PUBLIC READING SAMPLE

Die Schattendorfer Echos

Dancing on the Tightrope of Reality

Liana Marie Sive

English translation of the German cycle

Novel I

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CHORUS I

THE EAST DOOR LEARNS ERMORDET

Adornfeld brought the paper in before the coffee had settled. He did not wave it. He placed it beneath two estate letters and a bill for lamp oil, as if bad news could be disciplined by being filed under domestic expense. Frau Klemper had already set the paste jar on the long table.

The jar was a medicine glass with the label soaked off. Beside it lay a bread knife, a bone folder, three pins, two bent nails, and a square of gray cloth used for polishing silver. She put the knife handle toward Hermann and said, "Cut straight. Dead people do not need crooked edges. Leave the names whole, with a margin beneath the last line." Hermann touched the folded *Arbeiter-Zeitung* with the back of her fingers.

The paper was cool, and the crease split the headline. When she opened the sheet across the table, the type read: "*Von Frontkämpfern ermordet*"—murdered by Frontkämpfer. Rausch leaned over the sheet and read only fragments, because fragments were his habit and also his defense.

"Schattendorf. Moser's inn. Tscharmann's tavern. Shots before the meeting. Gendarmerie promise. Further fire near evening. Child. Invalid. Wounded."

He stopped after each noun as if the paper had placed a toll gate between words. Julia stood at the window.

"Read the word it prints, Rausch. It says murder; if you call it a misfortune now, that is what the people at the door will hear. And read the names beneath it before you start again with the headline."

Adornfeld took out his notebook and wrote the names in a column: Matthias Csmarits; Josef Grössing; Josef Haring; Alois Schmiedel; Josef Wagner; Jakob Stromer; Martin Grössing. He left one blank line after each name and put down the pencil. Alex came in with glue on his sleeve from some earlier crime against paper. He reached for the clipping.

Frau Klemper caught his wrist.

"Ask before touching." Alex asked.

Hermann nodded. Alex took the headline, carried it to the east door, and pinned it upside down. Nobody laughed. Alex's mistake left the accusation intact but forced every reader to bend toward it.

Hermann removed the pin and set it right. The pin bent; the wood resisted; the old hinge gave a short metallic complaint. She pressed the headline to the panel until paste rose along the edge. A corner curled back.

She did not smooth it at once. The paper had arrived as testimony, not as wallpaper. Frau Klemper wiped the paste from the table with the gray cloth. "Now read the names," she said.

Rausch began again, not in his fragments this time but one body at a time. Hermann listened for texture: grit in Csmarits, the hard little consonants in Grössing, the scrape in Stromer. Julia repeated each name after him. Alex repeated the ones he could say and did not pretend with the ones he could not.

The east door now carried the headline beside a bent pin while the names remained on the table. January had entered the house as paper, paste, and a list no one could put away.

CHORUS II

CONDOLENCE ON THE HINGE

The next Landtag report arrived with cleaner margins. Adornfeld carried it in a portfolio rather than beneath the bills and sharpened a pencil before copying the official wording. The table had been scrubbed. Frau Klemper disapproved of grief that used stickiness as proof.

"Paste jar to the left. Dry cloth to the right. No elbows in the official sorrow, Rausch," Frau Klemper said. Rausch read the unanimous resolution as if reading a proclamation under a low ceiling.

"*Burgenländer* killed by *Burgenländer*. Political reasons. Condolence of the Landtag. Political struggles with *geistigen Waffen*. No violence that breeds violence. Stern action against high-treasonous elements."

Julia folded her arms.

"Read the lines after the condolence. Do they say how the danger was allowed to grow? Who is being asked to give up which weapons? Alex is standing here with us, and the guns were real."

Hermann cut the phrase "*geistigen Waffen*" from the column and laid it beside the headline on the east door. Its ink was visibly lighter than the accusation above it. Adornfeld objected.

"The phrase belongs to the sentence. Leave enough of the column for someone to see what it governs."

"I have kept the column," Hermann said. "Those two words look harmless in it. Here, beside the headline, your eye has to keep going from one to the other."

Frau Klemper brought a strip of blue laundry ribbon from the kitchen basket. It had once tied sheets. She handed it to Alex.

"Hold one end. Not in your mouth."

Together they ran the ribbon from the lower hinge to the pasted Landtag phrase. Alex pulled too hard, bending the nail and splitting the wood in a thin line below it. Hermann covered the crack with her thumb while Alex waited for instruction. Rausch continued: peace with Hungary, friendship with the Hungarian people, refusal of Hungarian foreign rule, gendarmerie filled to prescribed strength, republican formations completed in the province.

The list offered a rail along the abyss but no floor. Adornfeld wrote that down before he could prevent himself. Julia looked at the ribbon.

“You have written ‘a rail,’” Julia said. “Alex is pulling against that ribbon. Will you take his arm before it brings the pin out?”

Frau Klemper pointed toward the broom.

“And when you have him, pass me the broom. There are splinters where he is standing; I cannot clear them with all of you round the door.”

The east door changed its second state: headline at eye height, Landtag phrase tied to the hinge, blue ribbon under strain, crack visible.

CHORUS III

BALLOTS AFTER BULLETS

After the April vote, the newspaper arrived with arithmetic. Adornfeld liked figures because they made grief wait in line, but even he hesitated before laying them on the table. Rausch read the figures for the Burgenland Landtag in the voice he used for quotations.

"Social Democrats: 55,111. Unity List: 57,688. Landbund: 22,491." Julia pointed to the second name. "Christian Socials and Greater Germans together."

He tapped each number with the pencil and left a black dot beside the thousands. Frau Klemper brought a bowl of white beans from the pantry.

"Let him use these. He can move them back and count again when he loses his place."

Alex counted votes in beans. Fifty-five for the Social Democrats, fifty-eight for the Unity List, twenty-two for the Landbund. Julia wrote THOUSAND above the piles and placed the exact figures beside them. Alex looked from the beans to the names of the dead. Then he pushed one bean toward the list of names.

"Can a fifth more votes bring Josef back?" he asked.

No one answered at once, which was the first mercy anyone offered. Julia sat beside him.

"No," Julia said. "I wish there were a number we could reach that would do it. There is not. But people who frightened the village will read these figures too. They will see that the village has voted again, and has not done what they wanted."

Hermann cut the election figures from the page. The scissors caught on the comma after the first number and tore a small triangle out of the margin. She held the scrap in her palm. Margin, missing; number, intact.

That was acceptable. She would not repair every accident merely because it looked like damage. Adornfeld marked the article's argument in his ledger: answer to Horthy; answer to the Frontkämpfer; answer for republican gains; answer for the school; answer from a border province that knew the appetite of old masters. Rausch read, "Hands off Burgenland," though those exact hands were his compression and not the paper's grammar.

He caught himself and corrected: "The paper says it differently. It means that." Frau Klemper took the beans away before Alex could make armies of them.

“Count them, Alex. Do not send that pile to fight the other one. I need every bean back in the bowl.”

They pasted the figures below the Landtag ribbon, not over the names. Alex held the lower edge. His thumb left a pale oval in the paste. The paper wrinkled around it, and Hermann did not smooth it out.

Alex’s thumb-mark dried in the paste. Afterward the door carried the headline, the Landtag phrase, the blue ribbon, the election tally, and the pale oval of his touch. The hinge no longer squeaked when opened.

CHORUS IV

MAY DAY'S FOLD

On May Day the newspaper did not arrive as a single wound. It arrived as a procession compressed into print: red Vienna, red flags, China, fascism, peace, democracy, work for the unemployed, tenant protection, small-tenant protection, old-age and invalid insurance, youth rights, the eight-hour day, the future. Rausch became intoxicated by slogans and therefore less reliable.

"Against imperialism. For the self-determination of the Chinese people. Against fascism. For peace and democracy. Hands off *Mieterschutz* and *Pächterschutz*."

He spoke as though each phrase already had boots. Julia took the page from him.

"Wait, Rausch. Say the demands slowly enough for us to ask about them. We shall be carrying them into the street; I want to know what I could tell someone who stopped me here."

Frau Klemper put a loaf on the table and cut four slices without changing expression.

"Say it now."

Rausch tried. Work for the unemployed sounded different beside bread. Insurance for the old sounded different beside the chipped cup of a maid whose mother had no pension. Youth rights sounded different when Alex wiped bean dust from his cuffs and asked whether rights could be put in a pocket.

Hermann folded the May Day issue once lengthwise. The fold ran through a list of demands, not through a name. She had learned that distinction. Paper could be disciplined if the hand remembered what must not be severed.

Adornfeld brought out a small bronze-colored May badge someone in Vienna had sent with a note about the march. Its pin had no clasp.

"Unsafe," he said.

"And Alex will want to wear it," Julia answered. "Can you mend the clasp before he sees it?"

Alex wanted the badge on the east door. Frau Klemper said no metal until the paste dried. He sulked with civic intensity. Hermann placed the May issue across the lower panel, below the election figures, where a foot might kick it if the door opened too hard.

The position offended Adornfeld. It pleased Frau Klemper.

“A person wiping the floor will have time to read that,” she said. “Provided you do not paste it below the dirt line.”

The paper bubbled in two places. Rausch reached to smooth it. Hermann stopped him.

“Leave that fold. It catches on the grain just here. If you press harder you will tear through the demand.”

Julia looked from headline to Landtag ribbon to numbers to May fold.

