Remington Portable (Creative Work)

&

Constructive Distance: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated* and Nicole Krauss’s *Great House* as Models for Third-Generation Holocaust Fiction

(Critical Essay)

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*A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy at*

*The University of Queensland in 2012*

School of English, Media Studies, and Art History
Abstract

This thesis comprises both a creative component, titled “Remington Portable”, and a critical essay, titled “Constructive Distance”. The creative work seeks to explore the ethical and narrative complexities of third-generation Holocaust fiction outlined in the critical essay in the symbolic language of literature.

The creative component of this thesis is a magic-realist novel about the Holocaust narrated, in part, by a 1934 Remington 5 Portable typewriter. After lying derelict in a New York cellar for fifteen years, Remington is woken by his dead Master’s granddaughter—the troubled Sarah—who has travelled from Brisbane to uncover the mystery of her grandparents’ escape from Nazi Vienna. Remington agrees to help Sarah, but he soon discovers that his harrowing stories are falling on the deaf ears of a young woman battling her own traumatic past. Interspersed between this present-day narrative, Remington’s tales of old Vienna create a rich and disturbing portrait of a city—and a man—crumbling under the weight of prejudice. 1936, Vienna. Henry Mensel has it all. A successful veterinary practice. A Jewish background he has escaped. The latest Remington 5 Portable typewriter. But as the rising wave of anti-Semitism sweeps Europe, Henry will be forced to sacrifice more than he ever thought possible if he is to survive.

The critical essay in this thesis considers whether Marianne Hirsch’s notion of second-generation postmemory can legitimately apply to third-generation Holocaust survivors such as myself. From its position of generational distance, can the third generation reasonably claim to have inherited the trauma of the Holocaust? Or is our connection to the atrocity more nuanced and imprecise? Authors of third-generation fiction face a unique ethical conundrum, I argue, in that they are simultaneously connected to and twice-distanced from the event they seek to explore. To illustrate my argument, I analyse two third-generation texts, Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything Is Illuminated and Nicole Krauss’s Great House, to consider how their authors’ connection to and distance from the Holocaust manifests in the trope of distance.
Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

Refereed Conference Proceedings:


Publications included in this thesis


Partially incorporated as paragraphs in “The Trope of Distance” chapter of the critical essay (page 141 paragraph one to page 147 paragraph one). The essay also uses short extracts from the above publication in the “Ethical Ambiguities” chapter and the Conclusion.
Contributions by others to the thesis

No contributions by others.

Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree

“A Personal Connection” (critical essay), page 128 paragraph two, page 129 paragraph two, and “Remington Portable”, page 24 paragraph two to paragraph four, and page 84 paragraph one to page 87 paragraph four submitted for BCI Honours, Queensland University of Technology, 2009, degree awarded 15 December 2009.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Richard Strakosch. Despite suffering the loss of his family in the Holocaust, he found the strength to begin a new life in Australia at the age of thirty-nine. The creative component of this thesis, *Remington Portable*, is inspired by what he endured. I hope, if he were alive, he would be proud of these words I have written.

My wonderful supervisors, Dr Venero Armanno and Dr Judith Seaboyer, stood by me with encouragement and patience. Their feedback was illuminating. I will always be grateful.

Mr Craig Bolland and Dr Kári Gíslason at QUT contributed invaluable ideas and feedback to *Remington Portable* in its early stages.

I would also like to thank my family for their love, support and understanding. They endured my stress, self-focus and collapses in confidence without complaint and were always ready with a hug, a pep talk or a rewarding lunch. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my darling husband, Korian Strakosch, for his superb imagination, his fabulous cooking, and his selfless love. If my grandfather inspired *Remington Portable*, you were the flesh that made it possible.
Keywords


**Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)**

ANZSRC code: 191904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing, 70%
ANZSRC code: 202005 Literary Studies, 30%

**Fields of Research (FoR) Classification**

FoR code: 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing, 70%
FoR code: 2005 Literary Studies, 30%
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## Creative Work

- **Remington Portable**
  (30,200 word extract from manuscript)

## Critical Essay

- **Constructive Distance: Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything Is Illuminated and Nicole Krauss’s Great House as Models for Third-generation Holocaust Fiction**

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## Appendix

- Remainder of *Remington Portable*
REMINGTON PORTABLE

by Antonia Strakosch

(extract from beginning of manuscript)
1.
The dark cabin swallowed hope. Sleeping bodies lay tangled in one another, limbs splayed towards aisles or windows. Temptation lured those doomed to wakefulness: the appeal of the movie screen (too bright to turn on now), the pull of the toilet, the promise of the next stewed brown meal.

Amidst it all, eyes wide beneath her eye mask, sat Sarah Mensel. Boarding in Brisbane, she’d held a vain, manic hope that the trip to New York to visit her uncle would fill her with a particular story. One to replace the narrative of her parents’ death three years ago, a story whose concrete memories she could fill a book with, and after that bookshelves—dozens and dozens of them—which she could use to support her interior walls. Since the accountant’s call last Thursday, and the news she’d have to sell her parents’ warm, memory-soaked house—Sarah had glimpsed, finally, this far speck of hope. The hope sprang less from the ancient promise she’d made herself to write about her grandparents’ escape from Nazi Vienna, and more from the sweet image of the book itself. Its physical presence, if not its stories, would stem her pain.

The captain’s voice descended from above Sarah’s head.

“Sorry to disturb you folks, but we’ve hit a rough patch bouncing off the Pacific. Looks like it will be with us for about ten minutes. Buckle up and we’ll have you out of it as soon as we can.”

The cabin fell silent, then a gasp rose up as the plane lurched forcefully to the right. It seemed fitting that this proposed book—the one Sarah was travelling to New York to research, the one she hoped, by some miracle, would arrive at the end of her week-long trip fully formed in her hands—would be the death of her, one way or another. Its vast unwrittenness pulsed against the crash and tug of the plane.
Suddenly, stillness, then a lunge so forceful Sarah’s head smacked against the window. She considered the possibility of death right here in the eternal unholy night. Well, it would make things a whole lot simpler.

In truth, Sarah had committed to writing the novel several months earlier when she’d sold her beloved old Italian violin. The $8000 had granted her permission to slash her hours at the local doctor’s surgery, freeing up three days a week in which to write. The fact Sarah had demonstrated such initiative signalled to those close to her that she was ready to embark on a new chapter, to tackle an older, more complex grief, and perhaps, in so doing, finally confront one closer to home. Sarah had looked on her new writing time as a way not necessarily of completing the book, but as a chance to explore a subject whose suffering had tarnished her family. A subject that had plagued her above all until that moment on the Nambour-Tewantin Road three years ago when a white Ford had veered across the two-lane highway and ploughed head-on into her parents’ 4WD.

Before that, the Holocaust had haunted Sarah and she had waited, fearfully, for the courage to one day explore her grandparents’ lives in fiction. The end product had never really interested her until the accountant’s phone call last Thursday. Now, the exploratory fiddlings she’d conducted over the past months—slim character notes, directionless readings on genocide—angered Sarah for the reason she hadn’t started writing at all. What else but the pages of a tactile book would comfort her when her parents’ beloved house was taken away?

The scratchy airline blanket on her lap had trapped some torturous warmth on Sarah’s right knee-cap. The knee pulsed hotly, a reminder of all that was wrong and all that could still go wrong, an omen expressed in the form of heat. The subject of her grandparents filled her with complex, genuine emotion—true—but precious little to
actually say. What she knew of their life wasn’t even sufficient to form a skeleton on which Sarah could drape her novel’s flesh.

In the six months following her parents’ death, after the emergency response of neighbours and relatives had cooled to the odd Sunday night lasagne, Sarah had lain in their blacked-out bedroom and it had hurt, quite literally, to breathe. Her friend Katie had visited more regularly. She knew Sarah so well that she would announce her visits by flicking the switch on the opposite bedside lamp. Shadowy light would emerge from the twenty-watt bulb—a globe so dim Katie had had to source it from a special lighting shop in Ashgrove—and eventually Sarah would open her eyes.

And then, almost six months to the day after the accident, Sarah rose from bed and pushed her wasted frame through to the backyard. The plants in the large built-in fish pond had died, but the lawn, being fake, had survived the death of its owners without withering or browning at all. Sarah sat in the white wicker chair by the pond—the one from which she’d happily refused to partake in her parents’ Sunday games of boule—and tried, really tried, to cry. But nothing came. So she imagined her mother laughing, back stooped and tanned arm extended, about to destroy her father’s claim on the white ball. The vision took for a moment, but soon after it too disappeared.

The long-limbed Asian girl beside her kicked a frilled socked-foot against Sarah’s calf and held it there. Her eye mask stung her eyelids but she would not close them. Having them open reminded her, somehow, of what was at stake. In fact, eye masks—along with black-out curtains and wraparound sunglasses—were Sarah’s drug of choice, bearers of a darkness that refused her natural yearning for light with the satisfaction of a tongue torturing a cold sore. Had she ditched the mask, she’d have come face-to-face with the onscreen flight path. The news last time hadn’t been
good. They were still hovering over the vast Pacific. A mere fifty-six minutes had passed since she’d last checked: six hours and forty-four minutes to go. The loneliness lunged in like a hundred mouths to swallow her up.

Sarah sensed an air hostess glide past—all French-knotted, smooth-cheeked efficiency. The seatbelt sign chimed off; passengers undid their belts in sleep. Sarah realised with disappointment the turbulence had stopped. She would survive the flight, transfer in LA for New York, arrive at her uncle’s and lay her facts at his feet in the hope he would fill them with life. The act of survival—the word itself—was a boomerang she could not escape.

Sarah turned to the window and tentatively raised her mask. The little girl had ceased kicking for the time being, and her mother was curled towards the aisle. Sarah lifted the window shutter a crack. A shaft of sunlight illuminated the girl’s socked foot. Its brilliance curled Sarah’s eyes shut but she opened them with her fingers. She would stare it down, the simple, devastating fact that when she returned from New York she would have to place her parents’ home on the market. Offer it up for someone new to claim, to forge memories in, to love.

Sarah was seven years old again, looking out the cab’s back window at her grandfather outside his building in New York, wondering why he was crying. Her father told her later this wasn’t unusual, that her grandfather cried—almost without fail—every time he said goodbye. They were crossing the Brooklyn Bridge on the way to JFK, and Sarah had looked back at the city and thought how big it was for someone so sad. The setting sun had struck one of the buildings.

“I’d bring friends home for holidays,” her father said quietly, “and they’d go to leave and the old man would burst into tears. He remembered saying goodbye to his sister in Vienna many years before and never seeing her again.”
But Sarah was too young to understand the meaning of her father’s words—she had never heard of the Holocaust. A few years later when the term gained currency in her head, she’d resolved to write about her grandparents, promised herself that their amazing life stories should not die with them. But Sarah admitted to herself now that this trip had little to do with that. The book she hoped to write wasn’t an act of memorial so much as it was one of replacement.

Outside her window, dawn rose slowly on the blue Pacific.

In the cab on the way to her Uncle’s, Sarah slept for the first time in thirty hours. The mounds of blackened snow clumped outside provided some texture to her dreams. She dreamed her psychiatrist had succumbed to a cigarette during their session. The smoke wove patterns in her crazy hair, but soon it turned to ashes and then to snow. Sarah woke to a surge of cold air striking her in the stomach. She tried swallowing but the inside of her mouth was thick. She slid over the torn leather seat onto the footpath. In front of her, a gilded high rise swept up to cover the sky. Until now, Sarah hadn’t connected Trump Parc with Donald Trump or indeed with Central Park. But the building’s Deco grace—a rooftop garden she could just make out surging to a tower literally topped with a gold crown—who else would dare towards such extravagance in the most expensive city in the world?

The driver stood guard over her suitcase, smiling kindly. Behind him, a bellboy hovered in crisp black tails. Sarah fumbled in her bag for her wallet. Inside was a wad of $100 bills. She hadn’t thought to get small denominations for tipping. Christ, in the two days between booking her flights and departing, the purpose of her trip had so obsessed her she’d nearly forgotten to pack at all. Across the street, an elegant, eager looking couple approached a horse-drawn carriage outside Central
Park. Sarah was filled with a nugget of hope. She hadn’t had such a feeling since before Thursday’s phone call, and it triggered a nostalgia for a time when this hope was part of her, when her joy and ease drew comments from those struggling to pass gratefully through life.

The cab fare was $51.30—Sarah handed the driver an even hundred. He stepped away from her bags shaking his head. In seconds, the bellboy had stacked them onto an elaborate trolley and was leading Sarah through the vast marble lobby. Wealthy, vigorous people reclined in jewel-toned ball gowns or else stalked about in bomber jackets. Sarah’s track pants and grey acrylic cardigan pulsed unpleasantly in the brilliant chandelier light. For a moment, she considered retreating behind the glacial protective panels of her wraparound sunglasses. But she didn’t have to, for they entered a dim mirrored elevator. Sarah was relieved until the bellboy struck button thirty-eight. The ground fell away beneath them. At some point—Sarah couldn’t say when because she was staring at her sneakers and then perhaps being led up a corridor—they arrived at Room 38APH. A buxom maid answered, tipped the bellboy from her apron, and with a curious smile ushered Sarah inside.

It was the apartment’s turn now to leave her breathless. The view of lights and trees over the park from the wall of windows was spectacular. The room wasn’t a lounge so much as an entrance or foyer. When had her uncle acquired such stunning wealth? Without cousins to bind them, Sarah had lost touch with him after her parents’ death. Before that, they’d spoken only at Christmas and on birthdays. Sarah hoped the fact her family had missed Ann and Solomon’s wedding eleven years ago when her appendix had ruptured spectacularly en route to the airport hadn’t contributed to them growing apart. She was anxious to make a good impression.
Sarah willed her jetlag and panic to disappear, and when they didn’t she plastered on a smile.

A slight, elegant woman dressed entirely in emerald appeared in the corner near the sofa. Her clothes draped submissively about her lithe frame; her slicked hair formed a perfect caramel bob.

“You must be Sarah,” she said, her feet gliding across the Herringbone floor.

Her upper body remained completely erect, and when Sarah looked into her face the woman smiled. It was a smile not just of greeting but of satisfaction. Sarah saw this was a woman untroubled by self-criticism or personal regret, a woman who wouldn’t apologise for her lot in life, a woman the more powerful for it. Sarah wanted to break out in applause. She looked again, and was surprised to see genuine warmth in the woman’s face. Up close, her teeth were sharp and not especially even. Sarah liked her immediately.

“I’m Ann,” the woman said. “No ‘E’ please, just plain Ann.”

Her striking green eyes shone from a smooth, unmade-up face. Surprisingly, though, feathered lines peppered her temples, and again in the area around her mouth. It took Sarah a moment to identify them as genuine wrinkles.

Ann smiled and extended her arm. The clingy fabric of her dress revealed lean muscles, braided like some triumph of contemporary art. Sarah guessed she had once been a dancer. In fact, she wouldn’t have minded seating Ann on the stark white sofa and observing her through one-way glass.

Her uncle had remarried well. One wasn’t supposed to speak ill of the dead, but Ann was a step up from Aunty Linda. Sarah had only met her twice, the last time on a family trip to New York when she was seven, but her aunt had struck her even then as a sort of wildebeest, slow to move, homely, yet oddly acerbic, the sort of
woman who would bake a cherry pie and then make disparaging comments about its calorie content as one ate it. Uncle Solomon and Aunty Linda had shared a pleasant apartment, Sarah remembered, but nothing like the glamorous aircraft hanger he inhabited now. The pharmaceutical business was clearly performing well.

“Your uncle is waiting to see you,” Ann said. “The chef’s just about to serve dinner.”

Sarah glanced at her wrist for a watch. Clearly, travel demanded an entirely new set of personal accessories.

“It’s eleven,” Ann said. “You haven’t put us out. Sol works ridiculous hours and I eat after the theatre.” The poised arm around Sarah’s shoulders began exerting a gentle force. “How was the flight?”

“Good,” Sarah lied.

Ann looked at her. “I hate flying.”

Sarah relaxed a little. “Actually, I couldn’t sleep. I’m exhausted.”

“Really?” Ann said, swinging them around a pillar and into an enormous den-like sitting room.

It was an odd question, Sarah thought. Exhaustion was a common side effect of long-haul flights. People needed sleep. But then she sensed that her uncle’s wife, the entire rarefied apartment building, wasn’t stocked with people but some heightened species bred for twenty-four hour life.

Suddenly they were in the dining room and her uncle was booming from its depths to let him have a look at her. The room was cavernous and strangely dark, illuminated only by an operatic scattering of candles down the huge dining table and in deco holders mounting the walls. The wall itself was covered in swathes of
luminous green silk, but when Sarah reached out to touch it the fabric turned hard and flat. Wallpaper, she realised with astonishment.

Ann’s lean, poised arm guided Sarah towards a figure at the other end of the table. Nerves pinged in her stomach. Who did she expect to find sitting there? She expected her grandfather, didn’t she?—the man who had endured great suffering and who she hoped, in writing about him, would help her to endure her own. She recalled the photo in her parents’ old dressing room of her grandfather as a child—the boy with wide, even features and high cheekbones. In it, he wore braces and long socks and an odd little peaked cap; his arm rested lightly on his sister’s shoulder. Eva was a beauty even then. A dark plait coiled around her head like a snake. One hand rested on her hip—with the other, she held an antiquated yo-yo. Eva gazed at the camera with a melancholy foresight, as if she had predicted the fate of her people in the Viennese orchard as a child. Sarah paused at the photo sometimes when she passed from her parents’ bedroom through to the toilet. But what of her uncle? How did she feel towards the man himself? Sarah couldn’t remember Solomon’s face at all; suddenly, she feared what she might find there.

They reached the end of the table, Ann’s arm still draped around Sarah’s shoulders. Solomon stood to kiss her on either cheek. The plush grey scarf around his neck grazed her hand, and Sarah glimpsed, in its smooth embrace, a window onto a different, chic-er world.

“Good flight?” he asked.

His face was both a comfort and a shock. It was round and wide like her grandfather’s, but there was something unsettled in it, a confidence not entirely certain, a sign that while her uncle enjoyed his situation he expected it, at any moment, to collapse away. All the same, his eyes danced with a strain of vitality that
made Sarah feel a hundred years old. Ann turned and the pair retraced their steps to a chair halfway down the table.

“It was okay, thanks,” Sarah said, sitting before one of three elaborate place settings on the great, imposing table.

The maid entered with the entrée: parcels of seared Albacore tuna enclosing matchsticks of crisp, sweet apple. She placed a bowl in front of Sarah. Sarah smiled anxiously. To tackle the parcels with knife and fork would risk disaster between plate and mouth. But to grasp them in her hands? Sarah looked for guidance to her aunt. She knew instinctually that Ann’s idleness was not a lack of efficiency. She was waiting. The chef appeared and poured a jug of yellow liquid expertly around Sarah’s tuna.

“Yellow squash soup,” said Ann. “Out of season, of course, but a favourite of ours.” She smiled slyly. “I don’t go in for all that local, seasonal crap. Why live in a globalised world and not take advantage?”

Sarah, in an attempt to stem her fear that the question wasn’t rhetorical, reached for her spoon. The dish was a revelation of tastes and textures, a rainbow on Sarah’s tongue. Her uncle and aunt conversed as if she were privy to the inner dealings of their lives. Strangers, she saw, did not put them ill at ease. They discussed their house in the Hamptons—should they go next weekend, or would it be too miserably cold?—the price of gold, Ann’s friend’s disastrous cheek fillers that had left her puffy and bruised. Interesting topics, all of them, but none directed at or concerning Sarah. As the minutes ticked by, she began to wonder when and if they would include her, when they’d mention—as surely they must—the urgent reason for her trip.
Eventually they fell silent, but only because the maid was serving dessert. Wide, shallow bowls landed before each of them. In their centre, a thick cut-crystal glass. At first bite of the vibrant watermelon granita topped with diamonds of piped meringue, nourishment exploded on Sarah’s tongue. She felt energised, alive. Reckless thoughts darted inside her head. Maybe Ann and Solomon would sponsor her to get a Green Card so she could visit more often. And then a crisper, sweeter thought: *maybe her uncle could buy her parents’ house*. Imagine if Sarah could stay living in the place whose fabric and furniture provided the single means of imagining her parents were still here.

A pain pulsed suddenly beneath Sarah’s ribcage, gripping her liver as if in a fist. She cried out, then clamped down on her tongue when her relatives’ heads turned.

“Everything okay?” Solomon asked.

Sarah grimaced as the pain slipped away. “Actually it isn’t.”

“What’s up?”

Solomon fingered the fabric of his scarf while he studied her.

“I’m devastated I have to sell Mum and Dad’s house,” Sarah said, wondering why she had to explain it again. “I didn’t plan to write this book on Grandma and Grandpa so quickly, but it’s become the only way I can see of moving through.”

Solomon glanced at his wife. “What book?”

“Sarah is writing a book, Sol, based on your parents and—” Ann turned to Sarah. “What would you say? Their experiences?”

Sarah thought perhaps she hadn’t heard right. Why was Ann telling Solomon now?

“You know why I’m here, don’t you?”
Solomon’s blue eyes filled with something. “From what you’re telling me, it sounds like you’re here to research a book.”

There was a trace of warning in his voice.

“But… my email.”

“I read our correspondence,” Ann said. “It’s my fault, Sarah. I didn’t tell him.”

Solomon caught Ann’s gaze, then snatched the crystal decanter before the maid could do it for him.

“My parents never spoke of it,” he said, sloshing burgundy into his glass. “If they didn’t, why should I?”

“But I spent into debt to come here,” Sarah said. “I only did it because I thought you’d know about Grandma and Grandpa’s escape from Vienna.”

“Why would you think that?”

Sarah bit her cheeks to stop from crying.

“Look, I know next to nothing. I support the U.S Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C because I’ve heard they do good work. My secretary wires off the money once a year. They send me an annual calendar. I’d prefer they didn’t, actually, because then I’ve got to put it somewhere. The last one had an odd picture on the front. I never unwrapped it.” Solomon glanced coolly at Ann. “Personally, I’d rather move on from the whole thing.”

Sarah felt breath escape her lips.

“What about letters—possessions?”

“There aren’t any,” Ann replied. “They brought next to nothing with them. Wasn’t much time to pack, I suppose.”

Her voice was brisk. Clearly, a subject that came between her and Solomon was both rare and unwelcome.
“I’ll tell you what,” she said. “There’s an old typewriter on the floor of the cellar. Honestly, if it wasn’t so heavy I probably would have thrown it out. You can have it if you like. You’ll probably want to donate it,” she studied Sarah’s face. “But who knows, maybe not.”

The fingers of Sarah’s left hand began to tingle. She glanced down to find her right hand gripping them cruelly.

“So you knew he didn’t know anything,” she said slowly, “and still you let me come.”

“Honestly, I thought it would be nice to see you. Sol has so few living relatives. And with your parents gone, I thought you’d enjoy it too. Living it up in New York—who wouldn’t?”

“Ann, leave it.” Solomon considered his empty wine glass. More circumspectly this time, he reached for the decanter and filled it.

“But I came from Brisbane,” Sarah said. “Do you know how far that is? How much it costs to fly to New York?”

Her belly throbbing, Sarah stood. She turned to leave but doorways led in all directions. She didn’t know through which she had come. At random, she chose one and began to walk.

“That’s the kitchen,” Ann said, leaping up with a glance at her husband. “Let me show you your room. I’ll bring the typewriter in if you like.”

“I’m getting a motel,” Sarah said, then turned to her uncle and burst into tears.

He reached an arm out towards her. “Sarah,” he said, his voice catching. “Let us reimburse you for the flight.”
Ann led Sarah to the guest suite via the cellar, where she retrieved the typewriter she’d mentioned from a folded cashmere blanket on the floor. In the suite, she pointed distractedly at a few features—working fireplace, Schonbek chandelier, behind the drapes a view of the Park—then placed the typewriter vertically on the rug by the desk and said she’d leave Sarah to sleep. The room’s splendour was almost heartening. If her life must unravel, Sarah thought, at least it would do so against a backdrop of luxury. With no way forward into her book—at an impasse, a literal dead-end—Sarah lifted the typewriter to the desk by the heavy silk drapes.

But the sight of the worn, broken thing, its black case faded and scratched, unleashed the truth of what she felt inside and Sarah burst into tears. She cried for the way she’d been left behind, for the weariness that beat at the heart of her, the expectation of loneliness and neglect. Finally her tears passed. She went in search of a washer in the marble bathroom and soaked it beneath a gold duck tap. Returning to the desk, she sponged the typewriter’s case from top to bottom, blotted the worn leather handle, attended to the deep gash beside it that harboured a small spider. Soon, the white washer was black and Sarah’s hands trembled. How dare her uncle leave her grandparents’ sole legacy to fester. What sort of man was he that he not only denied but desecrated his history?

She sponged the typewriter until the fabric of its case was free of cobwebs and dirt. In the bottom left corner, Sarah noticed the cloth had peeled to expose a pebble of wood. She unfastened the brass latch and raised the typewriter’s lid. It occurred to her that this typewriter had borne witness to the very history she hoped to explore. But as the thought gripped Sarah, the sharp pain from dinner returned. Something rose in her stomach, and she ran to the bathroom to be sick.
But she wasn’t sick, not from her mouth. Sarah yanked her track pants to her ankles and crashed onto the toilet seat. A dull ache pressed the contents of her stomach into the toilet bowl. Sarah sat still, afraid the pain might come back. But the thought of collapsing on the bed was too appealing. Gripping the toilet roll holder, Sarah stood shakily and went to flush. The colour in the bowl stopped her. It wasn’t brown but a dull, oxidised red. Sarah bent at the waist and peered closer. It wasn’t diarrhoea but a foreign thing leeched from inside her. Sarah looked at the small bloody dump and felt sick.

But as she staggered to the enormous poster bed and collapsed—speech. It took a moment for Sarah to recognise it wasn’t hers. Perhaps she was hallucinating or in fact had died. The voice was resonant and filled with suffering. Yet she’d caught it mid-sentence, as if her emergency in the toilet had allowed her to perceive a monologue already commenced. It was her uncle’s voice, Sarah decided, though flecked with something of an accent. Or maybe his advisor—the rich had such things—had come to check that she was sleeping. Pushing her hands against the mattress, Sarah stood. The voice was definitely in this room. It seemed to be coming from the window above the desk. Without thinking, Sarah stumbled across the floor and threw open the long patterned drapes. There was no man behind them, only the dark rectangle of Central Park bordered on three sides by the brilliant city lights. Sarah sank into the high-backed chair.

It was then she saw it—the tiny mouth on the typewriter’s spacebar. Wonderful colours danced on its lips. The mouth moved at the speed of a hummingbird’s wings, droning and sighing, its tongue licking the bottom lip and then the top.

Sarah sprang up. She clenched her hand into a fist and used it to beat her head.
The voice grew clearer and more beguiling. “You can hear me, can you not?”

Sarah beat harder on her forehead.

“Listen,” the voice pleaded. “This is a happy day—a most happy day. Refrain, please, from injuring yourself.”

Sarah recognised sadness in the voice, an emotion she tried to alleviate in others. She sank back into the chair.

“I had given up hope—I am not proud of the fact but there it is. And then tonight I felt a rush of air against my case as the cellar disappeared behind me.”

Sarah stared at the typewriter’s wee mouth, unable to reconcile its undeniable beauty with the fact she had, almost certainly, lost her mind.

“Fifteen years on one’s undercarriage is a very long time,” the typewriter went on. “Ann visited the cellar, Solomon too sometimes. The problem was neither one could hear me.”

Sarah’s insides felt heavy. She pressed her knuckles into her forehead.

“Please—do not do that.”

“Then explain to me,” she said slowly, “how it is you can talk.”

“My name is Remington Ignatius Portable. I was born in a typewriter factory in Ilion, New York, in 1934. Since the moment of my birth, I have been blessed with sentience.” Remington swept his tiny tongue across his lips. “Yet I have suffered in a cellar for fifteen years, never stretching my legs, so to speak, never being used or conversing with anyone. Then one evening I am plucked from obscurity and placed here on this fine mahogany desk.”

Sarah, unable to belittle another being—even an imaginary one—whispered, “I’m sorry to include you in losing my mind.”
“You are rare, not crazy,” Remington said. “I speak as surely as anyone. You are only the second person in my existence, however, to hear me.”

Sarah couldn’t help it. “Who was the first?”

Remington’s lips paled. “Someone very dear to my master.”

“Your master?” Sarah said.

“Henry Mensel.”

“You were my grandfather’s typewriter?”

“Until the last,” Remington replied. “His death was a blow like no other.”

“What about Grandma? Josephine?”

Remington’s lips mottled. “I was Master’s alone.”

Through her confusion, Sarah glimpsed a wad of hope. Remington had witnessed her grandparents’ past first-hand. He had the potential to unlock secrets, to cure writer’s block, to dictate Sarah’s novel to her and ask nothing in return. Sarah offered a cautious prayer of thanks to a God she this moment decided to believe in. He had delivered a miracle—if she had thought it possible she would have believed in Him before.

“Do you have any idea how it is to shout yourself ragged day in, day out?” Remington said, returning to his earlier topic. “To save your most charming discourse for the moment each evening when Ann sweeps into the cellar on the rare chance she decides to open you? She did open me once—I was never sure why. Yet it was a waste; she could not hear me.”

“How is it I can?” Sarah asked.

Remington’s smile betrayed a flicker of doubt. “Because we are destined to provide for one another. Already, after being cleaned, I feel better.”
Misgivings were flooding in again, the knowledge that a book—if indeed Sarah could draw her grandparents’ stories from the typewriter—wouldn’t save her if she was in fact losing her mind.

“For fifteen years I haven’t had the pleasure even of being purposefully ignored,” Remington said. “To be purposefully ignored requires that you exist in another’s mind in the first place.”

“What happened fifteen years ago?” Sarah asked.
Remington’s lips shrank. “Master died.”
“I miss him,” she said. “I never knew him, not really, but I miss him.”
Sarah realised this statement was at the heart of her need to finish the book. She wanted to fill the hole inside herself full of family lore. The urge was stronger than hunger.

“Master was a fascinating man,” Remington replied. “I miss him each and every day.”

“How was he fascinating?”
Remington’s mouth exploded in colour. “Imagine a hundred suns, each exquisite, each competing…” He broke off. “He was too much sometimes. I adored him.”

“And Josephine?”
“Master’s love for her was ferocious, devoted, so utterly consuming that at times it threatened to consume them both.”

“And Josephine’s love for him?”
“Primal,” Remington cried, his tongue plunging between his teeth. “The terrifying love of a mother for her child combined with pure, naked adoration. When
they were together Viennese streets fell silent, World War One types—Master’s Uncle Otto, for God’s sake—fell at their feet for advice.”

Unfortunately, thought Sarah, the typewriter was too expansive—prone to flights of fancy. Sarah glanced back at the huge, high-ceilinged room. Their surroundings surely weren’t helping. The black marble ensuite, site of her recent medical disaster, lay directly behind them. The distance between its spa bath and double vanities was so significant that between them one could have erected a king-size bed. And the bed itself, its four posts draped in a green silk canopy with tassels and plaited purple trim, beyond it two armchairs the size of plunge pools, and on the opposite wall this desk itself—each item promoted expansivity, recklessness, a belief in abundance Sarah knew was not reflected in life. Remington, it occurred to her, was the sole being who could help her uncover her grandparents’ story. He was her shot at the novel. If she could knock him back to earth, she could just possibly produce an object that could replace the beloved house she was being forced to sell.

“Maybe you could tell me about my grandparents,” Sarah began. “True stories, chronological, from the beginning as you knew it to the end.”

The sentence had come out poorly. Remington repeated the first half.

“Grandma and Grandpa’s life story,” she said more emphatically, “from when you met them to when they escaped Vienna for New York.” Inside the right-hand pocket of her track pants, Sarah’s fingers actually crossed. “Can you do that?”

Remington’s mouth glowed cerise. “There is much I would rather forget,” he said.

“I understand. But maybe in telling me, it will help you move on.”

Remington’s lips trembled. “Perhaps you are right. What we lived through haunts me,” he said. “But if I brought it to the light...”
Excitement, or pain, gripped Sarah’s stomach. She’d deal with her lunacy tomorrow. What harm was there in one story?

“Where should we start?” she asked.

“I know exactly where,” Remington said. “May 6th, 1936. The day of my purchase in Vienna. What events were set in motion that day, what wonderful and terrible events…”

Sarah rushed to get her MacBook from her hand luggage. She slid the lithe, silver laptop from its sleeve and placed it beside Remington on the desk. The difference in size was comical: a fruit box to a sheet of cardboard, a 60s television to a streamlined LCD. Remington did not notice.

“I will begin now,” he said. “Please do not interrupt.”
May, 1936

The doorbell sounded with a ping. The shopkeeper patted my case, winked once at my fellow typewriters, then sprang on his strong, nimble legs towards the door. Fragrant spring air stormed the shop. It was ten a.m.—I had been poised on the counter since eight. Outside, my soul mate, my master: one Henry Mensel.

Adrenalin seized my keys, stripping my thoughts, rendering senseless the monologue I had prepared the previous evening. The shopkeeper’s back obscured my view of the door. I cursed his broad, steady shoulders. Yesterday, as we arrived weary from the docks they had proved a comfort—how distant this memory now seemed! Today their girth thwarted me.

I strained in the direction of the door and glimpsed the leather of a well-worn briefcase. The large hand upon the handle, however… Had I not envisaged these same dextrous fingers since infancy? The medium-brimmed hat above the shopkeeper’s head reminded me, too, of something I had seen in dream. Beneath it, smoother than I had dared imagine, an expanse of forehead. Suddenly, the shopkeeper stepped aside and I beheld perfection.

My master.

The height and bearing he possessed—how his wide, open face caught the light! The eagerness with which he regarded me was quite unnerving. My prepared greeting, full of wit and warm intelligence, departed and I was left with nothing whatsoever to say. Master appeared not to notice. He approached the counter and placed his hat lightly beside me.

“The Remington 5?” he said.

The shopkeeper gestured expansively. “The Remington 5 Portable, quite right.”
Master lay a slim, cool hand upon me. Each nerve of mine shocked to attention. He stood opposite—the man I had dreamed of, the one to whom I would devote the rest of my life. What sort of being was I that I could not speak? Seconds gathered. Five seconds, ten. I studied the grandfather clock in the corner. If I didn’t gaze at my new master, I reasoned, I wouldn’t meet awkwardness or disappointment, wouldn’t see his face fall as recognition dawned that I was dumb or mute. Fifteen seconds in, Master raised his hand and stroked his middle finger against my case. The loving action jolted me to life.

“Guten morgen,” I stammered. “My name is Remington Ignatius Portable. I–”

“A Yankee typewriter?” Master said.

The shopkeeper smiled. “Oh yes. All the way from Ilion, New York.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Why would you?” he said. “The better models—the Remingtons and Underwoods—hail from New York. You want to avoid the ones from further west. I don’t stock them. Can’t rely on the quality. At Hans’s Typewriter Shop, we sell only the best.”

The monologue I had prepared last night returned to me in a blaze of adrenalin, its pages vivid in my mind’s eye. I decided to skip the opening, a treatise on the bond between man and machine I had devoted several hours to, and begin with the personal anecdote on page two.

“I was born in an old munitions factory in Ilion, New York,” I said, “in July 1934. With typewriters, our birthplace has as little bearing on our lives as a flea on the body of a lion, while the conditions of our labour are of the utmost importance. Envisage a factory: concrete floors; a high, soul-less roof; few windows. Visualise—”

Master gestured at my brass hinges. “Do you mind?”
“No, of course,” said the shopkeeper. With practiced fingers, he unclipped my case from my hinges and slid it back behind my head. The shift in my physicality required that I skip ahead several pages.

“At first glance, you will notice the pleasing, compact size of my maple wood box—durable, lightweight, and covered in piano-black damask. To appreciate the details of my design, however, you must first close my box, place my body horizontally on a flat surface, and raise my lid.”

I saw too late that my lid was at right angles above me. Mortified, I hurried to continue.

“Notice the two sturdy metal latches at my back that prevent my case from disassociating with my frame,” I said. “These latches may look primitive, but they revolutionised not only the form but the feeling of my species, who had previously suffered from a depression of spirits as you might imagine would a man were he repeatedly separated from his arm…”

“Amazing how they fit everything in,” Master said, smiling.

“Note the two shift keys, a feature of the European models, and the silent platen knob. But watch this.” The shopkeeper plucked me from the bench as if I were a feather. “See how light it is! Portable as a button.” He clasped his chin. “Or rather, a machine made for a man on the go.”

He passed me to Master, sliding the lid I had claimed connection to further along the counter. Master gripped my frame and hauled me in the air. Without warning, we began to spin around. The ground swam; strange shapes coiled on the floorboards. I waited for the crash, the moment when I slipped from his hands and splintered in shards on the ground.
Suddenly, we stopped. Master held me at arm’s length, his breath crashing in and out, his high forehead furrowed at the eyebrows. I noticed a deep diagonal scar between them. Who had inflicted it? How had I not seen the gash before? Emotion clogged my throat. I felt such a rush of love for Master, such joy at the prospect of bearing witness to the minutiae of his face, that for a moment the air squeezed out of me.

Master avoided the shopkeeper’s eye as he returned me to the counter.

“Pardon me,” he said, reaching into his pocket for a handkerchief. “The typewriter is a present to myself—I’m excited.”

“Think nothing of it,” beamed the shopkeeper. “A highlight of the job, really. The other day I had a novelist in here, a published one. Writes romance, he said, or maybe crime. Anyway, bought himself a new Underwood for his birthday. Breaks out in song the second I open the case! He could sing too.” The shopkeeper whipped a cleaning cloth from his apron. “What’s your occasion?”

Master glanced at his feet. “I saw my hundredth customer at the clinic.”

“What profession are you in?” the shopkeeper asked.

“I am a veterinary surgeon.”

“A surgeon?” he said. “How fantastic.”

“It is a profession like any other.”

The shopkeeper nodded. Master laid his Schillings on the counter. The men turned towards me.

“Can you hear me?” I whispered.

Master smiled and gripped my lid. I had not a moment to quiz him further before he closed my case.
How I relished those first minutes alone with Master. As I clapped gently against his leg—though he walked fast along Rembrandtstrasse and never looked at me—a feeling of relaxation spread across my carriage. As it did, a thought crept up that perhaps Master could not hear me. I could neither confirm nor deny it. I already loved the man whose clammy palm clasped my handle. If our bond struggled to come into this world, then I would struggle each day to earn it.

I devoted myself to studying the spread of stubble on Master’s chin as we turned into Herrengasse. The street was more crowded, and as Master drew me to him I indulged in the strange warmth that emanated from his legs. I scanned the other pedestrians. It appeared Master had excited a group of women. They laughed and smiled at him; the boldest blew a coy kiss. Master nodded warmly at the group as we overtook them by Sigmund Freud Park.

Vienna—such beauty did she unveil at that moment. The high carved rooves of buildings, the statues flecked with gold; her sky had all but disappeared. Master fixed me comfortably along his thigh, and I tapped rhythmically against it as his long legs covered the cobblestones. We passed many ancient and intriguing shops, until finally we entered a building with great arched windows. A man with a waxen moustache, dressed in black and white, appeared inside.

“Herr Mensel—so good to see you. Your sister is waiting.”

“Very good, David. Thank you.”

The grandeur of the café was overwhelming. Resplendent marble columns rose to the high, domed ceiling—sweeping leather booths partitioned by tall, thriving palms fanned the floor in every direction. We followed David through the light-filled atrium, past the decadent cake cabinet, to a private table against a screen adorned with portraits of the Emperor Franz Joseph and his wife Sisi. And there, sitting with her
right leg wrapped twice around the left, delicately inhaling a cigarette, was Eva Lieber. Lustrous chestnut hair gathered loosely at the nape of her neck, her skin like freshly churned cream—how befitting that Master be related to a Goddess.

“Henry,” said Eva, rising. “I’ve so been looking forward to this.”

Master kissed his sister on both cheeks. “You look ravishing—do turn around.”

Eva did so shyly, glancing behind her.

“Where did you find this dress—have I seen it before?”

“I made it,” she said. “Rudolph doesn’t believe in wasting money on clothes.”

She laughed quickly, pushing a few gleaming hairs towards her face. “But I want to see your typewriter, Henry. Here,” she cleared a place on the table, “do unclip it.”

Master dabbed a linen napkin in a glass of water and carefully wiped the table.

“Such care,” Eva said, almost whispering.

Master grinned. “Is it stupid?”

“Of course not—typewriters are expensive.”

“It isn’t the money,” Master said. “It’s just—I so rarely treat myself.”

Eva stubbed her cigarette in the ashtray. “Do open the case—I am beside myself to see how they fit everything in there.”

Her voice faltered as she spoke. She sat and pressed a hand to her mouth.

“What is it dearest?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

Master smiled gently.

“Please, I’m happy to be here,” Eva said.

“It’s the café,” said Master, sitting quickly. “I should have suggested somewhere else. The Café Leopold.”
“It isn’t kosher either.”

Master’s face fell. “Of course. Eva, forgive me.”

“No no,” she said. “It’s Rudolph, that’s all. He left early this morning to make some sales outside the city. Even so, I feel as if he can see me—as if he knows.”

“He can’t and he doesn’t,” Master said. Joy tickled his cheeks.

“Look at you!” Eva burst out. “Grinning from ear to ear.”

“I reached my hundredth customer, did I tell you that?”

Eva shook her head.

“The typewriter is a present to myself.”

Her coal-brown eyes filled with tears. “Look at me, my brother achieves something and all I care about is myself.” She swept hair from her face. “I want to see inside the typewriter, Henry. I’ve never seen one up close before, at least not such a small one.”

David appeared and clicked his heels together. Master glanced up at him.

“Two slices of Sacchertorte, thank you David—”

Eva shook her head.

“Two or one, Herr Mensel?”

“I’m sorry—one, and two Grosser Brauners with a small jug of cream.”

“Certainly.” He bowed and departed.

Eva reached her slim hand toward the ashtray. “It isn’t just keeping kosher, Henry. I am trying to watch my figure.” She inhaled. “Rudolph—”

“Rudolph what?” Master said.

“He says I have put on weight around my middle.”

“Nonsense. You are divine as always.”

Eva’s eyes drifted to her lap. “Please, I’d like to see the typewriter.”
Master’s forehead creased. “If you say so.”

Avoiding his gaze, David returned the fork to the table. “If you will excuse me, Herr Mensel. Frau. Enjoy your torte.” He bowed and turned quickly on his heel.

Master shook his head. “I’ve been coming here since university days,” he said to Eva. “Surely David knew my background.”

Eva’s breath came quickly. “You’re fair, Henry. Perhaps he didn’t.” She reached gingerly for a bite of cake then thought better of it and fished in her packet for a cigarette.

At that moment, the Nazis on the back wall launched into the Horst Wessel song. Tables around the café joined them. Eva closed her eyes, her hand with the cigarette suspended in the air. Master reached for the small lighter on the table and lit it.

“We won’t let this spoil our time together.”

I licked my lips. “Perhaps you would allow me, Master, to lighten the mood.”

I gazed up at him. His eyes were trained on Eva—not a scrap of recognition for the words I had spoken flickered in them. Eva smoked hungrily, sifting crumbs through her fingers. Her cheeks twitched as if she were biting their insides.

“Eva?”

“Did you say something Henry?” She let the crumbs fall to the table. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t concentrating.”

“I said we won’t let them spoil our time together,” Master repeated.

Eva imbibed on her cigarette. “No we won’t,” she said. “It is nice to get out. The house is so dark. The ceilings are dreadfully low and have those horrid wooden beams across them.” She shook her head. “But of course, you know that.”

“I propose a toast,” Master said.
Eva brushed lightly at her cheek with the back of her palm and raised her coffee cup. “To your hundredth customer.”

“No, to good times and spending them together.”

Eva took a long, slow sip of coffee. “Can I tell you something?”

Master fastened my lid and placed his hands atop my case.

“Never mind,” she said. Eva blushed and took a morsel of cake. “I’m sorry—I’m a bit out of sorts today. My apologies.”

Master sat back in his chair. “What is it, Eva?”

She glanced at the packet of cigarettes, though the one in her hand had not burned through. “I don’t want to bore you….”

“You never bore me,” Master said.

“Really, it isn’t polite conversation.”

Master smiled. “Now you have to tell me.”

“Well, it’s my marriage,” Eva said quietly. “I’m quite unhappy.”

“What? Is Rudolph not a gentleman?”

“In public, perhaps, but in private he becomes quite someone else.” Eva swallowed. “It’s as if I cannot please him.”

“How ridiculous. Do you think many Viennese women can marry solely based on beauty, as you did?”

“Oh yes,” she whispered. “But I fear it has worked against me. He resents me for it. If only I had contributed a small dowry. Something.”

“What had we to contribute?” Master said. “Mama’s silver candelabra? Or perhaps one of Father’s horses so that he must drive the other twice as hard?”

The siblings caught each other’s eye and burst out laughing.
“It is fair enough,” Eva said, recovering herself and glancing towards the Nazis. “Rudolph works such long hours—what does he care for a wife with shiny hair?”

Master paused. “Has something happened?”

“Last night, he—”

“What, dearest?”

Eva reached for another cigarette. “He returned from a business trip. Lockenhaus, I think. Anyway, I’d saved money from the week to prepare his favourite dinner.”

“Tafelspitz,” Master said.

Eva nodded, her eyes filling with tears. “He was early, you see—he wasn’t supposed to arrive until six. The beef was still boiling, I was peeling apples—I wasn’t even dressed.”

“What happened, Eva?”

A tear slid silently down her cheek. She held the cigarettes out in front of her, one lit, one unlit. “He slapped me.”

Master began breathing heavily.

“It’s okay, Henry. It wasn’t hard. But it was the way he did it, standing right there looking into my eyes.” She dropped her head. “I thought he was going to kiss me.”

“When does he get back into town? I will have a word.”

“Please don’t. Anyway,” Eva wiped briskly at her cheeks. “Rudolph doesn’t take kindly to suggestion.”

“It won’t be a suggestion,” Master said.

Eva glanced at her brother. “It’s not just that.”
“What do you mean?”

“It’s nothing personal,” she said. “But Rudolph’s competitive, Henry. He sees relationships in terms of power. You earn more than he does.”

Master sneered. “I’m hardly making my fortune.”

“You don’t have to downplay your achievements,” said Eva. “I’m proud of you.” Her smile was touchingly genuine.

Master swiped brutally at the ersatz cream. “Perhaps. But how can Rudolph not see the value of what he has in front of him?”

The voice that responded was deeper than Eva’s, and masculine. “I quite agree.”

Startled, they looked up. The three Nazis had formed a semicircle around our table. The senior officer wore a black collar patch with an insignia of three silver pips.

Master looked him coolly in the eye. Atop my case, however, his hands began to sweat. “Can I help you, gentlemen?”

“Yes.” The Captain tilted his head. “Jews?”

“Roman Catholic,” Master said. He glanced at Eva. “My sister upholds the Jewish faith.”

The Captain looked Eva up and down. “Pity,” he said. With menacing grace, he retrieved a strand of her hair with the curl of his little finger. “You don’t think to dye it like the other girls?” He turned to his friend. “What does your wife use, Klaus?”

“Schwarzkopf Extra Blonde.”

The Captain turned back to Eva. “Or perhaps you enjoy to stand out.” He released her hair with a flick and began to laugh. Eva turned quite red. “The pharmacy on the way home, uh?”
Eva bowed her head.

“Did you hear me, Jew? I said the pharmacy on the way home.”

“She heard you,” Master said.

“How do you know?” The Captain was clearly enjoying himself. “Are you incest siblings?”

Master grasped my handle. “What I meant was, I would be grateful if you would address any concerns you may have to me.”

“Would you now?”

The short Nazi laughed. “He would, Hauptsturmführer.”

“In that case,” the Captain said, “perhaps you would tell your whore sister that a woman’s place is in the home, and that her smoking insults me. I would be, as you say, grateful.”

Master made to stand. Eva reached for his hand.

“Forgive me, Captain,” she said. “I smoke when I am nervous. I shouldn’t have come.”

The Hauptsturmführer leaned in close. “Do I make you nervous?”

“W-what I mean is, I will go. Please leave my brother to enjoy his cake.”

Hastily, she gathered her things.

The Captain enunciated his instruction clearly. “I don’t want to see you here again. Understand?”

Eva nodded. The Nazi threw his hand toward her cheek. At the last moment, however, he changed direction and clapped an officer on the back. The men strode towards the door. Eva watched them, shivering. When they had exited, she collapsed in tears.
“Bastards!” Master said. “How dare they intimidate us here.” He was breathing so rapidly I thought he may hyperventilate.

Eva took a few breaths to steady herself. “I should go.”

“No,” said Master. “We will stay and finish our cake.” He swiped savagely at his napkin. His dessert fork crashed to the floor.

“What if they come back?” Eva whispered.

Master flicked his chin toward the exit. “It is a game to them. They forgot us the moment they walked out the door.”

He looked to me. With my case fastened, there was no chance I might communicate. Instead, I focused on sending soothing thoughts through my damask.

Eva’s hand crept to her hair. “Perhaps I should dye it,” she said. “If I were blonde, they would never have thought to stop.”

“Perhaps.”

Master’s shoulders jerked once in the air as if a puppeteer had yanked a string on either side of his neck. I wondered what bitterness resided there, what injustice that had demanded physical form.

“The men object to your colouring,” he said after a moment. “Yet your hair is a feature of great beauty. To dye it would be sacrilege. Do you not think so?”

“I don’t know,” Eva said. “People notice me, when all I want is to fade into the background.” She looked at Master, her pupils grown so large they appeared black.

“You could dig out your old cloche hat,” he said.

“Perhaps if I shaved my head.”

She laughed, and in a moment Master joined her. But their hearts were not in it. David came to clear the table, and the siblings fell silent.
That night, Master and I returned to his apartment. The building was narrow and decrepit, its paint peeling in thick green ribbons, its windows desperately in need of polish. It clung to a backstreet of Josefstadt, a poor area that drew prestige from its proximity to the Votivkirche and university. On the thin interior stairs, Master began to hum. It was a haunting tune—a funereal hymn. Its feeling unsettled me. We reached the top step and Master drew a key from his pocket. The door opened to reveal a sea of deep, dark greens—green upholstery, green wallpaper, carpet as dense as a forest.

