



FREE LEAGUE

Gunilla Jonsson  
Michael Petersén

# DEATH IS ONLY THE BEGINNING



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the Beginning







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Part 1 of Mauerfall

a KULT novel

Translated by Karin Tidbeck



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To Clive Barker,  
who taught us everything we need to know about Hell.







PART I:

THE MAGICIANS  
OF KREUZBERG







*Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.  
Love is the law, love under will.*

ALEISTER CROWLEY







# 1. BETHANİEN: AMANDA

Wednesday, April 19

Downy snowflakes floated down over Kreuzberg. The wind carried them from the river Spree up north, along the narrow park that followed the old path of the Berlin Wall. New leaves and cherry blossoms drooped under the wet April snow. South of the park, Kunstraum Bethanien's main building rose up like a sacred fortress of yellow brick, its entrance crowned with two pointed towers. Even though the operating theater had been refurnished into an art gallery, and the northern wing had become home to the municipal school of music, the defunct hospital radiated a Lutheran severity. The old hospital wards now housed art studios.

The Swedish sculptor Amanda Serner had been given one of the larger studios, a room that had once accommodated ten or twelve beds. The Masonite boards on the floor bathed in the light that fell in through the high, barred windows on the southern wall. Amanda, dressed in gray overalls, stood on a ladder by *The Fence*, a half-finished sculpture in the form of a gilded fence that cut the room in half. Shouts and thuds from the playground in the park outside trickled in through the ventilation windows.

"Amanda, can you go to lunch now? Your uncle is here. Dein Onkel."

Emre peeked in through the door to the studio. Normally the bearded curator would speak English to her, but sometimes he got it in his head to switch to German. It was a dig at her to practice the language more. It had been six months since Amanda had arrived in Berlin, and Emre thought she ought to be fluent by now.



"I'll be done in a second." Amanda twisted a meter of gilded barbed wire into a loose spiral and clipped it to the top of The Fence. "Don't just stand there! Come inside." She climbed down from the ladder, pulled her working gloves off and put her pliers back in the toolbox. Emre sat down on the step ladder by the door and squinted at The Fence, as if to see it from multiple angles at the same time. It glinted in the sunlight.

"Did you remember to lock away the gold foil?" he asked.

"No one will find it under all the junk."

"You should lock it away. It's a matter of insurance. Right, Harlan?"

"Absolutely. But it's not a huge matter for us at Life Insurance."

Amanda's uncle, Harlan, gingerly walked into the room. He stepped around the gilded rolls of barbed wire and the squat traffic barriers that Swedes liked to call concrete sows. The sows, seemingly massive, were cast on top of glass fiber frames to make them easier to shift around.

"Don't sit on those," Amanda told Harlan. "Moritz already broke one."

"Do they bite?"

"Not if you're nice to them."

The sows had been covered in layers of graffiti and glued-on rags until the distinct patterns melded into a murky texture. They were bigger than regular Jersey barriers, slightly asymmetrical, vaguely animalistic, frozen in movement. During the passage of spring Amanda had begun to see them as creatures, almost alive. Sometimes she talked to them. It was a little worrying. *Emre is probably right. I should work on my German and see more people.*

Harlan pushed a sow aside with his foot. He was sheathed in black Lycra, his bicycle helmet attached to his backpack. *A Lycra man*, Amanda had mused when they first met six months ago. *The kind who competes with himself and runs old ladies down.* But it was just an illusion, Harlan's attempt to blend in and tell his colleagues at Allianz Risikolebensversicherung *I am one of you.* He was two meters tall, with a tousled head of auburn hair. The same shade as Amanda's hair, and just as unmanageable. When she worked in the studio, she twisted hers into a bun at the nape of her neck. She and Harlan had more than just their hair in common. Their lanky frames, pale skin and heavy eyebrows made many assume they were siblings. Amanda looked younger, was a head



shorter and had a fuller face, but they were the same age. Vintage of eighty-nine. Sometimes they told outsiders that they were cousins. It was easier than explaining that Harlan's dad was Amanda's grandfather.

He gave her a hug. They hadn't seen each other since last week, on Good Friday, when they biked through Grünewald and got chilled to the bone before they found an open café full of people in knitted hats and quilted jackets who were having glühwein. They ended up spending half the afternoon in there. Amanda scrolled through her Instagram feed and showed pictures posted by people she had gotten to know at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. She explained to Harlan who everyone was and what they did. Afterwards she felt guilty about babbling for over an hour, but he said it was fine. They took their bikes on the S-Bahn back to Berlin.

"It's supposed to get warmer next week," Amanda said and put her toolbox away. "We could try a shorter bike ride. So we don't freeze to death."

"I think you're the one who was freezing. I had a great time." Harlan touched the barbed wire. He reached the top of The Fence when he stood up straight.

"It's an iconostasis," Amanda said. "There's supposed to be a wrought iron gate in the center. I'm working on that."

"You're going to hang icons on this?" He fingered the bronze-gilded latticework, which at a distance looked identical to an ordinary wire fence, but on closer inspection was not entirely symmetrical.

"I'm going to use embroidered lace cloths. Eastern European ones. They'll catch the pattern in The Fence."

"Will you make the deadline?"

"I think so. I won't be making the cloths myself. I found a little Roma lady. She's really sweet. She lives nearby. Nadine knows her. And I've also talked to a Kazakh arts and crafts society. They're great with lace."

The working title was *X Sanctum*, but Amanda called it *The Fence*. It was quite different from the sketch she had showed the Wall Foundation, whose project leader was Emre, when they asked her to create a work of art for the autumn exhibition. In Stockholm, she had been known for grandiose sculptures made of white plastic and aluminum,



their vast and shiny surfaces etched with sacred symbols like rock carvings. *X Sanctum* was originally intended to be in the same vein, but after one tortuous week she had thrown the plastic out and started on *The Fence* instead. No one had complained so far, even though she could feel the work drifting from concept art to a gilded objet d'art the size of a room. In August, the whole lot would be moved to an abandoned railway roundhouse in the old Pankow railroad yard, as part of an exhibition with the theme "borders and obstacles." It was the Wall Foundation's first big project in a decade, and the first exhibition further out from the city center than Wedding. A little strange, Amanda had thought, for a foundation nearly fifty years old. But according to the regulations of Mauer II, which was the foundation's actual name, all their projects should concern the townscape of central Berlin. The regulations had been modernized only in the last year, with Emre at the helm.

Amanda peeled off her stained overalls and changed into jeans and sandals. While she was getting changed, Emre walked through the room and inspected each and every part of the work, as if to record the proceedings. He was squat and muscular, with a curly, always well-kempt beard. Amanda had never seen him sloppily dressed. All his shirts and suits were tailored to make him look a little less massive. His forearms were covered in tattoos, a spiny rose hedge. Moritz, the oldest and most eccentric foundation member, claimed that Emre's beard made him look like Ashurbanipal and called him "our Assyrian bulldog." Emre had grown tired of pointing out that he wasn't Assyrian in the least, and instead accepted the nickname with equanimity. He had spent some years at various galleries in London; when his mother became a widow, he applied for the job as project leader so he could move back home to Kreuzberg. It was only part-time—he also ran a gallery with an acquaintance—but Mauer II took up a lot of his time. He often cursed the geriatric anarchists of the foundation and complimented Amanda on her professionalism.

"Are you about to have lunch?" he asked Harlan. "Would you like us to look at the sponsor contract in my office afterwards?"

"We can do it over lunch, if that's alright with you. It's not a secret."



“You go ahead. I’ll be down later. I have some things to go over with Nadine.”

Amanda took Harlan by the hand and led him into the corridor. Like everywhere in the old hospital complex the walls were painted white, bathed in strip lights that banished all shadow, here and there adorned with murals and graffiti. The whole area had been reserved for artistic activities ever since the hospital closed down at the end of the Sixties, the studio rent subsidized. The stairwell to the ground floor was covered in several layers of paint. Amanda had gotten her inspiration for the concrete sows here. The graffiti on the wall gathered in dark patches, creating a protective cocoon-like air. When she felt stressed out, Amanda sometimes walked out into the stairwell, put a pouch of tobacco under her lip and stared into the darkness until she calmed down again.

The restaurant was located in the old deaconesses’ refectory on the ground floor, where the nurses of the 19th century had gathered to eat at Spartan long tables. Under a vaulted ceiling, barred windows let in light from the garden nestled between the buildings. It was like stepping into a chapel. They sat down at a table near the courtyard, in the shadow of a piano, and ordered chicken with bulgur wheat.

“It’s my treat,” Harlan said. “It’s almost a business lunch after all.”

“Are we getting extra funding?”

Emre was the one to suggest that Harlan talk to his boss about sponsor money for the foundation. To everyone’s surprise, the insurance giant’s PR department was interested in supporting the project in Pankow.

“Allianz has a new sponsor budget with directives to spend more money on culture and less on sports. So things are looking hopeful. My boss liked the ideas about the exhibition in the engine shed. She’s in a society for the preservation of old industrial environments.”

Harlan took a folder out of his backpack: glossy insurance leaflets and a closely written record. For two years, he had been a lawyer in the glass tower by Treptower Park that overlooked the river Spree. His childhood German had returned, and his Bavarian colleagues often took him to be a native Berliner (which, in a way, he was). He had really moved back from London to Germany in order to get closer to his dad, but twenty years of separation had made that difficult. “Never mind Clive,” Amanda



had said when Harlan brought it up. She was disturbed by the fact that her grandfather preferred her company over that of his own son, even though lately he had started to ignore her texts too. “He knows we’re here. He’ll get in touch if he wants to meet.”

Clive had laughed when he found out that Amanda was tied to the Wall project.

“I was a part of that in the Seventies,” he said. “Ask Moritz about my wall spiders and he’ll tell you.”

When Amanda had asked Moritz, the old man reluctantly admitted that her grandfather had indeed been a part of the working team, but not in a prominent role. Emre had had no idea. It was thirty years before his time. Harlan was glad to hear about his dad’s participation and saw it as yet another reason to apply for sponsorship money from Allianz.

The food arrived, and Harlan moved the brochures to an empty chair.

“The policy material is mostly for Emre and the board,” he said. “I don’t think there’s anything odd about the contract.”

“The fogeys on the board don’t like feeling bought. Don’t forget that. To them, Allianz is one big oddity.”

“We’ll see what they say. I think they’ll go along with it.”

“Some more funding would be good. It would let me hire a business when I make the gate for the iconostasis. It would save a lot of time. I had really intended to work on other things too while I have this studio, not just the Pankow exhibition.”

Emre and Nadine came down just in time for coffee and began leafing through the papers. Nadine was the board’s student representative, a position that Emre had established when he was given the mandate to rejuvenate the operations. The old members had reluctantly agreed that investing in youth culture with no one under forty on the board looked bad. Nadine was working on a sound installation that would be exhibited along with Amanda’s sculpture. It would pick up the visitors’ buzz and clatter and generate different types of responses in the form of sounds sampled from empty cityscapes, then mixed according to an algorithm. It was technical and complicated and Amanda could grasp none of it. Still, Nadine happily explained it down to the smallest electronic detail. She was short and slight, in constant motion, involved



in a tightly woven web of feminist and anarchist gigs, clubs and music projects. Her light hair was immaculately cropped, and she always wore identical, freshly ironed black shirts. "Perfect," Harlan had said the first time he saw her with Emre. "Two hipster entrepreneurs. I'll bring you to my boss, and we'll get paid upfront."

"It looks good to me," Emre said about the contract. "I'll have to take it up with the board, but I think Renate will agree. You can never know with Moritz."

Nadine nodded: "Renate wants funding for her youth project. The municipality will be in on that, so it'll be a partnership to Allianz's liking."

"And if you can get some funding, you won't have to spend as much time working at the bar," Amanda told Nadine. "You need to get more sleep."

"I need more loudspeakers for Pankow. I went out to have a look. It's a difficult venue. We have to try to patch the ceiling and fix the windows, or the acoustics will be completely impossible. Why don't we go out there someday so you can have a listen? It'll be easier with the two of us."

"Just say the word. I'm always here. But, you know, me and sound. Don't be mad at me if I don't get it."

Last autumn, when Amanda had been in Berlin for two weeks and barely had had time to leave her studio, Nadine showed up one night to drag her off to a party where people talked in German about electronic music. Six months later, they had probably been to ten parties like that, and Amanda could still just barely understand what people were saying. Fortunately, that didn't seem to bother Nadine.

Amanda leaned across the table and kissed Harlan's forehead. "You won't need me for reading the contract, right? I want to sort out the barbed wire today. Harlan, talk next week?"

"Let's."

She finished her beer and made her way back to the studio. The snow had let up. Beyond the spring foliage, she could glimpse the nursery school housed in a handsome 19th century building, its terrace crowned with Roman arches. It had originally been a gathering hall for the nurses. Where children in visibility vests now trundled around on tricycles, Amanda could in her mind's eye see deaconesses stride across



the yard in their floor-length black nurse capes. She closed the ventilation windows to mute the noise from outside and turned to The Fence.

It wasn't entirely easy to see the structure beneath the half-finished work. She had started out with the sows. They were lined up like pews before the iconostasis. The whole project had definitely taken on a more religious air during the winter. Grandpa Clive, the man who no longer answered his phone, had convinced her to enhance the religious aspect. Now, after the fact, she couldn't tell exactly how. He had bought her lunch in a seedy tavern in Charlottenburg and talked about his excursions into East Berlin, back when he was a part of the Wall Project: the abruptly cut-off streets by the Berlin wall, the people he had gotten to know there. After that lunch, Amanda's work had begun to change. In a good way. At least that's how it felt right now.



## 2. PURGATORY: CLIVE

Thursday, April 20

Clive stood in the courtyard between the black buildings of Columbia Square, back to the street, face turned toward the ruined stone clock tower. “Diligence and order,” his father Liam had said with a scornful laugh every time they passed the tower, and slapped the back of Clive’s head. “Remember that, lad. Diligence and order.” The clock tower was part of the philanthropic commissioner’s utopian 19th century dream of a healthy working class, embodied in the gothic buildings that now mostly resembled prison barracks. The laundry rooms on the top floor had been converted into squats, and mountains of refuse stunk up the basement. Yellow smog lay like a lid over the courtyard, whose paving was marred by deep craters left behind by the bomb raids in the war. The gothic arches of the stairwells resembled church windows five stories tall, filled with a compact darkness that bore up the ceiling.

Clive wasn’t alone. Another man walked by his side—perhaps not a man. The creature was humanoid but genderless. It wore his father Liam’s face, cut off to form of a bloody mask stretched across its head with wire and hooks. Blood dripped onto the shabby gray suit. *I’ve seen this in a film*, Clive thought. *Maybe a film by Stuart Gordon?* He understood that he was dreaming. When they arrived at the foot of the clock tower, he became even more sure that this wasn’t the real London. The tower was higher than he remembered, a gothic rock formation that blocked the view of the other buildings. This close up, he could see that it was painted with eyes, mouths and little grotesques. Those were his doodles,



the same ones he had spent the Seventies spreading around Berlin in the form of leaflets and posters.

"I've added something new," The Face suddenly said, not in Liam's hoarse voice but in a deep male voice that echoed between the buildings. "I made a note of our conversation about your granddaughter and her work. She used barbed wire, correct?"

Clive looked down at the pavement and saw that the courtyard was covered in barbed wire. He had waded right through it without noticing. His legs were mangled. The flesh hung in ribbons from his feet and under his kneecaps. The shinbones were exposed, the connective tissue in tatters. A trail of blood led behind him into the street. As he saw the wounds, sudden pain set in. He woke up.

It wasn't morning. According to his cellphone it was 3:36 AM, and it was dark outside. He deleted a text from Amanda without reading it and stared down at his feet. His legs were shot through with pain, like a marrow-deep toothache. Usually he would walk down to the gym under the railroad by Savignyplatz before breakfast, but not today. The vodka bottle still stood next to the bed. He poured himself a glass and opened the closet door to take a look in the mirror. No sign of the wounds from the dream. But he looked like an old man: white stubble, bloodshot eyes, body shrunk up like a gray ragdoll. He turned away from the mirror and emptied the glass. He was supposed to meet with a Mr. Patrushev at eleven to show him a painting by Ilya Repin, a fairly unknown portrait discovered by a contact in London. Genuine, by the looks of it. He was careful about these things now in order to build trust with the Russian customers. But he had emailed Patrushev the night before and canceled. The next customer appointment was in two days, which he had left as it was. He couldn't just drop everything.

A shower and a slow, careful shave made him feel better. He trimmed his nails and stood up straight in front of the bathroom mirror. Normally he looked younger than sixty-seven, but he couldn't handle stress anymore. A shaggy beast appeared as soon as he ran out of steam. He put on a pair of black jeans, a casual shirt and a slate gray Barbour jacket. Without turning on more lights than he had to, he snuck out through the furnished hallway and took the elevator down to street level. Careful



not to make too much noise, he stole along the freshly plastered turn-of-the-century facades town to the parking lots on Knesebeckstraße and slid into the driver's seat of his gray BMW. Four cheerfully drunk girls staggered out of the S-Bahn stop at Savignyplatz into the cold night and jogged past the car. A paperboy sped soundlessly by in his electric car. Clive waited until the paperboy had turned down the corner to Kudamm, then pushed the start button and backed out of the parking slot. He followed the electric car down the avenue for a short while, then turned at the corner where he thought café Möhring still ought to be located. Back in the Eighties, when he drove from the house in Dahlem to the art gallery every morning, he would have breakfast there. It must have been fifteen years since the café had been replaced by a clothing store. The traffic increased when he reached the connection with the major road from Schöneberg, but thinned out again closer to the university. This stretch of road, past dark institutional buildings and sleeping patrician villas, he could drive in his sleep. On the last stretch, he zig-zagged along narrow residential streets between darkened houses before stopping in front of a lot whose high walls segued into thuja hedges toward the far neighbor.

Frohmalsstraße 14. A low Sixties villa with a flat tin roof and gray plastered walls. The only thing that set it apart from the other houses down the street was the kiln chimney, but most people assumed it to belong to an old boiler. The street lay downwind from the chimney, and the air reeked. The filters hadn't been changed in fifteen years. It had slipped his mind. Hopefully none of the neighbors had complained. He dug out the torch from the glove compartment and put it in his mouth as he unlocked the steel gate in the wall. It had been almost twenty years since he had actually lived here. The garden had run wild. Rhododendron, renegade rosebushes and cypress trees had spread out over ivy-covered ground. Here and there stood earthenware jars that had once held geraniums, now overgrown with ivy and scraggly wild roses. Buds and leaves shimmered with frost as he swept the torch across the darkness.

He found his way along the narrow path to the cellar door, and stepped into the pottery. The stench was worse here, nauseating. The kiln was cooling down, but the room was still hot. The rack where he



usually put vessels ready for firing was pushed up against the wall. The floor was littered with ceramic pots and figurines: dogs and cats glazed in blue and green, twenty years old. He changed out of his sports jacket and into a leather apron, rolled up his sleeves and put his gauntlets on, then opened the kiln door. The kiln was big enough to fire meter-high pots, or a human body. Clive raked out the remains of the body that had been cremated overnight. It was completely charred. The more delicate bones in the hands and feet fell apart into ash when he touched them with the rake. He shattered what he could with the rake, then stuffed the bone splinters into a tall pot. Before shutting the door, he grabbed a pinch of ashes and dropped it into a bowl of blood that stood on the table next to the kiln.

He picked up the bowl and turned to the workshop's back wall. It was covered in a billowing mural that hid all seams. No one could tell that the wall wasn't massive. Clive forced his vision to double, to glimpse a red sigil hovering in front of a narrow door. He was really too tired for this. The sigil bent and twisted. Only after he had closed his eyes and taken a long moment to breathe, could he focus and manipulate the symbols in order to make the door entirely visible.

Holding the bowl of blood in his left hand, he opened the door and stepped into a windowless room with a vaulted ceiling. The old wine cellar. Now, his temple. The altar was built of basalt bricks, ordered from an Eastern business in 1996 under the pretext that he was building a stone plant stand in his garden. On the altar, his magical tools—the sword, the chalice, the scepter, and the ring—and Karoline's severed head. He had turned her face away from the door. He knew it was superstitious, but right now he needed rituals to keep himself together. He dipped his fingers into the bowl and drew a sign on her forehead: theta, for Thaumiel, the angel of death. The temple walls faded away, and the room opened onto a burning battlefield. He closed his eyes. *I'm too tired for this.* When he looked up again, the room was back. He gently placed the head at the far end of a shelf by the northern wall. It was already occupied by fourteen skulls, old and dun-colored, patches of mummified tissue stuck to the bone like scurf. The choir, he liked to call them. A library from the Nineties, created during the years when



he had had use for the ephemeral and splintered memories stored in those skulls. He hadn't thought there would be more. Especially not someone like Karoline. He had no use for her memories, but here they were nonetheless.

Before he returned downtown, he dragged the new bone pot into the garden. He left it next to a cypress tree at the edge of what had once been a garden pool, now a thicket of moisture-loving sedge. His fifteenth pot. The others were distributed throughout the garden. Clive avoided looking at them. He filled Karoline's pot with half-frozen planting soil from the pile behind the old compost, then planted a little rose bush whose branches peeked over the rim. When he was done, he had to sit down on a crumbling garden chair until he found the strength to go back to his car.

A window was lit in one of the houses at the end of the street. Other than that, the darkness was compact. Clive normally enjoyed driving at night, through labyrinths of tree-lined boulevards and cobbled residential streets. This time he just wanted to get home as quickly as possible. He took the road past the botanical gardens, where Rachel used to take Harlan to see the palm trees back when they lived here. He didn't want to think about that now. He threw caution to the wind and drove through the Schlangenbader tunnel downtown at 120 kilometers per hour.







# 3. LÜTZOWSTRASSE: SVETLANA

Thursday, April 20

Svetlana crossed the Landwehr Canal at the billowing, grayish-white Shell building. The sun peeked out between wispy clouds, and early sun-worshippers ambled down the tree-lined footpath that ran along the canal. Several houses along the quay wore blankets of green vines slung across their facades. She liked that. It made the houses look alive. She turned onto Lützowstraße and into the courtyard between the pastel-colored townhouses that were built to harmonize with the red industrial building still standing by the canal. *Gated community*, had been her thought the first time she had arrived. But under the springtime sun, among flowering cherry trees, it didn't look too bad. A blackbird peered down at her from a branch. Karoline's house was lime yellow. The stairs to the front door were lined with pots of wilting geraniums, surveyed by a small blue ceramic dog. Svetlana unlocked the door and went inside. A week's worth of mail lay on the floor. She called out, with no response, and had a quick look inside all of the rooms. Nobody home. She called Mom again.

"No, she's not here. She hasn't been home for days. She didn't call you? I'm going to call the police. No, they won't start looking for her without a good reason, but it won't hurt to call them, right? In case they know something."

She hadn't exchanged this many words with her mother for several years, not since she had returned to Berlin. It had been a week since Karoline stopped answering her phone, but Mom wasn't particularly worried. "It happens," she said. "She goes on business trips."



Svetlana glanced around without quite knowing what she was looking for. Even though she spoke to Karoline a couple of times a week, she hadn't been to her house very often. The house looked almost uninhabited, home-styled as if in anticipation of a sale. The white and gray furniture might as well have been shipped over from a furniture store. "How can you afford this?" she had asked the first time she visited. Without getting an answer. Perhaps she should have asked more questions.

The mandatory wall of family photos was in the bedroom. Mostly for Mom's sake, Svetlana reckoned. The upper row consisted of pictures from Saratov and Astana in Kazakhstan, where Stalin had deported Mom's family during the war. Wedding photos. People dressed in rags, shovels in their hands. Studio photos of tense-looking men and women in their Sunday best. Below them hung a photo from last year, where Karoline and Svetlana stood arm in arm in front of the summer café on the quay across from the Hauptbahnhof. Svetlana with a wry smile, dressed for work in a skirt and jacket, black hair falling across her eyes. Karoline in a white summer dress, blonde hair in a neat pleated bun, clear blue eyes laughing at the camera; Svetlana had cursed for fifteen solid minutes helping her make that bun perfect. No photo of Clive, she realized now. She had been trying to reach him for three days, and made one last try. He picked up after eight signals, drowsy. It took a moment before he understood who he was talking to.

"Is Karoline with you?" Svetlana asked. "She hasn't been home for a week. I'm worried that something might have happened to her."

There was silence at the other end. She could hear him drinking something to clear his throat.

"No, she's not here. We haven't seen each other for a while. A couple of weeks. Is she missing? That sounds odd. But no, she hasn't told me anything. If you'll excuse me. I'm on my way out." He hung up.

"Suka blyat," Svetlana said out loud. She sat down in a low Jørgensen armchair in the living room, where glass terrace doors faced the little garden plot in the back yard. She disliked Clive. She hadn't always, but he was the type of man who made you more suspicious the more you got to know him. "A manipulative shithead who could have been your



old man,” she had told Karoline, who laughed and didn’t see the problem. He wasn’t the first older man in her sister’s life, but probably the oldest one yet. Karoline claimed that he was fun to be around. Svetlana told herself that some things you just don’t get. She should have raised hell when she found spyware on Karoline’s cellphone. Or gone and told Clive off, because he was probably the one who had planted it.

She picked up her cellphone again and called Ulrich. He didn’t answer. No one at Schaffer Properties answered. After splashing some water on the geraniums and sorting the mail, Svetlana left the house. Karoline worked in Neukölln, in a gray office building by the shore where the industrial canals met the quays of Sieversufer. Normally it was a thirty-minute drive, but Svetlana turned off too early at the old Tempelhof airfield and had to wiggle her way through back streets edged with industrial buildings and sparsely distributed apartment blocks. Ulrich Schaffer had acquired small industries and lots along the canals, waiting for the next construction wave. It was already beginning to pay off. He had moved his office from east Berlin to this nondescript gray concrete building from the Sixties. A tall steel fence enclosed the parking lot and the yard around the house. Svetlana parked in the street outside and went in through a side gate.

Three men in windbreakers and denim sat at a table made from loading pallets, smoking. Svetlana recognized one of them. His name was Peter, sometimes Pjotr, depending on the company; back during the years after the reunification, when they lived in the concrete eastern suburb of Marzahn, he had been in the class next to Karoline’s. Svetlana had gotten into fights with him almost every day during her teens, before her gender affirmation, before she moved to Hamburg. It wasn’t fighting, not really; she had been beaten up. He used to wait for her by the newsstands down at Max-Hermann-Straße together with three or four older guys. It was only Peter who beat her up, with the unspoken subtext that things would get worse if she tried to get away. He didn’t recognize her.

“Is Schaffer in?” she asked.

“Who’s asking?”

“Karoline’s sister.”



He understood who she was, now, and was unsettled. He put out his cigarette and mumbled something she didn't care to catch. "Karoline isn't here. The boss will be in sometime before lunch."

Karoline was the reason Svetlana had returned from Hamburg. She had originally planned to move for good, but when summarizing her activities and the people she saw, she concluded that the most important thing was her phone conversations with Karoline. She was the one she talked to before the gender affirmation and the surgeries. She was the one she called in the middle of the night. When Svetlana was offered the job at Xero Sicherheitstechnik, she moved back to Berlin, perhaps to be close in case something happened; she realized that now. She took the elevator to the third floor. Frieda, Ulrich's assistant, sat by the window overlooking the canal where colorful kayaks snuck along the center lane. She was short and stocky with dark rings under her eyes, dressed in an emerald blouse and a white scarf that contrasted against the office's dingy brown color scheme. When she heard the elevator door, she put her cellphone away and looked up.

"Oh, it's you! Did you hear from Karoline?" she immediately asked when she saw Svetlana. "She hasn't come in for work. I've been trying to call her."

Svetlana shook her head. "I came to ask if you've heard something. She hasn't been home for a week."

"Have you spoken to Clive?"

"He doesn't know where she is either."

"I think she's about to break up with him. Not a day too soon. Would you like some coffee?"

Svetlana accepted some instant coffee in a mug with the BFC Dynamo logo and some cookies from a tin that Frieda put on the desk.

"He beats her," Frieda said. "Did you know? She said she'd taken a fall, but I don't believe it."

Svetlana hadn't known. She hadn't even considered that, and an irrational lump of panic lodged in her throat while she pushed away mental images of what she would like to do to Clive. It might not even be true.

"Maybe I should have told you or Magda, but it felt like a private thing," Frieda said.



“Mom wouldn’t have listened anyway.”

They had coffee in silence until Ulrich stepped out of the elevator. He was the same age as Clive, but considerably more worn; the deep tan couldn’t hide the lines on his face. Fifteen years earlier, when Svetlana first met him, he had looked like a gangster in his leather coat and golden neck chains. These days, he mostly looked like a dull banker from Mitte. He immediately understood why she was there.

“I’m worried about Karoline too,” he said. “But she might have gone away for a while. She seemed tired.”

“I’ve called the police,” Svetlana said.

He didn’t like that, but didn’t respond.

“I want you to talk to Clive,” she said. “He won’t tell me anything, but Frieda thinks that he beats Karoline.”

*Traitor*, Ulrich’s gaze told his assistant. Frieda ignored him.

“He won’t tell me anything either,” he said. “We don’t do business anymore. If it weren’t for Karoline, I wouldn’t see him at all.”

“Is he a criminal?”

Ulrich fell silent again. *What do you think?* his look said. The business they’d done and which dated back to the reunification had always been illegal. It was only now, when Ulrich tried to become an honest real estate manager, that they had parted ways. But Clive had always been more of a fixer. Not a gangster.

“As far as I know, he only deals in art these days. Russian 19th century art. I gather there’s a lot of money in it.”

“Could Karoline have stumbled over something she wasn’t supposed to find out?”

“No.” He sounded surprised. “What would that be? I think he’s only into art. That’s not something that would get you into trouble. She’s probably just gone away for a while.”

Svetlana took the elevator down to the courtyard. She considered asking the men in windbreakers whether they knew anything, but stopped herself at the last moment and went outside to her car.







# 4. WINTERFELD+PLAZ: AMANDA, HARLAN

Saturday, April 29

Amanda rang the doorbell at Harlan's place at eleven on Saturday afternoon, a thick folder under her arm. The folder held her grandfather's drawings from the Seventies, which Moritz of the Wall Foundation had given to her. She had originally intended to take them to Clive's place, but he wasn't answering his phone. Harlan opened the door, freshly shaven and dressed as if expecting a visitor.

"Svetlana's here," he said. "Karoline's sister. You know, Dad's Karoline."

Amanda put the picture folder on the hallway table, between two blue ceramic dogs Clive had made during his pottery period in the Nineties. She hung her jacket up and peeked into the kitchen. Svetlana sat at a massive table with eight chairs that had come with the apartment Harlan took over from a colleague. Her coarse black hair was tied into a bun at the nape of her neck; she was drinking coffee from the pod coffee machine. The whole kitchen was newly renovated, furnished with red domestic appliances and polished marble slabs. Harlan had brought a few stray items in the move from London: a teapot, blue pot-holders that his mother had given him, a teacup from Denby adorned with a robin. Amanda dithered between English and German. She decided on German:

"Hi, I'm Amanda. We haven't met, but Karoline helped me out with contacts to a Russian-German arts and crafts society for a work of art I'm creating. We had lunch together before Easter."

Svetlana rose and extended a hand. "You're Clive's granddaughter."



Amanda perceived tension in the tightly modulated voice, anxiety below the surface. Karoline had told her of the sister who had returned from Hamburg (after her gender affirmation, Grandfather had interjected) and worked on something for a security company. She looked younger than Amanda had imagined, closer to thirty than forty, dressed in a purple woolen skirt that might have been worn by a colleague of Harlan's. You could tell that she was related to Karoline. They shared the same long, narrow nose.

"Yes," Amanda said. "Did Karoline mention me? We had a great time at that lunch."

"She's gone. Nobody knows where she is. Everyone says she's gone on a trip, but I don't believe it."

Her voice broke. Amanda sat down and took her hand, unsure of what to say. The only time she had met Karoline, during that lunch together with Clive, she had had to bite her tongue in order not to mention the age difference between them. *Don't sound like a Swedish moral watchdog*. Karoline had looked younger than her forty-something years. But a couple of glasses later, they all got silly. Karoline told stories about working for small-time tradesmen gone wrong, and was unexpectedly interested in Amanda's twists and turns working on The Fence.

"Svetlana says Dad installed spyware on Karoline's cellphone. And that he might have beaten her," Harlan said.

She had called him the evening before. He wouldn't believe her accusations then. He had tried calling both Clive and Karoline, with no answer. Still, when Svetlana showed up on Saturday morning he let her in, and once she sat there at the kitchen table he began to believe she was telling the truth. She had shown him the website for the program she had found on Karoline's phone. The advertisement bragged about how easy it was to spy on a partner you suspected of cheating.

"I removed the spyware," Svetlana said. "I told Karo she should ask Clive if he downloaded it. But she just laughed it off. She's like that. Nothing is ever really serious to her."

"Have you tried the women's crisis centers?" Amanda asked. She tried to recall whether something during that lunch had suggested



that Clive was beating his girlfriend, but she wasn't sure what she was looking for.

"Yes, I've talked to everyone. The first time I spoke to Clive was last week. I didn't mention the spyware then. Maybe I should have. I've been trying to call him several times since then, but he hangs up when he hears my voice."

"She's his accountant, right? I only met her that one time at lunch, when she gave me the number for the arts and crafts society."

"Yeah, and they're a couple," Harlan said. "For just over a year."

It had been twenty years since Mom divorced Clive. He hadn't heard of any other women in Dad's life before Karoline showed up. "Late life crisis," his mother Rachel dryly said when he told her. "It's not like he's suddenly developed guilty feelings about buying sex." He wanted to call Mom, now, and ask her whether Clive had ever beaten her—but he was afraid she wouldn't give him an honest answer.

"I hope she hasn't gotten caught up in something illegal," Svetlana said. "Both Clive and her boss, Ulrich Schaffer, were pretty nasty characters when I got to know them."

Amanda glanced at Harlan, who shrugged.

"He's never been convicted of anything," he said. "But sure, I've heard the stories. Schaffer was some sort of bigshot in the community administration back east. Totally corrupt, if you're to believe Dad. They smuggled goods to the East in the Eighties. Chocolate and such."

"They sold cocaine in the Nineties," Svetlana said. "And did some odd jobs. Schaffer was in touch with old cops from the East who had gone into the security business. They were in the protection racket, blackmail, a lot of stuff like that. Schaffer started out thinking he would make big money in property, but didn't do too well in the Nineties. So he became a criminal instead."

Harlan turned away and polished the coffee machine with a rag. The cocaine was news to him, but he wasn't surprised. The assault was worse. He didn't want to think about that.

"I'm going to his place to show him some pictures he drew in the Seventies," Amanda said. "Should I bring you?"

"I don't think he'll let you in if I'm with you," Svetlana said. "He hung up on me."



“You probably have the best shot at getting inside,” Harlan told Amanda. “He hasn’t spoken to me for a month.”

“I guess I’ll find out if he wants anything to do with me. Then I’ll ask him about Karoline.”

“That’s nice of you,” Svetlana said. “Ask him to call me if you do get hold of him. I have to go to work—I’ve things to do that I didn’t get done during the week.”

When Svetlana had left, Harlan sat down at the table with his phone. He opened a cloud service that held photographs he’d uploaded for Mom before he left for Berlin. There, among pictures of Grandmother’s house in Brighton and excursions to Kew Gardens in the Nineties, were two pictures of Clive in the Eighties. It was before he got married, and they moved to the house in Dahlem. He had just opened the art gallery on Fasanenstraße and had plenty of money. He looked like a yuppie in his suit with too-wide lapels and a heavy Heuer wristwatch.

“She’s worried,” Amanda said. “It’s understandable. Are you angry at her?”

“At Svetlana? No, why would I be?” Harlan closed the image viewer and put the phone away. His look told Amanda that he didn’t want her to browse the photographs.

“Because she just claimed that Grandpa used to be a drug dealer and that he beats his girlfriend.”

“I didn’t know anything about the cocaine. Or the other stuff.”

“You still don’t. They’re only rumors.” They had never spoken about Clive. Not beyond jokes about him never getting in touch. That was why Amanda came to Moritz; she knew he had known Grandpa in the Seventies, and asked him what he remembered. He gave her the folder with pictures and told her to show them to Clive.

“They smuggled people, cigarettes, chocolate—lots of stuff. He used to tell me about it when I was a kid, like adventure stories. But I had always assumed that it ended sometime in the Seventies. That this was back when he was young.”

“It’s a long time ago now.”

“He’s a fucking liar, that he is. But I hope he hasn’t gotten Karoline mixed up in something dangerous. Or hurt her.”



“Come on, let’s go outside for a while. You can’t just sit here and brood.”

Harlan lived at Winterfeldtplatz, in a gray and white turn-of the century house on the corner overlooking the square. It was mostly by random chance that he had ended up in the gay neighborhood with its bars and cafés in every building and tourists walking around at all hours. He didn’t mind. He liked sleeping with his window open, hearing the drone of voices outside. Back in London, he had lived in Camden. “Like Friedrichshain except five times more expensive” was his description when people asked about it.

It was Saturday market in the square, and the space in front of the red brick church was filled with stalls selling cheap clothing, sausages and handicrafts. Harlan and Amanda walked over to the café across the street, next to the second-hand bookshop where Harlan had bought German classics that he never got around to reading. Amanda had brought the folder with Clive’s pictures, but none of them felt like looking inside. They ordered beer, a Berliner each, and Amanda got a grilled sandwich. Harlan wasn’t hungry, but he calmed down once they’d sat in silence for a while. Outside, light rain fell on the market stalls. People unfolded umbrellas or sought refuge under the trees that lined the square.

“You don’t have to go to his place,” Harlan said. “You get that, right?”

“Of course I get that.”

The rain chased the market visitors into the café until all the tables were occupied. A damp warmth misted the windows over, and further conversation about Clive felt impossible. Amanda put a third of the too-big mozzarella sandwich on a saucer: “In case you get hungry.”

She scanned the room, her gaze locking on two men having an intimate conversation by the door. She shamelessly studied them as they pushed through the crowd and a little clumsily got up on bar stools by the counter. One of them seemed to have trouble with his right knee. “Don’t stare,” Harlan had told her the first few times he had seen her scrutinize people like that. He was used to it now, had almost learned to enjoy it. Most people never noticed they were being watched. Amanda turned to face him. Her gray eyes refocused, like little camera lenses.

“Do you think I’m staring too much again?”

“No worries.”



She grinned. At this time a year ago they had never met, just spoken on the phone a few times. It was only during winter that they had actually started hanging out. Casually, in his austere living room. “Better than sex,” Amanda had said the last time they were on the couch, drinking wine in front of a Netflix crime show. She had just made a last-minute cancellation on one of Nadine’s musician acquaintances, a guy just over 20.

“We could go to the movies tonight,” she said. “Something mindless.”

“I don’t know.”

“I’ll go see Grandpa and call you later.”

Amanda wrapped the folder in a plastic bag she found in her purse and trudged off to the subway. The rain had let up, but the market visitors had grown tired of the weather and streamed past her toward the naked cast iron cupola of Nollendorf station. Two older women were complaining of the quality of the market stands: “The same crap everywhere.” Amanda locked her gaze on them as they passed. They were both dressed in red coats—one of them carmine, the other a little darker. She contemplated the cut of the coats and the talk of lousy market dealers, mostly to avoid thinking about Grandpa. The women walked ahead of her all the way up to the platform and stepped into the same car as her: the U1 westward.

Clive lived on a street that ran parallel to Kurfürstendamm, in a yellow building with Jugend-patterned arches and a cute little courtyard. Amanda rang the entryphone and was surprised to get an answer.

“I have some pictures to show you. Your pictures. Moritz gave them to me.”

The front door made a clicking noise, and she stepped inside. He lived on the third floor, in a six-room apartment that extended all the way through the house. It was a leftover from the marriage to Rachel, Harlan’s mom. He had bought it in the Eighties and kept it throughout the economic slump after the reunification. He had periodically rented it out to students. Amanda had been there once before, when she was new to Berlin. Clive smiled at her when he opened the door. He was dressed in a gray lamb’s wool sweater, his unshaven cheeks rosy.

“It’s great to see you. Come inside.”



“Did you lose your cellphone? I’ve been trying to call you.”

“I don’t know where it is. There’s been a lot going on.”

She could sense a streak of alcohol through the smell of breath mints: vodka or gin. She stepped into the hallway, which was the size of a living room and shaped like an antique atrium with doors that opened onto the rest of the apartment. A patchwork of paintings covered the walls, mostly oils, a lot of Russians. Spotlights lit up the walls like in an art gallery.

“It has to look right to the customers,” Clive said as she studied a picture of luminous red Cossacks on a flowering plain. “I work almost exclusively with Russia these days. It’s not always that inspiring, but it pays very well. Some of the older art has become insanely valuable, and I happened to have some good contacts in the east.”

She moved her gaze back to the painting above the Cossacks: naïvist shapes moving in front of a circle of fire. She didn’t recognize the style. Maybe an illustrator from the Forties?

“George Patel,” Clive said. “You haven’t seen his work before? He was the one who started the Wall Project in the Sixties. He was a friend of Guy Debord in the Fifties, started out as a Situationist.”

That didn’t tell her much, but she recognized the name Patel from the presentation material Emre had given her when she agreed to work within the project.

“There’s a nice movement to it,” she said. The fire dancers drew her gaze in a way that the Russian oils failed to do.

“Yes, George was gifted. I learned a lot from him, mostly street art. We did pop-up stuff in the Sixties and Seventies. Like the big dogs on the building gables over at Potsdamer Platz. Have you seen the pictures? There was a ton of gables to work on after the war, all the way up to the Eighties. He died in Seventy-Eight, I think. Maybe Seventy-Nine.”

He showed her into the apartment’s biggest room—the living room, with double doors on three sides and an exit to the southern balcony. The Jugend stucco in the ceiling had been gently renovated. More modern art hung on the walls, no Russian 19th century to be seen. Amanda counted three Patel paintings. They formed a triangle on the northern wall across from the balcony. She could see a surrealist element to the



pictures, now. A Forties-style cyborg man with rusty metal arms stared out across a desolate plain. A cityscape, shimmering with color, fell apart into pixelated shards. A face (she recognized her grandfather's green eyes and heavy eyebrows) broke out of a stone formation that rose out of water. Its colors were soft, anthroposophical.

"Emre hasn't quite managed to explain to me what holds the project together," Amanda said. "I think he's trying to find a unifying theme with borders and walls, but it's a little hazy to me. Did George Patel have a clear vision?"

"It's more of a mode of cooperation. We were almost exclusively into street art in the beginning. Things got a little complicated when it was time to move everything into studios and exhibitions. That's partly why I got out in the Eighties."

"Moritz told me it was because you turned Nazi. That they threw you out for hanging around with right-wing extremists and drawing racist caricatures in some right-wing rag."

"Moritz is an idiot. Nice, but an idiot."

"He gave me these pictures."

She sat down on one of the brown Barcelona chairs and laid the sketches out on the coffee table. There were some comics in there; Clive had spent a couple of years drawing a satire comic for *Junge Welt*. "Like the Little Berlin comic for seedy old men," had been Amanda's first thought when she looked at the pictures together with Moritz. She didn't mention that now. There were caricatures too, cartoons of men she didn't recognize. One image depicted Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof being chased by The Man. Clive laughed when he saw the pictures.

"We were all Rote Armee Fraktion back in those days."

"But you got over it?"

"Luckily. Would you like a drink? Whisky?"

He filled two tumblers halfway with ice and poured some Old Pulteney into them. Amanda watched as he knocked his drink back and then poured himself another. *He passed it down.* Mom's periodic drinking and Grandma's silence. Why hadn't she seen it when they had lunch in Charlottenburg before Christmas? Or during that afternoon with Karoline? Amanda put her glass down on the coffee table and



pushed it away. She wanted to say something about Harlan, and about Karoline, but couldn't find the words.

"What's this?" she asked instead and picked up a detailed copperplate sketch of a dark, gothic building with a clock tower in the foreground.

"Columbia Square," Clive said. "In London. East End. I grew up there. It was like a housing program from the 19th century. Charles Dickens inspired them to build it. Torn down a long time ago. I drew that from memory."

"Are all of these from the Seventies?"

"Yes, I think it's from when I taught a drawing class at the art academy. That was in the mid-Seventies. Moritz worked there as well, as some sort of assistant. They wouldn't employ him as a real teacher, because even back then he refused to give them his name."

In all the papers from the foundation, he just went by Moritz S. No last name. And according to sources, the first name was taken as well. Nadine claimed that he might belong to an old Prussian family, but that sounded like a rumor he could have had spread on a whim.

"He sends his regards." Amanda raked the pictures together into a pile on the table. Then she said, "I talked to Svetlana. She's worried about Karoline. She heard that the two of you had been fighting."

"Yes." Clive looked down at his hands. "She broke things off with me. We had a row. It's almost two weeks ago. I think she was going away somewhere. She wouldn't say where."

"Svetlana found spyware on her cellphone."

That made him angry. Amanda could sense a red aura around his head. She closed her eyes, and when she opened them again the red tint had gone away. Stress, she told herself. My eyes are messing with me. In the hallway, by the Cossack painting, Clive harming Karoline had seemed impossible. Now, she wasn't so sure.

"I don't know anything about that. Ask her to talk to Ulrich Schaffer about it. It would be just like him to do something like that."

"You should talk to Svetlana."

"I will."

He wanted her to leave, now, but she lingered and looked through the art on the walls. Most of it was by people she had never heard of,



from a German Sixties and Seventies world she knew nothing about. Two rooms further inside were stacked with cardboard crates and boxes where he had saved good-to-have knick-knacks of metal and wood and stone, a habit she recognized in herself.

“You don’t do sculpture?” she asked.

“No, just drawings and ceramics. And, well, the street art. But that’s a long time ago. You’re the only sculptor in the family, I’m afraid. I can only make little ceramic dogs.”

“That’s what I’d thought I’d be doing too. I mean, not little dogs—I wanted to be an industrial designer. But then my sculptures caught attention. *Curved Space*. They let me do a wall in the new commuter train station, and it all went from there. And I’m lucky. I’ve realized that I don’t have the right flair for design.”

“They say there’s no such thing as luck.”

“Bullshit.”

They laughed about that. Out of a wooden crate, Amanda picked up some rusty bits of metal, perhaps brought from some old workshop. “This looks like sculpture material.”

“Trash. I’m a bit of a hoarder, I guess. Like Moritz, if you’ve been to his place.”

“Come by Bethanien someday, and we can go see Moritz and talk some more.”

When she had left, he let out a long breath and drank a third glass of whisky. For a moment, he played with the thought of calling Svetlana, but left it alone.



# 5. CHARLOTTEBURG: CLIVE

Wednesday, May 3

“Two detectives barged in yesterday and asked for Karoline. Somebody gave them the idea that she’s in trouble because she works for me.”

Ulrich Schaffer leaned against the counter at Kunsthandel Clive Connelly, while Clive put up the CLOSED sign and locked the door. He had told his assistant to take a couple of weeks off with pay. “While I sort out some family matters.”

“They talked to me as well,” Clive said. “It’s standard procedure. You know that, Ulrich.”

“Frieda claims you beat Karoline. She’s told the police that too.”

“That’s just something she got into her head. We had some shouting matches, that’s all. Come sit down in my office.”

They sat down in an armchair each. Clive had redecorated since going into Russian painting. In the Eighties, when he had used the earnings from their joint ventures to open the gallery, the walls had been adorned with British post-war art. He had sold a Francis Bacon once. Now, the office was furnished with folkloric cabinets and patterned carpets from central Asia. A portrait of Nikolai II hung behind the desk.

“I think it’s pretty bloody unpleasant when the cops poke around in my affairs, you know that,” Ulrich said.

Clive sat in silence, as if thinking about something else. He wasn’t completely unused to Ulrich yelling at him. Even in the Sixties, when he showed up as a young reporter with peculiarly good contacts on both sides of the Wall, he had had a knack for vexing Ulrich. Doctor Schaffer,



as the German demanded to be addressed back then, was employed by the municipal administration of East Berlin and worked hard to use his private smuggling routes to assume a position of power. The most important component to his business was Clive's unfathomable ability to smuggle people and crates full of cigarettes and chocolate between East and West. When something went wrong—because Clive gave the cigarettes to his mates, or helped a pretty girl out instead of the East German who had paid dearly for the trip—arguments ensued. It was the same story all over again later, when Clive made dead bodies disappear for a handsome fee. Sometimes “there was trouble” and the price they had agreed on suddenly doubled. The Irishman, they called him, and many feared him. But not Ulrich. Ulrich yelled at him.

“Did you do something to her?” Ulrich asked. “Yes or no?”

“No.”

“If you're lying, you're fucked. I'll kill you.”

Clive nodded to show that he understood: “We'll have to hope she shows up again soon.”

He showed Ulrich out and replaced the CLOSED sign when he was gone. Maybe he should go away for a while, until Ulrich calmed down. No, that would look suspicious. Better to carry on as usual. He left through the back door and picked his car up at Knesebeckstraße. Twenty minutes later, he parked the car behind Bethanien, by the massive old preschool seminar building. He took a shortcut through the park and across the lawn, where films were screened in summer. Spring had returned. Clive toyed with the thought of going inside to see Amanda, but instead made a left toward a façade to the north, its walls sooty and covered in graffiti. He had lived here during the second half of the Seventies, in a commune where he shared two rooms with Moritz and his girlfriend Renate. Moritz still lived here, but they hadn't seen each other for over a year. The house hadn't changed much; it was merely a little more worn, its brick walls covered in even more color. Moritz lived at the top, under the eaves, more of a lodger than a part of the commune. He had never been a people person. Two young women looked at Clive in confusion when he asked for Moritz.

“He never comes out,” one of them said. “We go upstairs sometimes just to check he isn't dead.”



The door was painted black, covered in geometrical patterns of signal yellow and red, and he had to knock five times before it opened slightly. Moritz lit up when he recognized Clive.

“Come in! I was hoping you’d swing by.”

“I had to. When you go around telling my grandchildren I’m a Nazi.”

“Ha-ha—right. Well, you were, so it wasn’t a lie. She’s clever, your offspring. She took it the right way.”

“This place looks like shit. Don’t you ever clean?”

The room looked like a drug den, forty-year-old newspaper clippings glued to the walls. They were mostly political essays, but some news articles and pictures of celebrities from glossy magazines had found their way in there too. The geometrical figures from the door continued across walls, floor and ceiling. A magical Faraday cage. Clive unconsciously took a deep breath before stepping inside, as if he was about to lower himself into a water tank. Apart from a mattress in the northwestern corner, the only piece of furniture was a table built from wooden trestles and two drawing-room doors painted white. A little herd of bronze and iron figurines stood on the table top: biomechanical, insectoid, some almost humanoid. A half-finished wax model of something that resembled a beetle with long antennae had been pushed aside to make space for half a leftover pizza.

“I have some beer,” Moritz said and fished a six-pack of Paulaner out of one of the many paper bags that kept all his belongings. He was dressed in black leather from head to toe and gave off a rank smell. His hands, forearms, neck and shaven head were covered in blue and red tattoos. The patterns echoed those on the door and walls. Clive knew that his whole body was covered in ink. The project had begun at the beginning of the Sixties. The illustrated man, they used to call him. Over the years, his neck had thinned out and his muscles wasted away until he resembled a knotty, ink-covered branch.

“You’ve been busy,” Clive said and picked up a statuette that looked like a little alien. “Do you sell these?”

“A shop here in Kreuzberg sells them. The kids like them. They ward off bad dreams.”

“I need to ward off bad dreams, too. I dream about hell.”



“Not entirely unexpected.” Moritz grinned.

“I need protection against the living, too. Old enemies.”

“Your old Stasi friend?”

“He was never Stasi, but yes, him. He came by today and threatened to kill me.”

“Rightly so, I assume.”

“He’s got it all wrong. Can you help me? You were always better at this.”

Forty years earlier, Moritz’s occult geometry had saved Clive’s life. It was the first time they had smoked heroin together. He, Moritz and Dietmar—a guy he had brought across the wall from East Berlin—had locked themselves inside George Patel’s temple in Bethanien’s basement. Patel was away, so they counted on being left alone. Dietmar was on the run from the police in the East; he wouldn’t tell them why, but Clive had helped him cross the border. Moritz suspected him of being Stasi, which Clive laughed at. Moritz thought everyone was Stasi. The temple walls, floor and ceiling were painted in the soft colors of Patel’s oils. They sat inside the copper triangle sunk into the floor planks. At first, Clive thought he was going to fall asleep. Instead, he became unpleasantly wide awake. He looked past the temple walls and saw brick warehouses. Beyond them, a wide quay. The others saw it too. Dietmar was the first to step out of the triangle and through the wall.