“The demands are all underneath the names now,” Julia said. “When someone reads them aloud, ask him to begin there. I do not want us shouting over the people we have just named.”

Frau Klemper swept the paste flakes into her hand.

“And ask him to sweep when he has finished,” Frau Klemper said. “Someone has to stay after a meeting.”

By then, the door bore: January accusation, February condolence, April count, May demand. The hinge held.

PRESS INTERLEAF

THE OFFICIAL PAPER FILES THE WOUND

The official paper arrived without hurry. Its lack of urgency was the first offense. Rausch had carried the *Wiener Zeitung* under his coat because rain had begun before the church bell. He placed it on the table beside the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, but not touching it.

Even paper seemed to know when another paper had brought a different law.

"It does not say murder," he said.

Julia did not look up.

"Then read what it says."

Rausch bent close to the column.

"*Zusammenstoß*."

Frau Klemper stopped trimming the lamp wick.

"Who has supplied that word? Is it the reporter's, or is he copying what the police sent?"

Adornfeld copied the heading into his notebook: "*Der Zusammenstoß in Schattendorf*." Beneath it he left space for the report, the promised clarification, and the statements he could not yet attribute. Frau Klemper waited with the scissors in her hand.

In the margin Adornfeld wrote: "what the word avoids." The official account did not deny the dead. It did something more orderly. It placed them after the station, after the two meetings, after the waiting Schutzbund men, after the alleged blockade, after the gendarmes had mediated, after the groups were supposed to withdraw, after the return through the village, after the songs and shouted insults, after the guests at Tscharmann's had grown afraid and moved into the private rooms.

"By the time I reach the names, I have read half the column," Julia said. "If we cut it here, someone reading from the door will stop at the account of the meetings."

"Then keep the column whole," Adornfeld said. "We can mark where the account changes, but I do not want the sequence altered by our scissors."

“Give me the lower sheet,” Frau Klemper said. “I can paste the two ends together without covering the last line.” Rausch waited until she had laid them flat, then continued.

Three hunting guns in the dwelling. A converted military carbine in the attic, loaded. Sixty-six hunting cartridges. Nine military rifle cartridges.

He read the numbers twice because numbers quieted him and frightened the others differently each time.

Alex, who had been ordered not to touch the wet paste and was therefore touching the dry brush, asked whether the gun in the attic was loaded.

“The paper says it was,” Julia answered.

“Why was it up there?” Alex asked.

Hermann took the brush from him before he put it into the paste. “I do not know. Put the dry brushes in the other pot.”

There was also the small item. Josef Tscharmann had not yet been formally examined at the court, the paper said, but he had admitted to the gendarmerie that he had fired from the window of his father’s inn onto the street. Everyone stayed where they were. The admission did not thunder.

It lay on the table like a tool whose use everyone knew and no one wanted to name. “Put the admission where someone can read it from the doorway,” Rausch said. “There is no room beside the names,” Julia said. “You would have to cover part of the notice.” “The reverse is still clear,” Adornfeld said. “Open the door while I hold the column against it. We can see whether the hinge cuts off the last lines.”

They opened the east door and pasted the official column to the back panel, where the wood was less scarred. To read it one had to turn the door inward and stand between hall and passage. Hermann liked that and distrusted liking it. Frau Klemper cut a narrow slip from the funeral notice: Csmarits in Klingenbach, Grössing in Schattendorf, members of the Burgenland government to attend.

She placed it below the weapons list. “A funeral under cartridges,” she said. “That is not an arrangement I would have chosen.”

Alex held the corner while the paste took. His finger slipped and left a moon-shaped blur under the word “*Leichenbegängnis*.” “Leave it,” Julia said.

Outside, at eleven, the village stopped in pieces: a hammer paused, a cart stood in the lane, a woman waited with both hands in flour, and a door remained half closed. The paper had announced fifteen minutes of work stoppage. Inside the hall, each interruption became audible without ceremony. The next layer on the door was: official report on the reverse, funeral under weapons, confession near the hinge, silence entering by the clock.

PRESS INTERLEAF

FIVE GRAMMARS AT THE TABLE

By the end of the week, the table had too many papers and not enough table. Adornfeld proposed sorting them by date. Frau Klemper needed the nearer end cleared before the cups arrived. Julia was still comparing two funeral reports and would not let him take either until she had marked the passages she wanted copied.

Hermann brought boards from the shed. The boards warped; Pál put a folded scrap beneath one corner and told them not to lean on it. The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* remained at the center because it had arrived first with its accusation unsoftened: murdered by Frontkämpfer.

The *Welser Zeitung* entered from Upper Austria with a quieter Catholic grammar: tragedy, order, family, official report, and restraint. Its columns did not deny the dead. They placed the event within appeals for protection and containment, words whose decency could harden when fear supplied the pressure. Julia laid its report beside the others. “It asks order to carry grief,” she said. “We must still ask whose order, and what it permits.”

“Here it says they cannot judge yet,” she continued, holding the first report beside the later one. “Now read what they say about the mourners. They have already decided which of them should be allowed to speak.”

Last came the paper Rausch did not want to bring and Adornfeld insisted must not be hidden: the *völkisch* National Socialist sheet, with its poisonous inversion of the event. Frau Klemper placed a saucer over the worst words before Alex could sound them out.

“Why have you covered that bit?” Alex asked.

“I do not want you repeating it in the schoolyard before you know what it means,” Frau Klemper said. “Ask Julia to read it with you when she has finished. Leave the saucer there until then.” Hermann moved the paste away from the edge.

She placed a black thread across it and pinned the thread at both ends, so the paper could be read only by lifting the thread deliberately.

“Anyone coming in can see we have covered it,” Rausch said. “They will want to know why we keep a paper we will not let them read.”

Julia answered, “Then we will have to explain. I want to be able to show which words were printed here when someone repeats them as if they were his own.”

Rausch left the thread in place. They made a table to compare what each paper had done to the same dead.

Paper	Grammar brought into the room
Arbeiter-Zeitung	Murder, class wound, armed reaction, Schutzbund necessity.
Wiener Zeitung	Clash, report, clarification, confession, weapons, funeral, procedure.
Salzburger Wacht	Provincial solidarity, stoppage, burial, national labor body.
Welser Zeitung	Tragedy, order, official report, Catholic restraint, Seipel containment.
Deutsche Arbeiter-Presse	Inversion, provocation myth, antisemitic and anti-Marxist permission.

“This table makes the five accounts look equivalent,” Adornfeld said.
“Write that objection beneath the table,” Julia said. “I still need to put the words beside one another to see what each has left out.”

Hermann took the *Wiener Zeitung* slip and slid it behind the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* headline, not to hide one with the other, but to show how the official paper could remain invisible while bearing weight. When the door moved, the official slip rasped against the wood. The sound was small, bureaucratic, and impossible to ignore once heard. The door’s table-state: accusation on the front, official filing on the reverse, provincial solidarity at the lower rail, Welser order near the latch, poison under thread.

PRESS INTERLEAF

SPRING WEATHER IN BURGENLAND

Spring did not soften the papers. It multiplied them. Burgenland brought candidate lists, party calls, election figures, parish gossip, *Pächterschutz*, Easter hope, May Day expectation, the cost of bread, the cost of rent, and the cost of being told to wait by men whose shelves were full.

"There are pages here without a mention of Schattendorf," Adornfeld said. "Are those to go into the same file?"

"Keep them beside it for now," Julia said. "I want to see what people were being asked to attend that month, and what else they had to pay for."

The *Burgenländische Freiheit* spoke from Sauerbrunn with the urgency of a young province that had no luxury of being merely local. It asked how to win the election, how to hold the border, how to answer Horthy without becoming what Horthy desired, how to govern villages, how to make farmers and laborers believe the Republic belonged to them before someone with a uniform or a sermon told them otherwise. Rausch brought the April and May pages in a string-tied bundle. He wanted to quote the grand sentences.

Frau Klemper made him sort first: election, rent, bread, insurance, small tenants, youth, church, border, Frontkämpfer, May Day.

"The May Day page will end up in three piles," Rausch said. "It has the bread price and the meeting notice as well."

"Then leave the sheet whole and put a slip in the other piles," Frau Klemper answered. "I have only asked you to clear this end of the table."

Alex took the May Day sheet and asked why China was in a Vienna newspaper. Julia brought the atlas from the shelf. He held the page with one finger while she looked for the map, then asked whether the workers named in the report had ever been to Vienna. She said she did not know.

"Then how did they get in our paper?"

"Someone sent an account of what had happened to them. We would have to follow it back to find out who. Look here: the report begins with a place and a date." She moved his finger away from the map and showed him the line.

Hermann cut no names from the spring pages. She cut edges, numbers, demands, and dates. The strips made a weather band across the lower part of the east door: bread, rent, insurance, tenant, border, school, May, vote.

VORSPIEL

Womit anfangen? Kaltes Gestein umarmt Hermann sanft. Ihre letzten Seufzer verhallen durch endlose Hallen. In Österreichs Katakomben hört man ein leises Raunen: Wo beginnt das Ganze?

Above her, the clouds kept their silence. Below her, the stone remembered. Between them lay Austria, reduced and restless, a country that had survived its empire only to find itself without a name large enough to inhabit. Schattendorf.

Shots were fired in Schattendorf in January; the July verdict would carry their consequences far beyond the village. Hermann entered that history late, through recollection and damage rather than eyewitness certainty. The plain fact is simpler: Hermann was already dead when this account began.

