

The Concert

by
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Translated from the German
with a critical afterword by
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Translator's Note

Hartmut Lange's novella has gone through numerous printings with the author's primary publisher, Diogenes. However, since its first appearance in 1986, one small but crucial mistake had managed to go unnoticed by the editors until 2003, a year which brought the publication of Lange's collected novellas. It is a small typographical error: the German word "Sie," a pronoun that translates as a formal version of the English word "you," had been printed as "sie," which in the context of the sentence in question means "they." Expending much attention on this almost insignificant typo would in most other cases be pedantic, but this error occurs in a pivotal section of the novella.

Frau Altenschul receives a letter from her friend, the tormented pianist Rudolf Lewanski, who cannot bring himself to leave his villa. He is horrified at the presence of the uniformed Nazi standing in admiration outside his door, hoping to find forgiveness and redemption through Lewanski's performance. The corrected text reads,

“Ich fühle mich hintergangen. Wie konnte ich Ihnen zusagen, in Berlin zu bleiben, und wie kann ich die Gesellschaft eines Verbrechers, die Sie mir erstaunlicherweise aufzwingen wollen, wieder loswerden!” (53).

“I feel deceived. How could I have promised you to stay in Berlin, and how can I rid myself of the company of the criminal that you, to my astonishment, want to force upon me!” (36).

The optimistic progression of the book topples. Frau Altenschul, Lewanski’s dear friend and unofficial patron, has come under suspicion of playing a double game: encouraging the pianist to achieve maturity and find redemption through his mastery of the late Beethoven sonatas, but at the same time allowing the criminal responsible for his murder to pester the despairing and now humiliated artist. The original misprint, displaces the blame onto an unknown “they:”

„[W]ie kann ich die Gesellschaft eines Verbrechers, die sie mir erstaunlicherweise aufzwingen wollen, wieder loswerden!”

“How can I rid myself of the company of the criminal that they, to my astonishment, want to force upon me!”

This difference deflates the acerbic and poignant note that offers the first hint of the book’s ultimately bleak denouement. Lewanski’s suspicions become clearer later, but only through Frau Altenschul’s hurt response to his accusations: “[H]ow could you think that I had deceived you?” Since the path to this realization leads the reader on an indirect and tortuous detour, it is difficult to appreciate fully the seriousness of this break in the friendship between these two characters, who, only after having found each other, can believe that there may be hope of redemption after the horror of death.

1

Anyone who was anybody among the dead of Berlin, anyone who was tired of mingling with the living, anyone who cherished the remembrance of those years when time still passed, sooner or later sought an invitation to Frau Altenschul's salon. And since everyone knew how very much Max Liebermann meant to this elegant, delicate Jewish lady so devoted to the beautiful things in life, it was customary to send a calling card to that villa on the Wannsee in which they expected the painter's presence.

But Liebermann refused to make recommendations to Frau Altenschul, whom he visited every evening. He lived in his studio at no. 7 Pariser Platz and painted. He would occasionally stand at his easel for hours, until, after he laid aside his brush and palette on a table on which stood a decanter of water, a box of cigars, and a Chinese porcelain bowl, he finally put on his pince-nez. He would position himself in front of the canvas once more, scrutinize everything carefully—and

remain morose. He took great pains to recoup those bright moments when he had been alive and satisfied with his work, but now he was bored, since unlike Frau Altenschul he had no idea whether he could ever find anything desirable in death. He was finally released once and for all, no longer shackled to life. Yet no matter how sublimely he applied the colors, he could not assert that they resulted from anguish, from a tormented uncertainty propelling him onward. Why then should he even paint!

He often left his studio in such a mood and headed toward the Berlin City Palace. For him the avenue called UNTER DEN LINDEN was still in the condition with which he was familiar before he died. But, and this is the secret of the dead, he had the ability to see the present, and so he saw that the palace was no longer there, and that at the same time a monstrosity of concrete and glass had been constructed on that very square toward which he was strolling. The reflection of the rising sun in the glass of this disquieting building made him squint once he had left the Armory behind him. It struck him as odd that the living paid absolutely no attention to architectural proportion, but he was incapable of becoming indignant about it. He kept out of the way of the pedestrians rushing past him. The automobiles that almost grazed him as he crossed the street were of no matter to him. He was concerned only not to get run over, although that would have been of no matter to him as well. And so he presented the picture of an old man, who slowly, with utmost composure, made his way hesitantly through the traffic like someone out for a stroll, his glance darting here and there, more out of opportunity than curiosity. His white lounge jacket hung open so that his vest was visible, which, like his narrowly cut pants, had an indeterminate color. Over his patent leather shoes he wore light green

gaiters, and although the collar of his shirt was fastened, there was no tie. Nowadays he neglected to be particularly proper in such matters.

When the sun began to bother him, he turned his back to it, and considered whether he should hazard the long stretch to Anhalter Bahnhof so that on his way home he could walk along Leipziger to Potsdamer Platz, something of which he was particularly fond.

An hour later he was standing before the overwhelmingly tall concrete wall, on top of which was a bulge meant to make climbing over impossible for the living. Beneath his feet he felt a patch of cobblestone and something metal that could have been a streetcar rail, and he gazed at the square, which had been leveled. He was still familiar with the area from the turn of the century, when horse-drawn trolleys thronged the streets and the Palast Hotel lent the place a Parisian air. And thus he saw in the same moment a scene from long ago, saw coaches as if they were wedged together, saw horses prancing on the pavement as if trying to disentangle themselves, saw quaint figures, entirely out of style, in frock coats and flowing dresses, their hems almost brushing the ground, saw bowler hats and round constructions tipped forward, overloaded with imitation fruit or cascades of feathers. But the sun illuminated the entire scene and made everything he saw, the past and the present, appear in phantasmal, contradictory colors, so that he began to doubt whether it had ever been possible for him actually to paint the sight that now overwhelmed him.

2

Strange: Although Frau Altenschul was outside of time, she sat in front of her dressing table mirror each evening, fretting that every little wrinkle in the corners of her eyes, which she so painstakingly treated with creams, remained unmistakable.

It was the middle of October. The days were finally getting shorter, and since she was in the habit of lighting candles just before sundown—those magnificent candelabras that from all sides lit the parlor and even the bathroom—she was obliged to draw her velvet curtains, which at night, however, needed to be pulled aside again when the clear, cold, darkened sky stood above the villa, for she wanted to see the sky and the crows that slept in the crowns of the dead oaks, which time and again started up, flapping their wings as if the artificial city glow disturbed them. She would occasionally stand at her window for hours, facing westward toward the Tiergarten. The view eastward, though, where Voßstraße ended at Wilhelmstraße, she avoided.

From there, she often said, came evil, "and," she added as she pointed her finger towards that angular, half-destroyed building connecting the two streets, "I am happy that that one there" (and she did not speak his name) "is once and for all barred from ever setting foot in his palace again. Professor Liebermann," she said, "it is beyond my comprehension why you always pass by that place on your way from the Brandenburg Gate, even though it is much quicker and more convenient to cross the Tiergarten."

This happened in the evening. During the day, if one wanted to visit the area Frau Altenschul called home, one would find the entrance to Voßstraße blocked, indeed the street no longer existed, a circumstance that was, however, entirely trivial to Frau Altenschul. She had had the three-story villa rebuilt. Its russet bricks, its high, corniced windows, reminiscent of Schinkel, everything but the entrance with a column adorned with a peacock, had been demolished by the war. She had had this ruin, over which ivy was already growing, restored, and had reclaimed the interior, which had been pillaged after her death and stored in a warehouse, so that everything that was dear and precious to her stood once again in its proper place, including a Guimard glass cabinet, to which she was particularly attached, although part of its inlay was missing. The villa, too, stood there once more, untouched, though invisible to the gaze of the living, and just as she had been accustomed to do before her death, she hosted evening gatherings in her parlor. As she did on this Thursday in October.

After Liebermann was finished chatting with her and had again left her alone, the guests began arriving, and she finally heard that din of voices so familiar to her, for it was now past 11, the time for which she had requested their presence

on her invitations. Liebermann had taken on the role of host, while Frau Altenschul was still preoccupied with her toilette and the irreversibility of her age, when ‘Ahs’ and ‘Ohs,’ a ripple of joyful agitation, became audible from the hall. Someone had evidently come in and received a particularly warm welcome, and to judge by the sound of the reception, it was someone who had never set foot before in her villa on Voßstraße, at least not since his death. And as the applause that accompanied the newcomer from the stairs to the salon gave no sign of ebbing, she laid her hand-mirror aside and stepped into the hallway to see the person about whom everyone was so excited.

She was nearsighted, but could nonetheless recognize a young man standing near the grand piano, his left hand raised in a sign of slight embarrassment to fend off the applause, and she saw on his face a curious smile, a smile expressing utmost restraint yet verging on playfulness, one that was irresistible, especially to those who, like Frau Altenschul, tended to be on edge.

“Lewanski,” she exclaimed, “you’re playing again! And you’ve decided to come back to Berlin! I must give you a hug!”

An hour later, after everyone had dined and was drinking the coffee Frau Altenschul had had served on Sèvres porcelain, Lewanski took a seat at the grand piano and played Chopin.

‘He never used to wear glasses,’ thought Frau Altenschul, ‘or have I forgotten.’

And she was astonished that the gold-rimmed spectacles she found so displeasing did not impair his vivacious concentration, quite the opposite: Lewanski sat upright, arms stretched out toward the keys, his elbows almost straight, his

dark-blond hair, a little too long, repeatedly falling over his forehead, so that he was forced to tame it with a quick toss of his head. With his glasses, Lewanski looked like a child forced for a few moments to focus his restiveness on one point, so that from this constraint can emerge that very freedom that Frau Altenschul might enjoy as music, indeed as an irresistible music.

Lewanski was playing the twelve Etudes from Opus 25, flourishing the *allegro*, the *presto*, the *agitato*, the *vivace*, almost without a break, like a metaphorical garland before the ears of his enthralled listeners.

“What entrancing originality,” thought Frau Altenschul, but this impression soon changed. Lewanski played the C sharp minor slowly, or rather: he tried to. He succumbed to the tempo change. Although he gave particular emphasis to the melodic line, he indeed fell into such sluggishness, letting the tension within this impossible piece grow so greatly, that one might think his breathing was being choked from an excess of emotion. He suddenly broke off, sat motionless on the bench, stared at the keyboard, and said:

“Litzmannstadt.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” said Frau Altenschul, “what’s wrong!”

“Litzmannstadt,” Lewanski responded, beginning to play again, hesitantly, as if he could no longer trust his skill, as if he were being forced to look for the *andante*, broke off once more, stood up, bowed slightly toward his audience, and although he smiled, his inconsolability was unmistakable.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “you can hear for yourselves: In order to perform this piece, I should be older. I was torn from life too early.”

Everyone was silent. And the consent of all those present who had died a variety of uniformly violent deaths was like a solemn assent, though no one in the salon shared with Lewanski that harshness toward himself, that melancholic certainty with which he refused to acknowledge the extent of his talent.

“Why has he stopped playing?” asked Liebermann a little too loudly. “And,” he added, “what is this about Litzmannstadt?”

“In Litzmannstadt,” said Frau Altenschul, barely audible, “actually known as Łódź,” and Liebermann needed to lean toward her in order to make out what she was saying, “in Litzmannstadt,” said Frau Altenschul, “he was seized at the railroad station as he was trying to escape, and shot dead. He was twenty-eight years old.”

“Hmm,” said Liebermann as he considered Lewanski, who was still standing there smiling, unembarrassed. Liebermann was full of benevolence, but at the same time irritated that something had happened to this person he was scrutinizing so attentively, something that was beyond his comprehension. He felt ill at ease being the only Jew in this circle who, after a long and happy life, had veritably wished for death, and he caught himself sounding too harsh on account of this very uneasiness as he said:

“Then he should not make so much of it. He is in Berlin again, and here he will be celebrated.”

3

A few days later Frau Altenschul sent for Lewanski, but met him as he was about to mount the stairs.

"I want to show you the Tiergarten today," she said. "You should see how magnificent the rhododendrons are. And if we keep quiet, we won't startle the ducks."

He offered her his arm, noticing that she barely reached to his shoulder. They walked like this the short stretch to Potsdamer Platz along Bellevuestraße and beyond, to where the tall trees began. There were beeches and lindens, among them some whose tops had been shot away, but right around the trenches, on the islands accessible by footbridge, stood poplars, centuries old and unscathed, that seemed to fringe the overcast sky with their branches, and a continually shifting damp wind made Frau Altenschul draw her cloak closer. She was freezing, but it was a condition without significance, indeed the chills that crawled across her arms and down her back were pleasant, and she saw that Lewanski too, without hat or coat,

the collar of his shirt open and wearing only a light jacket, enjoyed being exposed to this weather.

She wanted to say something to him, but had to admit to herself that she was too bashful to initiate conversation. In the meantime a certain feeling crept over her, something bordering on satisfaction, that she was out for an almost intimate stroll with this man whom she had seen for the first time at the Philharmonic fifty years earlier, just as his piano performances were becoming celebrated, and who had but once appeared in her salon, and, as she recalled, for only a fleeting half hour, although she had repeatedly sent him invitations in feverish anticipation. She knew Lewanski could not find peace, unable to forget those years when he had to hide, when he was always on the run, always hoping that he could ultimately succeed in escaping his murderers, and she knew that he also distrusted death, since during his life he had been so terrified. In Prague and London he had performed private concerts, staying no longer than one or two days, knowing of no place where he would have liked to linger. Now he was in Berlin, and Frau Altenschul hardly ventured to hope that he would stay for longer than the duration of their stroll.

They crossed a meadow. Lewanski was determined not to disturb the harmony of their gait. They stepped lightly; the high-heeled shoes Frau Altenschul wore forced her to trip hurriedly along, but the longer they remained silent in the darkness, the more restless he became. Because they had reached the towering shrubs, he let her arm free, eventually walking along like someone who did not know whether he could trust his surroundings. He hurried past them, as if he could not wait to leave them behind.

“But the rhododendrons,” she said, trying to take hold of his arm again, “I wanted to show you the rhododendrons.”

He remained standing, his hair blowing about, and behind his back, where the water from a flooded trench reached his shoes, three or four mallards rose into the air. He winced at the beating of their wings.

“There is no need to be frightened,” she said. “There is nothing more in this city that can harm you. And that fellow there,” she said as she pointed over the rhododendrons toward the cast-iron bridge, the middle of which was adorned with an eagle, its head and wings towering far above the railing, “that fellow there,” she said, and in the darkness Lewanski recognized a figure holding a peaked cap in his hands who, with his head raised and upper body leaning slightly forward, looked across at them as if he wanted to greet her with a burst of obsequiousness, “that fellow there,” Frau Altenschul said, “has been seeking to hand me his calling card for years. But believe me, he will never set foot in my salon.”

When they had reached the bridge, Frau Altenschul almost brushed the stranger standing near the right guardrail with her cloak, and since this encounter was inescapable, Lewanski looked him in the face, and noticed that he nodded politely, hoping Frau Altenschul would respond in turn. When she did not, he slapped the gloves he was holding in his right hand against his knee—a gesture of sorrow that Frau Altenschul likewise paid no mind. Lewanski was tempted to look back again before the bridge had vanished from sight, but refrained from doing so because he felt that Frau Altenschul would not approve of his directing so much attention toward that fellow for whom she felt such disdain, and so he took her arm once more and remarked casually:

“The all look alike, but this one is missing his insignia.”

“They regret having murdered us,” said Frau Altenschul. “They had clearly forgotten that they would encounter us again. But it is only this man and another fellow of his sort who have managed to vex us.”

They continued walking, and since the rain of the past few days had formed pools of water everywhere, they had to go to considerable lengths to avoid them. They stepped around a planting of viburnum bushes and young yews, and Frau Altenschul could not help noticing how attentively Lewanski strove not to let her realize that the path was impassable, how much he smiled when he was obliged to extend his arm and stand on tiptoe to help her over the rotting timber that edged the path. She knew very well that there is a politeness that emerges only when one is particularly lost in thought.

“Stay in Berlin,” she said. “And should it be impossible for you to feel at home here, at the very least stay as my guest for the next few months.”

4

"Persuade him," said Frau Altenschul. "He is in his room, but cannot make up his mind to stay. And I would have wished that he of all people could repudiate the injustice done to him."