Clive recognized Metropolis. His paths below the Berlin wall went through the city beyond illusion. Patel had taught him to follow the clearly marked trails where he would be more or less safe. This was something else. He warned the others, but Dietmar wouldn’t listen; he walked out onto the quay where a rusty cargo steamship was moored. People were dancing on deck, and the wheelhouse was lit. They were playing Sex Pistols. Clive remembered that because he’d only heard them once before, on a German television show about the British punk wave. A creature stood by the gangplank, half insect and half frog, dressed in a shabby corduroy suit. In guttural German, it invited them to board the ship. The people on deck all looked completely human. It might as well have been Saturday night at Der Dschungel in Berlin. People were dancing and drinking and fucking. Against their better judgement, they were pulled along. Clive wasn’t surprised when he, semi-conscious on a couch in the mess, had the



idea to look at his watch and saw that the hands weren't moving. He had heard stories about people who disappeared into Metropolis for decades. Fear revived him. Moritz met him on deck and they started looking for Dietmar. They found him in the cargo room, behind tarpaulin drapes covered in oil and blood. He was dead, his belly cut open, entrails spilled on the floor. His body was mutilated: his nose and eyes were gone, and his torso was lashed with wire to a paint-stained chair.

While Clive stood there dumbfounded, Moritz's quick reflexes saved them. He saw the torturers before they arrived: three men wielding axes, naked under their bloody aprons. He used Dietmar's blood and a piece of his mangled liver to paint a protective circle on the floor. It gave Clive time to visualize a path back to Patel's temple. When they returned, a mere five or ten minutes has passed, but Dietmar was gone. They never saw him again.

"Is it your body that you want to protect?" Moritz asked. "Or something of more lasting value?"

"My body."

"You should get tattooed, then. I know of a good studio here in Kreuzberg. I can supply them with ink and patterns. But it'll take a couple of weeks to get everything into place."

"I'll try to stay alive in the meantime. Are you in touch with Renate at all these days?"

"We talk on the phone sometimes. She teaches kids to paint. I think they're going to learn labyrinths eventually. We get municipal funding for it."

"Well, shit. I never thought that would happen."

"She's a good teacher."

As opposed to Clive and Moritz, Renate had a formal education. She had almost graduated from the Weißensee School of Art when Patel helped her cross into West Berlin. She went straight to the Berlin University of Arts. She was the one who got them into the graduation parties at the end of the Sixties. Moritz would sometimes pretend to have an upper-class background, but that was a sham. He had told Clive about childhood years spent drifting through post-war Germany. He neither knew his name nor place of birth.



“Amanda showed me the drawings you gave her,” Clive said.

“I was hoping you’d want to come back, now that she’s here.” Moritz wolfed down the last pieces of pizza and moved the wax figurine back to the center of the table.

“What would I be doing here? Are you connected to the Wall at all anymore? It looks like you only make little protective scarabs to get money for more ink.”

“Not only. I place them throughout the city.” Moritz nodded to a map of Berlin on the wall. Pins and inked lines crisscrossed the city center. “In patterns. So that they can talk to each other. You know that some of your old pictures have begun to talk, right?”

“Sometimes I think you’ve gone mad.”

Moritz smiled and didn’t reply.



# 6. WEISSENSEE: RENATE

Wednesday, May 3

The roof of the old children's hospital had partly burned and caved in. Where it still remained, the beams were blackened. Broken roofing tiles littered the attic floor, and daylight fell in through the holes between naked joists. Renate swept tile fragments and branches through a gaping hole to the floor below. Kim, Tamara and Julia stacked broken tiles into a corner. The whole group of students was there, fifteen kids between sixteen and nineteen dressed in painter overalls or paint-stained T-shirts and jeans. The class was outside of school hours, organized by the Wall Project, but several of the students came from art-oriented high schools and secondary schools. Those not busy cleaning covered the graffiti on the roof pillars with white paint or checked whether the remains of the roof were stable enough.

"Can you see the circle in the middle of the floor?" Renate rubbed her piassava broom against the floor planks three meters out from the massive wooden pillar that held up the middle section of the broken roof. The wood glinted; a thin metal strip sunk into the floorboards formed a perfect circle around the pillar.

"Is that steel?" Julia asked, a thin and dark girl with neat hands and bright red nails. Renate had been surprised by her strength as she carried off tiles and junk.

"Silver. We'll have to polish it up. I've got some silver polish in my bag. The triangle inside is made of copper." She continued toward the pillar with her broom, drawing a line in the dust to reveal the verdigrised triangle.



“What’s it for?” Kim rubbed her thumb over the blackened strand of silver. She was taller than Julia, more broad-shouldered, but didn’t really like to get her hands dirty. She had kept herself busy sweeping the floor while Julia and Tamara carried roof tiles.

“It’s what remains of a work of art from the Sixties. A friend of mine made this while it was still a hospital. I thought we could build on that and create something new. Let me know what you think.”

Renate opened her worn leather briefcase and took out some sketches that she had made in her studio during the week: a three-dimensional mandala in earthy colors, built inside and on top of George Patel’s magic circle. Julia helped her lay the sketches out on the floor; ever since winter, Renate was having trouble bending over freely.

“It’s just a suggestion,” she said. “For you to build on. I’m thinking we could use materials from the house—glass, stone, and wood details—to build a labyrinthine sculpture in the middle of the circle.”

It was the first time she had brought her students beyond the sanctioned street art walls of Urban Spree or Gleisdreieckpark. She had been uncertain of how they would react to the ruined hospital, even more decayed than the last time she had been here, but most of them thought it was exciting. Now she was mostly worried that someone would fall through the floor and get banged up.

“It’s supposed to capture the house’s soul in some way, right?” Julia said. She had taken Tamara’s hand. They were a couple, and had shown up for the class together. Julia was the enthusiastic one. Tamara, short and slight with her blonde hair plaited to her head, stayed in the background, observing. She reminded Renate a little of Moritz, but without all the childhood scars that made him crooked and warped. For the second class, they had brought Kim and asked if she could join too. She had no experience in painting, but was single-minded in a way that Renate appreciated. And it was apparently important to the other two that she was there.

“Yes, we could call it the house’s soul. Try to look past the decay to what it looked like before it became a ruin. Consider what might have inspired the architect. It was built at the beginning of the 20th century. I have some older photographs if you want to have a look.”



She brought out an iPad and called up a set of pictures with the hospital's history, which some of the group looked at. The others studied her mandala sketches, looking a little intimidated by the complexity of the task. Chadi, the cockiest one, took the lead. He was short and compact, a knitted gray cap pulled down to his eyebrows. His broken German got half of the gender determiners wrong, but the conviction in his voice seemed to make that escape the others' notice.

"I guess we'll have to do one piece at a time," he said. "You're thinking a labyrinth pattern, a little like a medieval city. Should we use—what's it called—chalk, to sketch on the floor and then find materials to build with?"

"It's a good start. Then we'll talk about how to continue."

Renate took a box of school chalks from one of the plastic boxes where they stored paint, brushes and tools. Chadi and Julia grabbed a stick of chalk each and picked a sketch to use as a model. "Let's follow Renate's pattern," Julia opined. "If we start making changes, we'll never be able to finish." Chadi didn't contradict her.

There wasn't room for more than two or three to draw on the floor at the same time. Kim and Ernst—a tall, whippet-like boy with an eye for structures—positioned themselves outside the circle, directing Chadi and Julia as they drew a labyrinthine pattern radiating from the pillar. The others went downstairs to find raw materials in the broken and junk-filled rooms that could be glimpsed through the holes in the attic floor.

"Watch out for the holes in the floor," Renate called after them. "Walk only where you can tell that it's solid."

They came back upstairs with empty bottles, bricks, parts of the banister, pipes from a radiator and an entire stack of more or less intact ceramic tiles. Five brass handles from missing doors were also part of the loot. Things looked better than Renate had dared hope for. No one was sick and tired, no one questioned the exercise, and no one mentioned the magic circle, despite the fact that several of them must have recognized the occult symbolism from computer games and movies. It was a little surprising.

Before they had time to consider how to build the mandala, the sun had sunk below the base of the roof and it became hard to make out the



lines on the floor. The kids spread sheets of plastic over the sketch and the toolboxes before they descended to the bottom floor, their way lit by the flashlights on their cellphones. Renate stayed behind, accompanied by Ernst, who was contemplating the sketch on the floor.

“What do you see?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

She didn’t reply. It was too early to talk to them about the circle. Ernst was tall and thin, just like his father, whom Renate had known for a long time. He wasn’t a magician. But perhaps his son had the right eyes to see through the Illusion.

“What does Horst think about you working with me?” she asked.

Ernst shrugged. “Nothing. Is he supposed to think something?”

“You’ll have to send him my regards.”

“Without mentioning that you brought us here, where we could crash through the floor and die?”

She gave him an encouraging pat on the shoulder and guffawed. “Exactly. Shall we join the others downstairs?”

Ernst lit their way with his cellphone, insisting that she hold on to his arm as they descended. This was the way she had come from East Berlin, up the back stairs of the children’s hospital, in the spring of 1966. That Easter, more people than usual had been let through the wall from the West to see relatives. Uncle Lothar, who worked at Siemens, had come over to see his sister and Renate. He had brought two friends. “Artists. I thought you might enjoy that, Nate.” It was George Patel and a barely 20-year-old Moritz. They sat in Mom’s kitchen, drinking coffee, talking about friends and family. Two weeks later, George showed up and asked if she wanted to come west with him. She thought he was a little weird — in the worst case, a rapist — when he asked her to come to the children’s hospital after sundown. Still, she came. He guided her up the worn stairs, past more doors and landings than seemed reasonable for a three-story building, and up to the attic where she spotted the circle in the floor, its glow like a gently flame-colored neon sign. He took her hand and led her inside the circle, away from Berlin. That was the first time she saw Metropolis.

In the defaced hallway, inside two gaping openings where the doors to the entrance had once been, the kids took out beer and sodas from



the bags that Alex and Kaz had fetched from Renate's van. Their cell-phones flitted like white fireflies through the corridors and out into the back rooms.

"Stay on the ground floor. You hear me?" Renate said and glanced at Ernst, who gave her a mocking smile. She put down a battery-powered hurricane lamp next to her and sat down on the stairs with a can of Coke. It was getting chilly. She hugged her leather jacket closer and felt the phone vibrate in her inside pocket. Lotti Decken. Renate hesitated for a second with her thumb above the green dot before she decided to answer:

"Hi Lotti, so glad you called! Such a great time last night." She had been to a ladies' dinner at Lotti's place the evening before, and told her that the Wall Project might get sponsor money from Allianz. Lotti was on the Wall Foundation's board too, and was concerned that Renate might be assuming too many responsibilities.

"Are you teaching them tonight?" she wondered. "This late?"

"No, I'm resting. I've just gone through some theory with them tonight."

Lotti was the kind of person who was better off not knowing too much. She had spent her whole career at the art school and had helped Renate draw up a curriculum for the kids. But she didn't need to know about the children's hospital. They agreed to meet up again next Tuesday. After the call, Renate found herself alone in the hallway. She listened to the voices echoing through the ruin and finished her Coke. Alex and Sara appeared in the door opening that led to the back hallway. He was tall and black; she was pale, with discreet makeup.

"I should get going," Alex said. "Before it gets too late. I'm getting up early." He was on an apprenticeship program to be an electrician, and was the only one except for Kaz who didn't come from a secondary school or high school.

"I'll walk you to the station," Sara said. "I'm heading home as well."

"Will you be there on Sunday?"

"Yes, of course."

They disappeared in the direction of the park, whispering amongst themselves in English. Maybe headed for the station, maybe not. It wasn't



any of Renate's business, and that felt good. The first street art class she had taught was for young teens down to the age of twelve. Back then it had really felt like Lotti said, that she had assumed too much responsibility. Here, the youngest one was Chadi, precocious for his sixteen years, and all Renate had to worry about was being a teacher. She leaned against the wall and listened to the voices in the darkness.



PΔR† 2:

†HE SKULLS  
OF ØΔHLEŲ







*It's not hands that call us, but desire.*

PINHEAD







# 7. WATERGATE: AMANDA

Thursday, May 11

The sun rose over Spree, and Watergate's dance floor was almost empty. Amanda and Harlan sat on the low floating stage on the river below the club and saw morning light find its way across the pointed fairytale towers of Oberbaumbrücke. Before 1989, there had been a checkpoint for pedestrians on the bridge. Clive had mentioned it when he spoke of his adventures in the East, about biking through Kreuzberg and crossing the bridge to Friedrichshain, where tenement houses sprawled beyond the wall.

"I talked to Mom yesterday," Harlan said. "Before I called you. She said that they got divorced because Dad beat her. Beat her badly. She could have been scarred for life. Or died. She never wanted to talk to me about it before. I think she feels ashamed."

Despite the sunshine, it was chilly. Pale veils of night mist lingered over the water. They lay in a tangle on the landing stage's vinyl benches, sweaty after a night spent dancing. He had called her half past midnight and asked her if she wanted to come with him. "Somewhere we don't know anyone. Somewhere with tourists, so we won't have to speak German." They ended up at Watergate, a techno club with high panoramic windows facing the river, among Dutch soccer tourists who after an hour were replaced by drunk students. Harlan just wanted to dance, and refused to tell her what was wrong. It was only when the dance floor thinned out that they went to the landing stage on the river and he started talking. He told her about how when Mom had ended the



call, he had spent an hour going through websites about violence against women. “Then I called you.” It was Thursday, and he was supposed to be back at work in three hours. Amanda hugged him.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked. His face was bare. She didn’t understand how he would manage to put his insurance officer’s mask on before work. “Should we go to Grandpa’s place?”

“You can’t trust anything he says, can you? I do feel better now, compared to when I’d just spoken to Mom. I panicked a little then. I’m thinking about taking a couple of weeks off to visit her.”

“Are you moving back to London?”

“I don’t know. Do I let him chase me out of Berlin? Like he did with Mom?”

“No, you don’t!” Amanda was frightened without quite understanding why. *I don’t want you to move. Don’t leave me here alone with Grandpa.*

It was only until the week before Easter, when they’d known each other for more than six months, that Harlan started talking about his life in London. There was Rick, another insurance officer, Harlan’s senior by twenty years and (it had turned out) married with three kids. Amanda was pretty sure that his name wasn’t really Rick, and that it would be several more months before she got his real name. The move to Germany was probably about getting away from Rick as much as it was about getting closer to Dad. In Berlin, Rick was succeeded by Hanna, a twenty-something economist of whom Harlan wouldn’t speak at all: “It was a big mistake.” That was after Amanda had already worn him out with talk about the four short and failed relationships she had plunged herself into after Grandma’s death.

“Want to go for breakfast?” she asked. “Then you can go home and get a couple of hours’ sleep.”

When they left the club, the sun had ascended above the bridge that hid the sky from the street. A subway train rattled overhead. Harlan, who worked five minutes up the river, knew which cafés in the area would be open at this time in the morning. He guided them past closed bars and fast-food joints to a café that served homemade sandwiches to taxi drivers at all hours. The owner could tell that they wanted to be left alone and kept clear after serving them.



“Svetlana has called me three times by the way,” Harlan said. “There’s something she wants me to look at. Some pictures, I think. But I don’t really have the energy for it.”

“She can’t e-mail them to you?”

“She says she wants to meet up. Karoline is still missing. The police are looking for her. I think they’re taking it seriously since Ulrich Schaffer might be involved. And Dad.”

Amanda pulled her sandwich apart to make two open-faced sandwiches: one with cheese, one with salami. She ate the salami slices before starting on the bread. “We could go to Svetlana’s place right now,” she said. “It’s just stupid not to ask what she wants. After all this business with your mom, you don’t want more things hanging over your head, right? Call her.”

Harlan reluctantly dialed the number and got through after one signal. “We can go there,” he said after hanging up. “She’s at home. She lives at Mehringplatz.”

The street had woken up by the time they left the café. The night crowd that had milled about outside the bars only a few hours earlier had been replaced with the morning crowd headed for work. While they waited for the subway train, Harlan closed his windbreaker to hide his sweaty T-shirt. They rode in the back of the train, then followed the stream of people from Hallesches Tor station, down the stairs from the tracks and across the street that ran alongside the tree lined Landwehr Canal. The enormous circle of Mehringplatz was originally meant to be a node in the grand city plan of the 19th century, but had been converted into a modest dog park in the middle of a housing estate. Svetlana lived in one of the Seventies’ buildings that formed a ring around the park. She came down to the front door to let them in. She didn’t look like she had had much sleep either, but was dressed for work in a skirt and white blouse.

“Have you been out dancing?” she asked and looked at Amanda’s sweaty T-shirt.

Amanda had freshened up in the café’s restroom, but she was soaked all the way through, unused to dancing for so long. If she hadn’t been so focused on the fact that something was wrong with Harlan, she would



have quit after an hour. She was constantly surprised by his superior stamina.

“Yeah. I thought you might have time to see us before work,” Harlan said. “I’m sorry I didn’t get in touch before. Amanda made me call you.”

They took the stairs up to the apartment on the first floor. Amanda kicked her shoes off and looked down at the hallway carpet, a Kazakh camel hair patterned with cheerful deer and triangles. An icon, probably recent, hung on the wall across from the hallway mirror. She wanted to ask about the doily on the hallway table, but it didn’t feel like a good time. Svetlana showed them into a living room furnished in the same Russian and Kazakh style, accented with some Soviet nostalgia: lace, bright colors, vinyl seats. Two gray cats lazily watched Amanda from their chairs.

“My grandmother was a Kazakh Russian. Her name was Svetlana. I took my name after her. I think I thought it would somehow placate Dad that I let her name live on. But it didn’t work. The cats are called Bibi and Boris. They’re siblings.”

She poured some tea and set down a plate of jam cookies before she fetched a laptop and flipped up the screen so that all three of them could see it.

“It’s probably nothing. But I want to show you a house, Harlan.” She hesitated at that. Amanda could see her searching for the right words, without finding any that fit. “I’ve been following your dad,” she said eventually. “I think he’s lying when he says he doesn’t know what happened to Karoline.”

Harlan didn’t reply, so Svetlana opened a folder and continued:

“There’s a house in Dahlem, on Frohmalstraße. He’s been there twice during the last week. Just into the house and then out again. I’ve been in the yard. It looks completely abandoned. No one’s lived there for at least ten years. I wanted to ask you if you know something about it.”

The first photo showed a gray wall with a green-painted gate. Then followed a score or so of pictures of the overgrown garden, the house with its tall chimney and, glimpsed through gaps in the curtains, furniture covered in dust sheets.



“That’s where we used to live when I was little,” Harlan said. “That last picture was my room. It looks just like when I was a kid. Dad never told me he still has the house. I assumed that he sold it. Beyond Freie Universität, right? A little side street that you could almost miss.”

“Yes.”

Amanda asked to see the pictures again, starting at the beginning. She wasn’t tired anymore, rather hyper-awake, as if she had knocked back an energy drink. The first picture of the garden showed a large rhododendron whose magenta-colored flowers had just come into bloom. Under the shrub lay something that looked like a body, partly hidden beneath the foliage. “Next picture.” The house came into focus. She could see it clearly then: two naked bodies, impaled on large nails, stuck out from under a sprawling bush. Blood ran across the ivy leaves on the ground.

“Can you see it?” Amanda pointed at one of the mutilated bodies.

“It’s a pot.”

“A pot?” Amanda zoomed in until a blurry torso filled the screen. A thick nail stuck out next to one of the nipples.

“I think it’s one of Dad’s,” Harlan said. “He went through a pottery period. Blue glaze with panels that looked like his street art.”

Amanda recalled the late night at Watergate. She hadn’t taken anything. She had had a beer, two sodas and a drink—she couldn’t remember what—but nothing hallucinogenic. The living room around her looked like it should. No bodies. No hallucinations.

“I’m going to call Dad and ask,” Harlan said.

He called Clive, who answered almost immediately. While the call went on, Amanda flipped back and forth through the images. She saw bodies under several shrubs, and in a couple of images the wall and the thuja hedge seemed to be dissolving. She could glimpse a dark, blurry landscape beyond. The sky was dark, as if the sun was hidden behind a thick cloud cover. Svetlana talked about the mismanaged garden; it was obvious that she couldn’t see the bodies. Harlan ended the call.

“He says he never got around to selling the house. He goes there sometimes to check the roof for leaks. He said we could go over there together sometime. But right now he has a lot on his plate. Should I have



mentioned Mom? It didn't feel right, though." Harlan took Amanda's hand. "Are you not feeling okay?"

"What do you see in the pictures? Are you only seeing the garden and the house? Pots? Are pots all you can see?"

"What are you seeing?"

*It's not a psychosis if you can will the images away. You just have a vivid imagination.* That's what the child psychologist had told Amanda when she was eleven and thought she was going crazy. She went to the pediatric psychiatry with Grandma, who said they didn't have to tell Mom about the visit. "She'll be too worried." Back then, Amanda had seen an absurdly tall tower rise out of Bårsta soccer field; where a forest ought to be standing, a confusion of massive stone houses climbed up the Bårsta mountains. She learned to close her left eye and will the intruding buildings out of existence. The false houses, as she began to call them, appeared more and more rarely over the years. They disappeared entirely when she was around fifteen.

She leaned across the table and looked Svetlana in the eye. "I want to go over there and have a look," she said. "For Karoline's sake. Something's wrong. I'm not sure what."

"Was it something Dad said?" Harlan asked.

"Can't we go have a look? Or if you're going to work, I can go by myself. I don't have any plans."

"We can go in my car," Svetlana said.

They crawled through morning traffic along the broad avenue south, past the Tempelhof field where the horizon flattened and the city seemed to spread out endlessly in all directions.

The whole drive past the disused airfield, Amanda kept scrolling through the pictures. "We should drive you home," Harlan said and took Svetlana's phone out of her hands. "You're not well."

"I'm fine. Let's take a look and then go home."

After the botanic gardens, Svetlana drove in among the villas and let the car's GPS guide them to the green steel gate on Frohmalstraße. On one side stood a white two-story villa with a sign that advertised a holistic clinic; on the other, a low house obscured by a thuja hedge.

"There's a back door in the wall," Svetlana said.



"I remember that," Harlan said. "It led to Mrs. Lahm's garden. She and her son would sit and drink under a chestnut tree. It's gone now. It looks like they extended the house."

They walked into the driveway to the clinic and saw the door, made of the same green-painted metal as the gate to Clive's house. The lock hung loose. Harlan opened and walked into the overgrown garden. He found it difficult to orient himself. The paved paths had been eaten by the ivy, and rose thickets sprawled across the lawn. Here and there, tall trees had been cut down, only thick stumps left behind.

"Those pots weren't here when I was a kid," Harlan said. "They're new."

*I don't see any pots. Only dead bodies.* Amanda wasn't yet ready to say it out loud. She looked over at the thuja hedge. Sometimes it flickered, and instead of the neighbor's villa she could glimpse a blasted landscape, something like a bomb-wrecked plain. The corpses lay there, just like in the pictures. From under a budding rhododendron, the disfigured bodies of two men protruded, their flesh penetrated by dozens of heavy nails. Both were missing their heads. They were half-buried in the mud under the shrub. Large, emerald green flies buzzed in the shadow under the branches. The stench was nauseating. She searched the shrubbery with her gaze, looking for a female-shaped body. A shaved leg stuck out of the tall grass in a wet hollow. It was a woman. Headless, but not mutilated. The nails on her hands were long and well-manicured; Amanda thought of Karoline's hand around her wine glass during that lunch before Easter. She turned away and threw up into the grass.

"What's going on?" Harlan put his arm around her and felt her forehead. "You're feverish."

"It's the stress. I don't handle it very well. I get, like, hallucinations." She tried to make it sound normal, nothing to worry about, but Harlan was scared. "Let's get you to a doctor."

"No, it's nothing dangerous. It's happened before."

Amanda closed her left eye. With some effort, she could will the image of the body away. Where it had lain stood a high, glazed pot that held a little rose bush. The rose looked freshly planted, loose soil carefully tucked around its trunk. She stuck her hand in and pulled the bush up.



Its thorns pricked her palm. Harlan stopped her when she started rooting around in the soil: "What are you doing?"

"I think there's something in here." But when she drove her hand into the pot, all she got was a fistful of dirt.

"You're bleeding. Watch it, you'll get dirt in the wound." Harlan attempted to brush the dirt off her hand and pulled her away from the pot. Amanda looked around. The other bodies were gone too, replaced by pots full of weed and ivy.

"The smell," Svetlana said. "Can you feel it? Sour and burnt." She was growing fearful, and gave Amanda a handkerchief to dry her hand with. "Sit down for a moment and we'll look around. I think someone has left footprints by the cellar door."

"I'll come with you." Amanda rubbed her hand against her jeans and turned her gaze toward the sky so she couldn't see the pots.

"We used to put the key under this flowerpot." Harlan turned over a row of pots that stood upside down on the wall next to the door. The key was in its spot, newly oiled and obviously used during the past year. He unlocked the door, and they stepped into a pottery. Next to the door stood a rack with shelves that could be rolled directly into the kiln. On a table, ceramic animals: dogs, cats, birds. The kiln took up the greater part of the room. It was a professional front-loaded model, disproportionately big for the little workshop. The work table and the floor were littered with pots of all sizes.

Svetlana opened the kiln door. The inside was scrubbed to a shine. It frightened her even more, and she glanced up at the flue as if some trace might be left behind. No one wanted to say it out loud: "*He burned her body here.*" Amanda scanned the workshop. There was no door to the rest of the house. Harlan put his hand on the yellow back wall, which was painted with green and brown geometric fields.

"There used to be a door here," he said. "To the wine cellar."

"Something's there," Amanda said. The wall felt wrong. She took a deep breath and stared at it with both eyes open. *If I can will the visions away, I should be able to will them into existence.*

Like a holographic projection, a red circle emerged in the air above a little wooden door covered in the same cheerful color fields as the



workshop's wall. Shimmering symbols, Greek and Hebrew, surrounded the circle. In the middle were three symbols she didn't recognize, more like sigils than letters. They glowed white. Her fingertips tingled as she touched the circle, and she felt a connection to Clive.

"Grandpa made this," she said, mostly to herself.

To her surprise, she knew what to do. Her fingers fumbled across the signs, as if hunting for the solution for a tile puzzle. Using her right hand, she pulled the three white sigils toward the edge where they faded away. Her left hand gingerly touched the letters. The circle went out, and the door became visible to Harlan and Svetlana.

"What the fuck," Harlan said. "Where did that come from?"

"You just couldn't see it before."

Amanda grasped the rusty handle and opened the door. A cloud of flies hit them. The room stank of rot. The darkness was compact. Svetlana turned on her cellphone's flashlight and shone it on the stone altar that held Clive's magic tools. She swept the beam to the right, and saw the row of skulls along the wall. It took her a moment to recognize Karoline's head. She almost dropped her phone.

"Don't touch anything," Harlan said. "Don't go inside. Don't touch anything. I'm calling the police." He fled outside and fumbled for the phone in his pocket.

"Come on, let's go outside. Don't touch anything." Amanda gently took hold of Svetlana and turned her away from the shelf where the head stood. She felt nauseous and wanted to scream *I didn't know, I had no idea*. Instead she herded the stunned Svetlana out of the workshop and pulled up a chair for her on the weed-covered gravel in front of the cellar door. Harlan vomited into a pot by the wall.

"I had no idea." Amanda put her arms around Svetlana, who sat completely still, weeping.

They waited in the garden until the first police patrol arrived. It was followed by more, and an inspector in a gray sports jacket led them over to a police van. They sat in there for half an hour while more cars parked outside the house and technical personnel in protective suits cordoned the lot off. After leaving DNA samples and fingerprints, the three of them were handed coffee in paper cups. Svetlana cried and wanted to call her



mother. The police inspector, a short woman who had introduced herself as Sara Busch, said that unfortunately it would have to wait. Harlan sat in pale stillness. He threw up again, this time into a plastic bag handed to him by Inspector Busch. Amanda held Svetlana and tried to answer the questions from the police. No, she didn't know where Clive was. She knew nothing about the skulls, other than that the head belonged to Karoline. No, they hadn't entered the house, just the cellar. Busch disappeared outside again and returned after fifteen minutes.

"We've set up a control center in the clinic next door," she said. "If you'll follow me—Superintendent Müller wants to talk to you."

In the clinic, police officers were setting up computers and communications equipment on folding tables in the outer waiting room. Busch showed the way through a corridor to an inner waiting room with soft couches and big ferns on side tables. A bizarre figure stood in the middle of the room, its pale and hairless skull nearly brushing the ceiling. From the maw of what looked like the face on a waterlogged corpse dangled a meter-long red tongue. A baggy gray suit hung in loose folds on the shapeless body. At first, Amanda thought it was a statue. Some kind of silicone model. But it moved, and the eyes that fixed on her were very alive. She giggled until tears ran down her face. She tried to stop but couldn't. *It's the shock*, she told herself. *I'm in shock*. The other two looked at her.

"Ms. Serner, if you'll come with me," the creature said. "We can talk in private over here."

Its voice was softer than Amanda had expected for such a powerful chest. She met the beady grayish-white eyes that lay deeply embedded in the flesh, and nodded. The creature took her to an examination room with a desk, an exam table and two patient chairs. The creature's huge bulk seemed to melt through the doorway, as if the wall wasn't entirely solid. Amanda tried to concentrate and double her vision in the same way that she had done in the garden. The creature faded away to a mere shadow, and a man stood in front of her, tall and burly, with a gray buzz cut. The suit fit him well. She was startled by how neat he looked.

"Müller." He held his hand out. Amanda took it. "You can see me."

"I'm trying not to."



“Very well. Have a seat.” He sat down behind the desk and flipped a laptop open. “You’re Amanda Serner. Born on April 12 1989, in Södertälje, Sweden?”

“That’s correct.”

“Your grandfather is Clive Connelly, born in London in 1950, currently a resident of Berlin?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me what you saw. Start at the beginning, and include everything this time.”

She told him about Svetlana’s pictures, about the corpses on the ground, the circle above the door and the temple with the skulls. Müller wanted to know how much she understood.

“You said you removed the circle. How were you capable of doing so?”

She had no answer for that. No, Clive hadn’t taught her how. He hadn’t taught her anything. They had barely met. A year ago, she didn’t know he existed. Müller was persistent.

“You’re tied to an art project he helped start up.”

“A coincidence,” she said, and wondered how he’d had time to figure that out.

“One last thing. How is it that you can see me?”

“No idea.”

“I’m going to assume that you won’t pass on anything we’ve said here, and that you won’t discuss the things you’ve seen with anyone.”

Amanda nearly nodded, but stopped herself. “I won’t say anything unless I have to,” she said. “But I can’t make any promises.” Not making a promise felt important.

Müller nodded as if he understood, and showed her out.







# Ⅹ. WINTERFELDTPLATZ: HARLAN

Thursday, May 11

It was early evening when the police dropped Harlan off at Winterfeldt-platz with strict orders to call if he heard from his dad. Amanda had escorted the shocked Svetlana home, but Harlan wanted to collect his thoughts in solitude. When he entered the apartment, he realized that something was wrong. There was a musty smell in the air, and the two blue ceramic dogs were missing from the hallway table. He called into the darkness:

“Hello? Dad, is that you?”

“Here. In the living room.”

Clive sat on the couch with a half-finished bottle of Smirnoff between his feet. Harlan stopped in the doorway.

“You have to call the police, Dad. It’s better if you do.”

“Come inside. We need to talk.”

The trap shut when Harlan stepped into the room. Darkness fell. His feet were stuck to the floor. He couldn’t move. As his vision gradually adapted to the murk, he saw a faintly glowing triangle on the oak floor. Its corners were marked by white fragments of something sharp—bones, maybe. The dogs’ shattered remains lay at his feet.

“I went to the house as soon as I realized you were there, but the police had already arrived. What the hell were you doing there?” Clive shouted at him, and Harlan’s mind was cast back to memories of Dad’s shouts, Mom’s shouts, slamming doors and shattered china.



“What did Karoline ever do to you?” he asked, surprised that his voice carried at all.

“It just happened. We were fighting. I lost control.”

“The way you fought with Mom? It’s dumb luck that she’s alive!” Harlan was shouting too, now. “Let me go, for fuck’s sake! Do you think everyone’s your bloody toy?”

“No. I’m just doing what I have to.”

Clive picked up a snub-nosed revolver from the floor next to the bottle. Harlan hadn’t seen it until now. He had time to think *the bastard is going to shoot me* before Clive put the barrel under his own chin and pulled the trigger. The bullet burst through the back of his head and lodged in the wall. Bone fragments, blood and brain matter welled out of the wound. His body crumpled onto the couch and the revolver dropped to the floor.

Harlan thought he was going to throw up, even though his stomach was completely empty. He couldn’t breathe. Then the pain gripped him, as if an invisible hand grabbed his entrails from under the diaphragm and pulled them up through his chest and out through his nose. The walls faded away, and he found himself staring up at a gothic brick colossus under a black sky. He was on his knees in a tangle of barbed wire. A creature in a suit leaned over him, a man’s face strapped to its head with hooks like a mask.

“Who the hell are you?” the creature said.

Harlan couldn’t reply. He didn’t know whether his tongue was still in his mouth. His whole body was a throbbing wound. The creature grabbed his hair and the remains of his tattered T-shirt and dragged him through the barbed wire toward the brick structure, past a misshapen clock tower covered in graffiti, through a dark gate and up a winding stone staircase. When they arrived at the top, Harlan’s sweater and most of his jeans were torn off. Deep scratches scored his body, and blood pumped out of a wound on the inside of his left thigh. *I’m bleeding to death*, Harlan thought. *I ought to be passing out*. But he didn’t. The creature threw him onto the cracked tiles of what looked like an old laundry room, with heavy stone tubs below narrow gothic windows that let in a jaundiced light.

“It’s not him,” another voice said. “The fucker tricked us.”



[Harlan]

[Harlan] made himself look at the dead body on the couch. Just a moment ago, that had been him. Now it was a mere thing, unusable even as a magical focus: the skull was ruined. Phantom pain shot through his jaw on the spot where he had pushed the barrel against it and pulled the trigger. I'm Harlan, he told himself. Harlan. Harlan.

The magical triangle went out. The soul it had been created to trap no longer remained in this reality. [Harlan] carefully stepped over the lines, avoiding the bone splinters in the corners, and turned away from the body on the couch. He felt his jacket pocket. It held a cellphone and a wallet full of cards, one of them the business card of a Superintendent Müller at the Berlin Criminal Police. He dialed the number.

"It's Harlan Connelly. I just got home. My father committed suicide. He shot himself in my living room. You don't have to rush the ambulance. He's dead."

"Don't touch anything. Wait there until we arrive."

He sat down in the hallway and concentrated on his breathing. Until the very last moment he had thought it wouldn't work—that it was just one last "fuck you" to the world. But here he was, seated in his son's body, avoiding the hallway mirror above his head, and it felt repulsive. Not at all like putting on a new suit. "It's like a drug. You keep wanting something better," the man who taught him the ritual had said. He had been a little crazy, and [Harlan] began to understand why. For the first time since he was five, he was on the verge of tears. His brain didn't grasp what was going on, but his body wanted to cry and he couldn't stop the tears from falling. He sat there bawling like an idiot when Müller and Inspector Busch rang the door, three technicians in tow.

"I'm so sorry," Busch said and put a hand on his shoulder in a way that made him understand that they had met before. "We'll make sure you get all the support you need."

It was only then that he looked up at the superintendent and saw the lictor protrude through the doorway. *Shit, it can see right through me*, he thought. *It's all over*. But Müller's human guise, which [Harlan] could glimpse with an effort, radiated compassion:



“You’ve had a terrible night. Your niece and your friend are alright considering the circumstances, if that’s of any comfort.”

[Harlan] had run into lictors before, in the East back in the Seventies and Eighties. “The Gestapo of Illusion,” George Patel had called them. [Harlan] thought that was a little harsh. They were more like guards in the prison called reality. They didn’t put on acts. If it had understood what had really happened, [Harlan] would have noticed. A technician peeked into the living room but didn’t enter. The others pulled on protective overalls in the hallway.

“What’s that on the floor?” the technician asked.

“I don’t know. The shards are two ceramic dogs that my father gave me a long time ago. He had shattered them and spread them out when I came in. He was still alive then. I didn’t see the gun until it was too late.”

They asked him to tell them the story, and he quoted the exchange with Harlan almost verbatim. He left out the parts about Harlan getting caught in some sort of trap.

“We’ll cordon the apartment off during the investigation,” Müller said. “It might be a couple of days until you can come back. I must warn you that journalists may get in touch, and that it might be trying. Is there somewhere you can stay, or would you like us to get you a hotel room?”

“A hotel is fine.”

They took him to a hotel on Lietzenburgerstraße, just a block away from his art gallery. He brushed off the irrational fear that someone might recognize him, and made himself look in the mirror next to the reception desk. It wasn’t as bad as he thought. Harlan and he shared the same hair. Almost the same nose. With a little good will, it might have been Clive in the Seventies. *It’ll be alright*, he told himself. *I can do this*.

## Amanda

Amanda and Svetlana sat in the kitchen by Mehringplatz with a cup of tea each. The cats had picked up on the anxiety in the air and fled into the wardrobe. A nearly emptied bottle of vodka stood on the table. After three phone conversations with Mum, Svetlana had decided not to go to her parents’ place in Eberswalde until the next day. The police had



called her twice to ask for additional information. There were online pictures of the house in Dahlem, surrounded by technicians in white protective suits, but the newspapers had yet to publish anything.

"I should go there before it reaches the news," Svetlana said.

"Wait until tomorrow. It's better that way. Let them get used to the thought that she's gone. Besides, you're not sober."

"Why didn't she tell me that he was beating her?" *Why didn't I understand*, she meant. Amanda had told her ten times not to blame herself.

"It was impossible to tell. I met them a month ago, right, and all we talked about was some fucking arts and crafts society."

"You knew there was something in the house. He must have told you something."

"He didn't. I saw things in your pictures—bodies, almost like ghosts. I saw them again in the garden. Where you saw pots, I saw corpses. I can't explain it."

"You made the door appear."

Amanda shook her head. The clarity she had felt by the circle in the cellar was gone. "I don't know how that happened." She burst into tears and wanted to think about Karoline. But all she could see in her mind's eye was Grandpa with a glass of whiskey in his hand, standing by the French windows in the apartment with all the paintings. "I came to Berlin to see him and understand who Grandma was." Her voice became a squeak.

"Are you psychic? Were you always?"

"Psychic?" *Hellseher*. It took Amanda a few second to translate the German word. It was a word that belonged to sordid reality shows. But it was something to hold on to. "Maybe. I had hallucinations when I was little. But they went away."

"Maybe I was meant to show you those pictures. So that we could find her."

Amanda knew with every fiber of her being that there was no such meaning. But it didn't matter. She didn't mention the superintendent's swelling form. It didn't fit with the explanation that right now made Svetlana look at her with gratitude and a little pity.

"Do you know why he murdered her? How she died?" Svetlana shared the dregs of the bottle between them.



"I don't know anything. I'm sorry."

"They'll catch him. Ulrich won't help him."

They finished the last of the vodka, and Svetlana led a semi-conscious Amanda to the couch. Half an hour past midnight, Müller rang the doorbell. Amanda roused herself and heard him talking to Svetlana.

"He's dead," Svetlana said when she came into the hallway.

"Clive Connelly is dead," Müller confirmed. "I'm sorry for your loss. Everything indicates that he took his own life."

"Does Harlan know?"

"His son was there. I just spoke with him. He's alright, considering the circumstances. The death happened in his home. We've taken him to a hotel while the technicians do their job."

Svetlana called her mother to tell her that her daughter's killer was dead. Müller asked Amanda whether she would need psychological help, but she shook her head. Maybe later. Not now.

"How did he die?" she asked. The police, of course, wouldn't answer. *You fucking asshole!* Only now that Clive was dead, Amanda found herself angry at him. *How the fuck could you kill yourself in Harlan's own home?* She thought about Karoline's severed head, and got the impulse to go to Mommsenstraße and slash the Russian paintings in the hallway. Boris the cat hid behind her legs, peering at Müller. Amanda had managed not seeing the superintendent's monstrous shape since she entered the hallway. Not looking at his face helped. She tried calling Harlan, but he didn't pick up.

"He might be asleep. Can I go see him?" she asked Müller. "I want to talk to him."

"I can drive you there."

"Go to him," Svetlana said. "I'm going to take a sleeping pill and drive out to Mom's place tomorrow." She gave Amanda a tight hug. "You can call me anytime if you need to talk."

"I'll call you tomorrow. Are you okay with me leaving?"

"Of course I am. Thanks for being here. You have no idea how much it means to me."

On the way down to the car, Amanda could no longer keep the image of the monstrous superintendent away. She let him swell into



her field of vision. It was almost soothing to watch the bulging rolls of fat slide into the driver's seat of the black BMW and push the side door open for her. If he understood how she saw him as they sped westward down the almost empty street along the Landwehr Canal, he didn't show it.

"How long will he have to stay at the hotel?" she asked.

"At least a couple of days. Maybe a week."

Müller stopped in front of the hotel. It wasn't a tourist hotel, rather a simple three-star place for business travelers and people who needed temporary lodgings. He led her past the reception and up to the fifth floor. A plainclothes policeman sat at the other end of the corridor.

"We're giving him some extra protection," Müller said. "The newspapers have begun to ask questions."

He knocked on the door next to the policeman. [Harlan] opened, dressed in the same black jeans and T-shirt as the night before. Amanda threw her arms around him. He smelled of sweat and something else that she recognized but couldn't place, and gave her an anxious hug back.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I heard what happened. I'm so sorry."

She didn't let go of his hand; instead, she pulled him over to the bed and sat down. She would have liked to take him in her arms and hold him until the shock let up, but he pulled away.

"Hartwig will be outside if you need him. I have to get back to the station," Müller said and closed the door behind him.

[Harlan] took a deep breath and sat down at the other end of the bed. He looked at her for a long moment, as if he was wondering about something. *It's the shock*, she told herself and caressed his cheek. And he hadn't slept for over twenty-four hours.

"I'm not feeling well," he said. "I would prefer to be alone for a while."

"You can stay with me in the meantime. You shouldn't be alone. I'm sure we can bring Hartwig along if you're worried."

"Maybe in a while. Not now."

"You need to get some sleep. I can stay here if you want me to. You haven't slept since yesterday. And that thing with Rachel was enough to break you, you know."



[Harlan] looked her with wide and empty eyes, as if it was the first time he'd heard about Rachel. While Amanda scooted closer, he took his cellphone out and scrolled through the list of calls. He looked at in- and outgoing calls to Rachel and seemed to count them. Amanda glimpsed the call from the night before, the one that had been over at half past eleven. It was 118 minutes long. [Harlan] stared at it too, and looked nauseous.

"Do you want me to call Rachel?" she said.

"No, no, not at all. I'll call her. Tomorrow. I have to collect my thoughts."

"Should I stay? Would you like me to?"

"You go on. We can meet up later. I'll call you. I need to be alone."

He was scared. Amanda could smell his fear and forced herself not to touch him. He had crawled deep into himself and shut all the doors. She felt helpless. "I'll come again tomorrow," she said. "Let the police know you need to talk to a psychologist? Please? I know you don't like it, but it's probably a good idea."

She kissed him on the neck before leaving. The hotel was a block south of Kurfürstendamm, less than a ten-minute walk from Grandpa's apartment. She didn't really want to go there, but she took a detour past Fasanenstraße and peeked through the display window of his art gallery. "Come by the gallery someday," Clive had said the first time they talked on the phone, while she unpacked in her studio. It was difficult to make anything out in the darkness. All she could see clearly was a bronze figure in a Pickelhaube. She had never been inside; she had felt a little bad for never coming by during autumn.

She would have to change to the red line at Gleisdreieck in order to get home, but she stayed on the train until Kottbusser Tor, the station closest to Bethanien. Housing projects, their balconies adorned with satellite dishes, turned their facades toward the open space crisscrossed by the subway tracks. It felt almost like back home in Södertälje, a livelier Geneta, open at all hours. Some guys were arguing outside a bar. Amanda gave them a wide berth and continued towards Bethanien, past the Turkish supermarket and the bakery. Here and there, streetlamps lit up spots of the park in front of the cultural complex. The two towers — *minarets*, Amanda thought — protruded like little horns above the



entrance. She let herself in and took the back stairs up to the studio. The concrete sows looked at her as she stepped inside.

“Harlan wants to be alone,” she told them. “And Grandpa is dead.”

She sat down with her back against The Fence and closed her eyes.







# 4. PRENZLAUER BERG: AMANDA

Tuesday, May 16

Pictures from Dahlem's House of Death streamed through tv and all other media outlets. Amanda had closed down her Facebook and Instagram accounts and put her phone in silent mode. When things were at its worst, she counted one call every ten minutes from unknown phone numbers. But none from Harlan. She had called his workplace and asked for him, but he hadn't been in.

"The police refuse to tell me where he is," she said to Emre. "He's gone into hiding."

"He must be going through hell right now. The municipal music school in the culture building complains about journalists looking for you."

"I never worked with that school."

"Exactly. Harlan's life is probably a nightmare, but there's nothing you can do right now. Have you considered going back to Sweden for a couple of weeks?"

They were in Amanda's apartment on Rochstraße, having takeaway from the Vietnamese place around the corner. Emre had fetched the food. Amanda was worried she might be developing a fear of people. Still, she had gotten off easy compared to Svetlana, who was featured as "the juvenile delinquent from Marzahn who became a woman and found her murdered sister's head in the magician's temple of death." The press had dug up a suspended sentence for vandalism from back when she was sixteen, and published school photos of a lanky teenager next to a picture of Svetlana and Karoline in front of a restaurant in Berlin.



“Svetlana has it worse,” Amanda said. “She’s stuck in Eberswalde where people try to photograph her if she so much as peeks out the door. There’s a memorial service this weekend, but the police say it might be some time before Karoline’s remains are returned. Svetlana says all this has her talking to her dad again. I guess that counts for something.” The police had found ashes and charred bone splinters in fifteen pots on the Dahlem lot. Karoline was the only one to be identified so far.

“Did you know her before all this?”

“No—we met at Harlan’s place a couple of weeks ago. Now it feels like I know more about her than I know about anyone else in Berlin. We talk on the phone at night.”

Amanda hadn’t managed to work since they found Karoline. The morning after, when she woke up on the studio floor, she tried to start on the frames that were to hang on *The Fence*. But when she tried to fix a piece of wood to the work bench, her hands refused to obey her. That’s when she called Svetlana, who had just arrived at her parents’ home in Eberswalde. Svetlana’s mom took the phone and thanked Amanda, on the verge of tears:

“Lana told me that you helped her, helped us find out the truth about Karo.”

“She might want to leave Berlin too for a while. This will pass.”

“I can’t let it go. A year ago, I didn’t even know Grandpa existed. I can’t stop thinking about him. If you’d seen that house, you’d understand.”

“You need a breather.”

“You just want me gone so that the journalists will go away.”

That made him smile. The newspapers had yet to find out about Clive’s connection to the project, but it was only a matter of time. Amanda had asked Emre if they really didn’t know that she was Clive’s granddaughter when they invited her. *Not at all*, he assured her. When he discovered her sculptures in Stockholm, he had never heard of Clive.

They finished the spring rolls, and Amanda brewed coffee into two stoneware mugs. She put a box of Butterkeks on the table and filled a flowery cream jug with milk for the coffee. She rented the three-room apartment from a classmate at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. The building’s façade was freshly plastered, but the



apartment itself hadn't been renovated since the early Nineties. The furniture was big, drab and worn. The china looked like it had been won at some Swedish farm auction: chipped vintage cups with blue flowers, white IKEA plates. Amanda had supplemented with flea market purchases—brightly colored bowls and tubs, which Emre fiddled with as if estimating their value. They waited for seven o'clock. They had made an appointment with Renate in the dilapidated children's hospital in Weißensee, famous in the graffiti circuit, which Amanda had found out when she googled it.

"What does she want? Other than to show her students off?" Renate's youth class received grants from the municipality, and was the Wall Project's main revenue item. Before Renate started up Junge Art, as the class was called, Mauer II had slowly been draining its funds dry.

"I guess she's wondering what happened to Clive. They were old friends."

"It's all in the papers."

"They lived together in the Seventies—Renate, Moritz and Clive. They were close, I think. Moritz is devastated." Emre had tried to talk to him the evening before. A girl in the commune had told him that Moritz had taken something and lay unconscious in his room. "But he's alive," the girl said. "We went upstairs and checked his pulse."

"Renate knew your grandmother. Maybe she wants to talk about that."

Amanda hadn't known that. Grandma Beate had never spoken of Berlin—not even mentioned Clive for as long as she was alive. It was in her deed that Amanda and her mother Helena found Mom's birth certificate, and with that her father's name: Clive Connelly. There was also a small bundle of letters from him, dated between 1969 and 1970. Short reports of what was going on in Berlin, ending with the queries about the baby. He wrote in colloquial English, and called Beate "Dearest". The letters might as well have been lifted from a Fifties' working class documentary, although made more complicated by the row of grotesques at the bottom of each page. Having read the letters, Amanda wanted to meet Clive. She hoped to fill in the blanks fifty years after the fact. Helena knew better and refused to have anything to do with him. Amanda had a feeling that she knew more than she let on. They had spoken a



day after Clive's death. Mom said that she'd seen it in the news. She was audibly drunk; the conversation was brief.

They called a taxi at a quarter to seven and went downstairs to the street. The air was sticky in a sudden tropical heat wave that had people getting their summer wardrobe out. Two girls in shorts and tank tops danced past them down the sidewalk, and Amanda regretted putting a jacket on. The hospital, closed down for two decades, lay at the edge of the Fauler See nature reserve east of the city. Amanda had never been there. At some point Harlan had talked about going there by bike to look at a lake frequented by birds. The driver dropped them off on the sidewalk that ran along the railroad track across the street from the hospital grounds. The old hospital park had run completely wild. The buildings gaped like burnt-out shells. There wasn't a single undamaged window pane, and the roofs were partially caved in. The wind carried teenage voices and the smell of grilled hot dogs into the street.

Behind the main building that crouched like a brown colossus from before ww1, an oil drum burned among last year's leaves under the tall trees. A space had been cleared in the brushwood. Six youths holding hot dogs and soda cans had crammed themselves into a broken couch. Five others stood on ladders leaned against the wall, spraying the brown plaster façade with color, supervised by a lean woman with her frizzy hair gathered into a pony tail. She was dressed in paint-stained white overalls, as if she had just stepped out of her studio. When she spotted Emre, she ran over and kissed him on the cheek. Amanda recognized her from the pictures in the Wall Project catalog.

"This is Amanda Serner," Emre said. "You haven't met before, right?"

They shook hands, and Renate's handshake lingered as she scrutinized Amanda. Just like Moritz and Clive she looked younger than seventy, but the face around her sharp blue eyes was lined.

"I'm sorry I didn't call you earlier. I was going to seek you out when you came to Berlin, but I chickened out. Being reminded of Clive was tougher than I thought. I had put him completely out of my mind." She glanced at Emre and the kids, and lowered her voice. "Maybe I suspected something. It feels like I should have." Amanda pulled Renate into the shade under the tall trees, where they could speak in private.



"I'm just trying to understand what happened."

"He's dead, isn't he? I only know what I've seen in the news."

"He shot himself. He had a temple full of skulls in his basement. Something... satanic. I don't know."

"He was into that kind of thing in the Eighties, I think. I assumed back then that it was just for fun."

"Emre said you lived together in the seventies."

"We moved in together in Seventy-two, he and I and Moritz, in Bethanien. It was one of the first squats. Moritz and I were a couple then."

"Did it have something to do with Mauer 11?"

"Yes. George Patel lived there too in the beginning. We worked together as a group. A lot of idealism, not a lot of money. We did well for a while. Until Clive tried to sell the project to his criminal buddies from the East. Ulrich Schaffer, if you've met him."

"I've heard of him. What was he supposed to do with an art project?"

"It's not just an art project. Clive used it to smuggle wares and people between East and West. When Schaffer started selling drugs, he wanted control of it, and Clive was in his pocket. There was a big fight. We threw Clive out, but I thought he'd have gone on the straight and narrow since then." Renate looked to be on the verge of tears. "The news says they've found fifteen charred bodies. I still can't get my head around it."

"I haven't watched the news. It just makes me anxious. Emre said you knew my mother."

"We were in the same circles. I got to know her through Clive. She made clothes for the theater. Clive made posters and programs for all kinds of things: parties, theater, music. When Beate got pregnant, she went back home to Sweden. I thought she was going to have an abortion. We lost touch, and I felt bad about that."

"Grandma never mentioned him by name."

"It's good to see you. Really. You look a little like Beate, do you know that?"

The wall painters climbed down from the ladders and put the spray cans in bags on the ground. The painting covered what had once been the hospital entrance, a short staircase up to two doors in a tower-like building. Some of the letters in the words *Säuglings-* &



*Kinderkrankenhaus* could still be made out on the wall. The youths stepped back to survey the shapes that spread out organically from an asymmetrical window upstairs—white and purple knotty branches that here and there morphed into tentacles. The students were in their late teens. Secondary school and high school, Amanda guessed. Three girls formed a group in the middle, slightly more well-dressed than the others in designer jeans and sweaters that looked like they came from a thrift shop, carefully chosen to look unique. Two boys kept their distance from them and each other: one of them tall, black and broad-shouldered in a T-shirt; the other shorter, in a hoodie and knitted cap despite the summer heat.