PART I



Shadows of Schattendorf: Adornfeld’s Echo

CHAPTER 1

The Golden Shimmer

Schattendorf woke without Vienna's machinery. Before sunrise there were no trams or café doors, only a bucket striking stone, a shutter forced open, and a woman calling first in Hungarian and then in German. Mist lay in the meadow beyond the eastern wall of the Mansion. A bird called from the orchard.

Light reached the church tower, the low walls, and the two dark tracks worn into the road by carts. Smoke lifted from the first chimneys, thin and reluctant. The fields, damp from the night's rain, held the first light in small broken pieces. Hermann stood at the upper window and watched.

The glass was cold beneath her fingers. She had been standing there longer than she knew. Behind her, the room remained untouched: bed made, washbasin unused, dressing screen folded, the morning robe placed over a chair by a servant who understood household order better than household sorrow. On the writing table lay a sketchbook, a silver pencil, a sealed account from Vienna, Julia's letter, and a brittle newspaper clipping folded to the same width.

The letter had been opened before dawn. Then again at dawn. Then again after the bird called. It contained no accusation.

That made it worse. Only five lines, in Julia's hand:

Papa,
You keep rooms for every dead thing.
You keep silence for every old wound.
But there must be room for the living. Is there room in it for me?
J.

Hermann had read the last line until the pressure of the nib seemed more visible than the words. She returned to the paper as to an inventory: the downward hook of Julia's J, the softened fold at the center, the small bruise where the nib had paused before the question. With each reading Hermann became more conscious of the room's scale.

Generations had filled the Mansion with portraits, uniforms, property agreements, prayer books, hunting trophies, visiting musicians, unpaid debts, family scandals, and the dead. The dead had always been given the best rooms. It remembered badly, as old houses do. A step creaked for a person who had never used it.

A door swelled in damp weather around an argument no one had entered there. In certain mornings, when mist pressed against the glass, the house seemed to offer Hermann not memories but rehearsals: the same grief moved from room to room until one mistook recurrence for fate. Hermann turned from the window. The mirror above the washstand held her face imperfectly.

A crack ran from the upper left corner through the glass, not across her features but beside them, producing a second cheek, a second eye, a mouth almost hers and not hers. She had often thought the crack unremarkable. The public record, where it bothered to mention such matters, preferred its old grammar.

It had been trained by church registers, school certificates, passports, inheritance law, and the invisible customs by which a society protects itself from the living. Zeitblom, when young, followed that grammar too closely. Later he corrected himself. Later still he corrected the corrections.

The records keep one grammar. Memory keeps another. Rita, when she is permitted to enter, keeps a third. The painting will eventually keep none of them cleanly.

I have kept the conflicting forms. Julia used “Papa” for her parent after she had begun to call Hermann “she,” and sometimes used it angrily. In one account I changed it. The correction survives in my hand beneath a word in Julia’s. AFW’s marginal note beside this passage reads:

Do not ask a corpse to keep your paperwork tidy.

Beneath Julia’s letter lay the January clipping Hermann had not meant to keep and had therefore kept. *VON FRONTKÄMPFERN ERMORDET.*

The left edge had been trimmed too close, so the V of VON survived only as a black tooth at the margin. No acquittal had yet been printed and no verdict had yet crossed the calendar. The paper belonged to the first morning after the shots, when the dead were still newsprint, names, witness-claims, and the odor of paste warming beside a stove. When Hermann lifted Julia’s letter, the clipping rose with it; old sealing wax had joined private paper to public paper during the night.

She separated them with the paper knife. A fiber from Julia’s page remained caught in the headline, and the headline took a pale thread of the letter with it. The inkstand rocked on one foot. Hermann slid the clipping under it without thinking.

The clipping slipped free. The inkstand rocked again. She folded Julia’s letter again along its existing crease, but the crease did not agree with the newspaper fold. She pressed them flat beneath the sketchbook.

"There must be room for the living." She could no longer confine the sentence to the page. Not that this was all Julia had written. Julia had written harder things.

But this one had passed through the walls. It had entered the staircase. It had gone below to the locked east hall, where dust covered the parquet in a gray film and the windows looked toward the village as if ashamed of their own height. The east hall.

The committee from the village wanted it. That, at least, was the respectable version. They wanted a place for lectures, for music, for children during the winter, for meetings that would not have to be held in taverns under the eyes of men who drank faster when politics was mentioned. They wanted, in plain language, a room.

Hermann had not yet answered. She looked again toward the meadow. When Julia was small, she had run there barefoot after rain. A servant had called after her, then waited with the shoes, watching Julia approach and turn away again at the edge of the terrace.

She had slipped on the grass, risen with mud on both knees, and laughed as though the earth had admitted her into a joke not available to adults. Hermann had watched from the terrace. Lord Alistair had still been alive then. Hermann remembered the glass door opening and his hand closing over the muddy crown. She remembered, with the same certainty, that he had never left the room. In that afternoon Julia had kept running. The grass under her knees was cold in both.

In the afternoon Hermann remembered longest, Alistair stood behind the glass doors in a dark suit, one hand on the handle, neither entering the garden nor interrupting the laughter. She could see his hand more clearly than his face. "Children," he had said.

Hermann had thought it an insult. Julia had heard only the tone and bowed theatrically in his direction, muddy knees and all. The memory left as quickly as it came. In its place stood the morning.

The house waited. Hermann dressed without calling for assistance. White shirt. Dark waistcoat.

Black jacket too severe for the season. Her hands hesitated at the collar. The mirror offered two faces again. One belonged to the family portraits.

The other had been present for years, looking back from the margins of polished silver, window glass, rain barrels, and the dark surfaces of unplayed pianos. She touched the cracked glass once.

She fastened the waistcoat, undid its lowest button, and turned sideways in the glass. In the wardrobe hung a dress she had worn once, alone, until the servant's knock. She touched its sleeve before closing the door.
"Not yet," she said.

Whether she spoke to the face, to the house, or to Julia's letter, Zeitblom does not say. Perhaps he did not know. The corridor outside her room smelled of wax, old linen, and the faint medicinal bitterness of polish. The servants had begun their work below.

A broom moved somewhere behind a closed door. From the kitchen rose the smell of bread, coffee, and damp wood being coaxed toward flame. The Mansion had many names in the village. Some called it Schloss Kunstdorf, though it was not properly a castle.

Some called it Villa Dolorosa, after a priest with too much Latin and not enough tact had used the phrase at a funeral and found it repeated by people who liked a grand name for another family's misery. Hermann herself called it simply the house when speaking to Julia, the estate when speaking to lawyers, and the Mansion when she wished to accuse it. That morning it was all three. She descended the Grand Staircase slowly.

Her slow descent had nothing to do with age. The staircase had been designed to make haste improper: its width, polished rail, and intermediate landing turned ordinary movement into an appearance before the ancestral portrait. Halfway down, she stopped before Lord Alistair. The portrait was too large.

It had been painted in the last confident years of the previous century. Behind Alistair the painter had supplied a level prospect of fields and distant woods; no neighboring house interrupted it. He wore a black coat and a white collar. One hand rested on a document. The other held gloves.

Hermann had once asked what document. Her mother had answered, "Something important." Later Hermann discovered that the painter had invented it. That seemed to her the truest thing about the portrait.

Below Alistair, in the actual hall, Adornfeld waited. He stood beside the small table where the morning post had been arranged in three piles: estate correspondence, village matters, and Vienna. A fourth pile, too small to be called a pile, contained Julia's letters. Adornfeld had placed nothing on top of it.

He was a narrow man, not physically weak but constructed as if by a draftsman who disliked waste. His beard was precise. His cuffs were precise. His disapproval, when offered, was precise enough to wound without extravagance.

In this household of inherited melodrama, he had a rare gift: he could make even silence seem indexed.

"You have read it," he said.

Hermann reached the final step.

"Good morning to you as well."

Adornfeld glanced at the letter in her hand. "I was not sure you would want me to mention it with the others here. They are expected at noon."

"You might have begun with good morning."

He inclined his head. "Good morning."

"The committee has asked me to confirm that you will see them in the east hall. I have not answered about the room."

"I know what they want."

"Then I need to know where to bring them."

Hermann looked toward the tall doors at the far end of the entrance hall. Beyond them lay the east wing, which had not been opened for any public purpose since before the war. A ballroom once. Then a storage hall.

Then, after Alistair's death, a room where furniture went to wait for a need that never returned.

"The hall is not suitable."

"For what?"

"For children."

"There is damp in the south corner," Adornfeld said. "If that is your objection, we can get an estimate. It does not require you to promise the room today."

Hermann almost smiled. Adornfeld noticed and did not soften.

"The roof above the south corner must be repaired. The stove has not been lit in years. Three windows are cracked. The floor is sound, though ugly."

"You have inspected it?"

"Yesterday, after you said I might show Zeller the windows."

"You presume much."

"I understood that to include inspecting the floor. If you meant otherwise, tell me what I may show them at noon."

She passed him and entered the breakfast room. The curtains had been opened. Light fell across the table in long rectangles. The silver coffee service reflected the room in miniature: chairs, plate, hand, cup, ceiling, face—each object curved and reduced until the whole world seemed designed to fit inside a spoon.

Hermann sat. Adornfeld remained standing.

"That is irritating," she said.

"What is?"

"You standing there as though I have committed an error before breakfast."