The apartment was cosier than I had expected, decorated thoughtfully and with a modicum of flair. The bookcase dominated the entire eastern wall. Lamps were positioned at intervals, not for show, I saw, but to assist in the business of reading. Master dropped his keys on the hallstand and walked to the bookshelf’s closest corner. Slowly, with the care of a lioness stroking her cub, he ran a palm over several spines. Chaucer, Dickens, Freud: I saw the authors were arranged alphabetically. The fact illuminated some core thing of my master’s being, an element of order or desire for it, a rigidity that found freedom in books. Watching him stand there, his fair hair lit by a shaft of light from the nearby lamp, his head tilted to read spines and whisper titles he had read and whispered no doubt a hundred times before, I was overcome by a fierce new love for him.

Master gazed up suddenly at the ceiling. And then in a moment I have never forgotten, he walked to the dark polished desk by the window, unfastened my lid, raised his long, cool fingers and began to type.
Dear Otto,

I bought a typewriter today, old man—a wonderfully portable Remington 5. It surprises me, but I find myself drawn now to make a confession.

You asked me many years ago, when I was finishing my studies, how that awful duel came about. I refused to tell you, as I refused to talk about it with anyone who asked.

I wish to do so now. I cannot explain why, other than to say that the burden of what happened has weighed on me over the years, and this typewriter provides finally a means to express it.

You will think me a pansy, Uncle, but I have decided to frame the telling as a story.

The duel

The door to the lavatory opened and two young men with books under their arms hurried to the sinks.

“Did you see their faces?”

“White! Even Isaac, for all his muscles.”

“Especially Isaac,” said the blond. “Looked like he was about to cry cos his mother pulled away her tit.”
The tall one laughed. “I’d like to see him at university tomorrow.”

The blond shook his head. “Not a chance, Lars.”

Lars bent over the sink and splashed water on his face. I swung the door of the cubicle open with such force that it crashed back on the door beside it. I lunged forward and pushed Lars’s back into the taps. There was a dull cracking noise. Lars spun around, his fist in the air, blood leaking down his chin. I spoke softly.

“The Eagle, 6 p.m. tomorrow. If I win, no more signs on the door, you hear me? We walk in just like everybody else.”

“You’re a dead man, Mensel,” the blond said, flicking his hand out from under his chin.

“Maybe. But if I win, no more signs. No more. We come to class, we do our dissections, we go home. End of story.” I offered my hand.

Lars shook it solemnly. “Until tomorrow, then.”

The blond sliced his hand horizontally against his throat. “Enjoy your night, Mensel. Best find yourself a woman.”

I turned and reached for the door handle. “Until tomorrow.”

*
The next day, I descended the many stone steps to the smoky cellar bar. A young man raised his arm and called to me.

"Henry, over here."

I turned. "Isaac?"

I walked over to the deep wooden booth and sat down. My cheeks felt loose. "We need to talk," I said.

Isaac nodded eagerly.

"I don’t want to involve you in this," I said. "I must send you home."

Isaac grinned. "You just try it."

"I’m serious," I said. "What are you doing here, anyway? You’re three hours early."

"I’ve been here since one," Isaac said. "Listen, I live in the world as you do. What you are doing tonight—what we will do—is important."

"Maybe," I said.

"Every Jew at the University of Vienna will thank you." Grinning, Isaac whipped a piece of paper from his bag. "I typed up an agreement spelling it out for Lars. No signs at the university, no violence—whatever I could think of. We’ll get him to sign it." Isaac tapped his watch. "We better get cracking. We’ve only got two hours left to practice."

I shook my head. "I won’t fight you."
“Just a warm-up,” Isaac said, suddenly serious.

“Lars isn’t bad, you know. You will thank me come 6 p.m.”

Lars arrived early. He was flanked by friends and admirers, about twenty in all. I had only Isaac. The group did not greet us but rather grunted in our direction. Lars brandished his sword before his friends and they took turns admiring it as if it were a steed. I sat erect at the booth with a glass of dark liquid in my hand. My breath felt ragged. Isaac’s eyes had a peculiar light in them as they darted about the room. He appeared to be smiling.

“You know if you kill him it would be classed an accident,” he said.

I looked at my hands. The palms were peeling, and I began to tear an opaque strip of skin from the joint above my wrist. “Would they then leave us alone?”

“They’d have to. Besides,” Isaac said, lowering his voice, “fencing is a risky sport. No one would ask questions.”

I ducked my head beneath the table and vomited quietly.

“Henry?” Isaac leapt to his feet. “No no, stay down— I’ll get a towel.” He ran to the bar and returned with a stack of cloth napkins. “Here,” he said.
I wiped my mouth slowly and sat up. “There’s so many of them,” I said. “I counted twenty-three on the way in. Where are our classmates? Where are Jacob and Ilse?”

“They’re scared,” said Isaac, shifting his gaze. “What matters is they support what you are doing.”

I reached my chin towards Isaac. “If something happens to me,” I said.

“You mustn’t talk like that.”

“All the same, if something happens, I want you to accept my degree next month. Will you do that?”

Isaac fixed his light eyes on me. “I will.”

At 6 p.m., Lars and I separated from our friends and met in the clearing beside the bar.

“First strike wins,” he said.

I nodded.

We walked backwards five paces, brandishing our swords.

Isaac clapped his hands in the air. “Begin,” he yelled.

Lars’s friends roared with laughter. He silenced them. And then he and I began to dance. I sprung my right foot forward, Lars sent his left foot back; we spun around, danced as if on an axis. My sword was an extension of my body. When I swung my shoulder forward and flicked my wrist, my sword sliced closed to Lars’s side. Lars leapt back, astonished. But the near strike
had focused him. His movements became sharper and more forceful. He leapt around the floor, jabbing his sword in bursts. I lost my balance and stumbled backward. Lars paused for a moment, then thrust his sword forward at an angle. I fell hard on my wrists. The barmen and other patrons held their breath. But not Isaac. He jerked out as if to offer me his hand. A woman in the crowd held him back. And then I pitched my weight forward and leapt to my feet. A few in the crowd cheered, and in the commotion Lars swung his sword forcefully at my head. It struck. I staggered backward, blood seeping from the diagonal gash between my eyebrows.

Then, the shot. It almost went unheard.

But I had seen it—how Isaac had marched up to Lars with a pistol, how Lars had stood and waited for the shot that would kill him, and when it didn’t, when Isaac somehow missed, how he had reacted swiftly with his sword. Blood from Isaac’s throat came thick and fast.

Silence descended. Lars’s sword hit the ground with a clang. The crowd dispersed, and we were left alone.

I ran to where Isaac had fallen. Though my own wound was deep, it had mercifully passed between my eyes. I gathered my friend in my arms. Isaac’s head collapsed on my shoulder. I did not take my eyes off Isaac, though blood from my wound seeped into them. My teeth were gritted—nonsensical whisperings came from my mouth.
I staggered up the cellar steps—ran for what seemed an eternity. Finally, I turned into the garden of my friend Jacob’s house. But we could not revive Isaac. Neither could we involve the police. And so we returned his body, at dawn, to his father’s house.

I arrived, devastated, at my parents’ apartment.

“Henry!” Mama didn’t turn from the oven as I entered the kitchen.

“I didn’t come home last night,” she said. “Did you stay at Isaac’s?”

“I stayed at Jacob’s.”

Mama whistled. “Oy, fancy.” She wiped her strong hands against her apron. “I’m afraid I can only offer you breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry,” I said.

Mama turned from the oven. Her hand flew to her mouth. “Henry—your eye!”

I inhaled. “I was kicked by a horse.”

“You stepped behind a fiaker?” she cried. “After everything your father’s told you?”

“Of course not, Mama. We were on prac yesterday observing a horse giving birth, and I got too close to her foal. It was my own fault.” My shoulders sank and I sat down.
“But there is no bruising,” Mama exclaimed. “A horse kicks you in the head and your face swells up like a grapefruit. Where is the swelling?” She moved closer and traced her finger along my hairline. “Are these stitches?”

I nodded.

“They don’t look right, Henry. Look at this big one here—far apart from the other little ones.” She sank into a chair. “Did you go to a doctor?”

I paused. “I do feel a little hungry, Mama.”

Mama stood. “Of course you do, you have suffered a trauma.” She retied her apron. “You will eat, and then we will talk some more. Your father will be home soon.”

“Are there any eggs this morning, Mama?”

Mama’s eyes filled with tears. “That’s my boy,” she said, “kicked by a horse in the head and still he wants eggs! I will go to the coop, darling, and get you some.”

Mama left, and soon after Father appeared at the doorway.

“Good morning, Henry.”

He strode to the table and sat down. He had begun to talk of his morning with his carriage, and how he had received a long fare from one side of the city to the other, when he stopped.

“What happened to your eye, son?”
Mama returned with a handful of apples, which she thrust into the air. "Heinrich! Thank goodness," she said. "Look what has happened to our son."

Father looked coldly at me. "What happened, Henry?"

"A horse kicked him in the head is what happened. He was at the university—in a class, darling?"

I nodded.

"In a class at the university, a practical class, watching a horse give birth, when—you said you bent down to get a look, Henry?"

I nodded again.

"When he bent down to get a look and the mare kicked him in the head!"

"Calm down, woman."

Mama bit her lip. "I told him his curiosity would one day get the better of him," she said more softly. "Did I not, Henry?"

"You did, Mama."

"But never could I have imagined this."

Father drew his seat sharply towards the table. "I don't have all day, woman. I must return to work. Where is breakfast?"

Mama threw her chin at the ceiling. "I forgot the eggs."

"Bread will be fine, Helga."
“Our boy needs his strength after such an accident. Here, drink this.” She handed Father a cup of black coffee. “I will dash out to the shed.”

Father clutched the mug roughly in his hand. He waited until she was gone. “You do know that I work with horses, Henry…”

His tone was frightening.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“… that I brought this family through the Great War—through the depression—on the back of a pair of horses,” he said. “That I was raised with my sister on a farm where we would ride every morning and after school long into the evenings…”

“Yes, sir.”

“… that this very morning,” he continued, “in order to provide food for us to eat, when it was still dark, I was already at the city stables brushing down my horses…”

I raised my eyes. “You do that every morning, Father.”

“Then do not tell me,” he said, thumping his fist against the table, “that your injury is from a horse! I will not have my son insult my intelligence under my own roof.”

I lowered my head.
“What is more,” Father spoke more softly now, and leaned in close, “your uncle was a national fencing champion. I know a duelling wound when I see one.”

“You are right, Father. Last night—” But I could not continue, and—

“Grandpa never told his parents what happened?” Sarah said.

I sent a barren surface to my lips. “I asked you not to interrupt me. Of course, Master did eventually reveal all.”

Sarah nodded, and I cleared my throat to continue.

The words of Master’s letter poured down and through me. I had hoped for a short fiction—a fantasy where a man and his beloved typewriter traversed continents. I had hoped I might act as an accomplice, that Master and I would be hailed by the literati when our first story, inevitably, got published. Yet my excitement turned to dust when I glimpsed the suffering in Master’s face. He gazed through the window, his breath shallow, tears threatening his eyelids. Around us, the apartment was dark save for the lamps that glowed in a triangle. It occurred to me I could play a nobler role in Master’s life as counsellor and confidante, that we could derive greater meaning from one another here than would have been possible in public life. I was ashamed the thought had not struck me sooner.

Master stood slowly. He grazed his forefinger along my spacebar—a caress I loved and would grow to anticipate—then fastened my lid. I had hoped to retire with him to the bedroom. Never again, I promised myself, would I place my own needs above his. With the decision, contentment filled me like steam.
The next morning, Master emerged in a suit and strode to the kitchenette to brew coffee. What a sight he was! Whatever could our day entail? He smiled and hummed, a different man than the one from last night’s letter. At 7.20 a.m., he clasped my handle and together we entered the street.

The crowded morning U-Bahn was rife with dishevelled Viennese, victims of the unseasonably warm alpine wind. The hot air served only to excite me. What festivities abounded—what pure and unceasing life. As we exited the station, the föhn everywhere about us, Master drew my case up and across his body to shield his coffee. I indulged in the sensation of boiling air against my wood. Beyond the low sun, the magnificent carved façade of the Stephansdom glowed dully as we crossed the street. I gazed at the high arched stones—at the tall spire and narrow, dusty sky above it…

The sound of neighing and several cries drew my attention. Master glanced up the street. One of the horses in a pair of fiakers—the Viennese horse-drawn carriages—had collapsed, and was taking the second horse and the carriage with it. We began sprinting toward them. With still some metres to go, the second horse buckled under the weight of the harness.

Master looked at me. He turned to the fiaker; his eyes darted about the cobblestones. Finally, he spied a raised patch of ground, secluded slightly from the crowd by a low fire hydrant, and stood me on it. At the last moment, he placed his coffee beside me.

Master addressed the driver. “I am a veterinary surgeon—how can I help?”

Tears spattered the man’s face. “Please,” he said, “Petrushka fell first, but now she has taken Rupert. Help me.”
Master turned to the second horse upon its knees. A rush of pain swarmed his face before he managed to dispel it. “We must separate them,” he said. “The strain could snap its spine.”

The fiaker did so.

“Now detach the harnesses from the carriage.” He glanced at me and ingested a quick, shallow breath. “Are the passengers injured?”

“There weren’t any,” the fiaker said.

At that moment, the second horse’s legs collapsed beneath it. It was too much for the fiaker; he threw his body over the felled animal and wept. The rough wind loosened his hat and hurled it down the street.

“Pull yourself together,” Master said, clutching at him. “Your weight could injure the horse further.”

A small crowd had gathered to watch proceedings. I wondered if Master’s valour struck them as it did me. He wiped something from his eye, allowing the fiaker to worm out from under him while he kept a firm grip on the horse.

“See my bag on the cobblestones?” Master said. “Look inside and find my stethoscope. Quickly now.”

Upon receiving the order, the fiaker staggered to his feet and retrieved Master’s bag.

“You saw action in the war,” Master said.

The fiaker nodded. “At the Battle of Caporetto, among others. I was a Corporal in the artillery regiment.”

Master placed his hand on the second horse. Pools had gathered in his eyes—he blinked them away. “I need you to clear your mind, Corporal. The animal can sense your fear.”
The man’s breath quickened. “They both can, can’t they?”

Master shook his head to signal that the other horse was dead. The driver fell weeping on the cobblestones. Master gripped his shoulders.

“We need to work now on saving this one.”

I looked to the first horse. Pale froth had gathered around its mouth; its long, brown legs lay rigid.

Master seized the stethoscope from the driver’s hand and placed it under the second horse’s mane. “We’re going to have a little listen,” he said. “That’s it, in and out gently through the mouth.”

Such was Master’s tone that the horse began breathing normally. In my rush of affection for him, I did not notice the crowd emerging from the U-Bahn exit. Master glanced at his wristwatch and then at me. His chin flicked towards the pedestrians. He made to stand, but saw the stethoscope in his hand and remained squatting.

“The horse may have broken bones,” Master said. “He needs to be seen immediately.”

“How far is your surgery?”

Master turned in my direction and frowned. “We aren’t equipped to deal with horses. Someone must notify the university veterinary school to send a truck. Do you know where it is?”

The man nodded, and in a moment had enlisted the services of a fellow driver.

The crowd closed in tightly. The fire hydrant was a small mercy, diverting pedestrians in a circle around me. But as numbers grew, suited and stockinged legs breached its outline. I saw Master’s free hand stretch towards me, then it was gone.
The kick from the passing pedestrian caught me unawares. I fell hard on the cobblestones, where I had the misfortune of encountering Master’s morning coffee. The cup rolled out from under me, leaving in its wake a sticky brown trail. The liquid, mercifully lukewarm, seeped into my damask. Until this moment, my physical limitations had remained hidden to me. But as I glimpsed the world now, an infant dependent on another, its vastness was terrifying. I cried out to Master, then remembered he could not hear me.

A woman stumbled and a slim porthole to the scene opened up.

“Keep the horse calm while I test for breaks,” Master said to the driver. Though his face bore distress, I was struck by his ease and naturalness. “A break you can fix, can’t you?”

“Yes, depending on where it is…” Master lifted the horse’s left hind leg slowly in the air. The horse flicked its tail. “Good—this leg is fine. The problem is he fell on his side, so I can’t check the two legs underneath.”

“There’s still this left front one,” the driver said.

Master nodded. His hand crept lightly to the leg. Once again, he lifted it up. The horse threw back its head, neighing violently. It attempted to stand.

“Rupert!” The cry escaped the driver’s lips. He snuck a glance at Master, then fell to stroking Rupert’s mane. The horse’s eyes rolled in his head. Again, it made to stand.

“Reach into my briefcase,” Master said. “You’ll find a needle and a bag of solutions. Give them to me.”

The driver did so.

“Select the blue vial—you see it there?—and fill the needle. I’ll talk you through it.”
The man froze.

“Start by taking the top off the needle.”

Momentarily, Master turned to Rupert and administered a brief yet soothing pat. The driver started to do as he was asked.

“Good. Now unscrew the blue vial and tip its contents into the needle. Be careful not to spill any.”

The driver gripped the vial between his bratwurst-sized fingers. Biting his lip, he began to pour. The solution neatly filled the needle.

“Excellent,” Master said. “Now replace the lid of the needle and hand it to me.”

“What’s it for?”

Master gripped the metal spike. “To calm the horse so it doesn’t injure itself further. Here, you pat his mane. Calm, remember.”

The driver nodded. In a flash, Master had deposited the needle deep in Rupert’s rump. The horse’s straining neck relaxed.

“Now we wait.”

Master checked his wristwatch then strode towards me. The U-Bahn exit spewed commuters in the opposite direction. Master turned on his side to pass, apologising under his breath, smiling strangely at a woman who ploughed into him. Finally, he reached the fire hydrant. He glanced with distress at the pools of spilt coffee on the cobblestones. No sooner had he shifted me to a fresh patch of ground than a truck skidded to a halt beside us, followed quickly by another. The crowd scattered. Two men emerged from each.

Master recognised one of them. “Still at it, eh?” he said.
“Henry—good to see you.” He slapped Master on the back. “Yes, still holed up at the university.”

I watched the four men run towards the horses. In a moment morning commuters surrounded me. Between a pair of stockinged legs, I witnessed the men lift the deceased horse and carry it to a truck. Their muscles bulged and strained. They grimaced so they would not curse. One man, the shortest, had taken up the horse’s rear. He sweated as the rump bore down on him. His knees swayed with each step. But through some feat of will he remained standing, and the horse was hoisted inside the truck. The men returned for the second animal.

The driver stood apart, his mouth opening and closing. I sustained another small kick. Though I managed to remain vertical, doubt flickered inside me. How small I stood in this land of giants; many failed to observe me on the cobblestones at all. My misgivings were disturbed, however, for Master appeared beside me. He whipped a handkerchief from his pocket, applied it gently to my case, then plucked me from the ground. We turned off Stephansplatz onto a quieter street lined with shops. Master glanced at his watch and broke out in a sprint. My keys crashed painfully inside my case. He cupped his ear towards me, then slowed to a hurtling walk.

We arrived at the surgery soon after. A dozen or so elegant Viennese commandeered the street in front of us. Sprouting from their coats or sitting indignantly on the ground were small furry animals. I watched as each of the clients positioned them in order to best display their ailments. One lady shook her dog’s ears, another waved her cat’s backside toward Master’s face.

“Frau Hartmann,” Master said, breaking into a trot. “My apologies. There was an emergency at the Stephansdom—a horse collapsed.”
“I may well collapse in a minute,” the woman snapped. “I have been standing here for forty-five minutes. Sophia is melting on the cobblestones.”

Master opened the door to the surgery. He proffered my case out in front of him slightly, then thought better of it and dropped me to his thigh. “Of course, do come in.”

“Praise the lord!” an older man said as the queue began to move.

“Herr Doktor Professor, how are you?” Master shook the Professor’s hand as he shuffled past. “My apologies for keeping a man such as yourself waiting.”

Once inside, Master threw his hat on the stand and raised me to the counter. The polished mahogany was a welcome respite from the sodden cobblestones of Stephansplatz. In fact, the surgery itself was a triumph of décor and civility. Prints adorned the clear white walls, the chairs were upholstered in blue silk, and a wall of windows framed a floral centrepiece on the large, low coffee table. Master’s gift, I decided, was none other than the gift of style.

“Come in and take a seat,” Master said to the stragglers. “Frau Hartmann, I will see you now.”

The woman hadn’t seated herself like the others but had remained standing at reception.

“I should expect a discount,” she said. “We all should.”

“Now now,” the Professor said, lowering himself into a seat. “When have we known Herr Mensel to be tardy? He said there was an emergency outside the cathedral…” A pensiveness gripped the waiting room as he descended the final few centimetres, “and so an emergency there surely was.”

“Thank you, Herr Doktor,” Master said. “In regards to today’s fee, I will think upon it. Perhaps we can negotiate a discount.”
Just then, the door swung open and the föhn deposited a well-groomed woman inside. Her cream skirt and blouse were offset by a small feminine briefcase. She smiled at Master and walked demurely behind the counter.

“Just in time, Ilse,” Master said. “We’ve had a late start to the morning. See that everyone is comfortable. And we may be reducing the fee for this morning. I’ll let you know.”

Ilse nodded pleasantly and took a seat behind the counter. My presence did not appear to surprise her. No sooner had Master departed than she relocated me to the bookcase. Her nails were immaculate, and I took some joy as the shiny crescents brushed my case. From the shelf, I had a view of the entire waiting room, and through the large windows onto the street. Most fortuitously, if I pressed my hinges into the back of the bookcase I could make out the conversation in Master’s treatment room behind me.

Frau Hartmann’s clipped tones carried clearly. Her dialogue grew tedious, and I found my attention drawn by a tall feathered hat outside the clinic. In a moment, the door flew open and crashed back on the wall behind it. I glanced with some annoyance at the doorway. The brazen figure there was but a girl of seventeen or eighteen. The lyrebird feathers on her hat bowed as she entered the clinic. Despite the dry wind, her face, framed by pale-brown curls and an enormous wrap-around mink coat, displayed little perspiration. Significant diamond earrings adorned her small ears, and the leather of her gloves, I noticed, was of the same duck egg blue as the strangely high heels upon her feet. She wore an expression somewhere between distress and distaste; spying the coat rack from the doorway, she clutched her small terrier to her bosom and aimed her coat. The mink landed precariously on top, causing
the stand to wobble before crashing to the floor. The young woman whimpered in anguish; stepping forward, she circled the fallen stand and approached the counter.

“Please,” she said. “My little Suzie has injured her leg. She needs to be seen immediately.”

Ilse’s blue eyes blinked. “I’m sorry Fräulein, but there is a large queue ahead of you. Herr Mensel was delayed this morning—”

“I’ve already left it too long,” the woman whispered. “Suzie fell last night. The situation is urgent—you understand.”

Ilse glanced at the splayed coat rack on the floor. “There’s nothing I can do,” she said more firmly. “I’m afraid you will have to wait.”

“Wait?” The woman blinked as if she had been slapped. “But these other mutts have little wrong with them.” She turned to the waiting room. “See that large one walking about the floor? My Suzie cannot walk on account that she has broken her leg.” The woman’s mouth opened—heartened, perhaps, by her outburst.

An older, smartly dressed gentleman with a demure grey cat rose and shuffled over to the counter.

The woman bit her lip. “May I help you?”

Ilse stood. “Is everything alright, Herr Doktor Professor?”

The Professor looked calmly between the women. “You are making a fool of yourself, Fräulein,” he said. “I suggest you take a seat.”

The woman’s dog emitted an opportune whimper. “See how she suffers!” she cried. “One needs little education to understand that my situation is simply the most urgent. A man who cannot recognise this has no right to call himself a Professor.”

“And a woman who would demand to be seen first,” the Professor said, “has no right to call herself a lady.”
Ilse blinked. “Please—I’m sure we can work something out,” she stammered.

“Fräulein, Herr Professor, won’t you take a seat.”

Neither one moved. The splayed coat rack lay between them; the Professor spied the corner of his light tweed coat beneath the woman’s mink. He stooped to retrieve it. The fur was heavier than he had anticipated. In vain, he attempted to tug his coat out from under it. Finally, he shifted the mink with a small kick.

“You may tell Herr Mensel,” said the Professor, righting himself, “that I have taken my business elsewhere.”

“Oh no, Herr Doktor. He will be but a moment.”

“My mind is made up. Young woman,” he said, turning, “you should be quite ashamed of yourself.”

The woman raised her chin, though her eyes projected something else. Her voice was quiet. “Good day, Professor.”

A dry wind whipped the room as the Professor exited. Patrons fanned themselves with hats. Sighs ensued. In the meantime, a man had appeared in the Professor’s place—my fine master.

“Herr Mensel,” Ilse said, rushing around the counter. “I’m afraid we have a problem.”

The young woman tipped her head as she appraised Master. Heat rushed to her cheeks and she raised a hand as if to disperse it. “Not a problem,” she said, “so much as an emergency.” She extended her hand. “Josephine von Bremer. I take it you are the vet here.”

Master let her gloved hand linger as he examined the felled coat stand. “What happened?” he asked.

“It was an accident,” Josephine replied.
“It was no accident,” said an elderly woman who until now had been looking at her lap. “She threw it carelessly over the others so that it fell, and didn’t have the decency to right it.”

Josephine gasped.

“Is this true?” Master asked.

“I suppose it is. But with good reason. My little Suzie has broken her leg.”

Master glanced at the dog. “I would say she has. Still, I would hardly call it an emergency. Earlier this morning a horse collapsed near the Stephansdom. That was an emergency. This is simply bad manners.”

“But it happened last night, see—she’s been in pain for hours. An infection could be spreading. I’d die if I lost her.”

The woman looked as if she might cry. Master stared at her. From the bookcase, I saw something twinkle in his eye, a light I had not yet seen. He stepped around the mink to right the coat rack.

“Is this fur yours?”

Josephine’s eyebrows raised. “Whose else would it be?”

“It is too heavy for the stand. I am afraid you will have to hold it.”

“What if Suzie sullies it?” Josephine asked.

Master smiled against his will. “It is a risk I am willing to take.”

“Fine, hand it to me.” She arranged it slowly on her arm. “You might consider purchasing a second stand. I assume you can afford it.”

Master’s cheeks twitched. “Make a note of it,” he said to Ilse.

Josephine smiled once—brilliantly—then clasped her dog to her chest and patted its quivering head.
Master turned to the expectant crowd. “I must apologise—I know how long many of you have been waiting. But I’m afraid this woman’s dog must be seen first.”

“But Herr Mensel,” said the woman who had spoken up earlier.

“My apologies, I will be as quick as I can. But with a break such as this there is a level of urgency.”

“Herr Mensel,” Ilse whispered, “the Professor has already left. What if others follow?”

Master patted her hand. “It can’t be helped. Knock on my door if things become desperate.”

He extended his arm to Josephine and they walked towards the treatment room. As he passed, Master’s eyes landed on the bookcase.

“My typewriter,” he muttered.

Without pausing, he drew me down beside his thigh. The fine silk of Josephine’s skirt billowed in and out. Though her behaviour had appalled me, I am ashamed to admit that I wished she might glance at my case—that I might present my better half, unsodden with coffee, and she may remark on its quality.

“The typewriter was a present to myself,” Master said, closing the door behind us. “I’ll bring it in with us, if you don’t mind.”

Josephine bit her cheeks to suppress a smile, then with a twirl took in the framed Klimt prints on the wall, the two lamps, and the elaborate armchair upholstered in decadent burgundy silk. She gasped once in delight.

“Where did you find this?” Her voice was stronger than before. “Are you a collector of the Habsburg period?”

Master coughed and placed me on the side table.
“I aspire to be—that armchair was the first piece I ever purchased. I have another couple residing at home.”

The lie caught me quite off guard. Though Master’s apartment was sensitively furnished, its armchairs were simpler, cruder pieces—less elaborate than functional.

“My father is descended from the Habsburgs through his mother’s line,” Josephine said. “Grandmamma was the Empress Sisi’s cousin.”

Though I had known him just twenty-four hours, I had no doubt the affect this information would have on Master.

He cleared his throat. “Yes—yes quite,” he said.

“Quite what?”

“Quite right. That strikes me as quite right.”

Josephine laughed, then bit her lip. “Anyway, I’ve always loved furniture from the period. Daddy has a large collection, as you can imagine.”

“Won’t you sit down,” Master said. “The chair is mainly there to create atmosphere, but I sometimes encourage certain clients—the elderly, those who followed me when I struck out on my own—to take a seat.”

Josephine affected a pause. “And what is my excuse?”

“Who knows?” he said. His voice was almost boyish. “Maybe your great-grandmother had this piece in her living room.”

“Oh I doubt it.”

“Let’s just say, then,” Master said, “that your heels are very high.”

A cushion of air, significant enough to waft past my case on the side table, rose up as Josephine fell upon the seat. Suzie released a piercing cry. Josephine sprang forward.

“I can’t believe I did that.”
Master cleared his throat. “Place the dog on the examining table, if you would, and keep hold of her.”

Josephine obliged.

Gently, Master examined the leg. Suzie gazed up at him, and I was struck for the second time this morning by his gift with animals.

“She likes you,” Josephine said.

“It’s a good break,” replied Master, “across both the femur and the tibia.”

“The who and the who?”

“The femur and the tibia,” Master said. “If you think of it as similar to a human leg.”

“I was never much tack at biology,” Josephine said. “My tutor was a professor of some note from Berlin. I still regard him as the most tedious man in the entire world.” She laughed quickly. “Perhaps it was the accent. It sounds much more interesting when you explain it.”

“I doubt it,” said Master, clearly pleased. “The point is, Suzie has broken both of the major bones in her right hind leg. As a result, the leg will take a good while to heal.”

“How good a while?” Josephine asked.

“Several months, maybe longer.”

“Several months!” A whistle of air escaped her. “She’ll be a terror—she nips when she’s cranky. My fingers are her favourite.”

Master cleared his throat again. “Fingers often are.”

“She’s too like her mistress,” Josephine said. “If something doesn’t go her way, she becomes quite unbearable.”
Her hazel eyes filled with uncertainty. She slid her bottom lip over the top and blew a curl from her face. It was an odd gesture, endearing and unconscious. Master gazed fondly at her lips.

“I must apologise for my behaviour in the waiting room,” Josephine said, her voice low and confiding. “Suzie woke me this morning with her whining—the maid hardly had time to serve coffee. I’m horrible if I don’t eat in the mornings. Puts me in quite a state.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Master said. “Tell me, how did Suzie come to break her leg?”

“I was having a little party,” Josephine said, “seeing Daddy was out of town, and things got rather raucous. I put Suzie on a table to show my friends and she fell. At least I think she did—maybe someone pushed her.”

Master frowned. “Someone pushed her off the table?”

“Not on purpose, of course. But my friend Gustav—a fantastic poet, actually—is fond of absinthe. He loses all control of his limbs—it’s quite hilarious. To be honest, I can’t remember what happened.” She broke off. “I should have brought her in sooner.”

Silence ensued.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Josephine burst out. “I’m the picture of responsibility. It’s my artist friends. One can never predict what they’ll do.”

Master managed an air of nonchalance. “Perhaps if you started by securing her in some sort of cage before these parties started…”

“She’d hate me for it! Suzie’s the life of the party—truly. Sometimes I think my friends come just to see her.”
“Well the leg will be out of action for a while, I’m afraid,” he said. “I need you to give me your word you’ll keep her off it.”

“I never give my word,” Josephine said. It was a line she was clearly proud of. “Words mean so little these days.”

Master’s tone carried some admiration. “You live by your actions, then?”

“Wholeheartedly.”

The pair stared at each other for a moment.

“You must be half my age,” Master stammered out of the blue.

“What is your age?”

“Thirty-six.”

“Then yes, exactly. I’m eighteen.”

Josephine’s statement brought on a small coughing fit in Master. He attempted to dispel it. “Fräulein von Bremer, the course of action I recommend is to place the dog’s leg in plaster. My assistant arrives at midday—if you wouldn’t mind returning then, he will see to it. After that, your job will be to keep Suzie off the leg. If you must place her in a cage to achieve this, then I strongly recommend it.”

“Cages are barbaric,” Josephine said. “Suzie sleeps in her own room. Now that she is injured, of course, I will ask Fina to move her bed to my room.”

“At least for the next week or so,” Master said. “I’m going to give her an injection now to reduce the swelling. It should also help with the pain. I wouldn’t expect she’ll bother you much today after that.”

Josephine nodded. “Then there’ll be no need for me to return to the surgery after her leg is set?”

Master’s forehead was a map of perspiration. “I wouldn’t say so, no.”
Minutes later, Master plucked me from the side table and the three of us approached the counter. It was only later—years later, when we had already escaped to New York—that I would pinpoint this moment as the time when Master began to draw strength from me, subconsciously at first, of course, but afterwards more and more actively. It was the moment when I transitioned from machine to heartfelt ally, after which he carried me everywhere. At the reception desk, however, as Master raised me to the ledge, I wondered at my strange relocation.

“Ilse, Fräulein von Bremer will be returning at midday to have her dog’s leg set in plaster,” Master said. “She will settle her account then.”

The hostility of the waiting room had sent Ilse quite pale.

“Several patients have left, Herr Mensel—some of your regulars.” She lowered her voice. “And Frau Hartmann said the most horrid thing on parting.”

“I’m sorry, Ilse, this morning couldn’t be helped.”

“We’ve been lucky to sail under the radar this far,” she said, her voice faltering. “Occurrences such as this draw unnecessary attention.”

Master stayed perfectly still. “We’ll discuss it later, Ilse.”

“I’m sorry but it’s true, isn’t it?” she stammered. “Just one grandparent, no matter whether you’ve converted?”

Josephine turned to Master, her expression benign and unreadable. “That’s what I hear.”

Blood fanned Master’s cheeks. He raised his hands in a gesture of defeat.

“Excuse me,” called the elderly woman from the waiting room. “Some of us here are waiting?”

“Fräulein, I wish you the best of luck with Suzie’s recovery,” Master said.

I could see the effort it cost him to stay calm.
Josephine raised her small chin up to Master. Despite its beakish quality, the action contained some dignity. “Thank you for extending your every service, Herr Mensel.” She reached for her mink. “Guten morgen.”

A sigh of relief swept the waiting room as she exited.

“What a terrible woman,” Ilse whispered. “She couldn’t care less about the mess she’s caused.”

“Ilse, Fräulein von Bremer was a customer,” Master said. “What’s more, she is descended from the Empress Sisi.”

Ilse muttered something under her breath, then pasted on a smile and turned to the waiting room. “Herr Bielski, I believe you were next.”

And so the morning proceeded. Though Master’s job was repetitive, the variation in each animal’s ailment was sufficient to hold my interest. In any case, Master himself was the animal in which I was truly engrossed. He appeared distracted and ill at ease. By early afternoon, he had developed a nervous tick in his right leg which caused it to beat the ground. His competence never faltered, however, and by evening I was full to bursting with pride.

Finally, we emerged from the treatment room. Ilse had departed earlier, and without further ado Master retrieved his hat from the stand and we entered the street. A woman in an expensive black convertible signalled us. The wind cloyed at the lyrebird feathers of her hat. It took a moment before I recognised these feathers as belonging to Josephine. From their downtrodden angle, I extrapolated that she had been there for some time.

“Fräulein von Bremer.” The corners of Master’s lips curled into a smile.
“Herr Mensel, I hope you don’t mind. I forgot to tell you something earlier. Rather, I forgot to invite you—” Josephine stopped, bemused, and threw her gloved hands in the air. “What I’m trying to say is that I would be honoured if you would accompany me to my father’s house for dinner. He is back from his business trip and longing to meet you, after I told him of your exceptional treatment of Suzie.” She smiled and for an instant looked vulnerable. “That is, if you don’t already have plans.”

“I would be delighted,” Master said.

I was taken aback.

“And what are you carrying with you?” Josephine asked.

“My new typewriter. Perhaps you don’t remember—I showed you this morning.”

Any hope I had held that she had noticed me or thought of me afterwards collapsed.

“I was in such a state,” Josephine said, looking horrified. “I do remember—as we walked in, yes that’s right.”

Master swung his legs over the low door, and in a moment we were speeding through the streets. Josephine had a frightening disregard for road rules. Whilst I endured palpitations, Master leaned forward in his seat and gripped the dashboard like a boy.

“Fantastic,” he said. “The föhn is quite different when experienced by car.”

The statement highlighted the fact he did not own an automobile himself. Master sought to qualify it.

“I don’t drive on account of living so close to the Innere Stadt.”
“Why ever not?” Josephine said, a fierce light in her eyes. “I live just up on the Ring, but I abhor walking. Too much damn horse crap.”

She revelled for a second in the multiple curse words, then turned to garner Master’s reaction. He did not blink.

“But surely the chances of stepping in it are rather small?”

“Proportionate to the destruction it causes my shoes, it isn’t worth it. The dung turns the silk the foulest shade of brown.” She flashed Master a grin. “There, now you know everything about me.”

Each comment appeared to affect the other physically. Distanced from the morning’s trauma, Josephine was feistier and more humorous. Master giggled in a way I could see he wished he could control.

My musings were dispatched suddenly. From many metres back, I saw the approaching traffic light flash amber. Josephine crashed her foot to the accelerator. We narrowly missed colliding with an intersecting fiaker.

“Maniac!” she shouted. “Honestly, fiakers are the worst drivers. No wonder that horse you treated this morning collapsed—his owner probably rode him into it.”

I observed the twitching of Master’s jaw.

“My father drives horses,” he said finally. “He has done for forty years.”

Josephine whipped her head around. “I’ve put my foot in my mouth, haven’t I? I have a habit of doing it. Daddy’s called me Empress Foot ever since I was a girl.”

Terror stretched her cheeks into an odd smile. “Anyway, I bet your father picks up after his animals. Not like most of the others.”

Master held his tongue. “Whereabouts on the Ring?” he asked after a moment.

“Very much. Mozart and Strauss in particular.”

“Yes, I saw Cossi Fan Tutte last month. It was quite hilarious,” she said.

“Strauss, though. Isn’t he renowned for being boring?”

Master laughed. “I’ve never thought so.”

“Of course I still go. Daddy has a wonderful box close to the stage, and we drink champagne at interval.” She looked with some shyness at Master. “The French make the best wines, don’t you think so?”

Master nodded.

“Salon’s my favourite, and after that Dom Perignon. What about you?”

“Moët,” said Master slowly, referring to the only champagne house it appeared he had heard of.

“Their style’s a bit manufactured for my taste. It starts with such potential but falls flat around the mid-palette—then it’s doubly bad for having got your hopes up.” Josephine snuck a glance at Master. “Listen to me.”

“What?”

“Debating the merits of fine wine. Mother was notorious for sending Daddy’s friends to sleep that way.” She stroked her neck. “It seems some of her has rubbed off on me.”

“Has your mother passed away?” asked Master.

“Practically. She ran off with Prince Andrew of Greece when I was nine, and I haven’t seen her since.”

The admission lent Josephine a certain softness, at least on the diagonal. She was unsubtle, her curls clung too firmly to her face and there was a good deal too much flesh on her. She had something though, some vivacity or electric grip on life
that quite made up for it. Instinctively I did not like her, and yet I could not look away.
Sarah woke to a cool, spreading darkness. The drapes blocked light and memory, it seemed; she had no idea where she was. She tried wrenching her mind to the surface but it floated as if beneath gauze. She sat up. The room came into focus, vast and freshly amazing, so different from her parents’ bedroom with its quaint window seat and pale blue walls. The thought dumped its pain afresh on Sarah.

And then a sudden, chilling memory freed itself from the realm of dream. Last night, Sarah realised with a jolt, she had heard the old typewriter talk.

Sitting paralysed against the bed head, Sarah weighed her options. One: she’d gone completely fucking bonkers. This, here, was the likeliest option. Two: the typewriter, against every law of physics, did somehow talk. Three: a situation where number one, occurring first, had enabled number two.

Reason alone could not solve Sarah’s predicament. She needed an outside source to validate either option—to weigh her sanity one way or the other. Her grandparents’ story from last night flicked, once, through her thoughts. The fact it had only done so now—that she couldn’t remember a single thing Remington had narrated without running to her laptop—filled her with new, pressing guilt.

Sarah had always possessed the curse of insight. She was not only aware of, but could acknowledge, the contradictions in her own nature—the obsessive streak that caused her to devote shameful amounts of time to lining up items on her desk (the pink stapler beside the notepad beside the buckled ship-motif coaster that threatened to spill each glass she balanced on it but which reminded her of another time, a happier time, with an old and kind-hearted boyfriend), while simultaneously flourishing in a bedroom of knee-deep clothes. But where along the line—at which
exact point in the last three years—had she misplaced the single thing she’d ever valued in herself: her good, kind heart?

The question was so distasteful to Sarah it propelled her legs over the edge of the bed. And there on the desk, smaller than she remembered—innocuous even—sat Remington’s case. She had the impulse to fling it open. But what would that prove? If his mouth appeared she could still very well be crazy. If not, that didn’t settle things either. Remington’s mouth could come and go with sleeping cycles, moods, time of day. Sarah studied her bare feet on the rug. All she could think was to ask Ann or Solomon. But her relatives already considered her unstable. Imagine their reaction if she informed them the typewriter they had lent her could talk?

Sarah pulled herself upright. The movement unlodged something in her, a way forward she’d left unconsidered. The best way to proceed, clearly, was to take a fact from the story Remington had told her last night—one she couldn’t have known independently—and prove or disprove it. Sarah scanned her mental diary. It wasn’t as if the day were bursting with plans. Besides the few staff, the apartment was probably empty. This city had a library—in fact she’d heard of it. She would place her sanity in its hands.

Sarah threw on a pair of jeans and an old hoodie. She wished she were the sort of person to whom silk and cashmere came naturally, but her fabrics were denim and polyester. The luxury of her surrounds wasn’t going to magically permeate her suitcase. Avoiding the carved standing mirror by the ensuite and Remington’s case on the desk, Sarah grabbed her satchel and pulled open the heavy wood doors.

The sound of music and buoyant voices filled the corridor. Good Christ, Sarah thought, Ann and Solomon are entertaining. Her immediate thought was how best to flee. She was in no state to toast captains of industry or laugh at insider jokes. Sarah
remembered the Australian Chamber Orchestra fundraisers she’d attended with her mother—the way they’d looked forward to them, planned outfits, quaffed free champagne. For a moment, she considered returning to her room to change. But the memory was from a different life, one in which the sound of another’s laughter didn’t stab her with physical pain. She wouldn’t inflict her company on Ann and Solomon’s friends. Not when she’d likely lost her mind.

The party’s location was everything. If Sarah were lucky it was in the dining room and she could slip out undetected. Noise levels, however, confirmed the party to be in the foyer. The party, and the front door. Sarah was more practised than most at being invisible. Three years spent grieving largely alone and indoors could do that to a person. Sometimes, she’d stare in the mirror and see nothing—have to focus on the physical outline of her nose, cheeks and mouth to remind herself she was there. Still, it was unlikely Sarah could dash through the event with a wave and a smile. The kitchen might house a service elevator, though, and if she could reach it her low BMI might finally be put to use. She crept past the corridor’s tall windows, braced and turned into the foyer.

The event that greeted Sarah was disturbing for its size and elegance. At least fifty exquisitely dressed guests milled about. Scones and finger sandwiches exploded from two laden round tables, while a drinks waiter served rosé champagne and coffee from a counter by the windows. Jewel tones abounded—drenching the women’s dresses, draping artily around the speakers, spattering the men’s bow ties. In the far corner where the sofa had been, a small wooden stage proffered the passionate embrace of a male and female ballerina. Sarah’s stomach clenched. As yet, no one had seen her. The conversation was blessedly noisy, and the music—Wagnerian in a
way that struck Sarah as a bit rich for two in the afternoon—was resonant and consistent.

She pressed her back into the wall. Something behind her—an artwork of such juvenile simplicity it had to be the work of a master—wobbled and then stood still. Sarah edged towards the door. Up ahead, a statuesque woman in a strapless fuchsia dress posed a problem. She was too close to the wall—Sarah would have to speak to her or dart in front. The woman turned, attuned perhaps to a higher frequency. Sarah was horrified to see Uncle Solomon standing beside her.

“Sarah,” he said. “We didn’t want to wake you.”

Sarah grimaced in a way she hoped could pass for a smile. “You didn’t.”

Her uncle gestured at the woman beside him. “May I introduce Lady Elisabeth Adelstein.”

Lady Elisabeth—six feet at least with a suntan that spoke of summers in Monaco—smiled and studied Sarah’s face. Against the craving of her every cell, Sarah felt herself stand out. Felt the crass faux-shearling hood on her jumper, the mountainous ridges on her lips draw attention and, God help her, sympathy. She grimaced again and muttered hello. The greeting was so substandard she added a little bow.

But as Sarah stood, she happened to catch sight of Lady Elisabeth’s eyes. Behind them was a look Sarah had grown accustomed to greeting in the mirror. That this magnificent woman could harbour such grief disturbed Sarah. More disturbing still, no one else appeared to have noticed. Before she could articulate these thoughts, however, one of Ann’s toned arms swept in from nowhere to clasp the Lady’s shoulder.
“Elisabeth!” she cried. “You’ve met my niece, I see.” Ann glanced at Sarah then stepped in front of her. “Come, let’s refill our glasses.”

The women linked arms and turned away. Sarah might have considered this unusual—they had, after all, turned their backs on Uncle Solomon as well—but Lady Elisabeth’s haunting gaze had filled her head.

“In case you were wondering, we’re hosting a fundraiser for the Holocaust Memorial Museum,” Solomon said. “We do it every year.”

Sarah surveyed the sea of seriously bejewelled women and suave, shorter-looking men.

“It may seem an odd crowd, I suppose,” he went on. “But these are the high rollers. The big fish.”

Sarah had heard of the wealthy New York Jewish families—the Rothschilds and such—but never considered she’d be in a room with them. What’s more, why would Solomon, who’d expressed such distaste when she’d brought up the Holocaust last night, surround himself with those likely descended from its victims?

“So you host this every year?” Sarah asked, aiming for a casual tone and falling short.

Solomon nodded. “Since I met Ann. Before that I wasn’t so involved. But Ann encouraged me to acknowledge my roots. Someone in my position should give back.”

Sarah saw a swamp of perspiration on her uncle’s nose, and how it amplified a clot of spindly red veins she otherwise mightn’t have noticed.

“There you are.” Ann darted in between them. “Sarah,” she said, the muscle tone of her arms now somehow offensive, “what about we duck into my closet and find you something more…” She flapped the hand not holding her champagne. “More fitted?”
“She looks fine, Ann,” Solomon said, his tone uncertain. “Not everyone subscribes to your vision of aesthetics.”

Ann snorted, almost elegantly. “Nearly everyone.”

Sarah, torn between the need to escape and the odd sense she belonged here, said, “Is everyone here related to a survivor?”

Solomon glanced around. “Pretty much.”

“We don’t talk about that here,” Ann said, shooting a look at her husband.

“But isn’t that why you’ve gathered?”

“We’ve gathered to raise funds. Most here have family who died in the Shoah, but they don’t come here to dwell, they come to enjoy themselves. $100 000 buys them that much.”

The figure knocked Sarah’s mouth open. “Each person here donated $100 000?”

“At least,” Ann said. “Many three times that amount. Lady Elisabeth just slid us a cheque for $1.2 million—we’re naming a special foundation in her honour.”

“Not everyone donated so much,” Uncle Solomon said. “There is that one man—”

“Oh, him.” Ann’s eyes darted through the crowd. “There he is, sitting conspicuously by himself. His suit’s atrocious—atrocious, Sol—like he picked it up off the floor.” Ann glanced at Sarah’s hoodie. “You should go talk to him.”

“Ann.” Solomon shook his head.

“What? She should.”

Sarah turned to the slight, crumpled-looking man sitting by himself at the window. Her heart lurched. Over the years, a space in her chest had opened up to
allow for the movement—an inevitable side-effect of her glimpsing frailty. “Aside from the obvious,” she said, “what’s so different about him?”

“Every year we pick someone at random from the small timers and give them the chance to attend.” Ann studied the dancers and frowned. “We told this guy to bring a guest but he said he didn’t have anyone.”

Solomon pecked his wife’s cheek. “Not everyone’s as lucky as us.”

“Sure, whatever.” Ann winked at her husband. “Here,” she waved down Sascha the maid. “Why don’t you go sit with him and have a chat? Sascha will get you a plate of food.”

“I’d love to,” Sarah said, and actually she would have—vulnerability touched her in that way—“but I’ve got to get to the library.”

Ann glanced sidelong at Sarah. “The library?”

“Just some research I’ve got to do.”

For some reason this captured Ann’s full attention. “Stay,” she said. “Stay and have a good time.”

“It would mean a lot to us,” Solomon added. “We weren’t as welcoming last night as we could have been.”

Ann focused her startlingly emerald eyes on Sarah.

“I’ll stay,” Sarah said. She couldn’t say why—there was slim chance the crumpled man could help her book—but she wanted to meet him. “The library’s probably open late anyway.”

“Probably,” Ann said.

Solomon’s round, striking face looked genuinely conflicted. “Then let me introduce you to Bruno Weasal.”
The fact her uncle knew the man’s name and pronounced it without condescension filled Sarah with admiration. Ann smiled—another task performed to her satisfaction—and sailed off into the crowd. Solomon led Sarah to the leather ottoman by the wall of windows.

“Sir?”

Bruno was gazing out over the park and hadn’t seen them approach. He leapt up. “Can I sit here?”

“Of course,” Solomon said. “In fact, I was just coming to introduce myself. I’m Solomon Mensel, and this is my niece Sarah.”

Bruno performed the same odd sort of bow Sarah had offered to Lady Elisabeth. She wondered—cruelly, silently—if hers had looked so ridiculous.

“An honour, sir,” Bruno said, the bald tip of his head rising from the level of Sarah’s waist.

“It’s an honour to have you,” Solomon replied. “My sources tell me you are a long time supporter of our cause.”