“Have you ever worked with adolescents?” Renate asked.

Amanda hadn’t. She had poured beer at a pub in Stockholm’s Old Town and moonlighted in a framing workshop. During the last two years she had been fortunate enough to make a living off her art. Her costs of living were low. She funneled all her money into her studio and rent for her apartment, which she had shared with a Russian student until a month ago. She had considered looking for a new roommate before the whole thing with Grandpa happened.

“Sculpture is all I can do. Right now, it doesn’t feel like I can do that either.”

“You could help me out. It’s an art class, even though it might not look like it tonight, and it’s hard to find assistants with the right background. I thought you might need a break after this Clive business.”

“Emre says I need it. Did he talk to you about that?”

Renate’s look told her that he had. Over by the building, the two boys had relocated to the left wing, where the windows were close to ground level, and climbed the façade. The taller one reached up and took hold of the windowsills on the next floor. His arms were thick, ropy with muscles that must have required hours in the gym. His friend in the cap struggled to stay where he was.

“Chadi, for fuck’s sake! I’ll kill you if you fall down,” a girl shouted in broken German from the sagging couch.

Emre walked over to the façade and started a conversation with the climbers, ready to help out should they lose their footing. “Some



are born to be boy scouts,” Moritz had said when Amanda asked him what he thought about the project leader. The first time she met Emre, she hadn’t thought so. The same week she arrived in Berlin, he invited her to the opening of the gallery he ran together with Therese—a vivacious woman with a predilection for big, monochrome spaces. There, he had sauntered around in his tailored suit, sounding like an exhibition catalog as he talked to the upper-class ladies from Charlottenburg and Dahlem. Now, his eyes roamed to keep track of all the kids at the same time.

“Shall we sit down for a while?” Renate said. “I need a beer. Just thinking about Clive makes me tired.”

They sat down on a couple of broken garden chairs by the oil drum. The sun was setting, and cellphones glowed blueish-white inside the building. Voices and running footsteps echoed through the corridors.

“Is it a class from some art school?” Amanda asked.

“No, they’re from all over. I’ve put the group together from students I deemed appropriate,” Renate said. “Chadi in the hoodie up there, and his cousin Sara.” She nodded at the girl on the couch. “They lived in the refugee camp in Lichtenberg until this winter. I think they have an apartment now. Chadi is really gifted. He’ll amount to something. Alex, the one who can climb, is failing an electrician apprentice program. Other than that, they’re mostly from aesthetically profiled high schools and secondary schools.”

The trio that had been busy spraying the stairwell’s doors and windows came up to say hello.

“You know Nadine von Kreisler, right?” said the girl who had lingered by the mural, improving details until the very last minute. Her dark hair was caught in a straggly ponytail; she wiped paint off her fingers with a rag, seemingly afraid to stain her pants. “My name is Julia. Renate said maybe you can help us find new modes of expression. She showed us pictures of your sculptures in Stockholm.” When Amanda glanced at Renate, she looked a little embarrassed.

“Amanda. I’m working on something with Nadine for an exhibition in Pankow. She’s made a sound installation that goes with it. Do you know Nadine?”



“Kim’s the one who knows her. They go to the same parties.”

Amanda shook hands with Kim. She looked older than the other two, tall and deeply tanned with dark, solemn eyes. She had stood a step behind the others by the wall, watching them work. The third girl, with broad cheekbones and plaited blonde hair with blue streaks, extended a hand too.

“Tamara. I’m actually into computer graphics. We go to the Heinz-Berggruen high school. Over at Theodor-Heuss-platz.”

Amanda nodded as if she understood. She wouldn’t have been able to locate one single school in Berlin if her life depended on it. But she liked the tentacle things the girls had painted on the façade. They gripped the body of the building in a good way.

“I’m not on the aesthetic program. I’m in Latin and modern languages,” Kim said, as if it was important to clarify this from the start.

“You’re great at creating shapes with spray paint,” Tamara said. “Better than I am.”

Renate began picking up empty cans from the piles of last year’s leaves and put them in a bag. “What do you think about working with us?” she asked Amanda. “You can try it out right away and we’ll see how it goes.”

“Maybe. Unless it’s inappropriate, considering all the fuss in the media.”

“Not at all. It doesn’t mean anything.”

“Renate explained it to us before you came,” Julia said. “We understand.”

Amanda wondered what it was that they understood, but it was of less importance. The smiling teenagers made her relax. Julia asked her what she thought about the tentacles by the window. They looked nice, Amanda said. Especially the yellow and white streaks. When the three of them brightened by the praise, she felt happy. The weight across her chest lifted. She put a pouch of tobacco under her lip and watched as the girls each got a can of beer from the cooler bag, then disappeared into the ruin. Emre left the climbers, who had made it into the house, and sat down on the other side of the oil drum.

“I hope you don’t feel like you’re under pressure,” he said. “Let me know if this isn’t your thing. I just thought you needed to get away for a while.”



"It's okay. I don't know if I'll be of much use, but we can try it out."

"A couple of strong hands are a great help," Renate said. "I'm too old, really. But first I want you to tell me about Beate and Helena. I've thought about them a great deal over the years. Where did they end up?"

*In hell*, Amanda thought. Or maybe not entirely. Grandma stayed as a proofreader at the newspaper *Länstidningen* in Södertälje for the rest of her working life. During summer weekends she would sit in the tiny cottage by Malmsjö beach, doing crosswords and having sickly-sweet drinks with Agne and Filippa from the next house over. Mom wanted to study to be an architect, but when Amanda was born those plans had come to nothing. And after the divorce, when Amanda was nine, she started drinking for real. "I think we have a disposition for substance abuse. I try to keep that in mind."

"Your grandfather definitely did."

Amanda tried to tell Mom's story without making it sound too sad. Taking on jobs as a travel guide in France while Amanda sat in the cottage with Grandma and pined for the city. In later years, the gigs as a guide on Birka and the tourist boats in Stockholm. "It works as long as she stays sober," she said.

"What about you? Why did you become a sculptor?"

"I wanted to be an industrial designer at first. I drew a lot as a kid. It was like an escape from reality when things got bad. I drew everyday objects like furniture or machines. People said I was good at it. But when I got admitted to the Academy of Arts, I realized that I didn't have the flair for design. I don't get what people consider good-looking. So I ended up sculpting. That's three-dimensional too, but without the what-people-want mindset. It's more about me and the material, if you get what I mean."

"I think so. I guess I'm more social about everything I do. These days I mostly paint mandalas. People like them. It pays the bills."

"They're nice. Complex. I'm worried that the sculpture I'm making for Pankow is losing its shape. It's like it's all just turning into one big tangle."

"Not to worry," Emre interjected. "I'll let you know if you go completely off track."



Amanda changed the subject so she wouldn't have to talk about The Fence: "What did you mean when you said that Mauer II wasn't just an art project? How could Grandpa use the project to smuggle things?"

"I can show you. But not now while students are here. Can we meet here tomorrow morning?"



# 10. WEISSENSEE: AMANDA

Wednesday, May 17

At sunrise the next day, Amanda walked back through the gates of the old children's hospital. The grounds looked even sadder in the morning light. The brown turn-of-the-century buildings were sinking into the brushwood. *Beyond all hope*, was her layman diagnosis. *Tear the whole damn thing down and turn it into a park*. Renate was supposed to show up in half an hour. Amanda had woken up early and called Svetlana, whom she knew got up at five in the morning. She told her about the art students, about how Renate had shown them pictures of her sculptures in Stockholm and made her sound like a celebrity. "I don't know if I have the guts to teach them," she said. "I know nothing about street art and even less about pedagogy. I'm not that great a painter." Svetlana convinced her it would be fine. So here Amanda was, dressed in heavy boots and a camel-colored anorak. "Dress for all kinds of weather. Don't count on the heat to last," Renate had said.

Amanda chose a gaping doorway at random and stepped inside. The bombastic architecture of the early 20th century had endured the decay surprisingly well. Vaulted ceilings and curved window recesses in the tower-like annexes had been transformed into partially painted grottoes. Newer sections reminded her of zombie movie sets with their shattered windows and broken furniture. She walked through the house and waited for Renate by what must have been the main entrance, outside the stairwell that the students had adorned with branches and tentacles the night before. From underneath the fresh



paint, an older image surfaced in the morning light: an abstract pattern of brightly colored circles. Amanda recognized the shapes from the inner wall in Clive's pottery workshop. The thick lines meandered around the gaping doorways, rolling imperceptibly like a slow river. There was something else there too, just like in the temple. At first she wanted to look away, but then she sharpened her gaze and tried to double her vision. There was no clear circle here, rather a blotchy pattern of lines in the air. They swept up around the tower and further into the ruin.

"Can you see anything?" Renate stood behind her by the burnt-out oil drum below the tree in front of the building. She was dressed for a walk in the forest, in a windbreaker and heavy shoes, a knapsack slung over her shoulder.

"Grandpa hid his temple with a pattern like that. Did he learn that from you?"

"We learned together."

Amanda looked closer. The paint was sprayed on in several layers, more intricate than she had thought at first; broad, gently indented rivers in black and white divided fields of brown, green and yellowish red. A white line tingled at her touch, as if the paint wrapped itself around her index finger. The line tasted of Renate and of the teens, Julia's purple fingernails, Kim's brown eyes. The connection to her palate gave her a start.

"Could anyone learn how to do this?"

"Basically yes, but it's time-consuming and never worth the effort unless there's something you want to protect."

"What are you protecting here?" In Amanda's mind, not even Berlin's humblest hobo would want to live here.

"Come with me and I'll show you."

They walked through a side door which was half-covered by straggly shrubbery, and emerged into an entirely painted corridor. All the woodwork was gone. Vaulted doorways opened onto a stairwell. Windowpanes lay in small fragments on the floor. A spray-painted minotaur in a black suit stared at Amanda from the wall, pointing down the corridor.



“It’s a labyrinth,” Renate said. “You read the signs to find your way. These kinds of building make the best labyrinths. Come with me, it’s faster that way.”

A tight formation of snakes streamed down the left-hand wall. In the stairwell, they were met by a closely woven pattern of cogwheels and levers that covered the walls and ceiling. Amanda began to see glowing lines in the picture, much like the ones she had disarmed in Clive’s cellar. Renate led her around the hallway in the stairwell until they reached the worn stone stairs. The second floor was darker, and the glowing lines shone with a clearer light. The ceiling, walls and floor were covered in black strokes, as if someone had counted days out in a prison cell. At the end of the corridor, the strokes segued into pale, glowing symbols. They formed a path through the dark rooms and up to the attic, where the last of the fires had devoured half the roof. In the middle of the floor, around a pillar that bore up the ceiling, a mandala had been constructed from paint, wood, junk and rags.

“The kids helped me make the circle,” Renate said. “That will make it easier for them to use it if needed. But I have yet to show them what it really is. They think it’s just a work of art. You have to go slow with teenagers.”

She carefully stepped into the circle and invited Amanda to follow. At first, nothing happened. Amanda stared down at her feet and tried not to destroy the mandala. When she looked up again, the roof was disappearing. Here and there, roof tiles hung suspended midair against a black sky. The sooty joists faded away before her eyes, like washing off a glass wall. She looked out at a barren townscape, a ruined city that sprawled across the horizon.

“Metropolis,” Renate said. “The first city. Mauer II is about opening the door to this place. That was George Patel’s vision. Moritz and I have continued his work. Clive was a part of it in the beginning.”

*This is a psychosis, no matter what the psychologist says. The other stuff was just a tremor.* Amanda closed her eyes and concentrated to look beyond the ruins, or at least glimpse Berlin beneath the vision of the blasted city. But when she opened her eyes, all she could see were miles and miles of a chaotic cityscape, big and small houses jumbled



together. She saw something in the confusion that could possibly be the TV tower in Alexanderplatz. Lights glimmered here and there. The sky was dark. The wooden floor beneath her feet had been replaced by neat flagstones in gray and black. The circle was still there, but only as a shadow, the mandala's shape hinted at as a darker tinge in the stone.

"I'm not feeling well," she said. "Can we go back downstairs?"

"We're not in Berlin anymore. There's no way back here. But you don't have to be afraid." Renate took her hand and squeezed it to emphasize her words: "This is real. Search your feelings, and you'll know it to be true."

Amanda didn't want to search her feelings. She tried to look around without thinking too much. They stood on a roof terrace with playfully baroque parapets. Tall, ornamented urns balanced on the corners of the parapets, uncomfortably reminiscent of the pots in Grandpa's garden. A black moon hung low above the city's silhouette, whose absurdly tall buildings scored the sky. She decided to believe in it. At least for the time being. *If it's a dream, it doesn't matter what I believe.*

"Does anyone live out there?" she asked.

"Not many. Mostly people who have gone astray, or are on the run. It's not a hospitable place."

"And you want to open doors to here?"

"We think the gates are about to open, no matter what we do. Maybe this year, maybe in a decade, but when it happens it's wise to have had a look first."

"Can we go out there?" Amanda wanted to touch it. Better than to just stand there and doubt whether her eyes were deceiving her.

Renate took her hand and led her out of the circle. The children's hospital—or a building with the same shape—still stood beneath their feet. But the park had been replaced by houses, a confusion of low roofs and alleys that crept up to meet the hospital's walls. Behind them, where they had ascended through the stairwell, a slender ladder led down to the floor below.

"It's not the same house," Renate said before Amanda had time to ask. "Rather it's where the house in Berlin got its inspiration. Whoever built this might have glimpsed this building through the Illusion."

"Why are you showing me this?"



"You asked about the smuggling. And Moritz says you cast magical concrete sows. I was hoping you would see the protective spell on the hospital wall. You did."

"I saw bodies in the garden in Dahlem that no one else could see. That's how we found the temple. Grandpa probably thought that no one else could see it. That he was safe."

"That kind of spontaneous vision is rare. He must have been surprised. Moritz can do it with an effort, but you seem to be better at it."

"It's happened before. I saw things when I was little. Buildings that weren't there."

"Metropolis. You saw Metropolis."

"Maybe I inherited it from Grandpa."

"That's not how it works. It's not hereditary."

They climbed down a floor and emerged into a hall with gothic arches that made Amanda think about the restaurant in Bethanien. Three mattresses lay in a corner. There was a sour smell of refuse and piss. The vaulted ceiling was painted with the same protective patterns as the entrance to the children's hospital.

"Did the kids paint this?"

"Not the students we saw yesterday. I brought a class here a couple of years ago to do it. Some people use it as an occasional hiding place. Criminals, refugees, people from both Berlin and Metropolis. It's not an entirely safe place, but safer than the city outside." She looked like she was about to speak again, but decided to be quiet.

"Do Emre and Nadine know anything about this? Have they been here?"

"Emre knows, but he doesn't want to see more than he has to. Of the ones working in the project it's just me and Moritz, and now you, who have been here. And Clive, of course."

They continued down another floor to a windowless store room where wooden crates lay stacked against the wall.

"We stored smuggled goods here," Renate said. "And people, whom we smuggled between East and West. At first it was mostly people from the East who wanted to go West. Then, in the Seventies, the authorities started deporting people West. Then many wanted to go back and visit."



George taught us how to make the roads. Clive figured out how to make money off them. Come.”

She opened a wooden door onto a narrow alley in twilight gloom. Something many-legged scurried away into the darkness.

“Is it evening here?”

“Time passes differently here, but there is no sun. It’s eternal twilight.”

“Who built all of this? Where are they now?”

“We built this. Humans. This is where we come from.”

The houses that bordered the alley were built from hewed stone, here and there patched and reinforced with concrete. Graffiti covered the walls. Renate explained that the murals marked a safe path, a shortcut between two gates to Berlin. She led Amanda on a winding journey between windowless walls that grew higher and higher. The alley opened onto a great square. On the right stood something that looked like a palatial banking building of glass and steel. The façade seemed to billow in waves, rising tall through the yellow mist that drifted through streets and alleys.

“That looks like the Shell building by the Spree,” Amanda said. “The same wavy shape.”

“Shapes from the city in the Illusion are often mirrored here. Sometimes entire buildings are duplicated.” Renate pointed at the TV tower, which was more visible from here. It looked just like the tower Amanda could glimpse from her kitchen window.

“It’s the same tower,” Renate said. “Some structures are both here and in our reality at once. There are people who can use them to move through the Illusion’s veils, but it’s risky. I prefer the labyrinths and the marked paths.”

“You think this is some sort of more real reality? And that our world is like the shadows on the wall of Plato’s cave?”

“We’re fairly sure that it is. Most magicians call our reality the Illusion. George Patel called it the Prison. He wanted to tear it down. I don’t think that was very well thought through. In any case, it’s falling apart. That’s why I take the kids here. They need to learn, need to deal with it.”

“I’m wondering if both you and all this are a hallucination. Or a dream. Maybe I stumbled in the ruins and hit my head.”



“Come, let’s sit down.”

They sat down on a stone bench in front of the banking building that probably wasn’t one. The whole ground floor seemed to be taken up by one great hall filled with stone and glass cubes of various sizes. Someone had scrawled on the glass behind the bench; little grinning men marched across the façade.

“Those are Grandpa’s doodles.”

“We painted here in the Seventies. They’re preserved better here—there’s no weather, and the place itself is timeless.” Renate took a chocolate bar from her bag and gave Amanda half. “It’s part of the excitement. You don’t know how much time has passed when you come back. But along our marked paths, time passes almost like in the Illusion.”

Amanda ate the chocolate one square at a time and studied the house on the other side of the square, a more modest palace of gray and pink stone. Through a gaping window on the second floor she could see a chandelier that didn’t seem to belong there. It looked a little too ordinary.

“And you claim that humans built this?” she asked.

“A long time ago. Before we were locked inside the Illusion.”

“I don’t think I want to hear any more right now.” Amanda stood up and ran her hand across the glass wall. It was almost revoltingly smooth and warm against her skin. “How did you make the paint stick to this?”

“Magic, or whatever you want to call it. The wall allows adornments if you know how. That’s how we figured out that this is a human creation. It obeys us if we know what to do. But we should get going, before someone notices we’re here.”

The alley continued on the other side of the square and widened into an avenue between classicist, stern skyscrapers clad in stone. They didn’t encounter anyone, but sometimes the sound of running footsteps could be heard in the distance. Renate stopped by a traffic island between the lanes on the avenue and motioned for Amanda to lift the lid off a manhole in the paving. It was an ordinary sewer manhole from Berlin, a relief of the TV tower etched on its surface.

“I can barely lift it on my own,” Renate said. “The day I can’t, I’ll have to stop doing this. Let me go first.” She took out a couple of headlamps from her backpack and gave one to Amanda. “It’s dark down there.”



They climbed down iron footholds and stepped into a long, vaulted hall where doorways led in several directions. A rusted machine that vaguely resembled a combine harvester stood by one of the walls. More machines could be glimpsed in the darkness beyond the headlamps' beams.

"I'll give you a proper tour later," Renate said. "There's a lot in here to excite a sculptor."

The safe path glowed like an emergency exit, marked by fluorescent dots when Amanda sharpened her gaze. The beam of her headlamp didn't reach the ceiling. Something rattled up there.

"Should be bring the art students here?" she asked. It didn't feel entirely safe.

"Maybe, if we think they can handle it. I want to get to know them better first. We're almost there. You'll have to be quick when you step through."

She opened a little steel door and pushed Amanda ahead of her through the opening. They emerged into a tunnel. From the sound of distant trains, Amanda gathered that it was the subway.

"Bahnhof Zoo," Renate said.

Five minutes later, they stood at a table outside the bakery under the railway bridge and had a late breakfast.

"You want me to help you with this," Amanda said.

"As much as you have the will and strength to."

"Maybe we can start out with the street art and the kids? And do this Metropolis thing later?"

"We'll start with the paintings. They are the foundation, after all."



# 11. PURGATORY: HARLAN

Harlan had lost his voice and could scream no more. He lay naked on a cold stone bench. A creature wrapped in oily veils was stitching his wounds with steel wire, but blood still ran freely from his leg and puncture wounds all over his body. Blood covered the floor like a mirror—more blood than a human body should contain.

“Send him off to his old man,” the stitcher said and bit the wire off with iron teeth that glinted behind the veil.

He spoke Cockney, like a thug from a Sixties movie. All three of them spoke with deep male voices, led by the entity with a sliced-off human face strapped to its head like a mask. The Face leaned over Harlan.

“Clive Connelly pissed on our agreement. We were supposed to have him, and got you. What are you going to do about it, Squirt? Lie there and whinge?”

Harlan just shook his head. He couldn’t speak. Part of him wanted to see three surgeons looming over him on the operating table, but he couldn’t really believe it. It wasn’t a dream. He could hear the noise of a grinding machine and the clatter of iron in the background.

“You see, Squirt, it’s like this: you’re going to pay your old man’s debt by doing us a favor.”

The third creature, a flayed body dressed in a floor-length cassock, leaned a bundle of rusty reinforcement bars of various lengths against the stone bench and nodded at the Face.

“It’s a deal then,” The Face said. It took Harlan’s paralyzed hand and shook it. “First we’ll spruce you up to even out the odds for when it’s time for you to fetch him for us. It won’t cost you extra.”



The flayed priest took Harlan's left foot and cut an inch-wide incision in the meat by his ankle. Pinning the foot down with its left hand, it drove the first iron bar into the flesh, along the shin up to the knee. Harlan found his voice again and screamed. One by one, the iron bars were inserted into his limbs and along his spine. The priest and the veiled one hammered at the flesh and joints with clubs until iron melded with bone. The Face dripped something that looked like motor oil over his skin. It foamed and sizzled. Harlan floated in an ocean of pain. He screamed and screamed. Finally, they turned him onto his stomach and drove two red-hot pipes into his shoulders. The air stank of burning flesh. The veiled one walked over to a table by the row of windows and picked something up: two wings built of junk and black feathers. The Face fastened them to the iron pipes on Harlan's back.

"There we go! Can you sit up, Squirt? We won't have any whingeing."

To his astonishment, Harlan could swing his legs over the side of the bench and sit up. The pain hovered around him like a red aura, but he could move. When he extended his wings, blood pumped out through the iron pipes. Joints and wounds dribbled.

"You're not completely water-tight," The Face said. "But it'll do. It's not like you're going dancing. This might sting a bit."

The creature reached for Harlan's face. It put its fingers against his forehead, and suddenly the bone gave way like wet cardboard. Pain shot through his skull as the fingers groped inside the cranium and pulled out a handful of mangled brain matter. The cranial bone closed up again, and The Face stuffed the white brain matter into an empty tin.

"I'll take your name and some memories as deposit. You'll have them back once we have old Connelly."

The avenging angel searched his memory for his name. It had been there just a moment ago; he was sure of it. He tried to hide his panic from the three demons.

"One more thing," The Face said. "I'll give you something so the cunt knows we sent you."

The creature gripped the metal hooks that strapped the sliced-off face to its head. It pulled at them, clumsily enough that some bits of skin came with it, and unfastened the face from its head. The blank surface



beneath showed no facial features. It carefully fastened the face on the head of the avenging angel, who closed his eyes and chased after slippery memories, oblivious to what was happening to his body. The new face melded with the old.

“He’s in Berlin,” the Faceless One said. “Fly over there and get the fucker.”

The avenging angel unfolded its wings and rose through the ravaged roof and across the burning plains of Inferno.







# 12. REINICKENDORF: [HARLAN]

Wednesday, May 17

[Harlan] sat in front of his laptop in a bare hotel room in Reinickendorf. When the press found him, the police had moved him further out from the city center. He had spent three days going through his son's email and texts. He had closed Facebook down after scrolling through seven years' worth of photos and posts. He would have preferred to get drunk and fall asleep on the bed, but he willed himself to go on. A policeman sat outside the door, just as much to protect him as to monitor him. Müller didn't trust him, but he would be allowed to go back home to Winterfeldtplatz soon anyway. It wasn't as if they could stop him. He got up and poured himself half a glass of whiskey. No more than a quarter bottle a day, he had told himself. He had to stay on his feet. Money would become a problem soon. Harlan's work email was even more unintelligible than he had expected. He wouldn't make it through a single day at Allianz without being declared brain damaged. He would have to resign sooner or later. Clive's inheritance—he had left everything to Harlan and Helena—was frozen while the investigation went on. It could be months or years before it was over. Fortunately, Harlan had been careful, and saved up around forty thousand euros.

He went over to the window and looked outside. It was late. No journalists; they hadn't found their way to this hotel yet. Besides, the newspapers had lost interest when they realized that all the skulls except for Karoline's belonged to men who had been dead for a decade or more. *Could have told you*, he said under his breath and peered down



at the beer garden outside the tavern next to the hotel. It was located in an older building with a saddle roof. The tables and parasols spread out across a little plaza. A bulky shape crouched on the roof ridge. Some drunk, [Harlan] thought at first, but then he saw the wings. It wasn't human. It looked straight at him and took off with a roar that only he could hear. The window collapsed as the angel—that was the word that came to [Harlan's] mind—crashed into the room and took half the window frame with it. A cloud of glass splinters enveloped him and pricked the bared skin. The wings, organic feathers draped over an iron skeleton, stuck out at unnatural angles. But [Harlan] could only see the face, Liam's face, as stiff and expressionless as in the dream.

"They want you to come with me," the angel said in Harlan's voice. "They want to talk to you. You tricked them."

It took a moment before [Harlan] found his voice and could reply. "You have no fucking right to use my boy's voice. Do you hear me? Go to hell!"

He tried to back away, but the wings were large enough to fill half the room. The angel nervously shook its head, sheepish in a way that Liam would never have allowed, before it gripped Clive's shoulders and threw him against the wall. Something cracked in his left arm, but he ignored the pain and crawled under the bed.

"Help!" he screamed and hoped that the policeman was still out there.

The door to the hallway opened, and a policeman looked inside. He cried out when he saw the angel and went for his service gun. The angel turned around as if to speak, but the policeman continued to scream, flicked the safety off and opened fire. Feathers whirled around the room. A second policeman stormed in and emptied his whole clip into the angel's chest, while his stupidly brave colleague stepped in front of the bed to protect [Harlan]. The angel hesitated and raised a hand toward the police, who put one last bullet in it. Then it turned away and flew back to whence it came. The floor was a sea of blood and black feathers. The room reeked of Inferno, but [Harlan] was fairly sure that the policemen couldn't tell.

"Call Müller!" he shouted at the police. "Now! He needs to get over here." A lictor might possibly overpower the angel if it returned.



The policeman who had stood in front of the bed, a young man in a crewcut, fumbled for his cellphone and dialed the superintendent's number. [Harlan] stayed under the bed until the lictor showed up ten minutes later. He came alone, without a technician or assistant. Instead of asking what had happened, he ordered the policemen to go outside. They looked confused, as if they had already started to forget the angel. [Harlan] had seen the reaction before in people who didn't like to see beyond the Illusion.

"Are you hurt?" the superintendent asked.

"No, but someone came in through the window and tried to kill me. He had wings." [Harlan] sat down on the bed and pulled his feet out of the pool of blood.

Müller picked a black feather up. "Can you give me a closer description? Have you ever seen anything like this before?"

"What do you think? I've never seen anything like it, but he was here, just ask the policemen."

"I believe you. You look unhurt. Where is all the blood from?"

"Your men fired at him. He was bleeding something fierce. It didn't look natural."

They looked at each other, and both knew that [Harlan] was only telling part of the truth.

"I could put you in protective custody," Müller said. "In case he comes back. Until we know what's going on."

"You can't protect me against this, can you? I'm lucky to be alive. I'm going to leave now before he comes back. Are you going to stop me?"

Müller stepped aside and said nothing as [Harlan] shoved his computer and spare clothes into an overnight bag.

"Let him go," Müller said to the policemen outside.

Before he let the policemen back into the room, he painstakingly picked all the feathers up from the floor and put them in an opaque plastic bag. There was nothing to do about the blood. The technicians could puzzle over it, and Müller would like to have a DNA test anyway. When he was done, he called Busch and told her that [Harlan] would probably hide from the police. It wasn't that he suspected him of being involved in his father's death, but something was off.



From the backseat of a cab, [Harlan] watched sleepy suburban apartment buildings from the Fifties and Sixties pass by in the light from the streetlamps. Here and there, newer and taller buildings rose into the night sky; the area had come alive since the decision to close down the Tegel airport loosened construction restrictions. [Harlan] glanced at the sky while removing the SIM card from his phone, but could only see the lights from a plane descending over Tegel. The driver made for the city center and dropped him off at Hauptbahnhof. People were still moving around here. The usual suspects loitered outside the entrance to the derelict lots to the north. [Harlan] stepped into the great hall, a glass cathedral twenty-five meters high with footbridges and rail tracks high above. The telecom store next to the information desk was open for another ten minutes. He went inside and tried to look like a businessman on a trip who unfortunately needed a new phone. The guy behind the counter engaged in friendly banter, and [Harlan] had to make an effort to deliver easy smiles, laughter and witty repartee. For the first time since the Change, which he had come to call the event, he felt deep in his bones how difficult it was to sound like a thirty-year-old. The salesman gave him an odd look, but said nothing. He walked away with a cheap burner phone and flagged down an illegal taxi on the road outside the main entrance.

“To Zum Heckeshorn in Wannsee. Seventy-five euros if you take me there in twenty minutes.”

At first, the driver hesitated when he saw [Harlan’s] blood-stained pants, then nodded at him to sit in the passenger seat. He drove through Tiergarten, just a few blocks north of Clive’s old apartment. He could probably not return there for a long while yet. Before the angel showed up, he had contemplated leaving Berlin and beginning again somewhere else, maybe St. Petersburg. Now that seemed difficult. The angel hardly cared about borders.

Passing through Grünewald, the driver hit 130 and nearly forced a van off the road. He slowed down in the villa neighborhood of the Wannsee peninsula, as if he could sense that this was an area where you did



not want attention. [Harlan] clocked twenty-three minutes when they stopped in the parking lot above the villa that contained the Wannsee museum, but still counted out seventy-five euros in cash. He waited until the car was out of sight before he walked down toward the villa and started to visualize protection against infernal powers around himself.

This was where the Nazis had planned the Holocaust in 1942. In other places, paths and narrow alleys led down to Hell; here, there was an asphalt motorway to Inferno. It started in front of the villa's wrought-iron gates, where [Harlan] took out a piece of white chalk from his pocket and started drawing on the asphalt. He drew a triangle surrounded by the symbols for earth, fire and air. In the middle, he wrote the sign for Thaumiel, the most powerful of all angels of death—and the divine guardian of the Nazis. With a fruit knife stolen from the hotel's breakfast buffet, he made a cut across his palm and let blood drip into the triangle.

"Take a sip, Henry Neville."

He visualized the Abyss.

The gate swung open with a creaking noise, and he gazed upon Inferno. A freshly raked path led up to the villa. It was hard to believe that it had once been built as a private home. The house looked stern and official. It could have been an embassy. Now, it was a pale gray lighthouse on top of Thaumiel's underground citadel. Where thick rhododendron shrubs had obscured the view, shafts opened into the depths. In front of the stairs up to the house, rusty howitzers, shot-up tanks and mounds of corpses had replaced the flower beds and plantains just sprung into leaf. The stench lay thick, and the air filled with buzzing flies. Four men in black uniforms stopped him.

"I have an invitation," [Harlan] said.

The guard officer sniffed him and nodded. Up close, [Harlan] could glimpse the razide beneath the man: dirty iron and rotten meat in a human costume.

"This way, Mr. Connelly."

He was led into the house. On the surface, the villa kept its shape, with spacious rooms where the upper class of the last turn-of-the-century had held receptions before the Nazis annexed the peninsula by the little swimming lake. Armed men—or creatures disguised as men—moved



through the rooms and guarded every doorway. [Harlan] was shown into the conference room to the right of the hall. There was a meeting going on. Men in officers' uniforms from wildly different eras and places stood and sat around a table covered in advertisement brochures for expensive weapons systems, regional risk reports with colorful covers, portable computers and bottles of mineral water. A Templar knight in a white tabard, holding a shield adorned with an eagle, looked at [Harlan] with derision. At the far short end, his back to a small recess framed by black stone columns, sat the blond and ss-uniformed avatar of the Angel of Death. His eyes were black. The gloom that spread throughout the house came, [Harlan] realized, from him. Next to him stood an aide in a dark blue uniform jacket with a golden ribbon across his chest. He had set down his plumed Pickelhaube on a chair and was smoking a cheroot. His face was open and friendly, more English than German, as [Harlan]'s prejudiced opinion had been the first time they met.

"Welcome back, Connelly," said the aide. "Have you changed your mind since the last time?"

It was in 1995, the year after his divorce from Rachel, that Clive had played with the thought of pledging himself to Thaumiel. At the time, he had already started to use the death-angel's power to store memories in the skulls of the dead, but had never sworn himself into his service. He had been contacted by the aide, who initially claimed to represent Russian business interests, but then gradually revealed that he belonged to Inferno. Back then, Clive had withdrawn after glimpsing the death-angel's hell.

"I need protection. I'm being chased by an avenging angel, some sort of infernal creature. What do you want in exchange for your protection?"

If the avatar of the Angel of Death was listening to the conversation, he didn't show it. He glanced through a document on a laptop, occasionally switching to a report program to send a short message.

"We can set you up with protection," the aide said. "Can you give us the art project?"

The last time they had spoken, the aide had offered him shares in Russian energy companies in exchange for control over Mauer II. After the fact, Clive told himself that he had shied away from Hell. But



his refusal came equally from the fact that he didn't know how to take control of the project now that Renate and Moritz had thrown him out.

"The last time, you thought it was impossible," the aide said.

"This body will make it easier and they have appointed a project leader, so there's an organization to control. Besides, they're short on money. I think I can buy my way in."

"Do you need money?"

"Only protection." Everything had a price, especially in Hell. He didn't want to accept more than necessary. "And power over those below me." That was Thaumiel's gift: an infernal influence on everyone who recognized one's authority.

"We want the project, and control over the exhibition hall in Pankow. My lord wishes you to furnish a temple for him there."

[Harlan] had to search his memory for what was going on in Pankow, and recalled emails between Harlan and his boss about the exhibition project in the engine shed. Amanda's sculpture, *The Fence* and the concrete sows, were to be exhibited there.

"Why, if I may ask?"

"We think it might become an important exhibition hall. It will give us access to a clientele that is hard to reach otherwise. We want to control the project from there."

"You've never told me what your intention with the project is."

"You don't need to know."

"No, I don't."

"Let's take care of the formalities, then."

The aide pulled a dagger from his belt and told [Harlan] to roll up his sleeve. He drew blood with a deep cut and let it drip into a silver bowl. Then he took a sheet of parchment from a plastic folder with Thaumiel's sigil. [Harlan] was handed a quill, and the aide pointed at a line on the parchment.

"Sign here."

[Harlan] read through the text three times. He would be given protection from his enemies in exchange for control over Mauer II and a temple in the old engine shed in Pankow. He dipped the quill in blood and wrote his signature. The Angel of Death, who had ignored them



until now, wet the signet ring on his left ring finger and stamped a bloody circle next to the signature. [Harlan] felt a burning pain on his forehead.

"I'll come along as your bodyguard," the aide said. "I can protect you against most things that might show up in Berlin, and some fresh air will do me good."

The officers, guards and the documents on the table faded away. They were standing in the closed-down museum, where the plans for genocide were depicted on wall posters. The aide's Prussian uniform had been replaced by tight black jeans and a grey hoodie with the legend *Arkham Asylum* on the back.

"My name is Mike Wester," he said in a Berliner drawl and rolled a cigarette from a pack of tobacco he fished out of his back pocket. "You hired me when you started to get anonymous threats. I grew up in Lichtenberg and have a suspended sentence for assault, but it's ten years old. I've worked for several different security companies here and in Dresden. All my papers are in order if someone should check them. Want a cigarette?"

"No thanks."

Mike opened the glass doors to the back terrace, where the lawn sloped down toward the lake. The war machines were gone. They walked through the park around the house and closed the gate behind them.

"I need a new temple," [Harlan] said. "If I am to take my old friends on, I can't place it in the city. The police are already suspicious."

"No one can find you here. This belongs to us."

Mike pointed up at the forest behind the parking lot. All the houses above the road had been evacuated. Signs saying *No Entry* hung on the gates, and the windows gaped empty. [Harlan] saw the shadow of the death-angel's citadel fall across the houses.

"How's this?"

A white villa with Mediterranean blinds hid in the brush. The unpainted wood fence had a blue sign: *Betreten verboten. Lebensgefahr*. They stepped over the fence and tried the door. It was unlocked. Almost all of the furniture was broken or stolen. Someone had lived there on a dirty mattress, a long time ago judging from the cigarette butts and the dirt on the floor.



“It’ll do for the temple. I’ll need a car too, one that can’t be traced back to me. I can’t live here. I’ll pay you for your expenses.”

“No problem.”

“Do you have somewhere to stay? Are you going to camp on my couch?”

“The couch will do. I don’t sleep, anyway. How are you going to buy the project? According to our information, you have about 42,300 euros available right now.”

“It’s nice of you to offer your services as an accountant as well. All I need is to buy my way in, and I can do that with money that isn’t mine. Once inside your master will help us, right? I’ve seen what his servants can do with their subordinates.”

“Our master. And your old friends aren’t some brainwashed recruits. They won’t let themselves be controlled that easily.”

“There are people around them that I can control. And they’re gullible. That’ll take us far. You can give me one of those cigarettes. I’ve sold myself lock, stock and barrel, haven’t I? One cigarette won’t make much of a difference.”

[Harlan] picked up the previous tenant’s ashtray, a broken flowerpot, and put it on the remains of the kitchen table. He lit up a newly rolled cigarette. When he squinted, he could see the death-angel’s dark aura, like a cloud of smoke with him at its center. He didn’t like the fact that it made him feel safe.







# 13. WESTEND: JULIA

Saturday, May 27

Julia dithered between the paint-stained jeans and the painter's overalls. She grabbed the overalls and stuffed them into her knapsack. Mom sat by the white writing desk, turning a teacup in her hands. Erich's mechanical keyboard clattered in the next room. He was playing *Overwatch*, isolated from the outside world with his headphones. It was Saturday, and outside the window of Julia's room the sun shone in through the branches of the nearly faded chestnut.

"Renate calls them mandalas," Julia said. "But they're like patterns made out of city maps. We're supposed to cover the wall of a brewery at Prenzlauer Allé. It'll take all weekend."

Ever since she had begun the art class, reproductions from the gallery on Urban Spree had replaced the festival posters and photo collages in her teen bedroom. Patricia, the mom who could maybe identify a Monet with an effort, calmly accepted her daughter's new fad.

"It'll be fun to see when it's done. Are Tamara and Kim going too?"

"Everyone's helping out. We have a new teacher. The Swedish sculptor."

Julia hadn't told Mom that Amanda was the granddaughter of the Dahlem killer. It felt unnecessary.

"Kim wasn't sure if it was her thing," Patricia said.

"She's just super self-critical. That's who she is."

Kim attended Renate's class mostly for the company. During primary school, Kim and Julia had been inseparable. Now they walked on eggshells, making an effort not to let the relationship with Tamara drive



a wedge between them. During the past few weeks, Kim had begun to take a bigger interest in art. In her systematic fashion, she had studied the twenty most influential street artists of the world, and discussed concept art with the insufferably precocious Chadi and Ernst.

"We asked her if she wanted to come along to Crete," Julia said. "But her whole family has booked a safari in South Africa. The Kruger Park."

Julia was going to Crete with Tamara after school finished. Tamara, who lived for free in her dad's overnight apartment and had a thousand euros a month in pocket money, was going to pay for the hotel room and the flight.

When they first told Patricia about the trip, she was concerned about the money issue, but Julia and Tamara had reassured her: "The tickets are super cheap. It'll even out in the long run." During the winter, Mom had come to accept that Julia spent the nights at Tamara's place and rarely was home. Over the past month, she had started to make jokes about it: "I guess I'll have to learn to play Overwatch now that it's just me and Erich here."

They had kept the four-room apartment after the divorce, when Dad moved in with his new wife. Erich had stayed with his dad in Hemsdorf at first, but returned after six months to lock himself in his bedroom. Now he spent all night in front of his computer. Julia and Mom both felt vaguely guilty, as if there was something they could do to help him.

"I'll come home tomorrow," Julia said.

"Take care. Call me if there's anything."

Julia slung the knapsack with her painter's overalls over her shoulder and stepped out into the springtime sun on Reichsstraße. She texted Tamara as she walked toward the subway:

*Are you at home?*

*No, omw.*

*Meet up before?*

*I'll get off at Alex. The fountain.*

She walked upstairs to the square at Alexanderplatz. Tamara sat on the edge of the fountain with the spouting pillars. Her blonde hair was dyed a faint violet. She was wearing the black-and-white sweater that Julia had bought for her at the Hurricane Festival the year before. That's when they became a couple, at the back of the crowd, staring at each



other while wondering that the hell they were doing at a Rammstein gig before walking off to the tent that Tamara shared with a childhood friend from Rathenow.

“How are you?” Tamara gave her a hug.

“Okay. I told her I’ll be gone until tomorrow morning. I can sleep at your place.”

“We could ask Kim if she’s going out tonight.” While Julia and Tamara isolated themselves over autumn, Kim had been hanging out with older students from the Academy of Arts and the university. Julia and Tamara came back out to discover a more grown-up world with parties in town and in dorms.

They took the tram to the brewery, an old brick workshop with additions in black steel and sooted glass. The sign above the entrance said *Bauer Brauerei* the painting class crowded around a wooden table by the white plastered wall in the courtyard, eating cupcakes. A man in a plaid shirt, broad suspenders and well-groomed beard poured fruit juice into tall glasses and chatted to Renate. Julia recognized him as the brewery’s owner. He had visited Renate’s studio at Urban Spree the week before and talked about the mural.

The wall was three stories tall, partly covered by modern metal scaffolding. A mandala sketched in thick black lines could be glimpsed behind the struts. From the neat center circle, the pattern fell apart into smaller fragments toward the outer border, forming something that looked like a city map. Amanda stood at the top of the scaffolding, a little stiff, as if frightened by the altitude. She was dressed in gray overalls, directing Chadi and Alex who were using paintbrushes to fill in the blocks closest to the roof.

“She doesn’t look that fragile,” Tamara said.

Renate had told them to be careful with Amanda. *She’s had a hard time. Don’t ask about her grandfather.* Some still had. Amanda replied in clipped sentences and said nothing that wasn’t already in the news. She spoke German with a funny Swedish accent and laughed when they imitated her.

“I almost think that Renate is more affected. She lived together with him a long time ago.”



People were talking. Serina, Yvonne and Tom had quit when they found out that Renate knew the Dahlem Monster.

“Yeah, she looks thin. Like a little bird.”

Renate’s paint-stained jeans and oversized blue shirt hung loose on her frame. Her white hair was gathered in an untidy braid. The brewery had talked about painting the façade all spring, but Renate had doubted whether they could pull such a big project off. Amanda told her that it wasn’t a problem; they could do it in two weekends as long as the weather was okay.

“Hello there.” Kim came over and put glasses of juice in their hands. “You’re late.”

“What did we miss?”

“Not much. A tour of the brewery. Amanda’s going to show us how to paint. The wall is fucking enormous, but it sounds like she knows what she’s doing.”

“Okay, if you’ll join me.” Amanda gingerly climbed down from the scaffolding and motioned for them to gather around her. “I think we can work in groups of seven or eight at most, but it’s better to work in shifts. I’ll explain how to add the colors. You’ll do everything with paint-brushes. The four of you over there, and you three.”

Kim was one of the chosen ones. Julia and Tamara went over to the cupcake table, where Renate had sat down on a bench. They changed into overalls and ate cupcakes while Amanda blended colors and explained how the different fields would meet and contrast against each other, and how black and white lines would be added later.

“We’re lucky she showed up,” Julia said to Renate.

“I wouldn’t have dared say yes if she hadn’t.”

“You didn’t know her before?”

“No, Emre told me about her. He said she needed something to do.”

After an hour, Julia and Tamara took Kim’s and Alex’s place. They worked their way from the roof down and toward the mandala’s center, using earthy hues that mirrored the bricked buildings behind the brewery. Even Kaz, who had frowned at being used as free labor for Renate, was hard at work. The fragmented image of a map began to emerge below the roof and in the corners. Julia was fiddling with a smaller,



ochre-colored field when Tamara prodded her and pointed down at the courtyard. Amanda was talking to a tall, red-headed man in a bright blue suit. She made agitated gestures. Renate said something that seemed meant to calm her down, but that just made her even more upset.

"It's the son," Tamara said. "Her uncle. I've seen pictures of him online."

"He's really tall."

Renate reached to his chest. They shook hands, and he seemed to react to her frailty, as if afraid to touch her.

"Come on, let's climb down," Julia said. They descended and heard Amanda's distressed voice:

"No, I'm not angry. Well, maybe a little. Why didn't you call me? Do you think you're the only one who's suffered from all this?"

"We can meet when I've gotten my work in order. I'm just overwhelmed right now."

"Did you talk to the psychologist?"

"Do I look like I need a psychologist?"

"Yes, you do."

[Harlan] ran his gaze over the students' heads and looked like he wanted to tell her to shut up. The painting work had ceased, and everyone was either staring or demonstratively looking away. Renate took [Harlan]'s hand and led him away to the table.

"You're arguing in front of the students."

"We're not arguing. How's the wall coming along? You've given them one bastard of a complex pattern."

"Amanda drafted everything yesterday while I had coffee over here."

"You're taking care of her, right? So that this won't be too much for her?"

"She's stronger than she looks."

[Harlan] sat down next to Renate and looked up at the wall. He said that when going through the project's history as he was preparing the application for sponsorship, he had seen her early mandalas in pictures—the ones she had painted on half-empty houses in Kreuzberg in the Sixties. They were black-and-white more often than not. "You've commercialized them. What does Moritz think about that?" She laughed at that. Amanda sat down and whispered something in his ear. Julia felt



like an idiot staring at them, but almost everyone else was looking too. Tamara tugged at her arm.

“So are we going back to work? What are you staring at?”

“Shh.”

It felt like she was waiting for something, but nothing happened. She let Tamara pull her back to the wall, but not so far away that she couldn't hear what they were saying at the table.

“I talked to Allianz,” [Harlan] said. “You can get a bigger grant than I thought at first. Enough to continue this whole project, and maybe for Pankow too.”

“That would be a relief,” Renate said.

“I've talked to Emre. My boss will come to Wall Project's board meeting in a couple of weeks. He promised that you'll do a presentation.”

“Have you called Rachel?” Amanda asked.

[Harlan] looked like he had been hit in the face. “Of course I have. She's in shock.”

“Will you go see her in London?”

“Maybe next month.”

The reply calmed Amanda down. She gave him a hug, and he got up to leave. From the scaffolding, Julia watched him walk over to a black car, where a dark figure was visible in the back seat. Amanda climbed up to the mandala and reached for a paintbrush.

“Is everything okay?” Tamara asked.

“It's all the pressure after the thing with Grandpa. He ought to talk to a psychologist.” Amanda hesitated, as if she realized she shouldn't talk to them about her grandfather.

“You can tell us,” Julia said. “We'll keep our mouths shut.”

Amanda brightened. “That's kind of you, but right now I don't want to think about it. Maybe later.” She started filling in a lime yellow field below the roof ridge and showed Julia how to hold the paintbrush so as not to exhaust her wrist.



# 14. FRIEDRICHSHAIN: AMANDA

Friday, June 2

“All of Eberswalde was there,” Svetlana said. “I didn’t think I’d like it, but I did. Karoline would have approved. We were in the church, and the youth choir sang. The priest talked about life’s frailty. It was like a real funeral—they’d put her graduation photo in front of the altar, and there was a sea of flowers. She was really pretty in that photo. Dad and I will go to Lützowstraße next weekend and clean her place out.”

Svetlana had dyed her hair blonde and plucked her eyebrows thinner. It was hard to recognize her at a distance. They ate tapas and drank too much wine in front of a painting of white houses under a cerulean sky. Svetlana had been reluctant to go out at first—the media frenzy had died down but not ceased—but no one at the Portuguese restaurant had looked at them twice.

“Did you ever live in Eberswalde?” Amanda asked. She was the one to suggest they should go out and have dinner. During those lonely nights at home, her thoughts kept circling around the fact that something was wrong with Harlan. She had forced herself to stop calling him.

“No, I stayed in Berlin when they moved there. I hated the place. I felt horrible every time I had to go visit. But it was okay this time.”

“People say I should go back home and visit Mom, but I can’t do it. I’m still having visions. There’s no point in seeing Mom if I can’t support her.” Amanda had decided not to tell Svetlana about Metropolis. She didn’t know if she believed it herself.

“Does your dad still live in Södertälje?”



"No, in Tumba. It's about twenty kilometers away. He needs some distance to Mom for sanity's sake. She's a periodical drinker. Sometimes she's better. How's your dad? Can you stand each other now?"

"We're talking again. We're like a family. Almost. For the first time, ever. We'll see how long it lasts. One day at a time."

They had picked a small restaurant in the pub area around the Boxi, a green square with playgrounds and a lawn to picnic on. It was touristy and far away from their own neighborhoods. Comfortably anonymous. Svetlana took Amanda's hand. She looked concerned.

"What visions are you talking about?" she asked.

"I see buildings that aren't there. I did when I was a kid, too. I talked to Renate. She says she sees things too sometimes. It's probably nothing dangerous."

"Do you see buildings that aren't there anymore? Like seeing back in time?"

"Something like that."

"You don't really want to tell me what it is you see, do you? You don't have to be afraid of scaring me off. I'm not that easily frightened."

"I don't think you are. I know you aren't."

Amanda had described Superintendent Müller to Renate. She had found out he was a *lictor*, a being whose task was to sweep things under the carpet and keep humans away from Metropolis. Renate even claimed to have met Müller: "an unusual lictor, good at acting human." But Amanda couldn't tell Svetlana that. It would ruin the image of her as a psychic on some kind of mission to find hidden murder victims. She would turn into a broken nutcase that Svetlana would feel responsible for.

"I've started working with Renate's art students," she said instead. "It's a good distraction."

"Aren't you going to finish the sculpture for Pankow?"

"A bit later. I'm taking a breather. Emre says I have to. He's afraid I'm going psychotic from the stress."

"So am I. Have you heard from Harlan?"

"He showed up yesterday while I was painting with the students at the brewery I told you about. Something is really fucking wrong. I'm



afraid he's had a stroke or something. He's completely changed, but no one else seems to notice."

Svetlana sipped her wine and took a deep breath, but said nothing.

"You think I'm going a little crazy?" Amanda said. "Right?"

"A little. Not too bad. It's not that weird." Svetlana poured more wine and ate the last of the capers. "What's your actual relationship to him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you sleeping with each other?"

"He's my uncle."

"I guess that means no. But you're very close, and now you think he's failed you."

"It feels like he broke up with me."

"Have you considered that he might not see your relationship the same way? Maybe he doesn't think he has to break up with you?"

Amanda burst into tears and felt like an idiot, squeezed in between three businesswomen on the left who strained not look as if they were listening in, and a loving couple on the right who were engrossed in each other. Svetlana took both her hands and made her look straight ahead.

"You can sleep at my place tonight if you don't want to be alone."

"I promised to go to that fucking release party."

Nadine had persuaded her to go to a release party for a Dutch electronic musician at Panorama Bar. It was one of her attempts to guide Amanda into the wonderful world of sound. At any other time, it would have been exciting. Now the thought just made her feel tired. Amanda could sense Emre's hand behind it. He tried to make people invite her to all sorts of events, so she wouldn't be left alone.

"Maybe it's a good thing. You'll have something else to think about."

"It's in Berghain. Electronic music. Want to come along?" She could tell that Svetlana didn't. "Or I can call you when it ends and come over."

"I can join you if you want. How late is it?"

"Soon, at eleven. It's before the club opens. There will probably be journalists. You don't have to come with me."

"It might be fun. Can I go like this?" She was wearing a tight gray dress under a white cardigan.



“You look better than I.” Amanda hadn’t even thought about the release party when she pulled on green jeans and a tan shirt for dinner. *Probably a sign that Emre and Svetlana are right. I’m stressed out. I drop things I don’t have the energy to think about.*

They took a walk under shadowy trees to the gravel-covered derelict plots around the club in the power station, a majestic Soviet-style colossus whose concrete bulk was guarded by riot fences. Even an hour before opening time there was a short line of people between the fencing up to the entrance. Many sounded like tourists. Amanda could hear Swedish and English. Nadine stood next to the doormen together with Isabel, another sound enthusiast who had once, on a couch late at night, tried to explain the mystic essence of music. A broad-shouldered guy had his arm around Nadine. Her boyfriend? Amanda searched her memory for a name, or at least a comment about a boyfriend. Nothing showed up.