"I need an answer before they arrive. If there is to be no hall, I would prefer to tell them myself, before they have assembled here."
"You make it sound as though they have already been refused."
"They have asked twice. Julia has asked you too, though I do not suppose she meant only the hall."

Hermann's hand paused over the cup. "You have been corresponding with Julia?"
"She wrote to ask whether you were well."
"And you discussed the hall."
"I said that it was still closed."

Hermann poured too much coffee. She set the pot down and asked Adornfeld to sit. He pulled out the chair beside her, then chose the one opposite.

Adornfeld sat. For a time, only the coffee was poured. Outside, a cart moved past the gate, its wheels heavy in the wet road. The sound entered the breakfast room and left at once.
"What do they truly want?" Hermann asked.
"The villagers?"
"No. The century."

Adornfeld stirred his coffee without drinking it.
"I cannot answer for the century. Zeller wants children indoors for the winter; Rausch wants an audience. Those wishes may fit in one room, but I would not make them one request."
"Go on," Hermann said. She had meant the larger question and resented the relief she felt at his smaller answer. He set down his spoon.
"The requests I have received concern bread, rooms, and children kept out of the cold. Legitimacy is my word for part of it. There are men who no longer salute the portraits and men who have begun again. Julia's letter is more specific than either group. I would not file all of them under one wish."
"You have rehearsed this."
"I had to write something back to them. I kept the copies, if you want to see them."
"And what do I want?"

Adornfeld looked at her.
"I have your instructions about the repairs. I do not have an answer to that."

Hermann turned the cup in its saucer.
"I want the house not to vanish."
"Then let it be used."
"You think use preserves?"

"I think the roof will have to be mended whether there are people beneath it or not. We have postponed the repair because nobody goes into the room."

Neither of them spoke for a moment. Hermann looked toward the window. The mist in the meadow had lifted enough to reveal the orchard. One of the younger trees leaned badly to the left.

It had done so since a winter storm three years before. The gardener had tied it to a stake, then retied it twice, but the tree had kept its angle. It bloomed every spring.

"Julia believes the Mansion has no room for her," Hermann said.

"Have you asked her which room she wants?"

"That is not what she means."

Adornfeld drank his coffee before answering. "Perhaps not. I have not read the letter. You could ask her."

Their conversation continued much longer. It included remarks on the Austrian soul, the decline of landed authority, the housing reforms of Red Vienna, the theological implications of hospitality, and a comparison— regrettable even by his standards—between the east hall and the nave of an unconsecrated church. AFW cut six pages; Zeitblom restored two sentences.

The present version is the compromise.

After breakfast Hermann took the east-wing key from the drawer in the library.

The key was cold and left a gray mark across her glove. Adornfeld followed at a distance.

"You need not supervise," Hermann said.

"I know."

"Then why are you here?"

"In case the door has swollen."

"Is that concern or metaphor?"

"The latch stuck yesterday. I had to pull the left door toward me before Zeller could turn the key."

They crossed the entrance hall. The servants had withdrawn with the tact of those who knew a household decision was approaching and wished to hear it later in improved form. At the east-wing doors, Hermann inserted the key. It resisted.

Adornfeld said nothing. She turned harder. The lock gave with a sound less like opening than complaint. The air inside was stale.

Dust had settled over the floor, the covered chairs, the piano, the stacked frames leaning against the far wall. Three chandeliers hung above, each wrapped in linen. The room's tall windows faced the village. One pane was cracked in the lower corner, exactly as Adornfeld had reported.

Through it came a thread of morning air. Hermann stepped in. Beyond the cleared patch by the door, dust lay in an unbroken film. Nothing suggested that Adornfeld and Zeller had gone farther into the room.

Near the center stood a child's chair. Hermann stopped. She did not remember ordering it stored here. It was painted green, though the paint had flaked at the arms.

One leg was shorter than the others; a folded piece of cardboard had been wedged beneath it. Julia had used that chair in the garden when she was five. Or six. Or perhaps never.

Hermann touched the back of the chair. Dust came away on her glove. Adornfeld remained at the threshold.

"Leave me," she said.

He went back into the hall. She heard him draw the door almost shut, then push it until the latch caught. Hermann stood alone with Julia's absent chair and the covered piano.

Under the piano bench lay a packet of old scores: Bach with the corners worn soft, Liszt marked by a hand too impatient for margins, Wagner in a binding heavy enough to bully the shelf, and several blank leaves on which some later name had once been penciled and erased. The bench smelled of dust, felt, and iron. Hermann did not open the packet. She imagined pressing two neighboring keys, feeling the next one against the side of her finger while she held the first. They would sound together without ceasing to be two notes. She could remember the pull of that interval even here, beside the dusty bench.

"There must be room for the living." She crossed to the first window and tried the latch. It stuck.

She pressed harder. The metal snapped open and the window swung inward with such force that the room seemed to inhale. Cold air entered. Then sound.

The village came in first as fragments: a horse snorting, a woman laughing, a cart wheel striking stone, children somewhere beyond the wall, the church bell being tested or repaired in one uncertain note. Hermann opened the second window.

Then the third. By the time she reached the cracked pane, her hands were shaking. Not from effort.

Dust remained dust. The chairs were still covered. The piano still needed tuning. The damp had not withdrawn from the wall.

Yet the hall was no longer sealed, and with that the danger had begun. At noon, five committee members arrived. The schoolmaster, Herr Zeller, came first, carrying his hat in both hands and glancing too often at the ceiling.

Frau Klemper, who had organized winter coal collections with a severity that made charity tremble, stood beside him. A young Social Democrat named Rausch wore his best jacket and his worst expression. The priest sent a curate instead of coming himself, which everyone understood as both participation and refusal. The fifth was a boy of perhaps eight or nine, though no one had invited a boy.

He had attached himself to Frau Klemper's skirt and was introduced only after he stepped forward and said, "I am Alex." Hermann looked down at him. He looked back without lowering his eyes.

"Are you on the committee?" Hermann asked.

"No."

"Then what is your office?"

"I can count chairs."

Frau Klemper flushed.

"He insisted on coming, *Frau*—" She stopped.

The title failed her. *Herr*? *Frau*? *Gnädige*?

The old forms trembled. Hermann heard the failure, felt it enter the room, and for once did not rescue anyone from it.

"Alex may count chairs," she said.

The boy nodded, as if this confirmed a qualification long suspected. Adornfeld, standing behind Hermann, made a note.

They entered the east hall. Herr Zeller removed his spectacles and put them back on. Rausch walked to the windows and looked toward the village as though checking whether the view had changed now that he occupied it from above. Frau Klemper examined the stove.

The curate crossed himself discreetly, perhaps from habit, perhaps from concern over dust. Alex began counting.

"One, two, three, four—this one is broken."

"That one is Louis-Philippe," said Adornfeld.

Alex considered the chair.

"It is still broken."

Hermann laughed. It startled everyone, including Hermann. The sound struck the covered chandeliers, rose, and vanished into the linen. Rausch looked at her more directly then.

"You would allow meetings here?" he asked.

"I have not said so."

"But you might."

"I might."

"For workers as well as lectures?"

Herr Zeller coughed. Frau Klemper inspected the stove with intensified devotion. The curate looked at the floor. Hermann turned to Rausch.

"What would you need it for? There have been enough aristocratic meetings here; I do not see why yours should be more difficult."

"Discuss the agreements we work under. And choose someone to speak for us when there is a dispute. We have to borrow a room at the tavern now; the owner sits in on the meeting."

"You would still be meeting in somebody's house."

Rausch colored. "That is why I am asking about meetings, not whether we may hear a lecture." He looked at Adornfeld's notebook. "If we disagree with the person who lends us the room, do we lose the use of it?"

Hermann had prepared to discuss a timetable. She looked toward the floor Rausch and his companions would occupy, and was still considering what she could promise when Alex called from the far corner,

"Twenty-seven!"

"What?" asked Frau Klemper.

"Chairs," said Alex.

"If we include the broken king."

"The what?"

He pointed to a large carved chair beneath a dust sheet. Its back rose higher than the others. One arm had cracked.

"The broken king," Alex repeated.

Dollberg would later claim the phrase. Adornfeld would deny that Dollberg had been present. Hermann walked to the chair and pulled away the sheet. Dust rose.

The chair had belonged to Lord Alistair. No one said so. They did not need to. His initials were carved beneath the crest.

Alex touched the cracked arm.

"Can it be fixed?"

"Yes," Hermann said.

Adornfeld said, “I would ask Pál before promising that.”

“And ask what he charges,” Frau Klemper said.

The curate bent to inspect the cracked arm. “My brother could mend it, if the wood is sound. I had better not offer his work without asking him.”

Rausch laughed first. The curate straightened and smiled, still holding a little dust between his fingers.

Hermann did not. She looked from Alistair’s cracked arm to the green chair Julia had outgrown. Dust lay on both. Alex’s finger rested on the older wood.

“You may have the hall,” Hermann said.

Silence followed. She repeated it.

“You may have the hall.”

Herr Zeller inhaled sharply. Frau Klemper looked immediately suspicious of good fortune. Rausch opened his mouth, closed it, then opened it again in a more disciplined manner. The curate bowed his head.

Alex continued touching the chair.

“For lectures,” Adornfeld said, already writing.

“Music. Winter children’s hours. Public meetings by application. No smoking. No torches. No rifles. No banners fixed to the walls without permission.”

Rausch objected. “No banners? We put the meeting notices on ours. We need somewhere to display them.”

“Banners leaned against walls by prior agreement,” Adornfeld amended.