Bruno’s thin face beamed. “A little every year, like my father before me.”

“It’s people like you who are the heart of our organisation.”

Bruno clutched his heart in a way that would have been dramatic if it weren’t so genuine.

“My niece arrived yesterday from Australia,” Solomon said, checking behind him. “She’s researching a novel she’s writing on the Holocaust.”

“A writer?” said Bruno, breathless. “I love writers!”

“I’m more of an emerging writer,” Sarah said, wishing her uncle hadn’t mentioned it. “I haven’t had anything published.”
“But you will,” Bruno said, his eyes luminous. “You’ll chip away at it. You have that look about you. You know Art Spiegelman? Like him, but female.”

“No, no graphics,” Sarah said.

“No graphics?"

She shook her head.

“Oh well, just writing then.”

Solomon was staring at Bruno as if he’d discovered a gemstone in a bucket of filth. Clearly, he didn’t meet this unfashionable enthusiasm in the circles he moved in. With regret he said he’d leave them alone to talk.

Bruno’s benevolent, beakish face smiled with the eagerness of a dog. As they sat, Sarah noticed that his suit was not only crumpled but strewn with cat hair. His brown eyes twinkled with unabashed gusto.

“Will you look at that?” Bruno said, nodding at the view of Central Park. “I grew up playing by the ponds, but from here? All new.”

The two sat in silence a moment, punctured only by Sascha delivering the requested plate of food. As Sarah accepted it, she felt a slither of curiosity rise in her, the need to pry open Bruno’s stories. This, she told herself, was what writers did.

“So you mentioned your father,” Sarah said. “Did he survive the Holocaust?”

She felt dirty, almost, raising the subject so blatantly and with such stunning self-interest. Bruno’s eyes filled and something cool leeched in her stomach, until she looked closer and saw him quivering with excitement.

“My mother too,” he whispered. “Boy oh boy, do I have some stories.” A tear threatened his right eyelid. “Do you want to hear one?”

Sarah remembered Remington, the library, her mental health. She wasn’t proud of herself when she said, “Maybe another time.”
It killed her to see Bruno nod without any surprise. He was used to no one paying him attention.

“"In case you change your mind," he said, fishing in one pocket of his pants. A used tissue and two boiled sweet wrappers fell to the glossy Herringbone floor. “My card,” he said eagerly. “Maybe I could help your writing.”

“What do you do?” Sarah asked.

“I run my own business,” Bruno said. “Most days? Dead. But then one day—bam! Three customers.”

The hopefulness in his face touched something inside Sarah she thought had long since gone away.

“I’m busy this afternoon,” she said. “But tomorrow maybe.”

“You like tea or coffee better?” Bruno asked.

“Don’t go to any trouble.”

“No trouble,” he said.

“Coffee then.”

Bruno nodded twice. “Any time, I’m there all day.” He glanced at his watch.

“Three already! Four is rush hour at the shop.”

He leapt up, extending a slender hand to Sarah. His fingers were blackened and worn.

“So good to meet you,” she said.

Bruno smiled luminously, pointed at his card, then turned to weave through the party. Sarah couldn’t believe that minutes ago she’d asked Ann what was different about this man. Bruno was like no one she had ever met. She watched him approach Solomon by the food table. Surprisingly, her uncle was alone. The men shook hands and Solomon clapped his arm around Bruno’s shoulders. They stood like this a
moment, then Bruno headed for the door. When he reached it, he turned and waved. His hand surged back and forth above his head. Sarah saw her uncle wasn’t going to respond and jumped in instead. Bruno caught her eye; his arm flapped harder. After he left, a feeling prickled Sarah’s chest, a foreign, nourishing thing like wonder.

When Sarah glanced back at her uncle, he was navigating the outskirts of the party. She recognised his tensed shoulders and darting eyes. He was trying to escape. But from whom or what? This event wasn’t only Solomon’s party, it was his cause, his fundraiser, his giving back, though when Sarah thought about it, when she sifted through the jetlag to recall their conversation last night, it was a cause he’d framed as a burden. Solomon had made it halfway around the room unnoticed. But the empty stage stood in his way. A group perched close to it, cooing over the dancers who sipped mineral water as Ann ordered them about. Sarah watched her uncle weigh his options, then leap up with a swift, forward step that swept him onto the platform and had him clear of it in seconds. Solomon’s stealth was kind of impressive.

He arrived at the drinks table and asked the waiter for a cup of coffee. While the man turned to the gleaming red machine to begin frothing milk, Solomon drew a slim, silver hip flask from his pocket. He scanned the party, waited for his coffee, then turned his back on the waiter and spiked it with a large nip. He refastened the lid and slid the flask into his pocket, then gripped the table and sculled the cup in one.

It wasn’t so strange, Sarah supposed, for a grown man to spike his coffee. Had her uncle done it in plain sight she would have thought no more about it. But the act seemed somehow desperate. Without thinking, Sarah stood—leaving her untouched plate on the ottoman—and approached Solomon. The perspiration from his nose had seeped to his cheeks and forehead. Sarah extended her hand, patting his arm in a gesture of familiarity she immediately regretted.
“Would you like some company?”

Solomon’s eyes surveyed her face. “I fucking hate these things,” he said. He squinted, surprised perhaps to have spoken truthfully.

“But you’re raising money,” Sarah said.

She waited for Solomon to continue, ready for a lecture on the perils of privilege, ready to smile and nod if he’d just keep talking so she wouldn’t have to. Instead, he wiped the sleeve of his suit jacket roughly against his forehead. He was perspiring heavily, not just on his face but on his neck and hands. Sarah had just struck on something to say when Solomon reached out to the table to steady himself. It was lower than he expected. He stumbled. As he did his empty coffee cup flew from its saucer. In a moment of uncharacteristic coordination, Sarah caught it. She waved to Sascha—a wave she wouldn’t have been comfortable performing twenty-four hours ago and regrettably, still wasn’t. The maid arrived in an instant. She took one look at Solomon’s face and threw an arm around his waist. Somehow, through the act’s spontaneity or some other miracle, the pair looked to be sharing a private joke. Sascha even laughed as she led Solomon from the room.

Sarah was astonished. She’d thought the moneyed were primed for scandals, but the guests—save Ann, who shot a glance at her husband as he hobbled off—were oblivious to the state of their host. A strange incident, nothing probably, her uncle letting off some steam. Sarah could finally leave for the library.

At the front door she realised she’d left her laptop back in her room. She could have kicked herself. The suite was a no-go zone. Remington’s case was just too tempting. She’d open it, fall prey to his verbosity, end up believing that a talking typewriter was normal. Sarah closed her eyes and imagined the stray curls and endearing smoker’s rasp of her psychiatrist. Her doctor would spin things positively,
remind Sarah how she’d held up her end of conversations, met the delightful Bruno, and saved her uncle from shattering not only his coffee cup but his dignity on the wooden floor. That Sarah could conjure mini counselling sessions in her head was testament to the time and money she’d spent in her doctor’s small, yellow room since her parents’ death.

Sarah doubled back along the wall. The painting she’d disturbed was crooked. She straightened it without breaking her stride. The view of Long Island Sound from the corridor windows didn’t even draw her gaze. She arrived at the wooden doors to her room and latched them open. Without privacy, she wouldn’t be tempted to linger. The laptop was on the desk. The computer’s sleek lines had always struck her as the pinnacle of human progress. But compared to Remington, the silver machine seemed somehow cold and mechanical. In Remington’s bulk, Sarah saw reflected the comfort of Sascha’s bosom, Bruno’s unfashionable enthusiasm, a preference for all that was good and slow in the world over that which was fast and easy.

Without knowing why exactly, aware only of some feeling of new tenderness, Sarah slid her hand through Remington’s handle and lifted his case. A label on its underside caught her eye. In her jet-lagged haze last night, she hadn’t seen it. Hans’ Schreibmaschinen-Shop, it said—88 Schiellengasse, Wien. Sarah’s German was sufficient to know that this was the name and address of the typewriter shop Remington had described in his story. Proof he had talked. Proof, perhaps, she wasn’t crazy. Yet how was it Remington could communicate? Where had he learned to do so? Why him and not her MacBook Air?

Sarah returned Remington to the desk and unclipped his case. His voice exploded.

“So you deigned to open me,” he said.
Sarah had expected Remington to share her feelings of rebirth. The acid in his tone stripped her of this hope. “Deigned?” she said.

“I don’t appreciate being force-fed sleep as if I were a prisoner. Fifteen years in the cellar is quite enough.”

Sarah’s hackles flared. “You’re a typewriter, for God’s sake. How is it you can even talk?”

“Talk?” Remington said. “Talk? Talking is the least of it.”

“Not from where I’m sitting.”

Remington’s lips sparked. “Do you consider your primary achievement in life the fact that you can talk?”

Coolness spread in Sarah’s chest. She sat down.

“I apologise if I have upset you,” Remington said, slowing his breath with effort. “My goal was simply to point out that I am a being like any other, with my own origins, passions, and personality.”

“I’m worried I might be crazy,” Sarah whispered.

“I have just the tonic,” Remington replied. “The story of my birth. A story I have been perfecting for over seventy years.”

Adrenalin peppered Sarah’s stomach, though she was determined not to show it.

“Honestly,” she said. “It couldn’t hurt.”

“Very well.”

Emotion shook Remington’s voice, but he gathered himself and swiped his tongue once, grandly, across his teeth. His lips faded to a deep chocolate, as if lights had just dimmed in an auditorium.
“As I mentioned last night, I was born in an old munitions factory in Ilion, New York,” Remington said. “July 1934. Envisage a factory: concrete floors; a high, soulless roof; few windows. Visualise the brightest, whitest light you can imagine, distribute it among four low hanging floodlights, and insert a conveyor belt. These are the visual stimuli of our births. No petting or lovemaking forms us. No mother caresses our unborn frames. A typewriter could die in the womb, so to speak, and no one would buy flowers. Our births take months, sometimes years. They are painful. Hours upon hours of hammers and screws. Joint-ache. Freezing cold keys. Sometimes the factory workers make a mistake and have to unscrew us. This is worst—like having the teeth pulled from your mouth. Like being unborn. You might imagine, then, that the typewriter is inured to hardship—humbled and stoic—yet we are not titans, for it is only by envisaging the moment those unique fingers stroke our keys that in birth we retain our fortitude.

“We envision our masters.

“January 4th, 1935. A biting wind swept from beneath the doors of the factory and circled the warehouse. I lay on the conveyor belt, watching the tiny crystals of ice creep like spiders across the walls, not a single tooth nor gob of gum in my infant mouth to provide warmth. Inevitably, my thoughts turned to my master—the man he was and the ways I would cherish and honour him—when a strange and musical language permeated my machinery. Goethe’s great works tickled my hollow soft palette, the joys of Viennese opera vibrated the cavities of my cheeks, and as the music rose down and through me, I opened my mouth in silent joy and expelled its air to the ceiling. Ah, the melodies that danced in my head! Fidelio, La Traviata—such profundity and tradition they possessed and yet each wondrous and complex and new,
and as I witnessed the notes rise and fall, I beheld my master. I knew him, and in that moment I knew myself.

“Days and weeks passed. The snow began, sheathing the surrounding fields in a thick expanse of white, falling like wool on the ceiling of the factory. It did not cease for a month. The men travelled to and from work by starlight, snatching their hands out of their gloves to hammer and screw us, the chill of their fingers grinding frigid metal on metal.

“And still I was mute.

“March came, and with it the warmth of the sun. Droplets fell from the eaves of the factory, outside tiny flowers emerged from beneath the thawed ground, and my siblings and I, with inestimable joy, inhaled our first breaths of spring.

“And on March 7th, 1935, I began to sing.

“The sensation was so foreign to me initially that I supposed I was suffering from a fit. What other form of physical expression could produce such an outburst? Vibrations surged through my carriage, tiny sounds crept from beneath my keys and danced along the conveyor belt, and in seconds the glorious opening chords of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony formed on my baby lips and rang out through the factory. What joy this unexpected expression gave me. I composed an impromptu waltz of thanks and sounded it from floor to ceiling. I pledged to dedicate my voice to my master—to caress him in song as long as we both should live.

“The next day, I introduced myself to the magnificent Remington 8 on the conveyor belt opposite. To look upon his large, steady frame was to find comfort. I smiled at him—the first time my infant lips had stretched in that direction. He smiled brilliantly in return.
“‘My name is Remington Ignatius Portable,’ I whispered. I had not had the opportunity to introduce myself since I had happened upon my name, and I was pleased by its simple dignity. ‘Can you hear me?’

“‘Of course I can,’ he said. ‘You’ve been making quite a racket.’ His lips whipped along his spacebar towards me. ‘I’m Bob.’

“I noticed then how his face—if one could call it that—differed from the factory workers’ in that it contained a mouth alone and was devoid of eyes. How then could I see in a circle around me?

“Over the coming hours, Bob explained to me what had previously remained a mystery. We typewriters could speak only with our cases latched open. We could, however, see whether open or closed. Most astonishingly of all, our species of object alone had this gift of animation. When I pressed him for the reason why, Bob stated simply that he did not know. In the space of a single day, we had grown into bosom friends.

“That night, I dreamed in exquisite detail of my master’s fingers. When I woke, spring snowflakes peppered the blue-black sky. Before I could ask Bob of the fingers he had imagined, however, or conjecture as to the foreign lands whence we would be shipped, a strange and delicious coating consumed my tongue. Independently, my mouth gripped the consonants of the German language, and as it did, the splendid Austrian capital formed in my mind. Vienna—what glorious spires grew from her many fine streets, how the Ringstrasse glowed in the sunlight, how the Danube snaked and crept! It was at this moment I understood I was to become European. The knowledge had a strange affect on me. I saw men in wooded coffeehouses, their hands up in the air, dancing, as they talked. I saw old churches and cobblestoned streets, paintings of such beauty and colour that I began to weep. And as
I clamped down on my tongue, a voice told me simply to cry openly. What release
and joy I felt at this expression, as if I had been missing and had finally arrived home.

“‘Bob,’ I said. ‘Bob, wake up.’

“Bob’s lips stirred. ‘Rem?’

“I whistled excitedly. ‘Are you familiar with philosophy?’

“Bob stated, hoarsely, that he was not.

“‘It means to talk about life, Bob, to sit with your friends in a café with a slice
of torte and some coffee and really get to the guts of it. To philosophise is not so
unusual in Vienna. Listen to me—why, I haven’t even arrived!’

“Bob coaxed a yawn from the back of his throat. ‘What are you saying, Rem?
That you’re to become European?’

“I smacked my lips for emphasis. ‘Precisely!’

“‘But what exactly did you see? You might have read it wrong.’

“‘Nonsense!’ I cried. ‘See my tongue? What is this delicious, foreign coating
if not some kind of European sweet? And the songs I sing, the arias and the waltzes,
the masterpieces of Bach and Wagner and Schumann, are they not sung in German?’

“Bob looked thoughtful. ‘I just woke from a dream—nothing to do with cake
or sitting in cafes, but an image of a shop. A typewriter shop.’

“‘Go on,’ I said.

“‘Well, it’s just that when I looked at the typewriters, you know, really
zoomed in on them in my mind, they had these funny buttons on the right of their
keypads. And two shift keys. That’s right. They all had two shift keys.’

“Swiftly, we looked to our own frames, frames as yet unclaimed and thus
never really known, and beheld both a left and a right shift key.”
Remington broke off. His mouth and tongue were parched.

“What happened to Bob?” Sarah asked quietly.

“We were separated on the docks in Italy. I hoped for years that our paths might cross. But they never did. And now, of course, it’s too late.” With great effort, Remington trailed his tongue over the dry surface of his lips. “I never met another outside the factory who could talk, you see,” he whispered. “Not in the shop in Vienna—not anywhere. For many years I thought that perhaps I was mad. Now I wonder if my animated siblings originated solely from our batch in Ilion. Perhaps we were rarer than we knew.”

Sarah had planned to ask Remington for another instalment of her grandparents’ story. But loneliness poured from his keys. It was almost palpable. She was desperate, maybe, but not heartless. Then, to her surprise, Remington spoke.

“If you do not object, I will continue our story from where I finished last night.” His lips flushed. “I hadn’t realised the factory tale would upset me. I find it helps to think of Master.”

Sarah nodded and rose to shut the door. But in her heart she felt like a thief.
December, 1936

Forty-five minutes until the opera, and Master and Josephine lay cuddling on the armchair. Her habit of throwing herself into Master’s lap, small feet shooting out at angles, the glee and abandon of her little run-up and, worse, Master’s laughter as she landed with a smug plop in his lap, was enough to leech heat from my frame. Each time her tappety-knock came at the door—less and less since their engagement in November, as was custom, but still all too frequently—I prepared for some new affront. Tonight, their all-consuming kisses sucked air from every corner of the room.

Earlier in December, on a blustery night where they had decided to occupy themselves solely with each other, loneliness cracked my veneer. In the months since my purchase, I had strived to earn Master’s companionship, and his companionship he had thrown at someone else. I knew, of course, the other objects in the room were inanimate. Yet I was desperate. I sent my voice to the books and furniture. There was one book—a rare first edition Dickens, one of the few Master had not been able to convince himself to sell in the great scrape for the engagement ring—that pulsed with something different. Months before, I had sworn I had seen lips flash upon it. Since its siblings had departed, however, I had seen nothing more. I wondered if indeed I had not projected my own hopes onto the book, if the lips I thought I had seen were not simply the gold embossed spine flashing once, brilliantly, in the lamplight.

This evening, Master and Josephine consumed each other with some new urgency. I glanced at the hall clock. Perhaps I might compose the poem I had envisaged. I have always, in times of trial, drawn strength from the gentle arts. The poem’s premise roared within: it would be a heartbreaking comment on the extremes of modern society, rendered through the eyes of a chipped glass coffee cup in the Café Central. The set-up was a ruse—a damaged glass would be disposed of in such
an establishment. Poetry was rife with such convenient devices. The themes were ripe and topical. Acceptance of flaws in others—the mighty versus the powerless. Turns of phrase bristled on my tongue.

Yet the scene to my right stopped me. The nauseating din of passion trickled deafeningly down the walls. It seemed ridiculous, watching them, that Master should ever have doubted Josephine’s affections. Earlier in their courtship, he had been stricken by the fear that he would not be enough to hold Josephine von Bremer, that his means were insufficient, that he was punching above his weight. His anxiety had only settled with their engagement, when Master had proposed in a suite in the Hotel Sacher with candles all around and a buxom Polish soprano trilling the words, “Will you marry me, darling?”, and Josephine had sprung through the door and into Master’s arms so ferociously she had disturbed a candle that had gone on to singe the carpet.

I turned my attention inward. The poem’s hold on me had vanished. What sliver of society might cut their lip upon the chipped glass, I thought, nor care two winks if they did? My first poem deserved to be born of fury or devotion. Josephine, then. I recalled Master’s routine I had once depended on, before she had punctured it with bursts of “free time”—unexpected coffee dates, last minute strolls along the Ring with the night deep at our backs, spontaneous late arrivals at the surgery. Josephine took pleasure in rupturing routines and sprinkling change in unwanted corners of people’s lives. Though Master, in his own imperfect way, did love and use me well, Josephine he simply loved better.

I would channel my envy into rhyme—my grievances would grow magnificent through the deftness of my touch. I poised my keys to begin. I imagined
Master sliding a sheet of paper between my rollers, how I would savour its cool, crisp fibres—raise my platen knob, send a mental offering to my muse.

Nothing.

My mind, suddenly, had emptied of all but the sounds in front of me. After spattering a few pathetic rhymes about my head, I abandoned all plans of poetry and instead filled the apartment with *The Magic Flute*. My tongue caressed the notes, building them one upon the other. After a while, I noticed a flatness of pitch overtake the central melody. In my experience, such problems reflected troubles of the heart. I looked inside myself. The anger I harboured for Josephine had vanished. A deeper fury, with an altogether different target, had replaced it.

This anger was directed at Master.

My brain commenced a process of forceful rationalisation. The political situation required a certain inwardness. He was about to be married. There were humans in which he could confide. The intensity of my desire to defend him in the face of enduring neglect belied a single truth: he did not love me the way I loved him. I had given it my all, every ounce of intelligence and humour and warmth. Yet he could not hear me.

Josephine nibbled Master’s ear in between detailing, in breathy staccato, the Christmas she was planning at the Count’s.

“Daddy always over-caters,” she whispered. “Imagine the big table, the one in the ballroom, groaning with hams and wurst and glacé fruit, and piling all of it together on one big plate buffet style—that’s what the French call it, it’s terribly chic. Of course Daddy’s relatives are mostly tedious, except for Aunty Anja who’s in a wheelchair since hubby number four threw her down the stairs (Daddy squeezed him
out of Austria—bet he didn’t see *that* one coming), but she swears like a soldier and is completely hilarious, so we’ll talk mainly to her.”

I watched Master smile the smile he’d been deploying of late—cheeks flushed, lips shooting upwards, an unholy shine squinting from his eyes. Something flickered in them tonight, though—nerves, perhaps, or anticipation. If I had learned anything about my dear master it was that he was a perfectionist, and most at ease when excelling at tasks he’d performed many times before. What experience had he of a Gentile Christmas? Since his conversion to Catholicism in the twenties, late December was a time of year he simply passed over. Master performed his best reading, in fact, in the sleepy days between Christmas and New Year.

I glanced again at the hall clock. The opera—Mozart’s sublime *The Marriage of Figaro*—commenced in thirty-five minutes. The pair had been dressed, but now Josephine’s long blue gown—clingy in all the wrong places and with a daring split up one side—had ridden up to expose her garter belt, and Master’s jacket lay crumpled on the floor. Josephine had enlisted and then discarded Master’s hat in their tomfoolery; it rested upside down beside his jacket.

Master pulled away. “It’s my first Christmas,” he said.

Josephine’s eyebrows peaked but she smoothed them with her finger. “It’s the easiest thing in the world,” she cooed, her finger now stroking Master’s face. “You drink and eat obscene quantities, open spectacular presents—depending on who’s giving, of course—then collapse at the end of it all. The women are all dripping with jewels, it’s quite competitive,” she smiled wickedly, “but you don’t have to worry about that.”

Master was swinging in for a kiss when a knock sounded.

Josephine spun towards the door. “Are you expecting someone?”
“No.” Master untangled himself—tricky given Josephine’s determination to remain enmeshed—then straightened his shirt quickly and stood.

“Pooh, then. Don’t open it.”

He gave her a look he’d perfected since their engagement—lips pursed, eyebrows raised suggestively—and scooped down to collect his jacket. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, Henry.”

Eva’s voice trembled. Master fumbled with the door’s second latch and threw it open. Eva held her coat in both hands. Above it, black bruises coiled their way up her arms, and there were finger prints around her throat. For a moment no one spoke.

Then, Master.

“I’ll kill him,” he said.

Eva blinked and inched her way inside. Her feet slid forward one by one, past the hat on the floor—upside down, comical—to the wooden chair beside me on the desk. Master’s lips quivered as he watched her; he tried biting them. Josephine’s hands flew to her mouth. She shook her head and I saw she was fighting with herself, battling her contempt for Eva, struggling to find what was deep down a good, kind heart.

“What did he do to you?” she spluttered, and in her tone—accusatory, impatient—I saw she had lost the battle.

Eva flinched. Her pale, drawn face—beautiful even in despair—stretched as if in pain. The expression was so wretched I glanced instead at her dress. Fine, black silk—a luxury she could scarcely afford—fell softly at her ankles, and when I gathered courage to again peek at her face I saw she had applied lipstick and rouge. Eva reached a trembling hand to the seat and lowered herself, inhaling sharply from high within her chest.
“I remembered you were going to the opera,” she said.

Master nodded, aghast.

“I’m coming with you.”

“You need a hospital,” Josephine snapped. “And then the police.”

Master ran to his sister and clasped her arm, then released it in horror when she flinched. “Josephine’s right. We need to get you…”

“To the opera,” Eva said, closing her eyes. “It happened on Sunday. If I needed a doctor, I needed it then.” She dragged one foot to the other so that her ankles touched. From the sharp breaths she sucked through her teeth, it was clear the bruises extended down both legs.

Josephine watched her, a scowl gaining on her face—realisation of what she was about to do, terror when she saw she could not stop it.

“It’s just… We’re going alone Eva, just the two of us. Okay? We planned it, what—months ago. Didn’t we Henry? Didn’t we plan it?” She glanced at Master. “I wouldn’t mind normally—” her eyebrows, connected as if on a fine thread to her heart, twitched jarringly, “—but Daddy’s been strangely clingy since the engagement, and then it’s Christmas and his relatives descend like vultures. We won’t have a moment alone.”

I waited for Master to admonish his fiancée, to shout, perhaps, or slap her clean across the cheek. Instead, he strode to the front door and closed it, and then in a moment of indecision, his cheeks dark, he fiddled with the bookshelf.

I watched something rise in Eva, up her chest and outwards into her face. She clutched her stomach and fell forward in hysterics.

Josephine’s mouth opened. “What’s so funny?”

Eva pointed, breathless, at Josephine.
“I’m funny?” she cried. “I’m funny? What about you? Your husband beats you within an inch of your life and what do you do? You dress up for the opera!”

“That’s enough,” Master said.

“It’s alright, Henry,” Eva said, sitting up. “I’m ridiculous. It’s just ridiculous.” She blinked back tears. “It’s just Rudolph bought me this ticket in October for my birthday. I could either use it or sit at home. He was still at work when I left.”

“Couldn’t you have worn a different dress, then?” Josephine asked.

The rebuke appeared to pain Master more than anyone. I wanted him to shake or slap her—her, for whom life was one long red carpet, for whom Master had sold his prized first edition novels so that his bookshelf was half empty, for whom jewels came as a birthright while the lovelier Eva had none.

Master stepped towards Josephine. He was slow to anger—I had always admired this. But now I wanted him to scream some reproach at his betrothed. He said her name instead, evenly but for a slight warning. Josephine did not wait for him to continue.

“Eva needs to go to hospital,” she blurted. “We can drop her there then double back to the Staatsoper.”

“If you could just…” Eva closed her eyes. “If you could just ask, Josephine, if I was okay.”

Josephine blew a curl from her face, an act that always caused her to look vulnerable. “Are you okay?”

“No, I’m not. Every cell aches. It hurts to breathe, quite literally. But I sewed this damn dress—” it was the first time I had heard her curse; Josephine smiled despite herself, “—saved for a whole month to buy the silk. I’ve had it on since three
because I knew otherwise I’d lose the nerve and stay in my nightgown. But I’m here now and I’m coming with you.”

“What about when Rudolph gets home?” Master ventured.

“He bought me the damn ticket!”

Master grimaced. “If it’s what you want, dearest,” he shot a warning look at Josephine, “we’ll all go to the opera together.”

The three prepared to leave. Josephine flounced over to the door to retrieve her dress coat; Eva stood and Master slid her jacket up either arm. My case lay open from the afternoon’s journal entry—I prayed Master would not fasten it. At the door, he glanced back at me with a look I did not at the time understand. Suddenly, he dashed over to the desk, fastened my lid, and dropped me down beside his thigh. I could only assume that the scene’s unfolding had led him to seek comfort in my case.

Josephine’s automobile was parked illegally outside the apartment building, occupying the driveway and several metres of road. Eva saw it and closed her eyes, drawing in an inadvertent sharp little breath.

“I’ll release the gauge so you can climb into the back,” Josephine said, crashing onto the driver’s seat.

I waited for Master to intervene, but he simply stared at his fiancé and clambered with me onto the back seat himself.

“Oh no, I’ll take the back,” Eva said.

Josephine looked mildly alarmed. “Yes, hop out Henry. You’re sitting with me.”

Just then, snow began to pepper the black sky. The beauty of its thick, woolly descent silenced us. A tiny smile dawned on Eva’s lips as she stood alone outside the
car. Her hair, worn long against the fashion and tonight gleaming in a lustrous and elaborate French knot, soon bore a little cap of white. For an instant against the streetlamp, I could almost believe she was a carefree French woman, chic and independent. She lowered herself, slowly, into the passenger seat. Josephine saw she was outnumbered—a statistic she was not and would never grow accustomed to—and crashed her foot to the accelerator.

“And is the Count expecting us?” Master asked after a moment.

I had witnessed his jaw grind back and forth in the lead-up to this comment, and realised he was weighing potential topics of conversation.

Josephine smiled fleetingly. “We have seats in his box, my darling. As always.” She turned to Eva. “Where are you sitting?”

Eva opened her delicate beaded evening bag and held her ticket to a passing streetlamp. “In the high heavens, apparently.”

“So let me get this right. Your husband buys you a single ticket to the opera for your birthday—”

“Wait until you meet the Count, Eva,” Master said, rapping his knuckles on the back of Josephine’s seat. “He’s quite a character.”

“A character?” Eva said.

Josephine glanced quizzically in the rear-view. “Yes, what are you saying my darling?”

“Well, he’s short for one thing. I remember being shocked the first time I met him. But then in other ways he’s something of a giant.”

Eva angled her chin toward Josephine. “Henry said he works with medicines.”
“He doesn’t work with medicines,” Josephine snapped. “He manages them, oversees their distribution. He is the owner and chief of the largest pharmaceutical company in Europe.”

Eva exhaled. “That’s very impressive.”

“Look up at the royal box if you can from where you’re seated…” The comment triggered a giggle, one of Josephine’s few character traits that revealed her age. “Oh that’s right, you’re in the rafters. Look down, then, for a shiny bald head. That’s Daddy.”

“You’ll meet him at interval,” Master said.

Josephine pointed out that her father was served champagne in a private cordoned-off area, so it was unlikely that Eva would meet him.

“I will look for his head, then,” she said.

Eva’s grace under pressure, so rare in the aesthetically endowed, was a thing of beauty. Yet her hand trembled as she rummaged in her coat for a cigarette.

Josephine’s gaze flicked left. “There’s no smoking with the roof up.”

Master flinched—a fresh cruelty to be reckoned and dealt with. “But your hang-about artist friends hardly go a minute without one,” he said.

A chill gripped my frame. He had mentioned the unmentionable—the disastrous party Josephine had held for her bohemian friends back in August. Eva’s beauty had possessed every poet and artist in attendance, leaving Josephine—who had commissioned two gowns for the evening, one for greeting guests and a slinkier, brighter one for dancing—in such a fury she had prematurely retired to bed. Josephine had seen it necessary thereafter to cut ties with Viennese bohemian society—a fact she blamed solely on Eva.

I saw Master strike upon memory of the party too late; heat flew to his cheeks.
“Ex-friends,” Josephine said coldly.

Eva had retrieved her cigarette and was gripping it between her fingers. She studied the thing a moment, then slipped a small lighter from her pocket and lit it. Josephine, shocked by this act of open defiance, fell silent. Master drew his fingers to his lips and curled them into a fist.

“The snow is easing,” Eva said vaguely after a moment. “The weather is meant to be cool and bright tomorrow.”

“Do you often talk about the weather?” Josephine asked.

“Yes, sometimes. When I think it worth mentioning.”

Josephine drummed her fingers on the steering wheel. “This young fool tried courting me once—” her voice was high and bright, dangerous, “—but he was always starting sentences with, ‘Cold, isn’t it?’ or ‘What about the föhn?’ He was rolling in money, but who could stand him?”

“Look Eva, the Christmas tree by the Maria Theresa monument,” Master said. “We used to play around it when Mama and Father weren’t watching. Do you remember?”

“Yes. I always felt guilty but I couldn’t help it—the baubles were just so lovely.”

Josephine opened her mouth in mock surprise. Eva—her face as desolate as if she had been discovered scrubbing her bathroom on the Sabbath—stared forlornly out the window.

Outside the Staatsoper, a man buried beneath a black umbrella directed us to a parking lot across the street.
“Do you mind if I get out?” Eva said. “There’s often such a rush for the
downstairs coat room.”

Master leaned through the partition to farewell her, but Josephine sped off.
When he fell back, I watched red patches consume his eyebrows. The trait always
pulled at my heart, for it reminded me of that first night—that first, tender night when
he had poured the story of the duel right into me. Josephine swung her convertible
into the carpark, then sat still, her hands on the steering wheel.

“My sister comes to me after being abused,” Master said finally, “and you
treat her like a nuisance.”

Josephine had been expecting the comment, and cried, “You’re biased!
Always have been and always will be.”


Josephine smiled weakly. “You can’t?”

“You hate her for some reason. Why, Jay-Jay? And don’t mention your party.
All she’s ever been to you is friendly and polite.”

“Exactly,” Josephine said. “She’s so reeking with goodness it makes me ill.”

“Jay-Jay.”

Her face crumpled. “It’s just—she’s always around.”

“Eva?”

“Someone.” Josephine turned imploringly to look at Master. “I never have you
to myself. You’re either working or else I’m at Daddy’s. He’s become needier since
the engagement. It’s driving me quite insane. And he’s worried… How can I put this?
About your background.”

Master had been leaning forward between the seats; he fell back.
“Of course, he gave us his blessing—he’d have lost me if he didn’t. But his business these days is, well—complicated.”

“He doesn’t oversee a pharmaceutical company?”

“He used to—it’s what I tell people. But then Mother left in ’27 and he turned to dealing ammunition. She’d always pushed for it. I think he did it to spite her.”

“Is he supplying the Nazis?”

“Just a little,” said Josephine.

Master rolled his shoulders, as if propelling the unwelcome news off down a hill. “So you’d like more time to ourselves?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Then let me tell you something.” He pulled Josephine around the curve of the driver’s seat and kissed her. “We’re about to be married.”

Josephine beamed. “We are?”

That was their true strength, I have always believed—an ability to draw joy from the other in moments of adversity.

They embraced. “I’ve acted horribly tonight,” Josephine sighed over Master’s shoulder. “But I’ll be better. I see Thomas this week—I’ll make it an extra long session. We’ll implement strategies—help me to…” She pulled away. “God, half my life is spent drawing up battle plans.”

Master nodded and tucked a wisp of hair behind her ear. Josephine searched his face. At times of vulnerability, she was almost beautiful.

“You always leave me such a mess,” she said.

Master winked. “My darling, I can promise you that.”
Beneath the majestic stone arches of the Staatsoper, five bronze statues depicted themes of heroism, drama, fantasy, comedy and love. Master had once remarked that the sculptures represented the joys and trials of human nature. It occurred to me now that the trial he had referred to was the trial of love.

Josephine paid the statues no heed, staring instead at the little ivory hand mirror she held to her cheeks. She reminded me when she was upset of her hound Suzie, mouth twitching, poised to snap or collapse in whimpers.

Master paused at the foot of the grand staircase, where Josephine was prone to discard her mink. This evening she held firm to her coat, however. Her mood affected Master, as it always did, and as they mounted the stairs he glanced around in search of Eva. A sea of heads swam beneath us, many dusted with snow. Eva was nowhere to be seen. Josephine led us into the Gustav Mahler Hall, where she paused beneath the tapestry of *The Magic Flute*.

“My old tapestry,” she murmured. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

Master agreed that it was. Josephine took a moment to comment on the divine burgundies and golds, and how burgundy—her favourite colour, no less—highlighted the pink in her skin. On a normal evening Master would have laughed at this. But when I glanced up at him, I noticed his jaw locked in a grimace. Their first fight since the engagement had left a residue.

We walked along a grand corridor lined with portraits, hung floor to ceiling in the Petersburg style, to a small doorway draped with curtains. A gentleman in suit tails bowed and ushered us inside.

A short man with an impressive bald head stood with his back to us. His companion, a taller gentleman with a polished wood cane, stabbed the cane in our direction and the Count turned.
“Josie, darling!” A glance at his daughter’s small, pink face soured his expression before he smoothed it over. “And Henry, my man. What a pleasure.”

I saw Master’s gaze sweep over many things at once: the enamel swastika pin on the tall man’s lapel; the stealthy inch-high platform in the Count’s brilliantly polished black dress shoes; and his smooth, tanned cheeks, stretched in an odd looking smile.

“Josie. This is Herr Rutger, a business associate.”

Josephine attempted a smile.

“And Herr Rutger, this is the man I’ve told you about, my daughter’s fiancé—Henry.”

Master’s familiar name hung heavy in the air, a breach not only of societal norms but evidence of what Josephine had alluded to in the car. Master stared at Herr Rutger, then blinked and extended his hand.

“Henry is a fantastic veterinary surgeon,” the Count said, flicking the tassels of his cream scarf.

“I despise animals,” Herr Rutger said. “When I met my wife she had a cat. It didn’t last long.” The lips beneath his coiffed moustache broke out in a sort of smile.

“Well!” The Count hovered on his tiptoes. I discovered later he had acquired the habit in childhood when being punished by his tall dowager aunt.

“Stop leering, Daddy,” Josephine said.

The Count nodded, as if to say “fair enough!”, and the group took their seats. Master placed me in front of him on the floor, where I had a superb view of the Count’s cunning platforms but precious little of the stage.

“And how is business?” Master asked.
“Business?” The Count grazed his scarf along his neck. “Business is business, Henry. Some wither and some thrive.” He glanced over his shoulder at Herr Rutger. The man had retrieved a linen handkerchief from his breast pocket and was busy polishing his cane’s tip. For the first time, I noticed that the silver ball was in fact an intricately carved human skull. “And how are the animals?”

The Count had a habit of referring to Master’s “animals” collectively, as if he tended a group of geese at a small-time zoo.

Master smiled—an eager smile for it revealed a good portion of his teeth—and remarked that business was indeed very good. He listed last month’s profit margins as an example, illustrating with his finger that he expected the number to continue to rise. The comment took me by surprise. Master had never before felt the need to justify his fiscal success. If anything, he was fond of pointing out the very opposite—the second-hand furniture auctions and quaint old stores where one could secure a bargain. There was not a man in Vienna less concerned with money.

Master went to speak again—a number, I realised, a further statistic—when the lights to the auditorium dimmed. The overture to The Marriage of Figaro filled the theatre. The Count sprang forward and gripped the balustrade like a boy.

“My favourite opera.”

Josephine, who had been absorbed in her reflection, hissed, “The lights reflect in your head when you do that.”

The Count turned towards Herr Rutger, then inched back against his seat.

The sprightly overture continued; I imagined the soprano trotting buxomly across the stage. And then before I knew it applause rose up, and there was nothing to do but face the looming prospect of interval. In the half light, I could almost believe that Josephine had thrown off the altercation’s residue. But as the lights brightened, I
saw in her large eyes the sum of the night’s grievances. As our party moved toward the exit, the Count gripped Master’s arm. His fingers remained loose—the grip of a man used to achieving his desire with minimum effort. All the same, I felt Master’s leg beside me stiffen. The Count glanced ahead, but Herr Rutger had engaged Josephine in conversation.

“So,” he said, smiling. “A lover’s tiff, I’m guessing.”


“Let me be honest, Henry—my daughter is stubborn and spoilt. A failing on my part, I’m afraid. After her mother left I just couldn’t find it in me to deny her anything. There were years there where she did nothing but cry.”

It was to be one of the few times in their lives that they spoke openly to each other.

“She brings me so much happiness,” Master said.

“I see that. Still, giving my blessing was a hard decision, if I’m honest. Not what I would have hoped for my daughter. Not you, you understand—the situation. The climate.”

I knew from Master’s journal entries that he had considered the Count’s blessing an affirmation of his person. My heart clenched in agony for him. I watched the hope drain from his eyes, the hope that the Count had considered not only his daughter’s happiness but the personal qualities of the man standing opposite him, his ability to bestow strength and evenness on his daughter—qualities that had brought Master to this point of success in his life. Master saw now that his personal virtues had had nothing to do with the Count’s decision; in fact, the man did not know him. Josephine conjured emotions in expletives—in stamping feet and wild, hazel eyes.
Through sheer force of will, she had convinced the Count to agree to something he
never would have otherwise.

“There was a chair,” Master began, “a chair I was very fond of.” The Count
swung us around a pillar into the corridor. “I only mention it to give you an idea of
the commitment I feel towards your daughter. It was a Habsburg armchair upholstered
in patterned green silk. The chair was the first extravagant thing I ever bought myself.
A present to mark the opening of my surgery, something I aspired to and saved for for
many months. Josephine commented on it in my surgery the first time we ever met.”
Master paused to garner the Count’s reaction. “I sold the chair two weeks after our
meeting in order to save for the engagement ring.”

The Count’s eyebrows swung up and out in genuine surprise. “You are a self-
made man, Henry. I respect that.”

“It isn’t much—a single Habsburg chair when your house is littered with
them. But perhaps you see something in the gesture.”

The Count clapped Master on the back, the first and only time he would do so
until one desperate day, years ahead, in 1940.

“You are a good man, Henry. A good man. So many aren’t.”

“And what are we drinking?” Master said. In his excitement, he had forgotten
that one did not lay the subject of drink lightly before a von Bremer.

“I was thinking the ’27 Salon,” said the Count. “The year my wife left—why
not?”

Master nodded blindly.

“Or perhaps that’s morbid—is that morbid? Perhaps the ’28.”

Master tried—and failed—to recall a single occasion he had imbibed either
vintage. Indeed, what grape was the Count referring to? Was he fond of Grüner
Veltiner? And then it came to him: champagne—Salon was a brand of champagne. Master had in fact surprised Josephine with a bottle of 1927 Salon on their engagement at the Hotel Sacher. Fortuitously, her tasting notes—which she had attempted to condense on account of the occasion but which had still occupied a good ten minutes—returned to him vividly.

“The ’27,” Master said. “It has such a vibrant green apple nose you’ll forget any negative associations.”

The Count’s face lit up like an explosion. “Of course—the nose. How right you are!”

By the time we turned into the private area off the upstairs bar, there was a camaraderie between the men. I could never have imagined such a plush, ordered bastion of civilisation as that little corner of the opera house. Materials of luxury adorned every surface—velvet, gold and crystal—so that one may devote oneself in utter comfort to the pleasures of the ample bar.

Josephine, however, who had been raised in similar luxury, had returned to her hand mirror when Herr Rutger’s conversation no doubt gave out. Now, she looked up and grinned.

“Well, don’t you two look thick as thieves.”

She had shed the fight and was once again ready to embrace Master.

“Apologies for our delay,” the Count said, descending with a little puff to the armchair beside Herr Rutger. “My son-in-law here—fantastic man—was talking to me of champagne.”

Herr Rutger tilted his chin.

“But we decided it, didn’t we Henry? The 1927 Salon.”
Josephine clapped her hands. “You remembered, darling, you remembered the year!”

“He remembered all right. We had a fantastic talk about the straw green nose.”

Josephine’s eyebrows leapt about. Given her natural spontaneity, she was thrilled when people surprised her.

“That’s right, the crispest, just-picked green apple. Crunchy, almost, the first sip—crunchy and delicious.”

Herr Rutger fell to inspecting his cane.

“Rupert.” The Count signalled the elderly gentleman guarding the red velvet rope. His thin shoulders supported a worn yet dignified face. “We’ll have a bottle of the ’27 Salon. Good man.” Rupert bowed, and the Count turned to Herr Rutger. “And did you enjoy the first act?”

Master had just clasped Josephine’s hand to kiss it when a figure shifted in his vision. “Eva,” he gasped.

She stood alone on the far side of the bar clasping a shawl around her shoulders. From the look on Master’s face, it was clear he had temporarily forgotten her. He clambered under the rope.

“What is it?” the Count enquired. “Josie?”

“Oh it’s Henry’s silly sister,” she snapped. “Honestly, the world stops whenever she’s around.”

The Count raised the gold-rimmed monocle around his neck to his eye. “My!” he said.

Josephine endeavoured to smile as the pair approached.

“Count, may I introduce my sister, Frau Lieber,” Master said.
The Count beamed until Eva reached an arm out to adjust her shawl. Suddenly, it fell.

“Oh dear,” the Count muttered, then he glanced at Eva’s chestnut hair and long, slim nose and whispered something else. His arm, however, trained by generations of aristocracy, swept up towards a chair. He turned to Herr Rutger.

The man stared at Eva, then grasped the skull of his cane and levered himself up.


“I’ve seen enough.”

The Count sprang to his feet. “Our business, Leo, consider our business—”

“In the past,” Herr Rutger said. “You are all living in the past.”

It happened so swiftly—Eva’s shawl slipping at the same time as the Count recognised the undeniably Jewish beauty of her face—that none of us had yet processed what had happened. Their stricken, helpless faces turned as Herr Rutger hobbled off. Then Josephine spun to face her father and demanded to know why he was doing business with a man like that. The Count delivered a platitude—something about how in business, as opposed to life, one could not afford to be fussy about one’s associates. I watched his eyes as he spoke. To his credit, they looked genuinely conflicted.

“It’s your mother’s doing,” he said finally. “Before that I was in pharmaceuticals.”

“Then why change after she’s left? Why listen to the cunning of that awful woman when she’s deserted us?”

The Count muttered the word “money”, followed by a jibe—delivered mostly to his scarf—that Josephine had never minded spending it. Until this point, Master
and Eva had been still. But then Eva’s breath shot in twice—bang bang—and she slid the shawl up to cover her arms. She turned on her heel and in a moment was swallowed by people, just another gleaming head in the crowd.
3.
Sarah entered the apartment’s foyer the next morning to find Ann reclined on the sofa. Her bare feet straddled the white leather with a casual elegance; *The New York Times* and a cup of coffee balanced effortlessly in a single hand.

“I thought I’d wait until you rose,” she said, folding the paper in on itself.

“Let’s face it, I needed to apologise.”

Ann’s dress was an exact replica of the emerald number she’d worn yesterday, except this one was made of jersey and a vibrant orange. Gold and turquoise bangles knocked together as she spoke. On Ann’s person, it seemed, simplicity could be found in numbers.

“So I screwed up,” she said. Her green eyes glowed against the dress. “I was rude at the fundraiser—cruel. I get that way. I thought I should admit that in person, not pass it on via an aide.”

The sight of her lithe, tanned aunt against the white leather had an energising affect like coffee. Sarah was grateful Ann had disrupted her hectic schedule to apologise. But she felt a deeper gratitude, gratitude her life didn’t demand vitality twenty hours a day, the organising of servants and enacting of hierarchies. She was grateful to have once known simple, genuine pleasures.

“I’ve held you up,” Sarah said.

Ann flapped a bangled hand. “God knows they can rehearse without me. In fact, when I miss a morning they’re often more productive. Terrible for one’s ego.”

She grinned, and in the warm, crooked smile Sarah was coaxed to reveal her plan to visit Bruno. Ann insisted she take her limo; Sarah argued but it did no good. Ann would experience the Manhattan cab service, she told Sarah, consider it an adventure—maybe even hail one herself.
Sarah sat now on the limo’s lavish back seat, splaying her fingers across the fine-grained leather. Ann had pressed a cream cashmere coat into Sarah’s hands before leaving. The coat harboured some plethora of refreshment and ease in its sumptuous fibres. Wearing it, Sarah could almost imagine this car was hers. She didn’t like the feeling. A limo implied one was better and busier than others—one’s destination more important. A group of schoolgirls gathered on the corner of 5th Avenue with their phones. Was it Beyonce? the tall one screamed, was it Beyonce? Sarah wished she’d battled the subway.

When she glanced in the rear-view mirror, however, she saw that Ann’s driver hadn’t forgotten who she was. His breed of subtle snigger was so expert Sarah couldn’t be sure he was sniggering at all. She wondered what Ann had told him of her plight to find her grandparents’ story, just how desperate he thought she was. Sarah glanced out the limo’s tinted window at the street. They’d left the celebrity-hungry schoolgirls behind in the Upper East Side. Now, they were speeding south. Luxury boutiques and gleaming highrises gave way to laundromats and abandoned parking lots. The Lower East Side wasn’t simply lower geographically. The adjective connoted so much more.

On Grand St, Asian grocers proffering strange green fruit crept past, signs in Chinese and English for exotic massage. They turned into Essex. Jewish bakeries sprang up along with crowds of bearded men in black coats and hats. Sarah’s grandparents had no doubt considered this area familiar. She closed her eyes. Imagine, trying to write a book about the Holocaust—an inventive, nuanced book—with no more knowledge of Jewish culture than the word Passover and the dim feeling that the ritual fell somewhere at Easter. But it wasn’t only guilt in Sarah’s chest. Trampled on, quivering beside it—was a sense of belonging.
The limo turned onto a narrow, decrepit backstreet. No bearded throngs jostled for space on its litter-strewn sidewalk; Essex Street’s colour and life had suddenly drained out. They drove a few seconds into its depths, then pulled up at an ice spattered curb outside an abandoned hairdresser’s. Sarah glanced in the rear-view and the driver pointed across the street at a dusty shopfront. Typewriters dangled on cords from the ceiling and straddled, in two brave vertical towers, either side of the red front door. The shop sign gleamed oddly against the tired window: *Weasal’s Typewriter Shop*, and then, joined by a misplaced semicolon, *Second-Generation Purveyor and Repairman*. The driver opened Sarah’s door. Cold air struck Ann’s coat and tried burying in its folds. But the cashmere refused to be bullied. The fact heartened Sarah. Perhaps there were lessons to be learned from the props of the wealthy. Maybe quality could extend beyond the material of one’s coat to encompass one’s character as well. Could polyester pose as cashmere until it simply became it?

Sarah asked Ann’s driver to wait, then skidded on her Cons across the street. A little bell pinged her arrival to the strange, antiquated shop. She sneezed twice from the dust as a voice called, “Hello! Hello!”

Bruno barrelled up the narrow hall.

“You made it!” he said. His eyes shined as if she were some apparition of good luck.

Bruno’s delight made Sarah itch with discomfort—the knowledge she would disappoint him and the light in those wondrous deep eyes would go out. “I did.”

Grinning, he wiped his shirt sleeve back and forth against his nose. Sarah took in the outdated machines—dozens and dozens of them—that somehow framed Bruno’s head. The density of typewriters and typewriter parts sucked out the air.
Down the cramped aisle to her left, Sarah glimpsed an old Remington. Without thinking, she reached her hand out and inched towards it.

“You see something you like?” Bruno asked.

Sarah’s heart pounded. “I think so.”

“You look, I’ll get my coat.”

Sarah didn’t register the comment right away. She was thinking of Remington, and how it must feel to go through life without a sibling or friend who understood you. Maybe this Remington of Bruno’s would be the first. Its case—like all machines in the shop, she noticed—was open. Would its spacebar bear a perfect, tiny mouth?