“This is Lars, you haven’t met,” Nadine said, and Amanda breathed out. “It’s just started. So glad you could come! Emre is upstairs.”

“I brought Svetlana. I hope that’s okay?”

Everyone’s looks, including the doormen’s, said that they immediately knew who this was. Svetlana managed to look unaffected, kissed Nadine’s cheek and said that Amanda had told her so much about the sound installation that sounded amazing.

They walked through the entrance and past the big dancefloor in the turbine hall, where the evening’s lighting was being tested on the walls in broad swathes of purple and green. They continued up the steel stairs to the smaller floor that had once been the power plant’s control room. In the DJ booth stood a slight man in deep concentration, hair slick against his skull. A soft beat filled the room, but only a handful of people were dancing. It was more like a cocktail party, with a crowded bar and a small group on the dance floor. Emre was leaning against the bar counter, chatting with a muscular man with curly black hair. Nadine had discovered that Svetlana knew something about algorithms and was happily discussing her sound installation with her. Emre came up to them and introduced Mr. Curly:

“Karl Winkler from Berliner Zeitung. He writes about music.”



Winkler noticed Amanda's and Svetlana's reaction to his profession. He explained that he kept to culture and entertainment. No news whatsoever.

"I've talked to Karl about your cooperation with Nadine," Emre said to Amanda. "He thinks Renate's youth project is exciting too."

Winkler smiled. Amanda looked into his eyes and thought *he's going to try to pick me up*. Indeed, he offered to buy her a drink. She let him buy her a beer.

"I already had half a bottle of wine tonight," she said. "I mostly came her for Nadine's sake. Could you explain to me what's so special about this?" She nodded at the slender man at the mixing table.

"I can try."

Svetlana had managed to detach herself from Nadine and was talking to Emre at the other end of the bar. She was laughing at something he was saying. That made Amanda happier. She took a swig from her beer and listened to the journalist expand on cold and warm sound. After two beers, he figured out that she wasn't going to sleep with him, so he went to try his luck with Isabel. The dancefloor was more crowded now. The doors downstairs had opened, and the bass line from the sound system in the turbine hall downstairs vibrated through the concrete. Amanda let the crowd on the dance floor swallow her. She registered that Emre and Svetlana kept an eye on her, as if they were afraid she might collapse. It didn't bother her. After a while, she couldn't see them anymore. She let herself be pushed to the back of the crowd and sauntered downstairs to the big dancefloor, which was filling up. The sound was harsher here, and blue light drew lines through the air. Then she saw a dark hole form in the middle of the crowd, as if the dancers retreated from something. When she came closer, he suddenly stood in front of her, a ragdoll with black wings. A pool of blood spread around his feet. The dancers moved around him as if he wasn't there. They barely seemed to notice they were stepping in something wet. Amanda put her hand on him. He was warm. A stitched-up wound ran from his groin down to his knee. His face was undefinably familiar, with a skewed boxer's nose and green eyes, somewhere between thirty and forty years old. His upper body was peppered with rough craters, like acne scars.



“Bullet holes,” he said when she touched them. “They shot at me.”

It was Harlan’s voice. Amanda panicked and backed away. At the same time, some guy slipped in the growing pool of blood. His friend reacted as he stood up again, and voices rose above the music: “Blood.” “Someone’s bleeding!” “Get the medic.” “Who’s hurt?”

Amanda stumbled down the stairs to the entrance. The guards looked her over but said nothing. None of them saw the angel who stepped outside behind her.

The avenging angel felt like a stalker. He had followed her since she had left home at seven o’clock. It had been three weeks since he lost Clive’s trail. It didn’t bother him at first. He had drifted around Berlin, invisible to everyone as long as he didn’t touch them. Once he scared a little old lady when he said hello to her dog, suddenly becoming visible. During the past week he had been trying to find out who he was, with little success. He had spent half a day staring at the business office of Allianz, sure that it meant something to him. Then a memory surfaced of the house on Rochstraße, white, a bakery on the ground floor. He sat down on the curb next to the bakery, at this point sure that no one could see him, and waited until Amanda came out through the front door. She was a sculptor, from Sweden, and they had sat on his couch drinking red wine while Babylon Berlin was playing on a 60-inch wall-mounted TV. She didn’t see him either, until just now on the dance floor. When they had passed the line to the entrance and entered the empty lot that surrounded the power station, she turned around and faced him.

“Amanda?” he asked. “Can you see me?”

“Harlan?”

“You can see me?”

“Of course I can. Come on, we can’t stay here.”

They walked around to the back of the power station, where a narrow path followed the wall behind thick robinia shrubs. With her hand on his chest, Amanda tried to remember Harlan’s body. She had never seen him completely naked, and this body was harder, not entirely human, but the chest and neck looked like his. His wings were bigger than she had thought at first, straggly and sticky from coagulating blood. More



blood leaked from his joints and wounds at ankles and wrists. But she was sure it was him. It smelled like him. She threw her arms around his neck.

“What happened? What did you do?”

He gently put his arms around her and remembered that she was afraid of heights. She had told him when they went up in the TV tower, and she sat on the edge to force away her fear. He added that to the little pile of reclaimed memories.

“I was in Hell. They did something to me. I don’t remember anything. Am I dead? Is my name Harlan?”

“Your name is Harlan Connelly and you shouldn’t be dead. We met this Saturday. Don’t you remember?” It was dark, and she could only see the outline of his face. “You’re not wearing your own face.”

“I remember that. They gave me a new face.”

The nose had once been broken and hadn’t healed straight. The eyes were familiar, and yet not. Greener than Harlan’s. She pressed her cheek against him. Faint music vibrated through the wall behind them.

“Come on.” She took his hand and led him to the closed-down beer garden next to the club, with terraces connected by steel stairs and a bar behind steel blinds. Next to the bar was a low pool around a concrete pillar that looked like it had been taken from a parking garage. They sat down on the paved edge of the pool, and Amanda started to untangle the mess of pinions on Harlan’s back. He sat completely still, considering whether to mention Clive and the trio of devils, but didn’t. When she was done the wings lay flush against his back, raven black.

“There. Now unfold them.”

When he spread his wings to their full width, less blood leaked out as his shoulders than before. He cleaned the wounds where the iron bars had entered his body. They started to heal.

“Does it hurt?” she asked.

“Like a motherfucker.”

They both laughed. Like they had used to laugh at the German slapstick he claimed would improve her language. He added the slapstick TV to the pile of memories, while she shredded her shirt and bandaged the half-healed wound at his groin.



“Wait here.” He got up and stuck his hand in next to the lock under one of the steel blinds that covered the bar. The blinds rustled as he pulled them up halfway, enough to crouch down and go inside. He came back out with a bottle of tequila and a case of Paulaner.

“Are we lovers?” he asked and put the tequila bottle down between them.

“No. My mom is your half-sister.”

That made him a little disappointed. He took a swig from the bottle and she opened a beer.

“But Svetlana asked me about that today,” she said. “Whether we were lovers. I said it felt like you’d broken up with me.”

“Did I?”

“I don’t know what to believe. Do you want me to tell you more?” she asked carefully. “About what, your job? About your mom? Rachel. Do you remember Rachel?”

“No. What does she look like?”

“Dark and fairly short, I think. I’ve only seen her in pictures.”

“Rachel.” He tasted the name. It told him nothing, but he was sad when his mouth shaped the word, as if his vocal chords remembered something he didn’t. “You can tell me more later,” he said. “Not now.”

They emptied the tequila bottle shoulder to shoulder. Over at the club, the buzz of voices grew as the line lengthened. Someone might have called Amanda’s name, but she chose not to listen.



PAR† 3:

†HAUMIEL'S  
SERVANT†







*Der Tod ist kein Ereignis des Lebens. Den Tod erlebt man nicht.  
Wenn man unter Ewigkeit nicht unendliche Zeitdauer, sondern Unzeit-  
lichkeit versteht, dann lebt der ewig, der in der Gegenwart lebt.  
Unser Leben ist ebenso endlos, wie unser Gesichtsfeld grenzenlos ist.*

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN







# 15. BETHANIEN: AMANDA

Tuesday, June 6

Emre filled the table in the conference room with thermoses of coffee and hot water and a plate of rye sandwiches with cheese, turkey and alfalfa sprouts. It was Tuesday morning in Bethanien, and the whole Wall Foundation's board was present in the room that they had borrowed to show their activities to the Allianz sponsorship program's representative. One of Moritz' twisted beetle creatures stood next to the sandwich plate. Moritz himself sat in a corner; he had had a shower and put on a blue Baumler suit that matched his tattoos. He was drinking coffee, nervously swinging one leg over the other.

"He keeps a complete bourgeois salon in his paper bags," Renate said when Emre asked about the suit. "He got it in the Sixties when he was thinking about building a life. Now he can't be bothered to get rid of all the stuff. Right, Mori?"

She sat beside her old boyfriend dressed in a flowery tunic and black culottes, telling him about the street art project and the kids. Nadine, in a black shirt and plaid pants, was lost in her cellphone. Amanda didn't belong to the board, but had persuaded Emre to let her be there when she heard that [Harlan] was to show up and talk about financing. She sat between Jaroslaw Sauer of the Kreuzberg culture committee, and Lotti Decken, a striking lady of retirement age who according to Emre was involved in a score of charity foundations and knew Renate. Nikolai, a photographer from Frankfurt an der Oder, was setting out coffee cups. He had shared a studio with Amanda during her first months in Berlin;



they had gone on one date and discovered that they had nothing to talk about outside the studio. He was the only one not dressed up, and had let everyone know that he didn't like the thought of so much sponsor money from an insurance company. Moritz sided with him.

"It's not entirely easy for me," Renate whispered to Moritz. "I need the car to drive the kids around, and I'm running into extra expenses all the time. Just the paint costs a fortune. We have to buy it now that we're on municipal funding. They'll have a fit over the tiniest illegal thing, you know that. This would make everything so much easier, so I'll be able to concentrate on the important things."

"The kids can ride the fucking subway like everyone else. Or you can take them on shortcuts. Don't you take shortcuts?"

"I can't take them on shortcuts. You know that." Renate glanced at Lotti, as if afraid she might hear them.

"We don't have to discuss that now," Emre said.

Amanda calmed down when she heard Moritz talk about shortcuts. At least she hadn't hallucinated walking with Renate through Metropolis. Emre and Svetlana were miffed because she had disappeared from the release party without a word. "I met someone," Amanda had said. And then lied: "My phone died." She had bought Svetlana a box of chocolate as an apology. The memory of Harlan the brain-damaged angel had begun to fade. Maybe it was a psychosis? She had almost called the psychiatric hotline for help. If it hadn't been for the walk through Metropolis, she would have.

She could hear [Harlan's] voice in the corridor outside. He was talking to a woman, something about fiscal years and municipal funding, before he stepped through the door. He had no wings, and the face was his. But he carried himself the wrong way, stiffly and not slouching like he ought to. Amanda wanted to get up and ask: "Was that you in Berghain last Friday? Are you Harlan?" But she stayed in her seat. He gave her a curt nod and shook hands with everyone else.

The woman, in her fifties and dressed in a gray suit, presented herself: "Margarethe Kürsch." A stylized silver rose held her salmon-colored scarf together. Her graying hair was pulled into a discreet bun. "I'm Harlan's director. He has told me so much about you."



Mrs. Kürsch walked around the table and greeted everyone. She gave Amanda a compassionate smile: *Poor girl. Such a trauma*, her gaze said.

Amanda had imagined herself talking to [Harlan], making him stumble and reveal that something was wrong. Then she would take him to a doctor, who would conclude he had had a stroke, but that it would heal. Now opening her mouth felt impossible. She picked apart the top of a sandwich in silence.

Emre connected his laptop to a projector. "I've prepared a short presentation of the project. Have a sandwich. Nikolai, if you would pour some coffee?"

He projected a slide of pictures from the foundation's history onto a screen on the far wall. It was the first time Amanda saw a picture of George Patel, a short man with a goatee and plaid flat cap who gave the camera a sunny smile. He looked somewhere between fifty and sixty years old. The caption said *Freie Universität 1967*. She could glimpse a banner in the background, something about *Bildung*, outlined against stylized eyes, mouths and hands. Then followed murals and sculptures around Berlin, many of them in what had been the East. Moritz' beetles had begun as pop-up art in papier-mâché and plaster. Predecessors of Renate's mandalas showed up, drawn with chalk on asphalt and concrete. There were other artists too, like a rotund man in his forties who was spray-painting on big asphalt surfaces.

"Oh, Gerhard!" Renate said. "He hated the sun and always worked with asphalt in the summer. He had a stroke and died in a home. You remember Geri, don't you Moritz?"

Moritz mumbled that of course he did, he wasn't completely senile or he wouldn't be sitting in this fucking chair. During a sequence of shapeless male figures and coarse caricatured faces in black and sharp shades of gray, everyone looked at [Harlan]. Those were Clive's paintings, made in subway stations and underground rooms. [Harlan] stared expressionlessly at the pictures of his father's paintings, as if his gaze cut right through the screen to something on the other side of the wall. He had positioned himself so he wouldn't have to look at Amanda or Renate and Moritz. *Look at me, for fuck's sake!* Amanda wanted to shout at him. But no one said anything, and Emre scrolled through the sequence a little too quickly.



"There was a time when we had unique possibilities to work across the border between East and West," he said. "I've used this as a starting point now that we're entering a new phase and work with borders as a theme. Nikolai's photographs from Hungarian refugee camps have caught a lot of attention. They're part of the exhibition we're setting up in Pankow later this year."

The presentation ended with pictures from the overgrown, decaying railroad yard in Pankow. Photos of Amanda's studio, Nadine's sound system and Nikolai's photographs were inserted into the pictures.

"The exhibition in Pankow will open on the twelfth of August," Emre said. "So far, all the money from the foundation has been spent on this project, and we've had to turn to the municipality to finance the youth activities, which we are also very proud of. I'll give Renate the floor."

Renate didn't have a slide presentation. She squeezed down between [Harlan] and Margarete Kürsch with a list of participants and pictures of smiling youths in paint-stained overalls.

"Right now I have municipality funding until the summer, but summer is exactly when I don't want to let the kids go. And a lot of them are interested in continuing over the summer holiday."

This was apparently in Mrs. Kürsch's domain. She asked about the number of girls, recently arrived refugees and participants from underprivileged neighborhoods. She looked satisfied when Renate presented cost estimates and talked about written evaluations and contacts in schools.

After the presentation, Emre poured more coffee and set out a plate of little Turkish sweets. [Harlan] praised the project and said that this wasn't entirely easy for him, not after what had happened with his father, but he wanted to be part of something that Clive had had a hand in creating before he descended into darkness.

"When's the funeral?" Moritz said. "I've been trying to call you."

"Last Friday. In private. Only for the next of kin."

"What the fuck?! What next of kin?" Moritz turned to Amanda. "Were you there?"

"No. I don't know if you couldn't reach me," she told [Harlan]. "And my mom, did you call her? Your sister? It was her dad too! I could have given you her number if you don't have it."



“What with all the attention from the press, I thought it was best just to have it over and done with. I’m sorry if I’ve offended you.”

Moritz looked as if he was going to throw his coffee cup at him. “I can hear you’re just as considerate as your dad. Did you know I had to answer the phone when his mom called to tell him his old man had died over in London? He never went to the funeral. I had to lie to his mom and say he was sick. That’s what he was like, your dad.”

“I realize that this is difficult,” Emre said with the most authoritative chairman’s voice he could muster. “But could we end the meeting first and have the private discussions afterwards?”

Mrs. Kürsch said that Allianz were working on a long-term sponsorship plan, and that she was sure that the Wall Foundation could be a reliable partner.

“A living project with a solid foundation and history. That’s something we’ve been looking for. We’re choosing a number of partners for the coming five-year period. Normally that would start in the new year, but I’ve talked to Harlan and we have agreed to take money out of a temporary fund that could be bestowed on the foundation this summer. In that case, it could support Renate Poll’s project. We would like to have insight into such a long-term commitment. Is it possible for Harlan to at least be on the committee as an observer? What do you say, Mr. Balci?”

“We would have to discuss that at a regular meeting,” Emre said. “Today’s agenda includes a vote on whether we can approve a collaboration with Allianz.”

During the show of hands, Moritz and Nikolai were the only ones who didn’t want to make a deal with the insurance giant. Then everyone shook hands. Amanda stayed quietly in the background during the whole discussion. When they got up from the table, Mrs. Kürsch came over to her with condolences.

“You’ve been a wonderful support to Harlan. All of us, his colleagues, would like to thank you for that. Surely you can join me and Harlan for lunch?”

Mike had been waiting in the window recess in the corridor. He kept watch on the courtyard and threw his cigarette butt out the ventilation



window. Amanda stopped in front of him. Through the reek of tobacco, there was something familiar about his smell. He extended his hand.

“Mike Wester. I work for your uncle. Unfortunately, he has received anonymous threats, so I’m responsible for his security.”

She took his hand. There was something about it, like in the angel’s body, a metallic rigidity that shouldn’t be there. She tried to double her vision, but couldn’t glimpse anything inhuman—just an oily darkness that enveloped both him and [Harlan]. Mike pulled his fingers away before Amanda had time to consider it. Mrs. Kürsch took her arm.

“Would you like to show me the Pankow sculpture?”

It had been a week since she last worked in the studio. The graffiti project had consumed all of her time. Now the concrete sows looked at her with reproach, as if she had abandoned them. Mrs. Kürsch asked about the iconostasis and the Russian-German craft; apparently Harlan had talked to her about them. [Harlan] stopped in the doorway and tried to look like he was giving Amanda and Margarethe time to get acquainted. The pig-like traffic barriers stared into his eyes, shimmering and slightly magical. Mike peeked into the studio, but seemed to be dazzled by the bright sunlight that flooded the room. When they went downstairs to get lunch, Amanda took [Harlan’s] hand and pulled him along.

“Are you really okay?” she asked him. “Why didn’t you call before the funeral? Why won’t you pick up when I call you?”

“Emre said you were having a hard time. I didn’t want to add to the burden.”

*You’re lying. Why are you lying?* She had been about to tell him about the angel, but changed her mind. *Why don’t I trust you?* He put his arm around her shoulders, gently, as if she was a little child.

“You mean a lot to me,” he said. “I want you to know that. The sculpture is impressive. Really. It’ll be a fine exhibition.”

That calmed her down somewhat. Today’s lunch menu was a choice between spare ribs and roasted sweet potatoes. Everyone picked the spare ribs. Mike was content with a beer and sat down at the next table, as if to affirm that he was on duty. Mrs. Kürsch rushed her lunch and excused herself. “I have to get back to the office. You stay.”



“Was Rachel at the funeral?” Amanda asked when they were alone.

“No, she didn’t want to come. And I didn’t want to expose her to it.”

“But you asked her?”

“Of course. I’ve been meaning to call you, but the journalists have been awful. I’ve taken some time off to sort Dad’s affairs out.”

“Are you going to sell the art gallery?”

“I guess I’ll have to, but it could take months or years until the police are done so I can do anything at all. I’m sorry I’ve been out of touch. I realize that this has been difficult for you.” He sounded like he meant it this time.

“I’m helping Renate with her art students. We went out to the old children’s hospital in Weißensee. It was extraordinary.” She had been watching his face while they ate. It was him, and yet not. The wrong mimicry. The wrong word choices. *Did you split in two, and all the good in you ended up in the angel?* When she mentioned Weißensee, he stiffened as if to hide his thoughts.

“Did you know that Grandpa painted there?” she asked.

“I’d rather not think about him.”

“Why do you need a bodyguard?”

“Dad’s old contacts threatened me. They think he owes them money.”

“Have you talked to the police? Where did you find this guy?”

“I’ve worked with his company before. They’re tied to Allianz.”

“You should have told me about the funeral.”

“I know.”

They had coffee, and he asked her about how her sculpture would be tied to Nikolai’s photographs in Pankow. Before they parted, she kissed his forehead. He flinched, as if she had put a burning cigarette against his skin.







# 16.

## WINTERFELDTPLATZ: HARLAN

Wednesday, June 14

The children played in the schoolyard east of Winterfeldtplatz. Two girls in tracksuits chased each other over the rough-hewn stone rectangles sunk into the lawn below the school. It was a good schoolyard. Lots of trees. Harlan sat on the backrest of a bench outside the closed-down children's theater on the corner and gazed out at the square and the playground. Did he have children? Was he married? He ought to have asked Amanda, but when they sat in the bar behind Berghain his mind couldn't take anymore. She had said one thing: "You live at Winterfeldtplatz." So here he was.

The man he was chasing and whom the TV broadcasts called Harlan Connelly, but whom the devils in Hell claimed was his father Clive, had made himself invisible. During the first two days he had radiated like a white beacon through the Illusion's paper walls. Now he was gone. Harlan had stood inside the door of a bar, watching the TV behind the bar counter, invisible to the men who were discussing soccer. During the break between the first and second half of a game between Hertha and Dortmund, the news showed pictures from the murder house in Dahlem, mixed with pictures of the late Clive Connelly and his son Harlan, the man from the hotel room in Reinickendorf. *The bastards are trying to make me murder myself*, was his first thought. But now he wasn't too sure. *Don't do anything rash*. He would have preferred to fly down to Inferno and ask his three tormentors what they were up to, but he was afraid he might not get away a second time.

The front gate opened in the grayish-white house across the square, and [Harlan] stepped outside with Mike by his side. Harlan recognized



him immediately. The urge to swoop down and tear him to pieces made his body twitch. He held on to the bench to steady himself and tried to breathe calmly. The beacon's light gleamed faintly from inside a dark bubble around the pair, like the tip of a long tentacle extended from Inferno. Some kind of protective sphere. When he sharpened his gaze, Harlan could see through the Illusion's thin membrane. The square with the beer garden and the red church bordered on the ruined city to which he had instinctively run after getting shot. He concentrated on his breath and waited until the pair had rounded the corner before he flew up to the gate.

He could push the gate open without damaging the lock too much. He closed it behind him and walked up the stairs to the door marked *Connelly*, carefully broke that lock too, and stepped into the hallway. It was like walking into a half-forgotten dream. *Mom's photo is gone*, he realized when he looked at the chest of drawers in the hallway. The one Amanda called Rachel. He could still not remember what she looked like. *And the dogs are gone. He broke the dogs*. In the kitchen, someone had been chain-smoking and filled the sugar bowl with cigarette butts. The air smelled of smoke and whiskey and Inferno. Whiskey like Dad. Inferno like the stench from the corpse mounds on the ground beneath him as he flew away from the hellish laundry room, before he figured out how to picture the Illusion like a vertical surface and fly through it. He emptied the sugar bowl into the toilet and flushed, then put the bowl and the empty glasses in the sink.

He followed his aversion through the apartment like a bloodhound. He wanted to stay away from the living room; thus, he went into the living room. He didn't even want to look at the couch, and so he sat down on the couch, wings uncomfortably angled over the backrest, and closed his eyes. They had watched movies here, he and Amanda. He had bought the 60-inch TV on the wall in a hi-fi store on Lietzenburgerstraße. Amanda said it looked terrible. He was nauseous and wanted to throw up, but his stomach was empty. *I live here. This is my home.*

Up until now his nudity hadn't bothered him, but now he felt vulnerable. The couch was uncomfortably cold against his skin. He went into the bedroom and picked out a pair of black jeans and heavy boots. For the very first time, he looked at himself in the mirror and flinched at the sight of the lopsided nose and the rugged face. *Not me*. He held his



own gaze in the mirror and tried to adjust. *Don't be such a child. It's your face now.* On a little desk below the bedroom window, just big enough to hold a laptop, lay a thick folder with the Allianz logo. He opened it and glanced through the sponsorship contract for the Wall Foundation. There were pictures of bronze beetles, which he liked, and photographs of people sitting in front of blue refugee tents. A brochure about the Bethanien studio program was inserted into the contract. The folder's cover was adorned with an old black-and-white photo of the hospital building. *Barbed wire.* He saw himself brushing against the top of a high fence in a studio. *The sows are watching the sacred thing behind the iconostasis.* He had laughed at it then: *I don't get it.* He understood more now. His memory drew a path from the studio down into the hallway with its slender columns, out onto the driveway with locked bicycles and down toward the traffic and little shops at Kottbusser Tor. He opened the bedroom window and flew eastward to Kreuzberg.

Across from the bicycle parking in front of Bethanien's entrance, the trees were in summer leaf. Their branches reached into the ruined city on the other side of the membrane. That was odd. Some buildings, like the tv tower at Alexanderplatz, were present in both Berlin and the decaying city, but Harlan had never seen trees grow across the border before. The whole massive hospital building with its graffitied brick wings straddled the Illusion. He walked through the front gate and followed the memory track up to Amanda's studio. The door was ajar. She was sitting at her workbench next to the door, making carved picture frames with chisel and knife. He closed the door behind him.

"Hi. It's me again."

She gave him a long look. He was bleeding less. The wounds on his chest had almost healed. Some stray red droplets fell from his wings onto the Masonite boards.

"You got yourself a pair of pants."

"From the closet back home. You said I lived at Winterfeldtplatz. You were right."

"I'm afraid you might be a symptom of some kind of psychosis. Yesterday I decided you weren't real." Amanda had been about to ask Renate about the angel, but when she returned from lunch, the old lady was



taking a walk down memory lane with Lotti Decken. Neither Renate nor Moritz let on that they knew anything about Metropolis or inhuman policemen. During the hours in the studio that followed, Amanda had started to doubt her own memories.

“It’s me.”

“Please come over here.”

He gingerly stepped around the roll of barbed wire on the floor. His legs tingled when he looked at it, like phantom pain from the torture on the courtyard between the brick houses in *Inferno*. Amanda reached out and touched him.

“I went back to Berghain last night. The lock to the blinds that you cracked is still broken. It ruined the psychosis explanation a little, but not enough for me to let it go.”

“I had to break in at home too. It’s strange how easy it is, just because I can.”

“There’s another Harlan. Without wings. With your real face. I met him yesterday. He’s like a soulless version of you.”

“He’s the one I’m supposed to drag down to Hell. But I don’t know if I should. The demons claim his name is Clive Connelly. He lives in my apartment. He leaves whiskey glasses out on the kitchen table.”

“The demons claim?”

He told her about the three tormentors. During the last few days, the memories from Purgatorium had cleared up. He could describe the gothic building complex with the laundry room under the eaves, and the operation when the reinforcement bars were driven into him. Amanda’s look told him that she still saw him as somewhat of a hallucination. He made more gestures than usual, as if to stress the fact that he was really there.

“Grandpa made a sketch of that place. Wait and I’ll show you.”

Amanda walked over to the chest of drawers where she stored knick-knacks that might come in handy. There, under a pouch with century-old brass and pearl hairclips, she had put the folder Moritz had given to her. She pulled out the sketch of Columbia Square.

“He said he grew up there. It was in London, in East End.”

“It’s in Hell now. That’s where I was. The demons speak Cockney.”



"Do you remember anything from when Grandpa shot himself at your place?"

"Was I there?"

"He shot himself in front of you. You saw it."

He became dizzy and leaned against the workbench. The memory of a stubbly man on the couch in his living room emerged. A revolver and a half-empty vodka bottle. *You have to call the police, Dad.*

"I should never have given him the key to my apartment."

"It would hardly have stopped him. Do you remember that we were in Dahlem before that?"

"Tell me and I might remember."

Some of what she described sounded familiar. Other parts told him nothing. Some memories refused to be recreated. He fingered the ornate frames and tried to decide what he felt. He ought to be angry. But it was as if too many memories were missing. His mind was numb.

"Did they say anything about me dying?"

"No, you didn't die. I talked to you afterwards, or with him. But I could tell something was wrong with you."

"Do you think it's Dad? Did he take my body and leave me to those three monsters?"

The thought had formed while he walked around the apartment. That must be it. The image of Dad, gun in his hand, proved it to be true. Amanda looked like he had slapped her. She touched his face and wiped away tears he hadn't noticed were running down his cheeks.

"Can you do that?"

"You probably can. If someone could turn me into this, someone else could sure as hell do that too."

His wings fluttered as he grew angry, and Amanda stepped away.

"Have you talked to him? The other Harlan... Grandpa?"

"Should I?"

"I don't know. What are you going to do? What am I going to do?"

"I want to remember more first. I feel completely lobotomized."

Harlan put his hand on the top of The Fence. Amanda had hung sheets of paper up to mark the icons' positions. A piece of finely knitted lace in a golden frame was already in place. The pattern in the lace



extended into lines on the frame and continued through the fence. Harlan tried to focus on the structure of the golden threads, but they seemed to switch places and twist in front of his eyes. Amanda walked over and threw her arms around him.

"You're too hot," she said. "Feverish."

"I feel feverish. It hurts all the time when you do that, so fucking bad. It cuts right to the bone."

She had experimentally touched the end of an iron bar that poked out by his clavicle, covered in a thin layer of leathery skin. She withdrew her hand and backed off.

"Don't stop, it feels good. We're becoming friends, the pain and I." He pulled her hand back to his mangled chest. "Hold me."

They sat down among the concrete sows on the floor. She tried to get used to his new face. *Second-hand*, was the word that came to her. It had been someone else's first. Someone who wasn't there anymore.

"Who did that face belong to?" She touched the broken nose.

"I don't want to know. Someone who scares Dad. Someone from his nightmares, I should think."

He pulled off her hairband, tangled his fingers in her hair and kissed her. She carefully met his tongue. It felt alive, normal. He smelled more like himself, now, when she could taste his saliva. His left wing crashed into a concrete sow. When he didn't think about them, the wings had a life of their own. "I should be careful of the sows," he said. "Moritz ruined one by sitting on it."

"You remember!" Amanda crawled into his arms and held him tight.

He unbuttoned her painter's overalls and caressed her back. "We shouldn't. Right? We're family."

"I don't give a fuck." She got up and stepped out of her overalls. Underneath, she wore a gray sports bra he had seen before, maybe when they were out dancing? He kicked his shoes off and got out of his jeans while she got naked. She walked around him in a circle, felt his wings and stroked the slightly-too-coarse skin. They had done something to his skin. She closed her hand around his cock. It was a little too hot, and the skin felt hard when she stroked it.

"Can you feel anything?"



“A little. Not that much. Use your nails.”

Amanda raked her nails over the head. Instead of crying out in pain, he merely smiled, as if the nerve signal just barely made it to his brain. She pushed the picture frames out of the way and jumped up on the bench. He unfolded his wings so that they wouldn't be in the way when she scissored her legs around him and pushed his cock inside her. He gently began to fuck her and tried to remember what it should feel like. The sensation was dulled, as if someone had enveloped his nerve endings in cotton, but she smiled at him and he smiled back.

“How does it feel?”

“It's nice. You don't have to be so gentle.”

He pushed harder, and the picture frames crashed to the floor. “I hope no one comes in.”

“It's just me here. Don't stop.”

She came. She gripped the struts on his back and his wings swung out of control. He tried to come, but it felt like he was wearing double condoms. She ended up jerking him off hard, pushing her nails into his scrotum until he almost cried out. He squirted semen all over her and one of the concrete sows.

“We could have made little cherubs,” she said.

“Shut up.”

“That wasn't wrong was it? Was I mean?”

“No, you weren't mean.”

They sat next to each other, she with one leg over his and her left hand gripping one of the wing struts, he with one hand on her crotch.

“Can I take your picture? I want to show Renate. If she can see you, I'll believe you exist.”

“Then pass me my jeans.”

She took fifteen pictures of him against the studio wall and put in a new album: Harlan, June 2017.







# 17. WINTERFELDTPLATZ: [HARLAN]

Thursday, June 15

"So even if they vote you onto the board, how are you going to do it? We want the project, not a board member without voting rights. We could have gotten that cheaper if we wanted to."

Mike had picked the sugar bowl out of the sink and started to fill it with new cigarette butts. They had been shouting at each other. "He was here!" [Harlan] had roared and waved a black feather under the aide's nose. "What kind of fucking protection is that?"

Mike had touched the quill, which turned into dust. "You're still alive, aren't you?"

The apartment at Winterfeldtplatz no longer felt safe. Besides, it was uncomfortably cramped. [Harlan] would have preferred to put a few rooms between himself and the aide. He had reluctantly accepted help from the Death Angel getting his Charlottenburg apartment back. Thaumiel had several servants within the judicial system and city administration. The police seemed willing to go along with it as long as he didn't liquidate his assets, but it would be another week before he could move.

Now they were in the kitchen, and [Harlan] flipped through papers and documents on the computer to check that nothing had changed or disappeared. Whatever the avenging angel was after, it didn't seem to have taken anything. The eeriest thing was that it had cleaned the kitchen up. Mike was vexed that it had walked right through his defenses. Therefore, he suddenly demanded that [Harlan] describe his plans.



"I still have my old network of protective spells and portals. Much of it is in the subway and buildings that are still standing. I'm going to connect it to the Wall again. Then I'll tie my network to your master's citadel. I can do that from the new temple."

"Our master's citadel."

"First I have to go through all the old paintings, maybe make some additions, but it won't be more than a couple of weeks. A month at most. I was planning to get Renate's art students to help me. They will be bound to our master through me. He'd like that, wouldn't he? Did you see Amanda's sculpture and the photographs in Bethanien? They'll work as a focus on that end."

"I'm not a fucking art critic. I'm your bodyguard."

"Being in there isn't good for you, is it? Just like you can't handle living in this neighborhood."

Mike couldn't pass into Inferno from the Winterfeldtplatz neighborhood without effort. The connection to Metropolis was too strong. [Harlan] was starting to feel uncomfortable in the gay quarter as well, just like Amanda's studio in Bethanien made breathing difficult. He didn't want to contemplate that.

"Never mind how I'm doing. When are you going to start on these additions?"

"I need to finish the new temple first. I'm going to talk to an old acquaintance about it. He might need some convincing, so you're welcome to tag along."

They took the black Mercedes that Mike had bought from a car salesman in Lichtenberg. "Completely worthless," was [Harlan]'s comment. It stood out like a magpie in a flock of budgies in Winterfeldtplatz, and it was impossible to parallel park. Besides, Mike was a lousy driver and wouldn't do as a chauffeur. [Harlan] drove past dull apartment buildings and onto the highway past Tempelhofer Feld, then into the industrial area by the canal where one of Ulrich's offices was located. It was evening, and all the windows except for Schaffer's were dark. [Harlan] stopped outside the gate and honked the horn until a man in working overalls came outside.

"It's closed."



"I'm here to see Ulrich Schaffer. We have an appointment."

They were let inside, and [Harlan] took them to the office. He hadn't been there a lot. Since the end of the Naughties, he and Ulrich had made an effort to keep their affairs apart. The secretary, a woman with tired eyes, opened the door for them.

"Come inside, Harlan. I'm so sorry about everything that's happened. It's terrible."

[Harlan] smiled carefully, unsure if they should be acquaintances, and asked for Ulrich. The office looked like he remembered it, overly ostentatious with bulging leather armchairs and nondescript pictures on the walls. Ulrich himself no longer matched the décor; dressed in a strict dark suit and a discreet tie, he was an old wolf in yuppie clothing.

"Christ." Ulrich looked up at him, and [Harlan] was reminded that he was half a head taller than he was used to. "You know, I don't think I've seen you since you were five years old. Terrible, this Clive business. Who could have known."

"I'm struggling to understand it myself." When [Harlan] saw Ulrich's quizzical look at Mike, he put his hand on the aide's shoulder. "This is Mike Wester. He takes care of my security. I've received some threats."

"You should have come to me. I could have helped you."

"I'm here now."

Three guys whom [Harlan] vaguely recognized sat in the kitchenette, playing cards. One of them, Peter, had been Ulrich's drug runner as a teen. Now he was wearing a slightly-too-expensive suit and bling on his wrists. Ulrich showed them the way through an open-plan office.

"We'll take the small conference room. Frieda, will you get us something to drink?"

In the meeting room, low chairs with red backrests stood around a glass table. Skype- and conference gear that [Harlan] doubted Ulrich could handle was inserted into the wall. Over a minibar along one of the walls hung a painting of Russian wheat fields, a Christmas present from Clive two years earlier, when they teased apart their last shared accounts and companies. Frieda put Absolut Vodka and mineral water on the table before she closed the door behind her. [Harlan] put his laptop on the table, mostly for show.



"I went through Father's papers. You've done some business together."

"It's a long time ago."

"The last transaction was in February 2015. The Christmas before he gave you that painting." [Harlan] nodded at the wheat fields. "And before that, you owned some companies together, didn't you?"

"Where are you going with this?"

"The police will take their own sweet time releasing my father's assets. I might need help here at the start. You will of course be compensated once the investigation is over."

"You want to borrow money?"

"No, I want you to help me with something. I've gathered that you help people into Germany for a fee."

"You want to smuggle someone into Germany?"

"I want you to procure two people for me that no one will miss. Age and gender is irrelevant. Young men will do. I think you can manage that. In fact, I know that you supplied my father with dead bodies over a decade ago, bodies that the police found burned in Dahlem. Does the name Bogdan Stancić, dead in May 1998, tell you anything?"

"What the hell are you saying? If this is some kind of police trap, I can tell you right away that I have no idea what you're talking about. And I don't smuggle people. I don't know where you got this from."

"It's not a police trap."

"Get out. Now. This conversation is over. Peter!"

Peter opened the door and stuck his head inside. He had a gun in his hand. Apparently Ulrich had thought that a meeting with [Harlan] outside of office hours was suspicious. "Throw this idiot and his friend out. They're not welcome here anymore."

Mike rose and put his cigarette out on Ulrich's hand before cutting off the three thugs' path to [Harlan]. Ulrich cried out in pain. The walls of the conference room bulged outward, as if from a powerful explosion. Mike's body burst open and twisted into a black inferno of metal rails and oily spikes. A rusty blade hit Peter under the kneecap, cutting through flesh and bone. He folded over as if rammed by a speeding car. The guy next to him took a steel ball to his solar plexus and a blow across the back of his neck that made him crumple to the floor. A black steel



claw pushed into his ribcage until it crunched. The third guy tried to run as an iron pipe hit him in the face. Teeth flew, lips cracked and his nose broke. The walls stabilized. Mike folded his infernal shape up and regained human form. He took aim with his thumb and used a sharp nail to crush the left eye on the guy with the broken nose. The man fell screaming to the floor and cradled his bleeding face. Mike sat down and lit another cigarette.

“You were talking about transferring two assets we need.”

Ulrich pressed a paper napkin against the burn on his hand. He had trouble breathing. [Harlan] poured him a glass of water.

“This wasn’t necessary,” Ulrich moaned. He was clammy and pale, and tried to scoot away from Mike.

“Yes, it was. Now you know that I’m my father’s son. You will call me on this phone.” He put down a cellphone in front of Ulrich. “I will tell you where we will receive the package. We need it within a week. After that, if this goes well, we might discuss further business that you might profit from.”

They stepped over the three guys on the floor. None of them looked dead. Frieda was gone.

“I’d say that went well,” Mike said in the elevator. “Now it feels like we’re getting somewhere.”







# IX. BETHANİEN: AMANDA, EMRE

Friday, June 16

Emre was dressed in a brown sweater and light pants that made him look older than he was. It was the kind of clothing he'd wear when he wanted to convince someone, Amanda had come to understand. He stood in front of the pictures of Harlan the angel, which Amanda had printed and put on the studio wall. Outside, a light summer rain blew against the windows.

"I can see the wall and the workbench," Emre said. "What is it you want me to see?"

"An angel maybe?" Amanda was dressed in the same gray T-shirt and torn jeans that she had worn when she came to Bethanien two days earlier. She hadn't been back home since. She had spent all of Thursday trying to call Renate, who didn't pick up. At first she thought that Clive would have stolen Harlan's body felt entirely plausible. But after a day, doubt set in. That's when she decided to show Emre the photographs.

"No angel." Emre sounded tired and stroked his beard. "Did Renate ask you to do this? She sometimes has me look at empty pictures."

"No, but I want to get hold of her." Amanda looked at the photographs. The memory of gripping Harlan's cock began to fade, as if she had been drunk or high when it happened, but she could clearly see a smiling angel look at her from the photographs. "What was it you wanted to talk about?" she asked.

"I just wanted to hear your opinion on Harlan's project with the art students." Emre assumed an authoritative voice, as if he expected her



to object. [Harlan] had hastily obtained money to repair Clive's old paintings in the subway. Four kids — Julia, Kim, Alex and Sara — had been asked to help out. Nikolai documented the process with his camera while giving artistic support.

"But why does he want to do it? Where are these paintings?"

"Here and there in the city. It's important to him that his father didn't leave only darkness behind. Don't you feel that way too? He was your grandfather."

"I'd rather not think about that. And why Nikolai? What does he know about street art?"

"Harlan is trying to make Nikolai feel like a part of the process, since he had doubts about the sponsor agreement. I think it's a good thing."

"I don't like it," Amanda said. It had only been three days since [Harlan] had been voted onto the board. Him suddenly teaching kids street art felt absurd.

"He knows nothing about art. Not a damn thing. He's a lawyer! Can't you hear yourself talking?"

"Maybe we don't have to argue about it?" Emre's cellphone rang. He fished it out of his pocket and answered. It was Svetlana. She sounded stressed out:

"We need to talk. Where are you?"

"In Bethanien, in Amanda's studio. Did something happen?"

"Yes. I'm on my way. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Svetlana hung up before Emre had time to ask what the matter was. They had talked about having dinner, without agreeing on a date. It was after that crazy night in Berghain. It had started with him and Svetlana talking in the bar, at first about Amanda, then about Emre's gallery—which Amanda had described to Svetlana in detail, it turned out. Emre asked her about Eberswalde, and they had free drinks before sneaking off to fuck in a room on the ground floor. He didn't really know how it had happened. He had really planned to go home early. Then they discovered that Amanda was missing, and were pulled into the chaos around the strange pool of blood on the dance floor. When no one was found hurt, everyone decided that someone must have poured blood from a container, two or three liters at least.



“What was that about?” Amanda began to fit a lace cloth into a gilded frame in order to occupy her hands. She had marked lace and frames with numbered tags to keep all the pieces in order.

“Svetlana is coming over. She wanted to talk to me about something.” For a moment, Emre lost his businesslike air.

“You found each other at that release party, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, we ran around looking for you for three hours.”

“I haven’t talked to her in a few days. I haven’t been well. I don’t want to bring her down. Do you think she’s mad at me?”

“No. But maybe a bit worried.”

They moved on to looking at The Fence, talking about the placement of the icons until Svetlana showed up and knocked on the doorframe. She looked more like herself again but had kept the blonde hair. Emre gave her a careful peck on the cheek, and she hugged Amanda tightly, as if to show she wasn’t angry.

“I’m glad you’re here too. You need to hear this.”

“Sit down.” Amanda pulled out a stool for her and sat down on the workbench.

“I’ve seen an old acquaintance in the emergency room in Biesdorf,” Svetlana said. “Peter, who works for Ulrich Schaffer. An asshole, but that’s not the point. He has his leg in a sling and looks like he’s been through a wood chipper.

“Poor bastard. Was it an accident?”

“No. Harlan’s hitman assaulted him and two others. The others are still in intensive care.” Svetlana briefly reported what Frieda had told her over the phone, about how she had locked herself in the bathroom, heard the screams and seen the terror on Ulrich’s face when he said they must not call 112, and certainly not the police. “Frieda had to drive them to the emergency room. Now she’s quitting.”

Emre sat down on a stool beside her. “Harlan’s hitman? That Mike guy?”

Svetlana nodded. “Ulrich is scared. Frieda has never seen him that scared before. Not like this.”

“Was Harlan there?” Amanda asked.

“He was there. Peter is terrified too. He warned me not to go anywhere near Harlan. And it’s not as if he usually cares about my well-being.”



Emre tried to interpret Amanda's expression. She looked frightened, but not particularly surprised. *You expected something like this, didn't you? What is it you're not telling us?*

"Who is this hitman?" Amanda asked. "Does anyone know him?"

"Mike Wester. I looked up his company. It's shady. It's been around for two decades, but no-one I've talked to knows what they actually do." Svetlana fiddled nervously with the lace cloths stacked on the workbench next to Amanda. "I'm sorry. I know you've been a mess and I really didn't want to dig deeper into this. But Frieda called me and I felt I had to talk to you. I was scared."

"Are you afraid he might hurt me?" Amanda thought about the skulls in the temple. She wasn't afraid of Grandpa, she realized. Even if he had stolen Harlan's body, she didn't fear him.

"Something is wrong with him. Maybe the shock gave him some kind of brain damage. That's what you thought when we talked before—that perhaps it was a stroke. I don't know. He needs help."

"So what do we do?" Emre said. "We decided to vote him onto the board last Tuesday. Can we prove he's mentally unbalanced somehow? Could any of those guys talk about what happened?"

"They won't talk. They would never tell the police."

Amanda hopped down from the bench. "Where is Harlan now? Is he at home?"

"No, he's out painting with the students somewhere," Emre said with suppressed anger. "This is their first day at work. Nikolai is there too. Renate might know where they are."

Amanda tried calling Renate again. This time she got through. "She's at Urban Spree. I'll go there and talk to her. See if you can find Nikolai." She changed her shoes and pulled on a beige summer jacket before disappearing out the door. A little too scared, was Emre's feeling, even considering what Svetlana had said.

"I should write down what you said," he told Svetlana. "Do you have time to stay a little while? We can go to my room."

Before they left the studio, they exchanged a brief hug and a kiss to confirm that what happened at the club wasn't a mistake. It made Svetlana look a little happier. That felt good. Emre shared a small office with



two other project leaders, but in reality he had the room to himself. The furniture consisted of two desks and four mismatched wooden chairs. He took his laptop out. Svetlana sat down on a paint-stained chair and watched as he began to type.

"This is a little overwhelming," Emre said. "Maybe you could help me talk to the board?"

"If you think it'll help. I don't understand anything. Harlan is really a sweet guy. When I started looking for Karo, I came to him because I couldn't imagine he'd be mixed up in anything."

"He's been a little cold and distant after this thing with his dad. I think he's staying away from Amanda." Emre started on a new password-protected document.

"He is," Svetlana said. "It was killing Amanda that he didn't pick up when she called. She doesn't know whether to be angry or worried."

"What did Harlan want with Schaffer?" Emre asked.

"No idea. Clive and Ulrich did business together in the Nineties. They sold cocaine. That's all I know."

"I think Clive was a magician." Emre gave Svetlana a searching look, but she merely nodded as if she understood. He continued: "Several of the artists in the project are occultists. At first I thought it was just nonsense. But I've come to believe that they can do things I can't explain."

"Amanda is psychic," Svetlana said, as if it was self-evident. "She saw the murder victims in Dahlem in pictures I'd taken, as if they were out in the open, even though they were cremated and put in pots."

"She tried to make me see an angel in the pictures she pinned on the studio wall. Come on, let's go downstairs."

They went back to the studio. The rain had let up. The sun shone in through The Fence and cast a checked pattern across the concrete sows. Svetlana stared at the pictures of the workbench, fourteen nearly identical photographs. "I can't see anything," she said. "Can you?"

"No, nothing. I have to try to get hold of Nikolai. Can you stay for lunch? We can finish writing after."

"Sure."

They stood there, staring at the photographs, while Emre called Nikolai and was told that the subscriber could not be reached.



Renate rented a studio in Urban Spree, a cluster of old warehouses that had been turned into a center for street art. There, she painted oils with broken city patterns and lopsided mandalas, paintings that were sold in the shop in the same building and that had funded the youth project before the municipality contributed. The culture area was housed in the brick buildings in an old rail yard. Amanda came there at lunch time, when there were a lot of people about. She found Renate sitting in front of a half-finished mandala in blue and gray.

"I've been trying to call you," Amanda said.

"I was in Metropolis." Renate was dressed in the same outdoor clothing as when they had met at the children's hospital.

"Do you know where Harlan is? Does he have students with him?"

"Yes, I think I know approximately where they are. Why?"

"There's something I want to show you." Amanda took her cellphone out and brought up a picture of Harlan, his wings unfolded against the studio wall. He smiled at the camera and made a V-sign with his right hand.

"Can you see him?" she asked.

"Is that an angel? In your studio?" Renate took her phone and pulled her glasses down the bridge of her nose to get a better look.

"It's Harlan. The one working with the kids is my grandfather. Clive. He stole Harlan's body."

"You're kidding me?" Renate zoomed in on the face with the lopsided nose. She panned out to see the wings and seemed to contemplate their construction.

"I'm serious. And scared. I haven't been able to talk to anyone about this. No one would believe me. Emre couldn't even see him in the pictures." Amanda recounted Svetlana's story of the assault at Schaffer's office and described her meetings with Harlan. She left the sex out. She saw that Renate had difficulty believing her. "Do you think I'm making this up?"

"You've been through a lot lately. I'm not saying you didn't meet this... angel. But how can you be sure it's Harlan?"



“Where is he? At least try to get the students away from him until we know what’s going on. Why are you letting him teach them?”

“The board thought it was a good idea, and I wanted a couple of days to myself.” Renate looked a little sheepish. She tried calling both [Harlan] and Nikolai, with no answer. “They’re at Friedrichstraße. There’s no coverage there,” she said. “We can go there.”

En route to the subway, she told Amanda about the paintings at Bahnhof Friedrichstraße. During all of the Seventies, Clive worked on a great mural that covered parts of the maintenance tunnels and underground rooms around the then-closed station. The painting was the hub in his network of doors between East and West, a waystation where he stored crates of coffee and cigarettes, and where refugees waited to be transported to safety. Almost everything was washed off or destroyed when the subway station was rebuilt after the Wall fell. Renate and Amanda got off on the U2 platform.

“I didn’t know that any of it remained. They remodeled absolutely everything here, but Harlan told me about these rooms that were left behind. They were walled up until a few years ago. Look out for the third rail.”

Renate showed the way into the tunnel from the eastern end of the platform and onward to a recess where a steel door was painted with a smiling yellow dick. A train rattled by while she looked for the right key on a crammed keyring and unlocked the door. They lit their way with headlamps through a low concrete tunnel. In the distance, voices could be heard through a half-open door. Renate knocked on the door, and Nikolai peeked out.

“Hi!” she said. “I just wanted to check up on you. I brought Amanda.”

They were let into a low, bunker-like room with rough concrete floors, walls and ceiling. Forty years earlier, every surface had been covered in paint. Now it took an effort to make out the dancing, half-human shapes against the concrete. A battery-driven work lamp hung from a hook in the ceiling. On the far short wall, some figures had gotten fresh paint: a white faun and a bird-headed man flanked something that resembled a many-eyed spider.

“Amanda! I’m so glad you wanted to come.”



[Harlan] was on his knees, stirring a can of white paint. Julia and Sara were using brushes to paint the spider creature in the middle of the wall in red and yellow. They waved at Amanda with wide smiles. Alex was filling in stooping shapes on a border along the ceiling, while Kim was spreading putty over a damaged section of the wall. Mike had stretched out in a corner, watching. Nikolai was taking before and after photos of the paintings.

The paintings were magical. It was barely perceptible in the almost-faded figures and more tangible in the newly painted ones. Amanda and Renate could both see it. Amanda walked up to the spider creature and looked at it. It had a score of legs and just as many eyes. When she stretched out a hand, it retreated into the concrete, as if shying away.

"Are you feeling better?" [Harlan] asked.

Amanda looked into his eyes and was suddenly unsure. He had Harlan's eyes, Harlan's smile. "I'm back to work," she said. "It feels good."

"It's constructive to keep your hands busy. Do you want to help out?"

"I don't know. Maybe. We were wondering why you started here. No one can come to look. And you don't know anything about art, do you?"

He guffawed. "Nikolai takes care of the teaching. I'm just helping out. It was the right place to start. And the kids are enjoying themselves."

Alex and Kim assured them that this was the best thing they had done in a long time. They were learning loads. Even Nikolai, who was normally sullen, had a wide grin on his face. He showed [Harlan] the pictures he'd taken and smiled happily when he was told they looked good.

"I want you to suspend the work until we've established what the students will actually do," Renate said. "It's not even legal to be down here."

"And where you're working with them is legal?"

"From now on it will be. Think about your main sponsor. They wouldn't allow any illegal activities."

"Darling, you can't tell me what to do."

At first, Renate looked as if she was going to hit him. Instead, she walked over and put her hand against his cheek: "My god. It's just like Amanda said. It's you. What have you done?"

[Harlan] flinched, disturbed by her touch. "We want peace and quiet here. It's nice of you to swing by, but we have to keep going."



Mike got up and put out his cigarette: "You heard him. It's time to leave."

Amanda took Renate's arm and pulled her outside. "We don't want to argue with him for no good reason. Nothing will happen to the students. Right, Harlan?"

"They're safe here. Don't worry."

Amanda stopped inside the door to the train tunnel: "You go. I can stay. I don't want to leave him in there with the students. I don't think Grandpa will let Mike hurt me." Why would she ever think that?

Renate gave her a panicked look: "It's Clive, isn't it? He used to talk to me like that."

"I'm pretty sure it's him."

Renate leaned against the steel door and closed her eyes. Amanda, who had led the way to the Dahlem temple, and now exposed Grandpa's trick to avoid Hell, felt irrationally guilty.