She was speaking about Lewanski, and her anxiety was such that she developed red blotches on her forehead. She told of their stroll in the Tiergarten and their encounter with that person whom she regularly saw and whose existence Liebermann questioned, that one who stood on the bridge and tried in vain to greet her, and she was convinced that, had they not encountered him, Lewanski would have stayed as her guest indefinitely. But now, she said, he was as if transformed, sitting in his room even though she had invited him to join them for tea, and she was certain, she added, that as soon as an opportunity arose he would slip away from the villa.

"Persuade him," she repeated, standing there, troubled and helpless, with the teapot in her hands, so that Liebermann had to ask her to be calm, and for the

present she should at least—with that he picked up his cup to have a sip of the excellent tea.

They sat in silence, and this continued until they heard a sound coming from the staircase. It was as if someone were trying to pass the door to the salon unnoticed.

"That's him," Frau Altenschul said quickly, "and he wants to leave."

But she was mistaken. Lewanski entered, apologized for his belated appearance, and, although Frau Altenschul had pointed out a chair nearer to her, he sat down on a settee a fair distance from the table on which the tea service stood, begging their indulgence. In the evening, he said, he could drink neither tea nor coffee without becoming edgy. With that he crossed his legs and sat particularly upright, and the way he pressed the nape of his neck against the back of the settee, the way he grasped both ends of the sofa with his arms almost entirely extended—a gesture that due to the width of the sofa seemed exaggerated—the way he avoided being particularly civil with his gaze even though he was looking in the direction of the table, all of this showed that he was striving for detachment, and that he had put on his tailcoat with no intention of entertaining his hosts.

Frau Altenschul was irritated. She found no reason for Lewanski to respond to her efforts, which should after all have flattered him, in such a way.

‘And what is that tail coat supposed to mean!’ she thought. ‘As if he wanted to prove that it was out of spite and because he was being forced to do so that he was ready to appear on stage for a concert tonight.’

She had a mind to leave the room.

“It is good that you are here,” said Liebermann. “We wanted to speak with you.” And he began, as was his style, to look searchingly at Lewanski. “I understand,” he said, “that you do not wish to give any concerts. I, too, am tired of the incessant painting. I think that, at some time, everything should come to an end. When I died, after all, I was almost ninety, and I can therefore say: No one has taken from me any of the time allotted for a life. But you, young man,” he said, squinting in the half darkness, the better to take in Lewanski, “But you, young man,” he said, “must retrieve life in death, since it wasn’t allowed for you to put happy or unhappy years behind you.”

Frau Altenschul feared Liebermann’s words might leave Lewanski unmoved. But Lewanski, still sitting unreasonably rigid in an inappropriate posture, seemed to be affected. At the very least Liebermann had surprised Lewanski with the suggestion that he might recover life in death.

“I hear,” said Liebermann, “you encountered those same phantoms in the Tiergarten whose existence I question. But as things stand, even Frau Altenschul cannot escape from the notion that her murderer accompany her like her shadow. Well: we have all become shadows and can no longer hurt each other, and if Frau Altenschul, like you, did not have every reason to reject the violent invalidation of her life, believe me, no one would be able to make me partake in a glass of champagne with other guests in this salon. I have always detested such rituals.”

Lewanski loosened his grip on the arms of the sofa and removed his glasses to clean the lenses with a handkerchief that he pulled from his breast pocket. As he did so, a lens leapt from the frame, perhaps because he had pressed too firmly, but he

hardly paid it any notice, forcing it back in with a light, metallic click, as if he had done this more than a few times.

“Of course,” Liebermann said, “we are Berliners, and I am honest enough to tell you: I wish the downfall of this city could be undone.”

“Better a flourishing Berlin among the dead than no Berlin at all,” said Frau Altenschul. “You can try at the very least,” she said, “to renovate the house on Koenigsallee that was offered to you. They have built unsightly bungalows on the property, but you can certainly disregard them.”

At midnight, it began raining heavily, and a weak thunderstorm could be heard as it drifted over the city. A warm wind wafted in from the southwest, and a feeling of spring hung over the red and yellow foliage of the chestnut trees, whose fruits lay strewn across the path, forcing passers-by to go out of their way to avoid slipping on the wet shells.

But the squall ended abruptly, the sky became clear and cold in an instant, and the earth steamed from the unexpectedly mild rain that had touched it.

Lewanski had bid his hosts adieu, commenting that since Berlin had been so insistently recommended to him, he would like to set out alone, and after asking for an umbrella he walked westward until he reached Koenigsallee. It was quiet here, and the arc-lamps, standing at a considerable distance from each other, could not shed enough light on the streets, the villas, and the trees that towered above their roofs, so that everything immediately in the vicinity of the lamps shone from the rain, but if one walked two or three steps beyond them the night was impenetrable to the eye. Lewanski noticed, after his eyes had adjusted to the darkness, that unlike

on Voßstraße almost everything here stood unscathed, as if there had never been any destruction; only a few sites were overgrown.

He recalled that he had lived on a pond nearby, perfectly round and so small that it seemed possible to leap over it. Among the reeds and the rushes were coots and droves of mallards; the drakes' feathers shimmered like silk. In November mist rose from the banks. He vividly recalled the mood that the view from his window had created day after day, and how difficult that atmosphere had made it for him to play Chopin vivaciously, something that he had of course intended, and for which he had earned praise.

"And the trees," he thought, "Who would have guessed that under these tall trees, so apt at warding off the rain, something so irrevocable could happen."

He stepped in front of the portico of the villa Frau Altenschul had mentioned and had difficulty tolerating the contrasts between the bungalows that had been erected in the park and the razed villa that nonetheless stood unscathed before his eyes.

He stepped onto the graveled walkway. To the right, under the lilacs, he saw an iron gate that had been taken off its hinges, perhaps with the intention of painting it, close by a copper urn covered entirely in verdigris and full of rainwater. To the left, next to the villa, where pruned elms enclosed the garden, stood a shed reminiscent of a carriage house with its door ajar. When Lewanski walked over to close it, because the wind was blowing in fine drops of moisture from the trees, he saw a motorcar inside—an Adler. With that his mood changed. If it seemed to him before that a rift had torn through everything he saw, that he would find it

impossible to accept with tranquility, as Frau Altenschul had suggested, the divided world that presented itself to his eyes, in this moment he succeeded.

There he stood, no longer taking notice of the bungalows that would otherwise have been able to block his view of the garden. The dustbins set up by every entrance under aluminum housings were of no matter to him. His gaze remained fixed on the automobile, and he remembered how greatly he had once desired to drive such a car, during those years when he had begun playing Chopin's etudes, hoping that one day his talent would bring in enough money to allow him purchase it, and that time and again he would go to the showroom where the automobiles were displayed for sale, each time inquiring, with a mixture of embarrassment and urgency, how costly this pleasure would be, supposing of course that he could make up his mind to buy.

Indeed, these were moments, as he recalled, that excited him and intensified his enjoyment of life so much that he struggled to suppress that pleasant sense of euphoria bordering on nausea. But it was a feeling he knew well from those times when he would sit at the keyboard night and day, sometimes without sufficient food or sleep, exhausted, indeed despairing and without hope of attaining that state of mind and dexterity that seemed necessary if he were to give expression to a particular progression, and suddenly he would succeed in making the instrument compliant to his wishes. He would be overcome then by a slight vertigo, and he would feel as if he were receiving ovations in a concert hall.

Oh, that life could be so sweet! And the more so when one was born to push it to the point of exhaustion, thanks to a gift for passion such as he possessed.

Lost in these thoughts, he entered the villa. Someone had evidently left in a

hurry, after cleaning up carelessly; here and there old newspapers and piles of dust had been swept together, and there was an odor of heavy tapestries that needed airing. From the hall ceiling hung a chandelier adorned with peculiar fabulous beasts, on whose heads were fastened balls of brass. Everything seemed so excessively elaborate, even the chains coming together at the center of the chandelier to support a delicate translucent shell of marbled glass could not diminish this impression. The sight pleased Lewanski, perhaps because a similar creation had hung in his parents' house, though somewhat smaller, so that it was suspended over the dining-room table instead of in the hall, but everything was, as he recalled, equally excessive.

He closed the door behind him, and walked up to the *bel étage*. He shivered at the sight of the empty rooms and the rectangular marks on the wallpaper left when the furniture had been taken away. He saw a mirror hanging orphaned amidst the bareness of the walls, since everything in relation to which it had been mounted was missing. He paced up and down the middle room, saw the leaded panes of stained glass in the doors, noticed that the light of a lantern reflected in the parquet despite the dust, and that the fireplace had a mantelpiece well worth examining. But he did not step closer to do so, though it seemed to him as if he needed to bring forward whatever it was that shimmered forth from the desolation of these rooms.

"There," he thought, looking toward the bay window, "the piano can go there." And he meant that very same instrument that had been at his command when he had begun his career in Berlin.

5

“He has come to a decision,” Frau Altenschul said.

The salon was so overcrowded that the guests had to stand in the entrance to the adjoining room, and it was a Thursday on which Frau Altenschul could triumphantly demonstrate to everyone how successful her efforts has been to bring together all those Jews, stripped of the life all too early that she so cherished, who now, and she referred repeatedly to Lewanski, gathered around her.

“He will give his first concert next weekend,” she said, and so much was quite obvious: This was an event that outshone everything else, including those habitual conversations so intensely held over tea or coffee.

There was talk of details. Some intended to celebrate Lewanski, who wanted to perform in the west wing of Charlottenburg Castle, and indeed so wildly that it would never again occur to him to desert to Prague or London. Here in Berlin, it was generally agreed, he had manifested his talent, here someone could answer for

his death, and here it should be allowed him to revoke his death, that injustice that had been done to him.

When the bell began to ring, as it did every Thursday fifteen minutes before midnight, no one took notice of it, or of the knocking either; indeed, although it was known who was down there asking to be let in, it was ignored in the hope that it would once again trail off, as was normally the case. But this time they were wrong. He stood in front of the entrance outside and remained persistent, although it was against Frau Altenschul's wish that he ever be received in her salon. The bell rang again and again until Frau Altenschul asked for silence.

"He can ring as much as he wants," she said. "It is of no significance. But I do not want him turning up if Lewanski plans to give his concert. Someone should once and for all make that clear to him."

With that she looked in the direction of the French doors dividing the room, and was clearly speaking with someone whose face was not recognizable because the door frame was hiding it, although his elegantly clad legs and patent leather shoes, whipping up and down, were discernable; as were his hands, including his fingers, which were ceaselessly occupied with a leather cigarette case, turning it over repeatedly in his hands. It was Schulze-Bethmann. He had written novellas of merit, fierce satires, and he was universally unloved, among the dead as well, although one could not but admire his ingenuity, of which he often, and at times inappropriately, made use.

At first no one knew with whom Frau Altenschul was speaking, since Schulze-Bethmann was making no attempt to reply. No one could understand either why Frau Altenschul had suddenly taken an interest in that person on the street, to

whom she otherwise paid no mind. But such incessant ringing and knocking had never happened before, and made everyone wish that someone would be audacious enough put a stop to it.

As Schulze-Bethmann walked down the steps, he saw a familiar shadow move past the grating at the hall window, and as he opened the door and stepped onto the sidewalk, that man who had just drawn so much attention to himself was on the other side of the street. He came to a halt once Schulze-Bethmann had caught sight of him, and now they sized each other up, he slowly pulling the riding whip held in his right hand through his clenched left fist, Schulze-Bethmann taking his cigarette case out of his pocket, and quietly helping himself.

As he lifted the cigarette from his etui to his mouth, noticing as his hands patted his jacket pockets that his lighter was missing, the other man was weaving his way hesitantly across the street toward him. He was in uniform and quite similar to the man who had been standing on the cast iron bridge the night Lewanski and Frau Altenschul went strolling through the Tiergarten, only this man was openly wearing all the insignia that the other had removed. As the uniformed man stepped nearer to him to offer him a light, Schulze-Bethmann saw the flame reflected in the silver death's head on his cap.

"You should remove this piece of metal," said Schulze-Bethmann, "now that you are in the same state you imposed upon us."

With that he drew on his cigarette, making the tip flame up, consuming a good quarter of the tobacco, and as he expelled from his pursed lips the smoke he had inhaled, the other man had difficulty moving his face out of the way.

What happened next was strange. Schulze-Bethmann wrapped his arm around the uniformed man and led him toward Wilhelmstraße, conversing quietly but forcefully with him. Frau Altenschul, who had stepped over to the window and observed this encounter, watched as the other man took off his cap while Schulze-Bethmann gesticulated uninterrupted with his left hand, and saw how he leaned his shoulder intimately toward Schulze-Bethmann. It was a sight that annoyed her. She thought about the hateful voices that claimed Schulze-Bethmann was so shameless as to enjoy conversing with his murderers, and it was difficult for her to ward off these thoughts as she watched them both, for they had now reached Wilhelmstraße and were standing before the angular, half-destroyed building, the sight of which was unbearable to her. She saw Schulze-Bethmann offer his hand to the uniformed man, who was stepping into the entrance, the other seizing it with a burst of obsequiousness somewhat too quickly, as if he wanted to reaffirm a pledge he had given Schulze-Bethmann. He clapped his cap back on and vanished.

When Schulze-Bethmann returned to the salon, he felt the tentativeness of the other guests, for although Frau Altenschul had shared what she had observed with no one, he had nonetheless been outside too long for a simple scolding of an unwelcome, uninvited guest. Schulze-Bethmann took it calmly, staying by Frau Altenschul's chair in the middle of the salon because he wanted to have a few words with her, but he kept silent, taking a cigarette from his etui, putting it in a silver holder, and, as he began to smoke, still not saying a word, when he noticed that his arrogant silence might annoy her were it to continue, he finally said:

“Everything is all right. No one will bother Lewanski.”

6

Frost set in the following week. The puddles left by the rain had frozen, and from the east, where three enormous smoke stacks towered above the Charlottenburg Castle complex, an icy wind blew, and a smell like burning sulfur hung in the air. Anyone who wants to walk into the park bordering the castle on the north or west after eight in the evening will find its wrought iron gates locked, and in November the oak trees, whose crowns reach leafless toward the sky, glitter, the light of the half moon reflected in their icy casing. The patches of water in front of the teahouse seem bottomless, but the silence necessary for this scenery of elm hedges, gravel walks, and monuments does not set in until midnight, when the nearby traffic abates and no more planes are to be heard.

It was around this time that Lewanski gave his first concert.

A room in the west wing of the castle had been arranged in such a way that it resembled a small concert hall, with only three hundred seats allowed, and the

platform on which the pianoforte stood, covered with a dark blue cloth, appeared so expansive that one could think Lewanski was on a stage. News of the event had spread, and all those who had not been invited but were curious enough to await the beginning of the concert crowded around the entrance, hoping that, after the doors had closed, they could at the very least watch from the window.

As the lights in the auditorium went down, Frau Altenschul stepped out in front of the platform and softly spoke a few words that were inaudible from the window, but the applause that broke out as she asked Lewanski to take his place at the piano, beckoning with her left arm, was loud and clear.

The silence that set in the moment after the applause abruptly ended lasted a long while, as all attention focused on the first notes from the piano. A shadow slipped away from an elm hedge, moved slowly toward the other side of the castle's wing, where the windows and doors stood without draperies, though unlighted, since the moon shone only on the south side of the castle, and as the first chords sounded an end to the silence, as Frau Altenschul finally relaxed her hands, pressed too tightly together, someone whose presence no one had wanted, and who, Schulze-Bethmann had claimed, would leave Lewanski alone, stood at one of the locked doors, gazing in the direction of the piano, but remaining out of sight. His eyes seemed to express sorrow, and as he brought his middle finger to his face with a hasty, inconspicuous gesture, one could have thought that he was trying to hide his emotion.

Lewanski played Beethoven's E-major Sonata Opus 109. Then three ballads by Chopin, and finally Anton Webern's *Variations for Solo Piano*. Frau Altenschul had trouble holding back her tears, and those seconds in which she took fright

because Lewanski paused, as if he wanted reconsider what had just emerged from beneath his hands, were interminable to her. She feared he would end his performance with an apologetic flourish, as he had done earlier in the salon, but no such thing occurred.