Sarah arrived at the typewriter amidst a wave of regret. It was a later model—smaller and more solid than Remington. More crushingly, its spacebar proffered nothing but a thin bar of plastic. She hadn’t expected the typewriters to talk, Sarah told herself—one was miracle enough. Yet she was silenced by the weight of disappointment.

Bruno was already back in the aisle, a huge puffer jacket dwarfing his slight frame while he struggled to right the inbound finger of a shearling glove. Sarah registered, belatedly, what he’d said before.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“I promise you coffee,” Bruno said. “I don’t have any.” A comical pointed beanie perched atop his wisps of chestnut hair, pulled low on his forehead so that his ears stuck out.

“But what about your shop?” Sarah nodded at the door as if someone, miraculously, might walk through it.

“Pfft, they can wait.”
Bruno fished a ring of ancient keys from his pocket and clumsily, with his gloves on, flicked through it. “Ready?”

Sarah remembered the waiting limo. “So where are we going?”


“I think so,” Sarah said.

Bruno’s beanie jerked up. “You never tried it?”

“I have, I guess. I’m just not too fond of meat.”

Bruno’s face fell. “You eat only vegetables?”

“It’s not that. Recently, I just haven’t had much of an appetite.”

This decided Bruno. “At Katz’s, you eat. We’ll share a sandwich, okay? I make concession.”

Bruno bundled up the aisle. Sarah followed him, careful her cashmere armour didn’t catch on a sharp, random key and unravel.

Outside, she knocked on the limo’s window and told the driver they were walking two blocks up East Houston to Katz’s Deli. The driver insisted he trail them. Sarah turned to Bruno to apologise, but saw his face beatific in the knowledge she had a limo at her disposal. So she said, “My driver’s a bit overprotective—he’s going to follow us.”

“Like the Secret Service?” Bruno asked breathlessly.

“No… Well, yes.”

Bruno hunched his chin into his collar as they turned onto Houston. “How’s the writing?”

“Hard,” Sarah said.

“Hard?”
For a moment, she considered unburdening herself—explaining to Bruno why she so urgently needed to finish her book. But the link to her parents’ house seemed somehow tentative. If she tried to articulate it, maybe it would collapse and disappear.

So, despising herself, she said, “I sold my violin to come here. I need the book mapped out by the time I leave in order to justify the expense.”

It wasn’t quite the truth, but it was close enough.

“And this is hard why?” Bruno said.

“Well, just trying to find a story.”

“Why trying?”

Sarah bit her lip. “My grandparents’ lives interest me, I suppose.”

“But why not doing?”

Sarah flicked her gaze up at the wide, gusty street. “Because I don’t have the full story.”

Bruno’s neck sprang from his coat. “You’re waiting to find this?” he said.

“What if you never find it? What if the full story no longer exists?”

“It has to,” Sarah said.

“Okay.” Bruno drew his gloved hands out in front of him. “Think of it like this. Better to keep your grandparents’ memory alive, or not alive?”

“Alive,” Sarah said.

His eyes burned with extra vigour. “The dead don’t tell stories. We must tell them. We forget? The dead get forgotten.”

END OF EXTRACT

(The remainder of the manuscript is included as an appendix for the examiner’s interest)
Synopsis of Remington Portable

From here, the novel continues to interweave the narratives from the present and the past.

PRESENT:

• In despair after his stories fail to affect Sarah, Remington confronts her and the two find friendship. But just why is it she can hear Remington? Could it be connected to the mysterious illness that threatens to claim her? And just what does Sarah have in common with her grandmother Josephine—the only other person ever to hear Remington?

PAST:

• Just over a year after Josephine and Henry attend the opera, the Nazis annex Austria. With the outbreak of war in 1939, and after a frightening visit from the Gestapo, Henry, his family, and Josephine retreat into hiding. The couple plan a clandestine trip to the Count’s to secure visas to emigrate to New York. En route, however, they are stopped randomly by a Nazi officer. He follows them to the Count’s, but Henry and Josephine escape with their visas. At the train station, an officer questions Henry about his papers. Josephine panics and lunges for the nearest Nazi’s pistol. A beautiful woman bundles the distraught Henry onto the moving train. His last sight of Vienna is of Josephine’s bullet-strewn body, waving almost, as the Gestapo move in.
Constructive Distance: Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated* and Nicole Krauss’s *Great House* as Models for Third-Generation Holocaust Fiction

(Critical Essay)

by Antonia Strakosch
INTRODUCTION

... The event of the Holocaust is already a horizon which orients our time,
certainly in the west, even now, three or four generations afterwards.

(Eaglestone 12)

Second-generation scholar¹ Marianne Hirsch has contributed significantly to the field of Holocaust memory studies as it relates to the transgenerational transmission of trauma with her research on how inherited traumatic memory (what she terms postmemory) of the Holocaust manifests in the aesthetics of the second generation. While Hirsch’s earlier work² examines in detail this link between postmemory and aesthetics, it also considers how postmemory intersects with the discourses of ethics and identity. In her 2008 article, “The Generation of Postmemory”, however, Hirsch asserts that “postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission” (114). My essay adopts Hirsch’s earlier position to suppose a crucial link between inherited traumatic memories and identity.

It is important to note that while Hirsch initially conceived of postmemory as a familial process of transmitted trauma, passed directly from survivors to their children, her later work encompasses “more explicitly comparative memory work” that includes “extreme dispossession in the context of the familial ruptures caused by war, genocide, and expulsion” (The Generation 24). Hirsch comes to distinguish, as Eva Hoffman does (187), between “the postgeneration as a whole and the literal second generation in particular”,³ thus demarcating “affiliative” and strictly familial

¹ In this essay, I use the term second generation to refer to the children of Holocaust survivors.
² See especially “Family Pictures” and “Past Lives”.
³ See Bos for a list of the differences between familial and non-familial postmemory.
postmemory (“The Generation” 114). This essay focuses specifically on Hirsch’s concept of familial postmemory.


My essay also engages with the important ethical questions of legitimacy and authenticity that accompany postwar representations of the Holocaust—questions that have occupied scholars since Theodor Adorno famously and controversially stated that “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34). Perhaps the most contentious contemporary scholar to engage in discourses of postwar Holocaust ethics is the French critic and second-generation survivor, Alain Finkielkraut, in his text The Imaginary Jew (1997). Finkielkraut criticises his generation for appropriating the suffering of their parents in order to gain a sense of moral advantage. Another second-generation French author, Henri Raczymow, has also contributed significantly to

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4 Hirsch defines affiliative postmemory as “the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation … compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission (“The Generation” 114–5).

5 While the distinction between familial and affiliative postmemory could prove fertile ground for further investigation, it is outside the scope of this essay to do so here.
discourse surrounding the ethics of transgenerational trauma by questioning his own right to speak about a horror he did not experience. Perhaps Raczymow’s most notable scholarship on the subject is his article for *Yale French Studies*, “Memory Shot Through With Holes” (1994). More recently, American literary scholar Gary Weissman’s *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (2004), explores why those people with no direct familial link to the atrocity attempt to connect to it vicariously, while also criticising the concept of second-generation postmemory to argue that “no degree of power or monumentality can transform one person’s lived memories into another’s” (17).

Weissman notes that while the term *third generation* has been most commonly applied to survivors’ grandchildren, it has also been broadened to include most Jewish Americans born in the 1960s and 70s (19). In this essay, I use the term to refer specifically to the grandchildren of survivors. While psychoanalytic theory has begun to examine the impact of inherited trauma on the third generation, there is currently little scholarship on whether Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory and aesthetics extends to the fiction of this generation. This is a significant gap in the field, given that third-generation authors have not only reached adulthood but are contributing critically well-regarded works of fiction, such as Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated*, and Nicole Krauss’s *Great House*, to the literary community. Articles examining *Everything Is Illuminated* in particular, such as “The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction” by Lee Behlman, and “Ethics in the Second Degree:

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6 In *Family Frames*, Hirsch acknowledged that her concept of postmemory is connected to Raczymow’s idea of the mediated and “fragmentary nature of second-generation memory” (22-3).

7 Notably, Weissman himself has no familial connection to the Holocaust.

8 Weissman’s book focuses on American responses to the Holocaust.
Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated*” by Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, have tended to focus on specific narrative elements (such as the use of fantasy or dual narrators) without considering how Foer’s familial connection to the subject has informed these narrative techniques.⁹

**Objectives**

My essay aims to address the gap in critical scholarship on third-generation Holocaust fiction. It will consider how third-generation fiction, as a relatively new mode of literature both connected to and independent of second-generation literature, contributes in a unique way to the discourse of transgenerational trauma.

In particular, I will investigate whether Marianne Hirsch’s notion of second-generation postmemory can legitimately apply to the third generation. From its position of generational distance, can the third generation reasonably claim to have inherited the trauma of the Holocaust? Or is our connection to the atrocity differently nuanced and imprecise? Authors of third-generation fiction face a unique ethical conundrum, I argue, in that they are simultaneously connected to and twice-distanced from the event they seek to explore. The questions I am interested to consider in this essay are: what are the particular ethical ambiguities inherent in third-generation fiction? Is third-generation fiction, by its very distance from the subject it explores, ethically suspect? How do these ethical issues differ from those surrounding second-generation fiction? And, importantly, how does the third generation’s unique position manifest in the narrative trope of distance? By addressing these questions, I aim to establish third-generation fiction as a distinct and under-explored phenomenon, with

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⁹ Jessica Lang’s article “*The History of Love*, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory”, however, is a notable exception.
its own specific narrative techniques, theoretical framework, and potential to contribute to contemporary society’s understanding of the Holocaust.

**Review of Field**

Before I review the field of postmemory and its relationship to second- and third-generation Holocaust fiction, it will be important to examine briefly the field of memory studies as a whole. The so-called “memory boom” of the 1990s, in which theorists across a wide range of disciplines began to consider the contemporary consequences of accessing the century’s history through the medium of memory, was the result of diverse and complex factors (Goertz 33; Rossington and Whitehead 5; Eaglestone 73–74). While it is outside the scope of this essay to investigate further the causes of this trend, the critical interest in memory studies in the late twentieth century also extended to Holocaust criticism. As distance from the Holocaust increased, theorists began to acknowledge that the history of the event was crucially bound up in the way it was remembered.

However, the traumatic nature of the genocide problematised an already complex relationship between the remembered past and the present. Many theorists, including Richard Glejzer and James Young, acknowledge that memory is a highly complex faculty, bound up in forgetfulness and inseparable from the social and personal factors that impact upon it (Glejzer 128; Young, *The Texture* 2–6). Moreover, contemporary philosophers argue that memory plays a crucial role in establishing personal identity (Rossington and Whitehead 2). Given the complex nature of memory itself, then, and the fact that memory is our only access to the otherwise distant events of the genocide, a stable, objective or coherent Holocaust cannot exist (Goertz). In Young’s succinct terms, there is no single Holocaust (*The
In light of this, how authors choose to represent the Holocaust, and their relationship to the genocide itself, is inevitably the subject of rigorous ethical debate (Goertz 33; Rossington and Whitehead 6–7). These questions of legitimacy and authenticity become more pronounced as generational distance from the Holocaust increases.

In her 1992 article “Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning and Post-Memory”, Marianne Hirsch uses the term postmemory to describe the deep form of associated Holocaust memory experienced by the children of survivors. The article explains postmemory as a traumatic inheritance “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection”, and explores how this phenomenon has shaped the identity and in turn the aesthetic products of the second generation (8–9). Hirsch argues that postmemory is so powerful in shaping second-generation identity that history has, in Efraim Sicher’s words, “maimed [the second generation] before their birth” (“Postmemory” 263). Hirsch’s concept of postmemory as inherited trauma is supported by psychoanalytic research, which reveals that the children of survivors inherit genuine physical and emotional traumatic symptoms from their parents: “as far as pathogenic effects are concerned, a definite continuum exists between real and imagined trauma” (Goertz 34). In relation to Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, the “continuum … between real and imagined trauma” is significant as it articulates the relationship between inherited traumatic memories and the imagination. Hirsch argues that while a common or non-traumatic memory may lose its potency as it is passed down, postmemory is powerful not despite but because of its distance from events, as it is mediated through the imagination. This article focuses on second-generation author and illustrator Art Spiegelman, and how his postmemory of the Holocaust manifests in his famous graphic memoir, Maus.
In her 1996 article for *Poetics Today*, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile”, Hirsch narrows her focus from considering the aesthetic shapes of postmemory in general to examine photography in particular. However, questions of second-generation identity remain a key concern. In this article, Hirsch emphasises the sense of marginalisation or exile from one’s own identity—the “diasporic experience”—that typifies the experience of this generation (662): “postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created” (659).

The sense of one’s own identity being “evacuated” by stories of parents who survived the Holocaust is a common theme amongst second-generation writers. Henri Raczymow, whose 1995 novel, *Writing the Book of Esther*, explores the moral legitimacy of second-generation authors writing about and claiming knowledge of the Holocaust, is equally well-known for his autobiographical writing on postmemory. In his article “Memory Shot Through With Holes”, Raczymow articulates the sense of void and absence that accompanies the second generation’s imaginary journeys to the world of the Holocaust: “mine are superficial roots, along the railway tracks across Europe, through the paths of emigration and deportation. But I neither emigrated nor was deported. The world that was destroyed was not mine. I never knew it. But I am, so many of us are, the orphans of that world” (103). In likening the second generation’s simultaneous connection to and distance from the Holocaust to that of an orphan from dead parents, Raczymow highlights the all-consuming nature of

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10 It is important to note, however, that Raczymow does not use the term *postmemory* directly.
It is little wonder, then, that second-generation authors such as Raczymow and Spiegelman utilise their texts as a means of working through the traumatic legacy inherited from their parents.

While my thesis will focus on third-generation literature, Spiegelman’s *Maus* will be important because it has impacted crucially the fields of Holocaust memory studies and postmemory. According to literary scholar Erin McGlothlin, whose work focuses largely on German-Jewish literature, *Maus* “is often viewed as the second-generation novel [sic] par excellence; Spiegelman in turn is seen as the paradigmatic second-generation artist whose creative production is predicated on a traumatic event of which he has no personal experience” (95). In *Maus*, Spiegelman juxtaposes his father’s experience of the Holocaust, which he recounts in graphic and realistic detail, with the creative form of the text and the central metaphor of portraying Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, and Poles as pigs. However, rather than attempting to portray events of the Holocaust that he did not witness, Spiegelman instead highlights his relationship to his father’s memory (what Hirsch would term his postmemory) of the events (Young, “The Holocaust” 669). In this way, Spiegelman “confronts the very possibilities of bearing witness to something he did not in fact see”, while also acknowledging the extent to which his father’s experience of the Holocaust—and his postmemory of this experience—have shaped his identity and creative output (Glejzer 128). By including scenes that problematise his own absorption in his father’s story (such as the famous image of the author drawing atop a pile of mouse corpses), moreover, Spiegelman acknowledges the questions of authenticity, legitimacy, and

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11 The title of Raczymow’s third novel, *Contes d’exil et d’oubli (Tales of Exile and Forgetting)*, is significant in that it refers to both the state of exiled identity and the forgetfulness bound up in memory that characterise the second generation’s experience of postmemory.

12 Importantly, Hirsch conceived of the term postmemory while reading *Maus*. 
profiting, indeed profiteering, from the past, that accompany postwar representations of the Holocaust (Glejzer 131; Sicher, “Postmemory” 264–65; McGlothlin 94–95).

Outcomes

According to Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes, “if Maus addresses the conflicts of the second generation … further chronological distance only increases the problem of conceptualisation and communicability” (4). My essay draws on this scholarship to evaluate whether postmemory can legitimately extend to the third generation, and their fiction in particular. By analysing two third-generation texts, Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything Is Illuminated and Nicole Krauss’s Great House, to consider how their authors’ connection to and distance from the Holocaust manifests in the trope of distance, I argue that Foer’s and Krauss’s texts are ethically valid not despite but because of their authors’ generational distance. By drawing attention to their remoteness from the Holocaust through their use of distance, Foer and Krauss both enable readers to compare their own perhaps dormant knowledge of the atrocity against the version being presented in the texts. In this way, each author leads readers away from a passive or complacent reading of history towards a more active one.
A PERSONAL CONNECTION

*We can say that the motor of the fictional imagination is fuelled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth.* (Hirsch, Family Frames 242)

My ninety-year-old Viennese Jewish grandfather died in a nursing home outside Kempsey, in central New South Wales, when I was ten. Though I was of course saddened by his death, I had never known the man, not really. In my young mind, the man we called Pardy was comprised of sweeping brushstrokes, each at once so opaque and simple that the brushstroke would have dissolved had I held it to the light. Pardy spoke with a funny foreign accent. Before he moved into the nursing home—and afterwards too, in fact—he would sit at the dinner table up to an hour before dinner was served, his bald head covered in a beanie. And above all, he cried.

He cried when I played violin for him in the old blue lounge at Grandma’s house, and when I crashed into the dining table on my Christmas roller skates, but mostly he cried when we packed up the car for the drive back to Brisbane. Dad said it was because he remembered saying goodbye to his sister Rosa in Vienna many years before and never seeing her again. I was too young to understand the meaning of those words. I had never heard of the Holocaust.

Sometime after Pardy’s death—I don’t remember when exactly but certainly by the time I completed my “Germany” project in Year 6—the term gained currency in my mind. Not in a vivid or historic sense—I was not the type of precocious child who read advanced histories with a torch beneath the bed sheets as my sister did—but in a hazy, emotional way: in the world of my imagination. Soon, the Holocaust and the suffering it had caused my grandfather had taken hold of me. I felt a need grow up
to one day write about Pardy’s life, to ensure that his amazing story should not die with him.

I find it interesting, in hindsight, that what my young mind knew so certainly I only as an adult began to question. I suffered no guilt or unease as a child at the prospect of writing about my grandfather—in fact, I felt a certain pride. It is only as I have grown older and have been able to articulate the vague yet powerful emotional connection I feel to the Jewish experience of the Holocaust as a member of the third generation, that I have questioned my ethical right to represent the atrocity. What authority do I have to write about my grandfather’s life—to claim connection to his trauma—when I grew up comfortably in 1980s Brisbane, about as far from Nazi Vienna as it is possible to be? Equally troubling in my own mind is the fact I can claim no direct link to, or personal experience of, the Jewish faith. How can I legitimately identify as an author of third-generation Holocaust fiction when I hardly knew my grandfather and the man had, once he arrived in Australia, abandoned both German, his native tongue, and the religion that had led to his persecution?

Sometime after I finished high school, an old tape emerged—an interview my Uncle Michael had conducted with his father in 1980. The tape was a revelation, not just for the facts of Pardy’s life that it revealed, but for a more unsettling reason. While my grandfather narrated the events of his life in chronological order from his birth in 1900, there was a period of six years—from the point of his first marriage in Vienna in 1934 to the time after his escape to Australia—that he entirely evaded. What trauma had Pardy suffered during that time, I wondered, to warrant his avoiding its mention? And if he had wanted to silence that period of his life while he was alive,

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13 Though the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 determined Pardy to be a Jew, he had attempted to outrun his Jewish heritage a year earlier by converting to Catholicism. After he escaped to Australia, Pardy’s family—including his first wife, his sister and her husband—perished in Nazi death camps.
what right did I have to create a fictionalised narrative based on it twenty years after
his death?

My essay seeks to investigate the reasons why this man I hardly knew
continues to exert such a hold over my life. The trepidation and guilt I feel over
conjuring a traumatic history in which I had no part is exacerbated by the
inventiveness of “Remington Portable”—the magic-realist novel that forms the
creative component of this thesis.\textsuperscript{14} The creative licence I believe is an integral part of
telling the “truth” of my grandfather’s story further problematises the already
complex ethical issues surrounding third-generation Holocaust fiction I have begun to
outline.\textsuperscript{15} Essentially, however, this essay represents my personal journey to articulate
the Holocaust’s strange grip on my psyche—in the words of Jonathan Safran Foer,
“the ways we are beholden to what came before” ("Interview by Williams").

\textsuperscript{14} The story is narrated by a Remington 5 Portable typewriter.
\textsuperscript{15} It is outside the scope of this essay to explore the ethical complexities of inventive versus
strictly historical Holocaust fiction. For a discussion of this, see B. Lang, Des Pres, and A.
Strakosch.
THE ETHICAL AMBIGUITIES OF THIRD-GENERATION HOLOCAUST FICTION

How do we begin to understand the desire to be closer to the Holocaust?

(Weissman 21)

As the final Holocaust survivors pass, the second generation’s task to convey their knowledge of the event to the third generation becomes more urgent (Sicher, “Postmemory” 263). However, the ethical imperative for later generations to keep memory of the Holocaust alive must compete with vigorous debate about the nature of vicariously claiming connection to this horrific trauma. Dominick LaCapra, for example, notes the dangers of “arrogating to oneself the victim’s experience or undergoing (whether consciously or unconsciously) surrogate victimage” (182). The nature of the debate LaCapra and many other critics engage in revolves around a single key ethical question: whose past is it to tell? If second-generation authors lack the authority to represent a trauma that they experienced only vicariously, as critics such as Alain Finkielkraut claim, it follows, as I have suggested, that the fiction of the third generation is doubly suspect for being twice removed.

As an author whose Jewish grandfather survived the Holocaust, I have engaged with both arguments about the ethics of representing the atrocity. My current position encompasses the nexus between these ethical/theoretical approaches. In this essay, I will contend that the ethics of representing the Holocaust poses particular challenges and opportunities for the third-generation writer. To elucidate how I have arrived at my position, it is important to first consider the ethical issues of legitimacy and authenticity that surround post-generations’ attempts to represent the Holocaust.

According to literary critics Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, the two main ethical imperatives for representing the Holocaust are: 1) “To produce
knowledge of the event so that something like it can not recur” and, 2) “To produce in
the reader an effect that forces him or her not simply to recognize the event but to
confront it” (12). These approaches represent two schools of thought about the
question of who can legitimately represent the Holocaust. Considered together, these
ethical imperatives produce a compelling argument for why contemporary society
needs to keep memory of the Holocaust alive. Just who among the post-generations is
granted license to represent the atrocity, however, remains contentious.

In the introduction to *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, second-
generation Holocaust scholar Irene Kacandes describes, with poignant irony, her
experience of being inspected by other scholars in the field at Holocaust
conferences—having them scrutinize her name tag, her jewellery, and even her face—in
order to determine whether or not she is Jewish (11). When Kacandes subsequently
reveals that she is not Jewish (her father was deported to a Nazi camp because he was
circumcised and mistaken for a Jew), she does so almost in passing. Her point, rather,
is to ask whether an author’s “pedigree” should determine acceptance into the closed
ranks of survivors and their descendants, a question that affects not only how one’s
scholarship and fiction are received, but whether or not one is granted license to write
about the sacred subject.

Kacandes’s anecdote resonates with what Aaron Hass has described as the
“hierarchy of suffering” among survivors and their families: “the more dire the
circumstances, the more family murdered, the greater the starvation and disease, the
higher the rung in this social register” (9). This question of an author’s pedigree lies at
the heart of contemporary debates over the ethics of representing the Holocaust.
The Power of Fiction

As the generation of survivors passes, accessing the event demands new levels of mediation and imagination, and so fiction, in particular, has come to be considered a “serious vehicle for thinking about the Holocaust” (Hungerrford 181). According to Sicher (“The Future” 65–66), many critics agree that fiction possesses a unique ability to represent the unrepresentable event that is the Holocaust. He goes on to discuss the power of fiction more broadly to promote empathy towards traumatic events: “it is literature that has at least since the Romantics enabled the ethical moment which compels reader response to pain and suffering, which summons the imaginative empathy of affinity with the Other” (66).

The potential for trauma fiction to encourage an “empathy of affinity with the Other” is important when one considers Bernard-Donals and Glejzer’s ethical imperatives for continuing to represent the Holocaust. Yet despite the liberties that govern usual creative practice, authors of Holocaust fiction are held to, and limited by, a particular set of ethical standards. Philosopher and literary critic Berel Lang offers a convincing argument for why this might be the case. He contends that the Nazi genocide was more morally complex than other large-scale horrific events of history, and so Holocaust fiction demands to be judged on its ethical rigour as well as on the traditional literary markers of form and style: the Holocaust’s “moral enormity could not fail to affect the act of writing and the process of its literary representation” (1). In this fraught realm, the question of who owns the Holocaust and so can legitimately speak about it must be considered along with the ways in which they may speak.

These questions of legitimacy and authenticity become more pronounced as generational distance from the Holocaust increases. Jewish literary critic Sidra
DeKoven Ezrahi argues that according to conservative Holocaust critics, “degrees of access” govern an author’s “relative claims to authenticity and artistic license” (53). This view posits that imaginative responses become less valid as an author’s distance from the Holocaust increases. However, while conservative critics might consider the imaginative response of a third-generation author to be less legitimate than that of a second-generation author (whose response is in turn less valid than the direct testimony of a Holocaust survivor), they do not go so far as to argue that these responses are simply invalidated. Rather, the conservative position highlights the fact that as generational distance from the Holocaust increases, the legitimacy of these aesthetic products becomes more ethically fraught.

The Second Generation

The term “second-generation Holocaust survivor” became common—especially in the field of psychology—in the mid 1980s (Flanzbaum 13). However, debate remained surrounding the ability of this second generation to authentically represent their parents’ trauma. According to Sicher (“Postmemory” 262), the key ethical question concerning second-generation Holocaust fiction is whether these authors are “second-generation witnesses” to the trauma of the first generation, or whether they have adopted a trauma not their own. Perhaps the most vocal critic of the second generation’s tendency to over-identify with, and claim “false martyrdom” from, the Holocaust, is Alain Finkielkraut who criticises his generation for appropriating the suffering of their parents in order to gain a sense of moral advantage: in identifying as victims of the Holocaust without direct exposure to its danger or suffering, Finkielkraut argues, the second generation, intentionally or not, resides in fiction as “imaginary Jews” (15). “Without having earned it, I assumed possession of an
extraordinary history and had the right to find it difficult to boot” (10). He insists “the Holocaust has no heirs” (34).

While *The Imaginary Jew* focuses on the dubious moral superiority the second generation adopts through claiming connection to their parents’ trauma, many other scholars have considered the extent to which postwar generations can legitimately represent the Holocaust (Prager 117). Raczymow, for example, questions his right to speak about a trauma that he did not experience directly (“Memory” 102). Authors such as Saul Friedlander and Primo Levi have also considered the dangers of postwar Holocaust literature in relation to the forgetfulness and distortions bound up in memory (Glejzer 128; King 25). Other critics stress both the privilege and the burden of this traumatic inheritance. Second-generation scholar Lori Hope Lefkovitz, whose research focuses on the Judaism and gender studies nexus, articulates this unique position:

> The “Second Generation” at once occupies a position of privilege, closer to some rupture and origin than those who cannot number their generations, and at the same time, ours is a position of relative mediocrity, emphatically not *first* … We are sensitised to the privilege of being on this earth, yet we know we are here through no merit of our own. One must live up to such survival. (36)

After considering Lefkovitz’s perspective on both the privilege and “relative mediocrity” of her generation, Finkielkraut’s claim that “the Holocaust has no heirs” is less compelling. Surely, in their very particular struggles with personal identity and neurosis, members of the second generation can call themselves “survivors”. Not Holocaust survivors directly, but survivors of their parents’ grief, silence, and

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16 Notably, he also engages with Kafka’s writings on why Jews in particular must earn their connection to the past.
expectation. Survivors of both a childhood burdened by their parents’ suffering, and an adulthood in which they must try, with varying degrees of success, to make sense of it. As the novelist Melvin Jules Bukiet notes, the second generation knows the first generation better than anyone else (qtd. in Weissman 18).

*The Third Generation*

According to third-generation literary critic Hilene Flanzbaum, “third-generation survivors began to be examined in the sciences as early as 1980” (14). However, with this generation, as I have suggested, our distance from the Holocaust means that debates over our ability to represent the Holocaust legitiately, or indeed claim connection to our grandparents’ trauma, become more ethically fraught. From this position of generational distance, what ethical right do we have to represent the Holocaust? Does a familial link to the atrocity lend our fiction a degree of ethical validity? According to the conservative position, where imaginative responses become less valid as an author’s distance from the Holocaust increases, third-generation fiction would seem ethically suspect. In this case, perhaps, is the third generation’s connection to the trauma of the Holocaust so remote that it no longer has any impact on the writing or the reading of our work? These issues of legitimacy surrounding third-generation fiction continued to plague me as I completed the creative component of this thesis, “Remington Portable”, the novel inspired by my grandfather’s experience. At the same time, they ensured that I remained vigilant about the ethical magnitude of my task and the gravity of representing the Holocaust.

Sicher notes how “the second and third generations may feel affected if only by association with the lives of the survivors and with their stories which become part of their own conscious awareness of the world around them”. This “obsessive
fascination with Holocaust-related traumatic material” can lead to the Holocaust becoming a primary site of meaning-seeking and identity (“The Future” 67).

Finkielkraut articulates the way the Holocaust came to dominate his life: “the Holocaust I never forgot. On the contrary, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. Deep ignorance, curiously enough, went along with this obsession” (36). My own preoccupation with the subject—a preoccupation that both troubles and inspires me—is the key reason why I have chosen to explore the Holocaust in my creative and critical writing. Legitimately or not, the Holocaust has crucially moulded my own sense of identity. Hilene Flanzbaum, however, questions whether “by the third generation … it make[s] any sense, psychological or otherwise, to attribute behavior to the Holocaust when so many other narratives have intervened?” Her answer resonates with my own experience:

… for me, it has been useful (if painful) to consider the history from which I descend. I take such categorization not as a verdict of destiny or doom but as a tool by which I better understand my previously incomprehensible behaviors and forgive my limitations. To think of myself as part of a third generation holds me accountable to my past.

(15)

**Jonathan Safran Foer**

In an enlightening interview with the Wheeler Centre’s Michael Williams in 2011, Jonathan Safran Foer discussed the ethical ambiguities of writing about trauma. While the next chapter of this essay, “The Trope of Distance”, deals primarily with Foer’s first novel *Everything Is Illuminated* (as well as Nicole Krauss’s *Great House*), Foer mentioned his second novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, in the context of
how it approached the trauma of September 11. A critic had accused Foer of appropriating a national tragedy for his own ends. Foer’s response illuminates the care and sensitivity with which he explores traumatic subject matter in his fiction: “writing is how I’m most careful with things”, so that even if the end product breeches ethical taboos in the eyes of some, “the intentions seem to me to be purely good” (“Interview by Williams”). The question becomes, then, to what extent should the author’s intentions inform reception?

With Foer’s Holocaust novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, the question of how to represent trauma ethically becomes arguably more pronounced. During the interview at the Wheeler Centre, an audience member asked Foer about his views on transgenerational trauma: whether trauma could be passed down from generation to generation, and the form that this inheritance might take. Rather than label his traumatic connection to the Holocaust explicitly, however, Foer provided the analogy of an old vine growing around a fence that has been removed because it is rotting, until “all that was left was this weird vine that’s attached to nothing” (“Interview by Williams”). The idea of inherited trauma as something deformed that flourishes and grows around absence or silence resonates with the experience of post-Holocaust generations.

Many second-generation authors describe a sense of absence or void—a lack of knowledge about the past that seeks some resolution or understanding in the present—as a key reason why they are compelled to explore the Holocaust (Hirsch, “Past Lives” 661–62; Raczymow, “Memory” 100). Third-generation authors arguably suffer this absence even more. In an interview for *The Times* in 2002, Foer articulated the extent of the absence he experienced when he travelled to the Ukraine to research his family history for *Everything Is Illuminated*:
There wasn’t a grandfather, there wasn’t a dog, there wasn’t a woman I found who resembled the woman in the book—but I did go, and I just found—nothing. It’s not like anything else I’ve ever experienced in my life. In a certain sense the book wasn’t an act of creation so much as it was an act of replacement. I encountered a hole—and it was like the hole that I found was in myself, and one that I wanted to try to fill up. (‘Interview by Wagner’)

As I mentioned, my grandfather died when I was ten—years before I understood the term Holocaust or all he had suffered. Everything I know of his life I learned from the single cassette-tape interview conducted by my uncle, or from the stories he told my ten-year-old father one evening after dad had broken his arm and could not sleep. In my experience, then, and similar to the “hole” Foer encountered when he travelled to the Ukraine, third-generation postmemory is filled with a twice-mediated distance from the Holocaust so significant that critics may argue our connection to the atrocity does not exist at all.

Foer explains that while he does not have any unconscious relationship to the Holocaust—he does not dream about it, for example—the event strongly influenced the tone of the dinner-table conversation in his upbringing: “there were things that my grandmother was unable to talk about, and my mother inherited those silences, and I inherited those silences, and my kids will inherit those silences” (“Interview by Williams”). By citing this specific example of the things left unsaid, the topics spoken around, Foer demonstrates that silence is in itself a powerful traumatic inheritance. Foer likens this inheritance to a symptom rather than an illness, when he explains that the content of his first novel “might mean that I’m exhibiting symptoms of something, not that I’m diagnosing it” (“Interview by Williams”).
The idea of Foer’s work as a symptom of an unarticulated trauma resonates in a broader way with the experience of third-generation authors. Our connection to the Holocaust is vaguer and more remote than is that of the second generation, who can more legitimately claim to have inherited trauma from the event. Despite this, a growing stable of third-generation authors, including Foer, Krauss, Elliot Perlman, and Michael Chabon, continue to explore the Holocaust in celebrated and challenging fiction. Just what, exactly, drives these authors to write Holocaust fiction if not some profound link to the subject in their own psyche? While perhaps third-generation fiction will always ignite rigorous ethical debate, the traumatic symptoms Foer describes—symptoms I identify with—nevertheless manifest in particular narrative techniques.
Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated* and Krauss’s *Great House* each uses the trope of distance to articulate its generation’s unique connection to and distance from the Holocaust. In this chapter, I will investigate ways in which Foer and Krauss use linguistic and thematic distancing techniques to highlight their twice-mediated knowledge of the atrocity. I contend that by drawing attention to their remoteness from the Holocaust, they enable readers to compare their own perhaps undeveloped knowledge of the atrocity against the version being presented in the text, and thus to be led away from a passive or complacent reading of history towards a more active one. In this way, I argue, *Everything Is Illuminated* and *Great House* can be considered ethically valid not despite but because of their authors’ generational distance from the Holocaust.

*Everything Is Illuminated*

First, I will explore the use of two distancing techniques in *Everything Is Illuminated*: the role of the translator as a mediating device in an already twice-mediated metafiction, and the translator’s comical and inept use of the English language, which serves to distance the reader from the “facts” of the story. Robert Eaglestone notes that “it is precisely the distance from the events that leads to its choice of novelistic style” (128).

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi discusses the potential for imaginative Holocaust fiction to engage meaningfully with contemporary ethical discourse: “ironically, an imaginative approach to the historical material that takes account of our increasing
distance from it—[is] also more amenable to universal ethical legacies” (61). I will argue that Foer uses imaginative language deliberately to draw attention to the layers of distance in his text, and in doing so engages with such “universal ethical legacies” by encouraging the reader to pay close attention to the version of history being presented behind this inventive language. Foer’s novel thus promotes “active reading”, a state in which the reader is less likely to passively witness the trauma of the Holocaust and more likely to vigorously engage in the act of remembrance.

Further, Foer’s use of distancing techniques serves to remind the reader of his twice-mediated access to the Holocaust. By employing these nuanced dual approaches to the trope of distance in his text, Foer responds ethically to the challenge of representing the Holocaust from the distance of the third generation.

Jonathan Safran Foer was born in Washington D.C. in 1977, the son of successful Jewish parents. During his undergraduate study in philosophy at Princeton University, he took an introductory subject in creative writing with Joyce Carol Oates. The course was a turning point in Foer’s life; after studying briefly for a degree in graduate medicine, Foer dropped out to pursue a career as a writer. His first novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, inspired to a degree by his maternal grandfather’s experiences of the Holocaust, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2002. The novel met with rave reviews, earning Foer a National Jewish Book Award and a *Guardian* First Book Award. Given the novel’s imaginative treatment of the Holocaust—a subject for which “etiquette” favours historical realism over the subversive potential of imaginative fiction—the lack of controversy surrounding its publication was especially noteworthy (Flanzbaum, qtd. in Kern-Stähler and Stähler 164).

Foer’s use of distancing devices in the text to highlight his multiply mediated access to the Holocaust underlies a complex metafictional narrative structure. Told
from the dual perspectives of the serious Jewish-American student Jonathan Safran Foer and his comical translator Alexander Perchov, the novel explores Jonathan’s journey to the Ukraine to find Augustine—the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. The narratives converge when it is revealed that Alex’s grandfather (who serves as Alex and Jonathan’s driver in the Ukraine) was both a victim and a perpetrator of the Nazi massacre in the town of Kolki. As the novel progresses, Alex begins to question the morality of “improving” the facts of the Holocaust to better fit Jonathan’s story:

We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred? ... If your answer is yes, then this creates another question, which is if we are to be such nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life? (Foer 179)

Alex’s question encompasses not only the ethics of writing imaginative Holocaust fiction but, specifically, Foer’s ability to access the subject from the historical distance of the third generation. Alex’s role as translator, then, functions as a further mediating device.

The role of the translator in literature has been investigated with growing interest in recent years (Kern-Stähler and Stähler 160). In the field of Holocaust testimony, however, direct access to survivors and their memories (in so far as is possible) is considered important. Including a translator in the act of testimony, then, adds a level of mediation that could be seen to detract from the directness of access to the survivor’s testimony. In the context of mental health, Hanneke Bot describes this complex interaction between witness, translator and listener as the development of a “three-person psychology” (qtd. in Kern-Stähler and Stähler 161). Positioned between
witness and listener, the translator both affects and is affected by the moment of testimony.

In *Everything Is Illuminated*, the role of the translator symbolises both the difficulties of transmitting the unimaginable trauma of the Holocaust, and the impossibility of receiving that trauma as reader or listener. By including a translator as one of his two central narrators, “Foer emphasises the narrative and mediated character of Holocaust testimony” (Kern-Stähler and Stähler 173). However, as a member of the third generation, Foer is already twice-distanced from the events he seeks to represent. The character of the translator, Alex, thus adds a third level of mediation. As he travels through the Ukraine in search of Augustine, Jonathan must rely on Alex to “illuminate” information about the present and the past. When Alex tells Jonathan in a letter, “You were perhaps accounting upon a translator with more faculties, but I am certain that I did a mediocre job”, moreover, he raises doubts about whether or not his translations were reliable (Foer 23). The question, then, is why Foer would seek to draw attention to his distance from the Holocaust by choosing an *unreliable* translator—a figure whose role is already responsible for providing a further layer of mediation. Alex later admits to his unreliable translations:

> “Fuck,” Grandfather said. I said, “He says if you look at the statues, you can see that some no longer endure. Those are where Communist statues used to be.” “ Fucking fuck, fuck!” Grandfather shouted. “Oh,” I said, “he wants you to know that that building, that building, and that building are all important.”

Here, Alex chooses to spare Jonathan the emotion his grandfather is suffering as a result of returning to his traumatic past. Curse words become commentary on the
landscape and its significance, allowing humour to bubble up in the spaces between the grandfather’s expletives and what Alex chooses to convey. This discrepancy between what is uttered and what is conveyed is an effective distancing device, as it creates distance between the witness’s testimony and its translation. In this way, Foer encourages the reader to question his text’s reality, even as he attempts to explore the subject of the Holocaust with some authenticity or truth. Foer uses this technique, I would suggest, to draw attention to his generational distance from the Holocaust. This distance serves to remind readers of the mediated and subjective nature of third-generation fiction. By asking readers to remain vigilant about questioning the version of events being presented in the text, Foer prompts them “to take another look—a deeper look, a more thoughtful look—at the event” (Flanzbaum, qtd. in Kern-Stähler and Stähler 165). The device of the translator, then, serves as an example of how an author can utilise generational distance in an ethical and instructive way.

On a linguistic level, Alex’s role as translator serves to highlight both the unreliability and the capacity of language “to convey the horror of traumatic experience and the ethical conundrums inherent in confronting it” (Kern-Stähler and Stähler 165). Indeed, Alex’s inept and comical use of the English language functions as the second key distancing device in the text. The following is an excerpt from the start of the novel, “AN OVERTURE TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF A VERY RIGID JOURNEY”:

My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name. Mother dubs me Alexi-stop-spleening-me!, because I am always spleening her. If you want to know why I am always spleening her, it is because I am always
elsewhere with friends, and disseminating so much currency, and performing so many things that can spleen a mother. (Foer 1)

Alex misuses adjectives and verbs to comic affect, when, for example, he substitutes linguistic synonyms such as “rigid” for “hard” and “dub” for “call”, but far from operating as a simple strategy for laughs, Alex’s misuse of language distances readers from the text, so that while they still become swept up in the story, they maintain a critical distance. In this space between creative and critical engagement, readers are led to question not only the narrator’s use of language but also, and more importantly, to compare their own knowledge of the Holocaust against the version presented in the text. Because if readers cannot trust Alex to convey accurately events in the present-day world of the story, it follows that they cannot trust him to convey accurately the distant events of the Holocaust. The narrator’s (mis)use of language thus allows Foer to explore wider themes of truth and perception. Jonathan pursues the truth of what happened to his grandfather in the Holocaust only to discover that from his position of generational distance there is no objective truth, that his knowledge of the Holocaust is subjective because it is mediated by (post) postmemory. By choosing a narrator who struggles with the English language, Foer highlights the vagaries of memory in his text, and encourages readers to engage more vigorously in the act of remembering the Holocaust.

Novelist Yann Martel, whose controversial Holocaust novel Beatrice and Virgil was published in 2010, has spoken out in favour of inventive Holocaust narratives for the reason that they encourage readers to engage more actively in the text. According to Martel, the fact that society still has trouble accepting metaphorical or imaginative representations of the Holocaust not only leads to stories about it becoming sacrosanct, but also limits the Holocaust’s capacity to teach. While such
faded and familiar images as “barking Germans [and] cowering Jews” still elicit an emotional response, their reduction to “ancient history” means they cannot persuade readers to re-evaluate critically their significance for contemporary society (Martel). Martel argues that creative Holocaust narratives—including, I would suggest, those that interrogate notions of generational distance—help society re-encounter an otherwise distant historical event.

Great House

Nicole Krauss was born in Manhattan in 1974 to Jewish parents; her maternal and paternal Jewish grandparents had emigrated to London and New York respectively to escape the Holocaust. She enrolled at Stanford University in 1992 to study English, and in 1996 received a Marshall Scholarship that allowed her to pursue graduate study in art history in Britain. Krauss’s first novel, Man Walks into a Room, published in 2001, explores themes of memory, and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times First Book Award. The History of Love, the author’s second novel and an international bestseller, was published in 2005 to wide critical acclaim. Published in 2010, her third novel, Great House, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction and was shortlisted for the Orange Prize in 2011. Krauss and Foer married in 2004.

In Krauss’s Great House, the trope of distance emerges in embedded, nuanced ways. Her technique is narratological rather than linguistic; rather than utilise distance in the language of the book, Krauss structures her narrative as a journey from “distant, foreign points” towards a traumatic heart: an Israeli antiques dealer named Weisz whose father’s desk was plundered from his study in Budapest by the Nazis (qtd. in Spence 35). The lives of the four Jewish narrators intersect at this “gargantuan writing desk” (Spence 35). Thus, the desk functions as an extended metaphor whose
menacing power comes to represent the burden of emotional inheritance; as the links between characters become clear, so too does their varying access to the trauma of the Holocaust.

The book is divided into two related sections, each containing four chapters narrated in the first person. In the first chapter, “All Rise”, a middle-aged New York writer named Nadia professes her remorse to an unknown listener she addresses as “Your Honour”: in writing seven novels at the desk she inherited from the murdered Chilean poet Daniel Varsky, Nadia confesses she has neglected opportunities to seize both love and life (Moore). Varsky’s death haunts Nadia to the extent that the trauma permeates each area of her life. Her descent into paranoia and paralysis (she cannot work) is told in flashback. The hulking desk that Nadia has “physically grown around” in some ways triggers this emotional descent (Krauss 17). When Weisz’s daughter, Leah, comes to claim the desk, the loss severs Nadia’s writing life; it is as if she cannot function without the familiar burden of this inherited object:

I looked across the room at the wooden desk at which I had written seven novels … One drawer was slightly ajar, one of the nineteen drawers, some small and some large, whose odd number and strange array, I realized now, on the cusp of their being suddenly taken from me, had come to signify a kind of guiding if mysterious order in my life, an order that, when my work was going well, took on an almost mystical quality … Had the caller been almost anyone else, after hanging up I would have returned to the desk that over the course of two and a half decades I’d physically grown around, my posture formed by years of leaning over it and fitting myself to it. (16–17)
While her character has no direct connection to the Holocaust (Nadia remains ignorant of the desk’s origins in the study in Budapest), her response to first gaining and then losing the desk mirrors symptoms of transgenerational trauma. Nadia clings to this trauma even when its direct object (the desk) has been removed. Here again, the desk functions as a metaphor to represent the third generation’s vague yet powerful emotional connection to the trauma of the Holocaust.

The next chapter, “True Kindness”, while it bears perhaps the least relation to the Holocaust (the desk is not present here at all), further explores themes of death and loss through the trope of distance. Set in Israel, the chapter focuses on the elderly Jew Aaron’s attempts to reconcile with his estranged son—a judge who is in a coma after being hit by a car (we later learn that Nadia was driving and Aaron’s son is the judge to whom she addresses her first-person confession). Aaron laments that his son “tirelessly searched for and collected suffering” from a young age, eventually writing a clandestine novel about a captured shark that bears the accumulated misery of the people dreaming around it (68). While the chapter does not deal directly with the Holocaust, suffering and death are present not just as themes but as menacing forces the characters are attempting to escape.

“Swimming Holes” explores British scholar Arthur’s guilty investigation into his mysterious wife Lotte’s traumatic past (Moore). As she succumbs to dementia, he considers whether her deep-seated grief at leaving her parents behind when she escaped from Nazi Germany on a Kindertransport in 1939 invalidates what he thought was their happy life together. In the fourth chapter, “Lies Told by Children”, a young writer/academic named Izzy explores the truth of her relationship with the damaged siblings, Yoav and Leah (Moore). In the second section of the novel, this chapter is replaced by one titled “Weisz”, in which Yoav and Leah’s father reveals the origin of
the desk’s extraordinary influence: he has spent his life as an antiques dealer tracking
down the furniture plundered by the Nazis from his father’s study. The desk is the
final piece in the puzzle, and after retrieving it he commits suicide.

The novel’s structure, which opposes “any kind of easy connective tissue” so
that characters and narratives stand removed from one another for the majority of the
book, reflects the difficulty of accessing the trauma of the Holocaust from the
distance of the third generation (Krauss, “Nicole Krauss”). According to Krauss:

> novels tend to be, in some way, a structural blueprint of the
> mechanisms of the author’s mind, and I happen to have a very strong
> spatial sense … I’ve developed this habit of starting at very distant,
> foreign points and moving inwards. I’m trying to understand: what is
> the connection between these feelings, these people, these places, these
> ideas? (qtd. in Spence 35)

Krauss’s narrative progresses from these “distant, foreign points” towards the
harrowing core of the novel—the owner of the stolen antique desk reclaiming it only
to commit suicide—with only a vague sense of how (or indeed if) these characters
and narratives will connect. Without any obvious sense of chronology, the narratives
stand beside each other in time and space. The novel’s structure, then, functions as a
series of concentric circles that sweep ever closer to the Holocaust as the site of grief.
Krauss approaches the trauma of the event indirectly, never tackling it head-on but
rather coming at it from the side as the narrative circles finally overlap. This structural
approach leaves the reader feeling both distanced from the trauma of the Holocaust,
and wary of investing emotionally in the story lest these tentative narrative threads
fail to connect. However, just as the reader struggles against the structural and
emotional distance inherent in the novel, so too does the author of third-generation
fiction struggle to access the trauma of the Holocaust from their position of generational distance. Thus, the reader’s difficult journey through the narrative—their battle against the trope of distance inherent in the novel’s structure—mirrors the third-generation author’s struggle to connect meaningfully with their remote traumatic past.

Linking these disparate narratives is the desk which, Krauss notes “becomes like a needle and thread that stitches some of the stories together” (“Nicole Krauss”). Far from a simple structural aid, however, the desk comes to represent the burden of inherited trauma. Krauss explains “it wasn’t so much the desk that mattered, but the burden of inheritance—emotional inheritance. This is one of the many things I was writing about: what we inherit from our parents and what we pass down to our children … And so, somehow, the desk became imbued with all of that” (qtd. in Spence 35).

As the desk was stolen by the Nazis, however, its menacing power over the characters linked to it stems directly from the trauma of the Holocaust. This trauma is symbolised in the physical structure of the desk itself. The desk’s nineteenth drawer is locked, as if here, sealed under lock and key, resides the original site of trauma: the hidden suffering of the Holocaust. This drawer haunts the characters for the reason that they cannot access it; what resides in there is a mystery that is both inherited and inaccessible. Thus, the desk functions as a metaphor, I would argue, for the vague yet powerful emotional connection these characters have to the Holocaust, despite the fact that many of them bear no direct familial connection to it. Krauss, however, contends that Great House does not explore the Holocaust directly:

I know this goes against the grain of what most critics might say about my work, but I would not say that I’ve written about the Holocaust. I am the grandchild of people who survived the historical event. I’m not
writing their story—I couldn’t write their story. There are characters in my novels who have either survived the Holocaust or been affected by it. But I’ve written very little about the Holocaust in terms of actual events. What interests me is the response to catastrophic loss. (“Nicole Krauss”)

Krauss acknowledges that the title of her book, *Great House*, which refers to a story from the *Book of Kings* about the Jews being exiled from Jerusalem, speaks directly to the “catastrophic loss” her family endured in the Second World War, and more broadly to “how Jews attempt to cope with the destruction that characterises their history” (Moore). The troubled Jewish siblings, Yoav and Leah, are the only characters in *Great House* who belong to the third generation (the desk was their Hungarian grandfather’s). While their father, Weisz, disguises the burden of his emotional inheritance, his strict and dogged personality (mirrored in his unrelenting search for his father’s desk) has the effect of transferring his own inherited trauma onto his children.