"Maybe you could just end the class for the semester?" she said. "The sooner the better. Why does he want their help to paint this? Do you understand what he's doing?"

"Something magical. You felt it too. These are the strongest portals. He wants them for something. And who is the bodyguard?"

"There's an oily bubble around him. Something hellish. I felt it in Bethanien and was going to tell you, but you were talking to Mrs. Decken and I never got around to it."

"I have to talk to Moritz. He needs to know. Should I ask Emre to come here? What are we going to do?"

"No idea. We'll have to talk about it later."

Renate snuck into the tunnel between two passing trains, and Amanda went back into the bunker.

"I changed my mind," she said. "I'll stay for a while."

"What the fuck!" Mike got up and came toward her, but [Harlan] stopped him.

"Amanda is allowed to be here. And please don't use that tone with her."

The bodyguard pulled a face and sat down again. Amanda began to help Kim with the concrete putty and asked her what she was going to do over summer. *Normal*, she thought. *Normal has to be good. Talk about*



*something normal*. Still, it slipped out of her, when [Harlan] handed her the pail of putty:

“Why his body? The world is fucking full of bodies!”

[Harlan] angled himself so that his back was toward Mike and lowered his voice: “Pull yourself together! We can’t argue in front of the students.”

“What is it you’re doing here?” Amanda took a deep breath and balled her hands into fists. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“We’ll talk about it later. Not here.”

All the work had ceased, just like when [Harlan] had come by the brewery two weeks earlier. Nikolai was nervously scrolling through pictures on his camera. Mike was listening with interest, a worried frown between his eyes.

“Sorry,” Amanda said. “I’ve been under a lot of pressure.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

She continued puttying the wall up together with Kim, who picked up the conversation again and talked about her family’s planned safari in South Africa. Apparently her father was some sort of bigshot at Humboldt University. He was going to give a talk in Cape Town about something to do with social structures. Everyone breathed out and the giggly giddiness came back. It was as if the exchange with [Harlan] had never happened.



# 14. ԲԵԻՆԱՆԻԵՆ: ԵՄՐԵ, ԱՄԱՆԾԱ

Thursday, June 22

Mrs. Decken and Mr. Sauer looked at Emre with pity. He tried again, with his most authoritative voice: “The mere suspicion of criminal contacts is completely devastating when we work with youths. We have to be able to temporarily suspend the project and find out if there’s something to this. At least not let him work directly with the students without supervision.” The wrong words, he realized when they were out of his mouth.

Nikolai leaned across the table. “What do you mean without supervision? I’m there! It’s going great. If I may say so, this smells of a vendetta. You feel that your authority is threatened.”

Nikolai had begun to dress in a more dapper fashion, in a shirt and leather vest, and shaved every morning now. Lotti Decken had made the observation, and Nikolai cheerfully said: “Harlan made me clean up.”

“There are no suspicions,” Nadine says. “It’s all lies. Can’t you tell the Russian is lying? She wants to ruin everything because her sister died. No one else has heard of this assault. No one reported it to the police. Such a violent assault without a police report, it’s totally unreasonable.”

“She’s not Russian, and I don’t think she’s lying.”

“I saw you in Berghain. You’re not thinking clearly here, Emre.”

Emre had seen Nadine and [Harlan] huddled together at the table by the courtyard in the restaurant, looking through project plans meant for the municipality. He wanted to say something about their suddenly



hearty relationship and ask how clearly Nadine was thinking herself, but let it go. Instead, he brought up the last item on the document in the computer:

“There are also these emails directed at Renate. If anything, they imply that Harlan is a bad influence on the kids.”

At least Lotti Decken ought to react to the fact that Renate was isolated from her own project and got threatening emails from the students. Hannes had called her a fucking cunt and written that she should stop screwing with [Harlan].

Lotti did indeed look very uncomfortable when she saw the screen dump. “I realize that this must feel terrible, Nate.” She took Renate’s hand. “But that’s not what we’re going to talk about here today. Can’t we schedule a new meeting for next week and draw up a clear outline for the youth project, so that this kind of thing doesn’t happen? Maybe you lost control over those rowdy boys?”

Renate pulled her hand away and was unable to hide her hurt. Emre gave up. Renate had tried to appeal to Nikolai. Did he not see what was strange about an art project in places no one could reach? He didn’t. When the murals were first painted, it seemed almost intentional that they were out of the way. Did she suddenly change her mind because she felt Harlan’s dad had let her down? And besides, it was documented in photographs. If anything the board was even more firmly on [Harlan]’s side after the emergency meeting. Moritz had sensed where the wind was blowing and stayed away.

“There’s an infernal influence. Faint but noticeable,” Renate said when the others had left. “I recognize it. It’s like a smell. Amanda said he has infernal protection. She has a knack for seeing things like that.”

Emre poured more coffee for Renate. “I’m thinking about quitting,” he said. “I can’t handle this.”

“You can’t walk away now! We only need to convince one of them to get rid of him.”

At this point, nine of the art students were working on restoring Clive’s pictures. It was a popular activity, and kids were lining up to be a part of it. The bunker under Friedrichstraße was almost finished, and they had begun working on a sequence of pictures in the basement of



a building in Prenzlauer Berg. Renate was furious. She was no longer kept informed of the students' location.

"I've been thinking about setting up protection around the students he hasn't gotten his claws into yet. Maybe hide them," she told Emre.

"You realize that sounds like kidnapping, or at least some sort of unlawful dispossession?"

She shrugged. "I haven't decided yet. I'm going to discuss the matter with Moritz. Let's talk tomorrow?"

"I guess so."

Emre stayed behind for a long time, writing. He had gotten into the habit of taking notes of everything that was said and done in an encrypted document, afraid that his memory might not work like it should. He had just finished and folded up his laptop when [Harlan] stepped into the room.

[Harlan] shouted right into Emre's face: "What the fuck do you think you're doing? You keep your grubby fingers away from my work. Do you think a secret meeting is enough to get rid of me, you little creep?"

"I'm doing my job. Your project has gotten out of hand. The way you're acting right now should be enough to make you take a break, if you just stop and think for a minute. It's too bad the others left. They would understand if they could see you now. Could you ask Mr. Wester to wait outside? If we're going to talk about this, I want to do it in private."

"You can't tell me what to do, you little turd."

Emre got up and lifted the laptop out of the way, afraid that [Harlan] might throw it on the floor: "We can talk when you've calmed down. Now get out! And take your bodyguard with you."

Mike stepped in behind Emre and put his hands on his shoulders. *They'll bash my head in now. Shit.* An absurdly strong hand gripped his neck and lifted him off the floor.

"Don't kill him," [Harlan] said, and at the edge of his horror Emre had the lucid thought that he ought to have recorded this on his phone.

The wall with the projector screen took on a milky white sheen and faded away, followed by the three other walls, until the room was gone. They stood on a burning battlefield where bloated horse cadavers and shot-up armored vehicles were half-buried in the mud. Mike alternated



between carrying and pushing Emre ahead of him across a plank to an oblong hole a couple of meters deep. An open mass grave. The bodies looked like dolls, tossed into the mud. With a scream, Emre was hurled into the grave and landed on a stiff, cold torso covered in mud and blood.

## Amanda

The concrete sows in Amanda's studio had moved again. Every night they edged closer towards the iconostasis, snouts pointed at the opening where she had intended to put the gate. Their colors shifted, too. Today they were redder than usual. Amanda pulled them away from The Fence. She had begun to talk to them more often since they came alive: "There's nothing there. You're getting ideas." They returned to their original blue-black color. "I'm afraid that Harlan might leave us," she told them. "Being here makes him hurt."

Two nights earlier, they had walked along the canal in Tiergarten, headed from the blooming rose garden and down past the lawns under tall linden trees. They held hands, but they were both stiff and scared. Harlan didn't think he could do anything about Clive. *And even if I could, I don't know if I want to. Should I be his judge and executioner? I have to at least think about it first.*

Amanda understood him. She felt something similar, a stupid fantasy about saving Grandpa from hell. Still, she was upset when Harlan said that. He wasn't angry in return, just mute. They parted without making plans to meet again.

Amanda had declined participating in the emergency board meeting to discuss [Harlan]. "I'm afraid I'll say something stupid," she told Emre. "Renate is better at reasoning with people." It hadn't helped, as she understood when Nadine came by and enthusiastically told her that [Harlan] would be given a bigger role in the project and would like to work closer with her. Amanda was on her way up to the office to find Emre when her cellphone rang. Svetlana. She sounded worried: "Hi, is Emre there?"

"No, not right here. I'm in the studio. Should he be here?"

"We were supposed to have dinner. We had booked a table for eight." It was nine o'clock. "He's not answering his phone. Is that his style?"



“It really isn’t. But he’s had a lot on his plate. There was some sort of emergency meeting about Harlan that ended a moment ago. Shall I go upstairs and see if I can find him?”

She went upstairs to Emre’s office, which was empty, and tried the conference room where the emergency board meeting had been held. When she held her head close to the door, she heard screams and what sounded like muted explosions. She carefully opened the door and looked into Inferno. It was worse than what she had imagined from Renate’s descriptions. The old lady had at some point wandered through Hell when she was young, and briefly spoken of what was there. Amanda had to bite her tongue in order not to instinctively slam the door shut.

“I’m going to check one more place,” she told Svetlana on the phone. “I’ll call you back.”

After the encounter with [Harlan] under Friedrichstraße, Renate had taught her how to protect herself against infernal powers: “In case Mike becomes violent, but I don’t know if it’ll help. It depends on what he is.” Since then, Amanda always carried two pieces of chalk in her pocket. She drew a circle around herself and visualized a web of golden barbed wire in the air. “Choose a form of protection that feels natural to you,” Renate had said. When the barbed wire was in place, Amanda took a deep breath and stepped through the door into the reeking war-zone. Corpses lay everywhere. The ground felt dead. Clouds of flies drew patterns against the glow of fires on the horizon. Mike crouched next to an open grave, looking down into it. Next to him, [Harlan] was hurling curses into the hole. *Grandpa*. She had started to call him that in her head. *Grandpa has gone insane and killed Emre too*. The barbed wire whirled around her, a corona of golden lines. She walked across the grimy plank one step at a time, avoiding looking to the side.

“What have you done?” She stepped up to the grave. Emre lay down there, looking up with brown eyes that were glossy with shock. Alive, but barely conscious. He had sunk down among the ruined bodies.

“You shouldn’t be here,” [Harlan] said. “Come, I’ll take you away from here.” He tried to grab her arm, but the whirling barbed wire cut him across the hand. He drew back in a spray of blood.



“Have you gone completely mad?” Amanda reached out through the cloud of barbed wire and shook him. “Grandpa, you have to let him go. Tell your fucking dog to help him get out of that pit.”

Mike didn’t move a muscle, and [Harlan] tried to stanch the flow of blood from his hand. Amanda knelt down and reached into the pit. Emre managed to grab her wrists and heaved himself over the edge.

“Things went overboard,” [Harlan] said and pressed the sleeve of his jacket against his wounded hand. “It’s a good thing you came.”

“We’ll talk about this later,” he told Emre. “I’m sorry it came to this.”

Amanda merely shook her head at him. He looked genuinely sorry. “You need help,” she said. “You can start with getting rid of that guy over there.” With Emre leaning on her shoulder, she stumbled across the plank to the door that opened onto the corridor.

Mike spat into the grave and swore at [Harlan]: “You’re a fucking cunt, do you know that?”

In the same moment that Amanda and Emre stepped through the door to the corridor, Inferno faded away and the conference room was recreated behind them. The protective barbed wire disappeared. Emre’s clothes were sodden with blood and corpse runoff. He stank of cadavers. Amanda put him on a chair and called Svetlana.

“He’s here, in Bethanien, on the second floor.” She sat down next to Emre. Her legs wouldn’t carry her. Her hands were shaking so badly she could barely hold her phone.

“Where have you been?” Svetlana sounded frightened. “Do you know what time it is? I’ve been looking for you all over since the janitor let me in.”

Amanda looked at her watch. Half past eleven. They had been gone for almost three hours. It felt like ten minutes. “He had a fight with Harlan and Mike. But I think he’s okay.” She turned to Emre. “Are you hurt?”

He shook his head and vomited on the carpet. Amanda’s overalls were bloody and reeking too. She got up on her feet and stepped out of it. When Svetlana came running up the stairwell, Amanda was in her T-shirt and panties. Emre had started peeling his clothes off too. He threw them as far away as he could into a corner.

“You’re bleeding.” Svetlana touched his grimy back.

“It’s not mine. There were a bunch of corpses. God, I stink.”



“We were in Hell,” Amanda said. “Grand... Harlan dragged him into Hell.” Her voice didn’t quite carry. She started heaving and coughed into a cup that was left on the conference table. Svetlana didn’t look like she was listening.

“Is there a shower here?” she asked and wiped corpse fluids from Emre’s beard with the flowery napkins from the coffee table. He was shaking like a newly bathed dog.

“Yeah, I can show you.”

They led Emre to the shower room. Amanda fetched two clean overalls while Svetlana helped him wash up. His skin was cold and clammy from shock. He wouldn’t say what had happened. She picked revolting fragments of something she didn’t want to name from his hair, and he stuck his head into the shower to get rid of the residue.

“Do we call the police?” Svetlana dried him off with a moderately clean towel they had found hanging on the radiator.

“But I’m alright,” Emre inspected himself. No injuries. He put on the overalls that Amanda had fetched, and combed his beard. The panic began to subside. The memory of the battlefield filmed over. “What do we tell them? That he opened a gate to Hell? They’d say I’m crazy and claim that I’m trying to smear Harlan’s name. They think you’re after him for Karoline’s sake.” He caressed Svetlana’s cheek. His hand wasn’t icy anymore. “I’m sorry there was no dinner.”

“I’ll take you home.”

Amanda stayed in Bethanien and declined when Emre asked if she wanted to come with him. “I’m going to take a shower and clean up here before I go home.” She wanted to stay with the sows in the studio, but she didn’t say it out loud. Even after all this it sounded too stupid to say she felt safe among them. And she needed to be alone with her thoughts. As late as this afternoon, before the emergency board meeting, she had contemplated talking to Grandpa. It felt impossible now.

“I’ll call you tomorrow,” Svetlana said. “We need to talk.”

Emre’s place was only five minutes away. He lived in one of the renovated buildings by Kottbusser Brücke. Svetlana parked in front of the gate and Emre fumbled to get the keys out of the pocket of his overalls. It was raining. Thunder rumbled in the distance.



“Do you want me to come upstairs with you?”

He nodded. Stepping through the dark gate alone felt impossible. *Did he make me afraid of the dark?* They took the elevator upstairs, and once they got inside he turned all the lights on.

“Your place looks really nice.”

Four Biedermeier chairs with maroon seats stood in the hallway. Around a chubby Rococo mirror hung little non-figurative paintings with lines in soft colors that made the wall look alive. Emre locked the door behind them. In the living room, they sat down on the couch that overlooked the street along the canal. A summer thunderstorm had sailed in, and lightning flashed across the roofs.

“Can you talk about it?” Svetlana asked.

“It’s starting to fade away. There was a grave full of corpses. A battlefield. Now it almost feels like a dream. Do you think it was all in my head?”

“You were covered in blood.”

“I don’t think I want to be alone. Will you stay?”

“Of course I will. Doofus.”

Emre shuddered. She grabbed one of the gray woolen blankets that accentuated the armrests and wrapped it around him. He lay down, suddenly very tired.

“There’s beer in the kitchen, if you want,” he said. “Or you could make a cup of coffee. I’m going to close my eyes for a while.”

The kitchen shone with chrome details; black-and-white photograph of stark faces overlooked a small drop-leaf table with two bar stools. The coffee machine looked like it required a barista license. There were no beans in the grinder. Svetlana found the manual in a kitchen drawer and beans in a cabinet next to an unopened box of hand-made chocolate. The first espresso failed. The second one was better, and the third looked practically professional. When she returned to the living room with two cups and the box of chocolate under her arm, Emre was sitting up, breathing heavily.

“I can’t sleep,” he said. “It all comes back to me then. Did I scream?”

“Not that I could hear. Maybe you shouldn’t have coffee if you’re that upset?”



"I want to stay awake." Emre knocked the espresso back and hugged the blanket tighter. Svetlana put her arms around him. His hands were cold again.

"Amanda saved me," he said. "Otherwise they would have left me for dead. The bodyguard wanted to kill me."

"That sounds insane. You realize that? You have to quit. This is crazy."

Emre could tell that Svetlana couldn't decide what to believe. She massaged his hands and glanced at the street, where rain was drizzling through the treetops.

"He's ensnared a dozen school kids that Renate was working with," he said. "Made them love him and hate Renate."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I can't just walk away."

He leaned in to kiss her, and she stopped him: "You're in shock. Chilled to the bone."

"I want to think about something else and forget all about that."

He tasted blood. "It's mine," he said. "I bit my tongue. Do I still smell weird?"

"You smell nice. Maybe a little of industrial soap."

They peeled each other's clothes off and huddled under the gray blanket, glued against each other until the heat crawled back into Emre's hands and feet. He hunched down at the end of the couch and licked her pussy. She laughed about his tickly beard. She gently and slowly sucked his cock. He smelled strongly of the jasmine soap in Bethanien; even his cock tasted of jasmine. The rose tattoo on his forearms continued onto his torso and down his loins in a tightly woven pattern. Afterward, he fell asleep like a baby, huddled into a big ball on the middle of the couch. Svetlana tucked the blanket in around his feet, wrapped the other blanket around herself and ripped the seal on the box of chocolates. A streetlamp by the canal cast a pale light on the windows. If [Harlan] wanted to, he could probably saunter right through the wall and let the bodyguard bludgeon both of them to death. No point in dwelling on it. She worked her way through the chocolates and listened to Emre's snuffling breath against the couch pillow.







# 20.

## KREUZBERG: AMANDA

Monday, June 26

Moritz measured with his fingers between Amanda's breasts and pressed the stencil paper against her skin. When he peeled the paper off, her heart chakra was covered by a hideous seal of Solomon.

"Does it being ugly have any magical significance?" Amanda looked down at the inch-wide blob on her sternum. She was over-tired, close to falling asleep in the stench of disinfectant. The only place where she could sleep was among the sows in the studio, and only for an hour or so at a time.

"Don't be a baby."

The six-pointed star was surrounded by four concentric circles where sacred names were written in Moritz' smudgy handwriting. They were gathered at his place under the eaves in the commune. Amanda was leaning back in an old recliner covered with a clean sheet. The tattoo machine, a red gadget with spools, stood on a stool next to them. A green mask covered Moritz' face up to the eyes. He put the needle against the skin on her sternum and started to draw the star while spitting muffled phrases behind the mask. A warm, tickling sensation spread through Amanda's chest. Emre and Svetlana sat on beer crates, stripped to the waist with compresses over the fresh tattoos on their chests. Amanda could see the sigils' magic shine through the gauze, silver burning through white. Svetlana had called Amanda early on Friday morning. She had asked her to describe what had happened in Hell, and they had talked for an hour. At first, Svetlana fell silent when she heard that [Harlan]



was Karoline's murderer in a new body. Then she swore in Russian and wanted them to kill him. Amanda felt ashamed to object. *It's still my grandpa. And Harlan's body. We should go to the police.* But she knew that was impossible.

"Stay still. Try to help me focus." Moritz snapped his fingers in front of Amanda's eyes.

Renate was cleaning the room. She rummaged in the paper bags and picked up odds and ends: a handy jar, an ashtray, a set of silver-plated drawing implements. Between each bag, she took her cellphone out and checked for messages. She had tried to call all the art students with no success. Those parents who picked up were evasive, as if they suspected that something was wrong with her.

"You can't let him continue," Svetlana said. "He's going to kill someone else. He's made Emre forget everything now."

Three days had passed since Emre woke up at dawn and felt his memories fade. He woke Svetlana, who told him that he had been in Hell. It had felt unreal even then. Now Inferno was completely gone from his head, replaced by a memory where [Harlan] yelled at him in the conference room in Bethanien. When he talked to Amanda, she claimed to remember everything. That was enough for him to let Moritz put a rock n' roll tattoo in the middle of his chest and sabotage the rose weave he had spent three years having made. Svetlana protested at first, but he nagged at her until she finally acquiesced to having a sigil tattooed on her chest.

"Harlan didn't make him forget," Renate said. "It's the Illusion. He has seen too much. It changes his memories."

"Who's changing my memories?" Emre clumsily pulled his shirt on and helped Svetlana get into her blouse. He nudged a big dust bunny with his foot. Normally he kept away from Moritz' den. He didn't want to be reminded of the old man's sad living situation. Now it felt as if the squalor hung together with the occult legacy he had tried to ignore.

"Not *who*. *What*. The Illusion. Everything you see around you is a lie, a shadowplay that prevents you from looking into reality. What happened was upsetting enough to let you see the truth temporarily, but the Illusion controls your senses and edits your memory after the fact to keep you in your place.



“That sounds like neo-Platonic drivel,” Emre said. “Completely insane.”

“But that’s why you don’t remember. You haven’t had any issues with what I do over at the children’s hospital. That’s about the Illusion too. But you didn’t want to listen when I talked to you about it.” She almost sound angry now. Worry and fatigue broke through the polite surface.

Emre shook his head and tugged at his beard, like he did when he was nervous. “Amanda remembers.”

“Some people are immune. There’s magical protection. The tattoos you have now will protect you. And some memories simply can’t be changed. Do you remember Udo, Mori?”

Moritz grunted under his mask. He sat with his face a hand’s breadth away from Amanda’s chest, deftly sketching the words that would let themselves be joined into the Demiurge’s true name.

“Udo was rescued across the wall by Clive in the Eighties as one of the last to be helped through. He was a student, a gifted mathematician. When he came to the West, he entered Technische Universität. Then the Wall fell. We got into Moritz’ Beetle and went over to see Udo’s mother. She lived by Volkspark Friedrichshain, in a damp apartment building that almost everyone had abandoned even before the Wall fell. Kids from the West and a group of Polish men had moved into the house a few days after *Mauerfall*. Two of the old tenants were still there, an older couple, but they claimed to never have heard of Udo or his mother. They had lived there for twenty years, they said, and swore that no Mrs. Uhlmann had ever lived there. For two days, we went back and forth through East Berlin in search of the mother. We spoke to teachers and students at Humboldt University. We drove out to Sportforum where Udo had practiced running at near-elite level. No one remembered him or his mother. People he claimed to know didn’t exist. Had never existed. Others swore that they’d never seen him before. His girlfriend Gabriella—he had spoken to me about her for hours—had never existed.” Renate fell silent and had trouble speaking. She looked out the window toward the northwest, where the Berlin Wall had run just a stone’s throw away when she and Moritz lived here together. She had used to sit here and smoke, watching the boarded-up houses on the other side.



Moritz pulled down his mask and picked up where she had left off: “The engine died in the middle of an empty field on the way back from Sportforum. I yelled at Udo. Said he was a liar and a Stasi agent. Then the fields around us faded away. The ground distorted under Udo’s feet, and it looked like he fell apart into a thousand pieces. A moment later he was gone without a trace. I felt like a fucking idiot for standing there and yelling at him.”

“I met him ten or twelve years later, in Metropolis,” Renate said. “The Illusion had spit him out. He couldn’t return. Only Moritz and I remember him.”

“And probably Clive,” Moritz said. “He was there.” He had finished Amanda’s tattoo and fastened a compress over the sigil.

“Why was his life gone?” Amanda said.

“Nobody knows. It was as if it had never existed. If there’s something you’re about to learn, it is that a lot of things have no explanation.” Moritz helped Amanda to her feet. His grip was surprisingly strong. “Don’t look so sad,” he said. “You do realize that we don’t think you’re involved in Clive’s fuckery? It’s not your fault he’s your grandpa. It doesn’t mean a damn thing.”

Renate had suggested that they meet at Moritz’ place, the safest place she knew of. And when Moritz heard of Emre’s trip to Hell, he offered to make protective tattoos. But when Svetlana yelled at him that they had to do more than that, for fuck’s sake, he looked away. The old artist couple looked small and frail. Renate talked about removing the art students from the graffiti project. She had spent two hours on the phone with Lotti Decken, who merely laughed and said that Renate was needlessly worried. Moritz muttered that this foundation thing was a dumb idea to begin with. “It’s not supposed to be a hierarchical project. We shouldn’t have a board. He wouldn’t have been able to waltz in like that if we hadn’t bothered with a budget and a board.”

“But now we do,” Renate said. “Stop whining! Think about how Svetlana lost her sister. We have to be able to do something. The most important thing is to get the kids away from him. And find out what he’s after. It can’t be the portals. They just crisscross Berlin. Why does he want to renovate them?”



"I'm staying on as project leader." Emre stood in front of the only mirror in the room, a 18th century freestanding beast framed with cherubs, buttoning his shirt. "I'm not going to let him scare me away. Has anyone talked to him since this happened?"

"He's staying away," Amanda said. "I've tried to call him. Maybe he realized that he went too far. And it's not Harlan. It's my grandfather. I'm completely sure. Renate and Moritz can see the photos of the man with wings. That's Harlan."

Amanda's cellphone with the pictures of Harlan the angel lay on the windowsill. Renate restlessly scrolled through the pictures, as if hunting for some hidden message. Moritz coped better. Once he had decided it was true, he merely shrugged: "That fucker. It's what you'd expect from him."

He told them about how Clive had come to him and asked for protective tattoos a few weeks earlier. "But he never showed up for his appointment. I guess he got desperate once the police came for him."

"You shouldn't become that desperate," Renate said.

"He is who he is. He sold Sonja out. That was the last straw for me. He returned from London in the summer of Eighty-six and brought Rachel with him. They were head over heels, and I nearly told her that it wouldn't last, and make sure he can't get to your money. If I had known, I would have told her. Sonja was from East Berlin—didn't she attend the art school in Weißensee at the same time as you, Nate?"

"Yes, sculpture. And you thought you'd train her as a magician."

"Right, I'd forgotten. And she turned out to be completely uneducable. In any case, she helped Clive smuggle people westward. She couldn't make roads, but she had contacts and set up meeting spots, code words, stuff like that. When Clive returned from London—he'd been gone for six months—Stasi had begun to stick their nose into the human smuggling. They were tipped off about where they could find Sonja along with someone she had promised would have Clive's help across the border. I'm sure Clive sold them out to save his own skin. Sonja died in prison two years later, right before the Wall fell. Clive and I didn't speak for a decade after that."

"I called Rachel," Amanda said. "He hasn't been in touch with her. I didn't know what to say. I promised I'd talk to Harlan about coming



to London, but he says he can't show himself to her, that she wouldn't cope."

"Trust Harlan's gut," Moritz said. He packed the tattoo machine into a paper bag and took his apron off. "Try looking at the pictures of the angel now, Emre. You should be able to at least glimpse him."

Emre looked at the picture of the avenging angel on Amanda's phone. Now he could see glimpses, but only at the edge of his vision. Sometimes it faded away. "Could the angel kill Clive?" he asked.

"He's protected by that bodyguard," Amanda said. "Harlan doesn't think he can take him."

Renate believed that Mike was an infernal creature, well-protected so as not to be seen in the Illusion. No one but Amanda and the angel had seen the dark bubble around him. "Almost only the angels of death have servants that powerful," she said. "Arch-devils," she elaborated when Svetlana wondered what she meant.

"I'll try to talk to him," Moritz said. "I want to know what he's after. A lot can be said about Clive Connelly, but a genius he is not. He improvises and hopes for the best, I'll bet on it. Maybe I can reach him. And don't we want to have a closer look at those pictures he's restoring?"



## 21. METROPOLIS: MORITZ, [HARLAN]

Villa d'If lay in Metropolis, a complex of white Bauhaus villas that climbed up hills covered in wild grass, meadow flowers, syringa and cypress. It was past its prime. The concrete was crumbling. Here and there, cracked glass walls had been repaired with plywood and tarpaulins. Moss-covered roofs were on the verge of collapsing. Weeds crawled up between balcony tiles and burst through the paving on paths and in stairwells. Moritz sat on the terrace of Maison Patel, the house that had once belonged to his teacher. He was burning lumber in an oil drum and smoking a hashish pipe. Behind him, the terrace doors opened onto a nearly unfurnished living room. The only seating consisted of three empty beer crates in front of the fireplace and some folded-up camping chairs leaning against the wall. A protective membrane of faces, eyes, ears and mouths in yellow and green covered the walls. On the lawn below, monotone trance techno played and naked people danced around a garden pond. It had been many years since Moritz had been here last, despite the fact that a labyrinth led straight here from Bethanien. He had walked around among the houses, looking for familiar faces in vain. A few people seemed to recognize him, probably by reputation.

[Harlan] appeared where Moritz expected him to, on the garden path that led up to the villa from the portal over at a statue by Dubuffet. He was alone. Creatures like Mike weren't allowed here. Moritz waved from the terrace, and [Harlan] took a shortcut through the group of dancers who instinctively stepped aside to avoid touching him. Up close, one could see the hint of a smudge on his forehead, shaped like a Greek theta. The aura of this place made infernal signs visible to all.



Moritz couldn't help reaching for the mark, but stopped himself before his finger touched it.

"You really are an idiot," he said. "You could have made yourself a zombie. That would have been cleverer."

Renate had guessed correctly. "Thaumiel is the death angel of Berlin," she had said. "That bastard would never go further than necessary to find a devil to serve." Then they knew whom they had to protect themselves against. The prince of obedience. The old enemy of George Patel. Moritz had already put Amanda to work practicing sigils against infernal influence. She was good. It scared Renate that she had walked into Inferno without a second thought, but Moritz tried to smooth things over: "She's just fearless. It can be a healthy quality, if you survive long enough."

[Harlan] sat down in the garden chair next to Moritz and borrowed his pipe. "Did you wait long?"

"I've looked around. None of the people we know are left."

"Too bad. I brought a bottle of wine." [Harlan] pulled out a bottle of Bordeaux from a silver gift bag. He rummaged a folding corkscrew out from the inner pocket of his padded jacket and uncorked the bottle. Moritz took a sip and looked at his face. He looked disturbingly like Clive in his thirties, as if the face had started to adjust and roughen. His hair was new too, short and neat like on a policeman or public servant.

"I understand that you're angry with me because of that thing with Emre," [Harlan] said.

"But Emre is still alive. You murdered your girlfriend and stole your boy's body." *Coax, don't make him angry*, Moritz had told himself. But he couldn't make himself coax. "Why Karoline? Did it have to do with Thaumiel?"

"It wasn't murder. It was a mistake." [Harlan] sounded angry. "We fought over a fucking phone app and she hit me. I blacked out and strangled her. I'm sorry it ended like that. I didn't mean to kill her."

"You nearly beat Rachel to death too, didn't you? That's why she left. I should have warned her about you." Moritz couldn't subdue his anger anymore, and [Harlan] looked away.

"You don't know shit."



“You murdered your own boy. How the fuck can you stand walking around in his body?” Moritz suspected who had taught Clive the art of stealing a body—an old acquaintance who ended up paying dearly.

“I didn’t think it would work. I was pissed off at him because he had called the police. Then an avenging angel came after me. I needed protection. That’s when I looked Thaumiel up.”

“You could have just come here,” Moritz said and gazed out at the dilapidated villas. “Why didn’t you? You could have gone anywhere in the whole world.”

“I guess I didn’t want to sit here and rot for the last measly years I have left.” [Harlan] looked down at his hands, and for a moment Moritz feared that he had provoked him too much.

“You know that the avenging angel is your boy, right?” Moritz said. “You sent him to Hell in your stead, and he came back for you.”

[Harlan] apparently didn’t know. Moritz could see that he was shaken. They sat in silence for a long moment, watching the dancers around the pond. [Harlan] sucked at the hashish pipe, looking like he was trying to fill his head with smoke.

“Amanda saw him, didn’t she?” [Harlan] said. “The angel. I gathered that from what she said when she was there with us under Friedrichstraße. She’s afraid I’ll harm the kids, but I would never do that.”

“They’re in some sort of relationship,” Moritz said slowly. “Amanda and Harlan. I would leave them alone if I were you.”

“What should I do?”

“Die. Or at least break away from Thaumiel.”

[Harlan] had quarreled with Mike when they emerged from Inferno after the incident with Emre. “You made me do this, didn’t you?” It was like shouting at a statue. Or a mirror. *What did you expect? That you could pledge allegiance to a death angel without being affected?* He handed the pipe over to Moritz before it was completely empty.

“You said in your text message that you could help me.”

“If you tell me what you’re doing. Why are you having the kids paint for you?”

After the tattoo session, they had ordered pizza and discussed what to do. Renate and Emre wanted to talk to the board again. A waste of



time, Moritz thought. Instead he suggested that they offer [Harlan] aid: “If he thinks I want to help him, he’ll expose himself.” Svetlana maintained that they should try to kill him, but didn’t know how. Amanda just looked unhappy, especially after Renate had said that [Harlan] still had feelings for her and that it was something they could use.

Moritz knocked the dregs out of the hashish pipe and put it in an empty flower pot. “What are you going to do with your old paintings?” he said.

“Not me. Thaumiel. He wants the Wall Project. I assume he wants the roads. No idea why. He’s a fucking angel of death. Who knows how they think? He asked me to give him a way in twenty years ago, but I was out in the cold. So now I’m trying to buy my way in. That thing with Emre was a mistake.”

That was the answer Moritz had expected. “If it’s the whole project he’s after, we have to protect it somehow,” he had told Renate and Amanda. They had to be prepared to destroy anything that couldn’t be protected. It hurt him more than it hurt Renate. If it hadn’t been for him, she would probably have started to tear down and paint over already. “Easy come, easy go.” To her, the work was more important than the result.

Moritz poured the last of the wine into [Harlan’s] glass, and pulled on the sneakers he had kicked off when he filled the hashish pipe. “What do you want out of it?” he asked. “Do you want to be Thaumiel’s slave? That’s what you’ll be. You get that, right?”

“No, I want to get the fuck away from this bullshit somehow.”

“Maybe I can help you. Shall we go for a walk?”

They finished the wine. Moritz picked the wine bag up and they went out into the park. The little lanterns on the ornate iron posts they both remembered from the Seventies had been replaced by open fires and plastic battery-driven lamps. [Harlan] strode over to two girls and managed to finagle a couple of bottles of beer.

“They think I’m your student.” He gave Moritz one of the bottles. “They’ve heard about you.”

“Come on. There’s someone I want you to meet.”

They entered a part of the building complex they had seldom had reason to visit in the Seventies, where many of the houses were empty



but not crumbling, covered in powerful wards. A broken asphalt path led up to a high, narrow house constructed of gray monoliths at right angles, more Frank Lloyd Wright than Bauhaus. A red bicycle leaned against the white marble stairs up to the front door. Yellow lamplight shone out of the long and narrow panorama wall that overlooked the rest of the complex. Moritz knocked on the door. A Black woman in a red dress opened the door, and [Harlan] found it difficult to breathe.

"Louise is an angel," Moritz said.

The angel looked around forty years old, tall and slender with cropped hair. Her eyes were completely black and inhuman, her handshake chilly. She gave [Harlan] a cold smile: "Enter."

The interior looked like it had been furnished in the Twenties: glass tables, Bauhaus chairs with steel frames, expensive art on the walls. Russian avant-garde. [Harlan] wondered if that was some sort of dig at him, but it seemed far-fetched. Louise showed them up an open wooden staircase to the second floor, which was furnished with a dining table and a group of armchairs around a brick fireplace. The light came from a large spherical lamp in the ceiling. Moritz took [Harlan's] arm, as if afraid he might flee. "Louise can draw your blood without the power reverting to Thaumiel. I need your blood to be able to protect you."

On the table stood two empty glass bottles, a silver bowl, and a knife impregnated with divine power that turned [Harlan's] stomach. The angel tore off a piece of surgical tape from a roll and fastened it to the mark on [Harlan's] forehead. Her thumbprint burned. "He'll wonder what's going on here," she said. "You'll have to make something up. He can't see us right now, but he'll realize I touched you."

"Can you kill me?" The words slipped out of his mouth. He glanced at Moritz.

"No, I can't kill." She sat him down on a chair and tightened a strap around his right arm, then made an incision along the vein and let the blood run into the bowl. "I'll take every third drop as payment."

Moritz sat down nearby and looked out the window. Renate had arranged the contact with Louise when Moritz explained that he would need [Harlan's] blood to draw up some wards. Amanda wondered how that would happen. "The students will never let you tattoo them," she



said. He said that they'd have to sort out the details later. Maybe they could protect the paintings and the project instead of the kids. "I think he's just using them as labor. If he doesn't have a project, he should let them go."

"How much blood do you need?" [Harlan] asked. He looked pale.

"All I can get," Moritz said. "She won't kill you."

The angel filled one bottle up, the other one halfway. She put surgical tape over the wound and wiped the blood spatters off the floor. Moritz put the bottle in the wine bag and helped [Harlan] to his feet. He was woozy. Moritz thanked Louise before they went back into the park and sank down on a bench by an ivy-covered bronze sculpture.

"You'd rather see me dead, wouldn't you?" [Harlan] said.

"I wish you were smarter than you are. And not so fucking mean. I considered you dead."

"I really thought Sonja would wiggle her way out of it."

Moritz was surprised and, against his will, touched that [Harlan] mentioned Sonja. He hadn't thought that Clive had understood, even then, why they fell out. "It is what it is."

"I was desperate when I thought I'd lose all my business in the East. For Rachel's sake. I needed the money to keep her."

"She was too good for you."

"Exactly."

"What happened in London? You were different when you came back. It wasn't just Rachel."

"Nothing happened in London. It should have, but didn't."

Putting off going back home had been stupid. He came there to confront Liam, but was met by a wreck he didn't even have the energy to yell at. They were all wrecks. Or dead. From drink. Or drugs. Hopeless, whining wretches. Then he met Rachel, but in order to keep her he needed money. And then Sonja died, and Moritz left, and everything went to shit.

"I can protect your paintings," Moritz said. "Now that I have your blood. I need to alter them a little when you're done with them, to stop them from letting through all of Thaumiel's power. Can you keep Mike away so I can do that?"



“He won’t let me out of his sight, so it shouldn’t be that hard.”

“Then you’ll go to Nirvana Tattoo and get three tattoos. They know what to do. It’ll give you some measure of protection, but I can’t do anything about the fact that you signed a contract in blood.”

They walked back to Patel’s house. [Harlan] sat down on the terrace. “You go on,” he said. “I’ll be right behind you. I want to stay here for a little while.”

There was something he wanted to try, a desperate idea. He waited until Moritz was out of sight before he walked down among the houses, back along the path to the angel’s house. Louise had something he needed, and he hoped that he had something in exchange.







## 22. ՅԵԺԽԱՌԻԵՆ: ԱՊԱՆԾԱ

Wednesday, July 5

Something had happened to Nikolai's photos. It was as if someone had Photoshopped the pictures with a mannequin filter, giving all faces the same vacant expression. A petrified army stared out from the screens in the studio. The hand-written signs in white ink on charcoal paper—life stories, names, dates and places—had been erased. Only the empty papers were left.

"I don't know what happened. They're all ruined!" Nikolai sat on a stool in the middle of the room, on the verge of tears. His black shock of hair stood on end, and the big brown doe eyes that had charmed Amanda when they first met were bright and panicky. "They looked like this when I came in this morning."

"But you can print new copies. You have the originals, right?" Amanda looked at one of the pictures up close and tried to remember what it had looked like before: three young boys and their mother next to a folding table in front of a blue emergency tent. Now they might as well have been four dolls, or dead bodies propped up for the photographer. Not just their faces were distorted. Their postures were stiff and dead, zombie-like. Amanda thought about Harlan's reinforced body, which wouldn't twist or bend like before.

"The originals are ruined too." Nikolai sat with the computer on his lap, scrolling through a slideshow. "I don't understand what's happened."

*Something infernal*, Renate would have said, but Amanda kept quiet. She assumed it had something to do with [Harlan], but couldn't see how.



Moritz had called her late Friday night and said: "It's Thaumiel." He had talked about death angels and Nazis until she had told him she couldn't listen anymore. Sometimes, despite everything that had happened, she got it into her head that it wasn't real. That she was psychotic. Especially when Moritz called her in the middle of the night.

She closed her left eye and concentrated, like she had done in the garden outside Clive's temple. The people in the pictures came alive again. The youngest boy laughed and turned his head. They were still there, just more difficult to make out. The writing on the note emerged too: "Zeinah Haik, age 38, with her sons Dawud, Kareef and their cousin Sami."

"It's just a mirage. Come on, let me try something." Amanda took the picture down from the screen and went into her own studio. She found a picture frame of adequate size and mounted the photo in it. Nikolai watched with the computer under his arm, completely silent as if afraid to sabotage something if he opened his mouth. Moritz had said that The Fence together with the sows was a magical artefact. He had sounded impressed: "You've woven strong protection into it. Well done." Maybe it could protect Nikolai's pictures. Amanda hung the framed photograph on the iconostasis. Slowly, the real picture emerged.

"Can you see it?" she said. "It's still there."

"How the hell did you do that?"

"Magic." *The Arts*, Renate had called it. After that standing breakfast at Bahnhof Zoo, Renate had brought Amanda to her studio in Urban Spree. There she had shown her how the mandalas were maps of the paths through the Illusion's borderland. She said that the Arts had to be learned slowly. "We can start with the labyrinths sometime this fall. If we proceed too quickly, the Illusion might react and defend itself with oblivion or something even worse." But that was before [Harlan] entered their lives. Now Renate no longer talked about being careful, and Moritz had given Amanda a book with a thousand names of archons, death angels and their servants. "Each name is a piece of the puzzle," he said. "Together they form our prison. Learn to use the names, and you can tear the walls down. Or at least figure out what the fuck to do about your grandfather."



Nikolai looked into his computer. He hadn't noticed that Amanda's thoughts had strayed. "The original returned to normal when you did that," he said. "But all the others are still wrong."

"We could try something else. Help me with this." Amanda started dragging one of the concrete sows out of the studio and along the corridor toward Nikolai's room. He helped her lift it over the thresholds, a rag in his hands to avoid leaving fingerprints on the haute pâte-painted flanks. Amanda righted the sow in the northwest corner and fetched the next one.

"We need four," she said. "One in each corner."

With all the four sows in place, the distortion disappeared. Faces and text emerged on the screens. Amanda patted one of the sows on the back. *Good pig*. Svetlana had asked if they had names. No, no names. They weren't pets. "They might move, or change colors," she warned Nikolai. "Don't mind them."

Nikolai went through the pictures on the screens one by one and compared them to the originals on the computer. He didn't look like he heard Amanda speak. Eventually he looked up.

"Thank you!" He gave her a careful hug. "Would you tell Nadine I'll skip the beer? I want to make sure everything's alright here."

"I'll let her know." Amanda had organized a meeting with Nikolai and Nadine at a little bar by Kottbusser Brücke. They needed to talk about the Pankow project, she had said, but mostly she wanted to get them away from Bethanien and make sure they hadn't gotten in trouble somehow. Ever since Emre ended up in Hell, she had started to worry about everyone in [Harlan's] vicinity. Renate was wrestling the municipal bureaucracy to get the art students away from the work with Clive's pictures, so far with no success.

"You got my email, right?" she asked Nikolai now. "I can take over the work with Harlan's kids. You can tell me how to go about the photography."

"You can't take photographs." His gratitude was replaced by distrust. He folded the computer up, as if afraid she might ruin the pictures again.

"I can learn." Amanda tried to sound humble. "You could teach me."

"He asked me to help out, and I'm going to. Why do you have to argue with him all the time? I thought you liked each other?"



On an icy January day, Nikolai and Amanda had had dinner at Mrs. Robinson's and then had sub-par sex at Amanda's place. When Nikolai understood that things wouldn't progress further between them, he had let slip some half-spoken insinuations that she was sleeping with her uncle. She ended up throwing him out into the stairwell. Fortunately, they no longer shared a studio at that point.

"You're the one I'm worried about," she said. "Harlan is dangerous. Can't you try to stay away from him?"

"No, I can't." Nikolai looked helpless. Not angry. Before she went to see Nadine, she hugged him and told him to be careful.

The bar they had agreed to meet in was in a street that ran parallel to Landwehrkanal. Amanda had been there once before, marveling at the number of lit candles they had managed to cram into the little room. Right now, coming here felt like making a point. She locked her bike next to a tree on the street corner and went inside. Enclosed by raw concrete walls, every available table surface was filled with burning candles. Nadine sat in a corner with a blue drink in front of her. She was dapper as always, possibly even more discreet than usual, as if coming from a formal meeting.

"Nikolai couldn't come," Amanda said. "He had to do some work on his pictures."

"I've become afraid of the dark. Isn't that strange?" Nadine squeezed one of the burning block candles and looked into the flame.

"Emre too. It could be the pressure." Amanda ordered a mojito and fetched three more lights for the table. The evening was young and the bar only half full, but it felt good to be surrounded by people and hear their chatter in the background.

"Maybe I should have told you when we agreed to meet," Nadine said, "but I haven't gotten a lot of things done this week. I don't know how much planning I can discuss."

"Totally okay. I just wanted to check in."

"Is Emre mad at me? I was mean to him at that meeting two weeks ago and said some stupid things about your friend, Svetlana. He looks really grim now. I tried to apologize, but he didn't seem to hear what I was saying."



“He probably doesn’t remember what you said at that meeting. He’s had a lot on his plate lately. He’s stressed out about all the trouble with Harlan. So am I. We don’t think he should run around painting with the art students in the subway without anyone knowing what he’s up to.”

Nadine sipped on the last third of her drink and nodded, seemingly a little calmer. *You aren’t sleeping with my grandfather, are you?* Amanda wanted to ask. *If you are, then stop.* Nadine had come along with [Harlan] to meetings with the municipality and the arts center. Together, they radiated a youthful energy and determination that seemed to charm everyone. The day before, Emre had complained about a lady who had called from the Academy of Arts and wanted to talk about financing. He asked Amanda what to do. “I can’t tell them we don’t want money, can I?”

“I meant to talk to you about Harlan,” Nadine said. “You know him much better than I do.” She looked embarrassed. It wasn’t like her.

“Did you sleep with him?” Amanda hadn’t meant to say anything, but it slipped out.

Nadine smiled: “He’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“I didn’t think he was your type.”

“He’s absolutely my type.”

Thaumiel, Renate and Moritz had explained, is the lord of blind obedience. He helps his servants influence others. Don’t confront those who have fallen for him or his lackeys, was the main rule. They’ll just walk away. Coax them instead. Try to show empathy. Amanda took a sip on her mojito and smiled: “So, what is it you’re wondering about my uncle?”

“Not about him, really. About his bodyguard, Mike. He’s unpleasant. Shows up as if from nowhere. And his friends hang out in Harlan’s apartment. I don’t know who they are. Gangsters, feels like.”

[Harlan] had recently moved into Clive’s old apartment. Amanda had been there once, to see what it looked like, and been frightened by the darkness that filled the rooms. Haunted, was the word that came to her. “What does Harlan say?” she asked.

“He makes it sound reasonable when we talk about it. I don’t know how.” Nadine emptied the fresh drink Amanda had put in front of her. “But Mike is creepy. He sits alone smoking cigarettes or plays cards with



his friends over in the guest room while Harlan and I have sex. I don't get how Harlan could think that's okay."

"Stay away from Mike. He's dangerous. Svetlana didn't lie when she said he put three hitmen in the hospital." Amanda wondered who Mike's friends might be. If they were human. She hadn't seen any during the short moment she was there.

Nadine's cellphone buzzed and she dismissed an sms. "It's Isabel," she said. "I haven't seen her for a week."

"What does she want?" Amanda peered at Nadine's phone across the table. The number directly below Isabel's was [Harlan's].

"They're over at the Farbfernseher. She was just wondering what I'm up to. I'll call her later."

Farbfernseher was a club over by the subway. Amanda passed it on her walks down to the river. "It's close, isn't it? Why don't we go there?"

"I don't have the energy for it tonight."

"Come on, let's go. Text Isabel and let her know we're coming." Amanda left her half-finished mojito and got up before Nadine had time to figure out a reason to stay. Out in the street, the wind swept needles of rain into their faces. Amanda fetched her bike and led it along the sidewalk up to Skalitzer Straße. The club with its bar and tiny dancefloor was located in an old TV shop just beyond the subway station. When they arrived, Isabel stood at the entrance together with two girls Amanda had never seen before. One looked very young, dressed in black with a shaven head, and the other was in her thirties, dressed in purple with a black headscarf.

"Amanda, do you know Elke and Claudia?" Isabel turned to the other two. "Amanda's the one who's related to Nadine's new boyfriend." That made them look concerned. That had to count for something. "Lars is here too," Isabel told Nadine. "But that's okay, right? He's been a little worried about you."

"I was really supposed to go home."

"No, come on." With the sudden mutual understanding that they had to get her inside, Isabel took one of her arms and Amanda the other. The club looked like someone's apartment ready for demolition. The little dancefloor was full. They put Nadine in the bar, watched by Elke



and Claudia, while Amanda took Isabel aside. She had thought out a speech about how [Harlan] wasn't who everyone thought he was, and how Nadine had ended up in a toxic relationship, but was interrupted before she had even begun.

"Something is really fucking off," Isabel said. "It's like she's been brain-washed. I'm worried sick."

Moritz had suggested something when they sat around talking about death angels among the paper bags in his room, while Amanda practiced drawing protective sigils on a squared note pad. Serotonin overload.

"A friend of mine suggested we should try MDMA," Amanda said to Isabel. "You can get hold of that, right? He thinks a serotonin rush might help her snap out of it. Apparently this is like the kind of brainwashing that sects do. The serotonin drops when the victim meets people from outside the sect, and rises again when the sect leader is nearby. In theory at least."

"Okay." Isabel looked uncertain, as if she suddenly didn't know where she was with Amanda, but then she collected herself and nodded. "Lars might have some."

He did, although he was reluctant to talk to Nadine. [Harlan] had called and told him to stay far away from her. They were given bag of mint green ecstasy tablets and managed to get one into Nadine.

"I think it's best if everyone takes one," Amanda said. "Then we dance and hope for the best."

A gang of five or six gangly guys smiled encouragingly and made space for them as they pulled Nadine onto the dance floor to the tune of slow and jazzy deep house. Having the dance work as an exorcism was more intuition than articulated thought. *Improvise*. They embedded Nadine in a wall of bouncing bodies and plied her with Coca-Cola and more ecstasy after a couple of hours. As dawn approached, when the dancers around them had been replaced by new ones, her features began to soften. She kissed Amanda on the cheek and gave Isabel a dumb smile. "You're nice, you know that? But I have to go outside for a while."

It was half past four in the morning. Nadine ambled out among the trees in the courtyard next to the club, Amanda and the three others in tow. Lars had disappeared in the wee hours, visibly scared by the thought



that someone might tell [Harlan] that he had seen Nadine. Some guy slept on the ground, sheltered by the wall. The rain had ceased, but everything was wet. Nadine flopped onto a damp bench, suddenly pale and looking as if she was about to faint.

“Fuck! Fuck!” She screamed out loud and made the guy sleeping by the wall jump onto his feet.

Afraid that they might have given her an overdose, they checked her pulse and poured water down her throat, but she waved them off. “What the hell is wrong with me? What did your sick bastard uncle do to me?” She grabbed Amanda with unexpectedly strong hands, and Isabel had to break them apart. Tears ran down Nadine’s cheeks. “There’s something wrong with me, isn’t there?”

“How do you feel?” Amanda put her hand on her cheek. It was cold.

“Like shit! I have these sick images in my head. What the fuck did he do? Why haven’t I told you and Emre?”

Amanda stared sheepishly at her and asked what it was she should have told them. Isabel spread her jacket out next to Nadine on the bench and sat down. Elke, Claudia and the by now wide-awake guy mumbled comforting words without knowing what to say. Nadine cried and hiccupped. It took Amanda fifteen minutes to coax the story out of her, or what she thought was the story. It was the night before that meeting at Bethanien, when Emre tried to make them oust [Harlan] from the board. Nadine had woken up alone in [Harlan’s] bed on Mommsenstraße. She had helped him move from Winterfeldtplatz and remained in the apartment, without quite knowing how that had happened. She could hear weird noises from the other end of the apartment. She walked over to the guest rooms that faced the courtyard. That’s where Mike had moved in. Now, muted whimpers emanated from inside. She opened the door to see Mr. Sauer and Mrs. Decken sitting behind the table where Mike had left his ashtray. Mrs. Decken’s left hand lay bleeding on the tabletop; her long, pink nails had all been pulled out and neatly lined up in front of her. Mr. Sauer’s face was battered beyond recognition. Nadine only identified him by his gray blazer. His nose was broken and his eyes were swollen shut. Behind them, the window opened not onto the courtyard, but a burning plain wrapped in thick smoke. Mike, who was holding



a pair of bloody pliers, swore when he saw her. [Harlan] hurried up to her and reassured her that they were just having a little conversation with Sauer and Decken about tomorrow. Nothing to worry about. The pair at the table nodded Nadine, as if they agreed, and [Harlan] herded her back to the bedroom.