When he finally stood up, the pianist was obligated eight times by the tumultuous applause to sit down for an encore. People dispersed slowly, discussing the splendid event; limousines pulled up. Frau Altenschul, who had worried whether Lewanski would be acclaimed this way, could now be at ease. She could not shake off the impression the E-major Sonata had made on her, and she was surprised that someone asserted to her during the ride to Koenigsallee, where Lewanski planned to throw a small party: The Beethoven, yes, Pollini or perhaps another performer among the living could pull that off in a pinch, but what Lewanski had done with the Anton Webern...!

The column of cars following the vehicle in which Lewanski was riding was having trouble getting up the drive to the villa on the gravel path. Since the iron gate, still off its hinges and now blocking the entrance, stood in the way, the automobiles became wedged together, and Lewanski, just like all the others, could not open his door and get out. For a few moments indecision reigned, and panic-stricken faces could be seen, because the column had come to a standstill so suddenly and without explanation.

Once the unintended chaos had been resolved, Lewanski stood with flowers in his arms, and was not allowed to get past the staircase to the *bel étage*. He must have been pleased at being lifted up on people's shoulders as they formed a small procession for him. He was passed around like this repeatedly, always accompanied

by cheers, and the general high spirits made it appear as if these people came from a time when it was still common to celebrate the artist with such exuberance.

Later, when everyone had collected in the *bel étage*, the doors of which were open, champagne was poured. And everything was just as it had been fifty years earlier. Then, as now, Lewanski had stood next to a half column topped with a potted aralia, and then, as now, he was tempted to hide behind its leaves, for he felt embarrassed.

A half circle formed despite the jostling of the guests in the corridor, and Frau Altenschul took pains to protect the two- or three-step space between Lewanski and those who so enthusiastically wanted to toast him, and Schulze-Bethmann, who was going around filling the glasses, suddenly raised his own glass, since it seemed hopeless for him to provide champagne for all those who had come uninvited, and shouted:

“To undying genius! To the confidence to dare to live the life that was ended.”

This he exclaimed, and now, after all had helped themselves to champagne, canapés, and every little while more champagne, the mood reached a high point. People were becoming tipsy and talkative, and people were calling the evening a miracle, for Lewanski had succeeded in razing the border between life and death, so much so that everyone there who hailed the pianist urged him to show his virtuosity, even here on the piano standing half hidden in the bay window, so that all those who had been taken in their blossoming years could now likewise hope to make this undone.

Liebermann could be found watching the whole thing with his usual skepticism, all the while waiting to leave the villa again. Because of his age, guests paid court to him. For the younger among them, he provided evidence of how much time people must be given to be able to achieve fulfillment. Everyone decided to ignore the eighty-eighth year in which Liebermann died, and wanted to celebrate his ninetieth on the spot. That was out of the question for him. The blessing of being able to die should not be looked down upon, he said, simply because one was swindled out of life.

“But,” he added, “I was lucky. That has nothing to do with me.”

He graciously accepted their courtesies, and even when Frau Altenschul pulled him aside and urged him to drink more champagne, he patiently emptied his glass. He saw how agitated she was and what pains she was taking not to let him notice, but the reddish blotches on her forehead that she had tried in vain to cover with powder betrayed her emotions. When Lewanski stepped over to them, she hurried away, commenting that she needed to tend to her guests.

“Are you happy?” asked Liebermann, and Lewanski answered that neither in London nor Prague had he experienced such a degree of curiosity as to whether he could succeed in mastering the late Beethoven.

“I can’t say much about it,” said Liebermann, “but,” he added, “anyone who can move Frau Altenschul to tears has something of which he can be proud.”

“Indeed,” said Schulze-Bethmann, who had come up behind them, “you played inimitably.”

And since Lewanski winced at being addressed unexpectedly, Schulze-Bethmann lowered his voice, indeed was almost whispering as he smiled obligingly and said:

“You would also move your murderer to tears, supposing he were allowed to be present at one of your concerts. As for the late Beethoven, you’re still a little too young. I hope,” he said as he was turning away, “that you can succeed in adding the experience of your death to your youth.”

In the perplexity that now followed, Liebermann fixed his eyes upon Schulze-Bethmann, who was walking to an ice bucket to help himself to more champagne and said:

“I do not like that man. On the other hand: He is the only one who says anything that gives one something to think about. If only he weren’t so caustic.”

7

This happened in November. In mid-December Frau Altschul made an attempt to reach Lewanski on Koenigsallee, since, contrary to their agreement, he had not since set foot in her house on Voßstraße, but no matter how much attention she drew to herself she could find no one to open the gate for her, and the drawn curtains at the windows gave her the impression that Lewanski wished to remain undisturbed. Or had he abandoned the villa?

When she appeared again the following evening, everything was just as it had been the first time; no one wanted to open the gate for her, but she noticed a light burning in the bay window.

“I recognize such sudden impulses from my time in Holland,” said Liebermann. “He is ambitious, and no doubt practicing for his next concert.”

Frau Altschul allowed herself to relax, and those gathered in her salon wanted no further information. They were certain that it could only be beneficial to

the next concert if Lewanski wanted to prepare single-mindedly and, so it seemed, in absolute solitude.

New Year's Eve arrived. Frau Altenschul had her hands full preparing for the turn of the year, for it was a habit most dear to her to reflect at midnight on the past and entertain hopes for the year to come with a circle of pleasant acquaintances, even though this should not have made any difference to her. But she kept count of the years as she had in former times, and she paid it no mind that she was growing no older, that she had already remained half an eternity in this unchanging state.

She had baked a Berlin specialty, doughnuts with plum butter filling, and the salon was decorated with paper garlands and some Chinese lanterns, but in such a way that a certain reserve remained unmistakable, as was to be expected of her.

At nine o'clock in the evening—the table was already set—Liebermann appeared with a bouquet of white chrysanthemums, forty-eight in number.

“For the new year,” he said. “And,” he added, “would you be so kind as to allow me to leave shortly before midnight. You know I don't like the turn of the year. But until then, I will gladly do the honors for you.”

And so whenever the bell rang he walked down the stairway to open the door for the guests, making charming remarks as he helped the ladies out of their wraps.

When he saw a letter that Frau Altenschul had apparently overlooked lying on the windowsill, he asked Schulze-Bethmann, who, as always, was the last to arrive, to take it into the salon.

“Of course,” said Schulze-Bethmann. “And if you want to see something,” he added, “then go outside. Our neighbors,” he said, pointing his thumb over his shoulder to the northeast, “are greeting the new year in their own way.”

Liebermann did not understand this comment and stepped outside. The sky was cloudless, though it seemed strangely flat, creating a sense of confinement, and a sound as of grinding iron chains hung the air. Liebermann followed the noise that seemed to be coming from the northeast; he walked around the house, and he now observed a strange occurrence on that rectangle of leveled and bare earth stretching all the way to the Brandenburg Gate.

He saw a column of armored vehicles, similar to those that patrolled the Wall by day and, like those, had their headlights lit, wanting to proceed along their usual path, but a figure whose shadow loomed tall in the lights stood in the way, hindering any further movement. Who this figure was, Liebermann could not tell. He saw only that it was pointing to a mound of earth with arm outstretched, and that those who had been sitting in the vehicles now marched in the direction of this mound and vanished, one after the other, as if they were entering a stairway that led into the depths.

When Liebermann returned to the salon, the doughnuts were already being eaten, and Frau Altenschul excused herself with the remark that the guests and, above all, she herself had been unable to resist the savory aroma. She also bemoaned that Lewanski had not come, although she had sent him an invitation to her soiree, requesting his presence.

Everyone chatted with one another, standing in twos or in small groups; only Schulze-Bethmann appeared isolated, and it was unmistakable that Frau

Altenschul, circulating with a large tray of doughnuts, expressly avoided him. She asserted, somewhat too loudly and without being called upon to do so, how right her decision had been to return to this area, at a time when it was still generally avoided. Everyone agreed with her, although no one really knew why she so suddenly insisted upon this explanation, but she went on to describe how, in the beginning, she had sought out Liebermann on Pariser Platz to overcome the loneliness of the winter months, and as she said this, she stretched her hand toward Liebermann, who was standing near her; she did not resist when he gently touched it, as if to bring it to his lips.

“We were alone here for a long time,” said Liebermann, “but now the crowd just keeps growing larger and larger.” Everyone laughed.

Shortly before midnight, the party spilled out onto the terrace to watch the fireworks. The open rectangle in front of the Brandenburg Gate lay in uncanny silence, the colorful spheres climbing skyward illuminated the mound of earth, and Liebermann was quite astonished that he had never noticed this feature located on Wilhelmstraße, though he passed it every evening.

“What is that pile of earth?” he asked, and Schulze-Bethmann responded, trying not to let the others standing behind him hear:

“The Führer’s bunker. There is no fancier way to say it. He was buried, and now, although those who died in there were done away with, the whole thing looks like a sepulcher. But they also say,” he added, “that some of those whom we had to fear are still gathered down there.”

With that he left Liebermann alone and went through the open door back into the salon, where he began to smoke, examining the paintings on the wall as if he had never seen them before.

The guests on the terrace were enthralled by the colorful crackling that met everyone's eyes and ears from all sides, and Liebermann, too, still mulling over Schulze-Bethmann's remarks, was soon seized by the unadulterated mirth that seemed to be permeating the city so that, after Frau Altenschul took his arm and brought him back to the company of the others, he forgot all the thoughts that should have been troubling him.

A half hour later everyone was busy pouring lead. Frau Altenschul had provided a large bowl with water, and small metal figurines were handed out that started to melt after they had been exposed to a flame, and the bizarre images created when the liquid lead was dropped into the cold water gave rise to heated and exhilarating debate.

"I also had a few figurines sent to Lewanski," said Frau Altenschul. "I hope he is daft enough to follow suit."

Schulze-Bethmann pulled the letter trusted to him by Liebermann out of his breast pocket, handing it over to Frau Altenschul with the remark that she should forgive him, but he had kept far too long a message clearly intended for her.

Frau Altenschul took the letter as if she had been awaiting it urgently; the rustling that arose as she ripped open the envelope and hastily unfolded the sheet of paper was clearly audible, and now no one spoke as, in a flash, she took in the name of the sender.

“It is a message from Lewanski,” she said, flying through the lines before her, since it seemed impolite to ignore the rapt attention of the others. But the faster she read the more agitated she became, her facial expression changing to incredulous indignation.

“Frau Altenschul,” Lewanski wrote, “I feel deceived. How could I have promised you to stay in Berlin, and how can I rid myself of the company of a criminal whom you, to my astonishment, want to force upon me! He is still standing outside my window, barring me from leaving the villa. Perhaps it is all the same to you, but it had not been my intention to give a concert in the presence of that man we encountered in the Tiergarten.”

The rest was a bitter remonstrance against himself, particularly because, as was often the case, he had been unable to resist all attempts at persuasion.

All those present looked with shocked astonishment at the paper as Frau Altenschul’s hand sank to her side, and only Schulze-Bethmann was cocky enough to smile and reach into his jacket pocket for his etui, or so it seemed to Frau Altenschul.

“What in God’s name is this supposed to mean?”

“Do not take the whole matter so seriously. He will calm down,” answered Schulze-Bethmann, but her punishing glance prevented him from actually smoking the cigarette he had pushed between his lips.

No more than fifteen minutes later the guests had left the salon. Only Liebermann remained, a gesture Frau Altenschul accepted gratefully, since it had been his intention to be home before midnight, and now both could be seen sitting next to each other for a while on the settee, she speaking softly but insistently to

him, he quietly taking notice of her understandable indignation, now and then just nodding his head.

8

What had happened?

On the evening when Lewanski's concert had been fully celebrated, Schulze-Bethmann had bid his host adieu with a puzzling comment, namely:

"I wanted to let you know," these were his words, "that I have done everything to be ingratiating to Frau Altenschul. But the circle of those who admire you is larger than you would think. Do I have your permission," he had added, "for someone whom you moved to tears to tell you this in private?"

"But of course," Lewanski had answered, failing, however, to grasp the meaning of the words, and since he smiled, which could be interpreted as willing assent, Schulze-Bethmann thanked him and left.

At four in morning, before dawn, while he was standing at the window to cool his champagne-ravaged head, Lewanski saw a figure dart toward the portico of the villa from the darkness of the garage. He heard the door that he had left

unlocked being pushed open, a light, sheepish cough, the few hurried steps necessary to mount the stairs leading to the *bel étage*, and there stood the man Schulze-Bethmann had announced, whom, however, Lewanski would not have welcomed into his room for anything in the world. It was the same man who had tried to greet him and Frau Altenschul on the iron bridge as they went strolling through the Tiergarten, and Lewanski saw again that he was missing his insignia, and that the color of the material where the death's head had been removed from his cap stood out more forcefully, giving the impression of newness.

“What do you want?” asked Lewanski, groping for a chair as if he needed support.

“I came to tell you how very much your piano playing moved me. Yes, I want you to know...”

“Go!” Lewanski cried.

But the other man, who was used to being met with horror or disdain, though never with what he had actually wished—friendly, unbiased attention—wanted to explain and justify his appearance, wanted to tell him, Lewanski, that there was no reason to reject him so harshly. With that he moved closer to Lewanski and, because he was having difficulty putting his intention into words as rapidly as the situation called for, he reached out his hands toward Lewanski with an embarrassed, almost imploring smile, as if to reassure him.

Lewanski let out a scream and fled to the farthest corner of the room, hurling whatever he could seize hold of in the excitement of the moment—note paper, bottles, plates, cutlery—at the man who so sincerely admired him.

‘He wants to touch me,’ he thought. ‘How can I stop him from touching me?’

And he noticed that the intruder was standing there baffled, making no attempt to dodge the objects.

Then, when Lewanski suddenly stood still, expecting the other man, whom he had so fiercely attacked, to set upon him in turn, the uniformed man turned away from him and stepped over to the mirror fastened above the mantelpiece. He contemplated his face, the right side of which, thanks to Lewanski, had begun to bleed from the temple, and pulled out a handkerchief to dab at it.

For a few moments, indecision reigned, and Lewanski struggled with a feeling of remorse, for it occurred to him that he had broken his word. Had he not reached an agreement with Schulze-Bethmann to receive this man here as a guest? And did he have the right to confront him like this, merely because he had completely misunderstood everything?

But his horror prevailed, and he was happy when the other man finally turned away from the mirror, removing the peaked cap from beneath his right arm and heading toward the corridor door. He turned once more before he vanished, looked in the direction of the piano, and said:

“It is my sincere wish that you might succeed in becoming incomparable on this instrument. Yes, you should know that I will be redeemed only when my guilt is rendered insignificant by your mastery.”

Lewanski went to the piano, closed the lid over the keys, put the scores in order, as if he were belatedly safeguarding everything to which the uniformed man had pointed. Finally, when he could assume that he was alone again, when he had bolted the front door, the corridor, the door to the *bel étage*, when his breathing had calmed down, he positioned himself behind the curtains of the bay window and

watched the gravel path leading to the gate where, however, the stranger refused to appear.

This had happened, and the pianist had not left his villa since, and Frau Altenschul, unaware of all this, had come under suspicion of being involved in a double game.

She wanted clarity. The very next morning she walked to Koenigsallee. It was sunny but cold outside; banks of snow were piled up along the sidewalks. It irritated her to have to slip and slide through the slush and ice along the path others had made, and, for that reason, by the time she set foot in the portico she was unable to subdue her bad temper, her impatience, which had become full-blown annoyance. She refrained from glancing up at the curtains to see if they were still drawn; she wanted to draw attention to herself without further ado, but she found the door open a crack. She entered. A lingering scent of perfume met her from the dark, overheated hall. But from the *bel étage*, where a few weeks earlier the festivities had taken place, a shaft of light fell onto the stairway, bright enough to show the way up the steps, and a chord could be heard being struck, the same chord over and over again on the piano.

The *bel étage* offered a sight of utmost disorder, indeed slovenliness: The large dining table shoved into the corner, boxes of rusks and cookies lay torn open everywhere, on chairs and tops of dressers stood cups and glasses from which tea or coffee had been drunk, with sugar scattered in between. The aralia on the half column had withered, the curtains were hiked up and spread across the window seat, the shade of the lamp that was the source of the light was covered with a table cloth,

the piano in the window niche was almost unrecognizable under the piles of clothing and notebooks. At the keyboard sat Lewanski.