Frau Klemper nodded. This seemed sensible to her. Hermann watched Adornfeld write the terms that would domesticate her decision.

Rausch kept his copy on the table. “Who gives permission?”

“I do, for now,” Hermann said.

“For the date or the subject?”

She had expected him to take the paper. “We have not settled that.”

“Then put it down as unsettled.”

Adornfeld entered the question beneath the conditions. Frau Klemper asked when Pál would inspect the stove; she would not bring children to wait for an answer in a cold room. Hermann promised an inspection that afternoon.

“You are pleased,” Hermann said to Adornfeld.

“I am relieved.”

“That is less flattering.”

“I did not know whether to ask them to sit down when they arrived.”

Alex looked up.

“Will Julia come?”

The question entered the hall more cleanly than the morning air had done. Hermann did not answer quickly enough. Frau Klemper drew the boy back by the shoulder.

"Alex."

But Hermann raised a hand.

"No. It is a fair question."

She looked toward the windows, open now to Schattendorf, then toward the small green chair.

"I do not know," she said.

Alex accepted the answer.

"If she comes," he said, "she can sit there."

He pointed to the green chair.

"No," Hermann said.

Several people stiffened. Then she added, "That chair is too small." Alex frowned, thinking.

"Then we need another."

"Yes," Hermann said. "We should count again."

"Yes," Alex said.

So Alex counted again.

That evening Hermann wrote to Julia. She began three times. The first filled two sheets. In the second she crossed out "forgive me." The third was short.

Julia,

The east hall was opened today. They will use it for lectures, music, meetings, and children when the weather turns. A boy named Alex counted the chairs. He asked where you would sit. I did not know. Come and tell me.

H.

She sealed it before she could improve it.

Then she sat in the library until the lamps were lit. The house made its usual evening sounds: settling beams, a servant's step, wind in a chimney not yet repaired.

Somewhere in the east wing, dust moved in the night air and resettled on objects no longer fully abandoned. At ten, Adornfeld entered.

"The letter has gone."

"Thank you."

"The committee will return Friday."

"So soon?"

"They offered Friday. I said I would ask whether it suited you."

She looked at him.

“You might have asked before telling me they were coming.”

“I am asking now. Shall I send word to Zeller?”

He placed a small object on the desk. The east-wing key. Hermann looked at it.

“You kept it?” she asked.

“You gave it to me, when you stopped to speak to Alex.”

“I do not remember doing so.”

“I thought you would want it back before I left.”

He turned to leave.

“Adornfeld.”

He paused.

“Have I done the right thing?”

Adornfeld slid the key beside her hand. “You have promised the stove.”

“Pál?”

“Tomorrow morning. He could not leave the forge today.”

Hermann looked at the unused hearth. She almost called him back as he went to ask the housekeeper for the blankets from the north bedrooms.

After he had gone, Hermann took the key and set it beside Julia’s letter. For a long while she did not move. Then, from somewhere below—perhaps from the east hall, perhaps from the kitchen court, perhaps from the portion of the mind that imitates houses when lonely—came a sound like a soft drum. Once.

Then again. Hermann waited for a third knock. Hermann stood.

The mirror above the mantel gave her back a face half-lit by lamp, half-held in dark.

“Not yet,” she said again.

But this time the words did not sound like refusal. They sounded like a promise made by someone afraid of being overheard.

AFW
Serenus.

UE
Yes?

AFW
Leave the child with the chairs for one night.

UE
Very well. For one night.

CANVAS INTERLEAF I

The Rose Ground

Hermann went to the studio after Adornfeld returned the key and before the house had decided whether the hour belonged to evening or night.

The room did not receive her as the east hall had done. In the east hall she had scarcely opened a window before someone wanted coal, chairs, or a rule settled. Here she knew where every object stood and how it would answer her hand. The ease was welcome. She had not yet decided whether to distrust it.

The large canvas stood against the north wall on two blocks of oak. It was taller than Hermann and nearly as wide as the window. A linen sheet covered it, though the sheet had been lifted so often that the upper edge carried five separate folds, none of them corresponding to the others. The lowest corner was stained with rose madder. Gold leaf had adhered to a place where no gilding had been intended. One blue fingerprint remained near the hem.

Hermann closed the door.

She drew the cloth away.

The painting had acquired several names in its making. Adornfeld called it “the large account.” Julia, in the one letter where she mentioned it, called it “the weather you have made obedient.” Zeitblom would later insist that the title had always been *Symphony on Canvas*. This was untrue in chronology and accurate in appetite. Hermann had written the words on the stretcher only three weeks before Schattendorf, then covered them with paper tape when the title embarrassed her. The pencil remained beneath the tape.

The surface began in rose.

Not pink. The ground was rose mixed with umber. It warmed the later layers, showing faintly through the black and beneath the edge of the gold. Hermann had altered the mixture three times before she was satisfied with it.

Across the upper field ran Marc’s blue, not copied from any one horse or mountain, but remembered from the authority with which he had once placed blue where the visible world had not requested it. The blue did not describe the sky. It claimed another manner of seeing.

Gold entered from the right.

The blue and gold nearly met above a central figure whose face Hermann had scraped out twice. At first the figure had been a young man in a military coat. Then a woman holding a palette. Then no body at all, only a set of hands sus-

pended over a chessboard, a residence slip, a child's chair, and a narrow map of Austria after Saint-Germain.

Hermann lit the second lamp.

The surface warmed. The rose rose through everything.

At the bottom of the canvas, a procession crossed from left to right. Workers, veterans, mothers, children, priests, teachers, men carrying rolled flags, women carrying baskets, one figure with a drum, one with a violin case, one with a sheaf of documents. They were not portraits. That had seemed a defense when Hermann painted them. No one could accuse her of using a particular person if every face was composite.

Now she saw the greater danger. A composite face cannot object.

The procession approached a door made from two adjacent colors. Blue on one side. Gold on the other. Between them Hermann had left a strip of unpainted linen so narrow that from a distance the colors seemed to vibrate. She had called the effect "the Trill" before she understood what she was asking it to do.

Two notes, close enough to touch, alternating rapidly enough to produce an event neither could make alone.

A perfect Trill.

She had believed perfection meant that the alternation would become seamless without becoming unison; that the eye would hold blue and gold, Germany and Austria, rupture and surface, male grammar and female life, parent and daughter, house and village, law and injury, past and republic, each distinct and yet relieved of conflict by exact relation. If she found the proper interval, no term would have to consume the other. The painter would not reconcile them by blending. She would reconcile them by timing.

She stepped closer to the canvas and touched the unpainted strip with the back of one finger. The linen was rough. On either side, the paint had been worked to a finish that made the roughness look deliberate. The eye read wound as design.

Behind her, the floorboard near the door sounded.

She did not turn. "You have opened the hall," Marc said.

His voice came from the wrong side of the room. The reproduction of the blue horse hung above the washstand, but the voice came from beside the canvas. When Hermann looked, he stood with one shoulder inside the north

light and the other where no body could have been without blocking the easel. His field-gray coat showed no mud. The absence of mud made him more dead than the wound would have done.

"I opened a door," Hermann said.

"I asked you to let us work there. You have done more than turn a key."

"You sound like Adornfeld."

"Adornfeld would put it so a clerk could not object. I want to know what they will do in there."

Marc looked at the canvas. His gaze moved first to the procession, then the map, then the blue. He did not praise the blue.

"You improved me," he said.

"I did not paint you."

"You have kept my blue. That is one way to improve a dead painter."

Hermann moved between him and the canvas. The gesture was absurd. A ghost did not require a better view.

"What is wrong with it?"

Marc smiled without pleasure.

"Tell me what you wanted first. You ask as though the painting had sent for a critic."

"It sent for you?"

"No. You did."

"I did not."

"You opened the hall."

"That is not the same as summoning the dead."

"You must have known I would come. I asked you for that room while I could still have worked in it."

A small sound came from the far wall: metal against glass, then silence. The saucer of gold leaf had shifted on the worktable. When Hermann looked again, Klimt sat on the low stool, examining one cuff as if the room had inconvenienced the fabric.

"You keep the gold too obedient," he said.

Marc laughed.

"You see? She cannot satisfy either corpse."

Klimt ignored him. He stood and approached the painting, stopping close enough that his breath should have clouded the varnish. It did not.

"You let the gold shine and then put dirt over it," he said. "I can still see where it was beautiful. Why do you keep covering those places?"

"Beauty has escaped punishment often enough."

"Uncover the gold. Punish the hand that uses it, if you must—not the surface for shining."

Marc moved to the other side.

"And the blue?" Hermann asked.

"You have let the blue look innocent beside it," Klimt said.

Marc's face changed.

"No," he said.

"Look how you have set them out. The blue breaks through; the gold closes around it. We are meant to see a future here and an empire there. You even let the blue come barefoot. The gold would send a servant ahead."

"You announce yourself quite well."

"I am dead. One must make allowances."

Hermann looked from one to the other. She had painted their opposition before either ghost had entered the room. That should have pleased her. Instead it made the canvas look prepared, as Julia's room might have looked if Hermann had obeyed the first impulse and arranged every object to receive the daughter she remembered.

"The colors remain distinct," Hermann said.

"The blue will stay where you put it," Marc replied. "Try asking the people downstairs to remain that far apart."

"But they can meet here," Klimt said. "Look where the two colors approach."

"You have decided how they meet," Marc said. "Look at the hands. None of them reaches across until your strip permits it."