“The next day we went to that damn meeting,” she said. “Not a scratch on them. But they were afraid of him.”

“Some bad fucking trip,” Claudia said. “He must have given you something.”

Everyone agreed that it seemed like the most likely explanation. Amanda said nothing.

“I should be pissed, right?” Nadine said.

“You have to stay away from him,” Amanda said. “Don’t pick up if he calls you. Let someone check your phone in case he planted something there. Svetlana can do it if you don’t know anyone else. Move away from home for a while.”

“You can stay at my place,” Isabel said.

“I don’t know if I have the guts to go back to Bethanien,” Nadine said. “But I’ll be fucked if I let everything go. Do you still want the sound installation?”

“It’s weeks until it needs to be ready. We can talk next week.”

“Thank you!” Nadine gave Amanda a tight hug, still chemically affectionate. “I’ll go home with Isabel. Aren’t you coming?”

“I was going to go home and check up on my apartment. I haven’t been there for days.”

Amanda waved goodbye to Nadine as she shambled away toward the subway, supported by Isabel and Claudia.

Sunlight crept across the rooftops, but the cross-streets still lay in darkness. The taxis ruled the streets, and Kreuzberg was asleep. Amanda detached her bike from the pole outside the club. She was relieved and scared at the same time. She hadn’t expected the torture of Decken and Sauer. She would have to talk to Renate about it as soon as day came. And tell Moritz that the ecstasy trick worked. The drug wasn’t completely out of her system. Fatigue radiated like a pale aura from her hands on the handlebar. She shouldn’t really be on a bike, but she wanted to be



outdoors after the throng in the club. She pedaled up Oranienstraße, past the gay bar with a winged Michael Jackson in the window, and the sushi corner where she'd planned the work with Emre the week after she arrived in Berlin. She could bike this route in her sleep, past the ten-story houses and up toward the river, through blocks that felt more like a Stockholm suburb than a city center. The day after tomorrow, school would be out in Berlin. Amanda had tried calling Julia and Tamara to see if they were going to quit the art class after school finished, but as usual they didn't reply. She checked her cellphone and noted that only Moritz had called her, before she sped up and rushed past the tower blocks toward Alexanderplatz.



# 23. NEUKÖLLN: AMANDA

Thursday, July 13

The restoration of Clive's last mural was almost finished. It was located under Neukölln, in three large air-raid shelters from the Fifties, accessible through doors from a man-high surface water tunnel. The pictures were from the early Eighties, when Clive's focus was more on furthering his smuggling than the art project or Patel's visions. The art students worked scattered through the vaulted concrete rooms, dressed in white overalls with "Mauer 11" printed in red on their backs. [Harlan] had used surplus municipality money to have the overalls made. The week after school finished, the students gathered every afternoon to paint. Some parents had gotten in touch to find out what they were doing, but talking to [Harlan] calmed them down. Nikolai took photographs and uploaded them to Facebook and Instagram. His portraits of the youths had been published in the Saturday edition of Berliner Zeitung, where they were described as "a sharp depiction of an anxiety-driven generation". At the same time, Renate had been flooded by a wave of hatred when it became clear that she tried to shut the project down. Kim and Julia had posted a picture of her behind cross-hairs on Instagram, and they were far from the worst.

"Nadine has left Berlin for a few days," Amanda told [Harlan]. "She asked me to tell you. She doesn't want to be disturbed."

"Pity. We worked so well together on the project financing. Did something happen?"

*Yeah, you happened to her, you asshole!* They were standing in front of a picture of something that might be a flower in soft colors, fractals repeated



in its pattern. A swarm of gaping mouths and staring eyes danced around the portal. [Harlan] and Amanda painted the eyes red and blue while the art students improved pictures of grotesque, gaping faces in the next room. Amanda had promised Renate to try to get the kids away from the project, but she had no idea about how to go about it. Instead she had searched them out every afternoon under the pretense that she wanted to help out. Almost every day ended in an argument with [Harlan].

He was more collected than before, his movements calm and his voice subdued. During their hours underground they had gotten to know each other in a way—like a nightmare version of the meetings she had fantasized about when she packed for her Berlin trip back in Stockholm. Renate and Moritz warned her that he was trying to snare her. Svetlana called her every night to check that she hadn't been murdered. Amanda had asked [Harlan] about Mr. Sauer and Mrs. Decken. His answers were evasive. Yes, they were at his place that night. No, nothing had happened to them. Who did she think he was?

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you," he said now. "About the angel." That's what he called Harlan. They had avoided the subject since Amanda had confirmed that yes, that was his son, and yes, he had been tortured in Hell by three nepharites who had preferred to see Clive. "What did he say about me?"

"He doesn't fucking remember you. He's completely brain damaged. They took his memories."

That shut him up. Amanda regretted letting her anger break through. They were alike that way. Clive also had the habit of cutting people off when he should have known better. She changed the subject.

"Something happened to Nikolai's pictures," she said. "An infernal influence. I had to protect them."

"Was that you? Well, what do you know. I was trying something out. Was it hard to stop?"

Amanda didn't answer that. They had begun to talk about magic, something that angered Moritz: don't reveal anything to him, can't you see he's trying to milk you for information. Don't worry, she defended herself, I don't know anything useful.

"I'm going to talk to the girls," she said. "Where you can't eavesdrop."



He merely nodded and continued painting. Amanda took Tamara, Julia and Kim aside. They were obviously uneasy. Their answers were curt when Amanda asked how they were doing. Tamara was the least affected. She hadn't been pulled into in the hate campaign against Renate, and Amanda suspected that she could walk away if she wanted to. Julia was the one who kept her there, even if their relationship had been bruised by harsh words and diatribes about Tamara being the bitch's boring favorite. The trip to Crete, which they had used to talk about every time Amanda met them, no longer came up in conversation.

"Renate would love to see you," Amanda said. "So you can talk about where things went wrong." No one said anything. "You could come with me to her place when we wrap things up here," she continued. "I don't think Harlan would mind."

"Yeah," Julia said. "He would. He's said so. He might go along with it because you ask him, but he doesn't like it when we talk to Renate."

Trying to drag them along was no good. Amanda had tried that with Sara and Alex two days earlier. She had intercepted them in the street outside as they were leaving, and tried to make them come with her to Bethanien where Moritz had promised to protect them with tattoos. It ended up with Sara yelling at Amanda before she and Alex got on the bus and disappeared.

"You have my number, right?" she now said plaintively to Kim and Julia. "Call me as soon as you get home. Can you do that for me? Pick up if I call you." Amanda wanted to touch them, establish some sort of physical contact, but they shied away.

"We don't have to obey you," Kim said.

"No, but pick up if I call."

Julia nodded and Tamara gave her girlfriend an encouraging smile. That was something at least. When Amanda turned around, Mike was standing there. She looked him in the eye. *Not human*. She was sure of it now, even if she couldn't see a shape beyond the Illusion when she focused her gaze.

Amanda walked around the bodyguard without turning her back to him. *Don't show fear*. As if that would help. But for the students' sake, she paused for a moment and let her gaze rest on him before she went back to the fractal flower. She stayed for an hour until class was over



and all the students had gone home. Then she fled through the tunnel while [Harlan] and Mike put the paint away.

Half an hour later she found her way to a little square in a three-way crossing in Wedding. Pale tenement blocks five stories high encircled the crammed space, a triangular lawn where a sculpture of stone and iron was flanked by two birch trees and framed by an ankle-high iron fence. Dead beetles lay in the gutter. Moritz stood on a stool in front of the man-high statue, polishing it with an emery cloth. He looked down at Amanda as she picked up a dead beetle and inspected it. It was made of bronze, but disintegrating somehow.

"It's necrosis." Moritz spit on the ground and stretched laboriously. He was dressed in a pair of overalls with the Köster construction company's logo on the back. "Something that idiot did is killing the beetles."

"I think he's filling in his paintings with blood," Amanda said. "Or semen. Something with vitality. I didn't want to ask about it." She had sensed the energies in the paint they used on the mural in the air-raid shelters.

"He's a fucking asshole. He doesn't know what he's doing."

The stone portion of the statue looked like a termite mound, covered in beetles with the same rounded bodies and exaggerated jaws as Moritz' bronze statuettes. Sharp iron feelers in bright colors radiated from the mound. Some of the beetles were painted too. Several of them had disintegrated and lay as if deceased at the base of the sculpture. Renate sat on a bench, polishing beetles with a cloth.

"I told the girls to call me," Amanda said and sat down next to her. "They seemed completely out of it. At least Nadine has left home for a while."

"You didn't have to come here. You look exhausted. You're not letting him get to you, are you?" That was Renate's constant concern: that Amanda would fall under the same curse as the kids and Nadine. She had told her that she ought to go back home to Stockholm.

"I'm not sleeping well." And only among the sows in the studio, never at home, but Amanda didn't say that.

"I've tried to talk to their parents." Renate lined up polished beetles in front of her in the grass. "But it isn't entirely easy to know what to



say. And some of them are of age. He binds them to himself every day they're down there working, doesn't he?"

"Yeah, like a fucking sect leader. I've tried to bring him down to earth to make them realize he's only human, but that only pisses them off. When I tell him he's an idiot to let the death angel feed his hubris, he calls me 'darling.'" Amanda picked a beetle up. It wiggled an antenna when she closed her left eye. "Let me know if there's anything I can do. Do they all need to be polished?"

The termite mound was a collaboration between George Patel, Clive and Moritz. It had stood there since 1975. According to Moritz, it was a focus for all the works of art tied to the Wall Project. Opening doors to Metropolis, which Renate had talked about that morning by the children's hospital, wasn't the whole truth. Patel had originally had another, grander vision. He wanted to tear the Illusion down. He didn't understand that it was already falling apart. "He was colored by the war," Moritz said. "He thought the Illusion had something to do with fascism. We later understood that that wasn't the case."

"What do you mean, 'the sculpture is a focus'?" Amanda handed Moritz a polished beetle. He attached the finished beetles onto the sculpture with new anchor screws in the holes where the old screws had come loose.

"It anchors other parts of the project. It has to do with how the short-cuts work."

Moritz refused to say more than that. He was visibly distressed by the fact that Clive had managed to affect the sculpture. "Could you hold my tools?" he asked Amanda. "It'll give me better reach. I can't figure out what he's done."

"It's really strongly tied to Grandpa." Amanda closed her eyes and opened them again to see better. It wasn't Thaumiel's red energy but Clive's shifting, opaque aura that penetrated the artwork. There were other energies, too, that she assumed belonged to Moritz and Patel. "Your aura in it is weak. Maybe that's why the beetles are dying."

"You have a sharp eye." Moritz reached up and gently caressed the beetles on the sculpture's top with his naked hand. Amanda thought they straightened a little when he grazed them.



"Top priority for an artist, don't you know."

"Give me the pail of red paint. I've mixed my own blood into it. I think it's better than his for this purpose."

They took turns painting semi-deteriorated beetles red, then attached the ones that had fallen off and pulled a protective sheath over the mound. Moritz intended to continue with the restored paintings over Friday and the weekend. He protected them from Thaumiel using paint mixed with [Harlan's] blood, and from [Harlan's] influence with his own. Renate feared he might be becoming anemic.

"Fuck knows what good it'll do. He's beyond help, if you ask me," Moritz said afterward as they sat on the bench eating wurst sandwiches. "But at least I'm halting the influence of the death angel."

"I've begun to destroy my pictures in the East," Renate said. "I painted over the dog with the red ball last night. Tonight I'll do two more. But the process isn't very easy. It's as if the pictures are resisting me. They show up again where I've painted them over. Maybe because the picture is also present in Metropolis without my knowledge. I've never seen anything like it."

"Maybe you could kill him," Moritz told Amanda. "He trusts you."

"Are you kidding?" Amanda put her wurst slice on Moritz' sandwich. Renate was right: he looked pale.

"Not entirely." Moritz munched on the wurst and hesitated before continuing, unsure of how Amanda would react: "What about his son? Is he completely useless?"

"Harlan? He understands magic even less than Emre does. A natural un-talent, I think." Amanda was a little hurt that Moritz called him useless. Harlan had stayed away from her during the past week. They had met every day before that, usually only for a short while, walking through Berlin in search of his memories.

"You don't need magic to drag the bastard into Hell."

"Harlan doesn't want to. Or can't. The bodyguard is too strong." *Don't pull him into this*, Amanda wanted to say. *He needs time to heal*. Moritz and Renate had made it clear that they were suspicious toward him. They had warned her: "He is an infernal creature after all. Don't tell him anything. Don't trust him."



“Can we talk to him?” Moritz asked. “Do you know where he is?”

Amanda took out her cellphone and brought up the clearest picture she had of Harlan, the one where he sat on her workbench, laughing into the camera. She visualized the feel of coarse feathers against her skin, the stale smell of Inferno and Harlan’s voice. “Come here.” She had noticed that the invocation worked better in Swedish. “Moritz wants to talk to you.”

Above the sidewalk next to the smaller one of the birches, the air shimmered. Harlan stepped out as if from a billowing wall of water. It took him a moment to orient himself.

“What’s that?” He stared at the sculpture.

“Something Grandpa is destroying,” Amanda said. “We were hoping you might understand it.”

“Looking at it makes me feel sick.” He took a step forward and kissed Amanda’s cheek. “I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch. What are you doing here?”

“Have you met Renate and Moritz?”

“Not that I can remember. But my memory is what it is.” Harlan held out his hand. Renate took it and gave him a friendly smile.

“You’ve been such a comfort to Amanda,” she said, and sounded like she meant it.

Moritz looked more skeptical, mumbling a ward against the creatures of Hell before he shook the angel’s hand.

“They’re trying to stop Grandpa from twisting the art project, The Wall,” Amanda said. “Renate is the one who worked with the kids I told you about.”

“Can you kill him?” Moritz asked. “Isn’t that what you’re meant to do?”

Harlan sat down in the grass in front of the bench, wings folded across his back. The left wing was a little askew, Amanda could see that now. “I can’t,” he admitted reluctantly. “I tried. That’s why I’ve been gone for a few days. I tried to take him on. It was like running into a wall.”

He had confronted Dad on the way up to Bethanien—stood in his way and started to say something. He couldn’t remember what, now. He had managed three or four words before Mike crashed into him like a train engine of steel and claws and whirling blades that would have torn



him to shreds unless Clive had stopped him. *Don't you fucking dare hurt my lad.* They left him there. He crawled into Metropolis and lay under a broken bridge for what must have been days while his wounds healed. His left wing still felt lopsided.

"I wasn't made to handle someone like Mike," he said. "They only intended for me to get Dad."

"He's in league with the devil himself," Moritz said. "Thaumiel. To get away from you." He tried to interpret Harlan's expression, but Liam's stiff mask wasn't very easy to read.

"What did he say about me?" Harlan's voice carried more emotion than his face. He sounded anxious.

"I don't think he wants to acknowledge your existence. He didn't think it would work, he says. Taking over someone else's body like that is difficult. I'm sure it was easier because you're his son." Moritz reached out and put his hand on the angel's shoulder in an awkward attempt to say *I'm sorry*.

"I barely remember what happened. Almost all of my memories are gone. The law stuff is gone from my mind too, even though I know it used to be there. I feel completely lobotomized. It's all a goddamn nightmare. I'd kill myself if I could, but I don't think it's possible."

That made Moritz uneasy. "Let me know if you figure something out. I'm going to go protect the old idiot's pictures. It can't do any harm." He loaded the painting gear into the trunk of an old Audi and drove off.

"We should try to help you with your memory," Renate said. "But first I have to get the kids away from your dad."

Amanda suddenly felt very tired. *Don't come here threatening to kill yourself like that. You can't do that. Don't you get it?* She smoothed the left wing's feathers down and tried to straighten the strut. Harlan clenched his teeth; if it hurt, he didn't show it. Renate said they might need to be alone for a while, and besides, she needed to consider how to destroy her paintings. She packed the picnic basket up and left them in front of the dying sculpture.

"You can't kill yourself," Amanda said.

"I don't think I can. Don't worry about it."

She told him about the hate campaign against Renate, about the torture of Mr. Sauer and Mrs. Decken, and about the sows that protected



the work of art in Bethanien. He looked unhappy and said he couldn't help her at all. They left the statue and plodded back towards the city, careful to keep each other at arm's length so that Harlan wouldn't become visible. As soon as he grabbed something or someone, there was a risk that others could see him. The sun peeked out from between the clouds, and they took the path through the Schiller park. Kids on summer break veered dangerously close to the invisible angel on the path and turned around when they heard Amanda guffaw. On the lawn in front of the graffiti-covered wall where Schiller's bronze statue stood, people were soaking up the sunshine. Amanda kept quiet as they walked past the picnic blankets. People probably thought she was talking on her cellphone, but she was irrationally scared that they would see the angel if she turned to him. When they entered the deserted cemetery behind the park, she took his hand.

"Metropolis is close here," Harlan said. He nodded across the fence around the cemetery, at the old Osram factory's yellow brick complex that blocked the way south. The factory buildings, which hadn't housed lightbulb production since before the fall of the Wall, were home to small businesses and stores. "That's in Metropolis too."

"Can you take me there?" Amanda gripped his hand tighter. Without answer or hesitation, he led her through the wall of the Illusion, a thin membrane along the traffic island on Seestraße in front of the old factory buildings. Behind them, the cemetery disappeared and was replaced by a glossy glass façade. They stood on a gravel road, as wide as Seestraße but more of a firebreak than a city avenue. The lightbulb factory's restored yellow brick buildings from before World War I still stood in front of them. A clock tower rose behind veils of yellow mist.

"A god lives here," Harlan said. "Or something like that. Like the guardian spirit of lightbulbs. I've seen him here a couple of times. Come on, I'll show you." He led her in among the buildings.







PAR† 4:  
ENDSPIEL







*The answer is out there, Neo, and it's looking for you,  
and it will find you if you want it to.*

TRINITY







# 24.

## WANNSEE: JULIA, [HARLAN]

Saturday, July 15

“I don’t think you should come with,” Julia told Tamara. “People have been talking so much shit about you.” And making threats. But she didn’t say that. Tamara, Chadi and Ernst hadn’t let themselves get sucked into the hate campaign against Renate, and as a reward become the targets of trash-talk and threatening Snapchat images. Julia felt helpless; she was angry at Tamara for making herself a target, at the others for coming at her, and most of all at herself for not doing anything.

“I can deal with it,” Tamara said. “You were the one who wanted us to go. I won’t let you go there on your own.”

“We don’t want you there, get it?” Kim interjected. “It’s best for everyone if you stay away.”

They stood on the platform, waiting for the train to Wannsee where they would be picked up to celebrate the completion of [Harlan’s] restoration project. The last picture—eyes and mouths in the room by the surface water tunnels in Neukölln—was done. Julia had put the last touches on the painting. [Harlan] had said she was gifted. She could go far. Kim had said she was happy for her, while Tamara had looked away and tried to make herself invisible.

Julia was holding a cooler bag with salmon sandwiches and a bottle of white wine that Mom had deemed appropriate for her, Tamara and Kim to share. She was anxious and tried to breathe calmly. *Think about the mindfulness exercises.* She pictured the school counsellor’s concerned face. It was Saturday afternoon and the sun was shining. They were going



to paint in an abandoned house and throw a picnic. She shouldn't be scared, but she was. A train headed eastward stopped at the platform. Julia took Tamara's hand and pulled her toward the nearest car. The doors opened and a man in a suit stepped out.

"Get on this train. Go all the way to Erkner. Have a cup of coffee. We'll talk tomorrow." She pushed Tamara into the car and expected her to get off again, but she stayed and looked back at them through the window as the train left the platform.

Kim and Julia got on the next train to Wannsee and sat in silence all the way to Grünewald, where joggers and people walking their dogs moved among the trees. *Why aren't we staying at home too?* None of them had an answer to that. Julia had tried to call Amanda, but got so anxious when dialing the number that she ended the call before it went through.

"It's better to just get through it," Kim said. "We'll stop doing this crap next week. It was a good thing you got Tamara out of the way." *A good thing because we don't want her here? Or because we can't protect her?* Julia didn't know for sure.

Before the train stopped at the platform in Wannsee, Julia got a text from Sara: *We're on the slope behind Bismarck.* On the other side of the station building, a well-manicured park rose to a crest and then sloped down toward Lake Wannsee. A path led to a bust of the Iron Chancellor, a white marble man who looked like he was wearing a cobble skirt. Sara was waiting for them there, dressed for summer in a tailored white blouse under a gray waistcoat. With her black hair flowing over her shoulders, she looked older than anyone else in the group. Julia suddenly felt childish in the blue and white summer dress that she had picked because Tamara said it looked cute.

"Harlan called and said they'll be a bit late," Sara said. "We sat down on the slope."

Alex, Kaz and Chadi were drinking beer on a red checked blanket under an oak. They had already emptied five cans that lay discarded by the foot of the tree. The rest of the group were scattered across the lawn; Julia could glimpse Ernst's silhouette down by the jetty, tall and scraggy with a vivid red backpack. She had hoped he would stay away. He and Chadi had been trash-talked for talking back at Harlan.



"I didn't think you'd come," she told Chadi, who handed her a can of beer.

"Sara wanted me to come."

Chadi looked older than usual, too, in his white summer jacket and new shiny shoes. His hair was gathered in a neat man bun. Julia wasn't sure that Sara really wanted her cousin there. She had put on the stony expression she wore when she was troubled. Since Renate had been replaced, Chadi had gone from favorite to pariah, but he didn't seem to care. "I'm better than the others and no one can take that away from me," he had told [Harlan], who laughed and shook his head.

Sara sat down between Alex and Kaz and lit a cigarette. She looked out across the lake and said something in Arabic that made Kaz smile. It was an internal game that had developed over the last few weeks. Julia gathered that they were joking about Alex, who took it in stride despite not knowing what they were saying. Kim and Julia sat down next to them with a can of beer each. When [Harlan] called Sara again, they were already tipsy.

Two minivans were waiting for them in front of the station building. Mike gave them what was probably meant to be an encouraging smile. He drove one of the vans. [Harlan] sat behind the wheel in the other, resolute and concentrated. He counted everyone and noticed that Tamarara was missing.

"She called and said she was sick," Kim said.

[Harlan] nodded as if he understood. "That's alright. I hope she feels better soon."

"Aren't Nikolai and Amanda coming?" Julia asked.

"Nikolai cancelled at the last minute. Amanda is occupied elsewhere. She says you're not to bother her. Under no circumstances."

The atmosphere in the van was one of elation. Hannes and Samir made enough noise to fill a stadium, yelling at passing cars through the van's half-open windows. [Harlan] didn't bother telling them off. If anything, he looked pleased. Julia and Kim squeezed together in the back. Kim was scrolling on her cellphone, showing Julia pictures from the school's finishing ceremony the weekend before. They let themselves be absorbed by the photographs, commenting on everyone's clothes and



stupid faces until the villas outside the van's windows faded away and the anxiety almost let up. The vans parked by a bus stop where the old entrance to the forest behind the peninsula's villas was crumbling with rust. Several abandoned houses could be glimpsed among the firs and brushwood, their windows covered with plywood.

"That's the house I had in mind." [Harlan] pointed at the white villa a hundred meters down the street. "What do you think?"

"Can we paint there now? In the middle of the day?" Chadi was the one asking. He had spent the ride looking out of the window while the others made noise. The idea of putting some color on the dilapidated house made him brighten up.

"I have the owner's permission."

Julia crossed the street and took a picture of the white villa, where [Harlan] stood next to the gate with a smile on his face. She sent it to Tamara. "Creepy, right?" she typed next to the image.

They carried the boxes of food, spray paint, beer and a red kettle barbecue into the house. [Harlan] nudged the gate with the No Entry sign open. "I thought we could start inside. Take a look around."

Neither Julia nor Kim in her light pants and broad-striped shirt were dressed to spray-paint anything. Still, they went inside the house. Someone had if not lived there, then at least been there, recently. A vodka bottle filled to the neck with cigarette butts stood in the middle of the kitchen floor. There was a sour, rotten smell, as if something had died under the floorboards. Alex and Kaz took a spray can each and started painting zombies on the walls in the living room, while Sara explored the house with a cigarette in her hand. Hannes, Paula and Samir sat down on the floor with cans of beer, laughing at something on Hannes' cellphone. Paula was an aggressive little girl with the habit of walking around with a knife in her pocket, but now she was laughing and relaxed, shoulder to shoulder with the taciturn Samir. Julia pulled Kim out back, where Ernst and Chadi had found a wall that was practically made for a mural. Ernst mumbled something about dark energies and used a piece of coal to sketch a pattern of knives, cogwheels and sharp antennae.

Mike put the bags and the barbecue down on the front stairs. Below them, invisible to the youths' eyes, Thaumiel's black labyrinth dug into



the ground. Letting go of the Illusion for a moment and looking into Inferno calmed Mike down. He put out the cigarette he had lit on the way from the van.

"I'm the focus of the spell," [Harlan] said. "The energies must flow through me. It'll tie my network to the citadel. Then the project will be ours."

"Are you going to let them play around in there for long?"

"Being here makes them pliable. The citadel affects them." [Harlan] opened a couple of beers and gave one of them to Mike. They stood on the stairs for a long moment, listening until the laughter and shouts from inside subtly changed and coarsened. It was time to act. [Harlan] walked into the hallway and released the protection on the basement door, which became visible. A theta was carved into the wood, filled in with blood from the two victims that had hallowed the temple—the men Ulrich had procured for them.

"Did you have a look downstairs?" he called out. The students were drawn to the stairs down to the temple. [Harlan] counted them. Twelve. Two were missing. "Where are Ernst and Chadi?"

After a moment's hesitation, Kim replied: "Out back."

"Go get them."

He can see it, [Harlan] realized when Ernst stepped into the hallway. The boy's gaze was drawn to the floor, down towards the citadel. Perhaps it was to Thaumiel's advantage, perhaps not. It couldn't hurt.

"Come downstairs and look." [Harlan] walked ahead of them into the temple. Mike made sure that everyone followed and then closed the door behind them. This temple was different to the one Clive had built in Dahlem. This had been dedicated to Thaumiel from the start, hastily furnished by [Harlan] during the days when the moon was on the wane. Everything was black. Twelve skulls stared out from shelves on the wall. The altar was a regular table covered with a black cloth. The magical tools were bought from Hornbach in Mariendorf and not something [Harlan] intended to keep.

"Gather round and you'll see." [Harlan] stepped up to the altar and lifted the Sword, an insulation knife with a blue plastic handle, to cut an incision through the Illusion's veils.



Ernst put his hand on Kim's shoulder. He was shaking. "There's something really fucking wrong about this. Come on, let's go upstairs." When he turned around, Mike stood in his way.

"You're not going anywhere." A heavy hand, inhumanly strong, gripped Ernst's arm.

The walls collapsed onto Inferno. The temple was still there, a square concrete platform in the muddy battlefield that stretched toward the horizon. The altar here was made of unevenly hewn stone, its smooth concrete surface carved with blood gutters. On a roughly built wooden frame hung the corpses of two men, emptied of blood, lashed to the frame so that their slit throats gaped into nickel-plated tin vessels. Remains of dried blood stuck to the bottoms of the vessels. The flies were everywhere, and the stench. Mike pinned Ernst's arms to his body and led him to the altar.

"The girl too," [Harlan] said. "We need three. I had Tamara in mind, but apparently she has a cold."

Chadi instinctively knew he was the third. He tried to back away, out into the mud among graves and ditches, but Hannes and Samir grabbed him. They flung him at the altar. He landed on his hands and knees in the mud and closed his eyes as Mike picked him up like a ragdoll. Kim and Ernst both screamed. Julia was stiff with panic. She wanted to close her eyes but couldn't. Across from her, on the other side of the altar, Sara stood as if nailed to the floor, staring straight at the kicking and panicked Chadi. Alex had grabbed her to stop her from rushing over, but she seemed unable to move.

"Will someone volunteer to take Ernst's place as a sacrifice to Thaumiel, lord of obedience?" [Harlan's] voice was strangely calm and clear.

No-one spoke. Mike heaved Ernst onto the altar and held him down, seemingly without effort, as [Harlan] shouted an incantation at the black sky and slit his throat. Kim was next.

"Will someone volunteer to take her place?"

[Harlan] looked at Julia. She felt like she was floating above her body, staring down at herself and Kim who closed her eyes as the knife tore her throat open. Before [Harlan] moved on to Chadi, Alex had put his hand over Sara's mouth and applied an iron hold on her. Chadi's white



jacket drowned in blood as his carotid was opened. The trembling bodies formed a triangle on the altar. Their blood was swallowed by the ground. [Harlan] gained a dark aura, a crown of black light. Everyone could see the red theta on his forehead now. Julia felt a burning sensation between her eyes, and instinctively knew she had a mark on her forehead too.

"It is done," [Harlan] said to Mike. "Just one more thing." He pulled a revolver from the waistband at his back and cocked it. "This is loaded with the bullet I shot myself with, reshaped and dipped in the blood of an angel. I'm going to renegotiate our deal." He raised the revolver and shot Mike in the head.

The aide crumpled to the ground and the temple's walls coalesced around them. They were back in the basement. The three dead bodies were no longer on the altar. There was no trace of blood. But Mike's body lay at [Harlan's] feet, twitching as if in a cramp. A wound gaped in his forehead.

Julia's throat filled with bile, but she couldn't open her mouth. Her face felt paralyzed. She wanted to scream at [Harlan] to take them back to Hell, where Kim was. But she couldn't part her lips.

"I haven't broken the deal," [Harlan] told Mike's trembling body. "Thaumiel will have the project, but I will keep these youths and my freedom. The three sacrifices belong to Thaumiel. You will be my servant until your master has full control of the project. Is this acceptable?"

Mike opened his eyes and made his body obey him. He sat up. "It is acceptable. For now," he said. His voice was colder than before, less human.

"Good! I'll bring the kids down to the lake. Clear the basement. We don't need this place anymore."

The conversation sounded slightly distorted to Julia, as if run through a filter. She followed [Harlan] into the overgrown garden and looked over her shoulder. They should go back inside, but she was no longer sure why.

"Come on, we can't stay here any longer," [Harlan] said. "The owner didn't like us working here after all. Klaus, will you take the barbecue? And the rest of you can take care of the boxes." He took Julia's hand and led her through the iron gate into the street. The others plodded behind, whispering in subdued voices, trying to figure out what had happened. Only Sara's voice cut through the murmur:



“Chadi’s still in there! He’s in there!”

That made Julia react.

“We left Kim inside,” she told [Harlan]. “Right?”

Hadn’t they brought Kim? What did the house look like on the inside? She couldn’t remember. Could she have forgotten that during the time it took them to walk out into the street?

“Kim wasn’t here. You’re mistaken.”

“Yeah, she was here. We took the train here.”

“She wasn’t in the van.”

No, maybe she wasn’t. Now when he said it, it sounded reasonable. Alex was busy explaining to Sara that Chadi hadn’t been there either. Julia tried calling Kim. She didn’t pick up. Should she call Tamara and ask? Maybe later. She wanted to get her thoughts in order first. [Harlan] led them down towards the lake, through the gates to the museum villa and along the path that snaked its way to the water.

“It’s too bad we didn’t get a lot of painting done,” he said. “But the weather’s nice. Why don’t we sit down by the jetty?”

They walked down to the lawn that marked the border between the Wannsee villa’s garden and one of the many marinas along the shore. It didn’t look like a place where just anyone could have a picnic, but [Harlan] didn’t seem to care. He opened the boxes and put bags of potato chips, cans of beer and bottles of red wine on the grass. Julia peered into the cooler bag she had been lugging around: three salmon sandwiches and a bottle of Chateau Bonnet. She opened the bottle and drank a third of it in one single gulp. The others headed right for the wine and beer too, ignoring chips and sausages. They spread out, as if afraid to get too close to each other. Julia emptied her bottle and started on Paula’s. Under a plantain tree a short distance from the water, Sara lay weeping on the ground. Alex sat next to her, chugging beer. Julia emptied the second bottle of wine and passed out in the grass.



# 25. ԲԵԻԽԱՆԻԵՆ: ԱՄԱՆԾԱ

Saturday, July 15

Amanda's sows moved through the studio. They slunk soundlessly around the roll of barbed wire and the buckets of paint and glue, waddling without legs, badger-like. Their flanks were light now, and their backs dark red. It looked like they were dancing.

"If you're trying to say something, I don't understand you," Amanda said as she tracked their movements.

Naturally, they didn't reply. Amanda worked on four new sows to replace the ones she had given to Nikolai. The foundation was cast. She applied layers of rags, wood splinters and paint over the concrete surface. The new ones looked a little shaggier than the old ones.

"I'm going to call you mountain sows. A little hairier than the low-land breed."

They weren't awake yet, but the living sows sometimes came up to sniff them. Amanda's work mood had returned after the excursion into Metropolis with Harlan. They hadn't met any gods, but he had showed her halls filled with strange machines of copper and bronze before they sat down in the bell tower and looked out at the city. Amanda came back late on Friday night. [Harlan] had sent her a text: "The last painting is finished. You can stop worrying about the kids."

There was a knock on the door, and the sows went still.

"Come in!" Amanda put the pail of glue down.

"Hi. Am I disturbing you?"



Tamara stopped in the doorway. She was winded and red-cheeked, a maroon jacket tied around her waist. Amanda waved her inside.

"My hands are covered in glue. Will you wait while I wash off? What do you think about my new concrete sows?"

At the edge of her vision, she could see the sows moving behind Tamara's back as if they shadowed her while she walked over to look at the half-finished lumps of concrete.

"The others are on a picnic in Wannsee," Tamara said. "Celebrating the end of the project. We finished the last picture. They didn't want me there."

"Did they say that?" Amanda hadn't heard anything about a celebration. "Is Nikolai there?" she asked.

"I don't know. Kim and Julia told me not to come with them. The others have been a bit mean. They're just being brats." It wasn't about that, her tearful voice said.

"Are you upset?"

The sows moved nervously behind Tamara. Amanda was growing frightened.

"I'm worried. Julia sent me this. Now she won't pick up when I call. I know where they are. Out on the peninsula."

She showed Amanda the picture of the white abandoned house on her cellphone. Amanda saw the death angel's citadel in the abyss below the villa, and the burning battlefield of Inferno in the background. [Harlan] was standing in front of the gate. He had a wide smile on his face.

"Stay here!" Amanda sat Tamara down on the stool next to the workbench. "Stay in this room. Don't move away from the sows. Understand?" And to the sows: "Protect her until I'm back."

Amanda ran down the stairs and tried calling Renate. No answer. Moritz didn't pick up either. Then again, he never did. She ran across the courtyard to the commune and up the stairs to pound on his door. No one opened. After four signals, she got hold of Svetlana. She was on the 96 headed north in the tunnel through Tiergarten.

"Are you in the car? Can you pick me up in Bethanien? We have to go to Wannsee." Amanda heard herself shouting. While waiting for Svetlana, she tried calling Julia, Kim, Chadi and two other students on



her contact list. No answer. She dialed [Harlan's] number and roared a message: "I will kill you if you hurt them!"

Svetlana was dressed for work in a gray suit and heavy walking shoes. She parked in front of the commune.

"I'm supposed to help a client with an emergency in Wedding," she said. "I really shouldn't cancel on short notice again."

"He brought my art students down into hell. Like he did with Emre."

The traffic was dense for a Saturday night, and Svetlana zig-zagged through back streets to get past the traffic jams. Amanda tried calling everyone again without getting a reply. It was almost forty-five minutes before they stopped in front of the white villa. No students were in sight. Amanda focused her gaze and saw the citadel below them. She felt dizzy and nauseous. Black. Dead. Raging. A hatred directed at her and Svetlana. *Begone. You shouldn't be here.* She used chalk to draw a pattern around them on the asphalt, visualizing a shield made of barbed wire, thick spools rotating around them with a thunderous noise.

"Let's go inside and have a look. Stay close to me."

The kids had been inside the house. There was a sketch on the façade out back. Two spray cans, white and blue, were neatly placed on the porch. As if the painters had intended to come back and finish what they started. In what must have been a living room, unfurnished and with broken floorboards, the walls were newly spray-painted. Grinning zombie faces in black and white. Kaz and Alex.

On the basement door, the energies from one of [Harlan's] sigils lingered despite covered with white spray paint.

"This used to be a temple," Amanda said. "But not anymore."

Empty shelves lined the walls. The floor was made of rough concrete. A carpenter's bench stood in the middle of the room. Amanda saw blood dripping down its wooden legs.

"Can you see something running off the bench?"

Svetlana couldn't. Amanda concentrated and willed the walls away in her mind. She could glimpse the temple in Inferno, vaguely as if through mist, and the three bodies on the altar.

"He murdered them." Amanda tried to make out the faces on the bodies, but only caught flashes, as if she was looking through muddy water.



“Who did he murder?” Svetlana looked around, uncertain of what to look for.

“I’m not sure. We have to go there. He’s released the connection to the temple somehow. It’s sinking into the citadel, away from here.”

Svetlana looked at her with despair. *Don’t tell me things I don’t understand. Just do what you have to.* Amanda picked up her piece of chalk again and started to draw. A triangle. Signs that she had seen in Renate’s labyrinth. The infernal elements Moritz had explained to her when they studied his beetles. The walls dissolved around them like paint washing off a shiny glass pane. They stood in front of the altar with the bodies: Kim, Chadi and Ernst. Behind them, the door to the basement stairs still hovered against the battlefield’s horizon. Svetlana supported Amanda, who stumbled.

“Are those your students?” she asked. “Do you recognize them?”

Amanda nodded mutely. It was only just now that she saw the two male bodies that had been strung up like cattle and drained of blood. Inferno was quiet around them, a frozen warscape where clouds of flies were the only things moving. Amanda had a sensation of being in free fall, as if they were standing in a slow transport elevator headed down towards the citadel’s foundation.

“We have to get them out of here,” she said. “Before the citadel consumes them.”

Svetlana grabbed the shoulders on Kim, who looked lightest. Her windpipe and carotid artery were slashed open; the flesh had been severed all the way to her vertebrae, and her head lolled on her neck. Amanda grabbed her feet. They tried to lift the body but had to give up. Their hands slid through the flesh without getting a grip. It was like kneading mincemeat. The bodies were there, and yet not. Amanda sank to her knees and wept. Svetlana took her cellphone out and started taking photos: the bodies, the wounds, the faces close up, the rack with the bled corpses. The golden barbed wire expanded and whirled around the whole room. “He knows we’re here,” Amanda said. “We should leave.”

“Harlan?” Svetlana squinted at the battlefield, but saw nothing moving beyond the swarms of buzzing flies. “I mean... your grandfather?”

“The death angel. I think we should go now.”



They left and closed the basement door behind them. Amanda maintained the ward around them on the way out of the villa. Out in the street, two gray security cars had parked in front of Svetlana's yellow Golf. Six men in black guard uniforms waited for them at the gate, compact sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders. *Not human*, Amanda sensed.

"Stay close," she said.

"This area is off-limits!" roared the commanding officer, a bald man with disproportionately large hands, and stepped into their path. When they came closer, he let his gun slide down into his right hand. "Stop right there!"

Amanda stepped closer and hoped for the best. The whirling barbed wire became visible. A filament whipped out and sliced the guard officer's arm open. Black blood pumped out over the butt of the gun. He got out of the way with a roar that didn't sound human. The others, who had begun to block the way to the car, also shied away. Svetlana fumbled with her car keys and got the doors open. She hit one of the other cars as she reversed, but managed to get the Golf into the street and accelerated up the slope. The guards didn't pursue them.

"Check if something stuck." Svetlana gave her phone to Amanda. The photos were there. Amanda quickly scrolled past the close-ups. "I can see them. But I don't know if anyone else will," she said and closed the slideshow. She couldn't bear looking at them. "I'm going to call the police. That Müller guy."

"What do we tell him?" Svetlana asked.

"That it's his goddamned responsibility to do something. He's not human. He'll understand." Or so she hoped. Moritz had laughed, and Renate sounded worried, when Amanda said they ought to call the police and tell them that Grandpa had stolen his son's body. But this was something else.

Müller answered right away. He asked where they were.

"On our way from Wannsee," Amanda said. "From Inferno."

He sounded unsurprised and asked them to come to the police building at Eiswaldtstraße. "I'll come outside and meet you. Drive to the front gates."

Five minutes later, Svetlana stopped in front of the brown-plastered barracks that housed the fourth police district's offices. They were located in a sleepy residential area, surrounded by the old institution buildings



of Freie Universität. Müller stood at the iron gates that barred the entrance to the courtyard. He opened to let Svetlana drive inside. Amanda didn't bother blocking out his swelling, supernatural form. She had sent him the pictures from the temple.

"Let's go up to my office," Müller said. He guided them across the courtyard and up to the third floor of the main building, a brown barracks with a white-plastered belfry-like tower on one side. The office was small and brown, its walls papered sometime in the eighties and since then impregnated with cigarette smoke.

"It's murder," Amanda said. "My grandfather murdered them. You saw the pictures." She was crying now, against her will, but the lictor hardly seemed to notice.

"Your grandfather is dead. He couldn't have killed them. But we're continuing to investigate the other deaths he was involved in."

"Did you listen to anything I said? He stole Harlan's body!" She had told him about the magical trap.

"That's an unreasonable claim." Müller had downloaded the pictures to his computer and was scrolling through them. He looked even bigger in the little room. His bulk filled the entire wall of windows behind the desk, and the violet tongue protruded between small, needle-sharp teeth when he spoke.

"Can't you get the bodies out? Can't you go inside?" Amanda held back the impulse to grab him and shake him.

"There are no bodies in the house," Müller said. "You said so yourself." *What a non-sequitur.* It was stupid to expect anything else from a creature whose sole purpose was to protect the Illusion, of course. Now he looked a little anxious, however. Amanda wondered for a moment how she could tell.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" she asked. "It's your goddamn job to arrest him. You're a cop, aren't you?"

"I can report the kids missing and ask some questions. I'll send a group of technicians to the house. But I doubt they'll find anything."

"You have the pictures. They're there, you can see it for yourself."

"You do realize how outrageous they look, with that landscape in the background. In any case, my colleagues wouldn't see anything at all. Believe me, I know exactly how this works. I don't want you think I'm



trivializing this, but there's nothing I can do." He retracted his tongue. Amanda wondered how it could fit. He looked truly resigned.

"Make sure my grandfather can't work with kids anymore. You have to be able to do that, right? Get the others away from him before more die."

"I'll talk to social services," Müller said. "It's best if you let me handle this."

He showed them out and opened the gates for the car. Amanda burst into tears again as they drove through the residential streets and out onto the freeway into the city. Svetlana wiped tears from Amanda's cheek and tried to keep an eye on the traffic.

"I'll drive you home," she said. "Is that okay? What do you need me to do? I feel so helpless."

"Could you tell Emre?" Amanda asked. "He needs to know. We have to shut everything down somehow. Drive me to Bethanien. Tamara is still there."

[Harlan]

"What the fuck is this shit," Mike said. He still had a mark on his forehead where the bullet had entered, and he was angrier than usual. The pale gray eyes squinted at Clive's spider painting in the bunker below Friedrichstraße, as if he was having trouble focusing.

"You were there during the sacrifice. You saw it. Nothing can stop Thaumiel from reaching in through the artwork. He should be able to control everyone tied to the project."

"Obviously something's in the way. Because it's not working like it should."

[Harlan] concentrated to see the flow of energies through the painting. His energy was there, polyrhythmic and loud, but the death angel's influence could only be sensed as a murmuring undertone.

"It's here. Look and you'll see." He traced Thaumiel's dark streak across the spider's body with his finger. His fingertips tingled, as did the tattoos he had gotten according to Moritz' advice. "But sure, it's weaker than it should be. Maybe it's just a matter of time, that it has to penetrate the whole system?"



*Or maybe Moritz is a hell of a lot cleverer than I thought,* he didn't tell Mike. He couldn't see any other explanation. He had opened a sluice gate to Thaumiel's citadel when he sacrificed the kids in Wannsee, but here he could only sense a trickle that drowned in his own magic.

"If you think you can rewrite the contract just like that, you're wrong," Mike said. "You'll have to fix this."



# 26.

## ΒΕ+ΗΛΙΕΝ

Sunday, July 16

Tamara had tried calling all night. Julia finally picked up at half past two in the morning, drowsy and hung over:

“I just woke up. Where are you? Are you mad at me?”

Tamara burst into tears from pure relief, and Julia had to comfort her before they could say anything more.

“Are you at home?” Tamara asked. “I’ll come over.”

“No, don’t come here now. It’s too late.” Julia sounded scared and angry at nothing in particular. “I’m drunk. I want to sleep.”

“I *will* come over. What happened? What happened to Kim?”

When she heard Kim’s name, Julia hung up and didn’t answer again. Amanda had reluctantly showed Tamara pictures of the corpses in the temple, a flat battlefield in the background, like black-and-white photographs from the Western Front during World War I. “You probably won’t see anything in the pictures,” Amanda had warned her. But Tamara saw every detail, like screenshots from a horror movie. Svetlana had torn the cellphone from her hands and yelled at Amanda: “She’s just a little girl! For fuck’s sake! She doesn’t need to see that.”

They were in Amanda’s studio. Moritz was smoking hash on the work bench, dressed in black leather from head to toe. He hadn’t said a word after finding out what had happened. Renate and Emre had left fifteen minutes earlier to find the murdered kids’ parents. Renate sounded as if she didn’t want to believe what she saw in Svetlana’s photos. *It can’t be true.*



Tamara believed the pictures. She had spent two hours on a stool while the concrete sows nervously moved around her. It was past eleven o'clock when Amanda answered her phone and said that Julia probably was okay, but that Tamara had to stay in the studio. She was fed up with obeying Amanda now.

"I'm going to Julia's place," she said. "I can take a cab."

Amanda wouldn't hear of it. She wanted to wait until Renate returned. When Tamara began to pull her jacket on, Svetlana was the one to realize she wasn't going to change her mind. "I'll drive you," she said. "We'll see if we can get her back here."

Driving through darkened streets to the sleeping residential blocks of Westend took half an hour. Svetlana tuned in to a bland radio channel and grabbed Tamara's hand when she continued to call Julia: "You're only winding yourself up." In the roundabout by the lit Siegestsäule column in Tiergarten, Tamara looked up from her cell-phone and asked:

"Did Amanda know? She nagged at us to call her. Did she know that Harlan was going to do this?" It had bothered her since Amanda and Svetlana returned from Wannsee and reluctantly, sentence by sentence, told her what they had seen. Tamara wouldn't believe them until they showed her the photographs.

"She understood that he was dangerous—that's why she was there when you were painting. Emre and I knew that he was a criminal, too. We just had no idea what the hell to do about him."

Svetlana accelerated along the stretch through the shadowy park. A dim half-moon floated above the trees. During the past two weeks, Emre and Svetlana had met at night, as far away from [Harlan] as possible. They had drinks and talked about childhood memories from Kreuzberg and Marzahn before having sex at her place among crocheted bedspreads and gaudy souvenirs from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Never at Emre's place. It was too close to Bethanien.

"But we didn't think he'd do something like this. It was just unthinkable." She slowed down on the bridge over the Landwehr Canal between two stone gates with Ionic columns.



Tamara sat in silence for a long moment, looking at the dark facades sweeping by. "Amanda calls him Grandpa," she said. "They fought a lot when we painted in Neukölln."

"We can talk about it when we get back to the studio." Svetlana parked in the darkness in front of Julia's front gate and looked around before they got out of the car, as if afraid that someone might jump them. They had to wait for several minutes before Patricia, Julia's mother, answered the entry phone:

"Tamara? Do you know what time it is? Julia is asleep."

"I have to talk to her."

The lock clicked and they went up to the apartment on the third floor. They got out of the elevator to see Patricia, blue dressing gown tightly wrapped around her thin form, close the apartment door behind her. Her face was taut, as if she was trying and failing to find the right words.

"Julia isn't feeling well," she finally said. "She can't see anyone right now. I'm sorry." Patricia sounded scared. "Do you know what happened?" she said. "I've never seen Julia this drunk, ever." She looked at Svetlana and seemed to recognize her without knowing why. Svetlana smiled and said she was a good friend of Renate's and Amanda's.

"I need to talk to her," Tamara said. "I don't know what happened either. Did she mention Kim?"

"Kim?" For a moment, Patricia looked confused, as if she couldn't place the name. "No, she didn't. Call tomorrow and we'll talk more, alright?" She gave Tamara a helpless hug. *It's not about you*, her expression said. "Okay?"

Tamara wanted to stay and wait by the front gate, but Svetlana refused to leave her there. "Come on, let's go back to the others."

They drove in silence all the way to Kreuzberg.

When they stepped into the studio, Renate and Emre were back. Night was fading outside the windows, and the sun lit the sky beyond the apartment buildings on the other side of the playground. Emre was pacing back and forth. He angrily kicked at Amanda's sows, who obediently let themselves be pushed around by his feet. Svetlana closed the door to the corridor and sat down next to Tamara on a wooden trestle by the window.



“Horst’s memory isn’t behaving like it should.” Renate sat on the workbench with her face in her hands, shoulder to shoulder with a mute Moritz. “He says Ernst slept at a friend’s house, but he doesn’t remember the friend’s name.”

Renate had sought Ernst’s father out in the desperate hope that Amanda had been mistaken, that the dead bodies in the temples were a mere hallucination. But Ernst was gone. His father, a long-time friend of Renate’s, sounded confused and became anxious when he saw how shaken she was. “It’s alright,” he had said in an attempt to soothe her. “Ernst will be home soon.” She couldn’t bear to say anything more and left. Emre had spoken to Kim’s mother, who claimed that her daughter was at a party somewhere south of town. When Kim didn’t answer her phone, she became worried. She tried calling Julia, without success. They finally got hold of Hannes, who claimed that Kim hadn’t been with them in Wannsee. He was drunk and hung up when they asked what had happened. They couldn’t reach Chadi’s dad. He was out looking for his son, his sister said.

“They’re not in our reality anymore,” Renate said. “I think everyone’s forgetting them. It’ll happen to us as well.”

Amanda sat by The Fence with her legs crossed, listening. She had called all the students and left messages on their cellphones. No one called her back.

“Could you fucking stay sober for once!” Renate tore the hash pipe from Moritz’ hands. He coughed and snatched the pipe back. He had been silent since Amanda and Svetlana showed him the pictures, but he shied away as if expecting a punch. Renate recognized the behavior. When everyone yelled at Moritz, he turned into the charity boy who was scared of getting a beating. He often told others that he had lived as a street kid after the war, but that wasn’t really true. He had spent most of his childhood in various institutions. Now he thought everyone was blaming him. *He’s your friend, damn it. You should have known.*

Emre had tried and failed to reach [Harlan]. Svetlana told him that he couldn’t go to Mommsenstraße to confront the killer. “The only reason to go there would be to kill the bastard. But you can’t do that. Shouldn’t I call Ulrich Schaffer? He knows people who do that sort of thing, and he hates Connelly. All we have to do is tell him how.” Svetlana had called Frieda a



few times over the summer to check up on her. She was looking for a new job and lived on savings, but kept an eye on Ulrich and told Svetlana that he was still doing business with [Harlan]. Mike had been spotted smoking outside the building by Sieversufer. Peter had quit and moved to Cottbus.

"It's difficult," Renate said. "The death angel is protecting him. Isn't that right, Mori?"

Moritz nodded silently.

"There has to be a way," Svetlana said. "Or should we just try to move all the kids away from Berlin? I guess we'll have to."

"Moritz can protect them," Renate said. "Tattoo them. But they have to get away from Harlan too." In her mind, she had begun to call him Clive, but they had agreed on not telling Tamara everything just yet. It could be too much for her.

"They're going to a photography class with Nikolai on Tuesday," Emre said. "According to the schedule. It's part of the summer activities we got extra funding for. I was going to call in and cancel it."

"Don't," Amanda said. "It's better if we can talk to them when they're all gathered. Are they meeting here in Bethanien?"

They were, Emre said. The idea was that they would continue working on Nikolai's work from the paintings in the bunkers and the subway, and take photos of their own to complete Nikolai's. According to the description Emre had been given, [Harlan] wasn't supposed to be there.

Moritz opened his mouth for the first time: "Bethanien is good. Protected. They're not as exposed here. Even better if we can get them into Amanda's studio. The Fence has strong protection. Then we might be able to calm them down enough to talk to them. I can make them amulets."

"I don't know how many would show up for a photography class," Tamara said. "Julia hates taking photos."

"If I've understood anything about the way Thaumiel's control works, that fucker will make sure everyone shows up," Moritz said.

## Julia

The Tuesday was warm, and the air in Bethanien's basement was stagnant. The smell of developer made Julia feel nauseous. She didn't even



like photography, was bad at it, couldn't judge light conditions. All the pictures she took with her phone were simple snapshots, intentionally bad and impossible to critique. No way would she voluntarily take analog photos with an old Leica. And yet here she was in a stinking darkroom while the sun shone outside. She stared into a plastic tray where a picture of the wrecked cars from the commune's trailer park emerged.