With utmost concentration he stared at the keys, seeming to want to achieve something by force that absolutely resisted him, his hair falling over the open collar of his shirt, his gaunt cheeks unshaven, the circles around his eyes so dark that they appeared to vanish into hollows, the glasses surrounding them with gleaming gold frames seeming so incongruous that they gave his bleary-eyed face a spectral quality. He did not notice that Frau Altenschul had entered the room and was witnessing his torment, his artistic obstinacy that threatened to consume him.

When he finally looked up and discovered Frau Altenschul, he instantly cringed, and the horrified face he made, as if her gaze were fearsome, alarmed her.

“For Heaven’s sake, what’s wrong?” she said, coming the few steps to the piano.

He stood up and kissed her hand, and as he did so, she noticed that he was in shirtsleeves.

“What’s wrong?” she repeated, but instead of answering, he hesitantly adjusted a chair, picking up the cups that stood on it, and as he went to the kitchen to fetch her, as he asserted, an exquisite vermouth, she once more surveyed the battlefield in which he had been working for so long, just as she had believed.

‘He is sleepless with ambition,’ she thought, ‘and he unremittingly does whatever his passion prompts.’

But she now thought about the letter, Lewanski’s letter, and as she pulled the envelope out of her coat pocket, she paused to consider whether it would be better to leave the matter unspoken.

Lewanski returned with the bottle of vermouth. She insisted that never before in her life had she drunk wine before noon, and with that she took his hand and urged him to set down the tray with the vermouth and glasses.

He should take a seat, she pleaded. He refused, pointing out the fact that he was without a jacket, his sleeves rolled up... But she absolutely wanted him to appear less distant, just as he was.

"How have you been faring?"

He answered evasively, avoiding any mention of the encounter with the uniformed man. He had been practicing the piano, he answered, day and night.

"Be patient with yourself," she said.

He smiled wearily and answered that the pain he inflicted upon himself was, unfortunately, unavoidable. It was a particular phrase, a particular expression with the stroke of his right hand. When he could manage that, he said, he would be ready to give a new concert.

She did not understand what he meant. He went back to the piano and began to play, only to break off with that very chord she had heard as she was mounting the stairs, as if it were a barrier, and she did not know why this should be necessary, or whether he had become a victim of his nerves.

"I do not know," she said, "where all of this will lead."

"Just listen," he called, once again striking the chord, the same chord over and over again, "can't you hear how impossible that is?"

"Even if you are not pleased with it," she said, "I have difficulty holding back my tears when you play."

He felt ashamed, closed the lid over the keys and, to avoid giving the

impression of vanity, did not want to continue the discussion. He went to the tray, poured vermouth into a glass and, as if to excuse himself, held it out toward Frau Altenschul before drinking. He then straightened his shirt, put on his jacket, and when he finally sat down near her, he took in the letter and the fact that she was still wearing her jacket. She said:

“Who had frightened you so much? Where is he? And how could you think that I had deceived you?”

He remained silent, staring at her with sleepless eyes.

“What time of day is it?” he asked.

“Afternoon.”

“And is the sun out?”

“Yes.”

“Would you by any chance like to go for a drive with me? I need to leave the piano, this curtained gloom that has held me prisoner for so long, to finally see daylight.”

Without a further word of explanation he offered her his arm, after he had draped a large, woolen shawl over her shoulders, and led her out across the gravel pathway.

Shortly thereafter, Frau Altenschul was sitting with Lewanski in that very automobile made by Adler he had admired months before in the garage of the villa. She had difficulty taking the exuberance with which he drove that car, his youthful abandon, at all seriously, and since she had never driven in a vehicle capable of such speeds, she had to hold onto the handle of her door to avoid becoming dizzy.

“Look,” he shouted, “how everything is shining,” and he pointed to the

roadside trees covered in hoarfrost.

She felt the letter in her pocket, noticing that, since her jacket was askew, she was sitting on it. But as Lewanski placed so little worth on lucid conversation and was still stubbornly reticent about the letter she wanted to discuss, she decided to forget her intentions, at least for as long as the drive lasted.

They left the city and drove along Heerstraße. The sun was about to vanish behind the treetops; he hummed away to himself, the pallor of his face had vanished, and his ears burned with excitement.

He was warm. He wanted to know whether he might open the window. She sat upright, firmly resolving to overcome the slight nausea the ride had abruptly caused so as not to spoil his fun.

“But of course,” she said, “We both have shawls.”

And so he opened his window, not just a crack, but as wide as the crank could be turned, and now the wind whistled between them as if they were sitting in an open coach, making the light shawl Frau Altenschul wore flap against the tonneau. She had to laugh at so much light-heartedness and youthful caprice, but it was pleasant for her to embark on such an adventure, and she did not let the feeling of being on an escapade like this pass.

He drove faster and faster.

“If it unnerves you,” he said, but in an enthusiastic tone of voice that she would not have dared to contradict, “we can slow down. You see,” he said, “when I was still alive, I would have loved to drive such a car.”

“But you get to drive it anyway,” she answered.

Then, after they had left Heerstraße behind them and reached the Havel

canal and the citadel in Spandau, and after he had had his fill of pressing down the gas to the howl of the engine, they drove slower. Both looked at the beam from the headlights Lewanski had turned on, and since the twilight was still bright enough, a strange, yellow glow appeared, like a clear haze, that lit their way. In the Spandau forest the road became narrower; they drove straight as a die, shrouded by the crowns of the trees, and there, where a concrete wall obstructed further travel, they saw the sky again.

Frau Altenschul affirmed how pleasant she found it to slowly glide along like this and said she would linger forever in this narrowness, the twilight glowing before her eyes; she felt as if she were alive. He agreed, but insisted that this feeling required much agitation to affect him.

“And the agony of discontent,” he added, “whenever I play before a public I love but, at the same time, have to fear.”

“And now you have life ahead of you,” she said. “You will give countless concerts.”

He smiled, decided to ignore the wall blocking the way, and continued to drive out into the Mark landscape.

The view expanded. They drove through farmland, passed the Havel Canal, then a small town, and deciphered the inscription SCHÖNWALDE on one of the street signs.

She wanted to know if Neuruppin were nearby.

That, he believed, would be another hour’s drive, but he would, if she wanted, drive as far as Fehrbellin to see the Rhin marshes.

She declined, and when he assured her, so as not to let the slightest

disappointment spring up, that he would gladly drive to Neuruppin, she answered: It is not worth the effort, it is a town like every other. She had been born there.

This annoyed him. Since he could only envisage her death, her birth seemed like a legend to him. 'And yet,' he thought, 'it must have been this event that is the source of all our trouble.'

Lewanski pulled up in front of a thick grove of young pines, saying that he would like to go for a short walk through them. She agreed, and now both went along a snow-covered path, holding each other's hands without giving it much thought, and Lewanski tried to keep Frau Altenschul from stumbling on the uneven and hidden ground.

They reached a clearing where felled trees had been trimmed and stacked. It smelled of resin, and to their right amid a larch copse they discovered some ruins. They stepped closer and recognized the remnants of a small village chapel, were astonished that it stood in such solitude, and when they stepped inside through the entrance overgrown with blackberry bushes, Frau Altenschul noticed, amid the tangle of scattered roof tiles and rafters, an oblong stone on which someone had chiseled the image of the crucified Christ. The feet and a portion of the head with the crown of thorns were missing, though the eyes remained, but even these were only suggested, for the rain had washed them away.

"You see," said Frau Altenschul, "I have never liked religions. But this man here," she said, pointing at the weathered stone, "has something true about him. They say he was God's son. He wanted to redeem humanity. They crucified him."

They considered the effigy for a while. Lewanski shuddered at the thought of being killed in such a painful way, hoisted up high for all to see, and he remembered

his own death, which had descended upon him suddenly and unawares. He was seized at the railroad station in Litzmannstadt and taken to a small room, where, having scarcely been able to supply the information demanded of him, he felt a blow on his neck and collapsed, shot dead. Only when he saw the boots above him step away to avoid touching him and the hasty and contemptuous gestures with which he was tossed onto a truck bed, did he feel, for the first time, excluded in a humiliating way once and for all from the living.

‘And at that moment,’ he thought, ‘how I would have wished to be not a man, but the Son of God.’

They wandered about the ruins a good fifteen minutes before going back to the car. Frau Altenschul, who had noticed that Lewanski had become pensive, mentioned the letter once more, apologizing for its condition—it was crumpled because she had been sitting on it. She insisted that this had happened only because he had sprung his decision upon her to go for a drive so suddenly.

On the return trip, which passed rather silently and with no hint of high spirits—the windows now closed—Lewanski suddenly took Frau Altenschul’s hand, drew it to his lips and said:

“Of course you’re right. Before one can feel deprived of all hope, one should at least give it another try.”

And he spoke about how her comment that she had been born in Neuruppin had reminded him: That birth, not death, is the event to which we are forever bound.

He said this, and with emphatic energy.

When they had once again reached Koenigsallee, they were tired and after all the impressions from this outing wanted to be alone. He accompanied her to

Voßstraße, and she stood for a moment before she could decide to go into the house, as if at a loss, as if she expected him to have something more to say, and he too remained silent, not knowing how he should take leave of her.

And so they looked like a shy couple who wanted to come closer to each other but lacked the courage to do so, and they let the resulting bewilderment remain. When she extended her hand to him and said, “You *will* try to go a little easier on yourself, won’t you?” he had no time to answer, so quickly had she vanished behind the door she had opened with a shove of her shoulder.

9

The E-major Sonata, Opus 109—now that, of course, is a piece of music that cannot deny its proximity to the *Missa Solemnis*.

Lewanski knew that Beethoven had jotted down the notes on the first movement while sketching out the *Gloria* and the *Credo*, though, since Lewanski was not familiar with the *Missa Solemnis*, he paid no attention to the relationship whatsoever. He felt drawn to the soft, lyrical character of this sonata, followed all the directions with utmost sensitivity, yet he felt there was something there that eluded his comprehension. He thought about Schulze-Bethmann and his remark that he, Lewanski, was too young for the late Beethoven, and about his recommendation that he add his the experience of death to his youth.

This remark mystified him. How could that incessant fear of being discovered, that short exchange in the railroad station in Litzmannstadt that had shattered all hope, and that blow to the neck that had come so unexpectedly that he

could not even have feared it—how should all this be of any benefit to the *andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*?

The first two movements—fine; with them he was fairly satisfied. But the *Variationsfinale!* He began the *mezza voce* again and again, made it more voluptuous, even more so, took it back, began the first variation with an intimate fervor that could almost be called excessive, and here, too, he took everything back, began the second variation, now intensifying whatever mood he had achieved to the point of bursting, then pushing beyond that to rein it in once more. He played the *allegro vivace* impatiently until he reached *piacevole* of the fourth variation, where, step by step, he intensified to *il piu forte*. With that he achieved such a pitch of excitement, playing the *allegro* in the fifth variation so swiftly, that he began to pant, and such was his jubilation that he would almost have been able to sing along with the final variation.

But at this point he regularly broke off, for what should have followed seemed unattainable to him. After he had become so enraptured and could no longer transcend the pinnacle of feeling, he was supposed to, after a short, deceptive silence, once more surpass himself and launch into a storm of trills lasting over two pages. The *cantabile* was then to resume once more, as if the heavenly firmament had finally burst open after so much violence.

He had whisked through the sixth variation in Charlottenburg Castle, acting as though, once he had done his utmost, he could let the sonata drift pleasantly to a close. But it made him uneasy. He sensed that everything on the last three pages was turning out hollow, yet he didn't know how to change this, insisting, however, upon his refusal to play Beethoven again until he no longer needed to be ashamed.

“What can I do to relieve you of this illusion?” asked Frau Altenschul, and he replied by asking whether it would be possible to speak with Herr Schulze-Bethmann sometime, undisturbed.

“Why?” she said. “How do you think this cynic can help you? I do not wish to speak ill of him,” she added, “but he sees things in a way that cannot please you.”

In order to set her at ease, he assured her that he would give another concert before Passover, but insisted that she give him Schulze-Bethmann’s address.

“I will go,” he said, “only if I believe that he can help me.”

With that, Frau Altenschul was satisfied.

Schulze-Bethmann lived in a wood-frame house near the Charité, which, strangely enough, was still standing between two rows of apartment houses. A colony of summer cottages had clearly once stood here and later been demolished, yet the allotment gardens with their fruit trees had been left untouched, and now, as he closed a rusted gate behind him, Lewanski stepped onto a narrow path bordered with stones that led straight to a veranda. This was the entrance to a summer house that had been faced with ugly brick. The beams supporting the roof and protruding well beyond the wall were lovingly turned, as was the woodwork of the veranda, which had been enclosed with glass.

“I beg your pardon,” said Schulze-Bethmann, “for inviting you to such an area, and in particular to such an abode, but I love this makeshift arrangement, since I cannot yet resolve, as Frau Altenschul keeps urging, to take up residence once again in Berlin.”

He had already stepped onto the veranda before Lewanski could ring the doorbell, overlooked the hand Lewanski extended toward him, and led him into the

vestibule; as he handed over his coat and white silk scarf to Schulze-Bethmann, Lewanski noticed that his host was wearing a kippah, and while he was trying to suppress his astonishment, which seemed improper to him, Schulze-Bethmann had already removed it.

“Do not be surprised,” he said, “you will find certain fetishes in my library, too,” and, after opening the door to a whitewashed room, letting Lewanski enter ahead of him, he pointed to a block of stone standing near the window. It was the segment of a façade depicting a lion’s head, which had cracked in the middle and had been repaired, and on top of it, half charred but still recognizable, lay a Torah.

“A chance find,” said Schulze-Bethmann, “from a stroll through Oranienburger Straße. Perhaps you know that a synagogue once stood there. I have never felt Jewish, but fate sends certain things our way.”

Then, after they had agreed to drink neither tea nor any other sort of beverage, but instead simply to sit and talk, Schulze-Bethmann sat down across from Lewanski in a wicker chair, asked, while lighting a cigarette, whether it would be permissible to smoke, crossed his legs, and fixed his gaze on his guest, meanwhile raising his eyebrows, as if he wanted to prompt Lewanski to explain the reasons for his visit.

“You received my card?”

“Yes,” said Schulze-Bethmann, “I received your card.”

“Well,” said Lewanski, “I do not want to bother you.”

So as not to regret his decision, he had resolved to limit this visit to one single question, namely:

“I would like to know,” he said, “why I, in order to play the late Beethoven, should add the experience of death to my youth. You remember your remark?” he added.

“But of course,” Schulze-Bethmann answered.

Lewanski felt the silence that ensued as a test. He thought he noticed that Schulze-Bethmann was secretly enjoying himself; at the very least it was unmistakable that he had begun to scrutinize him more openly and with a touch of irony.

‘Now,’ thought Lewanski, ‘everything is just as Frau Altschul predicted.’ He had a mind to cut the dialogue short there, was about to stand up to leave the room with an apologetic flourish meant to come off as short and amiable, but: ‘Perhaps that man who strikes you as so unapproachable and cynical,’ he thought, ‘has something to tell you.’

He remained sitting, and in this tense silence, quite unexpectedly, Lewanski began to explain himself.

He was, he said, body and soul an artist, but in no way vain enough to appear in public when his self-respect forbade it. He had not simply been looking for applause or a renowned career; he had very much hoped to make what he played on the piano comprehensible to others. This had been, he clearly recalled, his bliss before he had been swept from life to death: to let the emotion of such great composers as Chopin or Beethoven or Schumann be felt by himself and others.

“Of course,” he said, “the city of Berlin does not exactly inspire me to try this. I initially refused to take up in residence in these parts, and there are certainly

reasons to oppose Frau Altenschul's intentions, but for the sake of my capabilities," he added, "I decided otherwise."

He spoke in a low voice, as if to himself, and Schulze-Bethmann, who had been staring out into his garden for a while, finally turned his attention, as if apologetically, toward his guest and remarked with a smile:

"And now you are having trouble making yourself broadly understood with the E-major Sonata."

"Tell me," Lewanski answered, "whether I have enough talent to bend this sonata to my will, though I have already failed once."

"You will remain twenty-eight years old," said Schulze-Bethmann, "for all eternity. It may be true," he added, "that your murderer deprived you not only of your life, but also of the experience of death."

With that he stuck the rest of his cigarette into the silver tip he held between thumb and forefinger, taking one, two powerful drags that extinguished the remaining glow.

"How can you contend that I did not experience my death?"