"I placed them. I had to. If I leave every patch where it happens to fall, I get weather, not a painting."

"One hand has settled every movement. I recognize the temptation; I called my own arrangements necessary. They might also be called sovereignty."

Klimt turned toward Marc.

"You let your own arrangements pass. Put gold on this one and suddenly you object to its sovereign."

Marc's blue deepened in the canvas, or the lamp guttered. Hermann could not tell. She went to the window and adjusted the wick instead of choosing.

On the worktable lay Julia's letter. Hermann had brought it without realizing it and set it beside the gold leaf. The paper's worn fold crossed the edge of the saucer. A fleck of gold clung to the line: "Is there room in it for me?"

Hermann removed the fleck with the point of the knife.

It left a bruise in the paper.

Klimt watched.

“There. You have got the gold away from her sentence,” he said.
“No.”
“No?”
“I wanted the sentence to say only what I had read in it. Now I have bruised the paper doing it.”

Marc came closer. “At least you can see it now.”
“Do not praise that.”
“You noticed what your hand had done. That was what I meant.”
“I still get to decide what counts as a correction.”
“You could leave the mark this time. Let whoever reads it see it.”

Hermann laid the letter face down. The canvas stood behind it, too large to turn.

The unpainted strip descended through the map, the chessboard, the hands, and the procession. Hermann followed it with her eye. From the doorway it seemed broader than it had when she stood at the easel.
“What do they do after the door?” Marc asked.
“The canvas ends there.”
“You have not answered.”
“It is the edge.”

Klimt touched the air above the unpainted strip. “The frame is the edge. You have put this strip inside the painting and made everyone stop at it. Why should they call it an opening?”

Hermann felt the first movement of anger, then the more dangerous movement beneath it: recognition seeking a graceful sentence.

She refused the sentence.

Instead she took the palette knife and scraped a small place in the rose ground below the procession. The knife exposed linen. A woman’s painted shoe lost its toe. A child’s hand became three fingers. The strip widened by less than an inch.

Marc did not speak.

Klimt did not stop her.

Hermann scraped again. The rose came away in curled skins. Under the upper layer lay an earlier blue, under that a brown drawing line, under that the rough pale ground. The painting carried all its abandoned decisions inside it.

She stopped before the cut became a gesture large enough to admire.
“What is it called?” Marc asked.

Hermann looked at the paper tape on the stretcher. Beneath it, in her own hand, the title waited.
“Nothing yet.”

"That is not true," Klimt said.

"No."

She peeled the tape back.

SYMPHONY ON CANVAS appeared in pencil, the S darker where she had begun with confidence, the final S faint where the name had already embarrassed her.

Marc read it.

"A symphony has time," Marc said. "Where does your procession acquire any? You have fixed every figure at the moment you chose, and you ask them to obey it."

Klimt read it too.

"And a canvas has surface," Klimt said. "Let one patch shine without making it stand trial."

Hermann pressed the tape down again, but it no longer adhered along the edge she had lifted.

From below came two soft knocks.

Once.

Then again.

The notes did not come from the piano. They might have been a pipe, a bucket, a child testing the hall door, Frau Klemper setting down a cup. The room did not identify them.

Hermann listened until the interval between them became more important than either sound.

"The Trill," she said.

"Not yet," Marc answered.

Klimt looked toward the closed door. Neither guide spoke again.

When Hermann looked back, both men were absent. The stool held one thread of gold. The north light had gone gray. Julia's letter remained face down beside the saucer, bruised where the gold had been removed.

Hermann covered the canvas.

The sheet caught on the newly scraped place and tore a little at the hem.

She did not mend it.

CHAPTER 2

The Second Key

Adornfeld came the next morning with an inventory. He did not call it that at first. He called it "a preliminary statement of practical conditions." Hermann found him in the east hall shortly after nine, standing beneath the covered chandeliers with a notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other.

The windows were open despite the cold. A servant had swept the central floor, leaving gray ridges of dust along the skirting boards, as if time itself had been pushed to the edges but not removed. The green chair remained where Alex had left it. Lord Alistair's cracked chair stood uncovered in the corner.

Between them, twenty-six other chairs waited in various conditions of dignity, injury, and pretense.

"You began without me," Hermann said.

"Pál can come at ten if we know which windows need attention. I was going to bring you the list."

Adornfeld did not look up. He was measuring the distance between the stove and the nearest window with a length of string.

"I could have been here at nine."

"I did knock. You did not answer."

He made a note. Hermann crossed the room slowly. Yesterday the opening of the windows had felt like decision. Today it looked like maintenance.

She would have to arrange for the curtains to come down and the cracked pane to be repaired. The floor needed washing twice, perhaps three times. Yesterday she had imagined people entering; this morning she kept finding work that had to be done before they could.

"What have you found?"

"The crack runs under the sill. I cannot tell whether the frame has moved or whether it was fitted badly."

"Adornfeld."

He turned the notebook toward her.

"South corner: damp. The roof needs someone who can get onto it. Stove: inspection before it is lit. Three cracked panes, one of them loose. The floor appears sound. I have not priced the piano. There are twenty-eight chairs if we include Lord Alistair's, but his needs to be set aside until it is mended."

"And Julia's?"

He glanced at the green chair.

"Too small for the meetings. We could put it in the schoolroom."

Hermann looked at the green chair. "Leave it here for now."

Adornfeld waited with the pencil above his list. "I can mark it as set aside."

"It does not need a mark. I know which one it is."

He lowered the notebook. "Very well. I will tell the men moving the furniture."

She smiled despite herself. Adornfeld resumed writing. The committee had sent three communications before breakfast. Herr Zeller's was written in a careful schoolmaster's hand, thanking Hermann for "the noble and civic-minded permission provisionally extended to the educational interests of the village."

Frau Klemper's was shorter: she listed coal, brushes, soap, lamp oil, two buckets, and twelve blankets. Rausch sent no thanks at all. He asked whether political meetings would require prior review of topic or only of date. The curate sent word through the housekeeper that Father Benedikt wished to know whether devotional use of the hall would be permitted.

"What does devotional use mean?" Hermann asked.

Adornfeld, who had been sorting the letters into piles, answered without lifting his eyes.

"They used the schoolroom last winter. He is asking whether they may bring the children here if it is warmer."

"And you think he has noticed Rausch asking for the same room."

"He asks about political meetings in the next paragraph. I would answer the two questions separately."

He placed the curate's note on top of the others.

"Will you permit it?"

"I have not yet decided."

"Then I shall say that I am waiting for your answer. He will ask again."

Hermann sat at the table in the smaller breakfast room, where the morning light fell unevenly through a lace curtain and made a prison of flowers on the cloth. She had slept badly. The dream, if it had been a dream, left no image, only a rhythm: once, twice, then silence. She reached for Zeller's letter.

"Educational interests," she read. "Did he use that on his letters before the republic too? He has found a phrase he need not change."

"And Rausch?"

"He wants to know whether you will read the subjects of the meetings before approving them. We have not told him."

"And the priest?"

"He will want the answer you give Rausch. I would put them in the same letter, so neither has to rely on what the other reports."

Hermann lowered the letter.

"You expect them all to quarrel."

"I expect them to ask what they may do here. I dislike having to give a different answer when the second person comes to the door."

He placed a sheet before her.

"What is that?"

"The terms of use."

"I thought you had already written them."

"I have written what we discussed. These are the terms you would be agreeing to; nothing takes effect until you sign."

The word lay between them. Signature. Hermann looked at the blank line near the bottom. The printed heading Adornfeld had prepared read: Permission granted by Hermann von Kunstdorf, proprietor of Villa Dolorosa, for limited communal use of the East Hall.

The name was correct. The body beneath it was less cooperative.

"Must it say proprietor?"

"It is legally accurate."

"It sounds like livestock."

"It identifies the person who can grant permission. That is why I put it there."

She touched the paper but did not take up the pen.

"Could it say custodian? Or steward?" Hermann kept a finger on the word. "Host would be closer to what I hoped."

"It could, if we also identify the owner. I would not remove that. The person who has permission to use the room needs to know who can withdraw it."

"You make an invitation sound like a threat."

"Then let us say under what circumstances it may be withdrawn. That would be more useful than changing the title."

Adornfeld's face did not change after he said it. Adornfeld uncapped the inkwell and turned it a quarter inch so the chip in the glass faced him, not her. The pen lay across the blotter with its nib already darkened; he had tested it, of course, on the corner of a waste envelope and left three obedient strokes there.

Hermann took the pen by the wooden shaft. A ridge of old varnish caught her thumb, and a fleck remained on her skin when she lifted it. The first letter entered the page easily: H, a vertical line, a crossbar, the old practiced permission of a name trained by ledgers. Halfway through Kunstdorf the nib snagged on a raised fiber.

The ink gathered there, not enough to blot, enough to make the o heavier than the other letters. She held her wrist above the paper while the drop considered becoming accident. Adornfeld did not speak until the drop flattened.
“Let it dry a moment. The blotter will lift too much ink if we use it now.”

She finished the name because the paper required an ending before anyone could dispute it. The final f dragged a little tail of ink into the margin, where the printed border stopped it. The sheet smelled of gum, iron, and the dust that rises when a drawer has been opened after years of obedience. Adornfeld took the sand shaker and tapped it twice.

Fine grains fell over the signature, catching in the wet places, dulling the black shine. One grain stuck to the o in von. Another lodged at the foot of the f. He waited, then lifted the paper and let the unused sand slide into the tray.
“I require one more thing,” he said.
“Of course you do.”
“A second key.”
“No.”