Thus, although there are only two third-generation characters, I would argue that the themes of distance and haunting that permeate the book—the characters’ vague yet potent emotional connection to the trauma of the Holocaust—reflects the third generation’s dilemma. How do we access the trauma of the Holocaust from the distance of the third generation? What does it mean to be both connected to and twice-distanced from the event we seek to represent? How do we resolve these seemingly disparate approaches? Is our work, by its very distance from the Holocaust, ethically suspect? Or can this distance itself, when acknowledged and utilised as a narrative trope as in *Great House*, render our work ethically legitimate? These questions resonate throughout *Great House*. 
CONCLUSION

In “The Future of the Past”, Efraim Sicher articulates the second generation’s complex need to privately mourn and publicly “speak” the Holocaust—a need that encompasses both their desire to promote lessons of the atrocity in order to oppose the silence that harbours forgetting or denial, while simultaneously “working-through” the Holocaust’s traumatic legacy on their own psyches (70). Is the third generation compelled by this same need to privately mourn and publicly “speak” the Holocaust? Do our fictions arise from the desire to process our traumatic inheritance, or from subtler, more complex yearnings?

In this essay, I have investigated the ethical ambiguities of third-generation Holocaust fiction. I have engaged with scholarship that critiques this generation’s attempts to connect vicariously with its traumatic past, while also considering how the burden of emotional inheritance manifests in third-generation fiction in the narrative trope of distance. In Everything Is Illuminated and Great House, Foer and Krauss use distancing techniques not only to draw attention to their generational remoteness from the Holocaust, but also to encourage readers to confront the atrocity. Viewed in this light, the texts can be considered ethically valid not despite but because of their author’s generational distance. Foer’s and Krauss’s models suggest that an author’s very distance from the Holocaust is not only an inevitable but a productive ingredient of contemporary Holocaust fiction. Everything Is Illuminated and Great House have broader implications for how contemporary society accesses past atrocities, suggesting that the mediated spaces of (post) postmemory and imagination are fertile and legitimate sources for engaging with acts of atrocity.

Eaglestone notes how representing postmemory in narrative can lead the author to experience “the movement of one state of knowledge to another through
mourning the Holocaust” (97). This thesis has been my attempt to remember—and to mourn—my grandfather. Whether or not I have emerged at a new state of knowledge, as Eaglestone suggests is a possible effect of such remembering, grappling with the ideas outlined in this essay has allowed me to engage with the ethical and narrative complexities of third-generation Holocaust fiction, which in turn has impacted the writing of “Remington Portable”. This journey has been both intellectually and emotionally taxing, and deeply enriching. Ultimately, however, the work must stand alone. If it does, then perhaps these “processes of memorialisation … are not only an ethical commitment to the past, but a commitment to the future as well” (Eaglestone 100).
Works Cited


APPENDIX

(remainder of manuscript “Remington Portable”)
Having said his piece, Bruno shivered and returned his hands to his pockets. He smiled, eager to greet Sarah’s response. But they arrived at a crossroads. Bruno inched his mottled lips above his collar.

“My neighbourhood,” he said.

Sarah glanced ahead. Hordes spilled from shops and bakers to claim the icy street. Cabs roared their horns but the crowd ignored them. They had arrived, suddenly, in a Jewish area.

“Is it always so bustling?” she asked.

“Pfft. Wait for Friday before the Sabbath when Katz’s does franks and beans.”

Bruno snatched a hand from his pocket and used it, triumphantly, to stab the air.

“See?”

Sarah squinted across the street and saw, against a backdrop of construction, a deli with flashing neon lights.

Bruno leapt onto the street. His foot landed in a mound of dirty, half-melted snow. He whipped it up without stopping. They arrived at Katz’s wide shopfront. Despite the construction work—the fact the deli stood bare without so much as a tree or friendly bird to lend it company—some warmth or generosity radiated from it. Two queues snaked out the door. Behind a window of enormous hanging salamis, Sarah glimpsed a long and bustling counter. It wasn’t just religious Jews flocking through the door, either, but young couples, emerging executives, and at this moment, a young mother with a pram trying to burst through in the opposite direction. Bruno saw her and leapt forward to lift the pram’s wheels. The woman was so intent on her screaming baby she didn’t thank him. But Bruno stood smiling after her, as if there in
front of him passed the bearer of miraculous, precious life. Then he darted inside, and
Sarah leapt in, apologising, after him.

“Oy Sascha!” Bruno straddled queues at the counter. A bemused older woman
glanced up from scribbling on a paper ticket to wave at him.

Sarah inched backwards from the counter. What distinguished the lines on
either side of her she couldn’t say. The queue had split into five or six. At the head of
each, an efficient waiter—all pushing sixty, grizzled and shrewd—scribbled orders on
a wad of paper tickets. The younger, more fashionable crowd had dispersed among
the older, tireder folk. The fluorescent dining room’s laminated tables and creaky
wooden chairs were packed with tourists, rappers and families. The older customers,
the ones with beards and the ones without, some with thinning hair and others with
sunspots, clung to a few compact tables on the back wall.

Sarah noticed that one table in the three dozen was free. Bruno bounded
towards it, calling greetings to various staff with such volume and cheer that two
leather-clad youths actually rolled their eyes. Sarah followed him, her gut clenched
tight. The back tables bore at least ten ancient, speckled heads; these heads were
beginning to turn. By the time Sarah reached Bruno he had already seated himself.
She was about to dash off to the Ladies when she saw a white plastic rectangle
propped on the table. The word reserved, printed in black, commandeered its surface.
Beneath it, in worn blue nikko, were scrawled the words for Bruno. Sarah glanced
down and saw Bruno grinning.

“You thought I pushed in,” he said. “Mike—my friend thought I pushed in!”

The antique Mike held court on the phone on the back wall; he tucked it in
beside his shoulder and tossed his hands in the air. Sarah sat down.

“So,” Bruno said, removing his gloves finger by finger. “What do you think?”
Sarah felt the stirrings of a prehistoric memory, worn like a fossil to flecks of dust. Once, she would have enjoyed this. Her family, in fact, would have had a ball here—her father outlining the various Jewish specialties, her mother affectionately undermining him. They would have stuffed themselves with chopped liver and matzo ball soup and conjured the feast in loving detail afterwards. Sarah glanced anxiously behind her. Were it not for the fact she was positive every person in the room was staring, she just might have had a good time.

“I like it,” Sarah said.

Bruno grinned. “Wait ‘til you try the pastrami.”

It was uncomfortably warm. Bruno patted his earlobes and removed his beanie, then unzipped the collar of his jacket.

“So,” he said, eyes twinkling. “Stories.”

Sarah didn’t remember ordering anything, but two coffees arrived in thick, off-white mugs. Bruno beamed up at the waitress. Despite her age, there was something about the woman—a quality beyond her lustrous red hair and powdery, flawless skin. Sarah thanked her and saw that the woman’s eyes were yellow—startlingly so—and that against her skin this was beautiful. She knew, suddenly, that this woman hadn’t always served coffee. The waitress patted Bruno on the shoulder and returned to the counter. Bruno lunged his spoon at the retro sugar bowl, filled a heaped teaspoon and dumped it in his coffee.

“Okay, tell me the problem.” He dived back for another spoonful. “There’s a problem, isn’t there? With your writing?”

“It’s just the time pressure,” Sarah said, suddenly agitated. “That, and the fact I’m writing about my grandparents. If the book stinks, I’ve done their memory a disservice.”
Bruno’s nose quivered. “But you tell of the Holocaust, yes? Here, stories are better out than in.”

“So you’re saying I should just make it up?”

Bruno nodded vigorously. “Better to get people thinking,” he said. “You think Art Spiegelman win the Pootzer—”


“That’s what I said—the Pootzer. You think he win this by telling the truth? He draws mice and cats—and pigs even, the Poles as pigs!—and somehow it all makes sense. More sense than the real story.”

Sarah reached for security to her coffee. The liquid was pitch black. She noticed, too, an imprint of lipstick on the opposite rim. She gripped the handle and brought it to her lips. The coffee was bitter and almost cold; she forced a sip down, and then another. Bruno’s eyes widened to greet her response. When there wasn’t one, he fell to stirring his coffee. For at least a minute, he moved his spoon evenly around the rim. When finally he withdrew it, he licked the spoon carefully and laid it on a paper napkin he had waiting. He went to speak, then raised a blackened index finger to silence himself.

“We’ll wait for our pastrami.”

They didn’t wait long. The sandwich arrived, succulent and enormous, its two gaping halves burdened by pounds of glistening meat. If Sarah had ever had the urge to submit to her inner carnivore, she had that urge now. The waitress placed two side plates on the table. Bruno leapt on them. In a matter of seconds, he’d divided the sandwich halves between plates, whipped two paper napkins from the metal dispenser, and laid out Sarah’s cutlery. His moustache quivered expectantly. Sarah considered her cutlery, then gripped the great breaded thing in her fingers. She bit in
deep; the sandwich curled up comically into her cheeks. At last her teeth gathered speed. Sarah closed her eyes, savouring the ancient pleasure that slid through her, the feeling pure and whole in her gut of smoke and salt and sauce. When she opened her eyes, delight radiated from Bruno’s ears. He hadn’t touched his plate.

“So!” he said contentedly. “Now I tell you a story.” Bruno flung a hand up to correct himself. “Two stories.” He nodded at an elderly man with an orange comb-over sitting alone on the back wall. “See that man over there?”

Sarah nodded.

“He escaped in ’42. From Poland.”

Sarah felt the familiar throb in her stomach, the writer’s instinct flaring like a nostril with some promising new scent.

“Where in Poland?” she asked.

It was all she could think to say that wasn’t too eager, that didn’t reveal how badly she wanted the story—how she’d already considered, if it were good enough, writing it into her book.

Bruno rolled his shoulders and cracked his neck from side to side. The light in his eyes grew serious.

“That man with the orange hair is called Markus Salamander. He was a famous watchmaker in Krakow before the war.” His voice grew urgent. “You ever been to Krakow?”

Sarah shook her head.

“Before the war, it had the finest Old Town in all of Europe. Narrow laneways, worn cobblestones—grand buildings sagging one into the other. And here, between a tavern and an ancient coffeehouse, Markus Salamander plied his trade. He
was fourth in a line of renowned watchmakers, each son born with sharper eyes and finer fingers than the last.”

Bruno nodded wistfully at the old man.

“His fingers may look thickened now, but imagine them seventy years ago, each one strong and nimble as a concert pianist’s. Even before Markus’s birth, the fame of the little shop grew. Churchill, as a young man, had sent his gold pocket watch to Markus’s father, and the boy had stared, mesmerised, as his old man retrieved his steel tools from their pouch, slid on his soft white gloves and set to work removing the damaged crystal face. As he watched his father, it occurred to Markus that the old man’s tools, though thin and strong, could be thinner and stronger. Some were as thick as a cigarette—the finest still thicker than a match.

Several years passed. The famous watchmaker, an avid smoker of pipes, was diagnosed with throat cancer. Before the curse took hold of his windpipe, the sixteen-year-old Markus set to work fashioning his own tools from a hidden block of steel he had desired and saved for. He worked many weeks on the task, neglecting his young sweetheart so terribly that she left him for the artisan baker several doors down. In truth, however, Markus was happier than ever. Each evening, he crouched by the kerosene lamp in the workroom behind the shop and caressed fine slivers of steel from his block. Soon, he had five strong, thin tools the size of fishing wire. But he dreamed of a sixth tool—a screwdriver the width of ten human hairs. To Markus’s knowledge, nothing like it had ever existed. He set to work on the punishing task. Even with his superb eyesight, the screwdriver’s head was so fine he had to fashion it under a microscope. But finally the tiny tool came together, and Markus prepared to show his handiwork to his ailing old man.
It was six o’clock on a gusty Saturday; with his mother gone and father dying, Markus had abandoned observing the Sabbath. Saturdays, in fact, with the shop closed, were when he made most progress on his tools. He shaved the final metal fleck from his exquisitely wrought screwdriver, leapt up in a little dance, then slid the finished tools into their miniscule individual compartments in the slim leather pouch he had sewn for the purpose. Markus rolled and tied the pouch, secured it in his apron, and climbed the narrow stairs to his father’s bedroom.

An excited voice burst over the radio. Markus sighed—the announcers these days were easily riled. Perhaps in hindsight, he should have paid the voice heed. For it was August, 1939: in just six days, Hitler would invade Poland.

The old man greeted his son with a hacking wheeze. The cloth on his forehead had soaked through; Markus replaced it with a fresh one. Only then did he sit and remove his pouch.

‘What day is it?’ the old man croaked.

Markus felt a stab of regret in his breast, but he lied, ‘It’s Sunday, father. You slept through the Sabbath.’

The old man closed his eyes.

‘But look, I have something to show you.’

His father opened a single, swollen eye. ‘What is it?’

Markus held the pouch to the dim lamp light and slowly unrolled it.

‘Tools?’ the old man whispered.

Markus nodded. ‘Made of fine, strong steel. See how fine, Father? I left yours in the workshop—I hope you’re not angry. But I thought this could be my contribution. Grandfather revolutionised the fob chain, you designed the army’s wristwatches. I could be known for my tool’s precision.’
The old man, with the last of his strength, raised his hand to inspect the screwdriver. He removed it from its holder and held it close to his nose. His hand trembled; he blinked and brought the tool closer. For the last time, he smiled up at his beloved son. ‘Excellent work, my boy,’ he said. ‘You did excellent work.’ His hand fell back upon the bed. An hour later, he was dead.

Markus had overseen the shop during his father’s illness, but he stepped up now as owner and watchmaker. At first, the family name protected him. A number of high ranking Nazi officials even sent their watches, during the first few months of war, quietly to Markus for repair. But in December 1941, the Jews of the Old Town were rounded up at gunpoint and lined up for hours in the frigid Square. One by one, the officers searched them. But Markus had slipped his tool pouch into a pocket he had sewn inside his left sock, and when his turn came, it was not found.

And so Markus found himself standing for three hours beside the unlucky baker, whose wife—Markus’s childhood sweetheart—had died in childbirth. He had nothing to his name but the clothes on his back and the pouch in his sock. Finally, the officers marched the Jews through town to the old train station, where they were beaten with rifle butts and herded onto a cattle train bound for Birkenau.

Locked with dozens of others inside a cramped compartment and forced to stand on his neighbours’ feet atop filthy straw, Markus thanked God his father had passed. He could not guess how long the train remained at the station for his gold Rolex—gifted by a Danish royal when Markus repaired a water-logged heirloom three Danish watchmakers had failed to resuscitate—had been confiscated in the Square. Suddenly, the train shuddered into movement. Days passed without announcements, food, or water, and still the train wound along.
One morning, waking from a nap against three heads with the same idea, Markus glanced down to find faeces covering the ankle of his left boot. The shit was loose and warm, and had seeped well inside his sock. Instinctively, Markus lunged forward to save his pouch, striking instead a dozen bottoms and backs. A shaft of dim winter sun penetrated the clogged grate above his head. Markus grasped an idea: he would pick the carriage’s lock. No—he smacked his head—the carriage was locked from the outside. He fell into despondency. And then another, better thought struck him: he would pick the hinges and detach one side of the entire sliding door. Markus raised himself on tiptoes, feeling the shit trickle further down his sock. The high black hinge on the far side of the carriage came into view, rusted and enormous. Markus couldn’t see the bottom one, but it was no doubt the same. To unpick them would take hours—he would have to enlist help. Markus cleared his throat (the action loosened some phlegm), and announced his idea. The carriage was silent both before and after. Then a grizzled mother with two pale children told him to stop speaking horse shit. Markus explained his profession again—perhaps some in the train had heard of him? If people could create some room, he said, he would bend down and retrieve his pouch.

Silence again. Then a frail old man pinned directly in front of Markus announced that the carriage would cooperate. His voice was low and familiar—Markus couldn’t place it. But as bodies shifted and stomachs sucked, he remembered where he had heard it as a boy: Synagogue. The man was the town’s Rabbi. Markus stretched painfully towards his boot. Finally, he inched the shit-covered pouch from inside his sock and raised it in triumph above his head.
Bodies squeezed tightly together as Markus crossed the carriage and the old Rabbi delegated tasks. Four men and the smallest, most pliable girl—for the bottom hinge—would assist.

Over the next nine hours, these six drew close in shared purpose. The men worked in bursts, rotating when one grew tired. The girl astonished everyone by slaving for eight hours straight. But as the ninth hour dawned, the men’s drive faded. One made a comment—intended to buoy the other’s spirits—that the shit had made the tools damn slippery. Hearing him, the young girl overthought the next turn of the tiny screwdriver and dropped it promptly beneath the floorboards. Markus did not berate her. The train had been stopped for hours; he thought perhaps he might still get the screwdriver back. Morale was flagging, in any case, so Markus took the last shift by himself. The bottom hinge was quickest. The top took longer, but at last he freed the final screw. A strain of bounding joy shot through him. He glanced around the eager faces of the hushed carriage. Holding the door in place, Markus made an announcement.

‘When I release my hand, the door will collapse out.’ The carriage inhaled.

‘Remember, it’s still attached by the hinges on the other end. We’ll have seconds only before they come after us. We may be in a town or in the middle of a field. The important thing is that you run, and keep running until the train is out of sight.’

The old Rabbi flexed his wasted calf muscles.

Markus struck his final match and looked around to gather the mood. ‘Are we ready?’

The grizzled mother gripped her children. Pale faces nodded.

‘Alright,’ he said. ‘One, two—three.’
With a quick snap of Markus’s wrist, the door gaped out into the night. The gap was wide, and Markus ran through it, and others ran after him. They tumbled down an embankment beside a moonlit station onto a field of pristine snow. And then a whistle shrilled, and a command, and bullets exploded the air. Markus fell forward into the snow as a great weight collapsed on top of him. He clasped the pouch in his fingers and willed his last thought to be of it. But when the gunfire ceased, and orders were passed to leave the dead Jews in the field, Markus realised he wasn’t dead. The train pulled away from the station. Minutes later, Markus inched out from beneath the body on top of him, glanced back at his massacred friends, and without a thought ran through the snow.”

Sarah realised when Bruno’s hands fell to the plastic table she’d been holding her breath. His eyes shimmered like the surface of some exquisite lake. He blinked his long lashes several times.

“A miracle, yes?”

Sarah smiled, because Markus’s survival really was. The atrocious dye job of the old man on the back wall, in this profound new light, seemed almost forgivable.

“And I have another story.”

Sarah gripped the towering corner of her sandwich. Bruno’s story had unleashed in her some new hunger, an appetite that had vanished for a good three years.

“This one is different,” Bruno said. “A little girl this time named Irma Bauer.”

Sarah decided to tackle her sandwich when Bruno had finished.

“Have you heard of Irma Bauer?” he asked.

Sarah shook her head.
“What about Lotte Bauer?”

“No.”

Bruno’s forehead shot up. “And Madame Chanel?”

Under normal circumstances, Sarah would have been insulted. “Of course I’ve heard of her.”

“Well Lotte Bauer was Madame Chanel’s friend. They grew up together in Paris, poor as church mice. Like her friend, Lotte was a seamstress. But as Madame Chanel’s fame grew, Lotte decided to stake out different terrain by branching into the field of hats. Her talent was silk flowers—she’d clump them together on top of a hat, like this—” Bruno clasped the ketchup and brought it to his head. “Paris ladies loved it! Lotte started a shop on Rue Cambon two doors down from Chanel. Now, elegant Parisian ladies could buy a dress and a hat on the same street. Queues formed around the block for Lotte’s flower hats—big hats, little hats, berets and cloches, all topped with at least one exquisite little silk flower. And in the salon, which itself was decked out in a hundred silk blooms like a secret garden, little Irma Bauer, at just six years old, helped her mother by drawing pictures of her favourite flowers.

The things she would draw! One week peonies, so abundant you could smell them on the page, and then the next week tulips, each as perfect and bright as the bloom itself. Soon, the elegant ladies were queuing on Rue Cambon not only for a flower hat, but for a signed print from the little artist that had inspired them.

In 1932, the fact Lotte and Irma Bauer were Jews passed almost unnoticed. Some good years followed. But by 1938 their queues had begun to waiver. The drop off was slow at first, for the ladies of Paris cared more for fashion than for politics, but by January of 1939 there were no more lines outside the Magasin de Chapeaux de Fleurs, and few customers altogether. Madame Chanel helped where she could,
sending a well-heeled lady or two down the street when they could be persuaded, advising them that their pearls and jacket required, of course, a silk flower hat. But she soon stopped too, and by spring of that year, just as the superb bulbs in the Tuilleries surged to life, the glorious hat shop on Rue Cambon had no choice but to close its doors. Lotte Bauer fell into a deep depression, and with no Monsieur Bauer to pay the rent (he had run off years earlier with a Turkish belly dancer), little Irma was forced out onto the streets to sell her sketches by the Luxembourg Gates.

For the first three months, she wore an odd oversized hat topped with a silvery-green Globe artichoke. The vegetable had thistles in place of flowers, and Irma wore it pulled low over her forehead. Then one day she arrived at the Gates in a different hat, a pink beret crowned with a single magnificent rose. From then on, Irma chose her hats according to her mood, and the flower she wore was also the one she focused on in her day’s drawing. She was beautiful even then, but tough—though she was just thirteen, you didn’t cross Irma Bauer—and men of all ages took to stopping by the Luxembourg Gates to see which hat she had chosen that day. Less often, they bought one of her drawings.

An older, dignified gentleman, whose background no one knew but who spent his days ambling through the gardens, took to sitting on the park bench opposite Irma. After weeks of this, he approached one day—on the day of daffodils—and offered to buy her entire week’s work.

Irma had seen him before, and wondered why, in the spring, he wore such heavy tweeds with a matching peaked wool cap. He had a habit of bending to smell each garden bed he passed with his hands clasped tight behind his back. Irma wanted to trust him, but she was used to men trying to trick her by then, and asked the man what he would do with seven drawings of small coloured flowers.
‘It would help me,’ was all he said.

Irma stopped what she was doing and twiddled her crayon between her fingers. She squinted up at him. The old man was struck by the way the daffodils on Irma’s beret framed her exquisite yellow eyes.

‘What do you mean, it would help you?’

The old man asked if he may sit beside her. Irma shrugged and moved her skirt.

‘Have you seen me walking here before?’ the man asked.

Irma commented that perhaps she had.

‘It was my wife’s favourite place in all of Paris. She died last August, and since then I’ve come often to the gardens to remember her.’

‘What do you do for money?’ Irma said.

The man lifted his cap to wipe his hair. ‘That’s a very forward question, Mademoiselle.’

‘Well it seems strange,’ Irma said. ‘You come here for hours at a time. Don’t you work?’

‘I don’t, as a matter of fact. I used to, of course—oh, I ran some companies. But work seems pointless after a while with no one to share its spoils with. Besides, I have money enough.’

Irma looked at him long and hard. ‘I don’t enjoy my work as much either since my mother got sick,’ she said finally. ‘We used to work together.’

And Irma told the old man of the Magasin de Chapeaux de Fleurs, and the queues they’d once had, and how the customers had slowly deserted them. The old man gripped his face suddenly and began to cry. Irma hadn’t seen a grown man cry before, and wasn’t sure what she was supposed to do. When her mother cried—most
nights, in fact—she tickled her hair and sang a slow, calm song. Carefully, unsure if she should, Irma lifted a crayon-stained hand to the old man’s shoulder.

‘What is it?’ she asked.

The man sniffed and fished in his pocket for a handkerchief. ‘I thought it was you,’ he said. ‘My wife used to shop at your milliner’s. Madame Legoe.’

‘She was one of our best customers,’ Irma stammered. ‘We thought—’

‘My wife bought a hat with a daffodil on it the day before she died. She passed suddenly, you see…’ He clasped Irma’s hand. ‘I buried her in that hat, and with your matching drawing that I’d had framed.’

Later, when war broke out and the Bauer’s grew desperate, Monsieur Legoe took them in. He managed to arrange a single visa for Irma to emigrate to America. Her mother, anyway, wasn’t fit for travel. Irma arrived in New York aged fifteen, and never drew again.”

Bruno stopped. Something in his face had changed—the hopefulness or effervescence had drained out. Sarah glanced up at the counter. The waitress was assembling a dozen hot dogs on an enormous plastic tray, her red waves ablaze in the fluorescent light. Something in her slow, graceful movements caught Sarah’s attention.

“Is that her?” she whispered.

Bruno sighed and nodded. “Now I want to ask you something,” he said.

Sarah clenched her hands atop her jeans. She tried smoothing their horizontal creases but realised they were faded streaks inflicted by the manufacturer.

“Which story do you think was true?”

A chill passed through Sarah’s belly. “Aren’t they both true?”
“One is, one isn’t. It doesn’t matter which. I told you these stories to prove something. Something for when you get caught up on your grandparents—by how little you know.” Bruno leaned forward across the table, his eyes shivering and certain. “Write your book, Sarah. Make people talk. Think. Thinking good, thinking bad. Asking questions. People like you need to keep memory of what happened alive. It’s why I keep running my shop. In the hope that one day, a writer buys one of my typewriters. A book writer—how you say? A novel writer. And I can say to them, ‘Have I got a story for you.’”

Sarah’s mind raced in the limo on the way back to the apartment. She realised, somewhere on Fifth Avenue, that Bruno hadn’t told her which story was true. Strangely, this didn’t annoy her. If anything, she felt eager to deduce the truth herself. Sarah scanned her modest knowledge of the Holocaust. Apart from the size of Markus’s tools, both stories seemed plausible. And perhaps that was the very point. Bruno had got her thinking. If her book encouraged readers to engage, as she was, in the act of remembering the Holocaust, then perhaps it could serve a nobler purpose than simply supporting her own internal walls.

In the guest suite, Sarah slid her fingers through Remington’s handle and felt the promise of sun-warmed grass, bumble bees, a thousand unfamiliar flowers. She felt, by contrast, the lack of colour inside herself. Remington had given of his stories generously, and Sarah had been so preoccupied with her own grief she hadn’t heard them. As she stroked his faded damask, she realised suddenly why she’d cried on first seeing him. This courageous little typewriter was a relic of pain. When Sarah thought of the suffering Remington had experienced—only to be locked for fifteen years in a lonely cellar—she nearly wept again.
Sarah placed Remington flat on the desk and unlatched his case. His lips took moments to appear, and when they did a thick mist rose up to all but consume them. Sarah’s heart constricted.

“What is it?” she said.

Remington wheezed in and out. He whispered, “I must ask you something.”

“Anything,” Sarah said.

The mist circling his lips receded. “Why do you approach a story like this with such coldness?”

In an instant, ice pierced Sarah’s skin. Once, people had remarked on her warmth and empathy. It killed Sarah to think that by losing her parents, these qualities had hardened and died.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I used to be different.”

Remington closed his lips. He didn’t believe her.

And so Sarah told him of the accident, its aftermath—her beloved house. She told him of the accountant’s phone call a week ago, her desperate plan to write the book on her grandparents and use it to furnish some fragile new future. She told him of her emptiness. When she’d finished, Sarah realised she was still standing over Remington’s case. She sat down so she might bear his fury. But he surprised her.

“I know what it is like to lose one you love more than yourself,” Remington said gently. “To be cursed to survive. I know how it leads one to cling to stories of the past.”

Sarah went to wipe her nose and felt tears coursing her cheeks. “I’ve felt so horribly alone.”

“Not anymore,” Remington replied. “We have found each other.”
For a single, blissful moment a beam of light from Remington’s lips graced Sarah’s cheek. It felt like the footfall of an exquisite bird. She raised a hand to touch it.

“I will finish my stories,” Remington said. “But I have a condition.”

Sarah let her hand drop.

“You must acknowledge me as co-author of your book.” Remington licked his lips. “Do not think me heartless. The simple fact is this: my master and I lived through the horror. It is only right, in his absence, that my name be on the book jacket along with yours.”

Remington smiled again, but this time Sarah’s cheek lay cold.
April, 1937

The morning after the wedding, we sped fast through the country. The evening’s dancing and feasting and bountiful champagne, its many toasts—in essence, its pure joy—poured fetchingly from Josephine’s cheeks. I had to admit she had never looked lovelier. Her complexion, which against the colour beige could grow so tired as to make one weep, had overnight smoothed and intensified. She sat fresh at the wheel, her hazel eyes sparkling as they turned to gaze fondly on her sleeping husband. Her outfit, too—the simple navy pant offset by the crisp white linen shirt, the contrasting pair of red calf’s leather driving gloves, and her crowning triumph, the bright magenta and blue silk Hermes scarf fastened beneath her chin with a jaunty bow—the simple elegance of the ensemble signalled the dawning, I could only hope, of a new Josephine, a woman of substance who did not confuse an abundance of crystals with the makings of an enchanted life.

The rigorous country air had claimed Master’s hat an hour earlier, and cloyed now at his short sandy hair. I had never felt such freedom. I felt it despite Josephine’s monogrammed luggage on the back seat threatening to subsume me, despite the fact that Master’s wedding signalled the end of our simple time together. Here, now, we embarked on a new journey, and with this knowledge gladness reigned in my heart.

I glanced over the car door. Grasses and sprays of wildflowers trickled from the road in both directions, forming a tapestry in the valley below. Master’s tendency toward vile, life-draining hangovers could be cured, I knew, only by sleep. Yet I felt sorry that he should miss the view. Josephine, on the other hand, functioned superbly on four or five hours, and all the better if she had consumed some champagne. Master preferred a solid eight hours—ten if the evening had involved liquor.
And the previous night, it certainly had. Though the union defied traditions of the aristocracy (Master was, after all, of humble origins and in the eyes of many, more or less a Jew), the Count’s family had still turned out in spectacular fashion—all three hundred of them. The Count had rewarded their loyalty, naturally enough, with obscene quantities of vintage champagne. I learned something about this group of once-were nobles. Despite their rigid smiles and tendency to bandy about extinguished titles, when drunk they possessed what could only be called a collective knack for having a good time. I had never witnessed livelier or more vulgar dancing than at the grandiose reception. When Master finally retired at three in the morning amid boos and whistles, half of the Austrian aristocracy, in various states of undress, launched onto the dance floor themselves.

The honeymoon continued the untraditional theme. Rather than cruising to far-flung ports, Josephine had suggested a more local alternative. Why didn’t they utilise the hospitality of their many rich relatives in the country? And so she had surprised everyone, and Master, flabbergasted by the generosity of her suggesting this more affordable alternative, had been consumed even more fiercely by love.

And so we sped along the narrow country road towards Uncle Otto’s fabled castle. Josephine had condensed her packing into three suitcases—Master had expanded his to fill one. As I reflected on how my case stood in as the suitcase of my birth, I noticed Josephine tip her chin to observe a small stone church atop a nearby hill. My own gaze mounted the steep knoll as well. For a moment, we shared a single vision: the modest church’s rows of smooth grey boulders and little cross on top. I wondered if Josephine was struck as I was by its departure from the Stephansdom in my adopted city, if she experienced a sensation of awe as a single, thrilling chill. If two buildings of worship could differ so greatly in size and sensibility, I felt certain
this terrain would deliver us other surprises as well. Master’s family delighted in
telling stories of Uncle Otto’s castle in the Marchfeld Plain. Eva especially, with her
knack for storytelling, was adept at conjuring its vast, cold rooms and turrets carved
out of stone. The banquet hall, she said, was the size of a small steamship. How I
longed to see it for myself.

Josephine engaged the accelerator and we emerged upon a narrow plateau.
Asparagus fields stretched out in all directions, their lines pleasing against the chaos
of the alps. I imagined what Master’s uncle, the great landlord, must look like.
Renowned for his height and sharp tongue, Uncle Otto’s passion for the prized
Marchfeld white asparagus was equalled only by his legendary zest for life. Beneath
the surface, however, the war had affected him, as had the death of his treasured
young wife.

Suddenly, Josephine swept a gloved hand to shield her eyes.

“I think I see it,“ she said.

A grey stone behemoth rose from a ridge some way in front of us. Were the
high stone cylinders attacked by sets of teeth the turrets of which Eva had spoken?
Master stirred. A brilliant red blotch embossed the right side of his face where it had
collapsed upon the headrest. He attempted to swallow.

“What time is it?”

“My poor darling, you’ve missed the whole drive. We’re nearly there.”

Master squinted to the horizon.


Master slid his neck up the headrest and sat up. He was grinning now, too—
delighted, no doubt, that someone in his family owned a castle that could impress his
discerning wife. “Wait until you see inside, Frau Mensel.”
He had never addressed Josephine by her married title before, and I saw it pleased her deeply.

“Is it very big?” she asked.

“Huge.”

“And staffed?”

Master pretended to count. “By at least a dozen servants.”

Josephine turned and bestowed on him a brilliant smile. “Daddy would be so impressed.”

“Tell him, won’t you?”

It was at times like this, when the fabric of the world was sucked down to the narrow space between their heads, that I most wished Master could hear me. But as I looked now—my gaze speeding up to glance down on us from above—I felt an unexpected surge of pride. Were we not very like a family?

Master inhaled with his chin in the air. I had seen villagers in the last town breathing similarly, and was overcome by the urge to try it. I opened my mouth inside my case. A barrage of scents struck me—grass and flowers and asparagus—and something else I recognised as earth. Given half a chance, Josephine would liken the air to a fine champagne. Yet even this thought did not annoy me, for without warning we ascended the last steep hill and the castle unfolded up close.

The sheer scope of its great hewn stones was mind-boggling. I looked to the high turrets, not two but four of them, each crowned with a different flag. They snapped so briskly in the air I could not make out their emblems. Josephine veered to the left and we arrived at the vast carved gate. It opened miraculously as we approached it, and closed without a push. Neither Master nor Josephine found this surprising. A sweeping drive of ancient oaks sped my gaze upwards to the castle’s
entrance. Two enormous wood doors complimented the greyness of the stone. Beside me, bloated tree trunks the size of automobiles swept to canopies of wide, dappled leaves. We progressed up the drive, which before I knew it ended in a grand circle around a fountain. The castle loomed directly ahead.

Josephine quit the engine, then sprang from the convertible with her gloved hands clapped in the air. Eight servants in black and white stood erect in a pleasingly long line. A man, taller even than Master and tautly muscled, claimed the drive in front of them. I knew immediately that this splendid being was none other than Master’s Uncle Otto.

Josephine darted around to the passenger side to collect her husband, beaming at the castle, the servants—the very air. Her joy was infectious. Master exited the car with a smile so wide it touched almost to his ears.

“Otto, good to see you old man.” The men shook hands. “And allow me to introduce my wife, Frau Josephine Mensel.”

Uncle Otto ran an eye over Josephine, then clasped a gloved hand to his lips and kissed it. The gesture loosened her veneer of reserve; she engulfed Uncle Otto in a delighted embrace.

“You can’t know how grateful we are to you for hosting us,” she said, withdrawing finally. “And you’ve gone to such effort.”

“Nonsense—these chaps are grateful for the sunshine.” Uncle Otto clapped the nearest one—a bowed old man with an intricately-lined face—hard on the back. His palms were enormous; the man fell forward several centimetres, smiling tolerantly.

Uncle Otto’s rugged good looks were disarming even from my position in the car. The dimensions of his palms that had struck me as so giant initially were in fact balanced against his height. His frame was strewn with lean muscle, despite his age,
and his cheekbones were truly a thing of joy. Where my master was handsome, this man had the proportions of a Greek god. His teeth—great square pegs, white and absurdly even—beamed from perfect, symmetrical lips. Even his ears, large and cupped out to the side—ridiculous on another man—leant some dignity to the triumph of his face.

At a nod from Uncle Otto, servants surged forth and surrounded the car. Half a dozen simple, worn faces peered down at me. They began dividing the suitcases between themselves, ready to deliver them inside the cavernous castle, and a shout rose up in me, knowing I must be next. But as the cry formed on my lips, I noticed something. The collar on the nearest maid’s dress was missing half its fabric; the small white triangle shot out to one side and not the other. Humiliation welled in me on her behalf. Then I noticed a large diagonal crease across the cheek of the young man beside her. There was no two ways about it: the boy had arisen recently from sleep. The maid trailed a finger across one of Josephine’s Louis Vuitton suitcases. A grin lit her face, and I saw she was missing several teeth. When I inhaled, I discovered that the servant’s dank personas had in fact permeated the air. In her excitement, Josephine had overlooked the effort this little parade had cost Uncle Otto.

The servants parted and I felt Master’s tight, clammy grip pluck me from the seat. Relief pounded my frame as he carried me fast through the air.

“What’s that?” Uncle Otto enquired as Master placed me vertically upon a large, smooth stone on the drive.

“My typewriter,” replied Master.

The great man squatted to inspect me, knees surging out to either side. “Don’t trust it with the servants?”

“Of course I do—”
“Planning to document how I treat the dogs in some swanky journal?”

Master’s cheeks flared red. “Damn it, Otto,” he laughed. “Give a man a break.”

Josephine stepped forward and clasped Master’s arm. “He’s terribly sensitive when he’s had a drink the night before, Herr Mensel. I could say boo—” she spun suddenly to face Master, “boo!—and he’d fall all to pieces.”

Master clenched his fist and pressed it to his mouth.

“Oh darling, you don’t feel ill do you?”

Master flapped his free hand.

“Well!” Uncle Otto swept down and plucked me from the stone. The energy of his grip surged through my case like electricity. “My nephew always was a bit of a pansy. Can’t think where he gets it from. Tough as nails, my sister-in-law.” He winked conspiratorially at Josephine. “He’ll stop me soon to talk about his feelings.”

Josephine grinned at Master. “Why do you think I married him?”

“You mean it wasn’t for his wealth?” Uncle Otto signalled the servants then bounded through the enormous, latched front door.

Josephine followed him, cackling. She had a way of teasing Master that was affectionate rather than cruel.

“And how was the big event?”

“Sublime,” Josephine said.

Master reached forward to clasp his wife’s waist. Thankfully, the width of the double doors was such that we could have entered four abreast and still have had room on either side.

Uncle Otto’s huge, lunging stride landed us well inside the castle. My eyes took a moment to adjust to the darkness. How glorious the towering ancient stones!
Tall hewn steps stood opposite us, their carpet faded by a thousand summers. Behind and before us, a vast corridor disappeared in shadow. Candles mounted the stone at intervals, shedding light on what looked to be portraits of kings. Josephine shivered happily.

“Isn’t it grand,” she said.

Uncle Otto turned his handsome, square head. “Princess Josephine—”

Josephine smiled.

“I’m sure you’ve seen grander.”

“Fancier, maybe—velvet and gilt and things—but nothing so—” she spun on her tiny heeled feet, “so masculine.”

Despite his crippling hangover, Master released a contented sigh. From several metres away, I detected the sour remnants of 1927 Salon champagne.

The servants entered clutching Josephine’s many suitcases, and Master’s small bag and camel coat.

“So—a tour?” Uncle Otto said.

Josephine nodded.

“Enormous place—eighty-six rooms, most of them abandoned.”

“Eighty-six,” Josephine cooed. “Henry said there was only sixty.”

Uncle Otto was already striding up the corridor. He had forgotten I was in his hand, I am sure of it; I surged up and down his leg.

“Nope, eighty-six. We used more when Irma was alive, of course.”

“I’m sorry—”

“I have a surprise for you,” Uncle Otto said, cutting her off. From the stiffness in his voice, I saw he was not accustomed to bestowing surprises.

Master was lagging behind us. “Nothing alcoholic, I hope.”
“Nothing alcoholic?” Uncle Otto slapped the leg opposite my case. “A second reception, my pansied nephew—how about that! Litres of the good stuff. A congratulations from the Marchfeld Plains.”

“Oh no, Otto. We’ve already—”

“What’d you have me do—send it all back? My men are out ‘til sundown with the harvest but at eight o’clock—phwa! We come alive.”

The great man pinched my handle. I had experienced the sensation a thousand times before from Master, in love or impatience or fear. Each time we walked together he performed it at least once. Yet Uncle Otto’s grip was entirely different. Indeed, his walk and posture—his every utterance—belied a complete lack of planning, but more so, an utter faith in his ability to perform. He ceased talking and turned through a doorway into an enormous hall. I recognised the room immediately from Eva’s tales: the great banquet table, the two dozen chairs, the many tall windows hung with heavy red velvet drapes. Despite their number, the window’s thick panelled glass ensured that little light entered from outside. A huge chandelier adorned with candles hung low over the antique wood table. My eyes carried to an odd structure at the end of the room. Was I mistaken, or did I gaze upon a large wood throne?

The stooped valet, who had been struggling to keep abreast of us in the corridor, hobbled through the doorway and swept out a trembling, gloved hand. “The scene of your celebration, Herr and Frau Mensel.”

Uncle Otto went to clap him on the back then thought better of it. Instead, he strode forward several paces and swung me up upon the table.

“How exciting, darling. Another party!” Josephine said.

Master smiled fearfully.
“I would have brought a gown if I’d known,” she went on. “I packed simple country dresses—well, you know, simple enough. Nothing wedding-y.”

“You’ll be the best dressed bride there,” said Uncle Otto, already tired of the subject.

“And what a room. I bet it’s seen some parties.”

“You should have seen us after we were married,” Uncle Otto said, recovering his spirits, “week after week, hosting the best in the Empire. And then again after the war—I had an Iron Cross to show off, Christ, why not? But then, as I say, Irma died and, well… That’s enough of that.”

Josephine was smiling so fondly at Uncle Otto I thought she was again going to embrace him. He must have as well, for he took several slow strides towards the window.

“And the harvest?” Master said.

“What about it?”

“Going well?”

Uncle Otto attempted nonchalance. “Well, not well—they never tell me.” He spun towards Josephine. “You ever tasted a fresh picked white Marchfeld asparagus?”

“I think so,” she said.

“Can’t have—you’d remember it. Well you just wait ‘til tonight. My cook butters them within an inch of their life to serve with boar—damn delicious. And he makes a mean pure white soup, too, with just a hint of white pepper. White pepper, not black. You don’t want little flecks of black shitting up your perfectly white soup. I fired the last cook on this point.”

“God, old man—it’s good to see you,” Master said.
“Don’t tear up on me, nephew—Christ! What’d I tell you, Josephine? You married a pansy.”

The three continued bantering back and forth. As I listened, the same sense of belonging that had filled me in the car returned. I watched Master toss forward a comment on the state of his sexual desire, given he had passed out on their wedding night, and the three fall about in laughter. Against my damask, I savoured, for a single exquisite moment, the chilled castle air.

In their guest suite upstairs, Josephine tore through a mound of vibrant dresses on the edge of the four-poster bed, having destroyed the servants’ thoughtful unpacking.

“Where is it?” she said, flinging one dress and then another to the floor.

Master reclined, smiling, on the bed. “Where is what?”

“That shorter white gown—you know the one I had stored separately?”

“So you did bring a sort of wedding dress.”

Josephine grinned at him. “Of course I did.”

“But you told Otto—”

“And would again, my darling. Doesn’t everyone despise a petulant new bride going on and on about her wardrobe? Like it matters! Like anyone else cares!”

She tore again through the dresses by Master’s feet.

“What does it look like?” he asked.

“You know—the short one, cream-ish…” Josephine flapped a hand. “Lots of flowers.”

“Embroidered flowers?”

Josephine glanced up.

“You gave it to Eva,” Master said.
Josephine’s small mouth fell open. “What’d I do that for?”

“You don’t remember? You were trying to win back her sympathies after the opera. You gave her some other dresses as well.”

“I don’t care about the others,” she said, slumping on the edge of the bed. Master rolled forward and slid his arms around her chest. “Yes you do,” he whispered.

Josephine closed her eyes as he kissed her neck. His lips inched up her vertebrae, then dropped to her collarbone. She shuddered and he pulled her to him.

“No,” she muttered. “I have to get ready.”

“So do I,” Master said.

I attempted to turn my attention to the bright bird I could see pecking at the window. His friends called to him in the rose-hued evening, and for a time, his chirping drowned out the din of passion. But the noises grew moister and more insistent. I glanced back at the bed at the exact moment that Master slipped his hand down Josephine’s shirt to expose her breasts. She moaned as he bent to kiss them. As I tasted bile rise in my narrow throat, a knock sounded at the door.

Master sprang up. “Just a minute.”

“I won’t disturb you, sir,” came the old valet’s voice. “I just wondered if Herr or Frau required my help dressing.”

“We’re fine,” Josephine called, grinning wildly.

“Very good, then. Herr Mensel looks forward to receiving you downstairs.”

The couple departed the room in buoyant spirits. Josephine had happened upon an emerald dress at the back of the wardrobe, and she emanated radiance as they descended the spiral staircase clasping hands. On the bottom stair, she turned to
Master, eyes full, and asked if she looked beautiful. Master clasped her chin and gently kissed her.

I had come, in just twenty-four hours, not only to accept but to embrace their union. Though I lay neglected by Master’s leg, I suffered no envy at all. Indeed, I envisaged the joyous evening that lay ahead—the bountiful wine, the feast of many courses, the common farmers who would come to celebrate my master’s union. My last thought before Josephine spoke was of Master’s childhood—what I knew of it—a frugal, difficult time where he would never have considered, not even for a moment, that he may find himself at the age of thirty-seven with everything he ever wanted.

“Is it awfully quiet?”

Josephine’s voice reverberated off the thick stone walls. We had embarked upon the last stretch of corridor, a short distance from the banquet hall.

Master glanced ahead. “The door must be closed.”

They walked on a few steps.

“But aren’t we late—I mean, shouldn’t it have started?”

With another few steps, the open door came into view. Master grasped his wife’s arm and swung them through it.

Uncle Otto stood alone beside the laid banquet table. Aside from the eight servants dotted about at intervals, the hall was entirely empty.


But as he fixed on his uncle’s face, and saw his jaw clenched and forehead wrinkled, Master’s voice trailed off.

“There must be some mistake,” Josephine stammered. “The night, perhaps. They thought it was next weekend, or the weekend after.”

“No mistake,” hissed Uncle Otto.
“Well.” Josephine patted the silk of her ridiculous gown. “We can still have a good time.”

Master signalled the young maid for some wine.

“They must’ve planned this,” Uncle Otto muttered. “Thought about how best to humiliate me—”

“Sir.” The old valet hobbled towards him. “We don’t let it affect us.”

“But they were my friends.” To the great man’s distress, his voice broke on the word. He fell roughly into a seat at the table and wept.

Josephine, unable to reconcile the scene in front of her with the one she had envisaged in her head, waved briskly at the maid. The woman approached timidly with a platter of asparagus toasts. Josephine inhaled, then shot her hand out and clasped two toasts at once.

Master watched his wife shovel them into her mouth.

“Otto,” he said, sitting beside his uncle. “What happened?”

“They turned on me, didn’t they? Christ, I’m not blind. An old Jew in a Catholic stronghold? I knew things couldn’t last. But they made me believe otherwise.”

Master laid an arm around his uncle’s shoulder, but the man roared, “So they do it now. Because I made a big deal about the thing. Because I cared about it.” He flung his hand at the carved wooden seat. “Because I built you a fucking wooden throne!”

“That was for us?” Josephine gasped.

“Herr Mensel carved it himself,” the valet whispered. “Spent three months—”

“Don’t tell them how long it took!”
“It’s lovely,” Josephine said, her face suddenly pale and determined. She whipped a hand from her throat and extended it to Master’s uncle. “Shall we dance?”

Incredulous, Uncle Otto glanced up. “Tell your wife I don’t dance at the best of times.”

Josephine stared right back. “Tell your uncle, this party could hardly be called that.”

The ridge along Uncle Otto’s shoulders rose. Just as it appeared he was going to shout, however, he tossed his head back and roared with laughter.

“Right you are, my fine lady.”

He leapt up, his chair crashing back on the floor. Josephine’s right foot surged forward.

“A waltz,” Uncle Otto screamed. “Play a waltz!”

The old valet hurried to the nearby gramophone. Uncle Otto clasped Josephine around the waist. And when the music came, they danced. Master’s face betrayed a small and terrified smile. His gaze fell to the table, to the suckling pig, the platters of Tafelspitz and wurst and ham, the many terrines and salads of asparagus, and at the far end, the ladders of cutlery, fleets of glassware, and stacks of four dozen plates.

It looked as if the pair might somehow enjoy themselves. Uncle Otto cried out for more wine. As he did, the look of determination on Josephine’s face softened. She loved parties and dancing, and had an uncanny knack for making the best of things.

It was Master who found the situation unbearable. As he watched the first of Josephine’s lacquered curls spring out from her forehead, he realised he had exposed his new wife to the sort of deprivation she could justifiably come to expect. He lunged to the centre of the table and swung in to carve the suckling pig. But servants
swarmed him, and Master saw there was nothing to do but retire to a chair and try to stomach the couple’s dancing.

The music tinkled forth some ebullient new tune. But the sound sobered Otto. His eyes dulled with an idea. Before Josephine could stop him, he broke away and marched towards the door.

Josephine stood, embarrassed, in the centre of the hall.

“Well,” she said. “That was fun.” Perspiration had loosened more curls from around her face.

“It was good of you to distract him,” Master said.

“No, it was good to distract myself.” She perched on the chair beside Master. “Not that I’m not enjoying myself. The drive and everything, and this castle… And it’s just the start of the honeymoon—two whole months of it.”

Master was preparing to nod when Uncle Otto strode back into the room. A bundle of brightly coloured clothes protruded from under his arm. He marched up to the lit fireplace and threw back the grate.

Master sprang up. “What are you doing?”

“Do you recognise this piece of shit I’m holding?” Uncle Otto said.

Master glanced at the bright blue and yellow engineer officer’s uniform, and on top of it, the first class Iron Cross. “It’s your uniform.”

“Was my uniform.” Uncle Otto spun back towards the fireplace.

“Sir,” called a thin, ancient voice. “I have polished that Cross every day of my service these past nineteen years. The story of how you earned it is famous in these parts.”

Uncle Otto’s tone was menacing. “You want a story? How’s this. I served my country. Built a railway across the French front. Saw men’s heads blown off—found a
friend’s finger, wedding ring attached, with brain all over it in the dirt. And then I get back and, what? They slap me with an Iron Cross. And less than twenty years later, those same bastards turn on me. Whole towns of them—the whole bloody country!”