"You suffered it," Schulze-Bethmann said. "Before your death, were you so despairing of life that you needed to ask a higher power to take pity on you? Kyrie eleison! That, you see, is the despairing call of those who are satisfied with life and yearn for redemption. A person need not be dying to have the experience of death that creates spiritual songs, or more modest works like Beethoven's E-major Sonata, Opus 109."

Lewanski looked fixedly at the man opposite him, noticing that his face was gaunt and that his parted hair glistened, as if Schulze-Bethmann used pomade. The

narrow lips, the corners of the mouth that turned downward condescendingly, the striking, delicate, arched eyebrows that, in contrast to his gray temples, were deep black, as if dyed, and then—the eyes. They appeared melancholy; they seemed inconsistent with this man's harshness.

And once again Schulze-Bethmann stared off into the garden, and it seemed to Lewanski that someone whose presence he had overlooked had stepped onto the veranda. Schulze-Bethmann rose to his feet, left the room; Lewanski heard a few words of salutation, observing through the half-closed door that someone else was there, who in the depths of the narrow corridor was speaking quietly with Schulze-Bethmann, as if he wished to remain unseen. Lewanski noticed his hands gesturing forcefully and recognized, when Schulze-Bethmann stepped to one side and allowed his guest to be seen, the face of the uniformed man against whom he had lashed out.

"I beg your pardon," said Schulze-Bethmann when he returned to the room, "I have a guest who will alarm you."

"Why," Lewanski answered, incapable of appearing impolite, "do you show no consideration for me?"

He stood up, looked towards the corridor, and now the other man stepped inside.

"You are, I hear, acquainted with one another," said Schulze-Bethmann.

The uniformed man smiled, removing his peaked cap, clamping it under his arm, and when Schulze-Bethmann invited the man to take a seat near him, it was clear that he had difficulty making himself do so.

When they were finally seated together, separated by a small tea table, Lewanski was mystified as to why he put up with this so calmly, indeed with a touch

of resigned composure. He noticed how flaxen the uniformed man's hair was, and that there was sticking plaster beneath his temple, where Lewanski had injured him.

Schulze-Bethmann continued to smoke, staring at the tips of his patent leather shoes as they whipped up and down. The uniformed man occasionally cleared his throat, and since this tense silence could not last any longer without becoming awkward, Schulze-Bethmann finally said:

"I believe that we should show no false consideration. This," and with that he pointed his right hand toward to uniformed man, "is Hauptsturmführer Klevenow. I do not want to conceal from you that I am in the habit of receiving my murderer."

And now he spoke about how Herr Klevenow had, with the best of intentions, very quickly strangled him with a rope near a stand of birches. He said this without a trace of irony. In life, he added, everything happens with the best of intentions, even strangling; to be sure, it was Herr Klevenow's opinion that a Jew needed to be dealt with in such a manner. In this regard, he continued as he resisted touching the man's arm in a friendly gesture, one had to feel sincerely sorry for Herr Klevenow. He had wanted to improve humanity, though now found himself labeled a common killer. It was not insignificant, Schulze-Bethmann said, as if to be more cordial to his killer, who had turned pale as death, that Herr Klevenow had removed those insignia denoting his arrogant intention once he himself had had to die, and that he wished this to be recognized as a confession of his guilt. For the murderer had to realize, at the latest after he himself had entered the state of death, that his deed had been senseless, and that he might just as well have refrained. And that this, he added with utmost sincerity, struggling to keep his eyes, which had lost all of their luster, fixed on the tips of his shoes, this, he repeated, never happens so long as

we are still breathing, that in good health and with the best of intentions all we ever do is hate, humiliate, torture, kill, that, even when we behave kindly toward one another we never succeed in offering a semblance of justification for our existence... "This," said Schulze-Bethmann, "is what I call the insanity of life, and you will realize that I have no great desire to repeat in death such a condition when it had been untimely taken from me."

"Then why do you visit Frau Altenschul?"

"To intensify my distaste."

But now the uniformed man spoke; his face, after its initial pallor, began to redden with zeal, and his ears in particular glowed as he said:

He had to, with all due respect, emphatically contradict Schulze-Bethmann. It was well known that, as a writer of novellas, he had recognized only life's bleaker side, and the calm way in which he faced his death for which he, Lutz Klevenow, was responsible defied his comprehension. For life, he continued, leaning across the table toward Lewanski, was indeed something singular, irretrievable, and no one had the right to cut short, either for himself or others, an already fleeting stretch of time—a time, he had to admit, that he himself had enjoyed exceedingly. Yes, he had enjoyed living, he repeated over and over again, and he could understand why Lewanski, to whose talent, to whose very exceptionality he himself could never measure up, would attempt to retrieve life—well, what is more magnificent than life—in death. And for this reason, Klevenow assured him, he and his comrades would support the efforts of Frau Altenschul, full of good will and persistent interest. He had been knocking at the door to the villa on Voßstraße for years to emphasize this interest, unfortunately to no avail. Yes, if only it were allowed him or his comrade just once

to say a few words to those Jews toward whom they bore such guilt, he would say: Whoever succeeded in reversing that violent revocation of his life would also redeem his murderer!

"Sir, you must understand!" he cried. "When you sit at your piano and play so inimitably, when you move me and others to tears, how could I not hope that you might again conjure up all the art stolen from you and, in so doing, make the injustice done to you entirely insignificant!"

Lewanski noticed that the sticking plaster on Klevenow's cheek was beginning to come loose, and that a small, barely noticeable trickle was running down his cheek, and that he had pulled out his handkerchief in an effort to hold the plaster in place over the wound.

No one spoke, and this lasted until Klevenow again fell silent, stood up and walked over to the window, and since this was the only opening that gave the room light, the contours of his silhouette seemed particularly pronounced; he had the sun in his face, and stood there motionless, an alien sight.

"Were I a pianist," Schulze-Bethmann said, but softly, so that only Lewanski could understand his words, "I could think of an audience for whom it would be worthwhile to play again."

"What do you mean?" asked Lewanski.

"The earth," answered Schulze-Bethmann, "over which we walk to get to our new friend, Frau Altenschul, hides unspeakable things. I hope you can intuit what I am speaking of. Near that palace that was destroyed but is still frequented by figures like him," he added, pointing with the thumb of his right hand over his shoulder toward the window, "there is a large tomb, and it is said that deep beneath it, in the

Brandenburg sands, all those whom we had to fear are gathered, waiting as penitents for their redemption."

Lewanski recoiled in horror, and Schulze-Bethmann, who realized that he had gone too far with this comment, said:

"I can certainly see that a brilliant young man would hope to bring his passion for the piano to mastery and maturity. Nonetheless: Is it not so that the normal concertgoer becomes bored now and then, and that the artists of the world want to offer more than mere virtuosity? But," and now he turned to his other guest, the uniformed man, "I do not want to coerce you. Everyone does what he considers proper. Perhaps you should first obtain the score for the *Missa Solemnis* so as to understand the E-major Sonata in the spirit of melancholy."

When Lewanski had bid his host adieu and had left the path past the fruit trees behind him, he looked back at the garden once more before closing the gate, and it seemed to him that Klevenow and Schulze-Bethmann had stepped out onto the veranda. He heard a few words called after him, perhaps of encouragement, yet it was all so vague and unclear, and the veranda, hidden by the trees, eluded his gaze.

'The ground over which we walk to reach our new friend, Frau Altenschul, hides unspeakable things,' thought Lewanski, and when he returned to Koenigsallee he could not bear the glow of the lamp he had forgotten to extinguish, and the sun shining through the curtains with a vernal glare pained him. So he sat awhile in an armchair near the half-column, failing to notice how hopelessly withered the aralia was—its leaves had become strangely blackish-yellow—and he longed for a season that would match his dejected mood.

He wanted to share with Frau Altenschul what he had experienced that

afternoon, but he doubted whether it would be advisable to stoke her obvious mistrust of Schulze-Bethmann. And was it not conceivable that Schulze-Bethmann had unintentionally, in the spirit of familiar, high-spirited intimacy, let himself get carried away to those remarks.

He leafed through the score of the *Missa Solemnis* that he had bought on Oranienburger Straße, wanted to read through it, to the extent that the twilight prevailing in the room allowed, but could not grasp the significance of what he had before him, felt driven to pace up and down the room to render his increasing uneasiness tolerable. He attempted to remember what he had gained as an artist—a criterion he always applied—from his visit to that area near the Charité, which he had requested, after all. He could not say. Instead he grew suspicious that the presence of the uniformed man and Schulze-Bethmann's remarks were intended in some uncanny, nefarious way to seduce him into desiring something of which he could not possibly approve.

'The ground over which we walk to reach our new friend, Frau Altenschul, hides unspeakable things,' he repeated, and since he could not tame his restlessness, and feared the thoughts besieging him, he left the villa once more. An hour later he was standing before an astonished Liebermann, and allowed himself, without further ado, to be invited into his studio.

10

"Well," Liebermann said as he removed his pince-nez and fell silent, as if he wanted to reexamine what he had just heard. "It is, of course," he said, "well intended, and the significance of Klevenow's presence is unmistakable."

Lewanski stared at the Chinese porcelain vase that was obstructing his view across the table. Liebermann offered him a liqueur, and when Lewanski made no attempt to take it, he placed the glass next to the vase, stepped over to the studio's high window, and gazed out into the darkness.

"Of course," he added after a while, "the man (and with that he meant Schulze-Bethmann) sets little store by that which we commonly called life. There are people who place all the blame only upon the living, and perhaps he regrets his violent end less than those whose company he seeks out."

"He wishes to reach an understanding with his murderer," said Lewanski.

"This is, I admit, a bold thought," replied Liebermann, "but his intentions are

conciliatory," and when he saw how uncomprehendingly, indeed helplessly, Lewanski returned his gaze, he said, "I do not like him either, but would you deny the man his own opinion on the state of death?"

He sat down on a garden chair and contemplated a self-portrait he was painting; in the tall mirror propped on an easel, Lewanski saw Liebermann's face, which received sufficient light from the nearby lamp and the pale reflection of the sky falling through the studio window. He saw the bald head, the shaved neck, the forceful nose curving down to the walrus moustache, the searching solemnity of his eyes, and those two lines that extended from the root of his nose across his forehead, lending his aristocratic appearance a somewhat troubled aspect.

He grew calmer, and took no offense at his host's inattentiveness, because it pleased him that Liebermann was suddenly and unreservedly preoccupied with his art, showing no concern for pleasantries.

'Such a capacity for self-infatuation,' Lewanski thought, 'sitting in front of a mirror, absorbed in one's own appearance!' He had always admired this about painters.

Liebermann picked up a small brush and began dabbing at the canvas before which he sat, giving the straw hat he had placed on his likeness a little more yellow, and it now occurred to Lewanski that, just like that pensive, awe-inspiring old man, he, too, had the right to do things that served only to enhance his sense of self.

"It is impossible," he said. "No one will force me to perform before an audience that has incurred guilt in the way this one has."

"Nor is anyone asking that of you, either," answered Liebermann. "You mentioned that you had similarly intolerable encounters out on your strolls. I would

nevertheless be sorry if Schulze-Bethmann were to be thoroughly misunderstood simply because he is capable of confronting life's abysses more magnanimously than others."

With that he rose to his feet, began to clean his brush with a linen rag, walked to the table, and picked up his glass of liqueur, which he had left untouched, since Lewanski too had not been drinking.

"They say," he said, "that in death we are all equal, and one who receives his murderer in order to forgive him, well... Why should we hold onto that feature of the living, whose intolerance knows no bounds?"

"Would you offer this same explanation to Frau Altenschul?"

"Not a word!" cried Liebermann. "Not a single word! And I would like to ask that you keep your experience of this afternoon to yourself."

His sudden fervor betrayed how very dear Frau Altenschul's peace of mind was to his heart. He insisted that there were people for whom it was not the violent nature of their death that was utterly intolerable, but rather the circumstances under which it had occurred.

"I want to spare you the explanation," he added, "of that disgust Frau Altenschul felt at being tossed unclothed into a ditch, possibly amid laughter. Dying is the final and most sublime form of our existence, and you can imagine how much effort Frau Altenschul, so devoted to the beautiful things in life, has had to expend on forgetting her wretched end."

He drank his liqueur like a man forced to choke down something bitter, then walked slowly to the farthest corner of the studio. He stood for a few moments before a leather chair with turned arms, as if he could not decide whether he should

take a seat, but when he nonetheless did so, sitting bolt upright, his legs crossed, his right arm on his knees, his left on the back of the chair, he presented a picture of utmost dismay.

“You will keep your promise, won’t you? You will give another concert, at the latest by Easter?”

“But of course,” answered Lewanski.

“You know that you are Frau Altenschul’s only hope. If the thought of making up for life in death has any meaning, you can fulfill it. And you must admit that, at the very least, one must be thankful to Frau Altenschul for showing solicitude for your talent, of which you were robbed, in such a particular way.”

“But of course,” answered Lewanski.

When Liebermann accompanied his guest to the door and inquired with a touch of persistence about the music with which Lewanski was currently occupied, and whether it would be conceivable to make use of the Alte Philharmonie for the next undertaking, Lewanski, who had already stepped out onto the street, found it difficult not to become annoyed at such insistent questioning.

“Never mind that,” he said a little too brusquely. “I am off to collect experience for the late Beethoven.”

As he was crossing the street, Lewanski noticed that Liebermann remained standing at his front door, evidently worried because, instead of going by way of Wilhelmstraße, he had walked through some shrubbery and onto the open field beyond.

The sky was clear, and he looked across Voßstraße to Frau Altenschul’s villa, noticing that one park merged into another, almost all the way to Bellevuestraße,

and he was surprised that he had never before noticed this cluster of grand buildings. Or had they been reconstructed since Frau Altenschul had taken up residence again?

From the west, where an overwhelmingly high wall blocked the entrance to the Tiergarten, an armored vehicle, its headlights on high beam, drove toward him, forcing him to step out of its path; and now he found himself unexpectedly in front of that mound of earth, its silhouette looming unreal and daunting, which, strangely enough, had been constructed in the middle of a painstakingly leveled square. The earth that lay heaped up here glistened with moisture; there was no trace whatsoever of grass or weeds, just the impression of timeless freshness.

Lewanski was startled when the armored vehicle, evidently one of the routine patrols, suddenly changed direction and looped back toward the pile of earth; its headlights cast Lewanski's shadow upon a fragment of a wall that had remained hidden from him. He stepped back a few paces, intending to remain undiscovered.

The vehicle came to a halt; armed men climbed out and shone their flashlights on the mound of earth as if they had noticed something suspicious. Lewanski could see the gleam of their helmets, and noticed the trouble they were taking to avoid that half-collapsed entryway in which he was standing. They traced large circles with their flashlights no more than three steps from him, and it seemed to him that he was standing between marble columns with a frieze above them, but everything was so covered with moisture and lime that he could not tell whether he was mistaken.

When the uniformed men mounted their armored vehicle once more and departed, their engine roaring, he saw nothing but earth and remnants of brick overgrown with moss, but he felt something like warmth on his neck, and noticed that an abyss yawned before him, and when the light breeze blowing in a northwesterly direction from the Brandenburg Gate was trapped in the ruins amid which he stood, it seemed to him as if he heard a whispering and a humming, and it was a long time before he could break away from the oppressive closeness of the mound of earth.

As he stepped onto Bellevuestraße, he looked back once more from behind the tall trees to that bleak and barren square, hardly lit by the artificial city glow, and he could not understand why this brief excursion, this tarrying by a pile of dirt, had stirred him so strangely.

This happened in March. Lewanski had announced his next concert for the middle of April. At first he feared that, lacking concentration and all self-confidence, he would have to torment himself at the piano, but he was mistaken. Weeks passed without sleep or repose, during which he decided to forget all those oppressive encounters and do nothing beyond what the moment prompted. To ease his troubled conscience, he wrote Frau Altenschul—she was the only one he had not visited recently:

“I am practicing the piano day and night, and since I live not far from that lake which, seeming bleak and unfathomably deep, fascinated me so much in the past, I would like to go for a stroll there again, when the weather permits, to find the mood for Beethoven’s late sonatas.”