He closed the sand shaker.
“What happens if the meeting begins while you are out? They would have to find a servant and ask to be admitted.”
“The hall can be opened when needed.”
“By whom?”
“By the household.”
“And someone from the household will have to be here every time. Have you arranged that?”
“It is mine.”
“Yes. I am asking who will open it when you are away.”

The air between them felt tighter. Hermann rose and walked to the window. Beyond the glass, the village road was still wet from yesterday’s rain. Two children passed carrying a basket between them.

One slipped; the other did not laugh until the first did. Then both laughed, and the basket tilted dangerously. A second key. It sounded small.

She had been ready to discuss another repair. Now Adornfeld wanted another person able to open the door without her. She resented how small the request sounded beside what it would change.
“Who would hold it?” she asked.
“Frau Klemper, if she agrees.”
“Not Rausch?”

“He might accept, but people would have to go to him for permission even when they had already arranged a date with you. The same would happen with the curate. Frau Klemper has been organizing the coal deliveries. She knows when the room will be in use.”

Hermann turned.

“You have thought this through.”

“I asked her yesterday. She would consider it, if you explained what you expected.”

She almost laughed.

“Have the key made.”

“Come with me to Pál’s. He wants to know whether you will authorize the copy.”

“My signature is on the paper.”

“It says nothing about another key. I can write a second instruction, if you prefer, but his shop is open now.”

The second key was not the first attempt to make the house answer to more than blood. Years before the war had taught every room to count absences, Franz Marc had stood in the east hall with rain drying on his sleeves. “Move those chairs,” he had said. “All that light is falling on the backs of chairs. You could work here until evening.”

He had meant an artists’ colony: painters in the bedrooms, composers in the winter salon, lectures beneath the chandeliers, students sleeping badly under good ceilings, arguments over color in the morning and over bread by night. Klimt, from Vienna, had later sent a note with a gold border too beautiful for the sentence it carried: “A house that fears paint fears touch.” Hermann had kept that note. Lord Alistair had found it.

“A colony,” he had said, making the word sound like mildew.

“You would turn inheritance into lodging.”

“Into use,” Hermann had answered.

Alistair had looked toward Marc, not because Marc had spoken but because aristocratic men often locate disobedience in the nearest guest.

“Artists do not preserve houses. They consume them.”

Marc had smiled then, not kindly.

“I would pay for the room,” Marc had said. “If it is damage you are worried about, come and look where I work. There is paint on the floor. I cannot promise there would not be paint here.”

Hermann remembered the silence that followed more clearly than the argument. She had not defended Marc enough. She had not defended the house enough either. Between those failures the colony had remained a sketch: a blue horse in Marc's margin, a small butterfly beneath it, and a line of Hermann's pencil that stopped before becoming a door.

Now, years later, the colony returned smaller and more dangerous: not painters from Munich and Vienna, not manifestos under chandeliers, not Klimt's gold and Marc's animals, but Frau Klemper with a key, Alex with arithmetic, Rausch with a question, and a stove that would not light itself. Alistair would have hated this version more. That was almost a recommendation.

The locksmith was also the blacksmith, and the blacksmith was also, according to Frau Klemper, "a man who hears only half of what is said and all of what is not meant for him." His shop stood beyond the church lane, where the road narrowed and the houses leaned closer, as though exchanging local facts over Hermann's head. The forge was already lit when Hermann arrived with Adornfeld. A horse stood tethered outside, one hind hoof lifted, steaming faintly in the morning chill.

The blacksmith, Herr Pál, looked first at Adornfeld, then at Hermann, then at the large iron key in Hermann's gloved hand. He wiped his palms on his apron.

"Morning, *Herr*—" He stopped.

The forge filled the pause. Hammer. Breath. Fire.

Hermann had become familiar with such pauses. Some were malicious. Some were frightened. Some were merely grammatical, and therefore harder to forgive.

"Frau von Kunstdorf," Adornfeld said.

Pál blinked once. Then nodded.

"*Gnädige Frau*."

The form was imperfect but usable. Hermann placed the key on the counter.

"I need a copy."

"For the Mansion?"

"For the east hall."

The blacksmith lifted the key and turned it in his hand.

"Big key for one hall."

"It opens both leaves," Hermann said. "The room is to be used from the village entrance."

Pál glanced at Adornfeld, who made no addition to this explanation. The blacksmith selected a blank from a drawer. It was smaller than the original and without ornament. He set it down, reconsidered its length, and went back to the drawer for another.

He laid the old key beside it and rubbed chalk along the teeth until the pattern appeared as a pale uneven map.

"Do you want the crest?"

"No."

Adornfeld looked at Hermann. She continued, "No crest. No initials."

"What shall I mark it with?"

The question had not occurred to her. The forge snapped. A scale of blackened iron loosened from the blank and fell near the vise. Adornfeld said, "*Ostsaal*."

Hermann shook her head.

"*Gemeindesaal*."

Adornfeld's eyebrows rose slightly.

"The municipality has not taken responsibility for it. You should be clear about that when you give her the key."

"Not yet."

Pál smiled before he could stop himself, then removed the smile by setting the blank in the vise and tightening the screw until the iron gave a small complaint. He aligned the steel punch over the warm face. The hammer struck once, driving the letter G into the metal and raising a minute burr of silver-gray scale. He did not blow it away.

He shifted the tool two millimeters to the right and set the e under his thumb. The oil on the bench trapped coal smoke and gave it back in a bitter smell when the hammer fell again. The second letter entered crookedly; Pál corrected it with a file whose teeth rasped against the new cut and left filings on the bench like dark sugar. For m he changed punches.

For e again he wiped the face with his apron and left a black smear across the lower edge. "*Gemeindesaal*" appeared not as inscription but as work: strike, burr, file, breath, another strike. He tested the new teeth against the old key, marked one notch with chalk, filed, tested, filed again. The trial lock on the bench refused the first turn, admitted the second halfway, and opened on the third with a dry click that made the horse outside lift its head.

Hermann heard only the shop: hammer, vise, file, lock, breath.

"You understand," Adornfeld said quietly, "that they may read that as permission to arrange the use themselves? We have not settled how dates will be agreed."

"I am counting on it."

"Then we should put that in the terms. We have only written down how they are to apply to you."

"You wanted consequence."

"A key, yes. I did not ask you to have that word stamped on it. I am trying to understand what you want it to mean when Frau Klemper uses it."

Pál tested the new key against the old.

"Will she turn?" Hermann asked.

"Try her again before you pay," Pál said.

He handed her the duplicate. It was still warm. For one foolish second Hermann wanted to close her hand around it and keep the heat. Instead she placed it on the counter between herself and Adornfeld.

"This goes to Frau Klemper."

Adornfeld nodded.

"Today."

"Yes."

"Not after the repairs."

"Today."

Adornfeld took the key. Hermann watched him put it in his pocket. Outside, the church bell sounded eleven; they would have time to reach Frau Klemper's before dinner. At her gate Adornfeld returned the key to Hermann, leaving her to hand it over herself.

Pál looked toward the bell. There was a pause between its last two strokes. He waited for the second before turning back to the forge.

Weeks later, when the April *Arbeiter-Zeitung* carried the Burgenland election figures into her kitchen, Frau Klemper used the lower margin first to catch grease from the pan. The number 55,111 darkened at the edge but remained legible. She wiped the table with the clean half, turned the sheet, and only then allowed Hermann to cut the figures for the hall. "Wait until I have finished with it," she told Hermann.

On the morning the key was cut, they found Frau Klemper at her narrow house near the school, with three geraniums in the window and a boot scraper polished by generations of resentment. When Hermann and Adornfeld arrived, she did not invite them in. Instead she stepped onto the threshold, wiping her hands on a towel.

"Is there a problem?"
"Yes," said Adornfeld.

Frau Klemper wiped the flour from her wrist. Behind her a pan hissed. She glanced at the key in Hermann's hand, read its lettering, and asked which days they expected her to be available.
"Tuesday and Friday. Sunday by arrangement."
"I have work on Tuesday until three. If you want it opened before then, give someone else a copy."
"The meeting begins at four," Adornfeld said.
"And when you invite visitors from Vienna?"
"They can use the household entrance."
"Visitors to the hall."

Hermann had not thought of those. She said they would have to come when it was open. Frau Klemper held out her hand.
"If you change the hours, tell me before you tell the village."
"Yes."

She tried the weight of the key in her apron pocket. It pulled the cloth sideways. She took it out and put it on a hook inside the door.

She left the key on the hook. Then, after a pause: "Does Julia know?" Hermann's composure altered by a degree too small for most people to see. Frau Klemper saw it.
"I wrote to her."
"Has she answered? I could ask her when she comes, but I do not want to tell her something she was expecting to hear from you."
"No."
"Will she come?"
"I don't know."

Frau Klemper nodded. The pan hissed behind her, and she turned her head, listening, before she spoke again.
"If she comes," she said, "do not put her beside the portrait."
"Which portrait?"
"The one of the man with gloves."

Hermann looked at Adornfeld. He was watching the pan through the open door. "She used to turn her chair away from him," Frau Klemper said. "I remember putting it back after dinner." She stepped inside and closed the door.

The key had left Hermann's hand. Only then did she understand how much of the house had gone with it. They walked back without speaking. The village had entered the hour before noon, when labor begins to think about food and children begin to lose concentration.