Master darted forward to place his body in front of the fireplace. “You don’t want these things now—that’s understandable. But you’ll feel differently one day.”

“Get out of my way,” Uncle Otto hissed.

He swung back his shoulder, but before he could fling the parcel into the fire, Master shouted, “Damn it, Otto, give the fucking thing to me.”

Uncle Otto’s face filled with blood. He flung the bundle onto the floor. “Keep it, then,” he roared. “But if I ever see that damn uniform or medal again—”

Josephine darted forward to sweep them up. “You won’t.”

Adept at reading his master’s moods, the valet clapped once, briskly. Servants swarmed towards the feast and gathered plates and serving spoons. Uncle Otto watched them, scowling.

“Let’s eat,” he said.
November, 1938

Eight long months had passed since Master was forced to close the surgery. As I saw it, the Anschluss was less an armed invasion of Vienna than it was an attack on the Jewish mind. Master—a morning person since I had known him—had taken to sleeping late, and it was a good day indeed if he found the impetus to type on me for his journal. With nothing to fill his days, and forced to accept an emasculating allowance from the Count, my beloved master lapsed into depression. Josephine was the single being who could still draw from him a smile.

And so in a strange way, the horrors of Kristallnacht provided Master with some purpose. The danger of our expedition to Mama and Heinrich’s ensured that Josephine remained at the apartment. When we left she was sobbing in the lounge, her pink face turned towards the window as the city burned.

A terrible stench engulfed my frame as Master and I approached the Jewish Quarter, that of fire and smoke and clubbed-in windows. Glass sprayed the cobblestones like a demonic jigsaw; chimneys of smoke rose from rooftops both near and far.

In the black night, Novaragasse appeared relatively untouched, with only a sprinkling of glass from a pawn shop on the corner. Master’s thin frame crept along the wall. Halfway to Mama’s apartment, three louts sprang in from an adjoining street. The youths swiped long bats brutally through the air. Master seeped his extremities into the wall. His heartbeat hardly rose; mine struck my carriage as if meaning to destroy it. I had once considered myself audacious, but as I sought comfort in my case, I realised quite simply that I was a coward. We had gone two nights without sleep; as the youths retreated I swore they travelled towards us. In the
distance, the tall one spun around. But he could not see us, and soon after he shrugged and the group disappeared.

A street crossing faced us. Master’s stomach drew in to form a hollow. But his head and limbs remained visible (my frame suffered similarly), and we faced the prospect of dashing in plain sight across the street.

I looked inward—the closest I could come to closing my eyes. Air flew past. When I looked again, we had arrived outside Mama and Heinrich’s apartment. The brass gate required a key, which Master fumbled with and produced from his pocket. As he turned it in the lock, his belly commenced a symphony of gurgling noises. In the silent street, the sounds stood out like roars. Finally, the gate closed behind us.

Master darted through the frosty courtyard to the stairwell. The effort drained him, for he ascended the stairs in the manner of a dog stricken by arthritis. At the top he knocked—three short taps and a pattering of fingers. Silence. Perspiration from his palm drenched my handle. He knocked again, louder, and announced his name. Only then did footsteps approach. They paused at the peephole, then the door opened and Master’s father ushered us inside.

His eyes were bloodshot, his thin jumper stained with sweat though the hall was freezing cold. Father and son embraced.

“Your Mama is in the kitchen,” Heinrich said. The entire neighbourhood called Helga Mama. “You know how cooking soothes her.”

Master glanced around. “And Eva?”

Heinrich grimaced and gestured at the lounge.

“Henry,” Mama said, appearing from the kitchen. “Thanks God, you came for us.”
The family’s stricken faces signalled that something beyond the abstract horror was wrong. Master greeted his mother, then turned to Eva. Her hair fell in matted clumps against her white nightgown; brown wells circled her eyes.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Rudolph is missing,” Mama said.

“Around nine, he left to defend the Synagogue,” Heinrich added. “We couldn’t stop him.”

Master glanced down at me. I have always wondered his thoughts at that moment. His forehead was damp and creased; he stroked my handle and placed me by the door.

“If we go now we’ll make it under cover of night,” he said. “Our apartment’s safer. Rudolph knows to meet us there.”

“I’m not going without him,” Eva said, her voice breaking.

Mama clasped her chest. “Henry?”

“It’s not safe here. I narrowly avoided three men with bats.”

“I’m not going,” Eva cried.

The words seemed to cause Mama some great sadness. That the reticent Eva would permit herself such emotion flagged how dire things really were. Mama’s cheeks grew red; Heinrich clasped her hand and led her to an armchair.

Master sat beside his sister. “Tell me what happened.”

“He left. I begged him not to but his honour—” Eva caught her breath. “He cares more for it than he does our unborn child.”

Mama released a sob.

“Our daughter is pregnant, woman—this is a blessing.”

“Which Synagogue is Rudolph defending?” Master asked.
Heinrich turned to him. “You are so big and important now you don’t remember your own Synagogue?”

I saw the words stab at Master’s chest.

“I converted, Father.”

“Tell that to the bastards out there.”

“Shut up all of you!” Eva’s hair flew about her shoulders. She made to stand, but halfway up fell against the wooden armrest.

The family leapt and danced about. The dining table with the silver candle stick and bowl of apples grew still behind them. At the scene’s centre lay Eva, beautiful even in collapse. The family threw their anguish into her, the suffering they had balanced like a house of cards. Eva whispered, finally, that she was not hurt.

The news seemed to dislodge something in Heinrich; he sank into an armchair. The look on his face was of utter bereavement. Master saw it and slowly stood. With nothing left for them, the family stood too. All except Eva.

Mama hurried to the table and retrieved a cloth sack she had slung over one of the chairs. She grabbed it and began stuffing in apples. On the mantel stood a framed photograph of her and Heinrich on their wedding day. She grabbed this too. Master squatted before Eva. I do not know what he said to convince her but ever so slowly she pushed herself up. Master placed his arm around her shoulders. They wobbled for a moment, but seemed to derive some sense of dignity from one another and soon stood still.

“How can we leave it?” Mama asked. Her eyes languished on the woven rugs she had made for each of her children, the wall marked faintly with pencil where the siblings had recorded their height.

Heinrich slid the thick bound Talmud from the bookcase.
“I’m not fit like you young ones,” Mama said. “What if I trip and fall behind?”

No one answered her. The family gathered coats and scarves. Mama took a final look back at the apartment, then turned to the stairwell through which her children had dashed up and down from school. Master glanced resolutely ahead as he retrieved my case and descended the stairs. In the courtyard, the family gathered in a small circle. The air was cold and damp.

“What do we do now?” Heinrich asked.

The question struck me as very sad. He stood opposite his son, the capability he had prided himself on now departed, and glanced fearfully at his feet.

It is difficult to envisage those next few hours. Every street held the possibility of ambush with bats and knives. Shattered glass covered the city as if it had fallen like hail from the sky. We crawled and crept and ran. Finally, we emerged at the comfortable apartment near the Ringstrasse.

The block of city flats, along with a superb star-shaped diamond brooch, had come as Josephine’s dowry. In a burst of unexpected thriftiness, she had suggested to Master that they rent out the penthouse and instead occupy the charming ground floor courtyard apartment. As I had come to know her, I had learned that Josephine’s most consistent trait was her ability to surprise. In fact, as witness to the way she had coaxed pleasure from Master in the dark month after he was forced to close the surgery, I could not deny I had come to like her.

Josephine’s eyes brimmed with tears as she peeled open the door.

“Eva,” she cried. “Heinrich, Mama.” She could not bring herself to utter Master’s name but instead fell trembling upon him. He plucked Josephine from the
ground and kissed her, his white face pressed into her hair. But at a shove from Mama
the couple parted and Master led us in and shut the door.

The family stood dazed in the lounge. Josephine glanced at Eva’s nightgown
and wild, matted hair. A frown crossed her face. But in an instant it was gone,
replaced by an unusual expression—one of kindness. None besides me had seen it.
None, then, recognised the change for what it was—a heartening sign of personal
progress.

“Dear,” said Josephine, placing her small, plump hand on Eva’s. “Come and
sit with me.”

Eva allowed herself to be led to the sofa.

“Tell me, now. What is it?”

“Rudolph is missing,” Eva whispered. “I am beside myself.”

Josephine bit her lip and glanced at Master.

“He’s always been reckless—his bravery is one of the reasons I love him.
Why else would he leave me to defend our Synagogue?”

Josephine clasped Eva’s shoulder. “Because he is a man of faith, and that faith
will protect him.”

“How about some tea, Jay-Jay?” Master said, stepping forward.

He had expected Josephine to disparage Rudolph. For the first time, I was
filled with the desire to defend her. Josephine’s cheeks crumpled. She looked about
for the maid, then gathered her skirt and stood.

“Of course.”

Heinrich’s fist shook at his side as Josephine crossed the lounge. “The
bastards!” he exploded. “How dare they abduct the father of my future grandchild.”

Master stared at him. “They haven’t abducted anyone.”
“Oh yes? Then where is he?”

Eva burst into tears. Mama sat down beside her, her eyes shooting daggers at Heinrich. He fell silent. Finally, he and Master sat too. Minutes later, Josephine entered with an elaborate silver tray bearing a blue and white teapot and five cups and saucers. After the Anschluss, our staff had been whittled to one. The final maid had departed yesterday when news of the violence spread. From the look of accomplishment on Josephine’s face, it was clear she found the serving of guests in her home somewhat of a novelty. With a triumphant bow, she placed the tray on the carved oak coffee table, then sat down with the others to wait.

Mama turned to her. “Should I pour my own, dear?”

Laughing anxiously, Josephine darted up. A pained expression gripped her forehead, as if by forgetting to serve tea she had suffered some vital humiliation. I watched her tackle the unfamiliar ritual, enacting its steps as best she could, glancing at the ceiling periodically in an attempt to remember the order in which the maid had performed them. When finally she had distributed the cups and saucers, she fell to studying each person. When Heinrich gulped his tea in one she smiled, but I could see that Eva’s lack of interest, the way her eyes stared recklessly ahead without noticing the care with which Josephine had poured the tea and added little cubes of sugar—cost her some unfathomable disappointment. Several times she encouraged Eva to drink—once she even held the cup up to her lips—but Eva did not notice. Instead, her hands gripped and released the cushion by her waist, her knuckles turning white and then pink.

Mama watched her daughter miserably. A woman of robust opinions, she had made no secret of her aversion to Rudolph. Why would she accept a man of limited spine who expected to be treated like a king? A real man would treat her Eva as a
princess, not make a hobby of bruising her bones. Yet I could see, as I watched the 
blood rise to Mama’s cheeks, that she wished Rudolph to return safe. Perhaps he had 
amended his ways since July—the pregnant Eva, did she not?—seemed happier. 
Thoughts flicked across Mama’s face and she moved her lips to keep track of them. 
But something stuck in her after a moment, a memory she could not flick past. Mama 
returned her saucer without thinking to the table. A triangle the size of a dog’s claw 
chipped out of the porcelain. Josephine exhaled and closed her eyes. 

Time passed sluggishly; I swore an hour had gone by and glanced at the clock 
to find it had been a matter of several minutes.

“Perhaps we should play a game,” Master said finally. 

My heart leapt. Many a fond evening had passed this way in Master’s old 
apartment, just him and me and a pack of cards. The comfort one could derive from a 
game of solitaire never ceased to amaze me.

“What a good idea,” Josephine said. The tea and her interest in it had grown 
cold. “What about charades?”

“A game is not appropriate,” Heinrich snapped. “Have you forgotten my son-
in-law?”

“Of course not.” Mama smiled quickly at Eva. “But we can either sit here and 
count the seconds, or go some way towards distracting ourselves.”

“Very well then—how about cards?” Master said. 

“I am pathetic at cards,” said Josephine. “You know I am.”

“Untrue—you cleaned the Count and me out in poker just last month.”

She smiled brightly. “So I did.”

Josephine’s smile, as ever, leant Master energy; he shot up and retrieved the 
playing cards from the armoire beside the window. “Will you play, Eva?”
She tried to focus on him. “What?”

“Will you play cards with us?”

“That’s my girl,” Mama said, leaping on the sign of movement when Eva turned her left hand over in her right. “The minutes will fly past, my darling—Rudolph will be back before we know it.”

The comment seemed ridiculous given the black smoke we could smell rising from outside.

“What shall we play?” Master asked. “Black Jack? Go Fish?”

“You promised me poker,” Josephine said.

Master smiled. It was a sad smile, granted, yet its presence heartened me.

“I’ll get paper, darling,” Josephine said. “You deal and explain the rules.”

“What about betting chips?” asked Heinrich.

Josephine paused at the door to the study. The Count possessed a dedicated poker set—we did not. Matches were scarce and precious. A brainstorming session ensued. Finally, Heinrich produced a bottle of herbal Digitalis tablets from his pocket.

“Never in a million years,” Mama said.

Josephine dashed up to the bottle of heart medication. “Why ever not?”

“Because they’ll get mucky finger smudges on them, along with God knows what else.” She turned a severe eye on her daughter-in-law. “I’m not risking my husband’s life for a game of poker.”

Master suggested they use small lengths of rope. Not infrequently, his desire to diffuse the tension between his wife and mother resulted in odd comments like this.

“Do you have small lengths of rope?” Mama asked.

“I have a large rope and some scissors.”

“Listen to him! Who knows how we may need that rope in future.”
The group fell silent.

“I’ve got it,” Josephine said. Her face was infused with the rare light it had worn earlier, different to the luminescence of lust or plotting, a light of pure, unfiltered heart.

“Don’t tell me,” Mama snorted, “you’ll snip the dress on your back into a million pieces and parade about in your underwear.”

Josephine’s face fell. “Why do you have to be nasty, Helga? Does it make you feel better?”

Mama caught her son’s unsmiling gaze.

“What I was going to say is that I’d be happy to share out my jewellery. I must have at least three dozen sets of earrings, not counting all my brooches and rings.”

Heinrich’s brow knotted. “How many earrings?”

“What does it matter?” Mama said.

Josephine, smiling now, left the room.

“I’ve often wished for three dozen pairs of earrings,” grinned Heinrich.

Master laughed. “As have I, Father.”

“I would have liked just one pair,” Mama said evenly.

The light in Heinrich’s eyes faded. “Helga—you know I would have given you the world if I could.”

“I never wanted the world, Heinrich.” She looked at her thick, rough fingers. “But a ring, maybe—just one—after the children were born or for an anniversary.”

Josephine entered with a large cut-crystal tray and tipped its contents onto the table. Rubies and emeralds in exquisite settings scattered; an elaborate earring bounced onto the rug.

“What are you doing?” Mama shrieked.
“I’m looking for something.” Josephine’s fingers tore through the jewels.

“There they are. I wanted to give you these, Eva.” She held the large drop-diamond earrings to the lamp. “I was horrid to you that time at the opera. It was a while ago now, I suppose—two years? Quite a while. But diamonds never grow old. And I’ve grown up, haven’t I Henry? I’m quite different. The Anschluss changed things…” She bit her lip. “Anyway, I hope you’ll accept them as a peace offering. They clamped ever so hard on my ear.”

I watched Master gaze proudly at his wife. Eva exhaled as if from an accomplishment.

“How lovely,” she said.

Josephine beamed. “And we can use the rest for betting chips.” She sorted the baubles into piles.

“Yes, why not?” Heinrich said. He stared at the jewels in front of him, his hands balled into fists.

“Better than nothing,” Mama agreed. There was not a shred of humour in her voice. She inspected a large square-cut emerald ring against the woven veins of her hand. “It doesn’t suit me,” she muttered.

Master glanced over but could not deny it: the ring was as out of place on her hand as a sea captain stranded in a desert.

“The colour perhaps.”

Josephine tilted her chin. “But don’t red and green go together?”

Mama drew her hands to her and sat on them. “Who’s dealing?”

“I will.”

Josephine leapt upon the cards, dividing them first in half before bending and flicking them so that they all nestled in together. I had never known her fingers to
possess skill or grace, and was seized by the feeling of awe one gets when a human surprises you.

She dealt quickly. Eva sat in a sort of daze, her cards face-up on the table. Heinrich tried shielding her hand from view but Josephine had already seen it. Her face, so poor at concealing emotions in life, fixed with a stealthy expression. She bet steadily, raising her original wager with each further hand. One by one, the family folded.

Josephine was declaring victory when a knock sounded from outside. The family turned to one another. The knock came again.

“Rudolph!” Eva cried, her spine arching towards the door.

Heinrich stood. “Who’s there?”

“It’s me.” The voice was so faint and uncertain it sounded foreign. But Heinrich clapped his hands in the air. Racing to the door, he undid the many latches and clasped his son-in-law in an embrace. A large gash above Rudolph’s eyebrow was bleeding profusely.

“What happened?” Eva whispered.

Heinrich ushered Rudolph inside and closed the door. “The man needs a seat, Eva. There will be time for questions.”

But Rudolph, trailing blood across the rug, ran to and embraced his wife.

“I’m here, dear one—I escaped.” He buried his face in her hair. “I don’t deserve it… I don’t deserve you.”

“Lord God!” Mama cried, her solid frame spreading between her feet as she stood. “Now he feels things. Now suddenly he has a heart!”

“Be quiet woman.” Mama glanced at her husband, aware she had gone too far.

Eva pressed herself into Rudolph, her face aglow.
“Come Eva,” said Mama more gently. “We’ll let the man get stitched up. We don’t need to watch.”

“Helga’s right,” Josephine said. “You take the large guest room—it’s all made—”

Mama flung a thick arm forward and cut her off. Slowly, Eva untangled her arms from around her husband. Her face and hair were thick with blood.

“I think I need to lie down,” she said.

It was all Mama needed. Barging forward, she threw an arm around her daughter. In mid-air, its aggression departed and it landed soft as a bird. The two stumbled from the room.

For the first time in memory, Rudolph looked aghast not at the world—at some external slight—but at himself. Still, blood poured from his head, and Master announced that we must get him stitched up. I watched him as he spoke. Gone was his paralysis of many months, gone the lack of purpose in himself. For the first time in weeks, his spine stood erect. Perhaps tomorrow he may think to use me—perhaps tomorrow he may type it all up.

“Henry’s right,” Heinrich said. His wife’s outburst had quieted him; he spoke while glancing at his feet.

Without warning Rudolph dropped to the rug and crossed his legs under him. The effect was disarming; he looked like a schoolboy.

“I need some towels and cotton wool,” Master said as he knelt beside him.

Again, that purpose—the sweet sound of his lips forming a command.

Josephine leapt from her chair. “I’ll get them.” She returned quickly. “Here—three towels and an eternity of cotton wool.” She knelt beside Master. “And I found a sewing needle.”
She was at her best in a crisis, frightened by neither blood nor death nor dying.
The thought occurred to me that she would make a fine medical assistant.

Master grabbed several towels and instructed Rudolph to tilt back his head.
His hands were quick and steady.

“This may hurt,” he said.

Josephine swiped a silk cushion from the sofa and placed it beneath Rudolph’s head. He stared vacantly at the ceiling.

“I was lucky—when they attacked the Synagogue I was already outside. I managed to hide in the gap between two buildings.”

Josephine glanced at Master. The resolve in his face heartened her.

“The situation was already very bad. When I left Novaragasse I could hear screams and shouts—terrible screams, you must have heard them—and from every direction the sound of breaking glass.”

A moan sounded in Rudolph’s throat. Master leaned in closer.

“There’s a shard of glass,” he whispered to Josephine. “I’ll need something to remove it—tongs would do—and some spirit to wash down the wound.”

Josephine nodded. “Now why don’t you lean back and have a sleep?” she cooed. Rudolph fixed on the lines around her eyes, not wrinkles but some measure of her feistiness. His moaning ceased.

Heinrich had collapsed in the armchair; now, he leaned forward. “What will you use to stitch him up?”

“I’m getting to it,” Master said.

“Maybe try fishing wire.”

“That isn’t such a bad idea. Find some, would you Jay-Jay? And some tongs and alcohol.”
Josephine was fondest of her own ideas; she stood silently and left the room.

Just then, pain clouded Rudolph’s face and he started weeping. The noise was raw and rough. It filled the room and in an instant I saw the fear we had each papered over—the months of humiliation and hurt—bubble up on the faces around me.

Heinrich drew his fist to his lips to stop their quivering; had my case been open, I would have wept myself.

Josephine reappeared with the tongs hot from the oven, a bottle of kirsch schnapps and a reel of fishing wire. It was clear that in assembling the materials—sterilising the tongs, perhaps, or in sourcing the final bottle of schnapps from the cellar—the crisis as she saw it had abated. Her skirt ballooned as she dropped to the rug. Can it be, I thought, she has not heard Rudolph? But then her cheeks filled with something, and as the air sucked in her shoulders sank.

Though the ease of Master’s purpose had evaporated, he clasped Rudolph’s shoulders firmly. Still sobbing, Rudolph gritted his teeth. The operation was swift. Afterwards, Rudolph was calm and strangely lucid. He told us what had happened. Nazis had surrounded the Synagogue. Somehow, he had escaped while the others were trapped inside.

Josephine clasped her mouth so that a gold ring struck her in the nose. She asked Rudolph why he hadn’t staged a coo or stabbed their leader. Something flickered on Rudolph’s face—pain perhaps, or simple exhaustion. He closed his eyes.
4.

The accountant’s email leapt onto Sarah’s screen. Once, this humble man had represented survival—a financial way forward in the dark weeks after the accident. His habit of dashing into appointments an hour late with bags of groceries, apologising profusely, had been somehow endearing. But he had come, more recently, to stand for the loss in Sarah’s life. He couldn’t prevent the thing she loved from being taken away.

His email delivered more bad news. The overnight collapse of her parents’ shares meant that the house must now be sold urgently. Though he was of course very sorry, would Sarah mind if he organised removalists to come in the next few days while she was still away?

Sarah’s head went dark. After the day she’d had with Ann—the exorbitant lunch at Per Se, the $10 000 Marchesa gown for the opera this evening Sarah had begged Ann not to buy but she had of course bought anyway—the news dulled something inside her. She stood up carefully. Remington’s case lay closed; she was grateful for this small mercy. For the room started swimming—no drama, just a sense of luxury collapsing quietly in on itself—and Sarah made her way to the bed and without drama collapsed too.

For a moment, her stillness extinguished both breath and life, and she gave herself to it, to this quiet, still world without pain. She must have slept. When she awoke cold inhabited her, as if icicles had replaced the surface of her skin. Sarah dispatched a single trembling wrist to her forehead, and then focused on stilling her breathing. The inhalation delivered prompt and unpleasant news: Sarah had forgotten to flush the toilet. Her mind reeled back to the offending scene—the bright and
unholy shit, the escape across carpet to check her emails. She glanced down and saw her jeans abandoned around her ankles.

A wave of something—cool rather than cold—crashed over her, a crescendo that reduced her vision to a speck of light. And then it was gone, and Sarah could curl her spine to sit up. But there was no relief. For here, she faced the simple truth that her illness, whatever it was, was getting worse. She needed a doctor and probably to go to hospital. She hadn’t set foot in one since the day three years ago that Katie had wheeled her into the hospital’s sunny carpark. Medically, Sarah hadn’t needed a wheelchair. But the fact was she couldn’t convince her legs to walk.

Sarah decided to shelve her medical concerns in favour of the more pressing goal of flushing the toilet. She slid her right foot tentatively forward and stood up. Remington’s closed case came into view on the desk, and it occurred to Sarah suddenly—horribly—that she was naked from the waist down.

A brisk knock came at the door. Launching down towards her jeans, Sarah cried, “Just a minute!” but it was too late—the door opened and Ann’s liveried form swept inside.

Ann didn’t blush or turn away on seeing Sarah—quite the opposite. Rather, she tipped her head on the side and brushed a finger over her lips. Christ, thought Sarah—she’s going to turn this into a piece of choreography. But then Ann remembered herself, and as she did she remembered the time.

“Everything alright in here?” She flicked an emerald eye over her Rolex.

Sarah glanced at the ensuite. She could accept the humiliation of Ann surprising her half dressed, but the toilet bowl was something else. Ann glanced in its direction, alerted no doubt by the repellent stench.
Sarah crouched down and hiked up her jeans. Her aunt watched her, the expression on her face calm and neutral. Ann had no doubt witnessed her share of scandals, and Sarah wondered if her ability to deal with them was instinctual or something one acquired with wealth.

“So we need to speed things up,” Ann said.

“I’m not sure if I can go tonight,” Sarah replied, only now registering the diagonal reams of mauve taffeta that appeared to be attacking Ann’s throat.

“What? Why?”

“I’m not feeling well.”

Ann accepted the statement, though it went no way towards changing her mind. “What do you need? Aspirin? Quick-eze? A shot of heroin?” She grinned, then let it fall when she saw Sarah’s face. “Seriously, what is it?”

How could Sarah convey the panic the accountant’s email had triggered in her—the dire state of her shit? So she said, as her mother had done when an overdose of Pont L’Eveque threatened to claim her dignity, “I’ve got an upset tummy.”

The comment decided Ann—she marched over to the unopened box on the bed and flung off its lustrous white ribbon. “My dancers vomit all the time. The exertion can do that. But they know not to come to me with it as an excuse.”

Ann whisked out the superb cream gown and flapped it until it extended to the floor. There, in the bias-cut silk, lay pure injustice. If Sarah’s accountant represented loss, this dress was the concept made manifest. Memory of its torturous purchase in Bergdorf Goodman that afternoon flooded over her. Despite the remorse she’d felt on hearing Remington’s last story, Sarah had tried to enjoy her outing with Ann, had smiled during lunch. But when it became clear her aunt was determined to buy her a designer gown for the opera, Sarah had tried to explain that $10 000 would make a
real difference in her life at home. If Ann were determined to treat her, maybe she
would consider gifting Sarah the money. Ann thought the request so hilarious she
waved over the stuck-up shop assistant to retell the story. Finally, she bundled Sarah
into a change room and bought the first dress she tried on.

Now, as Ann ranted about tickets to opening night at The Met being “as rare
as hen’s teeth”, Sarah made a decision: she’d do something out of character to shut
Ann the fuck up.

She studied her aunt, a woman who had climbed the Manhattan society ladder
with her bare hands, who considered vomiting a necessary evil and useful tool, who
wolfed sea bass at Per Se with the elegance of a plumber and yet emerged, sleek and
triumphant, above an easily disastrous taffeta gown for a night at the opera.

“So here’s the strapless bra we bought,” Ann said, producing it from a
submerged Bergdorf Goodman bag. “What about your hair? Up-do?”

Sarah tilted her chin up to face her aunt. Taking no pleasure in what she was
about to do, she scraped the stray blonde scraps of hair from her face and pulled them
tight into a high bun. She’d been wearing her hair this way after ballet one afternoon
when the modelling scout had approached her in the shopping centre. Though her
parents had encouraged her to model she’d refused: what pleasure was to be gained
from pulling her fourteen-year-old spine into alignment—dwarfing her friends and
family—when it was so comfortable where it was? She’d witnessed enough girls at
school doomed by the curse of beauty. Later, her thoughts on the subject had only
solidified. There was a café in Teneriffe her mother and her had frequented that was
rife with off-duty models and fashionistas. Though the café was relaxed, the women
weren’t. With stabbing glances they sized up bags, shoes, cuffs. They dressed up for
their daily dose of quinoa salad. Was there a gaze more critical than that of a beautiful woman appraising another?

In front of Ann, however, the most openly judgmental woman Sarah had ever met, she was inspired to harness the remnants of her inner model. Holding her hair tight, Sarah stood and for once stood tall. The effect was just what she was after: Ann gasped, raised an arm and gasped again.

“Fuck!” she cried. “Were you this tall yesterday?”

Sarah shrugged without letting her bun drop.

“And your face is so much better without all that hair in it. Pretty, even.”

Sarah had predicted correctly—Ann recognised beauty as a form of authority. Not only that, she was heartened by her niece’s covert good looks, as if they reflected well on her.

“Right!” Ann clapped her hands. “Wear your hair exactly like that.” She peered at Sarah. “Are you wearing makeup?”

Sarah shook her head.

“No need,” Ann said merrily. “Anyway, there isn’t time. Five minutes, okay? I’ll let you get dressed.” She darted back towards the door. “Oh that’s what I meant to ask you today.” She waved her hand briskly. “Keep getting dressed! Yep, the invisible zip, remember? On over the head.” Ann waited while Sarah battled with her zip. “How’s your novel going?”

Sarah slid the $10 000 of frothy white silk over her head and felt the fabric melt against her skin. There was a new respect in Ann’s voice, a sign she wasn’t asking for the sake of it.

“I’ve made a bit of progress,” Sarah said. “I went to see that man from the party yesterday, remember? Bruno?”
“What did he tell you?” Ann snorted.

“It was quite interesting, actually. Anyway, I should really be working tonight.”

Sarah’s aunt paused to study her. The dress was asymmetric—as was everything Ann wore and admired—and more showy than Sarah would have liked. She couldn’t get its price out of her head, the fact it had cost her—quite literally—the shot at a better life.

“Tell you what,” Ann said, abruptly grinning. “You finish the thing and I’ll market it myself.” She whipped her fingers together in the air. “‘Aussie beauty plumbs family history to tell a heartbreaking story about the Holocaust.’ Publishers would lap it up.” Ann smiled, her eyes radiant as if she had already accomplished it—already signed her niece to a six-figure three-book deal. Her fingers dropped. “Bet you don’t feel sick anymore, huh?”

Oh, thought Sarah, if only you knew.

The icy curb outside the Metropolitan Opera embodied everything Sarah had predicted of the evening. It was the sort of unpleasant detail she had come to expect from and seek out in life. That she’d disembarked from a limo the size of Russia wearing Marchesa, that her freezing toes in her strappy Manolo Blahniks were pedicured for the first time in their lives—these details passed over Sarah like a shroud of mist. Her first act, captured by a dozen flashbulbs, was a spectacular skid on the ice. As her foot shot out from under her, Sarah derived warm comfort from the look on Ann’s face. She had time to notice, too, that the opera house in front of Lincoln Centre Plaza was a triumph of arched windows and suspended glass, and that
there was a carpet—an actual red one—lined with photographers leading to its tall imposing doors.

Sarah employed her core to right herself. Ann had darted on ahead to chat with the paparazzi, placing as much distance between herself and her unsteady niece as possible. But when she saw Sarah striding up the carpet, her neck surging from the funnel neck of the cashmere coat, Ann sprang back to claim her. Sarah heard her project the words, “my niece the author”, and as the fragile confidence she had nurtured fizzled and died, she saw with horror Ann swing them towards the wall of paparazzi. Blinding flashes fizzed and spread. Sarah felt the tired smile hanging on her lips like some breed of road kill.

Finally, her aunt whisked them through The Met’s revolving doors. Ann—oblivious to the damage she had caused and in fact smiling—ascended the grand staircase amid air kisses and breathy hellos. They entered their box through a small gilt door. Solomon was already seated inside, and Sarah ran to his bald head and actually kissed it. He masked his shock with a broad smile. Sarah fell into a seat beside him.

It took her a good few minutes to remember she was seeing an opera. She glimpsed a title on her uncle’s program: La Traviata. Sarah recalled Remington’s story. Her grandparents had seen this very opera in Vienna in 1936. As the lights dimmed, Sarah wished more than anything Remington was here with her. It wasn’t just that she needed his stories. Through shared grief, they had come to understand each other. The more she thought about it, the more she hated herself for leaving him behind.

When the lights rose, Ann had already vanished.
“She’s on the board,” Solomon said, mistaking the look on Sarah’s face for one of disappointment. “Interval is where it all happens. Join me for a cigar?”

Sarah had her uncle alone. Though she hadn’t planned to ask him to buy her parents’ house, it occurred to her now that she had nothing to lose.

“I don’t smoke,” she said.

“Neither do I. Ann would kill me—you’ve seen her lungs, for Christ’s sake! So I sneak out the side.”

Relief exploded in Sarah’s chest. The side.

“Dad smoked cigars,” she said as they stood. “Mum hated it, but then she smoked menthols when she’d had a few wines so she couldn’t say anything.”

Solomon shook his head as he held the door. “Why’d he have to study medicine in Australia, for God’s sake? We missed going to college together. I didn’t even know he smoked.”

They turned from the lavish upstairs bar into a narrow corridor and followed it along to its end. “He always spoke happily of your childhood, if it’s any consolation.”

Solomon’s chin twitched. “He did?”

“Of course. Why wouldn’t he?”

Solomon was saved from answering by their arrival at an odd little elevator with carved glass doors. During the ride down, Sarah wondered what her uncle’s reaction had meant. A short walk delivered them to the chilly night and a sidewalk refreshingly free of photographers. Aside from a few straggly trees and an empty bus stop, they were entirely alone.

“What did you say before about our childhood?” Solomon had retrieved a long thin cigar from a silver box and was lighting it with an incongruous plastic purple lighter.
“Just that dad always spoke happily about it. Playing in Central Park. Going on picnics upstate in March where you had to snatch your fingers out of your gloves to eat your sandwiches. Grandpa stocking the old Land Rover with Grandma’s shortbread for you to go on fishing trips.”

Sarah glanced at her uncle and noticed, disturbingly, that his cigar hand had fallen by his side.

“What is it?” she said.

Solomon turned to her. “I don’t want to ruin memories, here.”

Something caught in Sarah’s stomach. “What do you mean?”

“What I mean is, we never went on any picnics. Outside work, the old man wouldn’t leave the house. He spent his time reading in a chair by the window. Mum took us to Central Park once, but she was depressed and had some sort of panic attack. I grew up at friends’ houses. Took your father along with me. I made it our business to avoid home whenever we could.”

Sarah’s heart had slowed to a standstill. “But why?” she asked.

“You haven’t been in a house where the adults hate each other—where every minute is poisoned by silence and regret. That was our house growing up. I swore I’d never marry. But then I met Linda. And after that, Ann.”

“But they were passionately in love,” Sarah heard herself say. “Viennese streets fell silent when they were together. Their love for each other sustained them through the war.”

“Who told you that?”

For a second, Sarah nearly blurted the truth. “Dad told me,” she lied. “Their marriage leant them strength. Grandma wasn’t beautiful but Grandpa loved her, and she worshipped each single thing he did.”
Slowly, Solomon drew his cigar into the air and used it to punctuate his point. “She was beautiful, actually. Very beautiful. I don’t think I ever saw her without red lipstick. But that can’t sustain a marriage. Grief was all they had left after the war, and they clung to it instead of each other.”

Solomon’s handsome face stared past the bus stop to something in the distance. He puffed on his cigar, his cheeks filling as they were supposed to.

“I broke my arm when I was ten riding my bike. It was aching like hell one night and I couldn’t sleep, so the old man said he’d come and tell me a story. I remember being thrilled, but when he sat by my bed his eyes were wet and angry, and for the next thirty minutes he told me what he thought of my mother.”

Sarah didn’t know if she could hear any more. The news her grandparents were unhappy wrenched something open, a little box she’d locked and stored away. Worse still, Solomon’s story brought Remington’s tales into question. Remington had no reason to lie, did he?

Sarah realised Solomon was still speaking. She heard him describe the train station where her grandparents met in Vienna, the fact her grandfather was weeping by himself in the first class carriage. Her grandmother, resplendent in bright red lipstick, had comforted him.

The bell signalling the end of interval blared from somewhere behind them. The sound punctured Sarah’s thought: her grandparents hadn’t met at a train station, they’d met at her grandfather’s surgery. Remington had devoted half a chapter to their meeting—why would Solomon tell it differently? She turned to her uncle.

“By the time we came along, it was as if a chunk were missing out of each of them,” he said, “and however much they tried to fill it—by the old man withdrawing and Mom taking to drink—there was too much missing to fill. I drank pretty heavily
myself for a while. Not so bad now. What you saw at the fundraiser was really
nothing.”

Sarah didn’t know what to say.

“Anyway, Mom died in ’75—just gave up living and died. The old man—
tough old bastard—lasted longer. Only died in ’97. But you know all this. Right? You
visited him.”

Sarah nodded weakly. “What did he do after Grandma died?” she asked.

“He grew calmer, actually. Worked less and read more. I remember visiting
him at the apartment from college once. He’d almost retired by then, only went into
the surgery one day a week. He was sitting in the same damn blue armchair by the
window he’d sat in my entire childhood, the cushion moulded to his arse and sagging
nearly to the floor. I asked him what he’d been doing. He pointed to the bookshelf,
and I noticed the spines of his books were stacked horizontally to fit more in, and that
books were covering most of the dusty room. I’d been investing for a while by then,
and offered to pay for a housekeeper. The old man looked up at me, I remember—
stared his watery blue eyes right into mine. And you know what he said? ‘I like it
filthy’. And he smiled. It was the happiest I ever remember seeing him.”

Solomon’s cheeks burned red. It was a welcome contrast to his habitual tan—
the effortless bronze the New York elite sported on their face, neck, and hands. He
stomped a single shiny boot on his cigar, and Sarah noticed, with a dull shock, that the
heel and toe were strangely cowboy.

“Did you talk about anything else?” Sarah asked.

Her uncle was staring at the curb, but all the same Sarah saw his eyes fill.

“We talked about Mom,” he said. “Good things. Her cooking.”
He inhaled so that his chest rose, and then his eyebrows quivered and he burst into tears. Solomon cried hard and fast, as Sarah supposed he did everything in life, and she stood helplessly beside him. She wanted to reach a hand out to touch him, but it would probably only make him cry more. And then he was sniffing, and wiping his coat sleeve back and forth against his eyes.

“Isn’t that silly? I haven’t cried in years.”

Solomon flicked his red eyes up at her, and Sarah saw uncertainty in their bright blue depths. “He told me that she was a wonderful cook. That they had dinner parties before her depression got bad. That even though he was an absent husband, she cooked for him until the end.”

Sarah’s brain felt thick. All she’d wanted was to ask Solomon about buying her parents’ house. Now she had two conflicting stories about her grandparents. Sarah overhead Solomon asking if she’d ever tried Rugelach. She shook her head.

“Mom’s were the best. Sweet, but not too sweet. You’d bite in and they’d dissolve in crumbs. The old man nearly cried when he remembered them. And we talked about her stews—the way she’d throw in these strange ingredients and the thing would turn out damn delicious. We relived the good things. At one point, he even went and got their picture from the bookcase, an old black and white one they’d had taken professionally after they arrived in America. And that’s when I saw him cry.”

Solomon raised the back of one hand to his eyes.

“I nearly didn’t go that day. I was on summer break from college—I wanted to be partying in the Hamptons. My girlfriend at the time convinced me. Funny, isn’t it? That afternoon’s the fondest memory I have of the old bugger. Before that, I never really liked him.”
Sarah tucked her chin partway inside her coat. Maybe the wind shield would help her ignore what Solomon had just told her. Help her ask the question.

“I’ve got to ask you something,” she said. Her feet and hands were blocks of ice, and Sarah hoped their glacial calm might extend inside her. “You know how I mentioned the other night that I have to sell my parents’ house?”

Solomon frowned, surprised by the change of subject. But he saw Sarah’s face and nodded.

“Well I was wondering if you’d consider buying it. As an investment—to sell later on. It would mean so much to me at this point to keep it in the family.” Sarah realised, horribly, that she was crying. “If you’d just consider—”

“I can’t, I’m afraid,” Solomon said quietly. “I’d like to, don’t get me wrong. But the recession hit Ann and me pretty hard. We’re still getting back on our feet.”

Sarah nodded, tears smudging across her cheeks. There, she thought. It’s done.

Solomon patted his large hands together for warmth. “Well we’ve missed the start of Act Two, I’m afraid. I’ll tell you what happens. There’s a lot of wailing, and then she dies.”

“Thanks a lot,” Sarah mumbled.

Her uncle grinned. “You know how many times I’ve suffered through this damn opera? I could stab Verdi. The bastard’s operas are always so fucking depressing.”

It was Sarah’s place to laugh—Solomon had turned expectantly to see it—but she just couldn’t. He moved on quickly.

“I should have lied, I suppose, when you mentioned our childhood before. But I’m not very good at it. I’d be a richer man if I were.”
Sarah wrapped her arms around herself as they turned from the curb.

“Richer?”

“Hell yes,” Solomon said. “There’s no place for an honest man in business.”

Sarah opened the hefty doors to her room. Her brain felt as if it were melting—as if the news from the accountant, Solomon’s refusal to buy her house combined with his odd stories of her grandparents—had taken their toll in some devastating new way.

She anticipated Remington’s words of wisdom like a mug of chamomile tea.

As she stepped inside, Solomon’s words came flooding back. They undermined the very foundation of Remington’s story. Her grandparents were desperately in love—when stripped to its bones, what else was there in his tale but this simple shining fact? The truth was, both Remington and Solomon couldn’t be right. One was lying. In Sarah’s heart, Remington’s stories rang true. Or was it simply that she wanted to believe in her grandparents’ happiness?

Sarah flicked on the light then walked to the desk and unfastened Remington’s case. Something was different. Pain stabbing in her gut, Sarah inched closer. Remington’s lips were black. She’d seen them flick through colours as if they were spokes on a wheel—seen them embody a neon yellow reminiscent of the runway. But she had never seen them cold and black. A chill thundered through her that perhaps he had died, that she was witnessing the death of that sparkling inner soul and with it, the death of the single companion who truly understood her. Holding her breath, Sarah waited.

Nothing.

Then, a whisper. “You are back,” it said.
“I’m here,” said Sarah, relief flooding her chest. “I’ve got so much to tell you. My day’s been horrible.”

As slowly as if each millimetre of movement depleted energy, Remington stretched his lips. Then he exhaled, a cold, misty shiver. “Oh yes?”

“I got an email from the accountant earlier. Something’s happened. He wants to send in removalists in the next few days so we can sell the house sooner.”

A wall of tears hovered behind Sarah’s eyes. She expected to see comfort in Remington’s lips. But they looked blacker.

“So at the opera I asked Solomon if he’d consider buying the house as an investment. And he said no. And then he told me that Grandma and Grandpa were terribly unhappy—in their marriage and everything else.”

A shot of vermillion like a streak of fire tore across Remington’s bottom lip. The flash illuminated his keys, and for a moment Sarah could only behold the splendour that was his when he chose it. She anticipated the redemptive cry she could feel gaining force, Remington’s words of comfort, the way forward they would concoct together.

Instead, Remington thundered, “Did you not hear a single word I spoke last night?”

Sarah was shocked. “Of course I did.”

“Do you think this is all about you?” Remington’s breath crashed in and out. “For days, I have narrated the terrible suffering my master experienced. The history I speak of claimed six million Jewish lives. And in response to my stories, I have listened to your endless tales of personal woe. This evening, finally, I realised something.” Remington’s lips whipped along his spacebar towards Sarah. “You do
not care about my stories. They have not changed you. And the reason is now clear to me. You care only for yourself.”

Each cell of Sarah’s froze. The truth of Remington’s words crashed over her. Mute, she glanced past his case at her laptop. Had she not transcribed Remington’s stories, would she remember them? Had they inched even slightly inside her heart? Last night’s tale, for example. Kristallnacht. The beginning, she could only assume, of the end. How had it affected her? Hadn’t she gone to bed afterward, stomach aching, and dreamed of selling her parents’ house? Today, had she thought of Remington’s tale more than fleetingly?

And there it was, the glaring fact Sarah couldn’t escape: the story of her grandparents was bigger than her own suffering. Could she live with herself—brush her teeth in the mirror each morning with any sort of satisfaction or self-respect—knowing she hadn’t sacrificed everything to record it?

When Sarah glanced down at Remington, his lips pulsed a hard, opaque green. Forcing her cheeks to move, Sarah mouthed the words, “I’m sorry.”

A change crept over Remington. “You are not a bad person,” he said slowly. “But I will not keep telling my stories if they do not affect you. I am too old—my heart cannot take it.”

“I understand,” Sarah said.

Remington studied her. She faced him honestly, filled with remorse. Finally, he said, “I ask only that you think about what I have said. Sleep on it, Sarah. Reflect, I beg you, on my stories.”

Sarah closed her eyes. “I will.”

“Then I will narrate the next sequence tomorrow. However, I request a change of scenery.”
Sarah’s stomach pulsed freshly with pain. “Where do you want to go?”

“To Master’s grave,” Remington replied. “I wish to visit Master’s grave.”
March, 1940

For the first time in three weeks, we had dinner in the kitchen. Eva stood at the stove; Rudolph and Josephine played cards at the little table in the corner. Once or twice, as Eva reached past my frame for a carrot, her fingers gently grazed my case. Her hands were softer than any quilt. She began humming a Yiddish folk song, and was building to the chorus when Master yelled for her to stop.

“For heaven’s sake Eva, do you mean to invite them in?” Eva continued peeling carrots, though her eyes filled with tears. “Forgive me,” Master shook his head. “I have slept in this uniform for three weeks. My nerves are shot, and still they haven’t come.”

“Your sacrifice is a sacrifice for us all, Henry.” Eva held his gaze a second. “You smell.” The siblings collapsed in hysterics. Eva began to hiccup. “Let me at least air your shirt—please, for all of us, or if not then come with me to the bathroom and I’ll sponge under the arms.”

Rudolph shook his head. “We cannot risk it, Eva. The minute Henry removes the uniform they will come. It happened to the Goldbergs and the Wiesels. They let their guard down to have a bath, and when the Nazis showed up at their door they were naked and dripping. They were deported this way in the month of February. Their lives are a lesson to us. You are wise to stay in uniform, Henry. If Otto’s cross does not save us, at least you will have your clothes.”

The light faded from Eva’s eyes. “Of course you are right, Rudolph. I was wrong to make fun.”

The card game and the cooking resumed, and for a moment Master glanced between the two. His eyes settled on me. “I will be in the dining room,” he said, and gripping my frame, he lifted me from the bench.
The look in his eyes frightened me. As he placed me on the dining table, I felt a tide rise up in me, some stealthy, mottled thing that sought an audience, someone to whom I may cry “do not give up!” Master sat at the table and unclipped my lid. I knew something certainly: if the family were deported this evening, he meant to leave me. My senses emptied. Silence roared through my frame. I could recall nothing except the fact that no one was present as witness. My finale would creep in and out of existence. The only proof it had ever occurred would be the letter Master would soon type, and once that had succumbed to the ages it might never have existed at all. I glanced at Master’s hands as they descended. His mouth quivered as he typed. The letter has always stayed with me.

March 11th, 1940

To whom it may concern:

If you are reading this, our greatest fear is realised: we are deported. To Mauthausen, perhaps further on to Poland and the horrors we hear of the place there. We have watched our friends’ and colleagues’ numbers here in Vienna dwindle and vanish from the streets like fog.

I write this letter not to assign guilt, but with a far simpler request. You have most likely noticed the wooden box placed on the corner of this letter. In the box is my typewriter, a 1934 Remington Portable who has served me better these past years than many friends. I dare not ask that you love him. Rather, I ask that you use him. Unfasten his case and caress his keys. Use him
to express the musings of your heart. Cradle him in your arms like a fiddle and coax the songs of our country from his keys. Treat him as a brother and friend and you will be rewarded with both. This alone I ask.

Sincerely,

Henry Mensel  
Dr Med. Vet.

The words poured down and through me. In his despair, Master had finally referred to me using the personal pronoun. Yet I hardly noticed. I focused only on his face. I saw his cheeks and the way he bit his lip ‘til it bled and began to sob.

“Do not leave me, Master,” I whispered pleadingly. “Please—consider me a suitcase. Take me with you.”

Master wiped his nose with the back of his sleeve. Still, after all we had experienced, he could not hear me. He rose and slid the paper from my rollers. I grew desperate. Would he not caress my keys before abandoning me to the enemy? As if in answer, Master stroked the length of his forefinger against my spacebar and walked away.

We gathered in this front room after dinner. Master had on his uncle’s medals, the Iron Cross in pride of place on his breast and several smaller ones on ribbons beneath it. He sat stiffly at the table, but had placed the chair back against the table so as to
face the front door. His spine was bolt upright—his shoulders rigid as if carved from a slab of marble.

None of us could say if the plan would work. I thought back to the week with Uncle Otto in the Marchfeld Plains three years earlier. The puckering of fabric around Master’s shoulders as I looked from the table spoke of the weight he had lost. Eva had performed what surgery she could with a needle and thread but it was not enough. Master’s posture only heightened the ill fit; perhaps if he had slouched the loose fabric may have moulded to his form. He attempted to stretch his shoulders; a pouch of fabric on the right one lifted to a peak. Suzie stirred at his feet. She had taken lately to following him—a fact that upset Josephine, though she would never have admitted it.

“What time is it?” she asked.

Her voice resonated in the large room. No one glanced at the hall clock and no one answered. Mama and Heinrich lay asleep with the babe in the far bedroom—how long had they lain there? Minutes and hours passed. Finally, a loud noise came from outside the window. Master, in full Austro-Hungarian army uniform, shot upwards from his chair. He remained standing for many minutes. The street grew silent.

“They will come for us, Henry,” Eva said, her eyes big and black against her skin. “If not now then tonight, tomorrow, next week. They will come for us like they came for all the others.” She began to cry softly.

Master turned slowly to face the group. He raised his fingers to the Cross and stroked the dull, gleaming metal. A wave of jealousy surged through me. How I wished I were made of duller, blacker stuff, that I could be hammered into crosses and pinned across hearts—how I struggled each minute for bravery and strength and found in my frame only confusion. Truths I had for years avoided flooded my frame. I
may be useful, but does the owner of a hammer feel pride, I asked myself, when the tool hammers in a nail? And what of a typewriter who cannot be heard? What pride may this machine elicit then?

The thoughts brought me little joy as we sat and waited for the Nazis. Eva had fallen asleep on Rudolph’s shoulder. Her beauty always intensified when she slept, so that her milky skin and dark coiling plait atop her head looked as if they were drawn there by angels. The knock came just before midnight. Eva awoke instantly. The knocking came again, louder this time, accompanied by several barks. Suzie sprang up, growling. Not long after the Anschluss, Master and I had seen an elderly Jewish woman ripped to pieces on the Ringstrasse by one of the Austrian SS’s German Shepherds. The man had laughed as his dog tore into her. Josephine, who was terrified of large animals, began to shake. Master rose from his seat. I was forced to bite my tongue to stifle a sob as he brushed dandruff from his shoulders and spat quickly on his palms to polish his medals. He stamped the boot of his right foot, then marched up to the door and threw it open. Two Nazis stood there with a dog. The Commander began shouting orders.