"Think about the contrast," Nikolai said.

Julia thought about Kim. She had ordered herself to do that at least once an hour after she understood that she was forgetting her. In her mind's eye, Kim's face went fuzzy at the edges until only her brown eyes remained. She had left messages on Kim's cellphone without getting a reply. Tamara had called her to talk about Kim, but Julia couldn't handle it. Anxiety gripped her brain like a cold hand when she tried. She didn't have the strength to see Tamara either. That was the worst part. *Just like when I couldn't call Amanda.* They could have short conversations on the phone, but if Tamara so much as mentioned Kim's name, Julia hung up.

The darkroom was stuffy, with white walls and red light bulbs in the ceiling. The viewing stations stood against one of the walls, the trays of various fluids against the other. Julia was glad she had put a pair of shorts and a tank top on, as if she had thought she was going to the beach instead of the culture house's basement until the very last minute. Several others were also dressed for a day in the sun.

"You're allowed to talk," Nikolai said nervously. "Does anyone have any questions?"

No one spoke. After the finishing party, where everyone was so drunk they couldn't remember anything afterward, the general mood had been weird. Julia remembered drinking wine straight out of the bottle on the grass by the lake. What happened before or after was hazy. They were supposed to paint, but she couldn't recall that they had. It wasn't her habit to get dead drunk. A text showed up on her phone. Mom. They had argued before Julia left home.

"That art class isn't good for you," Mom said. "Why has it continued over the summer? That wasn't the deal to begin with, was it? Is Tamara there? She called me at work to ask about you."



Julia was inexplicably pissed off. Mom's mere mention of Tamara made her angry. She had lied and said that she was at Tamara's place when they were painting under Neukölln. Now she lied and said that they might be breaking up. When Mom got upset and wanted to talk about it, she yelled "It's none of your damn business!" and nearly scared Erich to death by nearly punching him in the face when he unexpectedly showed up in the hallway.

That was yesterday. Julia had slept at Sara's and deleted Mom's texts during the evening. She felt wholesome at Sara's place, in a tiny two-room apartment at the top of a house in Lichtenberg. Normally they wouldn't let anyone else spend the night there, Sara's mother said in fluent English, but Sara was worried and needed someone there. When Julia showed up, Sara had been yelling at her mother and uncle that they had to find Chadi. Her uncle tried to calm her down. Sara lost it then and they started to argue in Arabic. Afterwards, her mother and Julia held each of her hands as she wept. She couldn't sleep at all on her own. With Julia squeezed in next to her in the narrow bed, she at least dozed off every now and then. Now she stood in front of one of the plastic trays, poking at the fluid like a zombie.

"You're leaving it in too long. It's going dark," Alex told Julia. He fished the picture of the cars out.

"Who cares."

"You don't like taking photos." Not a question, an assertion.

"No. I hate taking photos."

Everyone was there. That pissed Julia off too. [Harlan] wasn't even present, and yet they all showed up to photograph car wrecks.

"I thought I'd like it," Alex said. "I've always liked black-and-white pictures. Contrasts, playing with shades of gray." The black cars swam in the tray of stopper fluid. "But this is pointless."

"Want to get out of here?" Julia asked. The words burned on her tongue. *If you say yes, we'll leave together. We'll bring Sara.*

But Alex shook his head. "Don't say that." He had taken a series of pictures of everyone in the group, close-ups of faces from various angles. Like mug shots. Now he nimbly moved them between the trays and onto the antique drying cabinet that looked like a sheet mangle. Nikolai was



happy with him and chatted about how the pictures could be displayed. Julia inhaled the smell of developer, tasted the nausea and wondered if it could still her anxiety.

"It's good you took Sara home," Alex said. "She feels like crap."

"It's this thing with Chadi. That he's gone."

Alex looked confused, as if he didn't understand what Julia meant. She had given up on talking to the others about Kim. They walked away when she tried.

"Sara's mom doesn't want me there," Alex said. "I think she blames Sara's mood on me. Even though we've never met. Do you think she doesn't like me?"

Julia shook her head. "She doesn't understand what's going on. It's not about you. How could she dislike you if you've never met?"

"Let's go upstairs and talk about paper quality," Nikolai said.

They washed up and ascended from the basement to a little conference room on the second floor where Nikolai had laid out photo books, paper samples and checklists for the developing process. He explained how multiple sources of light could be used for studio photography, and Sara started to feel okay about being bored. Boring was good. They segued from studio photography into nature photography. Maybe they could go on an excursion to take pictures of birds along the river Havel. Everyone thought that sounded good. Then there was a knock on the door. Nikolai opened and became nervous when he saw Amanda and Emre standing outside. Behind them he could glimpse Renate and Tamara, who waved at Julia.

"We're in session," Nikolai said. He closed the door halfway as if to hide the students in the room.

"We can wait," Amanda said. "How's everything going? Could you ask Julia to come outside? Tamara wants to talk to her." She stuck her head into the room and made eye contact with Julia.

Julia stepped outside. It was painful to look at Renate, and when Tamara wanted to hug her panic welled up.

"You can't come here," she said. "Go away. Didn't you get it when I told you not to come along? You have to stay away." It was the first time she thought about the afternoon before they went to Wannsee, and



remembered how she had put Tamara on the train. She grew angry at Renate and Amanda. *How the hell could you bring her? Take her away. Protect her.*

Tamara didn't look like she was listening. She tried to grab Julia's hands: "Julia, listen. You have to come with us! You have to!"

"No!" Julia found the strength to pull away, but Tamara insisted:

"You remember Kim, right? Do you remember what happened? Please, try to remember."

Julia did, as if a soap bubble broke and the world outside suddenly became clear as glass. She remembered Kim's body, blood gushing over her striped sweater. It was unbearable.

"Leave me alone!" she shouted.

"You have to come outside with us. It's dangerous to stay. Amanda can help you out of here."

Julia hit Tamara with a hard punch that broke her nose and made blood run down her upper lip. It made everyone in the room react. Alex stepped into the corridor as well. His broad fist landed straight in Tamara's face. She crumpled to the floor and didn't get up. When Emre stepped in between them, he was rewarded with a blow. He grabbed Alex and threw him to the floor. The rest of the class streamed out past Nikolai, who watched in silence. Sara and Samir descended on Renate, knocking her over and kicking at her back and stomach. She curled up to protect her head and screamed at them to stop. Amanda received a blow to the midriff from Hannes and doubled over. Emre tried to tear Sara and Samir away from Renate, but Alex and Kaz threw themselves at him. A rustling sound could be heard from the stairwell, a whooshing noise in the corridor. Julia saw something closing in at the edge of her vision and was thrown into the wall right leg first. It felt as if her knee broke. Only when she had been thrown to the floor could she see Amanda's concrete sows clearly. They burned in red and yellow, moving like great centipedes as they rumbled into the kids and knocked them to the floor. Emre was the only one standing when the sows arranged themselves in a protective circle around the women on the floor.

"What are you doing?" Nikolai looked like he was waking from a stupor. "My god!"



The rage was gone. Julia looked down at her bloody right hand. Renate's left arm had been snapped into an unnatural angle. She was deathly pale and looked ancient, frail and confused. Emre leaned over her to check that she was breathing. Amanda was speaking into her cellphone:

"An ambulance. Bethanien, Mariannenplatz. Older woman. Assault."

Tamara was on her hands and knees. Blood ran from her broken nose and formed a puddle on the floor. A janitor came running with a first aid kit, and footsteps could be heard in the corridor and the stairwell. Julia wanted to kneel next to Tamara, but didn't dare. She stood completely still, uncertain whether she could trust her own body. *What if I hit her again?*

"You'd better wait inside." Nikolai herded the class back into the conference room. He sounded heartbroken and scared. "What happened?"

No one could answer. Julia could see her fist land in Tamara's face, but no thoughts or feelings were connected to the memory. Alex sat on the floor shaking his head as if struck by a nervous tic. Sara tried to walk out into the corridor to see how Renate was doing, but Nikolai didn't want to let her out.

"Let the professionals do their job."

A paramedic came inside and tended to everyone's wounds. Julia's hand received a gauze dressing. Her knee was sore but didn't seem to be badly damaged. After a long moment, when she had begun to leaf through a book about studio photography to keep the anxiety at bay, two police officers came to take statements. Renate and the others were gone by then. There was no sign of the concrete sows either. No one could describe the events, and the police officers were annoyed, especially at Nikolai whom they practically yelled at. From their discussion, Julia gathered that neither Amanda nor anyone else had wanted to point anyone out as responsible for the assault. A woman in a pantsuit, whom Julia understood to be the director of the culture center, arrived in the wake of the police. She yelled at Nikolai too and told him to get the phone numbers of everyone's parents. The police officers left together with the director. Julia had somehow expected them to be driven home or taken to some guidance center, but they were left behind with Nikolai who was collecting his books and papers.



“They’ll call your parents,” he said. “We’ll wait here until they show up.”

Instead, [Harlan] was the one to a moment later tear the door open, stomping inside with an indolent Mike at his heels.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing? You could have killed them, for fuck’s sake!”

Alex crawled under the table to get away. Julia sat perfectly still and closed her eyes. But [Harlan] ignored them. He went straight for Nikolai, whom Mike had driven up against the wall. Nikolai’s ribcage creaked, and he cried out in pain.

“You go home,” [Harlan] said. Everyone sat in silence; no one met his eyes. “Nikolai and I have things to discuss. They’ve called your parents. Go downstairs and wait for them in the hallway.”

Julia stumbled into the corridor with the others. Before [Harlan] slammed the door shut, they heard Nikolai beg for mercy.







# 27.

## FRIEDRICHSHAIN: SARA, ALEX

Thursday, July 20

The youth psychiatry ward was housed in a white-plastered Twenties building overlooking the helicopter pad at Friedrichshain's hospital. A helicopter landed just as Sara looked out the window, and men in red-and-white jackets hauled a stretcher out. Sara couldn't understand what she was doing here. "It's a formality," she had told her mom. "It's not as if they think I'm psychotic." The whole class was there. They were spread out at round tables in a day room, filling out a survey about the Bethanien incident. Outside, a gentle summer rain fell. The throb from the helicopter's rotor blades trickled into the room.

"The way I remember it, she fell," Alex said.

"I kicked her." Sara had a clear image of her foot hitting Renate's stomach. "I'll write that down."

"Even the psychologist says she fell." Alex reached out as if to stop Sara from writing, but changed his mind at the last second.

"I did call and apologize for kicking her. She's not mad, if that's what you think." Renate had sounded wretched on the phone, but glad to hear from Sara. She thought Sara and Alex should visit her and talk about what happened. Sara said they'd think about it, but didn't mention it to Alex.

"Did she say anything about Tamara?" Alex asked. "Is she hurt?" He had explained to Sara that Tamara got in the way when he went for Emre. He hadn't meant to hit her.

"I think she's okay."



Alex wore a compress over his right eye and walked with a limp. Julia, who sat across from Sara, drew flowery tendrils in the survey's margin and made no effort to answer the questions.

"Tamara calls me sometimes," she said. "She thought it was a good thing we went here."

Sara had thought that Julia would be angry at Alex—he was the one who had assaulted Tamara, after all—but she hadn't said a word. She had also stopped talking about Kim, the childhood friend that she had tried to make Sara remember during a long night-time talk while Tamara's mother Iman sat in the living room trying to calm uncle Mahdi down. Now Sara began to doubt that Kim had ever existed. Maybe Julia was psychotic and got ideas. Or... no. They had squeezed into Sara's bed and talked about Kim and about Chadi, the cousin Sara had lost somehow, she didn't know where. Alex claimed that Chadi had been there at the beginning when they were painting, but not lately. Uncle Mahdi said he'd lived here recently and that the police were looking for him. Sara had discovered that she felt better when she didn't try to remember what he looked like.

"Has everyone filled the survey out?" the psychologist asked.

Doctor Ackermann was dressed in a turquoise tunic and wore a heavy necklace of marbles in earthy colors. She collected the surveys and scanned the replies.

"You're having difficulties talking about this," she said quietly. "I understand. Let's go through it piece by piece and try to work our way to what happened."

"Nothing happened," Hannes said. "There's nothing to talk about. The old woman fell. End of story."

Hannes' left arm was in a cast. No one in the room was completely without bumps or bruises. During the conversation with Doctor Ackermann they had begun to agree on the explanation that they had started a fight in the corridor for no reason, and that Tamara and Renate got in the way. That's what [Harlan] had claimed, anyway, when they met him at the police station after the fight. He told them that everyone had to attend the meeting at the youth psychiatry ward and that they should listen to Emre when he told them off in the future.



"I would like us to talk a little more about the art class," Doctor Ackermann said. "You had a finishing party a week ago, didn't you? Could someone tell me about that? Samir, maybe?"

"Go to hell," Samir said.

"Nothing happened," Alex interjected. "We just had too much to drink. Especially Samir."

Sara fished a pack of cigarettes out of her bag and grabbed Julia: "Come on, let's go for a smoke. I can't stand being here any longer."

She expected Ackermann to stop them, but she didn't. They rode the elevator down to the reception and walked out onto the turning area in front of the main entrance. The beautiful summer weather had been replaced by thunder-hot rain. They stopped under the roof over the colonnade by the gate. A man in a white doctor's coat was already smoking there. He gave them an embarrassed smile as if ashamed of his cigarette, and left when they looked at him.

"We could get out of here," Sara said. "Go for a coffee."

"No, we couldn't."

They lit a cigarette each. Julia, who usually never smoked, coughed and grimaced. A black BMW slowed down and parked over by the playground that formed the border between the psychiatry ward and the taller hospital buildings. A man in a crew cut and dirt-brown coat stepped out of the car. He looked at Sara and Julia as if he recognized them:

"Good day. Do you belong to Renate Poll's students?"

"Kind of," Sara said. "Why?"

The man showed his ID. "Reinhard Müller. Superintendent at the criminal police. Are the others here with Doctor Ackermann?"

"On the second floor."

"Maybe you could show me?"

They followed the superintendent upstairs in the elevator. Before they stepped inside to join the others in the day room, Sara grabbed Müller's sleeve: "There's something I want to ask. About my cousin, Chadi Halabi. Do you know anything about a report? He's missing."

"Why would he know..." Julia started to ask, but Müller nodded and suddenly looked full of sympathetic concern.



"We had a report come in from Amanda Serner," he said. "It's under investigation, but I'm afraid the case will be closed if we don't see results very soon. I'm sorry."

"What did Amanda say when she filed the report?" Sara asked.

"That he's missing. She was concerned."

They went into the day room, where Doctor Ackermann had gathered everyone around the largest table and was talking about group dynamics. She hadn't expected Müller to show up, which was apparent when he introduced himself:

"The criminal police? Why? Has someone filed a report now?"

"We're treating it as suspected assault," Müller said. "And it ties into another case we're working on. This is not a trivial matter. Mrs. Poll could have died."

"From what I understand, she fell. An accident." Ackermann made it clear that she didn't want Müller there.

He circled the table and examined everyone's faces. Sara could see them shying away from him.

"I really came to talk to you," he told Ackermann. "I can wait outside until you're done."

"We're done for today, anyway. We've scheduled a follow-up for next week. You'll receive an SMS later today when I've entered it into the schedule."

Sara asked Julia if she wanted to do something afterwards, but she was going home to see her dad who had found out about the events in Bethanien through back channels and was upset. Kaz disappeared outside the moment Doctor Ackermann gave them permission to leave. He had started hanging out with his old gang of potheads in Görlitzer Park in an attempt to get away from it all. Alex and Sara walked together to the tram.

"What does your mom have to say about all of this?" Alex asked. He knew that she would have preferred Sara to study around the clock to get into university.

"She's down. She can barely go to German class anymore. But Mahdi's worse. He's completely confused." Chadi's dad had called everyone during Monday: the school, the police, the social services, the director



of Bethanien, Renate, and [Harlan]. When no one could help him, he started driving around in a shabby Volvo he'd borrowed from a friend.

"He has no one else. His wife died when we still lived in Aleppo. He's an agronomist and has applied for a hundred jobs, but no one in Berlin wants a Syrian agronomist. Chadi is his life."

"But Chadi hasn't lived with you since winter, right?"

"He has... I think. At least he was with us earlier this spring. I remember that." Sara began to become uncertain. She was only completely convinced that he'd lived three blocks away from them in Aleppo, close to the nicer houses in the old town. He would give her precocious lectures about the old town's architecture when they went shopping.

"Do you want to come home with me?" she asked. "And talk to him?"

"To your uncle?" Alex had never been to Sara's place. They'd been dating on and off since February, and seriously since Easter, but Sara had from the outset made it clear that it was best if they met in town or at his place.

"You can promise him that you have an eye on me, so I don't disappear too," she said. "He's afraid I might."

They took the tram to the apartment building where Iman and Mahdi had been assigned an apartment in January, after a year spent at the refugee camp in Lichtenberg. It was a cramped two-room apartment in a massive ten-story building, with windows facing the street. Sara's mom opened and stared at Alex. She was dressed in black trousers and an embroidered blouse from a vintage shop in Prenzlauer Berg, as if ready to go out.

"Is that what he looks like?" she said in English. "I thought he was German."

"My dad's American," Alex said. People sometimes took him to be North African, especially after he started coloring his hair.

"This is Alex," Sara said. "Alex—Iman, my mom."

They stepped into the kitchen. A stocky man in his fifties sat at the kitchen table, staring into a cellphone. His eyes were bloodshot and he hadn't shaved for a week.

"Mahdi," Iman said. "This is Alex, the boy Sara met."

"He's disappeared from my phone book," Mahdi said in choppy German. "What the hell is going on? Have I gone crazy?" He looked up at



Alex as if expecting an explanation. Iman started making coffee and Sara put cups on the table. Alex carefully sat down on a stool and said that the contact lists on phones tended to act up. He'd lost his whole contact list once.

"I haven't gotten any help," Mahdi said. "Nothing. No one cares that he's gone."

"I'm sure he'll turn up." Alex tried to recall Chadi's face but failed. Had they met? He was uncertain.

"It's as if I forget him sometimes," Mahdi said. "His things disappear. He made a little clay bird. It was on our dresser. Now it's gone." Mahdi burst into tears. They looked at him helplessly.

Iman patted his shoulder and poured coffee: "Not in front of the kids, Mahdi. I probably moved the bird by accident."

"It's alright," Alex said. "It must be awful. I understand that too."

They had coffee and pretended that Mahdi wasn't there. Iman asked Alex about school and his American dad, who had been a flight technician in the military before he got the job at Tegel Airport. Sara looked out the window and wished she was somewhere else. Somewhere far away.



## 28. FRIEDRICHSHAIN

Friday, July 21

Tamara had spent three nights on Renate's sofa, under a window overlooking the building cranes on the next block. Late Tuesday evening, after four hours in the emergency ward's waiting room, Amanda and Tamara had helped the old woman home from the hospital. The apartment lay a stone's throw from Renate's childhood home, in the newly restored houses around Forckenbeckplatz. It wasn't the neat spinster apartment Tamara had expected. The walls were adorned with the same magical copper and silver ornaments she had seen in Moritz' apartment when he tattooed a sigil on her chest. Sometimes, when Tamara opened her eyes in the middle of the night, they blazed in white. Above the magical lines hung a patchwork of oil paintings and lithographs. The furniture was oldish, bought at IKEA and Höffner in the middle of the Naughties. A blue oilcloth covered the kitchen table and two African violets stood in the window.

"Julia says that the meeting with the psychologist was pointless," Tamara said. "It won't help them. I talked to her this morning." She fingered the tape on her nose and helped Amanda serve coffee in the kitchen. "Julia is with her dad now. I called him and told him to make sure she stays there. I think he understands that something's wrong." Tamara was relieved when they told her that [Harlan] was actually the Dahlem killer. That explained why he felt so twisted.

They had gathered to talk about what to do—everyone except Moritz, who was at home making beetle amulets, and Svetlana who was trying to keep her job. Renate sat completely still on a kitchen chair with her



arm in a sling. Under her roomy jersey sweater, her stomach and chest were covered in bruises. Amanda sat down and poured coffee. Her arms and back were bruised, but she was less injured than Renate. Emre leafed through a registry of the students from the art class. The names of the three dead had disappeared as if eaten by the paper. He had called the murder victims' parents, who sounded angry and clung to the thought that their children were just out somewhere and would return home soon. Emre tried to help them remember but even Chadi's dad, who had been the most resilient one, had started to forget.

"We'll have to kidnap them," Amanda said. "It's the only solution. They'll never come along willingly to get tattoos, and what I did to Nadine won't work on eleven people. How did Grandpa make them jump us? Some fucking kind of mind control?" On Wednesday, she and Moritz had gone to Friedrichstraße to have a closer look at Clive's restored paintings, hunting for an explanation. They saw Thaumiel's darkness as a shadow in her grandfather's many-colored aura. It made none of them the wiser.

"What about the dead?" Emre said. "The ones who disappeared?" He had stuck a post-it note with the dead kids' names and ages on his fridge at home. It took two days for the names to fade away. Then he put up a new one.

"They're with Thaumiel. We can't help them." Amanda's memory loss was less severe than that of the others, but the dead slipped away from her too. Even her anger subsided. *You'll get over it*, Grandpa had told her in a text message. She was afraid it was true.

"Apparently Clive got angry with the kids, so I don't think he would have told them to attack us." Renate paused for breath. She spoke with an effort, as if she had difficulties getting air into her lungs. "He's trying to bond them to him. All that effort. It's nothing he will do without reason. I've seen similar effects before. Sect leaders use it sometimes."

"I should have seen what he was doing, shouldn't I?" Tamara said. She had recounted everything she could remember of what [Harlan] said and did during the work on the paintings. It was as if the others in the class were enamored with him. In love. At first, Tamara was jealous, afraid that Julia was going to leave her. Then she realized that something was wrong.



"You couldn't see it when you were in the middle of it," Renate said. "Like a fish in an aquarium."

"Let me take that. Don't strain yourself." Amanda helped Renate put the coffee cup back on the table. "We need a deprogrammer, is that it? Or an exorcist."

"Something like that, I suppose. Thaumiel is the lord of blind obedience. The kids were in his hell and have been bound to it. I think that goes for Lotti and Jaroslaw too. They are starting to obey him." Renate had been on the phone with Lotti Decken all Wednesday morning, trying to get her to oust [Harlan] from the foundation's board. Lotti ended up telling her not to call again and hung up.

Emre had also talked to the board about putting all activities on ice after the assault, without success. [Harlan] was furious and tried to blame Nikolai. The culture house's directors, who were beyond [Harlan's] control, were talking about giving their cooperation with the foundation an overhaul. But that would take weeks. The only comfort was that the youth psychiatry took the events seriously. Amanda sensed Müller's hand in the background.

"I spoke with Harlan... Clive... on the phone before I got here." Emre put the class registry down. "He says he's devastated. That he didn't think Nikolai would lose control the way he did. But he claims he still has confidence in me as project leader. It's important to him that the project survives. He was pissed off when I said we'll probably have to postpone the Pankow exhibition. Can we use that somehow?"

"They're going back to the hospital in Friedrichshain on Tuesday for a follow-up with the psychologist," Amanda said. "Could we take them with us from there? If we tell them that Harlan asked us to bring them? But we can't detain them for more than a couple of hours before they call our bluff. That's not enough."

"We'll have to bring them from there straight into Metropolis," Renate said. "It should be outside of Clive's sphere of influence. Villa d'If is protected against infernal influence."

"How is that supposed to happen?"

"A labyrinth. It's a good hospital to place a labyrinth in. I was there for my appendix in Fifty-eight."



## Emre

Tuesday, July 25

After lunch the following Tuesday, Emre stepped through the doors to the youth psychiatry ward and smiled at the receptionist. He had arranged a meeting with Doctor Ackermann to talk about how he could support the art students. The ward was located in an old, white-plastered building, its back to the district park and its entrance facing the more modern hospital buildings that housed the medical clinics. A good location for a labyrinth, Renate had said. She knew the area from childhood. She and Amanda were busy painting somewhere in the culverts under the hospital.

Doctor Ackermann was a short, pudgy woman in her fifties who wore soft earthy colors and giraffe-shaped wooden earrings. They shook hands, and Emre said that he hoped he might be of use. "Don't lie unless you have to," Renate had warned him. "They're psychologists after all. Don't underestimate them." Ackermann could tell that Emre was worried.

"We're concerned too," she said. "We wouldn't have these meetings otherwise. They seem to have confidence in you. I'm glad you got in touch."

She made an honest and professional impression. Emre almost began to doubt that he was doing the right thing. Should he leave this to the psychiatrists? "I've hardly worked with them at all," he said.

"They seem to trust you, and Mr. Connelly of course."

"Of course."

Emre listened to the doctor chatting about the clinic and the program while they rode the elevator up to the day room on the second floor. Light flooded in through the windows. Flowering landscapes and abstract, soothing pictures hung on the walls. The kids were having tea in little groups at circular tables. The whole thing felt a little twisted, as if the room had been furnished for little children and not gawky teenagers filled with aggressive anxiety. When Emre entered, everyone looked up.

"Nikolai says hello," he said. "He hopes you're all doing well." Nikolai had gone on sick leave and was visiting his sister. Emre hoped he would stay there.

"Is he okay?" asked a girl in a baggy knitted sweater. Julia. Emre had looked at pictures of them all and memorized their names.



“Just a little tired. I’m trying to get him to go on vacation.”

“They’re blaming him,” Julia said. “And Alex and Kaz. It doesn’t really feel fair.” She pulled out the chair next to her so that Emre could sit down, and lowered her voice: “Is Renate okay? She didn’t hit her head, did she?”

“No, she’s fine.” Emre sat down and moved his attention from Julia, whom everyone was looking at. Sara sat across from them, flanked by Hannes and Kaz. Sara and Kaz both had vacant eyes, introverted.

“Did Harlan tell you to come?” Hannes asked.

“Yes. He asked me to check up on you.”

“He says we should do what you tell us.”

Everyone looked expectantly at Emre. Doctor Ackerman was scribbling on a notepad.

“What do you want to do?” Emre asked carefully.

He got no reply. Don’t mention the missing ones, the magicians had warned him. You have no idea of how they’ll react. In the end he drank his tea in silence while Ackermann moved between the groups and chatted about schoolwork and parents. He took his phone out and sent a text: “I think they’ll do what I tell them.”

Renate had spent two nights laying down the labyrinth together with Amanda. It zig-zagged out of the hospital grounds and westward to the river through shadows of the past that Renate used to tear the Illusion down. Moritz, Svetlana and Tamara waited at the other end. The cell-phone vibrated: “I’m on my way.” The idea was that Amanda would lead the students into the labyrinth while Emre stopped them from fleeing. It all built on the assumption that they could turn [Harlan’s] control against him.

Doctor Ackermann had just gotten up to say something when the door to the corridor opened and Amanda stepped inside.

“Hi, are you about done? Harlan asked me to pick you up.”

“We’re just about to finish,” Ackermann said. “You’re Amanda, aren’t you? I know that the police psychologist disliked you coming, but I think it’s a good thing.”

Amanda smiled and said that she would have loved to stay for a while, but that they were in a bit of a hurry. Emre managed to herd the whole group into the corridor and said in an assertive voice:



“Come on, let’s take the stairs.”

The students obeyed him. They left Ackermann in front of the elevators and stepped through the doors to the old stairwell. It was a time labyrinth. It brought them back through the Sixties and Fifties to when the hospital lay in the East, its plastered walls flaking. The stairs ended in a culvert where newly painted snakes coiled around the walls. The corridor ended in a sturdy steel door covered by a smiley face. Alex and Sara, who were at the back of the crowd, began to hesitate.

“There’s no way back,” Emre said and forced his voice to sound calm. “We have to move forward.” He pointed at a placard on the wall, where the Friedrichshain’s public administration instructed the public about how to use the culvert in the event of an evacuation. It was dated 1953. “We’re no longer in the place we came from.”

To his surprise, they listened to him and continued forward through the door to a half-rebuilt Berlin from Renate’s childhood. The hospital rose up around them, white-plastered but only partly restored. The tall buildings with the medicine departments didn’t exist yet. Three smoking nurses in austere uniforms looked at them in surprise from behind a chubby white ambulance parked next to the stairs to the emergency ward. Everyone walked carefully in order not to attract attention from passers-by. A policeman in a knee-length coat stared at them in disbelief. They were close to Metropolis. A gate in a demolished house opened onto the great city. Amanda and Emre waited until everyone was gathered before walking inside ahead of them. They led the way through a narrow alley and across a narrow square, up to one of the gates to Villa d’If. When everyone was inside, Amanda closed the labyrinth. The gate in the white wall disappeared behind them.

Svetlana and Tamara greeted them by a concrete sculpture of Dubuffet—or by someone who imitated the Frenchman’s cartoonish figures constructed from puzzle pieces with rounded corners. Moritz sat on the base of the sculpture together with Renate, who looked ready to faint and was drinking water from a steel bottle. Emre looked up at the sky and felt dizzy. A black abyss gaped up there, and for a moment it felt like he would fall into the sky. He aimed his gaze ahead of him, at the slop where white concrete buildings climbed up terraces between cypress



trees and winding stairs. California, was his first thought. Luxury villas and barren gardens with Mediterranean plants. He took Alex by the arm and led him onto the lawn by the pond. They had been prepared to wrestle the abductees to the ground, but the kids merely crumpled to the grass. Some of them burst into tears. Tamara took Julia in her arms and sat her down by the edge of the pool.

“You’re safe here,” Emre said. “We had to get you away from Berlin.”

No one seemed to hear him. Svetlana tried to calm a weeping and shaking Sara down.

“Where’s Harlan?” Hannes asked. “Amanda said he’d be here.”

“Try not to think about him,” Amanda said. “Let’s go up to the house, and we’ll tell you what happened.”

Emre and Amanda led the way past the goldfish pond. They had to support those who could barely walk up to Patel’s old house.







# 24. HAUPTBAHNHOF: MORITZ

Thursday, July 27

An inverted termite mound, nearly four meters long, hung like a stalactite from the Hauptbahnhof's glass dome. It was covered in beetles; rusty iron feelers wrapped in yellow barbed wire spread out from its sides.

"I have no fucking idea," Moritz said. "It looks dangerous. How is it attached to the ceiling?"

"It's yours. Do you think I'm an idiot? How did you get that up there?" [Harlan's] voice had grown hoarse, and he sounded more like the old Clive. In his mind's eye, Moritz saw him in an old tired body with ruddy cheeks. A shadow covered him, something that hadn't been there earlier. The moment [Harlan] understood that the art students were gone, he called and demanded a meeting. He talked about a sculpture at the central station and wondered why Moritz was sabotaging his work. They agreed to meet at the top of the transit hall, on the catwalk under the ceiling. Renate didn't want Moritz to go, but he dismissed her concerns. *He can hardly murder me there in broad daylight.*

[Harlan] and Moritz stood right under the sculpture, clearly an artifact of some kind, and looked up. Travelers milled around them. Some of them glanced upward, but no one seemed worried by the massive dripstone whose iron spikes pointed in all directions.

"How the hell would that have happened? I've never seen it before." It was hot, and the sun glinted in the barbed wire around the sculpture's feelers. Moritz looked slovenly in his worn undershirt and paint-stained pants. He wanted to show his tattoos as a warning to Mike: *Don't touch*



me. The body guard had taken on a new aura too, paler and more difficult to interpret.

"Are you going to confess? Is that why you wanted to see me?" Moritz asked. Whatever good that would do. [Harlan] was beyond justice. Moritz had laboriously tried to explain that to Amanda.

"I have nothing to confess."

"Then we have nothing to talk about, do we? Why did you want to show me this?"

"I want to know what the hell you're doing." [Harlan] kept Moritz at a distance. He avoided turning his back to him. "I've been around to look at the project. It's happening everywhere. Paintings are changing. Sculptures are growing. This fucking thing showed up this week. I discovered it when I came here to look at your beetle sculpture in the subway."

Mike was watching them with interest now. *This has to do with the death angel*, Moritz realized. *It's displeased with him.*

"I protected your paintings against the death angel's influence. Tried to protect *you*, actually. But this... no one climbed up and mounted that in the middle of the night. You get that, right? It came from somewhere else. Maybe Metropolis."

Moritz tried not to say more than necessary. He hoped that the structure would fall down and crush them, but it seemed unlikely. It hung securely from the ceiling, attached to God knew what. Mike stalked around them like a restless hunting dog. He couldn't see the sculpture, Moritz had realized, and seemed confused by their conversation as if his infernal brain couldn't interpret their words. His gaze slid right through the termite mound when he looked up. *Good to know.*

"Where are the kids?" [Harlan] asked. "I told the police that Renate kidnapped them."

"That's decent of you." Moritz was surprised that [Harlan] didn't understand where they had taken the students. But even if he did suspect, Villa d'If would hardly let him in anymore.

"I need them to finish the web of portals. No one will get in trouble. We're going to prepare the engine shed in Pankow for the exhibition."

"You're a fucking turd. I tried to protect you, but apparently that didn't work." *You belong to Thaumiel now. George would weep if he saw*



you. Moritz didn't want to look at [Harlan]. *Don't show emotion*. He had played with the thought of attempting to kill [Harlan]. But when he saw the young and fit body up close, he realized it would be impossible. Ever since they got to know each other, Clive had been bigger and stronger. A childhood of starvation lingered in Moritz' body like a weakness, and now he was an old man while [Harlan] looked like a bodybuilt dancer.

"What's that thing in the ceiling for? Explain it to me."

"No idea."

The paintings that Renate destroyed came back, and Amanda's sows were making themselves at home throughout Bethanien. Something was going on, and it was comforting that [Harlan] didn't know what it was either. *Let go now and we're sorted*, Moritz whispered under his breath to the stalagmite in the ceiling. It didn't listen. He couldn't make out a visible aura but was fairly sure that it had a life of its own, just like the sows. Maybe Amanda could talk to it.

"We're shutting the project down," he said. "We've put the brakes on the activities and suspended everything that has to do with kids. Amanda's thinking about going home to Stockholm."

"This is my project now. You can't do a damned thing. In a few weeks, everyone will have forgotten about this and the police will pick Renate up for kidnapping. Amanda is just a bit down. It'll pass."

"The police are on our side, at least the lictor who is investigating you." Moritz never thought he'd say that. He would have welcomed Müller if the lictor suddenly strode up to tear [Harlan] out of the Illusion.

"They have nothing on me." [Harlan] sounded certain. He stepped aside for a woman with two children and gave her a kind smile.

"You know just as well as I do what happens to people who are sacrificed to a death angel. They aren't reborn. They're stuck in Hell until the whole fucking thing falls apart." That was the general opinion among those Moritz had asked, in any case. No one knew for sure.

"Those three were a necessary sacrifice. The others are safe with me now. I've bound them to me. As long as I'm alive, Thaumiel can't get to them. You should thank me, actually. And believe it or not, it's all thanks to you. If you hadn't introduced me to Louise I would never have figured out how to twist the kids from Thaumiel's grasp."



Moritz was dumbfounded and tried to hide his surprise.

"I've been patient with you because we were friends," [Harlan] continued. "Because you helped me when I was in trouble. But if you continue to screw with me, I will come down on you. I don't think you'll survive it." He made himself touch Moritz; he put his hand on his arm and jerked as if getting a shock. His tattoo tickled. Moritz gave him a cold smile: "Death is only the beginning."

[Harlan] didn't reply. He left without looking back and brought Mike with him. Moritz waited until he was sure they'd left the transit hall before he left the stalactite and took the escalator down to the lower subway platforms. One of his bronze sculptures was there: eight beetles on a concrete slab in the dead angle under the stairs. When he arrived, three beetles were gone. The other five had moved. One that used to be on its back had righted itself. He called Amanda: "There's something here at the Hauptbahnhof I want you to see."

## Alex

Alex buzzed the entryphone at the apartment on Mommsenstraße that [Harlan] had taken over from his dad. Sara and Kaz waited next to him at the front door.

"I want to go home," Kaz said.

"Shut up!" Alex slapped him and regretted it immediately. Kaz looked smaller than usual, like a twelve-year-old on the verge of tears.

"Who is it?" Mike's voice on the entryphone.

"Alex and two others. We want to see Harlan."

"Come upstairs."

The door clicked. They had persuaded a man in the villa next to Maison Patel to help them back to Berlin. Sara was the first one to lose it. She refused to listen when Amanda told her that her cousin Chadi was dead and trapped in Hell. "You're lying," she shouted and fled in among the abandoned houses. Alex and Kaz slipped out after her when they realized that they were stuck in the villa, and that neither Amanda nor Emre had a tangible plan beyond "wait and see". They told themselves that they wanted to go home, away from all this crap. But the same



moment they stepped out under the railway viaduct by Nollendorfplatz, they tried to call [Harlan]. When he didn't pick up, they started walking. It had taken them half an hour. It was almost one o' clock in the morning, and cheerful people going to or from some party gave them happy smiles. They rode the elevator upstairs. [Harlan] waited for them by the door. His gray tailored suit was covered by an apron, and he wore a friendly smile. The air smelled of cooking meat.

"Thank God you're unharmed. Come inside."

They followed him through a short corridor into the kitchen. It looked like something Alex's mom would have liked. It was gently renovated and furnished in a Thirties or Forties fashion, new domestic appliances snuck in between tall white cabinets. On the stainless steel counter next to the sink, a human head that had been boiled to shreds was drying on double sheets of newspaper. A young man, Alex thought, but the flesh had mostly dropped off the bone and it was hard to tell. Sara let out a hissing noise, maybe a muted scream. Alex took her hand and shushed her.

"As you can see, I'm in the middle of something," [Harlan] said. "But it'll be done soon. There's no need to worry. It's no one you know. Have a seat in the meantime."

They sat down at a little folding table. *He's not angry at us.* Right now that was more important than the skull that stared with empty eye sockets from the kitchen counter. *It's just a thing. Don't look at it.* Mike stood in the doorway, fishing out olives from a jar with a cocktail fork.

"Want some?" He put the jar down in front of Alex. "You must be hungry. I think there are crackers somewhere too."

[Harlan] cut the loose meat off the cranium and polished the bone with a tea towel. The brain, which had been pulled out before the head was boiled, lay like a gray amoeba in the bucket for household garbage where [Harlan] threw the discarded meat. When that was done, he dipped a brush in a black gravy boat filled with red paint, perhaps blood. He painted the skull with a steady hand. The paint bled and seemed to disappear as soon as it touched bone.

"Come," he said. "Have a look and tell me what you see. It'll be quick. Then we'll put this away and eat."



Alex got up and made himself look at the skull. At first he could only see the cranium and the clouded water that flooded the counter. Then the symbols on its crown emerged: exact lines that formed a complex pattern.

"You see it, don't you? What do you see?" [Harlan] asked.

"A pattern. Like a mandala or something."

"What about the rest of you?"

Sara gave the skull a quick glance and shook her head mutely. Kaz refused to look. He had sat completely still ever since they entered the kitchen, lost in thought, as if in a trance. Still, [Harlan] looked satisfied.

"One out of three isn't bad. Everyone can practice this, but it's easier if there's a yarn end to pull, if you get my meaning. I need people who can learn this. Let's go sit down in the living room. Mike can clean up in the meantime."

[Harlan] brought the jar of olives and a tin of crackers that Mike had summoned from the cupboards and put them on the low coffee table by the Jugend armchairs in front of the open window that faced the street. He motioned for them to sit down, and put a bottle of whisky and four glasses on the table. Alex looked out the window. The roar of cars over at Ku'damm was muted, as if the apartment had been moved away from Berlin. When he tried to focus on the ceiling lamp the light felt wrong, too weak.

"Tell me what happened." [Harlan] poured him some whisky.

Alex told him. Sometimes he paused to let Sara add something. She managed a few words when Alex stared at her. *Say something, damn it. Don't let him think you're a fucking victim.* Kaz refused to open his mouth. He ate the remaining olives and stared up at the ceiling.

"You've had a hard time of it," [Harlan] said. "Drink, and you'll feel better."

Alex was getting tipsy. [Harlan] said he was proud of all three of them. He asked about Maison Patel, about who was there and what Moritz and Renate had told them.

"You're going to testify against Renate," he said. "I'm going to talk to the police. We'll go through exactly what you'll tell them."

"What about the others?" Alex asked.

"Give them some time. They'll grow tired of camping out there."



A shrinking part of Alex thought about Julia and wished that Tamara would keep her there. *Lock her up. Why didn't you bastards lock us up?* That thought was erased when [Harlan] put a third glass of whisky in front of him.

"Then I'm going to need your help. We're going to finish the project in Pankow. I've arranged for it to become a permanent installation where you will decorate parts of the old engine shed. It'll be a little like a temple, if you get what I mean. We have a lot to do. You look tired. Finish your drinks and you'll be able to get a few hours' sleep. I'll drive you home tomorrow morning and talk to your parents once we've been through what you're going to say about Renate."

[Harlan] showed them into a guest room at the back of the apartment and closed the door. A big closet covered one of the short walls. The bed was big enough for three, but Kaz curled up on the floor, wrapped in the bedspread like a larva in a cocoon. Sara opened the closet. It was full of cartons and shoeboxes. She peeked into one of them: coal sketches, mostly faces. Another box contained bundles of old newspapers.

"His dad's," she said. "Or his. If Amanda was telling the truth." None of them had really believed Amanda when she said that [Harlan] was the same person as the Dahlem killer.

"We should probably leave it alone."

"This is Renate. See?" A young Renate's face, sketched from three different angles. Under the pictures of her, sketches of Moritz—Alex wouldn't have recognized him without the tattoos—grinning at the observer as if he stood in front of a photographer. Sara took the drawings out of the box and put them on the bedside table.

"This is crazy," Alex said. "What are we doing here?"

"He'll drive us home tomorrow."

Sara took a box of pictures and sat down next to him on the bed. It was like looking at someone else's family album: coal sketches of people, sometimes of dogs or cats. No objects. No plants or buildings. Names were scribbled in pencil on the back. Most of them sounded German. Some French or Russian.

"Should I put them back?" she asked. She had spread the pictures all over the bed.



“No.” Alex saw something similar to the mandala on the dead man’s forehead in the kitchen. A pattern of shifting colors formed around the coal sketches and pushed the darkness out of the room. “Leave them. I think they’re protecting us.”

They got undressed and lay down among the pictures. Alex made sure all the faces were turned right side up, arranged around the bed and down by the foot end. He had a hard-on and was a little drunk, but less scared than when they sat in the kitchen and stared at the dead skull. Sara kissed him, and behind him he felt the sketched faces survey them as they began to fuck, carefully so as not to wake Kaz who was snoring on the floor in front of the window.



# 30.

## ME+ROPOLIS

“I gave Clive some of my blood,” Louise said. “I thought he would use it to break away from Thaumiel, not steal the youths from him.”

The angel, dressed in a red leather jacket and ripped jeans, stood in front of a silvery sigil on the wall of Moritz’ room on the third floor of Maison Patel. It looked much like his Berlin home with the same paper bags and sacks of gypsum and clay. Protective spells ran like glowing paths from the room to the rest of the house. A yellow portable gramophone was playing John Coltrane. Renate sat next to Amanda in the window, drinking wine from a bag-in-box. Moritz was knocked out on a mattress in the corner, exhausted from protecting the art students and the house. The kids had been grounded ever since Sara, Alex and Kaz disappeared, but the fact that all nine of them were still there was pure luck. Svetlana had taken leave to help out, but none of the houses in Villa d’If were built to keep anyone in. It clashed with the purpose and function of the place.

“You have to admire him,” Moritz muttered. “I didn’t think he had it in him to trick Thaumiel. We can’t touch him. Better he controls the kids than the death angel.”

“He tricked us too,” Renate said. “I was an idiot. We should have kidnapped them as soon as we understood who he was.” She was internationally wanted for kidnapping and couldn’t return to Germany under her own name. She had asked an acquaintance to create a Swiss identity for her, but it wasn’t ready yet. Moritz and Amanda tried to make her stop drinking. She had been drunk since they arrived at Villa d’If and realized that the kids were doomed.



"We should have killed the fucker a long time ago." It was the first time Moritz spoke openly about killing [Harlan]. Amanda had understood that he had difficulties talking about even harming anyone else. A protection of some kind against the anger he carried around, Renate claimed.

"He cares about us," Amanda said. "Or else we'd be dead by now. He didn't give a shit about Harlan, that's just how it is, and he doesn't give a shit about the students." She shared Moritz' sentiments: right now she could kill Grandpa. But she no longer trusted her own feelings. *Is the death angel getting to me?*

"So what the hell do we do?" Moritz sat up and filled a pipe. "Cuddle him and hope he turns nice?"

"You've already tried that," Renate said. "It got us nowhere."

"He's going to get worse," Louise interjected. "Even if a part of him resists, it will lose. He's even more enslaved by Thaumiel than the students are. I think it began long before he signed that contract."

"You were a little in love with him, Mori," Renate said. "That's why you didn't see it sooner. You're too nice."

"I try to see the best in people."

"He was easy to like."

He was like them and yet not when he showed up in 1967 with a little Leica to write articles about the student uprising for eight different British local papers. He turned out to be a pretty bad photographer and an even worse reporter. Two of his employers caught him plagiarizing articles from a French newspaper. But he could make old-fashioned leaflets and murals with brushes and paint. Moritz and Renate met him at a party with students from the academy of arts. He told them about his London childhood as if it was an adventure. The ruins like a playground. Charming gangsters in suits. Street fights like movie scenes. Of course they were stories and lies, they realized, but still compelling when Renate compared them to the ruins of East Berlin and the bare two-room apartment in Friedrichshain where her mother had drunk herself to death. They showed Clive around town, took him to the Kommune I collective and to the university where they helped him find the right interviewees. Moritz envied his ability to charm everyone from East German policemen to grumpy landladies.



George Patel saw his talent for magic. That was the only thing George cared about in a person.

"I wonder if he's always been more cunning than we thought," Moritz said. "Maybe he fooled us all along."

"He's good at improvisation. It looks planned, but it's something else." Renate poured a glass of wine and handed it to Amanda. She had put the sling away, but her arm was still in a cast.

"Maybe Harlan could drag him into Hell," Amanda said. "If we can help him take Mike on." They had asked Louise if she could take [Harlan] to Purgatory, but she had replied that that wasn't an angel's purpose.

"But Clive's memories will be erased there," Moritz said. "Then the kids will belong to Thaumiel alone. It feels like a bad solution."

"I would like to talk to the students some more," Louise said. "They need to know what's going on." She had looked into their eyes and studied the *theta* that everyone but Tamara wore on their foreheads. "Why don't we go downstairs and see them?"

The whole art class was in the day room behind the terrace's glass walls, lined up on chairs and benches taken from the abandoned houses nearby. The room, which was big as a classroom but shaped like a limp S, was furnished like a vintage store specialized in the northern European 1920's. Svetlana and Emre sat by the door behind the great fireplace. Louise walked along the line of nervous students and positioned herself with her back to the glass wall.

"You have pledged yourselves to Thaumiel," she said. "That can't be undone. Everyone who partook of the sacrifice Amanda described belongs to the death angel, now and for all eternity." The angel's cold, husky voice spread a celestial calm through the room.

"We can't remember a damn thing about that," Julia said. Tamara had showed her fading photographs of Kim on her phone, recounted the events on the subway platform before they went to Wannsee in detail, and convinced Amanda to show her the pictures from the temple in Hell. It took Julia a long moment to accept the truth, and her feelings still hadn't caught up with her. She felt frozen inside. Tamara walked on eggshells around her, as if she had to be kept away from anything that might move her.



“The fact that you don’t remember makes it worse.” Louise walked up to them one by one and put her hand on their foreheads. “You can’t feel regret. You can’t seek forgiveness. There is no mercy. You have to stay alive. This is important. Normally, death breaks all contracts, but not this. After death, you will travel to the death angel’s hell. He can keep you there for as long as it pleases him. The only thing standing between you and Hell is the man who used to be called Clive, the man who made you pledge yourselves to Thaumiel. As long as he is alive, you are servants of him and not the death angel.”

“We’re looking for a solution,” Moritz said as if to smooth things over. He had tattooed the seal of Solomon on the kids’ chests and drawn protective circles throughout the house, but it barely helped. “Still, we want you to know where you stand,” he said. “How bad it is. You have to stay here for now. You’ll be less affected here.”

“I’ll stay for a while,” Louise said. “I can answer any questions you might have.”

Samir raised his hand and asked if God existed. The angel replied that sadly he was dead. No one had any more questions.

Louise opened the doors to the terrace. “You don’t have to stay locked up like this. Everyone here has understood that they should not help you get back to Berlin. Frank is sorry that he brought the three the day before yesterday.” Frank was an American backpacker who lived in the house above Maison Patel. He had thought Sara, Alex and Kaz had wandered into Villa d’If by mistake and couldn’t find their way home. When he understood what had happened, he and Moritz followed the kids to Nollendorfplatz, but by then they were already gone.

Tamara took Julia’s hand and led her out onto the terrace, down the half-flight of stairs to the balcony outside the kitchen where they had stacked propane tanks and canned food. “You don’t need to hear any more of this crap,” she said.

“It’s good that they told us. We’ve understood that everything is fucked up.” Julia had tried to explain to Tamara what it felt like, but failed. She made another attempt: “I think this is what drug addicts feel like. It’s like withdrawal. The way I remember it, I felt a lot better when I was with him, even though I know it isn’t true.”



“It’ll get better. It has to.”

They sat down at the back of the balcony with their backs toward the warm wall and looked out at the ruined city beyond the white walls. A black moon floated above the silhouetted buildings. The sky had changed from black to poison green. “Don’t you want to go out there?” Sara had asked Julia when they first arrived at the little enclave among the cypress trees. No, Julia had replied, she didn’t. She wanted to go to Crete with Tamara and sit by the ocean, and cope with the thought that Kim was gone.

## Amanda

Three days later, Amanda and Emre had lunch with [Harlan] at Bethanien. It was a hot summer’s day. Mike stood outside the open doors to the courtyard, smoking. A teacher from the music school played a classical medley on the piano in the dining hall.

“We’re announcing an extra board meeting in two weeks,” [Harlan] said. “Then we’ll exclude Renate from the board. The police are investigating the matter. It would be good if more of the kids turned up, for everyone’s sake. Preferably all of them, of course.”

“You know that Renate hasn’t done anything illegal,” Amanda said. “You should turn yourself in. I have the name of a superintendent in case you want someone to call.” Renate had persuaded Amanda to go to the lunch. *I’m afraid to let Emre go to him on his own. You can’t see it yourselves, but you and Mori can still reach him.*

[Harlan] patted her hand and smiled: “What I know is that I have three testimonies from three kids who were drugged and woke up in an abandoned villa somewhere, they’re not sure where. So far they’ve only pointed Renate out, but that could change, you know.”

“And now you want to get rid of us?” Emre asked.

“No, on the contrary. Emre, I want you to support me at the board meeting and continue your work. And I want Amanda to finish her work so that we meet the deadline for the opening in Pankow. I got the green light to use the engine shed more permanently. It looks like we’ll get funding to restore it.”



*Listen to what he has to say*, Renate had told them. *Maybe you'll find out something useful*. It had turned out to be more difficult than they thought to free the students from Thaumiel's influence, and above all, Clive's. They no longer left anyone alone, not even when they were asleep.

"If I'm to finish the iconostasis on time, I need help," Amanda said. "Can I borrow the kids who came back?"

"Not all three of them, I'm afraid. I've put them to work decorating the engine shed in Pankow. I can spare one. Which one would you like?"

"Alex."

"He's all yours. I'll send him over tomorrow. Will that do?"

Emre wore a little mother-of-pearl beetle around his neck which Moritz had hoped would help him. Those who were in the know believed he was more vulnerable than Amanda. Against his better judgment, he felt an urge to please [Harlan]. He had to bite his tongue in order not to tell him about Villa d'If.

"I'll go upstairs and check my mail then," he said.

"I'll be right behind you." Amanda looked [Harlan] in the eyes. "Why those three? Was it to hurt Renate? Because she liked Chadi and Ernst so much?" She forced herself to keep her voice even.

[Harlan] looked surprised and a little indignant. He lowered his voice to a whisper: "I would never hurt Renate; you do understand that? The death angel wanted those three. He asked for them. Tamara was supposed to be one of them, but she was ill. Happily, Kim was acceptable."

Amanda didn't know what to say. She grabbed her bag and followed Emre outside.

"I'll see you later," [Harlan] called after her. "I'll talk to Alex." He stayed to order coffee. When she turned around, Amanda saw him chatting and laughing with the music teacher by the piano.

They went upstairs to the studio with the concrete sows and sat down. Emre was pale. "That bastard is getting to me. I can't stand talking back to him. How the hell is he doing that?"

"It has to do with the project, I think. He can get to you as long as you're a part of it. Stay away as much as you can. Don't talk to him unless you have to." Amanda pulled a sow closer to Emre.

"You can't feel anything?" he asked.



