoyed rather than tragic.

CHAPTER 9

Julia Before the Canvas

Julia came to the studio after the rain began. The rain fell lightly. The rain had not yet committed itself to weather. It touched the window in uncertain strokes, then withdrew, then returned along the same glass as if correcting a line too soon.

Hermann had left the door unlatched. Julia had not invited her in; fatigue had simply left the door unguarded. The latch had swollen in damp weather and required both hands whenever it settled fully into the frame. She had meant to plane the edge, but earlier had become a crowded country.

Julia pushed the door with two fingers. It opened badly. The bottom scraped once along the floorboards and stopped. Julia waited for the sound to finish before entering.

She had learned this from the house, or against it: doors in old rooms preferred to complete themselves before being contradicted. Hermann stood beside the canvas with a cloth in one hand. The cloth was not clean. Nothing in the studio was clean in the way kitchens understood the word.

There were cleaner and less clean rags, jars that had not yet become unusable, knives with one good edge, cups that should not have held turpentine and now held nothing else. The floor carried small histories of color near the easel: blue under the right foot, red by the window, a yellowish dust close to the table where Klimt's leaf had torn and refused recovery. Julia did not look first at the painting. She looked at Hermann's hands.

"Your thumb," she said.

Hermann turned her hand over. The cut near the nail had reopened. The blood was not dramatic. It had gathered in a small dark half-moon at the base of the thumb, then dried where blue pigment entered it.

She had forgotten it until Julia named it.

"The latch," Hermann said. "The door?"

"No. The window."

Julia looked toward the window. Its lower catch sat crookedly in the wet frame. Beneath it, a folded piece of paper had been pushed into the gap to slow the draft. Rain had darkened the paper's edge.

"Still?"

"Yes."

"You have enough rooms to hide from weather and none that keep it out."

Hermann almost smiled. Julia saw the almost and did not reward it. She stepped farther in. The canvas faced the window at an angle, turned just enough that anyone entering from the door saw it first as a dark surface with interruptions of light.

Then the eye adjusted. Lines emerged. Not figures exactly. Not rooms either. Relations, if one wanted to risk a word that had already been overused by everyone in the house and improved by no one. Julia stopped four paces from it. Hermann did not move beside her. The canvas was larger than Julia had expected, though she did not know what expectation had prepared her.

Perhaps she had imagined ambition would have made it monumental. This was worse. The scale was human. Too large for a study.

Too small for a public wall. It asked for a body to stand before it and then gave that body nowhere safe to stand. At the upper left, a late line entered beneath another and seemed almost to hold it up. At the lower right, twelve small pieces of color waited without deference.

Near the center, a curve had been cut apart and left in fragments. Julia saw these as paint before she saw them as music. That helped. The book had taught her mistrust of anything that arrived already naming its own structure.

Then she saw the red line. It was thin, nearly hidden among darker passages. It entered from the right, broke near the middle, returned lower than it should have, and ended in a small unfinished turn near an empty pale space. Julia's throat closed before she knew what she had recognized.

The line was the color of no ribbon she had owned. Not exactly. The ribbon had been brighter, cheaper, made of a material that frayed at the ends and was improved by being lost. She had worn it once around a paper crown because Prince Rita, unlike princesses, required fastenings that did not slip during rescues. No one had painted that ribbon or had needed to. Still, there it was, changed enough to deny accusation and close enough to make denial useless. Hermann watched the line of Julia's sight move.

"Julia—" "Don't."

Hermann heard the word before anger could organize itself, which made it worse for both of them. She closed her mouth. Julia moved closer. The rain thickened, and the window catch gave one small metallic complaint.

Neither woman turned. From three paces away the canvas changed again. A shape Julia had first read as a threshold became the corner of a room. Or the memory of a room.

There was no furniture in it, only a pressure where furniture might have stood if someone had prepared it badly. The floor of that painted room bent slightly

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