Strange, though: The variations of the E-major Sonata emerged from beneath his hands so easily, he thought, that, were he to trust the moment, he could produce the storm of trills effortlessly, joyfully, like the music of a resurrection, and

when he leafed through the *Missa Solemnis* and recited whole passages aloud, he also lost that bleak feeling Schulze-Bethmann had imposed upon him when he had remarked that to grasp and shape such a thing would require having experienced the melancholy of entire lifetime.

“Have I not died,” he cried, “and is this not the music of eternal life! And do I not have the right, like everyone else, to take part in every feeling and epiphany this world has to offer!”

Spring’s sudden overnight eruption gave him the confidence that it must be allowed him to imitate nature, which with unselfconscious power was greening and blooming, and since he had cast off his own form and was now free, committed without exception only to the essential, a mere glance at the chestnut trees in front of his room sufficed to affirm his euphoria.

‘Dying is by no means final,’ he thought, ‘I see now that everything revives, that everything, just when it seems lifeless, breathes again. And who should prevent my spirit from choosing the only form suitable to it?’ “I am a pianist,” he cried, “That’s right, a pianist! And I will show the world that I shall make my appearance exactly where they wanted to thwart me!”

When he became particularly agitated, not wanting the endless repetition to jeopardize the mastery he had achieved, he went out into the garden and enjoyed the intoxicating scent of the blooming jasmine; he had long since plundered the lilacs and stuck them in that empty vase from which he had removed the aralia because he could no longer bear its hopeless, withered appearance.

Strange, though: There would come times when he distrusted the intuitive power that had so suddenly vouchsafed itself to him. He not only found his thoughts

focused on pleasant anticipation of the audience at the Alte Philharmonie—something he would have regarded as entirely understandable—but, at the same time, caught himself wishing to play for other, more exacting listeners, who—and here Schulze-Bethmann's last remark came back to him—were not merely gathered to witness virtuosity. And this, he thought with horror, could only be those who longed for his presence as their redemption, and who presumably dwelled beneath the mound of earth near Wilhelmstraße. He reproached himself fiercely.

How can Jews killed so treacherously seek out the company of their murderers! And what if those who had riddled his neck with bullets should, after having had the pleasure of dealing those deadly blows, find themselves, thanks to Frau Altenschul's efforts, in the happy circumstance of watching their victim play the piano! Should he not prefer to remain silent once and for all beneath the earth rather than give concerts where calamity had befallen him! For, thought Lewanski, he had to say this much to his companions in misfortune: Whatever happens to one during life—for that, one is not responsible, but a person who can bring himself in death to stroll through parks, perhaps over the mortal remains of buried brothers and sisters, in a city that must be considered a charnel house, a person who can restore expropriated villas, mercilessly snatched away even though they were one's own property, and celebrate parties in them—must not such a person be considered wretched and worthless?

He closed the piano, wanting never to touch it again so long as his vanity—yes, he attributed it to vanity—tricked him into such hubristic desires, and he could not say whether the sudden mastery he had acquired did not have thoroughly wicked roots.

In one such mood his guilty conscience drove him out to the lake, for it was here, among the reeds and the rushes, that he wanted to forget each and every wish, experience, emotion of the months since he had returned to settle in Berlin.

“Don’t you see,” he cried, “that you have fallen into the old nest of vipers! I would sooner remain the shade into which they have made me than encounter them again!” And as he wandered around this body of water, he felt the need for neutral peace, free from stimuli; it seemed to him as if only in this state, undifferentiated from nature, and nowhere else, could he find lasting satisfaction.

As a boy, in those years when curiosity easily outweighs all other emotions, he had often thought about his own death, and taken pleasure in the notion that it would be the beginning of long pilgrimage through all the things he saw before him daily. He had wished to be a poplar tree, with the wind blowing ceaselessly through its leaves. Or he wanted to become like the pewits that flitted mysteriously over the flooded meadows, without anyone’s knowing the reason for their restless activity.

‘When I die,’ he had thought, ‘I will be everywhere, and thus among all these things as well.’

He hardly noticed that he had gotten too close to the edge and that the water was soaking through his shoes. He saw the trunk of an alder and wished to sit down way at the far end, where two coots were squabbling. In his absentmindedness, he had managed to make his way to the middle, teetering precariously, when he realized how deep the water was, and felt the wood beginning to give way beneath him. If he just stretched his arm out far enough he could manage to reach the birds... Then they suddenly took flight, noisily flapping their wings and traversing the short stretch to the other bank, and where they alit stood a man, who was

observing Lewanski. He wore a uniform and insignia, whose nature was unmistakable as it flashed in the pale reflection of the water.

“What now!” screamed Lewanski, who was having trouble keeping his footing on the unsteady perch on which he was standing. “So you killed me just so that you could keep tormenting me in death?” His indignation had been so aroused that he could not keep his foot from slipping into the water. This misstep so stoked his annoyance that he tore a branch from the alder, firmly resolved to bludgeon the uniformed man with it if he did not instantly remove himself from the premises. He reached his adversary in only a few steps, cutting through the water where it was marshy but passable, and he took no notice that the reeds and rushes over which he was tramping were dirtying his suit.

The other man remained motionless, even when Lewanski, no sooner than he had reached him, began pummeling him with the stick; he did not stir, made no attempt to defend himself. His peaked cap flew from his head; he paid it no mind. His expression manifested astonishment, but then he was forced to step out of the way, lest he be thrown to the ground by the violent blows from Lewanski, who was now swinging with both arms. He tried to get away, something he could do only by moving from the shore toward the water. He did so slowly, walking backwards to keep his eyes on Lewanski; his face was bleeding, though he seemed to take no notice. Once he was up to his hips in water and Lewanski could no longer reach him with his cudgel, he stopped, not even moving his arms to refasten the buttons of his uniform jacket, which had come undone. He presented a picture of utmost humility, watching passively as Lewanski, still beside himself with outrage, snatched up some stones, and when they struck him, the man sank to his knees.

Yet he raised his head so that he could keep it above water, and now his neck became visible, revealing a scar, a bluish line above the larynx. Lewanski noticed this and was horrified. An instantaneous feeling of regret overcame him so powerfully that he could hear his heart beating.

“He was brought to justice,” he whispered, staring at the other man, who he had just been wishing would sink out of sight like an apocalyptic vision.

“He was brought to justice,” he repeated, dropping what he was holding in his hands. And as he turned to rush away, unable to bear any longer the sight of the man bleeding so profusely, he was overcome with nausea. Shaken by cramps, he had to find something to hold onto, so stricken was he by the despairing recognition that he, who had never in his life hurt a fly, would be capable of killing another man. He tried to maintain his composure by standing up, resisting the desire to turn and look back toward the water. When he had put a good distance between himself and the lake, he waited, assuming that the other man would follow him once he had freed himself from the water, and he tried to convince himself that beating a shadow was no crime.

He stepped into the villa on Koenigsallee, leaned against the front door until he was certain that a figure standing by the garage had confirmed his suspicion. The uniformed man was standing there, busy straightening his clothing. He adjusted his waist belt and tried buttoning his jacket, which had shrunk in the water, up to his neck. When he finally succeeded, he rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead and hair, and clapped his peaked insignia cap back on his head. He did all of this turned partially away from Lewanski, like someone who had suffered a great

injustice, a humiliation, and who, because he felt incapable of protesting against it, was shrugging it all off with a gesture of gentle patience.

Lewanski climbed up the stairs, opened a window in the *bel étage*, noticed how still everything had become, and that the other man was reaching for a cigarette, which he tried in vain to set light, doing his best not to shiver in the damp clothes that now were impeccably neat.

‘The guilty shall be the weak,’ he thought, and: ‘He was brought to justice without even the hope of redemption.’

He checked meanwhile to see whether, in the incipient twilight, and at such a distance, he could discern the scar on the strange man’s throat, but he could not make it out.

In the southeast, where some pine trees had been felled, the moon rose, orange-red, and its light gave Lewanski a warm feeling. He breathed a sigh of relief, but he, too, was feeling the cold, and stepped back into the room. For a moment he was undecided, then cleared off the stool, which he had piled high with musical scores, and began to play, certain that someone who badly needed to was listening to the piano.

12

After Passover, the time had come. Frau Altenschul had completed the final preparations, and could contribute nothing more.

“The hall is too large,” she said, “yet even the people in the back row will be able to hear everything!”

“You can rest assured,” Liebermann answered, “it is consistent with your wishes, and you are certainly entitled to a degree of pride that our friend has finally stepped out of the private sphere to address an audience for whom, if one may believe the predictions, the Philharmonic will by no means suffice.”

Word of the event, which Lewanski was to stage with this concert, had spread as far as Prague and London. Although Frau Altenschul rejected all publicity, it was nonetheless known: In Berlin, in that city, from which hardly any sensational happenings were expected, tremendous things were afoot. It was said

that a highly talented Jew, murdered in his youth, wanted to defy his fate and recover in death the pianist's career stolen from him.

It sounded like a summons, and so the front lobby had filled by morning—the concert was not to begin until nine that evening—with those still hoping to gain admittance to the concert. But it was hopeless, and people discussed in the café nearby why it should not be possible to broadcast the concert over loudspeakers.

They were predominantly young people, among them girls with their heads shaved, which they wished to keep that way, they averred, until someone could prove to them that this humiliation they had been forced to undergo before their death could be revoked. They were skeptical, roving back and forth restlessly.

When the lamps in front of the Alte Philharmonie lit up, a few people went to the rear entrance to await Lewanski's limousine, but no one appeared, even though the concert was to begin in an hour. Frau Altenschul was holding court in Lewanski's dressing room. She had asked for silence, but the general excitement rendered this impossible. All sorts of congratulations and, above all, flowers were pouring in; how should one make it clear to the enthusiasts, who did not leave her side, that their elation was bound to discomfit the pianist, who was expected at any moment.

Liebermann appeared at last, gave a slight, sheepish cough, remarked that the Philharmonic resembled a fortress under siege, wanted to be on his way again, but his glances at Frau Altenschul and the unmistakable way he offered his arm to accompany her to their box—it was high time—remained without success. She was worried whether Lewanski would arrive appropriately dressed for his performance.

It was her dearest wish that Lewanski drape the silk white shawl loosely around his neck, making his appearance less formal.

The rest, she averred, need receive no further thought, and as irrefutable evidence she quoted a message Lewanski had sent her a few days earlier:

“My very dear friend, do not think that I am ungrateful, or that I have regretted taking up residence near you. I know how very fond you are of me, and I admire the persistence with which you try to reverse our common fate. I have been playing Beethoven, only Beethoven, and I can assure you, I am very confident.”

Schulze-Bethmann was standing in the doorway, but with his back turned, almost touching the hallway wall.

He evidently had something to say, but found no opportunity to do so, and it was surprising that he, although otherwise almost discourteously reserved, would stand in the way like this, and Liebermann had difficulty squeezing past him, saying, as he turned to leave the dressing room: “Very well then, I shall just have to enjoy the performance by myself.”

“We will be in neighboring boxes,” said Schulze-Bethmann, “and I have brought along a guest, who should by no means alarm you.”

“What do you mean?” asked Frau Altenschul, always ready not to suppress a certain testiness that overcame her at the sight of Schulze-Bethmann.

“Since this is to be, so I have heard, a concert of resurrection,” Schulze-Bethmann said, “I do not believe that the thought of reconciliation should be entirely discarded.”

“That goes without saying,” Frau Altenschul said.

“Then I am reassured.”

The bells chimed, members of the audience were urged to take their seats. Frau Altschul stepped out with Liebermann into the narrow corridor leading to the foyer, noticing that Schulze-Bethmann was hesitating to following them. The sight of the overcrowded concert hall pleased her.

“Now he is having his second life,” whispered Liebermann, referring to Lewanski. “He could not achieve such success while he was alive.”

As he said this, Liebermann looked over to the box on his left, returned Schulze-Bethmann’s smile, and searched in vain for that companion the writer of novellas had announced.

It was ten minutes past nine; the auditorium lights continued to burn brightly as a joyful impatience, a readiness to rejoice, manifested itself.

But alas!

There is a place in Berlin that bears the stigma of the taboo. It is no man’s land, painstakingly cleared. Whoever looks from the west past the wall meant to prevent access to the Brandenburg Gate will see the Adlon Hotel and that intentionally preserved rectangular space on which the Reich Chancellery once stood. Crows fly over it and disappear into the Tiergarten. By day, armored vehicles roll over the accursed earth to safeguard the borders of the divided city, but by night all the lamps are from time to time extinguished, and the headlights cannot cut through the darkness; then a figure, like an angel of death, stands in the way, barring any further movement.

Traveler, be kind to us
and remember the remains
over which your path leads

An abyss yawns, a staircase of marble lures one into the depths, and together the angel and those who were seated in the vehicle halted by the angel march downward. The metal of their helmets gleams, and the sound of singing—oh, what an irresistible singing—leads them deeper and deeper, to where, beneath the earth, someone is damned to celebrate his wedding perpetually.

For man is mortal
and God alone separates good from evil
and the evil one meets his maker
practicing infinite goodness

Lewanski had left his villa at seven, to be certain of reaching the Alte Philharmonie before nightfall. He took a taxi, but, since there was still enough time, he wanted to walk part of the way, even though he did not know how much time he would need, and so that no one would notice him in his tailcoat, he had slipped a duster over it.

He did not want to set foot in the Tiergarten, which was soon right before him. And so he walked along the Spree, observing the barges floating downstream, and looked at his reflection in the oily water, in a section where the bank was flat and unwallled, and where benches had been installed. A searching glance at his tailcoat, a pat for his white silk shawl—Frau Altenschul would be satisfied. He felt prepared to step before his audience, but wanted no sense of elation to spring up, for he had persuaded himself that his performance should serve the music, and nothing but the music, and that this had to take place in all modesty and always with the greatest possible effort.

Toward eight that evening, when it had become dark, he sensed, as he had in the last few days, that he was not really alone. But he paid it no further attention. He

was at ease, allowing the din of the metropolis and the pale reflection of the street lamps, which flickered to and fro when the boats churned the surface of the water, to have an effect on him.

When he thought it was time, he wanted to put the last few steps to the Philharmonic behind him; he was surprised that he once again found himself among the rhododendrons, although he had not intended to enter the Tiergarten. He wanted to avoid the cast iron bridge, and so took a detour through the flowerbeds. A ditch blocked his way. He lost his sense of direction, wandered aimlessly back and forth through a tangle of tall saplings, noticed, as he headed for a clearing, that he had stumbled into a damp, marshy meadow, but then he saw a hand stretched helpfully toward him.

“Come with me, sir,” said someone he could not make out in the darkness. “Come with me. One cannot leave the paths in this park without getting hot and bothered.”

Lewanski stepped, gently pulled by the other man, into an open field, and was relieved when he saw that his tailcoat beneath the duster had suffered no harm; he wanted to leave the man, who had been so helpful, with a smile, but...

“This is impossible,” he said, realizing that he was not on the southern edge of the park, as he had assumed, but on Wilhelmstraße in front of the mound of earth. “This is impossible,” he repeated, and before he could ascertain in what direction he would need to go to reach the Philharmonic, he was caught in the beam of two headlights. He saw his shadow cast across marble columns, noticed a staircase leading into the depths, and as he came closer, as he checked if it were that abyss that he had recently felt behind him, the other man said:

"Come in, sir. We have been expecting you." And as he doffed his hat, as if with solemn intent, he said: "It is already ten minutes past nine."

Lewanski looked him in the face, and recognized from the scar that it was the uniformed man. He recoiled, stepping back farther and farther between the columns, and how he negotiated the staircase he could not say.

He came to himself deep underground in an atrium-like hall. He wanted to turn back but felt the uniformed man standing behind him and respectfully but unmistakably blocking his path.

"How dare you!" cried Lewanski, "I must get to my concert!"

But the other man was silent, and remained entirely motionless, his peaked cap clamped under his arm, gazing at him with a friendly expression. And now, hoping to find an exit, Lewanski walked through several similar rooms overloaded with glass and marble, so spacious that he shivered. He saw a cold splendor of cornices and candelabras, and above each archway through which he passed was a frieze. He walked faster, taking no notice that the smooth soles of his shoes nearly caused him to slip on the polished floor. After he had walked hundreds of meters through a succession of empty mirrored rooms, he reached a locked door that refused to budge, and when he hurled himself against it, shoving aside the bolt holding it shut with his shoulder, it sprang open, and what he now saw was entirely unexpected.