“No. I think he avoids going for me. But that will hardly last.” Amanda had talked to Renate about it and told her that Grandpa was gone. “He’s like a shell. It won’t be long before he ignores me too.” But Renate didn’t agree: “He’s not gone at all. You’re only seeing aspects of him that you closed your eyes to before. Don’t blame everything on Thaumiel.”

“Why do you want Alex here?” Emre asked.

“Just a whim. Maybe I’ll figure something out when I talk to him. And as long as he’s here, nothing will happen to him.” She wondered to herself why she hadn’t chosen Sara. Something, an instinct, told her that Alex was in greater danger.

“I’ll talk to Harlan too,” she said. “He might have an idea of what we could do. He’s been to Grandpa’s hell. We haven’t.”







# 31.

## HAUPTBAHNHOF: AMANDA, HARLAN

Wednesday, August 2

"I can almost see it," Harlan said. "In the corner of my eye, when I look away."

"Mike didn't see it at all." Amanda stood next to Harlan beneath the stalactite that hung from the Hauptbahnhof's ceiling. People streamed past them, assuming that she was talking on her cellphone. Still, they parted instinctively around Harlan, a river of bodies around an invisible island. "Can you touch it?"

Harlan rose up into the air and spotted the beetles, big as bronze-colored quail eggs. They flew at him and around him in a swarm of buzzing wings. A little frightening. An unusual sensation: few things had frightened him after his death. When he stuck his hand into the swarm, it burned. "They bite," he said.

"Be careful."

Harlan hovered with slow wing beats. He could almost see the inverted termite mound, more as a feeling than a visual impression.

"It's alive somehow," Amanda said. "It's trying to talk to me. I think it's related to my sows." The beetles had flown down to meet her when she stepped into the station, a yellow swarm above the escalators that stretched to the first landing in the open hall. They hadn't bit her, and no one else seemed to see them.

Harlan landed on the stone floor with a thud. The beetles flew back up and disappeared into the dripstone. "It doesn't want to talk to me."

"It showing up here is no coincidence. It wants to be in a junction, and it's growing." That was Moritz' theory. Amanda and Moritz had



spent almost an hour beneath it, watching beetles fly up and out along the train platforms that formed the top floor of the station.

“Should you talk to that lictor about it?” Harlan asked.

“Renate says you can’t trust the lictors. Best not to contact him.” Especially not about this. The lictors had tried to shut the Wall Project down once before, but calmed down when Patel died. Who knew what ideas they would get if they saw this.

“Hopefully it doesn’t want to tear the station down.”

“Moritz is afraid it might.” Moritz had told her about George Patel’s initial plans for the project. He didn’t just want to open doors to Metropolis: he wanted to tear the whole Illusion down. If this was growing out of Patel’s old ideas, they had a problem.

“Can we remove it?” Harlan didn’t feel like flying back up, and he could barely sense its presence.

“Not if it’s conscious. Then we’ll have to talk to it.” How that was ever supposed to happen. Amanda had tried to get coherent answers out of the sows in Bethanien without succeeding. Maybe it was impossible. And the sows were used to her. “There’s something I want to ask you,” she said. “About Grandpa. Come on, I don’t want to be in everyone’s way.” She pulled him over to the glass banister that faced the transit hall below them.

“Ask away.” Harlan folded his wings over the banister.

“Renate and Moritz think that he fooled both Thaumiel and us. If he dies, Thaumiel will lose control of the project and the students will be the death angel’s slaves for all eternity. So we and Thaumiel both want to keep him alive.”

“Not good.” Harlan’s gaze slid across the platform above and down along the escalators toward the exit, searching for the oily bubble that followed Dad wherever he went. It wasn’t here. “Go on,” he said. “What did you have in mind?”

“The idea is that if he doesn’t die—if he stays himself but is still kept far away from the kids—we’ll have time to find a real solution. Do you think the ones who rebuilt you could keep him without erasing his memories? Apparently that’s what happens otherwise, when you’re tortured in Purgatory: your memories disappear.”



"I have no bloody idea. My memories disappeared, after all. They put them in a jar." It felt like a dream. He no longer saw it in front of him when he closed his eyes.

Amanda saw that Harlan was uneasy and drove her hand in among the quills between his shoulders, as she had begun to do to distract him when he became morose. "Could we ask them? Could you take us there so we could talk to them?" she asked.

"Are you insane?" It slipped out of his mouth. A hard knot grew in his stomach when he thought about going back to Purgatory. *You're a coward. That's right. Scared shitless, actually.*

"You don't have to go there on your own. I can protect us," Amanda said. "So they can't get to us."

"I still can't get him down there," he said. "Mike will tear me apart if I go near him." After the assault in front of Bethanien, he had stayed far away from [Harlan].

"We'll have to figure out a solution for Mike. Take him out of the equation somehow. But it'll all be for nothing if Grandpa just dies down there. Could you take me there so I can talk to those three?"

Harlan watched a beetle. It flew out along the southern platform and disappeared. "I can go there on my own. You don't have to come with me. I won't let you. But then you'll have to come with me to Dahlem first," he said. "Will you?" He had stopped outside the house several times, unable to go inside. *It doesn't matter. It's just furniture covered in sheets*, he had tried to tell himself. But he couldn't do it. Finally, he decided to ask Amanda to come along. "I might remember something. Or understand something."

"Do you want to take the train there?" Amanda asked.

They had come to the Hauptbahnhof by train. Harlan wanted to be around people. He had started to enjoy eavesdropping on conversations in bars and on the street. They headed down to the subway and got on at the end of the car where Harlan could fold his wings against the wall. Amanda squeezed in next to him.

"Do you remember practical stuff?" she asked. "Like the subway lines?"

"Did I use to ride the subway?" Harlan studied an ad for money transfer. Two happy women smiled against a cityscape.

"You used to ride your bike."



"I think I've forgotten how to ride a bike. That's not good, is it?"

"It sucks."

They laughed. Amanda guided them through two train changes until they got off at the right platform and entered the labyrinth of residential streets. Harlan had difficulties orienting himself at street level. Streets and houses merged into a muddle. During the last few days he had made himself walk, even when he got lost, refusing to take flight to get an overview. But he knew the way to the house in Dahlem. It was on the greater multidimensional map in his head, the one where the Illusion was a mere sliver. Outside the green gate in the driveway, a security guard was staring into his phone. Harlan broke the new lock on the side door by the clinic. They could tell that the police had recently been in the trampled garden. The mud was full of fresh footprints. It was hot. Amanda took her jacket off. Underneath, she wore a new linen dress. Ever since Renate had been outed as a criminal, she had been conscientious about her appearance, especially in front of people at the culture house.

"I called Mom, did I tell you that?" Harlan asked. He avoided stepping in the mud.

"How did it go? Can she hear you?"

"Oh, yeah. But she's angry. Because Dad didn't call her before the funeral." It had been a big relief when Rachel answered and heard his voice. He told himself that he recognized the choice of words even if not her voice. A slightly bureaucratic English with no noticeable dialect. She was born in Brighton. He had Googled it.

"Grandpa told me he'd called her."

"I told her to absolutely not come here. I think she understood. She knows more than she lets on. She cried and said she'd been trying to protect me." It had been a short conversation. Harlan was afraid to reveal how little he remembered.

"I guess she did. She got you away from Grandpa."

"That's what I told her, that she'd done the right thing. I told her I'll come over in fall. But we'll have to talk more to prepare her."

They stood in front of the front door. Amanda tore the cordon tape away and Harlan pushed at the lock until it broke. No one seemed to have been in the house for weeks. The furniture was still covered in



sheets, but randomly placed where the police technicians had left them. Amanda began to pull the sheets off in the living room. Harlan wandered through the house, searching for memories. There were photos of him as a child, thrown into a box of knick-knacks from the bedroom: a three-year-old Harlan on a swing in the garden, a baby bathing in a sky-blue plastic tub. They didn't speak to him. The paintings leaning against the wall were cheerful but impersonal, like public art from an office: people, soothing landscapes and townscapes, smiling faces.

"Would Dad have gotten these?" he asked Amanda and picked up a lithograph of an Alpine landscape.

"Maybe. They don't look like anything on the walls at Mommsenstraße. Maybe Rachel bought them."

Harlan's mother stood in the background of the photograph of him on the swing, a dark-haired woman in a yellow summer dress, barefoot on the grass. That was her. He had seen her face on Facebook and recognized her younger self. He put the photograph in a pile of things he wanted to save. "I'll bring all the photos," he said. "Can I keep them at your place?"

"Sure. Do you remember anything when you look at them?"

"Not much. But photos are better than nothing."

Amanda leafed through the pictures. Clive wasn't in any of them. He must have held the camera. "I'll take them home with me," she said. "I can scan them and see if I can make better prints."

They sat down on the white leather couch by the terrace door. Amanda caressed his cheek. "I've gotten used to your new face," she said. "I like the nose. It's better than the last one. More expressive."

"Thanks, I guess." Harlan had started to get used to the face too. When they sat in the clock tower at the Osram factory Amanda had asked if she could paint him, but he had declined.

"You can see the seam." She ran her finger along the thin scar where his new face had been attached. He kissed her. She stroked his chest, a light touch that sent tickling pain signals through his iron frame and into his wing tips and cock. His blunt hands caressed her breasts, and she pulled her dress off.

"Do you want me to hurt you?" Amanda asked. The last time they had fucked, at her place after a bottle of wine, she had bit his cock until he



came. That was two days after the walk through Wedding. They hadn't seen each other since.

"Maybe."

She bit his lower lip hard until blood trickled into his mouth. He gently drew his nail across her left breast, cut a small gash and lapped the blood up. It made him horny. *They accidentally checked the box for vampirism when they remade me*, he had joked when they had wine at her place. He kicked his jeans off and they began to fuck; she straddled him in the white leather sofa that creaked under them. When she bit his nipples and lip, the pain traveled to his cock and sensation returned for a moment, almost but not enough to make him come. Eventually, she grew tired and slid off him. He took her in his arms and kissed her sweaty forehead.

"Are you sure I shouldn't come with you to the nepharites?" she asked. "They won't touch me."

"I have to talk to them on my own. That's just how it is." She didn't contradict him. Harlan pulled his jeans back on and found a box for his keepsakes. Amanda got dressed and put the cover back on the couch. "I'll come home with you," Harlan said. "You can explain to me at your place exactly what to ask them about."

\*

Five minutes to midnight that same evening, Harlan stood alone in the park between the Maria Church and the river a ten-minute walk from Amanda's apartment. A tourist or two still ambled down the paths, but not in the darkness under the trees. He blocked out the city noise around the park and visualized the road down to Hell. The grass dissolved under his feet and was replaced by an oily water surface. He fell into and through the blackness, past sooty wisps of cloud, to the paved courtyard of Columbia Square. The faceless one approached from the gate by the clock tower, unbothered by the barbed wire that covered the cobbles.

"We had a deal," the nepharite said. "Where's your old man? We have your memories. Don't forget that."

"I want to renegotiate," Harlan said. "And ask some questions."



His tormentor pretended to be astounded by his audacity. “Do you think we’re a bunch of fucking oracles?”

“Something like that, yes. Answer the questions, or you won’t have the old man.”

“What is it you want to know?”

Harlan had sat with Amanda in the kitchen at Rochstraße, making notes in a sketchbook. The notes were in his back pocket in case he forgot. The faceless one began to suspect what he was after when he asked about Clive’s memories and Thaumiel’s influence.

“We could let him keep his memories and torture him,” the nepharite said. “It can be done. That’s how the death angels do it. Eternal torment, you know. Never sign anything with that clause.”

“But Dad didn’t sign anything like that for you?”

“No, so we can’t keep him here forever. He’s our guest, and he can come and go as he pleases as long as he figures out how, and doesn’t want to be punished anymore. Or when the pain erases the last of his desire for mercy. It’ll happen eventually.”

“It’s temporary,” Harlan said. “Until we find a better solution.”

“You’re his son. I see that now.” The nepharite chuckled with something that sounded like appreciation.

“Can you do it? Yes, or no?”

“We can do it. But it’ll cost you. What do you have to offer?”

Harlan had thought this through during dusk in the graveyard, as the last tourists plodded off to the pub district or the TV tower. The only thing he had worth selling.

“You’ll keep my memories,” he said. “My memories in exchange for his.”

“That will do.” The faceless one’s voice turned serious, and he stood up straight. A knotty hand reached out to Harlan.

“Then we have a deal?”

“We do. If you can bring him here without killing him.”

They shook hands on it. Harlan rose into the air and lingered in the square between the houses. He was no longer afraid. Perhaps he would return later and give the place a closer look. He flew up through the wisps of cloud and into the darkness above Purgatory.







# 32.

## ΒΕΤΗΛΙΕΝ: ALEX, ΑΜΑΝΘΑ

Friday, August 4

Alex helped Amanda gild the last frames for the iconostasis. He painted them with primer and she added the gold leaf. Outside, light rain pattered on the windows and the wind tore at the tops of the trees. Three concrete sows were parked behind him. Alex thought they glared at him.

“It’s not your fault,” Amanda said. “Grandpa is preventing you from thinking clearly. Are you sure you don’t want Moritz to give you better protection?”

“Yes.” Alex didn’t like her calling [Harlan] Grandpa. She hoped it would help him break free. *It’s not fucking working! Cut it out!* he wanted to scream at her.

“Do you know where the others are?”

“No.” They had driven around with [Harlan], making changes to the old murals, filling in details with fresh blood from the man who had died in the bathroom at Mommsenstraße. Alex had seen the remains when he got up the morning after the night in the guest room. He had stopped Sara and Kaz from looking inside. “They might be in Pankow. We’ve started working on the decorations there.” He put his brush down and remained seated. It felt like he was going to fall asleep. The concrete sows moved behind him. He heard them scraping against the floor, but when he turned around, they stood still. Mocking him.

“Try putting this up next to the last one.” Amanda put a dry frame in Alex’ hands, and he walked over to the gilded fence. It glared too, as if it was going to give him a shock. *It’s just a fucking fence.* He put his



hand on it, and the room disappeared around him. He floated in darkness, surrounded by rotating orbs and fragments of broken spheres he shouldn't be able to see, because there was no light here, but he could clearly sense whirling forms and the different mass of the objects. He could still hear Amanda's voice, but now she was talking about something she absolutely had to do, something he didn't want her to. He was angry, furious, and roared:

"For fuck's sake!"

The room coalesced around him. Amanda flew up from the bench when he cried out.

"Your damn fence is fucking with my head." Alex took a step back from the fence and turned his gaze to the floor. He almost stumbled over a sow.

"Stop that!" Amanda shouted at the nearest sow.

"It's gone now. It was like spheres." He didn't mention her voice in the darkness. He couldn't remember what she'd said anyway.

"It doesn't mean you any harm." Amanda put her hand on the sow as if to calm it down.

"You can't fucking help me, get it? This is messed up. You're talking to a goddamn lump of concrete."

Amanda looked helplessly at him. He almost felt sorry for her but wanted to hit her at the same time. The thought gave him a stomachache. *Everyone's fucking with my head. And you can't do a goddamn thing about it. Not you, not the inked old man, no one.*

"I want to go," he said. "I want to be with Sara."

He was supposed to be in New York with Mom and Dad to see Dad's cousins in Queens. But he had told them he didn't want to go. Dad was upset at first, but [Harlan] had explained to him how important the art project was and what it might mean to Alex in the fall: perhaps a well-paid job, something better than the grind of the apprenticeship program. He had been alone in the villa in Reinickendorf since Monday. No one seemed to care that he and the other two spent hours at the crumbling engine shed in Pankow, spray-painting faces on the walls. Sara had started to sound like she thought everything was okay. *It is what it is. I just hope he doesn't kill us.* Kaz was completely out of it. He didn't answer when spoken to anymore.



"I don't want the others to be alone with him." Saying it was almost painful.

"I get it."

Alex closed his eyes and put his hand on The Fence. *Can you help me? Whatever the fuck you are?* Nothing happened. When he opened his eyes, Amanda was giving him a quizzical look.

"No," he said. "Your fucking fence can't help me either. I want to go back to the others. So that nothing happens."

"I'll call Grandpa and ask him to pick you up."

Barely half an hour later, they heard [Harlan's] footsteps in the corridor. Alex could recognize them from a mile away. Amanda positioned herself in front of The Fence, as if to protect it. The sows lined up in the middle of the room. Mike was the first one to enter, as if expecting an ambush. He gave Alex a quick glance, but didn't look at Amanda or the sows.

"He's here," he said and stood by the door.

[Harlan] appeared in the doorway, dressed in the same expensive summer suit he had worn when they drove around improving the paintings with blood. "It's all about not looking like a vagrant," [Harlan] had told Alex. "In case the cops come and bother us. You're my kid, understand?" Alex had nodded to show that he understood.

Amanda stepped forward and took Alex' hand. Mike grimaced when he noticed her. She pulled Alex away from him. [Harlan] gave her a wide smile and went in for a hug, which she reluctantly accepted.

"Maybe going from graffiti to complex art like this was moving a bit too fast," he said encouragingly to Alex. "Don't see it as a failure."

"Where are the others?" Alex asked.

"Out by the rail yard. We're working on sprucing things up for the exhibition. You'll see."

"I'll come out and have a look at your work," Amanda said. "A little later."

[Harlan] took a closer look at the iconostasis and the sows. They stood completely still when he was present. Amanda gave Alex a warning glance. *Don't mention that it spoke to you.*

"You've infused it with strong protection." [Harlan] put his hand on The Fence and closed his eyes.



“It just happened. It’s part of the religious context.”

“Will you stick to the schedule even if Alex comes with me?”

“It’s almost done. I’m going to join it with Nikolai’s photographs. Nadine has given me the files for the sound installation. She won’t be at the opening. She’s had some mental issues.” They had had a long phone conversation. Nadine’s memories had faded, and she barely remembered why she was supposed to stay away from [Harlan], but she eventually agreed not to go to Pankow.

“Poor thing.”

Mike had retreated to the doorway and looked nauseous. Alex had seen it before, when they were restoring paintings. Sometimes Mike looked sick or drugged when close to the images. Alex walked over to stand next to him. *A demon*, Amanda had called him. *If he wants to kill you, you’re done for. There’s nothing you can do. Look away if he lets go of his human shell.* Now he looked tired, his skin grayish. He pushed Alex ahead of him into the corridor when [Harlan] said it was time to leave.

\*

The door closed itself behind them. Bethanien’s doors had begun to do that. That’s how the sows could move unhindered, Amanda had realized. She sat down on the floor in front of The Fence and closed her eyes.

“Why aren’t you talking to me? Are you unable to?” Nothing happened. When she opened her eyes, the sows hadn’t moved or even changed color. “Have it your way. I’m going to talk to Renate. After that, there’s something we have to explain to you. Don’t do anything stupid while I’m gone.”

She locked the studio behind her and walked into the stairwell. *Buildings are better suited*, Renate had explained, *for breaking the Illusion and entering Metropolis. Open landscapes are more difficult.* The stairwell had been used for years as a route to Villa d’If. Below the recent graffiti, a trail of symbols in the walls and ceiling was visible to those who could see the magical energies. Amanda had begun to grasp the underlying principles. She visualized the symbols, and the stairwell was lit up by a fluorescent glow. As she walked up to the next floor, the stairs turned



the wrong way: left instead of right. On the floor above that, the stairs segued into a meandering corridor with tiled walls that ended in a man-high surface water tunnel to a wide, drained canal. She climbed up a rusty ladder to the quay. Two guys dressed in jeans and hoodies crouched at the end of the ladder. They whistled after her as she continued up an alley to the enclave wall. She stepped through the gate in the white wall and followed the path up to the fish pond. Svetlana was playing soccer with Julia and Samir on the lawn.

"Renate is in the studio," Svetlana said. "She's drinking less now. Emre and I finished her last bottles and told her we weren't going to bring more."

Amanda followed a path through the ivy up to Patel's old studio, connected to the house with a covered walkway that looked about to collapse. The light was on inside. She knocked the door, and Renate opened.

"We have to talk," Amanda said.

Renate had moved her paintings here from the studio in Urban Spree. She had mounted a canvas as tall as a man and started on a new, map-like oil painting inspired by the neighborhood around Villa d'If. Angry white lines crossed a brown and gray background. She had also started to teach the students again. They were still irrationally angry with her, but their rage was kept in check as they covered the walls of Maison Patel in a chaotic mix of tags and abstract patterns. "Do whatever you like," she had told them. "We'll paint them over if they don't turn out well."

"How was Alex?" she asked Amanda.

"He's trying to resist, but I can't help him with that. He just gets angry with me. I think it's better if he can concentrate on protecting the other two."

"I got my passport. Elise Freiburg from Bern. I can go back to Berlin now." Renate pointed at a plastic folder with a passport and official documents that lay on the workbench by the window.

"I have an idea," Amanda said. "Let me know if it sounds idiotic."

"Have a seat."

They sat down at a round table where Renate kept a bag of Hanuta crackers and a thermos of hot water for instant coffee. Amanda told her about Harlan's excursion to Purgatory. "They could keep Grandpa there," she said. "Without erasing his memories."



"We can't leave him there." Renate didn't like it. Amanda saw her shying away from the thought. Killing him was one thing. This felt worse.

"Only until we find a solution. I'm thinking we could use my iconostasis to hide Harlan. Mike can't see it. He can't see me when I'm standing in front of it. I tried it today just to make sure. It's just like the dripstone at the Hauptbahnhof."

"The Wall Project's works of art have gained a will of their own," Renate said. "Mori is concerned that more works in the project are spreading out and changing. He found a dripstone in Marzahn too. Two of my paintings are growing. I got an angry email from some bureaucrat about a façade in Wedding that's being covered in green flowers. They claim I've been painting them at night."

"I'm thinking that if Harlan is right next to the iconostasis, Mike can't see him," Amanda continued.

"Hang him on the fence. Weave him into the artwork. That should be effective."

"Will you help me? I don't even know why it's invisible to Mike. It just happened without me knowing what I was doing."

"Sure. But Clive will see him."

"We'll have to fix that somehow. Hide him."

"That doesn't sound entirely easy."

"Do you have a better suggestion?"

Renate didn't. They had coffee and talked about different ways to hide an angel on a fence in the middle of a lit room. When the thermos was empty, Renate returned to her painting while Amanda watched.



# 33. PANKOW: AMANDA

Friday, August 11

The carpenters hadn't finished the floor in the old Pankow engine shed. They swore over the dented and settled concrete. A persistent rain during the night had left puddles in holes and seams. The whole construction looked ready to fall apart. The hall was the size of a circus tent, its cupola supported by a tight circle of iron pillars halfway out from the wall. Two rows of windows, high and barred on the bottom row, simple and squared along the upstairs balustrade, let light into the rotunda. The ceiling looked dangerously damaged, but the constructional engineer [Harlan] had hired reassured them there was no risk of collapse. Its gaping holes had been temporarily covered with plastic sheets that fluttered in the wind.

Alex, Sara and Kaz were busy painting the concrete around and under the windows on the ground floor: eyes, mouth, hands interleaved with sharp geometric figures. "It's a temple to Thaumiel," Moritz had told Amanda when they came to have a look a few days earlier. With its circle of iron pillars, the entire shape of the room was practically made to be a temple. The geometric figures on the concrete bore a meandering incantation to the death angel. "He hasn't consecrated it yet, but you can bet it'll take buckets of blood to do it." Outside the engine shed, halfway to the great turntable that had rotated the engines back when the rail yard was in use, they had run into a dozen Romanian EU migrants who had settled in one of the abandoned houses. Moritz had convinced them to leave. Getting Nikolai out of the way had proved



more difficult. He had returned after two weeks with his sister in Frankfurt an der Oder. Amanda tried to make him abandon the pictures and leave, but he refused.

"I've spent a year on this. I can't just take off," he said.

The iconostasis stood in the middle of the rotunda in front of a gaping hole in the floor that had been left behind and was filled with black, oily water. Nikolai's pictures had been blown up to a height of two meters and mounted in glass frames spaced out around the area with the fence and the concrete sows. While setting the whole thing up, they had realized that the faces on the screens gazing at the iconostasis looked more like a curious crowd of spectators than a congregation. This time, the pictures didn't change. Perhaps *The Fence* and the sows kept them in place. In an outer circle, below the balustrade, stood screens that described the Wall Project's history. [Harlan] sat on a folding chair a short distance from the artwork, talking into his phone. Mike stood by the tall iron gate, looking through a narrow opening at the derelict landscape.

"Come here so we can decide where you should stand," Amanda told [Harlan].

The idea was for him to inaugurate the exhibition by reading the Situationist Manifesto in front of the iconostasis. Or rather that's what he thought the idea was. Amanda had hoped that Harlan would manage to catch him during the morning rehearsals, before the audience showed up.

"Shouldn't it be in German?" [Harlan] asked.

"It sounds better in French."

Amanda had been surprised by the quality of his French. "I lived in Marseille for a couple of years," he said when she asked. "But if a lot of French visitors show up, it'll be embarrassing. I'm not that good." Emre was the one who threw out the suggestion to read the old manifesto that was supposedly the inspiration for Mauer II's formation. Binding the project to the past sounded like a good idea. Moreover, the humanist core of the text went right against Thaumiel's influence. Renate and Moritz reasoned that it couldn't do any harm.

[Harlan] positioned himself in front of *The Fence* and read out loud: "*Une nouvelle force humaine, que le cadre existant ne pourra pas dompter, s'accroît de jour en jour avec l'irrésistible développement*"



technique, et l'insatisfaction de ses emplois possibles dans notre vie social privée de sens..."

Reciting the whole text took just under ten minutes. "That's just right," Amanda said. "After that, the background spotlights will come on. But you'll have to come back tomorrow when more of the floor is done and Nikolai has mounted all the screens. Then we'll have a guy to help us out with the lighting."

[Harlan] walked up to The Fence and felt the gate, a wrought-iron lattice that Amanda had spent a week on together with a blacksmith in a workshop in Lichtenberg.

"It really belongs to the project," he said. "It's magical, as if George had instructed you. Is Renate behind this?"

"No. It just happened. I'm not sure how I did it." It wasn't a lie. She hadn't put an incantation in The Fence, not on purpose.

"Mike doesn't like it," [Harlan] said. The disrespect he showed his bodyguard was new to Amanda, almost as if the demon was his servant.

"He doesn't understand it. The magic is too human for him. What can you sense?"

"I don't have your eye. All I can feel is that it's part of the whole. A little as if it was trying to talk to me."

[Harlan] took a closer look at the gilded frames, but avoided touching anything.

"I'll stay here tonight and finish up," Amanda said. "I have to fix the hole behind it so that no one falls into it."

"Are you going to be here all alone? That's unnecessary, isn't it? We'll take care of it tomorrow morning."

[Harlan] had suggested going for a glass of wine in the evening. "To celebrate. Just you and me." Amanda said that they could have, but unfortunately she had to get everything ready. *Play along as far as you can.* The opening was scheduled for six o'clock tomorrow evening. They were counting on a couple of hundred visitors.

"I want to keep a bit of a margin," she said now. "It's alright. You'll have a security guard check up on things tonight, right? And I think the carpenters will stay until midnight."

"I'll drive the kids home. Call me if anything comes up."



It was almost midnight when the last carpenter left, reluctant to leave Amanda alone in the engine shed. She almost had to shove him outside. She circled the building once more to make sure she was alone before she called Renate, who was staying at a budget hotel in Bernau under her new name. Half an hour later she could hear a car stop outside the rusty iron gate. Svetlana's yellow Golf parked next to the engine shed, beyond the glow from the streetlights. Renate stepped out of the passenger seat. She had dyed her hair black and looked twenty years younger. In her skirt and jacket, she could have been taken for a stern accountant. Svetlana was dressed in a pair of jeans and a leather jacket, looking like a cop with her hair gathered at the nape of her neck. Renate gave her an angry look when she tried to take her arm to keep her from stumbling in the darkness. Amanda gave Svetlana a hug.

"Thanks for coming. I'm a little uncertain of how this is going to work."

"As long as we get rid of that asshole."

Svetlana looked tired. She and Amanda had spent the last few nights talking on the terrace outside Maison Patel. Amanda had done most of the talking. She was scared. Scared that she couldn't grasp what The Fence was doing, scared that Grandpa might have seen through their charade and was just playing along, scared that he would murder Alex and the other two before they had time to do something. Svetlana had mixed spritzers in tall glasses and said that there was nothing Amanda could do about that.

"Come inside." Amanda led the way into the rotunda, where spotlights lit a path across the concrete to The Fence. The rain had ceased, but the plastic sheets flapped in the wind under the high ceiling.

"How are things coming along?" Renate asked.

"Well, I guess. Grandpa has been unusually good at controlling himself."

"You're a good influence."

"I've summoned Harlan."

The avenging angel stood with his arms crossed in front of the iconostasis, inspecting the broad gilded frames where lace had been folded in layers to form the heads and faces of saints.

"It turned out really well," he told Amanda. "And I can see all of it. It's not like that beetle structure at the station."



He studied Svetlana, who stared at his wings. "Svetlana? We've met, right? Amanda has told me about you. I wasn't sure if you'd see me. Most people don't."

"Yeah, I can see you. We met a few times. I was there in Dahlem." Svetlana held out her hand and had to force herself not to react to his coarse, feverish skin as they shook hands.

"Where did you plan to hide me? In the hole?" Harlan looked into the oily water in the pit behind The Fence. It was the only spot where you could possibly hide close to the installation.

"I was thinking we'd hide you in Metropolis," Renate said. "We'll extend the installation into it and place you there with a connection to this place—maybe you can use one of the votive tablets from The Fence to see and hear what's happening in this room."

"It already exists in Metropolis." For a moment, Harlan let go of the one-eyed vision that kept his gaze fixed on the Illusion. The Fence was present in the great city, in a place he had never seen before. The engine shed wasn't there, but The Fence, longer and taller than here, stood in the middle of a paved square surrounded by obliterated ruins that were mountains and piles of rubble rather than dilapidated buildings. The square was many times bigger than the engine shed, perhaps a hundred meters across. The concrete sows were there too. They fidgeted nervously, peering at the ruins.

"That's a bit odd," Renate said. "Worrying, maybe."

"I've given up on trying to understand what The Fence is doing," Amanda said. "It tried to communicate with Alex, I think. He panicked and ran back to Grandpa."

"How do we get Harlan into the installation? If we are to get a stable connection, he needs to be a part of it." Renate walked around the structure and scrutinized it from all angles.

"I can bind him to the sows. If we paint him like one," Amanda suggested.

"Can you bring us through the Illusion here?" Renate pulled Harlan with her to the back of The Fence and positioned him with his back to the gate. "We could fasten you to the lattice here. You're the secret the iconostasis is hiding. And then an image of you in our reality."



"A doll," Amanda said. "I have some lace left. I can make a doll in his likeness."

They gathered pots of paint and glue, a sewing box and the bundle of leftover lace. Harlan wrapped his wings around the three women and stepped out of the Illusion. He had become better at limiting the effect instead of dragging objects and bystanders along by mistake. The engine shed faded away and they stood in the middle of the square, behind The Fence that bisected the middle circle of the open space. A chilly wind blew, and the darkness was more compact than in the area around Villa d'If. The air had a metallic taste. Iron. A circle of ruins marked the edge of the square; beyond it rose mountains that must have been buildings long ago but were now reduced to gravel.

"We're deep inside," Renate said. "We don't want to leave Harlan here longer than necessary. Be careful not to walk too far," she warned Svetlana who had started to walk away to the ruins by the edge of the square, a curious sow in tow.

"Take your pants off," Amanda told Harlan. "It's better if you're naked."

"All magic is embarrassing by nature, right?"

"Something like that. It breaks your defenses down."

Amanda and Renate began to paint him in layers, adding rags and glue to give him a rougher texture. Two of the sows moved around them while they worked, sniffing at Harlan. Svetlana held the paint pots and picked out rags that they glued to his coarse skin. When they were done, the whole flock of sows waddled up to look as if inspecting the result.

"They accept you," Amanda said. "Can I attach you to the fence? It's just symbolical."

She wrapped golden wire around the struts that supported his wings and fastened them to the fence. Then she sat down and finished the doll: a little Christmas tree ornament made of lace, its wings made of down from Harlan's plumage. They bound the little likeness to him in a ritual with a few drops of his blood.

"You'll have to make it back on your own," he said. "I'm stuck here."

"I'll make a labyrinth," Renate said. "Svetlana, will you drive me back to the hotel?"

"Sure. I'll stay there with you until it's over."



Renate picked up a can of black spray paint. She walked out onto the open space in front of The Fence and began to draw a labyrinth. Amanda sat down on a low stone plinth close to the middle of the square.

“Do you think this is going to work?” Harlan asked.

“No idea. I hope so. If we survive, we might learn something from it.”

He guffawed. His face looked funny when the blue paint cracked.

“Is the doll working? How many fingers?” She hid the lace doll behind her back and held up three fingers in front of it.

“Three, maybe. Don’t do that. You’re sticking your finger into my ear. Be careful with it.”

She carefully put the doll into the sewing box. “I’ll stay here tonight and take Renate’s labyrinth back tomorrow. So that you won’t have to be alone for long.”







# 34.

## PΛNΚΘΩ

Saturday, August 12

“There’s a pattern in the paint.” Sara pointed at the broad black lines that formed a jagged border under the windows in the engine shed. “Like signs.”

“Never mind that. Just keep painting.” Alex looked over at Amanda, as if afraid she might hear.

“Did you put them there? You can’t have?” The texture was far too detailed; no one could have had time to paint it during the night. It ran through the lines along the whole wall. Sara nodded at Amanda, who was dressed in a pair of white Mauer II overalls and arranging the concrete sows. “Did she do it?”

“Maybe. Or he did.” Sara understood that Alex meant [Harlan]. “What the fuck do I know?”

Kaz was on his knees five meters away, fiddling with an image of a fat, bright red little man with giant eyes and a gaping maw. His painting skills had improved after he had retreated into himself and stopped talking. Lately he had begun to play deaf too. Sara had to grab him if she wanted him to move or hand her something.

“Don’t you stop talking to me too,” she told Alex. “I couldn’t handle it. Are you going to?”

“No. It’s just... I’m having a hard time concentrating. My head is buzzing.”

He gave her an awkward hug and left a blue handprint on the shoulder of her white overalls. They continued filling in wide eyes with blue and



red paint. In the rotunda, the carpenters—late, of course—hammered at the floor, and Amanda was arguing with [Harlan] on the phone:

“No, you *are* coming here to rehearse. I’ve set up the sound system and the lighting guy has been here. I want to try it with the spotlights in place. No, not with a bunch of people here. I can’t adjust the light then. I’m telling you to come here right now.”

She hung up and quick-dialed another number. Her voice changed, and she allowed herself to sound tired: “You’ll have to come here. I was hoping to do it this morning when it was just him and me. Now the carpenters are here, and the kids, and Nikolai says he’s coming over. I want you here in case something happens. Yes, it was stupid to think I’d get him here before lunch.”

Moritz showed up at the steel gate fifteen minutes later, dressed in slacks and a gray Henley sweater. White stubble hid the tattoos on his cheeks and neck. He walked in a circle around the engine shed and looked at the paintings. His eyes caught on the signs in the black lines, and he called to Amanda:

“Did you see this?”

“Yeah, The Fence is doing something to Grandpa’s lines. I can’t be bothered to worry about it right now. Can you take the kids with you away from here?”

“I’ll take them to Bethanien. I brought a car.”

“You’re not taking us anywhere.” Alex pulled Sara away from Moritz. “He told us to stay. We’re going to help serve drinks tonight.”

“I’ll drive you back tonight and you’ll have time to help out.”

“If you touch us, I’ll call him and tell him you’re up to something.”

No, Sara wanted to shout. *You can’t call him.* But it was as if someone had pushed a stone into her mouth. Moritz merely shrugged and looked resigned.

“We’re not up to anything,” he said. “You’re imagining things. Come on, I’ll help you finish this while we wait.”

They went back to shaping eyes and twisted little men on the concrete around and under the windows. Amanda adjusted the lighting while yelling at [Harlan] over the phone. After hanging up again, she sat down on a green plastic stool among the concrete sows and took a deep breath.



“He’s bringing a bunch of people,” she told Moritz. “They had some goddamn kind of warm-up. Twenty or thirty people, he says. What am I going to do?”

“Go for it. It’s better than waiting until tonight. There will be two hundred people here or more.”

*Why are you letting us hear this?* Sara thought. *What if we say something?* But they never would. Not even Alex. They would never say anything that might upset him. Moritz took her hand and steadied it as she drew a broad arc with white spray paint. He had a surprisingly steady hand, and formed a perfect circle.

“Concentrate,” he said. “You’ll feel better.”

“I don’t feel better at all.”

“Then let me do it for you, so you won’t have to.” He let go of her hand and took the can of spray paint. He was a faster painter with his quick, sweeping lines.

“Should I kill myself?” she asked.

“No, that would be stupid. Don’t.”

Amanda had nagged at them about that when they were alone in the engine shed. *Don’t kill yourselves. It’ll only make it worse.* Sara lit a cigarette (she had noticed that Mike gave her his cigs if she asked for them when [Harlan] was listening) and watched Moritz work. He was protecting her somehow. Her mind and speech hadn’t been this clear since they’d returned to Berlin. She could think about walking out through the gate and just disappearing, even if the idea made her stomach churn.

On the other side of the gate, cars parked, doors slammed and cheerful voices sounded. [Harlan’s] rumbling laughter cut through the noise. Amanda stood up and smoothed her features into a slightly stern but friendly mask. Emre led the way through the gate with a gesture that signaled *I did my best*. Around him, tipsy people streamed inside with bottles and glasses in their hands. Sara recognized Mrs. Decken and Mr. Sauer from the project management, and a journalist called Karl something who had interviewed her and Alex about the kidnapping (they said Renate had drugged them). Mike stood in the background, his gaze sliding between Amanda and Moritz. [Harlan] moved through



the middle of the herd with a smile on his lips. Sara was happy to see him and hated herself for it.

“Can I get some order,” Amanda shouted. “We’re doing a final rehearsal. It’ll only take fifteen minutes. Stay outside the red line on the floor.”

[Harlan] gave her a hug and apologized for being late.

“Come here,” he called to Sara. “Take the glasses and put them on the table over there. There’s a box of wine bottles in the trunk of my car. The black Mercedes. Could you fetch it, please?”

She did as she was told while Amanda greeted everyone and managed to make them think she wanted them there. [Harlan] grabbed Moritz and dragged him around to present him as the foundation’s oldest and most skilled artist. Alex and Kaz made themselves invisible by the wall. Sara was holding a sticky wine bottle when Amanda turned the lights off around the iconostasis and told [Harlan] to stand in front of The Fence.

“Could everyone please settle down and step behind the line on the floor?”

It was raining outside, and a gray gloom filled the rotunda when the lights went off. Sara looked for Moritz. He stood next to Alex and Kaz, his gaze locked on Mike. The carpenters took the opportunity to go out for a smoke. Emre walked around and tried to get the audience to back up. [Harlan] rattled off phrases in French while the audience made small talk and had wine. Sara recognized Nadine’s soundtrack on the sound system, monotonous and sharp enough to make most of them settle down. The spotlights bounced between Nikolai’s pictures. With a sudden creak, the gate in the iconostasis behind [Harlan] slid open. He wasn’t prepared for that; he faltered and fell silent. The angel stepped out, naked and painted black and blue, the same color as Amanda’s sows. The Fence vibrated as its wings pushed through the gate. The sows turned, as if to stop [Harlan] from escaping, but he stood completely still. The angel took him in his arms and rose into the air. A heavy wing beat kept the pair aloft above The Fence for a moment before the angel dove feet first into the water-filled pit that Amanda had cordoned off with golden barbed wire.



Mike roared. He leapt high into the air after the angel and began to burst open. Iron junk cut through his flesh. Blood and oily fluids spattered the audience. When he crashed down into the black water to follow [Harlan] and the angel, he was a vortex of glinting and rusty metal, spraying bits of torn flesh in all directions. The sound installation fell quiet.

“Close the door to Inferno,” Moritz’ voice said from the row of windows.

Amanda started walking towards the hole in the floor, which seemed to have grown. Black water bubbled over the edge and ran over the new wooden floor. Before she had time to do anything, people began to scream. At first Sara thought that Mike’s transformation had scared them, but then she felt it too: a wet tentacle formed from rotating squares touched her mind. She remembered the tower of small blue and white boxes that Chadi had built the week before they started working with Renate. Greek composition, he had called it. He had been fascinated by the crisis in Greece and the events that followed. Sara was in Chadi’s head, looking at the suburban blocks through the window of the mini-bus headed for Wannsee; she saw memories of a half-finished image he had left on his computer before they went, a Greek temple ruin in a sandy landscape. Memories of a face he had begun to sketch on the abandoned building next to Ernst. She felt the stench of burning flesh and the knife against his throat on the altar in Hell. She slid out of his head and saw him die.

At the iconostasis, Amanda looked like she was having visions too. She stood completely still, her eyes focused on the ceiling. Then the engine shed disappeared. Sara stood in a windswept square under a black sky. At first she thought she was alone, but then she glimpsed the others in the distance, spread out across a stone field half the size of Tempelhof. The Fence stood in the middle of the square, bigger and longer than in reality. Stark mountains and ruins loomed in the distance. She aimed for one of the mountains and started walking. Someone called her name, but she didn’t listen, focused on keeping Chadi and his memories in her mind. She forced herself to linger by the image of his dead body on the altar. She pushed [Harlan] from her mind, shrunk him to a shadow at the edge of her memory. She had reached the edge of the square, now.



Sometime in the distant past, the open space had been surrounded by tall buildings, now turned to sterile gravel hills. *If I get lost here, I'm dead.* Still, she walked out between two gravel mounds at the edge of a broad boulevard covered in what looked like green concrete. Two men were arguing nearby. She recognized the journalist from Berliner Zeitung, Karl. He was yelling at a slender long-bearded guy in a blazer. When Sara walked up to them, they started fighting. Karl was more broad-shouldered and a head taller than his opponent. He pushed the blazer guy to the ground and kicked at his head until he stopped moving, then straddled his chest and pounded at his face until his knuckles were slick with blood. Finally, he picked up a heavy rock with both hands and crushed the bearded one's skull. Sara was just a step away from him then. He saw her and dropped the stone, fell back with a scream and crawled away on his hands and knees. The bearded one was dead, or ought to be dead, but the shattered mouth moved and a swollen eye looked up at her. Karl got to his feet and fled up a narrow path that wound over the nearest hillock. Sara sat down and took the battered man's hand.

\*

Harlan landed in the middle of Columbia Square with his own shivering body in his arms. He didn't want to put it down in the mess of barbed wire. He found an open space around the clock tower's base and gently put [Harlan] down on the cobblestones. They were both silent. [Harlan] didn't bother getting up. His gangly body curled up against the foot of the clock tower. Harlan wanted to look away, but forced himself to gaze down at his own face.

"I've talked to them," he said. "They will let you keep your memories. It'll give us time to get the kids away from Thaumiel. Then they'll take your memories. You'll have to try to hold on."

[Harlan] didn't seem to hear him. He looked at the nearest gate, where the three tormentors waded into the sea of barbed wire. Harlan stepped aside as they arrived at the clock tower.

"Not so cocky now, eh?" The faceless one, who was a head shorter than [Harlan] and looked slightly malnourished, effortlessly lifted him



off the cobblestones and began to tear the clothes from his body. "You don't want to see this, kid," he told Harlan.

"No, I don't."

And yet he lingered as they dragged his screaming father through the barbed wire and into the complex. The cries were muted by the stairwell, then became more audible again through the shattered windows in the laundry room under the eaves. Harlan sat on the clock tower's plinth for a long moment before he found the strength to get up and leave the courtyard.

When he stepped into the street that formed the border to a desolate part of Inferno, he was met by a chafed Mike. The bodyguard's human guise looked warped, a little too sloppily recreated.

"They won't give him to you," Harlan said.

"I didn't think so. I want to talk to you."

"About what?"

"We still want the project, and you want the kids."

"It's not my project."

"You can talk to your girlfriend. Arrange a meeting."

"Maybe. We'll see."

Mike nodded and walked into the burned landscape around the tenement houses. Harlan found it difficult to tear himself away from Purgatory. He remained standing there, listening to the screams that echoed in the distance.







# 35. BETHANÏEN: AMANDA

Monday, August 28

“The foundation has been disbanded,” Emre said. “The 1200 euros that were left in the account we donated to Sara Ghannam’s mother and uncle. It’s the least we could do.”

Nineteen people had disappeared, not including [Harlan] and Mike. The papers accused [Harlan] of drugging and abducting them, just like they had now decided that he was the mastermind behind the art students’ disappearance. The Wall Foundation was painted as an obscure sect connected to the Leftist terrorism of the Seventies, with Clive as its murderous leader. The police had found the skulls of three unidentified men in [Harlan’s] apartment, painted in the same fashion as the ones in Clive’s collection. The press spoke of a British enthusiasm for serial killings and sick rituals. Amanda had relinquished her studio in Bethanien to avoid more trouble, but she and everyone else had been told not to leave Berlin. Svetlana had preferred to quit her job over getting fired as a security risk. She helped Amanda pack materials and half-finished sculptures into large opaque plastic crates. Moritz sat on the workbench, smoking. He had been beaten up by a gallery owner from Schöneberg while saving him from the wasteland in Metropolis. His bald pate was covered in compresses.

“The Wall doesn’t need a foundation anymore,” he said. “It’s happily spreading out on its own.”

“Müller is afraid it might get the idea to open all the floodgates at the Hauptbahnhof,” Amanda said. “They can’t get it away from there.”



She had spent hours getting interrogated by the lictor, who had tried to tease all knowledge and memories out of her.

"You're a fucking idiot for telling the lictor about the Hauptbahnhof," Moritz said.

They had fought over it. Almost become enemies. Moritz didn't really trust Amanda anymore, and she sort of understood why. She hadn't told him, or anyone else, what the iconostasis showed her as it opened the doors of Illusion in the engine shed. She saw herself, and hated what she saw. It was when she roared at The Fence to stop that reality was recreated around them. With half of the guests from the rehearsal on the wrong side. After spending two weeks wandering the sterile ruin mounds in the far reaches of Metropolis, they had almost abandoned the search. Amanda still journeyed to the open space every day, spending a moment there to see if someone had found their way back to the iconostasis. Three days earlier, a badly injured video game designer from Hamburg had waited for her there, sitting with his back against the gate. The square had been empty ever since. She could no longer hear noises in the distance. The sows plodded around the fence. Perhaps they had multiplied.

"I still don't understand why they disappeared," Amanda said.

"They heard the siren song of Metropolis." Moritz squinted out the windows as if glimpsing the vast city over at Waldemarstraße. "I did too, at first. I saw a bunch of abstract shapes. Memories I couldn't interpret, I think. What I don't get is why the others started going at each other. And me. That fucking gallery owner claimed to hate me. Now he's embarrassed. He gave me a little oil painting as an apology. You must have seen something too?" he asked Amanda.

"Nothing I could understand. I told the iconostasis to stop, but it was too late by then."

"I think The Fence knows more than it lets on."

"It says nothing that makes sense, and you know it."

"You'll have to try talking to it."

They had fought about that too. *Your Fence. Do something.* Amanda had no idea what to do. She would have preferred to just leave it in the square. The original installation had disappeared from the engine shed



the moment the gates to Metropolis closed. When the police arrived, they were met by fourteen injured and traumatized cultural workers in an empty room where Nikolai's screens had toppled over. Luckily [Harlan] had a guest list, so they knew who had disappeared.

"Stop going on about *The Fence*. What are you going to do about the students?" Svetlana said.

"What do you think we should do?" Moritz touched one of the compresses on his head and grimaced.

"De-curse them. Wasn't that the plan?"

"We're working on it."

"Let me know if there's anything we can do to help. In the meantime, I'm going to try to get my new business in order."

She bubble-wrapped two white, rotund ceramic shapes and secured them with packing tape. Emre was sweeping the floor. He had become quieter after the catastrophe in the engine shed. Svetlana refused to leave him alone, afraid that he might hurt himself.

"We'll drive Emre's stuff home," she said. "And be back later. Try not to fight while we're gone."

When they were alone, Moritz slid off the workbench and began to help Amanda with the packing process. He fingered half-finished sculptures and sketches, commenting and asking what she had intended with this lump of clay or that shiny aluminum shape. Smoothing things over.

"I don't know what to do." Amanda had already bought tickets home to Stockholm when Müller told her she couldn't leave Berlin. She did what she was told in order to avoid trouble, but felt like a caged animal. It wasn't just to look for survivors that she spent hours wandering through Metropolis.

"And I'm not going down to Hell to go up against a death angel." Amanda was startled that Moritz had even had the idea. He smiled at that. "What did Harlan say?" he asked.

"He met Mike. They want to negotiate. With me, about the project. Don't ask why. I guess you're the ones he should negotiate with, if that's the case."

"On no condition whatsoever. I hope he didn't make any promises?"



"No, none. He wants to be alone for a while. And no one's expecting you to go down to Hell. You get that, right? You wouldn't survive a minute." She picked a black plastic bag of weed up from the box of copper wire. An olive branch.

"We have to talk to the Wall," Moritz said. "If The Fence won't make sense, we'll have to talk to another part. I'll give my beetles another go."

They sat down on the plastic crates, shared a joint and listened to the clamor and shouts from the music school students in the corridor outside.

## Alex

One week later, Alex and Kaz sat at the back of an anonymous lecture room in a dun-colored house next to the rail yard by the Ostkreuz station. It was the third time the police had summoned them. They asked questions here that had been impossible to explain to the counselors at the youth psychiatry ward. *Have you seen the great city?* They pretended not to understand. They mostly shut up. The nine who had returned from Villa d'If were spread out in the room, as if no one quite wanted to sit next to each other. The only exception was Tamara and Julia, glued to each other, enveloped in a bubble of muted whispers. At a whiteboard scribbled with phone numbers for psychologists and police officers stood Mrs. Hogenkamp, the counselor who had gone through the whole chain of events with them one on one. Alex didn't think she was human. Mr. Möhring, the police psychologist, stood next to her with a friendly smile.

"That's all," he said. "Call me if Renate Poll makes contact with you. She's not suspected of anything, but we would very much like to talk to her."

The tables rattled as the others started to get up. They didn't want to talk, they'd made that clear from day one, when Alex wanted to tell them what had happened in Pankow. Several of them seemed to believe the tale that Amanda and Moritz had spun, where [Harlan] was a crazy kidnapper. However that was supposed to have happened. They were angry when Alex mentioned the three forgotten ones—the sacrifices Moritz had told him about as he tattooed a spiny circle on Alex's back two days after Sara's disappearance. *There's no point*, Tamara had told



him. *They don't want to know.* When everyone else had disappeared into the corridor, she and Julia came up to Alex and Kaz.

"How about we go somewhere and talk? Just the four of us?"

Kaz grunted his assent and stopped scribbling on the table in front of him. They took the elevator downstairs and stepped into the drizzle on the street. "They'll track you. Throw your clothes away when they're done with you," Moritz had said. "Never mind Moritz. He's just paranoid," Amanda said when he asked her. They wandered past the car dealerships by the railroad up towards the station. There was a McDonald's in a glass cage by the entrance to the trains. They sat down in a corner with a soda each and a pail of nuggets.

"I keep dreaming about Harlan," Julia says. "It's dark and he's yelling at me. But I don't feel like seeing him anymore. I guess that's a good thing."

Alex and Kaz nodded. They were having the same dream.

"That alone should make the others see how fucked up this is," Alex said. "But that psychologist has fooled them into thinking that it'll go away. I can't understand how they swallowed it."

"I guess they feel like it's all going to go to shit when it's time. They can't bear thinking about it," Julia said.

"I want to find Sara. I don't think she's dead."

Alex and Kaz had been placed next to each other at the edge of the open space when the engine shed in Pankow disappeared. Alex wanted to go out among the ruin mounds, but Kaz held on to him, tried to knock him down rather than letting him go. When Moritz found them, they had been fighting until they were both bruised and exhausted.

"You'd never find her out there," Kaz said. "It was too goddamn big."

"I know that. But when we were out there, I didn't think about that. It was as if something pulled at me. Couldn't you feel it?"

"Don't know."

Kaz had begun to speak, but sometimes it was as if he caught himself saying too much and fell quiet again. He drew pictures of Sara, telling Alex it was in case she'd start disappearing like the other three had done.

"They don't want us to see each other," Alex said. "The cops and the social services. Someone from social services had called Kaz's mom and said to throw me out."



He had stayed with Kaz a few days in his cluttered three-room apartment in Neukölln. They played GTA on the half-dead tv while Kaz's mom talked to her sister on the phone about selling the kidnapping story to some magazine.

"We laughed about it," Kaz said. "They're morons."

"They're dangerous," Julia said. "They want us to die and be forgotten so they don't have to deal with the hassle. That's what's going on. Sooner or later he'll come back, only much worse, and we'll be zombies again until he gets tired of us and kills us. Then we'll end up in Hell and everyone will forget us."

"Yep," Kaz said.

It was still raining outside. They bought more soda and waited for it to stop.



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