“We are here to inform you and your family of your immediate deportation,” the Commander said. “Bring with you only what you can carry. Furs and jewellery should be traded now. You will not need these.”

My heart constricted, but Master stamped his right foot again. “I am an engineer officer of the Austro-Hungarian army, awarded the Iron Cross for bravery for building my railway through the front. My family and I are devoted Austrian citizens. You may take our furs and jewellery, otherwise piss off!”

The younger Nazi reached for his pistol. The Commander, a look of horror on his face, pushed him backwards.
“I was not … I apologise.” Restraining his dog, he turned to his colleague.

“The medal’s a first class,” he said simply. “There has been enough tonight already.”

“Enough, Hauptsturmführer?”

“Yes, enough.”

The young Nazi looked to his boots and shook his head. Master seized the opportunity.

“My wife has a collection of fine furs I am sure you will appreciate, Hauptsturmführer.”

The Commander looked thoughtful. “Any jewellery?”

“A good deal—much of it precious.”

The man’s eyes fixed on Otto’s Iron Cross. They were the palest shade of blue, and from my position on the dining table I thought I detected empathy. Empathy enough, though, to spare us?

“Here is what will happen,” the Commander said. “You will invite us in. We will inspect the house, take whatever we deem—” he searched for the appropriate word, “—deem necessary.”

Master stepped aside and extended his arm. The Commander tied the lead of his German Shepherd to a curve of metal on the garden trellis. He wiped his boots and stepped inside. The young Nazi watched him then did similar. Josephine had been restraining Suzie by the collar, but she lost her grip and the little dog sprang free. She tore up to the young one, teeth bared, growling. Without a thought, he silenced her with his boot. Josephine screamed as Suzie collapsed on her side. The dog wheezed and then lay silent.

At that moment, Mama and Heinrich staggered into the lounge in their nightwear. Mama’s hair was wild; Heinrich blinked and sucked his cheeks. Despite
Josephine’s wailing, the Commander took a moment to greet them, and I was filled with the hope that a man of courtesy would be incapable of inflicting much cruelty.

Beads of perspiration had formed on Master’s forehead. He glanced once at his distraught wife and buckled dog, then blinked to steady himself.

“Gentlemen, may I introduce my family. This is my wife Josephine,” Josephine drew a fist to her mouth but only wept louder, “my brother-in-law Rudolph and my sister Eva.” Eva’s face was streaked with tears, but she made no noise. “And these are my parents, Herr and Frau Mensel.”

Heinrich nodded curtly.

The young Nazi walked up to Eva and without haste squatted in front of her.

“Where are your furs, then?” he asked.

Eva attempted to catch her breath but instead began to hyperventilate.

“You see this?” the Nazi said. “You ask these Jews a question and they go all to pieces.” He spat casually on the rug by Eva’s feet. “Now I asked you a question. Where are your furs?”

“My daughter has only one fur,” Heinrich called. “An old, moth eaten hand-me-down.”

Even in her state, Eva’s cheeks turned quite red.

“The furs you’re after are in the main bedroom, second door to your right. You’ll find at least six there, including a fancy white mink.”

Josephine hiccuped. “But I love that mink,” she stammered.

The Nazi was airborne in a second. “What was that?”

“It’s just that one I’m attached to—we have many other things of value.” She clutched her chest, glancing at Suzie. “My grandmother’s linen, for example. Yes, a whole pile of it in the antique Chinese chest. And the chest itself is quite valuable.”
“Jewellery?”

Josephine bit her lip. “Some, yes.”

I glanced at Master and noticed that the collar of Otto’s uniform was now drenched with sweat. Eva’s babe was asleep in the makeshift nursery; would he stir while the fiends searched the apartment?

The Nazi regarded Josephine. “You have exactly one minute to pack the furs and linen and jewels into the chest and bring it here.” He glanced at his watch. “And I tell you, I am easily disappointed.”

I looked at Josephine and noticed that instead of rising she had sunk into her chair. Master entered the hallway in her place. The young Nazi followed.

The Commander took a seat beside Josephine. He was a tall man, and his legs folded awkwardly in front of him. “He means what he says,” he said softly, then removed his hat and wiped his brow with the back of his sleeve. He asked Josephine for a glass of water.

Without replying, she fell to her knees and crept across the rug to Suzie. The dog was lying on its side, breathing lightly. Ever so gently, Josephine raised her up. The Commander watched her then repeated his request.

“It’s just plain from the tap,” Mama replied instead. “No lemon or anything.”

“How I like it,” the Commander said.

Mama nodded and hobbled to the kitchen.

“Don’t go to any trouble,” he called after her. He turned to the rest of us. “My wife goes to too much trouble when we have guests. I tell her not to, that it will make everyone uncomfortable, but she never listens.” He grimaced. “She over-caters dreadfully.”
Eva attempted a smile and said that women could not help themselves, and that when her and Rudolph had had their own apartment, they didn’t entertain often but when they did there was always a mountain of leftovers, which no one ever ate, and that they sat in the icebox until she threw them out.

The Commander relaxed slightly. “Tafelaspitz is my favourite, but last week my wife came home with a whole rump of beef.” He threw his hands in the air. “Imagine! A whole rump of beef for two people.”

I saw Rudolph struggle with himself to stay seated; he stood slowly. “I cannot imagine.”

The Commander narrowed his eyes and squinted out the window. I prayed Rudolph would be seated. Just then, Master staggered into sight at the back of the hall, the trunk in his arms overflowing. Heinrich made to help him but the young Nazi insisted he needed no help. Tentatively, Master inched forward. The chest heaved and swayed. On his second step, his left boot caught upon his right. The chest fell hard upon the floor.

“Help him,” the Commander insisted.

The Nazi stared at his superior, then walked up the hall to Master. “I’m inclined to think Jews are clumsier than other races,” he said. “A colleague told me this fact last week and I agreed, naturally, but until now I couldn’t honestly say I’d seen evidence.” He projected this statement to the room as if it were a monologue, then extended a short muscled arm to where the chest had fallen and gripped a single corner. “Stand up,” he said.

Master attempted to uncross his feet but could not given the awkward angle of his arm. The Nazi repeated the order. His cheeks dimpled when he spoke. He swept
his blonde hair to one side and tucked it behind his ear. I observed his smooth, tanned skin and athletic form; in another world, he would be considered handsome.

He peeled one finger and then another from the chest so that he supported it with just his thumb and forefinger. The chest wobbled sideways. Its intricately carved lid sprang open. Furs spilled to the ground like baker’s flour. Rudolph went immediately to retrieve them. When he had gathered them in a pile—the white mink on top for it had fallen first—he walked to the dining table and laid them slowly beside me. I cursed him, for in doing so he had increased the chance the men would spy Master’s letter. For a moment, no one spoke. Then Master uncrossed his feet and re-gripped the chest. His medals jingled as he stood. Perhaps for this reason, the Commander asked him his regiment number.

Master’s complete attention—or at least every outward sign of it—was focused on carrying the chest. He passed close to me on the dining table. The tendons on his neck sprang out like water pipes, perspiration streaming between them. Anxiously, I recalled our week with Uncle Otto. Nowhere in it did I recall an exchange of battalion numbers or particulars. Master deposited the chest beside the Commander, then righted his back and wiped his hands.

“The—”

“The twenty-fourth Brandenburg Regiment,” Heinrich cut in.

The Commander glanced between the men. “Stationed in France?”

“My son was in France. Yes.”

The Commander nodded. “And where were you?”

“He has a heart condition,” Mama called from the back of the room.

The Commander turned and saw she had been standing some time with the glass of water.
“Does he?” he said, not unkindly.
“I’ll get his pills if you like.”
“How about you bring me that glass of water instead?”
Mama looked at the glass in her hand and coloured. The Commander watched her shuffle across the carpet, then turned to Master.
“You built a railway, you said.”
“Well, my men and I. Yes.”
“And did they all receive a Cross?”
Master shook his head. “But they all deserved one.”
The Commander reflected for a moment. “I fired a gun,” he said suddenly. “That’s all I did—tried to kill the enemy so they wouldn’t kill me. There is nowhere I can go, no railway I can ride to reflect on it.” He smiled and clapped his hands. “But it is getting late. We will leave you good folks alone.”
“There’s still the jewels,” the young one said, barrelling up the hall. “He’s given me a few but I’m sure there’s more.”
Josephine readjusted the limp Suzie in her arms. “What have you got?” she asked. “I know every piece if you want to show me.”
The officer lunged over to stand behind her. “Why don’t you tell me every piece and then I’ll show you what I’ve got,” he said.
Josephine bit her lip. “Yes, that’s a better idea, isn’t it? Let me see…”
“Wait.” The officer dragged a chair backwards from the table and placed it in front of her. He sat and leaned in close. “Slowly now, I want to hear everything.”
The Commander turned to watch them and spied the enormous white mink on the table. “My wife,” he gasped. “She’s always wanted a mink like that.” He turned to Josephine. “You see white is her favourite colour.”
Rudolph, unable to contain himself, shook his chin. “White is not a colour,” he said.

The Commander turned sharply. “What did you say?”

Master made a step towards his brother-in-law.

“I said that white is not a colour.”

“What is it then?”

Rudolph’s chin quivered yet still he spoke. “It is an absence of colour—the opposite of black. To say your wife’s favourite colour is white is absurd, like saying your favourite food is mustard. The mustard simply brings into relief that which it accompanies.”

The Commander shot up as if impelled by a fuse to tower over Rudolph. The height difference between them was at least a foot; Rudolph’s gaze met the Nazi’s collar. The Commander bowed down so that his nose grazed Rudolph’s forehead.

“You correct me again Jew, and it will be the last thing you ever do.”

Rudolph’s ginger moustache bobbed up and down. On the brink of tears, he glanced up the hall to where his child lay sleeping beneath a pile of quilts.

“Now then,” the Commander said, marching hands behind his back, legs one at a time out in front of him, to the jewels beside the mink. Master’s letter lay beside me to the right. If the Commander saw it now, he would confiscate me along with the family’s possessions. He turned to Josephine. “Bring the rest here.”

“But I don’t know what you have,” she said.

In a second, he strode to her chair and yanked her up by the hair. She screamed and clutched at her head as Suzie fell to the cushion.

“Look at this pile and tell me what’s missing,” he roared. “Tell me!”
Josephine’s dust-coloured hair stretched on an odd angle from her scalp as the Commander dragged her on her knees to the jewellery. Master’s eyebrows raised and parted. He leapt forward.

“Please, Hauptsturmführer. My wife has an excellent memory and is willing to cooperate. You will leave with the sum total of our jewels.”

The Commander’s jaw slackened. “She was not so willing a moment ago.”

“But she is willing now.”

His eyes grazed Master’s medals. “Then she better start talking.”

“You have one minute,” the young Nazi said from the side.

“There’s—there’s my grandmother’s collection,” Josephine stammered.

“Louder.”

“My grandmother’s collection,” she repeated. “A large necklace with matching earrings and bracelet made out in emeralds and diamonds…”

“Go on.”

“And my great-aunt was fond of pink diamonds, so I have a few of those—”

The Commander raised his hand.

“Specifically? Ah, a large four carat ring and several bracelets. But I always preferred earrings. I have sixteen pairs…” She glanced at Eva. “No, I gave one away. Fifteen pairs. And then—”

The Commander pressed his boot into her stomach.

Her voice rose to a squeal. “And my favourite thing—”

“More even than the mink?”

“More than the mink, more than anything. My mother’s diamond—” But at mention of her mother, Josephine collapsed in tears.
“It is a diamond brooch,” Master cried out, seeing the Commander meant to kick her. “Very large in the shape of a flower. The diamonds are of the finest quality. Fourteen carats, I think.”

The young one whistled. “Didn’t want to tell us that, did you?”

“The brooch is very valuable,” Master said quickly. “It’s wrapped in tissue paper in a small box beneath the bed in the main bedroom. There you will also find my wife’s grandmother’s collection.”

“See now that’s all we needed,” the Commander said. He gestured to the young one to retrieve the box and took a seat again on the armchair. “These things can grow very unpleasant but they needn’t be.” He tapped his fingers on the armrest.

“Funny, isn’t it, how different things are this time around? All these modern devices, modern weapons and such, but in the end it still comes down to money and power.”

I had an urge to point out the glaring contradiction in his statement.

“But then we’ve seen it all before, haven’t we? War is always bloody. I was a gunner like I said. Saw some terrible things. Terrible.” The Commander shook his head. “But we came home and started over. Built a family, a life. Put those experiences in the past as much as we could. But this one brings it all back, doesn’t it?” He sighed and the deep etchings in his face suddenly made him look very old. “My wife says it is good to talk about. She’s a big believer in getting things out in the open.” I thought I saw his cheeks redden as he turned to Master. “Do you talk much of the war?”

Master replied in a voice I did not recognise. “Absolutely. Some men bury it away but it’s no way to live.”

I looked at his mouth as he said this. Not a twitch—no sign of fabrication at all. The young Nazi raced down the hall.
“The bitch wasn’t lying,” he said. “The brooch is a beauty.” He blew on it and handed it to his superior.

The Commander exclaimed on its size, then in an act of unconscious cruelty held the brooch up to Josephine.

The young one dug about in the box. “And Grandma’s set isn’t bad either.”

The Commander barely glanced up as he tucked the brooch into an inside pocket of his coat. “In so far as is possible,” he said, standing, “it has been a pleasure.”

Master clicked his heels together and saluted. It was a terrible salute, lacking in precision, ill timed—laughable in any situation other than this. The Commander looked at the queer angle of Master’s arm towards his head and stood there a moment, still, before shaking his head.

“It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” He patted Master on the back and turned to Josephine. “Now I’ve left your mink, young lady, how’s that? A thank you for being a good sport.” The young Nazi stepped in as if to protest but the Commander waved him away. Tentatively, he squatted and touched Josephine’s arm. “I’m not a bad man—I have a wife and children. Perhaps one day you will see that.”

She stared blankly at him.

He rose and walked to the door. “I must tell you,” he said with his back to us. “The situation is only getting worse. Officers may return here.” He turned to Master. “I would leave tonight.”

With that, the Commander retrieved his dog and headed up the path. Master went to close the door. The young Nazi lunged forward and wedged in his boot. The two stared at each other for several moments. None of us dared breathe. The Nazi leaned in close.
“I will be back,” he said, then turned and strode into the night.
From the caretaker’s stand, it was a good five minute walk through the frosty grounds to the graves. Sarah had rugged up for the outing, aware she’d be spending hours outside, but she was unprepared for the cold to inhabit her bones and whistle up her sleeves. Remington’s case cracked with electricity. He had narrated a chapter before they’d left the apartment, but afterward his lips had grown thin and disappeared. Sarah wondered if recalling her grandparents’ visit from the Nazis had distressed him, or if he was anticipating the more immediate grief of mourning his master. Sarah hadn’t set foot in a cemetery since her parents’ funeral. She wondered how, with her infinite limitations, she’d comfort Remington when they arrived at his master’s grave.

Sarah crunched along one of two main arteries, scanning the rows from which sprang the sleeping houses of the dead. Once, she’d welcomed the cold for the fact of its discomfort, just as she’d relished drawing curtains against the brilliant Brisbane sun. But she was tired of bracing her bones against snow flurries and arctic winds. She longed for the Queensland embrace of warmth and light. When next she felt it, she would let it seep into her skin.

Sarah took the corner into Row 96. The icy wind attacked, tearing up the aisle, long like the path one might walk to heaven. On either side stood graves extravagant and petite, freshly flowered or left bare, some with headstones—sculptures—and some without. Ahead a way, Sarah spotted a square patch of overgrowth. She squeezed once on Remington’s handle and walked towards it. The two graves were in the shade of a modest oak tree. Beneath it, a knotted mass of vines shielded their numbers. Something tightened in Sarah’s chest. The electricity up her arm was coming quicker. Sarah balanced Remington on the cleared stone border of a neighbouring grave and tore at the earth with her gloves. Soon, she hit a dull metal
plaque. Its numbers revealed what Sarah knew inside her. These neglected graves where her grandparents’. She’d promised Remington to un latch his case as soon as possible. And so against her better judgement, this was what she did.

Remington’s blood-ruby lips were full. Sarah saw them quiver and pant, and then without warning a wail cut the frosty air. It gathered volume and pitch, then broke into dry, heart-wrenching sobs. Sarah’s throat filled with tears.

“I’ll clear the headstones,” she said, kicking herself that she hadn’t thought to reveal her grandparents’ names.

“Don’t,” Remington wept. “I want to remember this—remember how Master’s own son treated him.”

When his sobs fell away, they observed the graves in silence.

After a while, Remington licked his pale, wet lips. “It makes me glad, sometimes, when I observe how you humans treat each other, that I am not one,” he said.

Sarah had no words of defence for her species. “Did you once want to be?”

“Did I wish to be included in Master’s circle?” Remington’s breath came quickly. “Of course I did. Some nights I craved his conversation so intensely I thought my frame would collapse. Had Master been able to hear me on that awful March evening in 1940, for example, he never would have typed that letter. But I came, over the years, to accept my situation. How else does one live a worthwhile life?”

Sarah studied Remington’s wise, worn frame. When had he acquired such wisdom? Why couldn’t she claim more of it herself?

“On second thoughts, I would be grateful if you would clear the vines,” Remington said. “I am here to mourn my master, not to dwell on anger.”
Sarah didn’t have to be asked twice. She tore vines and flicked leaves. The activity was strangely nourishing, and she continued sweeping debris with her gloves long after the vines were clear. When finally she stood, she relocated Remington’s case to the right hand grave. This one was her grandfather’s. There were no phrases of love or respect, no “beloved father” or “devoted friend”. The words read simply: “Henry Mensel. Born August 11\textsuperscript{th} 1900, Died March 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1997.” The letters were of a florid gold-etched font, but the outline of luxury, Sarah felt, was devoid of a core. Sarah’s grandmother’s grave, on the left, bore no such gild, and being older its letters were more ingrained with dirt. But the line, “To a much loved Mom”, was a sign she was treasured at least, that someone had mourned her passing, if not her husband than her sons. “Josephine Mensel”, the gravestone read. “Born April 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1909. Died May 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1977.”

It occurred to Sarah that Josephine’s birth year, 1909, was nine years earlier than it was in Remington’s story. But she had no interest in clarifying facts. What her grandparents had endured consumed her. She was silenced by the weight of it. For five minutes, she stood beside Remington’s case and they mourned together.

“I wish to tell you something,” he said finally. His voice was low and etched with sadness.

“Anything,” Sarah replied.

“Yet I do not want to upset you.”

Sarah felt as if a secret were close to peeling its lid and her insides had cooled to receive it. “I can handle it,” she said.

“Master’s death…” Remington’s thin lips quivered. “I have never told anyone this. But I failed him at the end. Quite simply, I failed him.”

“I don’t believe you,” Sarah said.
Remington curled his tongue to an incisor and stroked it slowly along its length. “I saw Master’s death coming,” he whispered. “I watched it enter his face in the nursing home, watched it break down his muscles and slacken his cheeks. Yet still he polished and oiled me.”

“That isn’t your fault,” Sarah said.

“It is. If I were a nobler machine I would have made Master hear me. Then, I could have begged him to let me rust.” Remington’s lips paled. “Master never knew the agony I suffered each morning as he hobbled to collect the yellow cleaning cloth from over the sink. For his long, proud legs to be reduced to shuffling two metres across carpet stabbed me fresh each day in the heart. But then, as he sat at the table and his stiff, gnarled fingers set to work on me with the cloth… Do you see my failure?” Remington pleaded. “Do you see?”

“It was because he loved you,” Sarah said, willing her tears to press back into her eyes.

“Yes,” Remington whispered. “But if I had loved him, truly loved him, I would have found a way to die too.”

Sarah squatted beside him. Removing her glove, she lay a numb hand gently on his rollers.

“I did try,” Remington said. “I took to cultivating saliva in the late afternoon so that overnight I could dribble it down my chin. Each night, I dreamt I lay exposed to the elements—that I inhabited an open window pane as a storm poured over me, that I was dumped in a puddle of snow. Yet I woke each morning with vim and hope, expecting to find Master as a young man dressing for a day at the surgery. I felt, if I am honest, the strength to endure another world war, while my master deteriorated each day in front of me.
“After two tortured months, I happened upon another strategy to speed my deterioration. Rather than blindly wishing for a fate that would not befall me, I would seek age more actively. I decided to employ my new tactic at the dinner table. Master took up residence there in the early afternoon to wait for dinner. A year earlier, he had abandoned his lifelong passion for reading, and now he passed time by simply staring into the distance. I gazed up into the crags of his face. He turned his neck to a passing nurse and I internalised the slow creak of his joints. I focused on the salt shaker for forty-five minutes, and still his blank stare outlasted me.

“Finally, after three weeks of effort, I noticed a heartening sign. My keys felt stiffer. That was all, nothing else. Yet I knew the decay was breeding inside me.

“And then one evening, as Master was peeling off his slippers before bed, I saw a change in his face. It wasn’t anything he said or did. Absence simply spread across his features as colour and thought drained out. How I longed to cradle his beloved old head, to weep and tell him that I loved him. But I was on the table, and Master tucked himself beneath the covers and died without me.”

Sarah’s breath made circles in the air. She wished she could thread together words of comfort or redemption. But all she could think to say was, “I’m sorry.”

Sarah glanced between Remington and the neglect of her grandparents’ graves. Sometimes, the world seemed so bitterly unfair. She sat cross legged on the path, beyond caring about the cold or Ann’s coat. The old tsunami rose, cold and black and wide—the one that had pinned her to the bed for six months after her parents’ accident. But this time, the wave petered out. She couldn’t let the pain consume her anymore. She wouldn’t.

Sarah’s eyes wandered along the row. Down a way, she saw a white-haired, frail old lady seated in a plastic chair before a grave. The woman leaned forward at
the hips to replace an old bunch of flowers in a small glass vase with a bunch of
gerberas. As she sat up, she saw Sarah and smiled.

“Hello there, dear,” she called, her voice carrying with surprising vigour.

“Nippy, isn’t it?”

The woman gripped her walker and coaxed her long, thin frame to standing. There was no sign of fear or hurry in the act—no caution as if she might break a hip. Her movement, in fact, was almost graceful. Her height became apparent as she hobbled towards Sarah. Even with a slight stoop, the woman stood at at least six foot. She had decorated herself with eccentric baubles and bright fabrics: a green silk scarf, a pink lizard brooch on her collar—half a dozen coloured plastic bangles on each thin wrist. She arrived finally beside Remington and Sarah saw that her eyes, though cloudy, were a beautiful pea green, and that her white hair was secured by diamante pins in a French knot.

“I haven’t seen you in these parts before,” the old lady said, her mouth twitching with mischief.

“I’m just visiting,” Sarah said.

The woman smacked her lips delightedly. “British?”

“Australian,” Sarah said.

“I posed for an Australian once. Handsome man, divine accent, but lousy in the sack.” She raised a trembling hand to Sarah. “Pleased to meet you, dear. I’m Tabatha.”

Tabatha’s neck rose like a turtle’s to address Sarah, then returned to sit alongside her walker.

“A typewriter!” she exclaimed, spying Remington. She flicked her chin up at Sarah. “Don’t tell me—you’re a poet.”
“No,” Sarah said, wishing for a second that she were. “I’m visiting New York to write a book about my grandparents.”

Tabatha stabbed a painted fingernail at the graves. “These them?”

Sarah nodded.

“What sort of book?”

“An historical novel, I guess. They survived the Holocaust.”

Tabatha lowered her watery green eyes. “So many didn’t.” She blinked away something unspoken. “Would you be a doll and fetch my chair, dear? That way we can all have a nice chat.”

Sarah glanced down at Remington and saw his lips shaking excitably. Other than herself, Tabatha was the first new person he’d met in fifteen years. She supposed she’d be excited too.

Sarah walked down the row to the chair. When she gripped it, the plastic was already freezing cold. She wondered suddenly where the thing had come from.

Tabatha transferred her weight slowly backwards when Sarah placed the chair behind her, reversing into it as if it were a carpark. Her bottom finally reached the seat.

“No how I used to do it,” she said. “But as I tell my grandbabies—they want to put me in a home, you know, frightful business—the old bird’s not doing too badly for eighty-six.”

Sarah noticed the bright orange lipstick Tabatha wore had overshot its borders, as had her vigorous application of rose blush. Ann would rather die young, Sarah felt certain, than age with such gay abandon. Yet she couldn’t bring herself to pity Tabatha. In fact, the woman looked as if she were sitting upon a secret.

“Now I have a question for you, dear,” Tabatha said.
Sarah perched on the border of her grandfather’s grave beside Remington.

“Why does a young lass like yourself want to write about her grandparents?”

There was a strain of emotion behind Tabatha’s voice that Sarah couldn’t place.

“I always wanted to,” she said. “Things conspired to stop me for a while. But now it’s my time. I feel somehow like it’s a story I was born to tell.”

Sarah glanced down cautiously at Remington. But he was smiling.

“Bravo,” Tabatha said, clapping her bony hands together. “Young ones today are all me me me. My grandbabies, honestly—sometimes you’d think they were raised in a zoo. Me this and me that. When they go too far—not all the time, only when they’ve really pushed it—I drop the F-bomb. Ker-splat! Or if they’ve really got up my skirt, the C-bomb. Works a treat.” She beamed at Sarah, but the smile collapsed. “I try to keep a sense of humour about it all,” Tabatha said. “It’s hard, sometimes. There’s so much I want to say and no one interested in saying it. My life story—it’s a good ‘un, dear, let me tell you—will die with me.”

Tabatha adjusted a gaudy gold ring on her scrawny index finger, then fixed her eyes on Sarah.

“Tell your grandparents’ story, dear. Treasure it. Polish and shape it. And when the time comes, share it with whomever you can.”

The speech had clearly exhausted Tabatha, but she wasn’t done.

“You want my advice, I’d say tug on the old heart strings. Always works a treat. And slip in a lesson. Those big writing professors say you don’t want books to have a moral. And you know what I say to that? Fooey!”

Her watery eyes bulged, but she blinked and adjusted her scarf.
“Well I must be going, dear. ‘Twas lovely to meet you. Perhaps I’ll see you here again.”

Tabatha slid a remarkably modern phone from her coat pocket. But when she glimpsed Remington this time, she froze. Astonishment flickered on her face. She inched closer to his case. Then, finally, she shook her head.

“The old bird’s gone and lost it,” she muttered, bringing the phone up under her nose and tapping out a text.

“Well it was nice to meet you,” Sarah said. She struggled to keep her voice even. What was it Tabatha had seen? Had she glanced Remington’s lips? Why did the possibility fill Sarah with foreboding?

The caretaker approached with an empty wheelchair. After Tabatha had left, Sarah considered asking Remington what had happened. But something stopped her. Instead, in silence they farewelld her grandparents.

Sarah left Remington’s case open in the limo, and his lips hovered close to her leg. An ache was sliding inside her belly. She tried to ignore it, but its hooked fingers spread. She gripped the door handle and clamped down on her teeth.

“Can I offer you my next story?” Remington asked.

Sarah glanced down and saw his lips grey with concern. Concern, perhaps, for what the old lady had seen?

“I’m okay,” she said.

Remington ascended a C minor scale, his lips still watching her. Sarah reached a finger out to stroke his keys.
May, 1940

We had no way of knowing why the wife had ceased her deliveries. Opinions were slung back and forth in the cramped cellar on whether she had purposefully deserted us. She was an anxious woman with a wracking cough and small, kind eyes. I could not believe she would leave us to starve. If Eva were not breastfeeding, in any case, perhaps we might have lasted longer. But our situation was desperate: the family had gone without food or water for three days, and without light for two. Master must secure supplies.

His journal entries had ceased over a month ago. In moments of introspection—of which there had been many these past two months in hiding—I liked to envisage that he viewed our shared efforts as a form of therapy. Master had employed me, after all, following Suzie’s inevitable death, and more furiously still when Josephine had fallen afterwards into muteness. But candles were scarce, and for a month and a day I had resided, unused, on the bottom cellar step.

Until Master gripped my handle and we ascended the stairs together. A loud knock sounded as his head crashed into the floor above us. I gasped; through my case reeking black air clawed in to strangle my throat. The thick stone walls rang with sound of the crash. Master placed me on the step to wait for silence, then when it came harnessed the force left in him to thrust against the trapdoor. I teetered on the cold uneven stone. Finally, the door inched open, and Master clutched my case and we clambered through.

Upstairs, a deep mahogany lounge aglow in lamplight greeted us, its burgundy walls rising like the prow of some ancient Russian ship. A man sat in the centre of the heavy furniture, erect but for a slight tremble in his bottom lip. He retrieved his bookmark from the side table and placed it carefully in the heavy bound book in his
hand. Glancing between us, he returned the tome to the oak table. Master straightened his trousers and wiped a lick of saliva across his hair. The man—our supposed benefactor and onetime financial advisor to the Count—stared at him and coughed.

“I am sorry to disturb you, Herr Bauer,” Master said.

Herr Bauer tapped a long, slim hand against his chest. “No no, no disturbance.” He coughed daintily. “I’m sorry, I’m not at all well.”

“My condolences,” Master said.

I looked at him, at the chapped state of his lips, the skin around his eyes that had puckered and creased, and wondered with what pool of inner dignity he found this composure within him.

Herr Bauer clutched the cushion of his chair and slowly stood. “I had almost forgotten there was anyone down there,” he said. “My wife takes care of the running of the house normally. She has been taken ill, you see, and organising the servants and the cook… Well, it has been rather too much for me. And then the carpet began to move, and I thought ‘that’s it, you’ve lost your mind, old man, this time you’ve really gone and lost it.’”

“We wouldn’t normally disturb you,” Master said, “but our situation in the cellar has gotten rather desperate.” He licked his lips. “Your wife is ill, you say.”

Herr Bauer nodded. “Tuberculosis. She went into hospital on Monday.”

“What day is it?”

“What day is it?” His gaze flicked to the ceiling. “Why it’s Wednesday. No—Thursday.”

“Then we have had no provisions in three days. My sister is breastfeeding, you see, and has grown very weak.” The roof of Master’s mouth stuck suddenly to his tongue. “Something to eat and drink,” he said thickly, “even a few morsels of food
and a little water, would be so appreciated. And candles, for it is terribly dark and we cannot see.”

Herr Bauer stood oddly stroking his chest. Finally, he led us into the dining room. The corner of a mahogany table was laid elaborately with two place settings. Two wine glasses, a water glass, a glass for brandy and another for schnapps—it occurred to me that while the family were struggling to secure water, above our heads the old man had a drinking problem.

“This is where we eat,” he said.

With astounding good grace—more than I could have summoned—Master commented that it was lovely.

“I miss it, really, since Rita went away. Without her I eat in the sitting room by the radio.”

“Do you have a kitchen?” Master asked.

Recognition flitted across Herr Bauer’s face. “Of course.” He patted his temple. “I’m a bit all over the place, I’m afraid. The war, all that hideousness with the people in charge, and now my wife. I hardly know whether I’m coming or going.”

He led us through the far door into the enormous kitchen. In the centre stood a long island bench, its marble surface gleaming and spotless.

“I never come in here,” Herr Bauer whispered. “I couldn’t say where anything is.”

Master pointed at the icebox. “What about in there?”

“I suppose so, yes. The meats and things.”

At mention of meat, a trickle of saliva breached Master’s lips and proceeded down his chin.
“Rita does it all, see—organising the servants, supervising the groceries, right down to the menu for dinner. It takes up a good portion of her day. And she enjoys it. I am loathe to take that away from her.”

Master was losing patience. “Do you have any bread?” he asked.

“Bread? I would imagine so. I like my bread—reminds me of my time in France.” Herr Bauer looked about, an expression of terror in his eyes. Timidly, he opened the large cupboard beneath the sink. “I suppose if I were the cook I would keep it somewhere handy, away from moisture.” He glanced at the faucet. “Probably not in here.” Placing a hand beneath his chin, he scanned the kitchen. “I would keep it there,” he said, pointing to a high cupboard beside the icebox. He walked over to it, nodding, and pried open the door. “And there it is!”

Herr Bauer retrieved the brown paper packet stuffed with bread. The find buoyed him. He moved about more freely, lifting bowls and tugging at drawers. After a minute, he had assembled three apples, the loaf of bread, several chocolates and a large hunk of sausage. He lined them neatly beside each other on the bench as if he meant to take a photograph. I was reflecting on the absurdity of this when Master ducked around Herr Bauer and bit into the sausage. He inhaled the hunk without chewing, then flew to the sink and placed his mouth beneath the faucet. This display of famine appeared to touch some chord within Herr Bauer; he re-opened the icebox and cleared an entire shelf—including a gold-rimmed plate with half a meatloaf and several different types of sausage—into a paper bag with a sweep of his arm.

Master turned from his drink at the faucet. “You must forgive my lack of courtesy.”

Herr Bauer shrugged and nodded. “Rita doesn’t eat much,” he said, quizzically, after a moment. He extended his arm.
Without a word, Master plucked me from the bench and we followed him out through the dining room to the lounge. Herr Bauer returned to his armchair, where he reached for his ornately bound green book.

“Won’t you take this with you,” he said, sliding his glasses onto his nose. “It delves into the psychology and philosophy of love—what joins two people together. A wonderful book, truly wonderful. It should provide some fascinating hours of discussion.” Herr Bauer snapped the book shut. “I imagine the boredom is worst.”

“It is all bad equally,” Master said. “Forgive me—a final request. We are out of candles.”

The old man gasped. “Then whatever have you been doing?”

“Sitting in the dark,” Master said.

This statement troubled Herr Bauer; he pressed his fingers together in a triangle and peered through them.

“You may think it ridiculous but I’ve been afraid of the dark ever since I was a small child. My mother was a firm woman, and if I were ever naughty she would threaten to lock me in the broom cupboard under the stairs. Mere mention of the punishment was threat enough—until adolescence I was something of an angel. Later I rebelled…” He shook his head. “It doesn’t matter now. I happen to know where Rita keeps the candles for the simple reason that I go through so many, especially in the winter. I like my surroundings bright always.” Herr Bauer gestured at the faux sunlight glinting from every surface. “Of course Rita insists on buying the best beeswax candles, so this little obsession of mine costs us a small fortune. But I get such pleasure—don’t you?—from the way a well made candle eats its own wax, so that it burns down without spilling rivulets upon the table.” He laughed a little. “A funny word, isn’t it? Rivulets?” Herr Bauer stood and shuffled to a drawer in the large
oak bookcase. “Here, take all of these—yes I insist. Rita will order more, God willing.”

He handed the candles to Master, and then in a statement I have never forgotten, so completely did it extinguish the humanity to which we had been clutching, he said, “However is one to remain civilized if one cannot see?”

In the cellar, the candle illuminated the squalor in which we had been living. A bucket of waste lay in the corner opposite the stairs, but without light in recent days the family had been hard pressed to deposit their waste solely in it. The light somehow gave vent to the stench—a horrible combination of faeces and sweat and some intangible thing, and I gasped to think we had carried on, all of us, without notice or mention of it. The filth had encroached upon Mama’s blanket so that she lay sleeping in a rug half soiled. During these past months, I had watched her skin slacken and grey, as if each day it were smeared with another thin covering of ash. Heinrich was in no better a state—in what would have cost him great humiliation had he known, the zipper to his trousers gaped open. He lay pathetically on one side against his wife. The only one of us not relegated to the cold stone floor was Josephine. She slept separately on her Louis Vuitton travelling case in the corner, a custom design the Count had commissioned for her eighteenth birthday. Though Mama teased Josephine mercilessly about the trunk, when Josephine had snuck out last month to visit the Count’s about visas, Mama had poured over the seat with little fold out desk, the two clothes drawers and small space for hanging, and the mirror and vanity filled with decorative Art Deco crystal jars.

I remembered on seeing it Josephine’s movements in the half hour between the Nazis leaving the apartment in March and the family fleeing to the Bauers. While
others darted about gathering food and practicalities, Josephine shifted just once from her seat in the lounge to rescue her Vuitton travelling case from the bedroom. In one drawer, she placed her carefully folded mink—in the other two pairs of shoes and a clean outfit she tied with string. Then she sat still, clasping Suzie. During the months in hiding, Josephine had only moved from the embossed leather seat to cradle Master’s neck or whisper encouragement when he looked as if he needed it. These departures were a sign of the fierce love she felt for him, for no one else alive, I felt certain, could have coaxed her to kneel on the soiled stone floor.

I glanced at Eva. Her neck slumped awkwardly against the stair wall, her sleeping babe cradled beneath a swathe of filthy blankets. Beside her, Rudolph was asleep. I wondered as we descended the stairs how Eva had managed to maintain those elements of dignity that had been so fast to escape the rest of us. It wasn’t just that she never complained. Where within herself, for example, did she find a smile and story when the general mood most needed it? Her elaborate tales brimmed full of princes and mysterious caves, and in particular a special little boy who had the power to see in the dark. Many nights, when I felt something like wool unravelling at the edges of my mind, Eva’s stories provided crucial distraction.

But as Master and I trod the final step we saw immediately that something was wrong. Eva’s matted hair was laced thickly with sweat and her neck hung strangely against her chest. But her eyes were what alerted me. Her pupils were dilated and did not move when Master squatted in front of her. He placed me on the step, then gently grasped her shoulder.

“I’ve brought food, Eva.”

She moved her neck. “Hmm?”

“Food—some bread and sausage, and some water. Come, you need to eat.”
“I’m cold,” she whispered.

Master touched her cheek, then dropped the bag of food by his feet.

Mama stirred with the commotion. “Henry?”

“Something’s wrong with Eva, Mama.”

Mama pushed herself up. She had aged twenty years in a couple of months: her hair had turned white—her robustness I had so admired had all but disappeared.

“What is it?”

“She’s burning with fever.”

Rather than stand, Mama crawled the distance of four feet to the foot of the stairs. “What day is it?”

“Thursday, Mama. I went upstairs and met Herr Bauer. He gave us some food to eat.”

“Then let’s have it,” she said.

Heinrich sat up. “What’s happening?”

“Henry has brought food, Heinrich. But Eva isn’t well.” Mama glanced between her daughter and the bag by Master’s feet. “Eva? What is it? Do you feel ill?”

Eva shifted slightly. “It’s nothing,” she whispered, passing her son with effort to Mama. “I’m cold, that’s all.”

Mama pressed a hand to her cheek. “But you are burning, my darling. A hundred degrees!” She turned to Master. “Do something, Henry.”

Master’s family had always regarded his veterinary qualifications as an all-out permit to practise medicine. I knew how their expectations weighed on him.

“Henry can’t be expected to diagnose Eva until he’s first lined his stomach with food,” Josephine said, her eyes flashing open.
Again, I witnessed her startling ability to arise from sleep or despair to defend her husband.

“Josephine’s right,” Heinrich said. “Henry can’t treat Eva—no one can decide anything—until we’ve eaten.”

Rudolph, silent until now, nodded sheepishly.

The family agreed they would sit down to a meal. Master flicked the soiled blankets from the centre of the floor. A small broom stood adjacent the stairs; he fetched it and swept the stray waste into a pile in the opposite corner. Knowing his aversion to housework, I found the care with which he did this touching. When he had finished, he collected the bag of food. The family—all except Eva—gathered like wolves around it. Master tore the paper bag carefully outwards, then laid the items of food precisely on top. Mama clapped her hands when she spied the sausage, but sight of the two Mozart Kugeln caused her to break down in tears. Little Samuel in her arms broke out in sobs. She did not soothe him; no one laid a word or comforting hand upon his head.

Master tore the bread and poured some water from the pitcher into a small metal cup. He took these over to Eva. She placed her lips to the beaker and tried to drink, but the liquid spluttered down her chin. The others did not notice. They ate as if possessed. Mama snatched the chocolates and tucked them into a fold of her skirt. Rudolph fought with Heinrich over the bread—Josephine ate both the apples. Master glanced strickenly at the food; Josephine slung him a scoop of meatloaf.

I pressed my case into my frame and tried imagining myself elsewhere—the glorious Vienna Woods, a sweeping booth of the Café Central. But something in my vision drew me back.
I saw him soon after, his head splayed cruelly on the stones. He had ceased sobbing everywhere but his eyes.

“Master,” I cried through my case. “Eva—the babe has fallen hard onto the floor.”

Eva—had she heard me?—reached out a trembling hand. “Little one, come here to Mama.”

Master turned suddenly. The end of a large crust of bread stuck crudely from his mouth. I could see him struggling with himself—his shoulders jerked once in the air. Quickly, he stuffed the crust in his mouth and scooped the babe into his arms. He spun towards Mama, the culprit here but also once provider of life and steadiness, and gripped her arm before she could snatch the final piece of meatloaf.

“Let go of me,” she cried. “What are you trying to do? Have me go hungry?”

“You dropped him,” Master said.

Mama’s mouth sprang open. “I didn’t—he must have fallen. Anyway, he looks okay.”

“You dropped him,” Master said again. “You dropped your grandson and were so busy eating you didn’t notice.”

The weight of this accusation finally struck Mama—she fell back against the floor clutching her stomach.

“But how could I not notice?” she said. “I had him—I remember crawling to Eva to pick him up. I had him right here.” She gestured at her arms, then whispered, “I don’t remember, Henry—that’s the truth. I don’t remember.”

Heinrich sat back wiping his mouth. “You have to be more careful, Helga.”

“Careful!” The word seemed to unleash something in her. “Careful! Don’t talk to me about careful! I’ve been lying here in this hovel for months, hardly speaking
above a whisper in case Nazis are prowling the house, sleeping twenty-two hours a
day just to pass the time, never seeing the sun because I’m too careful—yes, careful—
to prance about to the Count’s as Josephine insists on doing. So if I let my guard
down for a minute because I’m famished and Henry produces chocolate, for God’s
sake—Mozart Kugeln—and I drop my grandson, just lightly so he isn’t hurt,” Mama
gestured desperately at Samuel, “then excuse me for being human and making a
mistake.”

She yelled the last section, then immediately broke out in tears.

“Don’t cry, woman,” Heinrich said, picking his teeth so we wouldn’t see the
tears in his own eyes. “It will only upset the rest of us.”

“I’ll cry if I want to,” howled Mama. “You can’t stop me crying, Heinrich
Mensel.”

“I think we should all calm down,” Josephine said, who had retreated to the
comfort of her customised trunk. “Eva’s fallen back asleep. And I didn’t prance about
deliberately, Helga, or because I enjoyed it—”

“You mean you did it accidentally?” Mama shot back.

“I pranced about,” Josephine went on, “because I’m trying to secure Henry
and I visas to emigrate to the United States. It isn’t the simplest thing in a war, God
knows, what with those bastards up above and a Jewish husband.”

“You knew what he was when you married him.”

Josephine stamped the heel of her ridiculous court shoes. “Of course I knew
what he was when I married him. But I’m trying to save our lives.”

“We’ll be fine right here,” Heinrich said.

Master turned to him.
“It’s dangerous out there, I’m not saying it isn’t. But you’re a respected veterinary surgeon, Henry.”

“I haven’t practiced in over two years, Father.”

“Doesn’t change what you are. Even me—I drove my horses six days a week for forty years.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Josephine snapped.

“They may humiliate us, they may even deport us. But they won’t kill us, I just don’t believe it. What have we ever done but serve our country?”

Silence.

“Besides, the Yankees are a bunch of clowns. You hear them speak English? It isn’t even English—it’s some other language. And the way they swagger about like they own the place. You want your children growing up around people like that? Your grandchildren?”

“I do, as a matter of fact,” Josephine said. “America’s the land of opportunity. We’ll live with a view of the Empire State building. Our children will go to the best schools and universities because we’ll pay for them to. Our money will be welcome there.”

“What about Eva and Rudolph and little Samuel?” Mama said fiercely.

“We’re too old, don’t worry about us. But Henry should know his nephew. You think they can afford to visit you?”

“Then we’ll pay for them to come out, won’t we Henry? Once a year, if not more. Daddy will set us up in a delicious brownstone—that’s what they’re called, I’ve done research—with a couple of comfortable spare rooms and lots of bathrooms. We’ll have a wonderful time going to the ballet, shopping on 5th Avenue…”

She glanced excitedly at Master.
“There’ll be bars like the American Bar on every corner. Small, moody places where the bartender will make a cocktail especially for you, off the cuff like that! I’ll be a great philanthropist, known for my style—on lots of committees. I’ll be frightfully busy…” She laughed and Master attempted to laugh with her. “American Vogue will do a large spread on our home, Henry, with me resplendent in couture and you in a smartly cut suit. People will envy us—we’ll lose our accents. It’ll be as if we were born there.” She paused. “Our daughter will be born there, anyway. She’ll be a great socialite, and look exactly like Bette Davis.” Josephine stopped, noticing that no one except Master was paying her attention. “You’ll see,” she said.

The cellar fell silent. Mama nursed Samuel with extra attentiveness, glancing now and again at Master.

“It may not be quite like that, Jay-Jay,” he said finally.

“Why would you say that?” Her eyes filled at the betrayal. “Why would you try and spoil my dream?”

“I wouldn’t, darling. I’m not. But it might be tough at first. Who knows if the Yankees even recognise my degree? And we don’t speak the language well. We might have to start at the bottom and work up.”

Josephine sniffed.

“Maybe we could practice our English,” Master said tentatively.

“Practice our English? Practice your English, Henry. I already speak it perfectly. Anyway, I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about living—living as if we mean it. Starting as we mean to continue.”

Later—I assumed it was evening as the family had for some hours been asleep—Josephine’s eyes suddenly flashed open. I saw their hazel irises dart about, then focus,
oddly, on me. Master had unlatched my case before bed as he always did, as though when he woke he meant to type into me all he had dreamed. Staring at me, Josephine gasped and flung her hands to her throat.

A chill spread like ink through my frame, for she gazed not at my rollers or keys but directly at my mouth.

“W-what are you?” Josephine whispered.

For a second I did not think to respond. How many times over the years as questions were tossed above my head, after all, had I learned to bite my tongue? Could it be true? Could a human finally see and hear me?

Josephine spoke again. “I could almost swear—” She drew a fist to her chin, “—I could almost swear I see a mouth.”

“You do,” I said, delight exploding belatedly in my frame. “My name is Remington Ignatius Portable. I am thrilled to finally make your acquaintance.”

“But you’re a typewriter—” Josephine knocked her fist against her head. “I’ve lost my mind, haven’t I? I’m the first.”

“You are quite sane,” I assured her.

But the question arose: why was it, when I had finally accepted no human would ever hear me, that Master’s wife would awake with the sudden ability to glimpse my mouth? The question threatened to dampen this unlikely miracle. Yet my need to communicate—my need not just to speak but finally to be heard—flowed like blood in my veins. Could such a wonder occur in this cold, cruel cellar?

I cleared my throat. “Difficult as it may be to believe,” I began, “I am a talking typewriter.”

The news was too direct; Josephine gasped.
“Please do not think yourself crazy,” I hurried on. “I have been struggling to communicate with Master since the day of my purchase. You, dear woman, are the first human ever to hear me.”

Josephine’s pale eyebrows gathered. “Your master?”

“Henry Mensel,” I said.

Josephine did then something very strange: she smiled. “Then we’re alike, for he is my master too.” Her smile fell away. “I’m malnourished,” she muttered. “That’s what it is. Or maybe the lack of sun. Yes, that’s it—the lack of sun.”

I spent the next ten minutes convincing Josephine of my soul’s existence. Finally, after four lonely years, I had a means to communicate. Yet while joy leapt in my keys, something sinister leapt with it—something I could not yet explain. My throat was rusty from neglect; suddenly, I coughed. I watched Josephine observe the unexpected throw of my lips, the tight ball of sound. Inexplicably, she relaxed.

“You must help me, Remington,” she whispered.

I asked how I may be of service.

“I was going to talk to Henry…” Josephine glanced at Master, his neck collapsed soundly on one shoulder. “But he looks—I don’t know. Peaceful.”

“Perhaps you would allow me to fill in for him this evening?” I said. “I am a fine conversationalist, if I do say so, and otherwise indisposed.”

Her mouth pursed slightly. “How do you know you’re good at it if you’ve never talked to anyone?”

Faced with the prospect of either losing her mind or accepting the word of a talking typewriter, Josephine’s feistiness still burst forth.

“With respect,” I said, smiling, “I have had a good deal of time to listen.”
Josephine flushed, recalling no doubt the intimate moments in which I had unwittingly taken part. But the doubt in her face soon dissolved. She stood and walked over to me, perching on the step nearest my case. “I wanted to talk about America.”

She bit her lip and glanced at the ground. I noticed her cheeks had grown very gaunt, making the light freckles upon them stand out. Other than this, her appearance had gone unchanged. Josephine was a beauty by no means, but what attractiveness she possessed clung firmly.

“What part of it specifically?” I asked.

“What I said before…” Josephine ground her teeth. “I made it all up.”

I attempted to digest this strange statement. “But that is the point of a fantasy, is it not?”

“What I mean is, my English is terrible,” she whispered. “I never listened to my tutor—I didn’t think I’d need to.” There were genuine tears in her eyes. “I’ll be an outcast.”

“You are too outgoing to be an outcast,” I said. “You will make yourself understood with gestures—body language.”

“It won’t be enough.”

Her tortured stare was utterly vulnerable.

“You communicate from the heart and always have done,” I said. “Some of your heart is malicious, it’s true…”

She smiled faintly.

“… but your message inevitably gets through.”

Josephine looked searchingly at me, her hazel eyes so pale they were almost yellow. “That isn’t really what I’m worried about.”
“Then what is it?”

She bent her head to the step, tracing her finger along the filthy groove between the stones. “Daddy can’t access his money,” she said. “It’s terrible because no one knows anything. His bank manager can’t even tell him how much is there, whether it’s been frozen or if ninety percent of it is gone.”

“Why would the Count’s assets be frozen? He joined the Party after the Anschluss.”