Smoke thickened over the roofs. Two men unloaded boards near the church. A woman beat a rug from an upper window with such violence that Adornfeld paused to admire the method. At the Mansion gate, they found a note tucked between the iron bars.

No envelope and no signature. The paper was ordinary, torn from an account book. The hand was educated enough to disguise itself badly. Adornfeld removed it before Hermann could.

"What does it say?" He read silently.

"Adornfeld."

He handed it to her. "Houses that forget their blood invite mud through the door." Hermann read it twice. The first time as insult.

The second time she looked at the spaces between the letters, trying to recognize the hand.

"Do you know the hand?"

"No."

She waited.

"Reisinger's son," he said. "Possibly. I have a note from him about a horse, but I would want them side by side."

"Bring it."

"You intend to answer?"

"I want to see."

They could not find the horse note that morning. Adornfeld put the threat in an envelope, dated it, and left the name unwritten. Hermann saw him look toward the road once before shutting the gate.

Somewhere beyond the houses Frau Klemper now possessed a key marked "*Gemeindesaal*." Somewhere nearer, a man who feared mud had already begun mourning blood. Somewhere on the road to Vienna, perhaps, Julia's answer had not yet been written. The Mansion stood behind Hermann with its old correctness.

The key no longer hung from her hand; she still kept her fingers closed.

Julia's letter arrived in the late afternoon. Hermann saw the envelope before the maid announced it.

Julia's hand had always leaned slightly forward, impatient with the line's appointed pace. Even the address looked as though it might leave the paper before being read. Hermann took it to the library. Adornfeld, who had been entering the east-hall expenses into the household ledger, closed the book.

"You may stay," she said.

"I was not leaving."

"Then pretend you were."

He rose and went to the window. Hermann broke the seal.

Papa,

Your letter reached me. I am glad the east hall is open.

I am glad a boy counted the chairs. I am glad you did not know where I would sit. A wrong answer would have been worse than none. I will come Saturday.

Please leave my room as it is. I mean the desk and the drawers as well as the furniture. I have been trying to remember what I left there, and I want to find it myself, even if it is foolish or embarrassing. Have someone try the stove. If it smokes, I can sleep elsewhere. I will not sit in the green chair. You need not have a welcome ready for me; I would rather we had time after I arrive.

J.

Hermann read it once. Then again. The second reading hurt more because it removed hope's decorations. Adornfeld did not turn from the window.

"She is coming," Hermann said.

"I am glad."

"You have not read the letter."

"You just told me."

"You looked as though you knew before I spoke."

"I hoped that was what it said. I was afraid it might be another refusal."

Hermann sat. Outside, late light had entered the garden. It touched the gravel path, the bare rose canes, the wet backs of leaves. Beyond the wall the village continued: buckets, carts, doors, voices, the ordinary indecency of life going on before one had finished interpreting it.

"Do not prepare a room," Hermann said.

"Then we should ask her what she wants when she arrives."

"It is cruel."

"She may not know until she has seen it again."

"She says she would rather we had time after she arrives."

"Saturday is clear. I can tell the committee to come on Friday."

"You admire her."

"I have always admired her."

"You never told me."

"I thought you knew. She wrote to me when she first left. I should have told you then."

She almost responded. Then did not. There were rooms even language should not open before Saturday. Instead she folded Julia's letter and placed it beside the unsigned threat, the east-hall terms, and the original key.

The desk looked suddenly crowded. A family, a village, a house, a warning, a room. All paper. All dangerous.

At dusk, Adornfeld left her there. He did not ask whether she wished for dinner. He had already ordered it sent to the library. This, too, was one of his forms of tenderness: anticipating the body while refusing to discuss the soul.

After dinner Hermann went to the old room. A drawer in the desk held ribbons, a school exercise, and a broken hair comb. She opened the window, pulled the curtain clear of the sill, and left the drawer closed.

When the lamp was lit, Hermann took up her sketchbook. For the first time in several days, she drew. Not the Mansion. It was not Julia.

It was not Schattendorf. A key. But she drew it twice: once as it lay on the desk, with its old crest and heavy teeth; once as it had looked in Herr Pál's hand, plain, warm, newly cut, marked for a room that did not yet know what it had become. Between the two keys she left a blank space.

Later she would say she had intended to draw the east hall there. She did not. The blank remained. Near ten, when the house had quieted and the library fire had settled into red, there came from somewhere below—perhaps from a loose pipe, perhaps from the cooling iron of the stove, perhaps from the village road where Herr Pál's hammer had taught metal to repeat itself—a soft sound.

Once. Then again. Hermann did not rise. She listened.

The sound did not come again.

CHAPTER 3

The Unprepared Room

Julia arrived on Saturday with one suitcase and no hat. She came by the public motorbus from Mattersburg instead of by hired car from the station. Herr Pál saw her from the forge and called that she could leave the suitcase with him while she went up to the house. She thanked him and kept walking. By the time he returned to the mare, his customer was asking why nobody had been sent to meet her.

By noon, Schattendorf had arranged these facts into six different interpretations. Frau Klemper, who saw her first from the schoolhouse window, gave no interpretation at all. She put on her coat and walked toward the Mansion gate. Julia was halfway up the road when Hermann saw her.

The morning had been dry and pale. The winter sun, if it deserved the name, lay thinly over the roofs and fields, touching nothing with conviction. From the upper landing window, Hermann watched the figure approach: dark coat, uncovered hair, suitcase in one hand, gloves in the other. Julia walked quickly, but not as one eager to arrive.

Rather as one determined not to be delayed. Hermann stepped back before Julia could look up and see her watching. That retreat cost her more than she wished to admit. Adornfeld, passing through the lower hall with a ledger under his arm, stopped.

"She has come."

"Yes."

"Will you meet her at the door?"

"That seems theatrical."

"She has seen you at the window. I think she will expect you to be there."

Hermann looked toward the portrait of Lord Alistair. The painted mouth above the staircase had been given the smallest curve of aristocratic confidence.

"I do not know what to say."

Adornfeld looked toward the door.

"She has her suitcase. You could begin by meeting her."

The side bell rang. Hermann stayed at the window. Adornfeld closed his ledger and stepped away from the desk.

"If you remain here, I will answer it."

"No."

"Then go."

She descended the first three stairs, stopped, and looked again at Alistair.

"Not you," she said.

Adornfeld's expression did not change. But he remembered.

Julia stood beneath the east portico with her suitcase at her feet. Frau Klemper stood beside her, not because she had been invited, but because she had decided the road between public bus and aristocratic threshold required a witness.

"Good morning," Hermann said.

"It is nearly afternoon," Julia answered.

"Yes."

The two women looked at one another. The years between them did not appear all at once. That would have been easier. They arrived in small delegations: a missed birthday, a letter unanswered, a painting sold without consultation, a doctor's name never spoken, a winter illness Hermann had learned of too late, Julia's first public lecture in Vienna, Alistair's funeral, the day Julia stopped asking permission to leave.

Frau Klemper bent and lifted the suitcase. Julia turned.

"I can carry it."

"I know."

"Then why—"

"Because you have already carried it from the bus. Give it here; you can carry it upstairs if you like."

Julia released the handle, though she watched Frau Klemper lift it.

Hermann said, "Your room—" and stopped when Julia looked back at her.

Hermann looked at the suitcase still in Frau Klemper's hand.

"I did not prepare one," she said.

Julia studied her.

"You have not put flowers in it? Or changed the curtains?"

"Nothing has been moved. I went in last night and opened the window."

"And the desk? I should have said more clearly about the desk. I do not want someone putting out the things I made when I was little."

"The drawers are closed, Julia. You can look before you unpack."

Frau Klemper looked from one to the other with an interest she did not bother to conceal. Adornfeld appeared in the doorway.

"There is tea in the small room," he said. "It was ready at eleven. I can find out whether anyone thought to keep the water hot."

Hermann looked at him.

"I told them to wait until Julia arrived."

"I told them eleven. That will explain why there are two trays."

Julia laughed. The sound entered the portico before anyone could prevent it. For one instant Hermann saw the girl in the meadow again, knees muddied, mouth open with a joy that belonged to no house. Then the woman before her closed around the laugh and became herself.

"Adornfeld," Julia said.

"Fräulein Julia."

"Still *Fräulein*?"

"Until instructed otherwise."

"You used to call me Julia. I have not become grander on the bus."

"Julia, then. I was not sure."

She smiled, and the smile made Hermann briefly jealous. Not of Adornfeld. Of ease. They entered through the east door.

Julia noticed the change at once. The corridor had been cleaned. Not polished, not restored, not dressed for sentimental inspection. Cleaned.

The runner had been beaten. The damp umbrella stand had been removed. Two cracked panes had been replaced with new glass that shone too plainly beside the old. At the door to the east hall, Julia stopped.

The key was not in the lock.

"Where is it?"

"With Frau Klemper," Hermann said.

Julia turned slowly.

"She can come in without asking?"

"There is a copy. I have kept the original."

"I meant whether she can use hers whenever she needs the hall. She does not have to send to the house?"

"She has agreed the hours with Adornfeld. She need not find me first."

Julia looked at Frau Klemper. Frau Klemper took the plain key from her coat pocket and held it up. Gemeindesaal. Julia read the word.

Then she looked at Hermann. For the first time since arriving, her guardedness faltered.

"You had that engraved?"

"Yes."

"It is premature."

"I have been informed."

"By whom?"

"Everyone."