After all the imperial frigidity and spaciousness, he found himself facing a bunker-like enclosure, no more than twenty paces across, and within it those of whom Schulze-Bethmann had spoken were standing in agonizing confinement, gathered, as he had described, deep, deep underground, entirely unredeemed. There

were thousands upon thousands, shoulder to shoulder, as far as the eye could see, and Lewanski was astonished that this could be possible within such close quarters. They had all, to a man, removed their peaked caps, of a design with which he was familiar and which he had learned to fear, and were standing there solemnly and patiently, as if they had been awaiting him, Lewanski. The pianist felt their gaze, realizing that he would not be able to endure it a moment longer.

A woman rose to her feet, who had remained hidden from Lewanski, perhaps because she had been seated at a table that stood diagonally across the room amid the uniformed mass.

"I am pleased you have come," she said. "My husband and I," she said, pointing to a place at the table that lay in darkness, "my husband and I," she repeated, "are greatly worried that you might not be able to forgive us."

She seemed timid, evidently unable to look Lewanski in the eye, keeping her head lowered, but the way she fidgeted with her necklace betrayed her agitation. And so, delicate as she was and dressed for summer, she stepped before the crowd.

"I ask not for myself," she said, "but rather for all those gathered around me. And for him whom I love. I know how much guilt we had incurred, but is it not true," she added, "that if we did so, it must be possible to undo it all."

Then, as if she noticed how incapable she was of putting the request that she wanted to utter into clear and understandable words, she looked to the farthest corner of the table, where someone from whom she evidently expected help was seated.

But Lewanski could make out no one, and when she quietly, almost inaudibly, as if she were embarrassed, asked whether he would like to take a seat,

and whether his coat were not uncomfortable in the stuffiness that no doubt prevailed—her attempt to be polite at such a moment astonished him.

He did not reply, and now she fell silent. For everything that she should have said seemed so inexpressible that she could not bring herself to say it, and she appeared to regret that the man at the far end of the table at whom she looked still did not want to show himself. She did not stir, standing now with her head held high before the others, the uniformed men, like a sister who found it impossible to leave her brothers, who had incurred such monstrous guilt.

Lewanski noticed how gratefully her gesture was received, and when he finally made up his mind to ask what was wished of him, she answered:

"Play for us on the piano. Or," she wanted to know, "would this, despite my request, be entirely intolerable for you."

Lewanski stared at her necklace of polished red coral that looked all wrong with the blue collar of her dress. He found her puffed sleeves excessive; altogether she seemed carefully dressed, though with uncertain taste. Among the uniformed mass surrounding her he recognized Klevenow, and before he could decide how to respond to this woman's request, the man who had followed him from the Tiergarten shut the door behind him.

The crowd stepped to Lewanski's left, where the wall was full of cracks. A piano became visible, and Lewanski was astonished that he walked over to it so quickly, beginning to slip off his duster, which was willingly received by the other man, who remained behind his back.

So the pianist was suddenly standing in his tailcoat before an audience that he rejected; he felt he should protest.

It is a mistake, this is not the Philharmonic, he wanted to say, but Klevenow had already provided a chair, so that the bride, at least, could sit near Lewanski, since the groom clearly did not wish to do so, and the uniformed mass imperceptibly closed ranks to spare her the feeling of being too crowded.

Lewanski noticed this, and the woman's gaze, directed at him in imploring but undemanding expectation, rendered him compliant.

'That I keep my eyes shut while playing,' he thought, 'may irritate her. I have to do it to avoid the uncertainty that overwhelms me when I can see the things around me too clearly.'

He was still undecided, worried because he could not manage to turn his back to this gathering with an apologetic flourish—something that would have been entirely normal under other circumstances.

He took his place, overcoming the temptation to bow. A final hesitation. But since it seemed absurd to him to sit at the piano without touching it, he launched into Beethoven's Opus 109.

An irresistible quiet and composure, an enchantment spread through the company that no soul could withstand, no matter what its disposition. A momentary sob was audible—or was it a cry—that was immediately suppressed, a soft click as if the door were opened and closed again by someone wishing to leave the room, but this too could not disturb the breathless silence.

Lewanski began playing the *vivace* quietly, almost playfully and with utmost sincerity. He sat upright, arms stretched out toward the keys, his elbows almost straight, his hair repeatedly falling over his forehead so that he was forced to tame it with a quick toss of his head.

He played the *prestissimo* with an impatient attack. Then, somewhere in the *andante molto cantabile*, he appeared to repeat himself. 'It is as if a rift is tearing through the entire world,' he thought.

A slight irritation arose, as if people had misheard, but he in fact repeated the third variation, hesitated, repeated it once more, and although this would have been thought impossible, those who had been his undoing were spellbound, hoping to be redeemed through his performance, and willing to follow him the more his high-handedness, his search for ever greater expression intensified.

This continued through the fourth and fifth variations, striving toward a climax in the storm of trills in the last variation, and this would have occurred in response to the mood of this audience, which had reached a peak of suspense, but Lewanski, persevering at the piano, his face full of doubt, seemed only to mistrust what had succeeded for the others, what had indeed succeeded a thousand times over.

'I shall remain twenty-eight for all eternity,' he thought, and shuddered.

A renewed attempt. 'Far too fast,' he thought, noticing that his fingers had gone numb, and the woman was leaning far out of her chair so as to be closer to him. "My God!" someone cried, but the end came abruptly.

In the middle of the storm of trills, after the fourth or fifth attempt, Lewanski suddenly broke off, stood up, closed the piano, and said with a regretful mien, slowly pulling the white silk shawl from his shoulders:

"Litzmannstadt... Litzmannstadt," he repeated. "I beg your pardon. You can hear for yourselves: In order to perform this piece, I should mature. I was torn from life too early."

13

After this unprecedented occurrence Lewanski remained untraceable.

So much did people believe they had been either misled or deprived of all hope that, after a few moments of bewilderment, when his absence had to be acknowledged, a scandal erupted in the Alte Philharmonie. Frau Altenschul was confronted, but she could not explain Lewanski's behavior, assuring through her sobs that, if there were reasons, they would have to be called entirely incomprehensible.

Liebermann firmly extracted her from the crowd, saw to it that they quickly got into a limousine, and, as he closed the door behind him after Frau Altenschul had taken her place, he saw that an aisle of honor was forming at the entrance to the Philharmonic, that the throng, which had just been so restive, suddenly fell silent, and that Schulze-Bethmann, with a sheepish smile, strode through this crowd that was parting before him toward a darkened vehicle, where an orderly awaited him in military dress—no more could be discerned in the darkness.

Liebermann was relieved when their own vehicle pulled away, before Frau Altenschul could take notice of what he had observed. But of course what developed into a widespread rumor could not remain hidden from her.

Schulze-Bethmann, people said, had been shameless enough, and for years no less, to receive his murderer, and his influence, so it was reported, had prompted Lewanski to do things of which no one dared speak out loud. And shouldn't anything that could be claimed about Schulze-Bethmann apply just as well to Frau Altenschul?

People began to cast doubt upon the honest intentions of her salon, claiming that it was not by chance that she had had her villa built near that palace from which she received compromising visitors.

"What nonsense!" protested Liebermann, attempting to reassure Frau Altenschul. But she was determined to defend herself. Since Lewanski remained untraceable, she wanted at the very least to force Schulze-Bethmann to admit his guilt, and so came about that last, memorable evening in her salon.

It was the beginning of May. Since the weather was fine, the chestnut trees were in bloom, a sight that put Liebermann especially into a somber mood. Frau Altenschul had asked that he arrive, as usual, before the others, but he was late setting out, and so was hurrying along Wilhelmstraße before night fell. He did not want to let any ill feeling take hold of him, since he knew that a difficult and unpleasant confrontation was in the offing. He had no intention of agreeing with everything Frau Altenschul said concerning her indignation toward Schulze-Bethmann.

When he saw the mound of earth, to which he had never paid any mind, he remained standing, stepped around a fence and some bushes to gain a better view, and then walked onto the open rectangle beyond. He remembered that there had been an apparition here on New Year's Eve, but could not bring himself to walk the few paces necessary to reach the pile of earth.

'There,' he thought, 'that king of the Goths lies buried, still causing us trouble. Forty years after his downfall,' he thought, 'one cannot even attend a gathering in a salon in peace, so lastingly has he altered this landscape. And we were so happy here, yet the whole thing was doomed to end in desperation and tragedy. I myself was fortunate, but the same cannot be said of my wife, Martha.'

He repressed this burst of melancholy, strode firmly onward, turned onto Voßstraße, and noticed from afar that the windows of the villa were already lit up.

The rooms were set up for the arrival of the guests, but no one made an appearance. Frau Altenschul, who had heard Liebermann's heavy, somewhat labored footsteps on the stairs, stood among the empty chairs, presenting a picture of misery. She looked bleary-eyed, had deep circles beneath her eyes, and it seemed impossible for her to go forward to greet Liebermann.

She asked if anyone had heard from Lewanski, and when he approached, shaking his head helplessly, yet with an expression as if he wanted to cheer her up, he took in her reddened eyes and suspected that she knew everything, but was refraining from discussing it with him. A few minutes later, as she remained standing among the empty chairs, while Liebermann went over to the windows to open the curtains, as had been her wont, she mentioned that it was time to leave the villa.

When Liebermann quietly protested, suggesting that she could of course remain present in these rooms, which so faithfully revealed her care and character, even if certain expectations had not been fulfilled, she smiled, and said that since she had been robbed of that hope, she now had the feeling she was dying a second time.

Liebermann sensed the finality with which she said this, and he felt unable to give a reply; he walked aimlessly about the room, since she showed no sign at all of reining in her sorrow, and he was happy when Schulze-Bethmann finally made his entrance.

He was wearing a light summer suit, on his lapel a posy of violets, and he held a straw hat in his hand that added to the cheerful impression he made a somewhat puckish effect.

He started, having evidently expected guests, and he did not know whether he should step inside, since Frau Altenschul took no notice of him whatsoever and seemed so strangely withdrawn. Liebermann gestured to him, and now he walked over to the table and, with straw hat still in hand, poured himself some of the cognac standing there, acted as if he were a guest among others, and refrained from anything that might underscore the exceptionality of the situation. Liebermann wanted to break the silence with a few trivial remarks, but Frau Altenschul spoke up first.

She talked about the events of the previous week, which perhaps had been unavoidable—her voice was so soft that the men had trouble following her—and: She did not wish to complain, she said, if her hopes had proven too high-flown. And also, the fact that some guests (and by this she meant Schulze-Bethmann) had not withstood the temptation to keep company with their murderer hardly mattered in

her heart of hearts. Ever since she had once again occupied this villa, she had undertaken all these efforts only to help herself and others of the same mind forget the experience of a horrifying death. For was it not natural that a person, who, like herself, had been condemned to lie for all eternity in an overfilled pit, with twisted neck and limbs out of joint, should strive to have the beautiful things in life before her eyes once more. She would like to know whether she could be blamed for this, or if she were asking too much. A Guimard cabinet would make her happy, so too a set of Sèvres porcelain, and if it had been her wish to redeem a pianist in a fashion suited to him, she could see nothing in this ambition for which she deserved be mocked.

She pulled a handkerchief from the sleeve of her dress, did not, however, want to dry the tears running down her cheeks, wanted only to make sure that her voice not choke up because it was so full of indignation; she blew her nose quickly, as if it were not proper to do so more than once with that delicate embroidered cloth, walked over to the window and gazed out into the Tiergarten for a while.

Liebermann had taken a seat on the settee; Schulze-Bethmann had laid his now bothersome hat on a chair, not wanting to drink anymore from the glass that he had filled with a little too much cognac; Frau Altenschul then closed the curtains that Liebermann had opened just a while before, as if what she saw outdoors only increased her melancholy. She said:

“Can you explain to me why Lewanski chose to play before people who killed him?”

Liebermann did not return her glance, but Schulze-Bethmann, who had expected to find an irritable hostess, and to whom it had been reported how vehemently Frau Altenschul had spoken of him to others, was surprised and struck

by her inconsolable misery. And since Liebermann remained silent, so as to convey that he felt neither capable of saying anything soothing nor called upon to do so, Schulze-Bethmann picked up his straw hat and walked to the door...

“Frau Altenschul,” he said, “do not misunderstand me. By no means do I want to contradict your present feelings. They are welcome to me, since, as you know, I have an irresistible bias, dead or alive, to look only at the negative aspects of my life, or, shall we say, anything that accounts for its own negation. But I do want to offer a few words of consolation, since I know how very much this feature of my character annoys you. You see,” he added, waving his straw hat in front of his chest as if to lend emphasis to the arguments that were now to follow, “you see,” he said, “it is pointless to hold on to that distinction that we made in life, namely between good and evil. You have experienced this yourself: We would merely prolong life’s contradictions into eternity, and after a few seconds of happiness once again become disappointed and filled with sorrow. And then what chance would we have to be released at last from this *Fata Morgana*? So...”

Frau Altenschul, who had walked a few steps toward the table, reached for the back of a chair; Liebermann had risen to his feet and put on his pince-nez, as if he wanted to have a closer look at someone who would speak like this.

“So,” said Schulze-Bethmann, “I can see no tragedy in the fact that the pianist Rudolf Lewanski has had the courage, or let us say, the opportunity, to play the piano for his murderers. The perpetrator and his victim—what else is left for us in death other than to sit together in consternation, astonished at the absurdities that indubitably and irrevocably happened in life. Nonetheless,” he added, resisting the temptation to walk a few steps back into the room toward Frau Altenschul, whose

grief he wanted to help relieve, “nonetheless,” he repeated, “you should know that I have always admired the persistence with which you insist upon the pleasant things in life. I wish now, too, that you might succeed in this. And as for Lewanski: Rest assured, Frau Altenschul, he will come again, since he must succumb to the obsession of an artist. He will attempt Beethoven’s Opus 109 time and time again. In the end, what else should he do.”

Schulze-Bethmann said this, and, after hesitating for a moment, not knowing whether his words had been helpful to Frau Altenschul, for she kept staring past him as if her thoughts were elsewhere, he put on his hat, saluted Liebermann, and went on his way.

When the door finally clicked shut, Frau Altenschul said:

“He wanted to reassure me. Lewanski will not return.”

Liebermann remained silent. Since the salon was dimly lit, receiving only a bit of additional light from the corridor, both of them seemed fossilized in this world of light and shadow, Frau Altenschul leaning on the chair in the middle of the room, Liebermann in front of the settee.

Frau Altenschul thought of that drive she had undertaken with Lewanski, and how, far beyond the borders of Berlin, they had almost reached the Rhin marshes and, beyond that, Neuruppin. And how on the way back he had spoken with particular fervor about how, not death, but rather birth was the event to which we are forever bound.

“I forgive no one who has killed another,” she said. “What happens to one in life is irrevocable. If Schulze-Bethmann is right,” she added, “if it is true that Lewanski must remain stuck in youth and never, not for one second, be able to

attain the mastery proper to a mature life, it would be better that he remain once and for all untraceable.”

Liebermann walked toward her to gently pat her shoulder, something he often did in such moments, but this time her aura of inapproachability made him refrain.

When he was on his way home and had reached Pariser Platz, mounting the iron staircase leading to his studio, he reproached himself for having left her alone. But what could he have said to improve her mood.

That she could hope to continue hosting her soirees, even though no one wanted to come anymore? That, if she wished, he would stay with her, even with a glass of champagne in hand, until Lewanski was once again present?

He stepped into his studio, and suddenly it seemed to him that he could no longer tolerate this large, bleak room, cluttered with easels and all sorts of painting paraphernalia. He noticed that he had forgotten to close the windows. He shivered, and had to sit down. A longing for something unattainable overcame him, and he recalled that he had felt this way once before when he had heard the Mozart Requiem—on what occasion he could not say. The soprano’s voice had been so penetrating, so appeasing, so consoling that he wished to hear it once more.

‘There is a hope,’ he thought, ‘that is irrefutable. There must be. Tomorrow, if tact allows, I shall be at Frau Altenschul’s again, and I will tell her that there is no reason to be unduly concerned.’

He thought this, and any other thought seemed unbearable.

14

And Schulze-Bethmann?