I knew the reason as soon as I spoke: he lay sleeping against the wall. I grimaced and pressed on.

“There is always the jewellery…” My lips paled. “Forgive me. Not the jewellery, perhaps—but the estate in Bavaria.”

“The Nazis have seized the estate,” Josephine said. “I found out the other week when I snuck out to see Daddy about the visas. Apparently the stone towers out the front are draped with those horrible red banners. Just think,” she said, waking the baby, “us scrounging for life in this hovel and those monsters living in a castle!”

Eva stirred and patted Samuel softly on his back.

“Calm down,” I whispered. “You will get it back after the war.”

“Who can say for certain that we will? Even Daddy doesn’t think so, and he’s always so appallingly optimistic.”

“Then you pack up the jewels and linen your father can spare and sell them at auction in America. Just think what those American women wouldn’t give to own authentic Habsburg jewels.”

A tear escaped down Josephine’s cheek. “I can’t—I couldn’t.”

“Those jewels could ensure your future.”
Slowly, she peeled open her dirty woollen cardigan to reveal a large star-shaped brooch. Even in the dull candlelight, the brilliance of its diamonds was near blinding.

“Your dowry,” I gasped.

Josephine nodded. “It was Grandmamma’s. It’s smaller than the one of Mother’s the Nazis stole but I like the pink in it. And a star is better than a flower, don’t you think? More daring.”

“A star will do nicely,” I said.

“They didn’t find it that night at the apartment because I was wearing it. I went night about, see, and that night I’d chosen the star.” Josephine sighed. “Maybe I should have worn both—maybe I should have sewn all my jewels into a corset like the Tsar’s daughters.” Josephine blinked tearily. “But I didn’t want to tempt fate, Remington—you understand. Those girls were all stabbed to death with bayonets.”

I paused to allow her time to recompose herself.

“But you made a clandestine visit to the Count’s,” I ventured. “What if you were stopped and searched?”

Josephine shrugged. “Daddy wanted to lock the brooch in the safe, but how much safer do you think it’d be in there? The thugs have already seized the estate in Bavaria—Daddy’s house in town could be next.”

“He will be the last man standing in Vienna, I am sure of it.”

She clasped the hinge joining my case. “But how will we get on?” she cried, her mind already leaping ahead. “In America no one cares about your background—I’ve read that lots of places. There are powerful families, certainly, but new money is as good as old. And no money, well…”
“Master will re-establish his surgery,” I said. “He is determined to provide for you.”

“And he will,” Josephine said. “But I’m talking about a different kind of money…”

“The sort you cannot earn in one lifetime. I understand.”

Her gaze fell desperately upon the stones. The silk court shoes she wore were smeared with every type of filth. She scraped tentatively at the silk with one of her fingernails. I decided to try a new tack.

“Wealth is a state of mind,” I said brightly. “Those American princesses will spot your breeding from a mile off.”

Josephine stretched her neck against her shoulder. “They will?”

“Of course, and as a result they will invite you to the most exclusive parties—the sort you were a fixture at several years ago…”

“Go on,” she said.

“… and place you at the head of the best committees, five or more…”

“At least,” she cried.

“And after a time the American designers will grow so accustomed to seeing your picture in the newspaper that they will request to dress you—nay, more—and insist that you keep every garment. Thus, Frau Mensel, you will infiltrate the world of the rich and famous on the salary of a veterinarian.”

Josephine looked at me in a way she had never done before, her eyes so warm I thought she may embrace me. “I feel better,” she said.

My heart soared. Here, unexpectedly, was the companionship I had so been craving.

“I do what I can,” I said.
Josephine angled her chin towards me. “You’re dashing by candlelight, you know that Remington? I could almost believe your leather handle was crafted by Louis Vuitton.”

Coming from her, I knew this was the highest form of compliment. “Thank you—you are not so bad yourself.”

Josephine smiled conspiratorially at me, then stretched out, yawning. “I’m going back to bed.”

“When are you and Master going to see the Count about the visas?” I asked.

“Tomorrow.”

Warmth crept across my keys imagining the buildings and statues I had so been missing. “Goodnight, then.”

I have never forgotten the way Josephine curled up then next to Master on the floor. “Goodnight.”

Master woke early. Our hiding place was a good half hour on foot from the Count’s, and each minute in the open placed us in danger. In this volatile environment, grooming was more important than ever—perhaps the single element Master and Josephine could control. Master retrieved his package of clean clothes, tied carefully with string, that he had stowed beside Josephine’s in her trunk. She stirred; Master greeted her with a kiss. Josephine sat up quickly. I realised in our haste to confide in one another the previous evening, we had neglected to devise a strategy for concealing my nature. Our visit to the Count’s was both perilous and crucial—would Josephine be sensitive to this and divulge our secret to Master later?

Master untied the string and aired his three-piece suit, then took the hand mirror from the vanity and held it to his face. Frowning, he attempted to pinch some
colour into his gaunt cheeks. Taking care to avoid me, Josephine stood and kissed each of Master’s fingers. Her spirits were almost buoyant as she fiddled with the string on her package. She flapped the dress and matching jacket twice, and as they unfolded a crimson stain the size of a beetle appeared atop the skirt.

“No,” she gasped. “It was perfect after I wore it last. I remember taking it off here by the step and inspecting every centimetre.”

Mama blearily opened her eyes. “What time is it?”

“My skirt!” Josephine said. “Someone purposefully stained it so we couldn’t go today.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Mama, coming to. “You had a glass of red wine at the Count’s—made a fuss about it so we’d all be jealous.”

Josephine turned white. “I did not make a fuss.”

“You did too, going on and on about the hills where it was grown, as if we’d know or even care if we stumbled on them, like we wouldn’t kill for a glass of something ordinary to take the edge off for ourselves.” Mama paused to roll her shoulders. “It’s plain as day to me—you spilt it yourself without noticing.”

Josephine bit her lip to stop from crying. “It’s possible I spilt it,” she whispered, fingering the linen. “I was a nervous wreck by the time I arrived at Daddy’s. He had Fina pour me a glass and then told me about the wine as a way of calming me.” She glanced uncertainly at Mama. “My mother used to do that when I was a child.”

The statement softened Mama; she manoeuvred herself onto her knees and crawled the short distance toward Josephine. “Let’s have a look.” She snatched the dress and brought it to the candle on the wall. “Yep, it’s wine alright.”

Josephine burst into tears.
“There there, it could be worse—it could be blood.”

“At least then there’d be some drama to it.”

Mama pawed at the stain. “All’s not lost. Heinrich, bring me some water would you?”

“But we’ve almost run out,” he replied, already awake.

Mama silenced him with her hand. “So we go thirsty for a bit. Your daughter-in-law’s life is at stake.”

Josephine clasped Mama’s wrist. “Thank you, Helga.”

“Now now—the stain’s not out yet.”

Josephine nodded and sat silently on the step beside me.

“Now,” Mama said, finally in her element. “I need a sturdy cloth of some sort and some soap or detergent.” She looked about. “Baking soda would work too.”

Heinrich fished about beneath his bottom and produced a small bar of brown soap. His eyes widened. “That’s what was keeping me up.”

The family broke out in laughter. Heinrich had not intended the comment to be amusing, and smiled with genuine delight. He lobbed the soap to Mama as if it were a football.

She caught it between her thumb and forefinger without flinching. “The water, Heinrich.”

He stood and fetched the single pitcher from the makeshift table in the centre of the floor. “If you could just use what you need…”

“Don’t tell me how to wash, Heinrich Mensel,” Mama snapped. “I grew up in the country, not the Vienna Woods—the country country. We washed our clothes outside in the dead of winter. Our fingers got so numb—”
“—you could pinch them for hours afterwards and not feel it,” finished Heinrich.

Mama’s eyes bulged, but she gathered herself and said, “Mother never wasted a drop of anything,” at which point she poured a single drop of water on both the stain and the bar of soap, pressed them hard together and began scrubbing vigorously.

“It’s coming out!” Josephine said.

“Of course it’s coming out,” grinned Mama, relishing the fact she was superior to Josephine, finally, in something. “All it needs is a bit of elbow grease.”

Mama grimaced with a sort of pleasure as her elbows surged back and forth.

Josephine watched her, then said timidly, “You know we may be leaving in as little as two weeks.”

Rudolph and Eva stirred in the corner.

“But what happens when we arrive in America? It’s one thing to board the ship, but quite another to try and establish a life.” Josephine’s voice lowered. “I mean—where will we live? What will we live on?”

Mama, crouched low over the dress so as to apply maximum pressure with the soap, said, “Hasn’t your father been making—what do you call them? Enquiries?”

“Enquiries?” Josephine said.

“Well surely he has some business friend or other who could put you up. Just in the short term, until Henry can re-build his practice.”

“But that would be horrible.”

Master fastened the final button on his vest. “It would be better than this, Jay-Jay.”

“But that isn’t how I planned it,” she said, her eyes beseeching him to agree with her. “Josephine Mensel doesn’t step off a boat in America and go directly to the
back room of some tiny apartment. I – I need to make an entrance. People will be watching, people expect it…”

Master extended his arms into his suit jacket and turned away from her, the first time to my knowledge he had ever done so.

“No one expects anything,” he said. “It’s a war, Jay-Jay. We survive—anything more is the cherry on top.”

An hour later we crept through the trapdoor and entered the street.
Sarah fell back against the limo’s silky leather seat. Its buttery caress exposed some vast and unfair luxury—a privilege she felt ashamed of given her grandparents’ suffering in the cellar. She couldn’t help but wonder if her grandfather would rather have buried that time in his life—if, by dredging it up, she was enacting a fresh cruelty on his memory. The pit in her stomach pulsed against the chill of her ribs. Sarah’s thoughts slid to a new focus.

*Josephine had heard Remington talk.*

The news should have buoyed Sarah—filled her with joy on Remington’s behalf—but an intangible cloud had arrived with it. What did she and her feisty grandmother have in common?

And then pain sliced like a wedge of steel across Sarah’s gut. Its brilliance filled her, pressed up through the heat of her skin. Lava spilled into her stomach where it rumbled and roared.

Sarah smacked her palm against the limo’s screen. It lowered, and her mouth found words. She heard the driver swear and felt the limo swerve to the left. The typewriter shop was a few blocks over, he muttered—she could be sick there.

Sarah thanked him, but the effort of speaking again triggered a round of sweat and she collapsed against the seat. Remington’s pale lips watched her. Sarah couldn’t stomach their pity. After the suffering he had just narrated, she wouldn’t steal focus again. His story was bigger than her. She was no protagonist.

The limo veered towards the curb. Sarah saw her fingers reach for Remington’s lid as the limo door opened. Gritting her teeth against the fire in her, she bundled through it. Bruno’s typewriter shop was two doors down. Sarah’s heart
crashed inside her ribs, but she set her sights on the door. Seconds later she pressed against it, and felt the cloudy glass give beneath her hand.

Bruno glanced up from a typebar he was fiddling with at the counter.

“You came back!” he said.

Sarah sped up the aisle with her head down. She hiked the weight in her hand onto the crowded bench top and asked if Bruno had a toilet.

Bruno glanced at her face then down at Remington.

“You brought me an old Remington to repair,” he beamed.

Fire squirted in Sarah’s belly. “I just came to use the bathroom,” she said again.

The question somehow delighted him.

“I’m the only shop on the street to have my own,” Bruno said. “I pay extra.”

Sarah doubled over as a cramp clawed at her gut.

“You okay?”

She shook her head.

“Behind the counter to the left. Here—I help you.”

Bruno hurried over and stood behind Sarah, placing his thin arms gently around her shoulders. “Okay, you ready? One, two, three.”

The pair staggered around the counter. The door to the tearoom was narrow and stacked with boxes; Bruno squeezed them through it. Vaguely, Sarah registered the open filing cabinet and ancient coffee cups with their impressive strains of vertical mould. Still clasping her shoulders, Bruno opened the bathroom door, which swung into the tiny toilet itself.

“I leave you here, okay?” he said. “You call out if you need anything.”
Sarah nodded and flattened herself against the bathroom wall to close and lock the door.

This time, there wasn’t diarrhoea, only blood. The hot, bright stream squirted into the bowl and covered its rim. It erupted again, longer, then once more. Sarah sat still. Emptied of fire, she felt sharper, as if she had space, finally, to consider Remington’s tale.

A new thought grew behind her eyes. What happened to the people who could hear Remington? Josephine arrived in America, lost her husband’s love and fell into depression. She died an early death. Could Sarah’s illness, then, her parents’ accident—her accursed gift for attracting misfortune—be related to the fact she could hear Remington talk? Just what was it, other than genes, that joined Sarah to her unlucky grandmother? Could it be anything as ephemeral, as ridiculous, as a curse?

The questions propelled Sarah up, where she attended to the bloody dribble on the back of her legs. She went to wash her hands at the narrow sink and was confronted by two metal stubs. Beside them was a wrench. Sarah gripped the tool, clamped it to a stub and wielded a trickle of scalding water. As she scrubbed her hands on the streaked pink soap, certainty filled her that Remington, despite his goodness, was hiding something. There were unchartered mysteries in him, pockets of silence and suffering Sarah knew she hadn’t reached. But there was one answer she simply must draw out of him.

Sarah flicked her hands on the tired grey handtowel and walked out through the tearoom. Remington wasn’t where she’d left him on the counter. Bruno had moved him to a grimy glass-topped table behind a wooden cabinet on the wall. Hearing Sarah, Bruno turned.

“You okay?” he asked.
Sarah nodded, lying. “I think so.”

Colour flooded Bruno’s cheeks. “Phew—I thought we need to go to hospital. I hate hospitals, but for you I would have gone inside.”

Sarah almost smiled.

“You need a new lock,” Bruno said, glancing down at Remington. “The case opened easily.”

Sarah noticed Remington’s plump, bright lips. Bruno hadn’t seen them, and she hadn’t worried for a second that he might. She turned to the grimy window. The view was of a narrow alley choked with garbage cans, their rubbish spilling loosely to the ground. Bruno looked over and smiled.

“See my view? Some customers ask me, ‘why you like looking at trash?’ And you know what I say to them? ‘Look up, my friend, and see the sky!’”

Sarah strained to glimpse a speck of grey sky above the clothesline of the adjacent building. She felt the cogs of a great wheel turn, as if something inevitable was coming full circle. She needed to get Remington alone.

“I better get going,” she said.

Bruno nodded. “Normally, take me two days to repair. But for you? One day.”

“I didn’t come here to get my typewriter repaired,” Sarah said, realising, belatedly, why Bruno had of course misunderstood.

His thin brow knotted. “No?”

“I came to use—” She stopped. “I came to say goodbye.”

“Why? Where you go?”

Sarah felt suddenly like crying. “I leave for Australia tomorrow,” she said.

Bruno’s deep eyes widened. “Already? You just got here.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”
Bruno’s blackened hand clutched his heart. “But I have more stories for you.”

“We can email,” Sarah said.

“Email? What email?”

Sarah checked to see if Bruno was joking. “It doesn’t matter. We’ll write letters to each other.”

Bruno’s face fell. “My writing—” He shook his head desolately. “I read, no problem. But my writing no one understand.”

“If you type it up I’m sure I could read it,” Sarah said.

“You couldn’t,” Bruno whispered. He was crying now. “My head and fingers—they don’t join.”

Sarah had exposed a raw nerve. Regret stormed in—the realisation she wouldn’t see this dear man again. She pulled a scrap of paper from her pocket, grabbed a pen from the table and wrote down her address in Brisbane. Bruno took the paper silently, then sprang forward to hug her.

“You’re my first writer friend, you know that?”

Sarah closed her eyes. “And you’re my first friend to own a typewriter shop.”

They stood like this by the window. Sarah pulled away finally to fasten Remington. She walked slowly down the aisle. At the door, she turned. Bruno was softly crying.

“Goodbye,” he called. “Thank you.”

Sarah remembered his great flapping wave from the cocktail party. She raised her hand above her head. A smile broke Bruno’s face and his hand shot up too.
The marble lobby of Trump Parc twinkled with fresh hostility. Sarah regretted that she’d employed her model walk a few days ago in the misguided hope it may help her fit in. She didn’t fit in here. She never had.

The lift flew heavenward, enacting the dictates of its design. Sarah squeezed Remington’s handle. Soon, she would discover the course of her own insignificant fate.

But when Sascha opened the penthouse door, her usually smooth black face was bunched in distress. Ann and Solomon were huddled together on one sofa. They glanced up, and Sarah saw the strangest thing. They’d both been crying. On Solomon’s face, the water seemed somehow natural. It was Ann’s tears that disturbed Sarah. Someone like Ann cried roughly every ten years. For her steely aunt to weep something terrible must have happened, something mammoth like another world war. Solomon called her over. Sarah tiptoed across the Herringbone floor gripping Remington. How did one brace for disaster?

Solomon indicated she should take a seat beside him. As she sat, Sarah noticed that the moisture on Ann’s smooth, nurtured cheeks gave her a waxed look. Her once-perfect bob was matted against her face. She was almost unrecognisable.

Solomon squeezed Sarah’s knee. “Lady Elisabeth died this morning.”

“For God’s sake, Sol—she committed suicide,” Ann said. “Slit her gorgeous wrists in the bath.”

Sarah felt her uncle’s large, square hand shake on her knee. The black news spread in her chest. Sarah shut her eyes against it but the blackness enveloped her, spilled into her arms, her legs, her head. The horrific fact was she gathered death around her. Maybe that was her curse, to sprinkle death on the heads of good people.
Sarah heard her uncle say you never knew how someone was unless you asked. Sometimes, he said, not even then. She heard him describe how Lady Elisabeth’s parents had survived Buchenwald, how her father had made a fortune on the stock market in Britain after the war, how she’d grown up taking summers in Switzerland and Monaco with the best of everything.

Monaco, Sarah thought bleakly—she’d guessed right.

“But she was generous,” Solomon said. “Not like some of the others. She never took for granted how lucky she was.”

“She was here just the other day,” Ann said. “I thought something looked wrong but I didn’t ask.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Ann—”

“You know how often I do that?” She cut him off. “See someone struggling and think less of them? I avoid negativity so it won’t wear off on me.” She stared, bereft, at her husband.

Solomon clasped her hands. “Humans are selfish, Ann,” he said. “And you’re honest. I love you for it.”

Ann closed her eyes. “I wish I could love myself.”

Solomon reached his arms out and wrapped them around her bony shoulders. They embraced for a long time.

“I’ll let you talk,” Sarah said, standing. She was having trouble slowing her breathing, clearing the waterfalls of sweat pouring from her forehead into her eyes.

Solomon sat up. “I’m sorry, Sarah, if this trip’s been less than you expected. We’re not very good at altering our routines. We should have spent more time with you.”
Ann sat up too. “You look pale, Sarah. While we’re being honest. You’ve looked pale for days. There was something before the opera, wasn’t there?”

“I’ve been shitting blood,” Sarah said. There was no point hiding the fact now.

If she were honest, she could escape to her room and confront Remington sooner. Misguided, maybe, but that was her thought.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Solomon asked.

“I was embarrassed.”

Ann’s forehead creased.

“Well let us call our doctor,” Solomon said. “He’s one of the best. And he makes house calls.”

“Alright,” Sarah said, aware only of Remington’s case against her leg—the disclosure she still had to draw from him. “I’m really sorry about Lady Elisabeth. She seemed like a beautiful person.”

Solomon’s eyes filled. “Thank you, Sarah. She was.” He blinked twice. “We’ll knock when the doctor’s here.”

This time, the astonishing view of Long Island Sound from the corridor windows dredged ancient pain. Sarah remembered being pinned, flat and nauseous, against the padded walls of the Gravatron ride at Dreamworld in Year Six. In fact, she’d been happy then, happy right through school and into uni. It wasn’t until she’d volunteered at the RSPCA over summer in third year that the sadness had entered her. An old cat came in, its speckled fur torn and crusty, ribs almost breaking its skin. Sarah couldn’t get it out of her head. Her parents sent her to a psychiatrist, but still the abused cat plagued her. She stopped eating, and then, to the surprise of everyone, dropped out of uni. In hindsight, Sarah had come to view that time as the beginning of a downhill slope. Within two years, her parents were dead.
Staring out at the flat grey water, Sarah thought now that perhaps joining these threadbare dots was a curse she had wielded herself, something that had been laid upon her when she was pitying old ladies or neglected cats—when she wasn’t looking. Bad stuff happened to those around her.

The suite’s extravagant grace greeted Sarah like some new affront. She lifted Remington’s case onto the wide desk by the window and wondered what he made of the view over Central Park, if he identified with it, if he’d come—here—to feel at home.

Sarah unlatched Remington’s lid and waited for his mouth. It appeared slowly. She was attuned almost to the flecks of colour—the show of tongue—that betrayed his clandestine emotions. His lips were still and thin.

Sarah began by outlining the tragedy that had befallen Josephine after the war. She was, Sarah reminded Remington, the only other person ever to hear him. She followed this with a summary of her own misfortunes and those with whom she came into contact, up to and including Lady Elisabeth’s suicide. Sarah ended with a question. The two women ever to have heard Remington traded—at best—in unhappiness, and at worst in death. Did she share a curse with her tragic grandmother?

“No,” Remington whispered. His lips had grown thinner and more still, as if he were trying hard to control them.

“I don’t believe you,” Sarah said.

Remington sighed, a sigh not of impatience but of something else. “And there is no way for me to prove it.”

“Please,” she said. “I won’t be angry. I just want to know.”
“Why?” Remington’s voice shook. “Why would you want to know such a thing?”

Sarah stared at him, anger right up now under her skin. “You know I leave tomorrow for Australia?”

Remington’s tiny mouth creaked open. “Why didn’t you tell me?” he gasped.

Sarah walked over to the enormous marble fireplace. The suite’s grandeur had officially grown oppressive. She realised it had always been that way, but up until now she’d blamed herself.

“I’m not sure,” Sarah said. “I guess I forgot.”

Remington’s voice came in a low wail. “I want to come with you.”

Sarah had thought of this already. They’d grown so close she couldn’t imagine life without him. But first he must answer her question.

“Do you even know what you’re asking?” she said. “My life is lonely—objectively depressing. You live in luxury.”

“And what do you think I have gained from this?” Remington cried. “That the bottles, my neighbours in the cellar, were 1985 Chateau d’Yquem? That the floor was polished oak, my blanket cashmere? You think this matters? A cell is a cell, no matter how you dress it.” Remington licked his lips, and Sarah saw that his tiny tongue was shaking. “I cannot wait for another like you to hear me.”

“What do you mean—another like me?”

Remington’s tongue stiffened.

“Tell me,” Sarah pleaded.

“Only if you agree to take me with you.”
Sarah couldn’t think of a single reason why she shouldn’t say yes. Their love for a complex, grief-stricken man had brought them together. She told Remington she would have to ask her uncle.

“Please do,” he said. “In fifteen years, he never once excised me from the cellar. I cannot see that he will object.” Great streaks of purple danced on Remington’s lips.

“If I ask Solomon, will you answer my question?” Sarah said.

“Yes,” Remington replied. “I will.”

Her aunt and uncle were still tangled on the sofa, talking in low, warm whispers. Ann glanced up as Sarah entered.

“The doc should be here in an hour,” she said.

Sarah had entirely forgotten. Suddenly, her need to hear Remington’s answer was even more pressing.

“Thanks. I’ve got a question about something else, though.”

Maybe it was the way she said it, for both Solomon and Ann sat up.

“You know the typewriter you leant me? Grandpa’s typewriter?”

Ann nodded.

“Well I was wondering if I could have it. I don’t have anything of his—Grandma’s either, actually—and it’d be really nice to. A way of remembering.”

“Sure,” Solomon said, relieved clearly the question hadn’t been harder. “Take whatever you want. Like I said, I try to forget.”

Her aunt smiled, a smile reminiscent of the old Ann. “Anything else?”

“No, that’s it. Thanks.”

“So an hour, okay?” she said.

“Sure. Yep, an hour.”
Sarah closed and locked the wooden doors behind her. Remington sat anxiously on the desk. The mood in his lips had changed. Before Sarah even reached him, he cried, “Solomon said no, didn’t he? I am to be abandoned once again in the cellar.” His mouth collapsed. “I cannot bear it—I cannot bear the loneliness.”

“He said yes,” Sarah cut in.

“Yes?” Remington wept. “Yes?”

“You’re coming with me.”

Remington broke into sobs, his tiny tongue slapping against his teeth. Gently, Sarah reached a hand out to stroke his case. Warmth filled her, the same feeling she used to get when she laid her head on her mother’s smooth shoulder.

“I won’t ever leave you,” she said.

Remington caught his breath. “I have tried, always, to bear my suffering with grace. I will bear yours too.”

Sarah closed her eyes. Air escaped her lips and she felt herself choke.

“Sit down,” Remington said. “Please.”

Sarah fell into the chair. There was no fishbone in her windpipe, no fingers around her throat. She focused on breathing in and out. Finally, she opened her eyes. Remington’s lips had plumped slightly, but their strangled browns winded her again.

“You asked me before if you were cursed,” he said.

Sarah nodded.

“In response, I ask your permission to narrate the final section of my story. I must warn you, however, there is one event you will find most distressing.”

“Will it answer my question?” Sarah asked.

Remington’s mouth trembled. “It will.”

“Then please tell me.”
His lips hardened to speckled eggshell. Sarah opened her laptop. She would record this final chapter. But this time, she would also remember.
Our route to the Count’s had been a source of rigorous family debate: the cobbled backstreets, where covert shootings were common and bodies found days afterwards, or directly down the Ring, past the Nazi occupied Hotel Sacher and Staatsoper draped all in banners. Josephine had won out days ago; her route along the Ring was faster, she claimed, and the fact it was littered with National Socialists meant a Jew would never walk it in plain sight. Our safety would be assured by the very fact of our brazenness.

Yet we had not accounted for, of course, the change in Josephine since hearing me speak the previous evening. The moment we turned onto the Ringstrasse she laughed and pointed out a shadowed street corner where we had once, apparently, made a memory. With another few steps we came out full into the sun. The light had the strangest affect on her. She giggled and grasped Master’s hand to attempt a pirouette. Master whispered urgently for her to stop. She did, and at the look on her face he did too.

Josephine drew her hand to her forehead to shield it from the sun. “The strangest thing happened last night, Henry,” she said.

A chill seeped across my damask. I focused on the glinting tram lines on the ground and noticed they had thickened and spread; we had reached the station outside the Staatsoper.

Master squinted anxiously into his wife’s face. “You can tell me when we get there,” he whispered.

Josephine nodded and we resumed our walk. The sunlight chafed my damask after the dank cellar, prickling as if it were poison ivy. With Master’s every step, my
keys leaked the smell of waste—the fresh spring breeze would not dispense it—and the wind coaxed a gentle yet persistent stench from both Master and Josephine.

I recalled the spring of 1936, when these glorious city streets had mirrored the life I anticipated Master and I would share together. When I had discovered that he could not hear me, I sought other ways through which we could connect—attempted to draw from him heartfelt entries in his journal. And when these had ceased after the Anschluss, I had decided, simply, to love him. For we had lived as best we could.

My reflections were dispatched by an officer with compressed cheeks and square shoulders that flattened into the sandstone Staatsoper as he smoked a cigarette. On seeing us he broke into a smile. Over seventy years later, I still cannot account for what drew this from him. Master stood erect, his suit and hat immaculate, his gaze neither apologetic nor confrontational. Josephine, perhaps, attracted the officer’s attention. Something had loosened overnight in her mind, and I saw this change in her draw glances from those around us.

The officer glanced up quickly from inspecting his nails. Seeing him, Josephine pointed to the five stone statues atop the Staatsoper and cried, “Remember those, Henry—the first time we saw them together?” Master gripped her arm but she ignored him and giggled, “We had a fight, remember? Over dear Eva. Oh, how I hated her then.”

The officer’s smile burst into a grin. We had nearly passed him—Master had ever so slightly quickened his pace—when the man stubbed his cigarette on the stone and ambled towards us.

“Papers,” he said.

His voice was nasal and high pitched; Josephine tittered and said hello.
“Papers,” he said again, flicking his eyes down her dress and then sideways, pausing at my case.

Somewhere behind us, a bird chirped high in the sky. I imagined myself airborne with him and his fine friends, darting about the eaves of the opera house, perching in the nearby tree. What I would have given to escape and soar with him about the city.

The officer’s fair eyebrows bunched in together. “What you got there?”

“My typewriter,” Master replied. “Would you like to see?”

“Why not,” he said, squinting at the sky—frowning, I was certain, at the bird I so longed to be.

Josephine’s hand leapt atop my case. “But it’s quite old,” she said. “Really not all that impressive.”

The officer smiled his wide, sly smile. “Well now I’ve got to look, don’t I?”

Josephine bit her lip and let her hand fall back against her skirt. Master placed me on the palm of his hand and opened my case. I had grown accustomed to the sticky sweat of his nerves, so different from the perspiration of heat or exertion, and felt it now drench my damask with the imprint of his hand.

The officer reached a stubby finger toward my ‘F’ key and scratched at the painted letter, then slid it to each crevice of my case. Josephine peered forward and a hand flew to her mouth. The officer glanced at her then again at me.

“Bit out of date isn’t it?”

Master managed a smile. “It was the picture of modernity when I bought it.”

“And when was that?” he asked.

“1936.”
The officer whistled in a bright, uninterested sort of way. “And what you been doing since then?”

“I worked as a veterinary surgeon.”

“And now?”

“Now I have a private income.”

The man sneered at Josephine. “Dowry, huh?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

The officer slid a cigarette from behind his ear and replaced it from his packet. Master’s hand trembled beneath my case, and I sucked every fibre in so that I might stay still.

“So why you carrying the typewriter around then?” he asked.

“My husband carries it everywhere,” Josephine said, her voice creeping towards hysterical.

“And why is that?”

“I suppose you would have to ask him.”

“Hmm.” The officer chewed the word a moment. His attention was waning, his gaze flitting out at the busy street. “How ‘bout this—show me your papers and I’ll let you on your way.”

Master fastened my case and handed it to Josephine. Though her hand shook, her palm was entirely dry.

“Here we are,” Master said quickly. “All in order I hope?”

I saw the story they had rehearsed with the Count—the ten Van Dykes donated to the Party, Master’s reason for adopting his wife’s name—ready on his tongue.
The officer brought the papers up close to his nose, following each word with his cigarette. “So you live just near here?”

“Yes, a little further up on the Opernring,” Josephine said.

“Nice place is it?”

She glanced at Master. “Not especially nice. Well, I don’t know. We like it.”

“Number eighty-nine, it says here.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Eighty-nine?” The man grinned. “Isn’t that a real swish house? The one with grounds and all that?”

“I don’t know,” Josephine said, holding me out from her skirt into the blinding sun. “That might be the building beside us.”

“Can’t remember eh?”

Master shook his head. “I apologise, officer. We had some distressing news this morning about my wife’s fertility. She has been distraught ever since.”

Josephine whipped her head around; that was not part of the plan. Tears sprang to her eyes. She had begged Master for a child since their wedding but given the climate, he had refused. It was one of the rare sources of conflict between them.

“No baby, huh?” The officer’s lips curled into a smile. “That is sad.” He drew on his cigarette, then extended his arm and ashed upon my case. “Right then, what say we go and have a look?”

“At the building?” Josephine stammered. “It’s further up the Ring than it looks. Quite far, actually. I’m sure you have more important things to do.”

“I got all the time in the world,” the officer said, looking up at the sky, peering at the brilliant spring morning. “And I could use a walk.”
“But our papers are in order. And there’s nothing of value at the house, really. We gave all that away.”

“Donated it?”

“Of course—to the war effort.” Josephine clasped Master’s arm. “What did we give away, darling? Ten paintings? Van Dykes, all of them. They’d been in the family for ages. Not that we didn’t like them, though personally I find his work a little dark, but we thought they’d be better suited to somewhere grander. A Nazi headquarters somewhere.”

“And where’d they end up?” the officer asked.

“What?”

The oversight in their story struck Josephine and Master at once. Josephine had discussed details on her last visit with the Count: the name of each painting, the year, in which month they had donated what. But the story ended with the donations themselves; no one had thought to take it further. Master reached unhurriedly for my case, then lowered his chin to meet the officer’s gaze.

“At the Abwehr headquarters in Paris at the Hotel Lutecia.”


“What kind of name is that anyway? Van Dyke?”

“He was Dutch,” Josephine said.

The officer frowned. “Really?”

“Oh yes, it’s why his paintings are so dark. The Dutch masters always are. We would have donated German paintings, of course, but we didn’t have any of such value.”

“An oversight on our part,” Master said quickly.
“Right, then.” The officer glanced at his cigarette. “Lead the way.”

“But it’s frightfully far,” Josephine said.

“Not so far dear,” Master said, smiling stiffly. “Please, officer. Follow me.”

The officer extended his arm. Master bent his elbow and Josephine grasped it without looking at him. To one raised on the formal Viennese culture, the exchange appeared normal. Yet how it pained me to see their passion in this moment drain out. Master brushed a remnant flake of ash from my case as we began to walk. His hand grew unusually cool; neither he nor Josephine glanced behind them. Thus, they did not see the officer retrieve his Luger from its holder and rest it against his leg. He whistled and smoked together, the cigarette gripped between his teeth.

Josephine stumbled on an uneven cobblestone. “We don’t have much to drink,” she called out, turning to the officer.

He ashed his cigarette out in front of him. “I don’t drink on duty.”

A grin spread on his face. For Josephine had seen the pistol, its dull metal gleaming in the sunlight, slapping lightly against the Nazi’s leg. As she turned back ahead, her elbow surged back and forth, and I saw she was clawing at the faint wine stain on her skirt with her fingernails.

Master drew my case in close toward him and inhaled. “I love you, Josephine,” he whispered.

Josephine’s wild eyes gazed up at him. She smiled once, brilliantly, and kissed him on the mouth. “And I love you.”

The kiss was quick—stolen—yet it heartened them both. Master gathered strength to glance behind us, and saw the officer had stopped to ask a passer-by for a match. He smoked so swiftly he had clearly run out.

“What will Daddy say? About the Lutecia?” Josephine whispered.
Master swept a thin hand over my case. He turned to the Parliament buildings, their bronzed flanks lit strikingly by the sun. “The officer knows the house but not the Count,” he said. “Once he sees who he is dealing with he’ll leave us alone.”

Josephine nodded, her eyes rimmed with tears. The officer ambled over to stand behind us.

“All better.” He gestured to his smouldering cigarette. “Good of you to wait.”

“Of course,” Master said. He lowered my case against his side. The material of his suit trousers billowed about his thin legs. “I just realised we hadn’t mentioned we live with Josephine’s father. You may have heard of him, the Count von Bremer?”

“I don’t go in for all that aristocracy,” the officer said.

Master bit his lip as we began to walk.

Minutes later, we turned into the manicured grounds of the Count’s. Small oak trees framed the path to the circular gravel drive.

“Nothing nice, eh?” the officer sniggered.

“I grew up with it, you see. I’ve always had it.” Josephine closed her eyes; the statement did not work in our favour.

I glanced at the upper floor of the wide stone mansion. The windows hid no human that I could see; they reflected the trees and nothing else. I watched Master search the same windows for signs of life.

We reached the end of the drive. A patch of grass with square stepping stones sunk in it led to the enormous front door. The officer strode up to it and ran a hand over the carvings on the wood, then knocked loudly. For a moment, nothing. The officer bashed on the door again.

Finally it swung open, revealing the old valet and the Count behind him. Though it was morning, he wore a dress suit with silken tails. Yet what surprised me
was something else. The Count’s cheeks revealed a steady unflinching smile as he extended his arm.

“Heil Hitler.”

The officer was taken aback and took a moment to salute. “Heil Hitler.”

The Count let his arm fall. “The Count von Bremer. I take it you have met my daughter and her husband.” For the briefest second, his gaze flicked to Josephine. He saw her small fist clamped to her mouth and blinked.

“Nothing special, eh?” The officer leered at Josephine. “Get your kicks, do you young lady, telling people it’s nothing special just to see their faces?” He stepped around the Count and valet into the foyer. The grand staircase sped his eye to the high ceiling and decorative carved skylight. “Still, I seen grander.”

“I’m sure you have,” the Count said, his arm guiding us unhurriedly inside.

The valet motioned to the drawing room. The Count proceeded first, and I saw the officer’s eyes follow him, uncertain, perhaps, of what awaited him inside. We passed in front of the staircase and entered a gilded room full of portraits.

The Count seated himself in his usual velvet armchair. “May I offer you a drink?”

“A sidecar,” the officer replied. He retrieved yet another cigarette from behind his ear and looked dimly at the unlit fireplace.

The Count produced a silver lighter in the shape of a crocodile from his pocket. He leaned toward the officer and applied pressure; a flame emerged from its mouth.

“Josephine, come—do be seated.”

Perspiration from Master’s neck trickled down his shirt. He sat quickly on an armchair and Josephine fell into the seat beside him.
The Count returned the lighter to his pocket, then snapped his gaze up at the officer. “Now before we go any further, my good man, let me ask you this. Do you know who I am?”

The officer imbibed on his cigarette with rather less gusto than before. “Some Count, you said.”

The Count smiled. “Yes, there are many of us who cling to the old titles. Perhaps this will jog your memory. The Reichsminister Göring has a friend…”

The man’s cheeks emptied of colour.

“Ringing a bell, is it?”

“Something like that,” the officer said.

“Any idea what this friend might do?”

He coughed without covering his mouth. “Some arms dealer—”

“Ammunition,” corrected the Count.

“Yeah, that’s it—ammunition.”

The Count cracked his neck. “Well now that we have that sorted. And you are…?”

“Officer Muller,” the man said. “Hans Muller.”

The Count frowned. “Doesn’t ring a bell.”

Muller went to draw on his cigarette then thought better of it. He glanced around the room. The valet returned with a silver tray bearing the sidecar and a small glass of water. He offered Muller the sidecar. He clasped it gingerly. The Count reached for the water glass and stirred the ice with his finger.

“Now what can I do for you, Officer Muller?”

Muller cleared his throat. “Well your daughter and her husband told me a story see, quite a good one. Trouble is I don’t believe it.”
Master crossed and uncrossed his leg. His foot connected with the left-hand corner of my case. I fell flat upon the carpet.

“What did they tell you?” the Count asked.

“A story about donating some paintings. Dutch, I think they were.”

“Van Dykes?”

“That’s it. Van Dykes.” Muller took a sip of his cocktail and glanced up at the Count. “Remember anything like that?”

“Of course—one doesn’t soon forget art of that calibre. There was a particular favourite of mine—you remember Josephine. Stood in the foyer opposite the stairs. But they were exquisite, all ten of them. We donated them to the Party between March and December 1939.”

Muller sipped again on his sidecar then returned the coupe to the side table. He seemed to be debating whether or not to proceed with his next question. “And where did they end up?” he asked finally.

The Count’s breath caught for a split second. “At the Adlon in Berlin.”

Muller smiled slowly. “The Adlon?”

“Well who knows where these things end up.” The Count spoke softly. “But yes—I’m sure it was the Adlon.”

Muller’s grin grew wider. “Then we have a problem. The happy couple here said something else.”

“The Lutecia, Daddy,” Josephine burst in. “Wasn’t it the Lutecia?”

“No, the Adlon, remember darling? Berlin.”

“Oh yes, perhaps it was.” She glanced desperately at Muller. “A silly detail, isn’t it?”
“I don’t know about silly.” He was snarling again, concern for the Count’s position clearly behind him. “Course, I’ll have to call them. The hotel, I mean.”

The Count stood. “If you do the Reichsminister will certainly hear about it.”

“Do what you have to,” Muller said. “But the Party’s serious about this stuff. I’m in line to move up.”

“Just think what you’re risking.”

Muller’s smirk retreated, but he nodded.

“Very well, my valet will show you to the telephone.”

Muller glanced at Josephine’s hand trembling on her chin, then turned sharply on his boot heels. Each person spoke at once.

“He’ll find out we’re lying,” Josephine whispered.

“Perhaps,” Master said.

“Perhaps? We are all dead.”

Adrenalin seized my keys. The Count walked briskly to a table by the window.

“You must leave now—directly from here. The ship I have you booked on leaves Brindisi in four days.”

Josephine glanced strickenly at her father.

“The visas came through. We can’t afford to take any chances.” He reached beneath the table and slid open an invisible wooden panel. “I managed to secure you American citizenship under assumed identities. I recommend you keep these names once you arrive in America, but it is of course up to you.” He handed Master the slim wad of papers and turned to his daughter. “I’m afraid this is goodbye.”

Josephine pressed a hand to her mouth and burst into tears. “But when will I see you again?”
“Soon, my darling. I will come and visit you in America.”

“But you hate to travel—Mother could never even get you to the estate in Bavaria.”

The Count lurched sideways. “I thought I heard him on the stairs.”

“What will happen to you?” Josephine wept.

“I will be arrested.” He clasped his daughter’s hand. “Nothing, a couple of nights in prison at most. I was serious about my relationship with the Reichsminister.”

I looked to Master, his face strained and barely withholding tears.

“I won’t have time to say goodbye. Mama and Heinrich are expecting us. They will think the worst. And Eva—” His voice broke on mention of her name. “She was asleep when we left, she wasn’t well. And her little son Samuel—I will never know him.”

The Count nodded. “But this is life or death, Henry. You must protect my daughter.”

A noise sounded on the stairs. I imagined the officer ambling in, a grin flat on his face, the pistol loose in his palm as if it were a pen or a man’s hat, then shooting each of us in turn. My vision circled inward. When I tried to look back at the room something screamed in my head. Yet I needed to farewell Master—to farewell the great love of my life.

I glanced out through my case. The officer was nowhere to be seen. Josephine had collapsed or was embracing her father. I have never forgotten the tender strokes he laid on her forehead or words of courage he whispered in her ear. Her feet hung limply to one side; the Count supported her as if she were a doll.

Master’s face and neck were bereft of colour. He whispered to no one, “I don’t know if I can leave them.”
The Count heard him and drew back from his daughter. “These visas are your chance, Henry. You must take action.”

Josephine stood sobbing beside her father. A clap sounded from the foyer.

“Go!” the Count hissed. “Bernard is warning us. The man’s on the stairs. Use the passageway.”

He reached behind a painting and turned a small metal wheel. The wall slid sideways, revealing the entrance to a dark stone tunnel.

Master ran to collect me from the rug, then clutched Josephine around the waist.

“I used to play in here,” she said dazedly.

The Count ushered the three of us inside. “Go,” he said. “I will see you in New York my darling, but now you must go.” He pressed a candle and silver lighter into his daughter’s hand, clasped it, then stepped away.

Josephine opened her mouth to speak but the wall closed before us. We stood in absolute darkness a moment. Master then reached for the candle.

Weakly, Josephine stammered directions. The tunnel slanted ever downward as we ran into its depths. Water trickled down the muddy walls. We reached a crossroads. Josephine pointed right to a filthy ladder. Master helped his wife climb it, then followed her up himself. We emerged through a grate onto an abandoned square. Glancing up, I saw the square was in fact the courtyard of a large apartment building. How many inside had seen us? We ran to the corner. A tram shuddered up the street. Master and Josephine leapt aboard. The back carriage was empty, and they fell upon the wooden seats.

Master caressed his wife’s tear-streaked face. A feverish light in his eyes burned bright.
“My darling—we must get a hold of ourselves.”

Josephine’s chin quivered; she wiped her eyes.

“The tram will take us most of the way. We’ll walk the rest. The station will be a madhouse. We could board without hassle.”

“But our papers?”

Master glanced to the window where ancient, leaning buildings crept past.

“We can’t know how it will play out.” He turned back to Josephine. “We have an advantage, though.”

“We do?”

“We have two identities. We can pick and choose when to use them.”

“You must promise me something,” Josephine said, not having heard him.

“We make it to America no matter what. If we do—if we really do—it will have all been worth it.”

Master clasped her pale, freckled face. “We go no matter what.” His forehead collapsed suddenly.

“We will send for them,” Josephine said. “Mama, Eva—we’ll get them out too.”

The tram shuddered into a station. A young woman and her mother, dressed simply, boarded and sat facing the front carriage. Josephine glanced at her lap and saw the faded wine stain on her skirt. But before she could remark, Master had covered her mouth with his.

The cavernous hall of the Westbahnhof was strewn with people. Beside the huge antique clock, the destination board delivered unwelcome news: the train to Brindisi
departed in fifteen minutes. As we stared between them, the clock’s unforgiving Roman face sped forward a minute and chimed.

“I’ll get food,” Josephine said, fishing in her skirt pocket for the purse.

Master nodded. “Quickly, though. Just enough to tide us over. We’ll stop again.”

“Where will I meet you?”

A group of Nazis strode past but did not stop. Keeping them in sight, Master withdrew the tickets from inside his jacket. “Platform three. Third—no, first class.”

His eyes met Josephine’s; they smiled.

“I’ll see you at the front, then,” she said.

“We’re really going to do this,” Master grinned.

Josephine leaned in quickly to kiss him, then she turned and the crowd consumed her.

Master and I hurried to the platform and found it relatively empty. The train emitted a burst of steam. We made our way past a large family to the sparse crowd at the very front. An elegant woman in red lipstick, her beauty oddly out of place, clung to a pillar beside an empty bench. We walked to the first class door. No one guarded it; the passengers were already inside. Master glanced right and his heartbeat quickened. A group of Nazis stood smoking a way down. One saw us and reached for a note in his pocket. He scanned it, then broke from the group. Sweat drenched my handle. The man was frowning.

“Papers,” he called before reaching us.

Master nodded. But as he reached inside his jacket, his hand stopped. The man saw it.

“Papers,” he called again.
Master’s hand did not move. I realised our dilemma. Muller would have already blacklisted the von Bremer name. Yet American papers, on German soil, would not fly either. The officer was striding now towards us. In terror, I glanced behind me.

It was then I saw Josephine. She had seen the exchange, and from her face, knew we could not escape it. The bag of food fell from her hand. Master turned and saw her.

Josephine cried out, “Go—you promised.”

She ran at the group of officers and lunged for the nearest one’s pistol. The man spun around. His eyes widened, then he collected himself, lifted the gun and shot her. I saw Josephine’s chest rip open.

The train whistled. Master collapsed through the first class door. A strange sound rose up from his throat. The beautiful woman from the platform leapt inside as more bullets exploded behind us. Seconds later, the train pulled away.

Master’s last sight of Vienna was of his wife’s bullet-strewn body, waving almost, as the Nazis moved in.
Epilogue

The day nurse swept open the curtain, spilling light through the window. Sarah opened her eyes. The private room her uncle had paid for in the palliative care ward at Mount Sinai Hospital was immense and barren, its only point of concentration the monitors and hulking machines near her head. Sarah clenched her stomach and twisted to the right. Her body ached as if she’d been beaten internally. The rectal cancer was too advanced for surgery, her doctor had explained, and so she’d been hit with chemoradiation to relieve her pain. But pain pressed up fierce through her skin.

A week ago, the blackness had threatened to engulf Sarah. She’d wept on receiving the biopsy result, and kept it up for the next three days. She hadn’t coped with her diagnosis the way she’d hoped she might.

But then Ann delivered Remington to the hospital last night, and placed beside him on the table a handsome bound copy of their novel. In fact, she’d printed and bound a hundred copies to give to friends, she said. Would have to print more. Was already halfway through it herself. When Ann left, Sarah stroked Remington’s case and promised she’d open him tomorrow. She needed time to be with herself. To understand this strange new feeling inside her.

This morning, an extravagant bunch of flowers and an unopened chocolate hamper greeted Sarah on her bedside drawers. Ann must have brought them earlier in the week, but in her gloom Sarah hadn’t noticed. She rolled the aching muscles of her back to face Remington on the trolley table, gritted her teeth, then leaned over and unlatched his case.

His mouth appeared, full and warm, glorious in the colours that streaked across it. Feeling its nourishment, Sarah wondered why she hadn’t asked for
Remington sooner. His lips parted, then they trembled and he burst into tears. Sarah clicked the control panel beside her and angled the top of her bed up.

“Please don’t cry,” she said.

A bubble of saliva blew out from Remington’s tongue. “Forgive me,” he wept. “But I am wretched.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“Not my fault?” Smoke poured from his mouth. “Only those who are dying can hear me. I suspected it after Josephine was shot, of course, and now I know.”

Remington exhaled raggedly into the smoke. “I should have told you that the Josephine from my story wasn’t your grandmother. Your grandmother was in fact a woman named Anna Bayer. She was Jewish—her family already deported—and had risked her life that day in 1940 by waiting at the station in Vienna, dressed in her finest clothes and bright red lipstick, in the hope she may sneak onto the train. Amid the violence, she did just that. Later, Master allowed Anna to use Josephine’s visa to gain entry to America. They married to ensure her safety, and for the same reason she kept Josephine’s name. Master never forgave her.”

Remington broke off.

“I should have told you this sooner. But I am a typewriter,” he said. “My power lay in the narrative. How was I to keep you with me if you knew the end?”

Sarah raised her hand from the bed and held it out to him. “I would have loved you anyway.”

Remington’s tears came fresh. His spacebar coursed with such sadness. “I have a final request,” he said.

Sarah felt the pull of something warm beyond her and let her hand fall against the bed.
“I have cherished much of the past seventy-eight years. I have been blessed to have two great loves—one in the final chapter of my life. But I have suffered, too, and I am tired.”

Sarah gazed past the hulking monitor to the tall window and its view out over the city. “What are you asking me?”

“That I be released, finally, from my torment. That we be cremated together.”

“I can’t,” she whispered.

“What kept me alive in the cellar was the hope I may one day have the chance to share Master’s experience. Thanks to you, that has happened. His story has been recorded. Ann will ensure it finds an audience.” Remington’s breath misted. “It is enough for me.”

Sarah studied this neglected old typewriter she had grown to love. She felt a space open in her, filled high and wide with peace. Remington deserved to know it too.

She buzzed for the stoma nurse. The woman came immediately. Sarah whispered her request for a sheet of paper. The nurse stared her smooth, kind face into Sarah’s and nodded. The space was growing rapidly, surging out into her head and hands. When the nurse returned, Sarah would ask her to slide the paper between Remington’s rollers. She would type her request on his own keys.

And then, finally, the space would take her.

END OF MANUSCRIPT