The blooming chestnut trees enticed him. He wanted to make use of the late evening for a stroll, and so, in the company of Klevenow, he was under way, first around Friedenau, then ambling to Steglitz, toward the botanical gardens. Since it was warm, the streets were bustling, so that Schulze-Bethmann repeatedly had to turn off onto byways to escape the crowds. He asked Klevenow to leave aside all false consideration and take off his jacket, but the man expressed his thanks, commenting that appearing in shirtsleeves was not his style. He seemed smaller than Schulze-Bethmann, yet broader in the shoulders, making a continual effort to remain a half step behind his companion, and he seemed to be brooding.

This bothered Schulze-Bethmann from time to time, especially when, in the fragrant air and beneath the milky moon visible above the city roofs, Klevenow wanted to discuss the deepest questions, such as: How it could happen that someone,

an idealist his entire life, came in the end to be labeled a common killer, and if there were any possibility to avoid this pitfall once and for all, before it was too late.

Since Schulze-Bethmann was in high spirits, he asked his companion to refrain from staying the half step behind him and to join him at last, freely and uninhibitedly, as was customary for two people speaking with one another on a stroll.

This, answered Klevenow, he could not do. "It goes without saying," he added, "that I should at the very least feel embarrassed toward a person whom I treated in such a way."

They reached Wulffstraße. Ancient trees stood there, overflowing with foliage, their blossoms like massive candelabras. Schulze-Bethmann could not see his fill, asking Klevenow whether this sight could not banish his perpetual sorrow. Klevenow gave an embarrassed smile, not knowing how to respond to this comment.

In the botanical gardens they walked up a hill planted with conifers. Low-lying mist spread around them, and on the street below flowed ceaseless traffic, a steady stream of headlights in both directions. Schulze-Bethmann noticed how tense Klevenow was. He wanted to say something to him, wanted to stress that it was pointless to brood over life's unremitting perfidiousness. He wanted to say:

You killed, to be sure, and whoever kills incurs guilt. But guilt is a great opportunity—for atonement, sir. One who does not want to atone for his guilt is despicable. But you are so remorseful... At the sight of a blooming chestnut tree you really might allow yourself to set aside all of this brooding.

In the northern sky the big dipper moved toward the horizon. Its contours were clear, bright, and overwhelming in their proportions. But Klevenow paid it no

mind, although Schulze-Bethmann called it to his attention. An hour later, the constellation had vanished behind the roofs of the city.

Afterword

The Concert opens with a stroll through Berlin. Ambling through the city streets, the painter Max Liebermann is overwhelmed by the sight that meets his eyes: the city as it stood at the moment of his death in 1935, and the streets as he remembers them from the turn of the century, when his work as an artist had already begun to enjoy widespread renown. Yet his gaze is also able to leap the boundaries that would otherwise limit this already layered vision; thus he can simultaneously see the Berlin of the present, of the 1980s. It is divided at the Brandenburg Gate, patrolled by armored vehicles, and dotted with newly erected buildings of a design he finds distasteful. The bewildering juxtaposition of these three separate periods overwhelms him, and despite his full maturation as an artist, he doubts his ability to paint what his eyes present to him in death.

The introductory scene suggests the book's two primary themes: division and stasis. The rift between the past and the present, the separation of East and West Berlin, the dualistic categories of victims and perpetrators, and the simplistic

distinction between good and evil repeatedly emerge in the novella. But the dead have been cast into a state of paralysis. The world Max Liebermann sees defies his competence as an artist, for in such a state of stagnation he has lost the energizing sense of uncertainty required for artistic articulation.

The two themes gloss the state of discourse on Germany's postwar legacy. The world's horrified reaction to the Holocaust, maintains Lange, has become a moral gag-reflex, allowing comfortable and uncritical notions of good and evil to emerge. In his autobiography, *Irrtum als Erkenntnis: Meine Realitätserfahrung als Schriftsteller*, Hartmut Lange provocatively writes, "Heiner Müller's aphorism 'What can be said against Auschwitz once it's feasible' indicates that this moral outrage directed at the mass murder of Jews must be seen as too hastily conceived and, consequently, unrealistic."¹ Lange wishes to dig deeper into the implications of this righteous indignation, and to bring its roots into the open. But the work's goal is just as philosophical as it is historical, perhaps more so: to create a world that transcends the subjectively deformed perceptions of the living in order to cast doubt upon comfortably formed distinctions between guilt and atonement. Starting from the indifference of death, Lange wishes to place the insanity of life in sharper relief.

For Rudolf Lewanski, the anguished pianist searching for redemption through the maturation of his artistic abilities, the notion of moving beyond life's contradictions is untenable. He is torn by an ambivalence that causes him to recoil instinctively at the notion of encountering the uniformed men responsible for the mass execution of the Jews, but he is repeatedly and inexplicably drawn to their company. Despite his unequivocal desire to become incomparable on the piano, this

¹Hartmut Lange, *Irrtum als Erkenntnis: Meine Realitätserfahrung als Schriftsteller* (Zurich: Diogenes, 2002). 47.

irresoluteness makes him impotent, dooming him to eternal repetition.

A week after his impromptu first performance, Lewanski and Frau Altenschul set out on a stroll through the Tiergarten. The pianist is on edge. Unable to maintain the harmony of their gait, he inexplicably rushes away from his companion. He finds the beating wings of the birds in the park startling; he soon encounters—perhaps for the first time—a uniformed man, his insignia missing, who in vain tries to greet the pair. Lewanski reflects only later on the sentiments that have been causing him so much trouble as he considers an automobile made by Adler: “[I]t had seemed to him before that a rift had torn through everything he saw” (23). He sees the world as divided; in death, reality has burst apart irreconcilably into a deeply troubling world of perpetrators and victims.

Lewanski’s stroll with Frau Altenschul initiates his journey through death to find a way back to his art, which, he hopes, might reconcile the divided world presented to him. His first concert in Frau Altenschul’s salon, however, serves merely to reinforce his doubts. Abruptly ending his first performance, Lewanski comments, “I beg your pardon... You can hear for yourselves: In order to perform this piece, I should be older. I was torn from life too early” (13). Lewanski poignantly feels his shortcomings as an artist, for he has had no opportunity to have the melancholy of a lifetime behind him. With the unexpected and premature conclusion of his concert, it becomes painfully apparent to both the pianist and all guests present that the death he suffered may have been not only a physical annihilation but an artistic defeat as well.

Unable to let go of the moral distinctions stubbornly held onto by the living Lewanski ultimately shatters. Believing that he has attained artistic consummation,

the pianist announces his eagerly awaited concert for the middle of April. Yet he fails. He wanders off the path in the Tiergarten on his way to the Philharmonic. Lewanski cannot resist being guided by one of the uniformed men, and he suddenly finds himself beneath the mound of earth. While performing in the Führer's bunker, he begins to doubt his ability. His playing becomes erratic, he starts to repeat himself, and his hands go numb. The thought occurs to him once again: "It is as if a rift is tearing through the entire world" (90). His final concert becomes a recapitulation of his first. Lange reiterates his description from the first performance, with a few omissions, as Lewanski launches into the piece:

Lewanski began playing the *vivace* quietly, almost playfully and with utmost sincerity. He sat upright, arms stretched out toward the keys, his elbows almost straight, his hair repeatedly falling over his forehead so that he was forced to tame it with a quick toss of his head (89).

The piece concludes with the same broken and despondent mantra:

"Litzmannstadt... Litzmannstadt," he repeated. "I beg your pardon. You can hear for yourselves: In order to perform this piece, I should be older. I was torn from life too early" (90).

The pianist's failure emerges in his inability to progress beyond the virtuosity he once attained in life. His fear that death has doomed him to eternal repetition has been realized. With this knowledge he withdraws from the public—it is his death as an artist.

Manfred Durzak maintains that Lewanski's ultimate failure derives from his inability to escape those distinctions made by the living, "namely between good and evil" (96). According to Durzak, the pianist, having attained true virtuosity between

his first and final performance, debases this accomplishment after his brutal attack on his uniformed admirer. He achieved perfection not only through sheer virtuosity, but also, to some extent, through his ability to overcome those divisions that render life mad. This cohesion shatters once he lashes out at the uniformed man. The pianist realizes that he, too, is capable of killing, even though he feels he lives a just life, and that the violent and senseless string of events leading to his death was not a unique and linear progression. Lewanski now feels complicit in perpetuating a circle of violence that changes only by increasing in intensity.

However, little evidence supports Durzak's contention that Lewanski has achieved mastery in the period between his first and last performances. His new-found skill is suggested, but never stated. He feels that he has fully matured, but this may be an illusion. Lewanski has fooled the audience at Charlottenburg Castle, playing only part of the Beethoven sonata; art's ability to create illusion should come as no surprise. Furthermore, Lewanski's piano playing is not mere virtuosity. When Frau Altenschul remarks that their ride together in the Adler makes her feel alive, he replies that, to achieve such a feeling, he must undergo a degree of pain and uncertainty. He requires "the agony of discontent. . . whenever I play before a public I love but, at the same time, have to fear" (51). The performative aspects validate his art, but simultaneously present obstacles to its fulfillment. Without the challenge presented by performance—the desire to play before a public, but the torment and uncertainty that such a performance engenders—life is impossible. His command of the sonata between concerts, then, is only partial. The concert is needed to validate it.

The stasis of death is embodied in the repetition Lewanski manifests in his

third concert, which is paralleled in the book's form. Through the repetition of words, phrases, sentences, and whole paragraphs, Lange creates a world in which pervasive stagnation is tangible. This aspect of the novella has gone almost entirely unnoticed by scholars and literary critics. The subtlety with which Lange incorporates repetition makes the oversight forgivable: the attentive reader is led to the realization of the correspondence between the book's structure and the import of the plot only at the book's denouement—Lewanski's disastrous final concert, which seals his fate: to remain in the unchanging state of death with no hope of progression. Only in this section does Lange repeat excerpts long enough to be unmistakable; the recapitulations remain otherwise shorter and easily missed.

Leitmotifs are introduced, and slight variations are made. The description of Lewanski's concert is recapitulated in the twelfth chapter, as already noted, as are his despondent final words of apology. In the fifth chapter, after her announcement that Lewanski will give his first official performance in Berlin, Frau Altenschul reflects on the rumors that circulate around Schulze-Bethmann: "She thought about the unkind voices that claimed Schulze-Bethmann was so shameless as to enjoy conversing with his murderers..." (29). These concerns are justified by the narrator in the thirteenth chapter, when Frau Altenschul herself falls under the other Jews' suspicion of consorting with the uniformed men: "Schulze-Bethmann, people said, had been shameless enough, and for years no less, to receive his murderer" (92).

Lange develops a particular vocabulary to describe the state of death and the hope for its revocation. A few descriptions are employed that retain their content and form throughout the entire novella. Frau Altenschul's guests believe that Lewanski should stay in Berlin, because "here it should be allowed him to revoke his

death, that injustice that had been done to him” [*hier sollte es ihm erlaubt sein, das Unrecht, das man ihm angetan hatte, zu widerrufen*] (27). Klevenow expresses similar sentiments:

“[H]ow could I not hope that you might again conjure up all the art stolen from you and, in doing so, make the injustice that had been done to you entirely insignificant” (64).

[*“Wie sollte ich mir keine Hoffnung darüber machen, daß Sie alle Kunst, um die man Sie gebracht hat, wieder hervorzaubern und daß Sie damit das Unrecht, das man Ihnen angetan hat, ganz und gar unerheblich zu machen.”*]

Multiple references are made to his death as a “violent revocation of his life” [*der gewaltsame Widerruf seines Lebens*] (21, 64). The same encouragement is repeated in different company and at varying times that he be able to “retrieve life in death” [*das Leben im Tode nachzuholen*] (21, 63, 70) alongside the repeatedly referred-to hope that he “add the experience of his death to life” [*Ihre Jugend der Erfahrung des Todes anzugleichen*] (35, 55, 59).

The word “redemption” [*Erlösung*] serves as the thread unifying each of these conceptions. It is repeated by each figure and all through the different circles of characters. Frau Altenschul, Schulze-Bethmann, and Max Liebermann speak of it, as does Lewanski, who, in doing so, draws an ominous parallel between Christ’s redeeming crucifixion and his own hope for performing a concert of resurrection. Even the uniformed men and their unnamed “sister” in the Führer’s bunker—presumably Eva Braun—utter the word, hoping to bring the murdered pianist to perform for their redemption.

Lange manipulates certain phrases more subtly. Frau Altenschul and

Lewanski walk through the Tiergarten “in an almost intimate stroll” [*fast vertraulicher Nähe*], a phrase reiterated when Frau Altenschul first sees Schulze-Bethmann walking along with one of the uniformed men, and describes the pair as walking “intimately” together (16, 29). Both Max Liebermann and the uniformed man, who attempts to approach Lewanski, give “slight sheepish coughs” [*hüsteln verlegen*] as they suddenly appear within their respective scenes: the former right before Lewanski’s final performance, the latter upon entering Lewanski’s villa uninvited (44, 81). The Reich Chancellery is described as “that angular, half-destroyed building” [*scharfkantiger, halbzerstörter Bau*] by both Frau Altenschul and the narrator (11, 29).

Yet repetition also serves another purpose. Lewanski’s task propels him toward a seemingly inevitable reconciliation between the mercilessly killed Jews and their Nazi murderers. This unsettling outcome, however, is never realized. Lewanski’s ultimate failure to perform the E-Major Sonata in the Führer’s bunker hinders the redemption of all those present in the room, Lewanski included. The reasons for this conclusion are manifold: perhaps, as Reinhard J. Brembeck sharply notes in an article for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, it is “less the fault of the author’s political correctness than Beethoven’s.”² Indeed, Lange’s repeated references to the distinctiveness of Beethoven’s late works and to his mass, the *Missa Solemnis*, suggest where some of Lewanski’s obstacles to achieve mastery lie, and perhaps, too, where Lange derived inspiration for his book.

“Lewanski knew that Beethoven had jotted down the notes on the first

^f Reinhard J. Brembeck, “Steigendes Entsetzen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [Munich] 1 September 2007: Feuilleton, 4.

movement while sketching out the *Gloria* and the *Credo*,” the narrator tells us, “though, since he was not familiar with the *Missa Solemnis*, he paid no attention to the relationship whatsoever” (55). Shortly thereafter, Lewanski’s thoughts drift once more to the peculiarity of these late works and their potential implications for his art: “He thought about Schulze-Bethmann and his remark that he, Lewanski, was too young for the late Beethoven, and about his recommendation that he add the experience of death to his youth” (55). Unable to escape the fear that he may, in fact, have been torn from life too early to truly realize his potential for mastery, the pianist is forced to focus his concentration on that which he would otherwise leave unnoticed.

Theodor Adorno’s work on the style of the late Beethoven, particularly the *Missa Solemnis*, is likely to have inspired Lange to structure his novella in this way. Thomas Mann’s influence on Hartmut Lange’s writing supports this claim; Mannian narrative detail peppers the work. Phrases such as “This happened in November” and “What had happened?” introduce several chapters, clear evidence of stylistic borrowing. Lange’s adoption of Adorno’s philosophy of music, in the vein of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, to invoke certain concepts that reinforce the work’s thematic structure comes as no surprise.

In his “Alienated Masterpiece,” Adorno investigates the oddness of the *Missa Solemnis*. The conclusions drawn closely parallel much of Lange’s own project, and reading the E-Major Sonata Opus 109 as embodying similar problems offers a key to the book’s at times opaque philosophy. While Adorno might not have accepted such a parallel—nowhere in his work does he draw a connection between the *Missa Solemnis* and the E-major Sonata Opus 109—Lange uses the sonata merely as a

placeholder; the problems Lewanski encounters in performing the late work of Beethoven parallel the composer's creative problems in writing the piece, as interpreted by Adorno. Lewanski's art, however, is reproductive, while the composer's is creative: the pianist is attempting to bring to life the notes as their creator intended them. Nonetheless, through a complex process of mediation, the problems of the historical situation in which Lewanski finds himself are translated into the performative aspects of his art. The divisions that dominate the current historical situation cause a parallel disjunction to develop within the pianist. The irreconcilable dichotomy within Lewanski is expressed in his work. His piano playing is marked by impotence and inefficaciousness.

Lewanski fails. The composer, with the melancholy of a lifetime behind him, was able to move beyond the no longer adequate harmony of classicism into a work, "which is not satisfied with conflicts so obviously contrived."³ Such a possibility is beyond his comprehension, and the pianist is therefore incapable of expressing it at the piano. According to Adorno,

The late Beethoven's demand for truth rejects the illusory appearance of the unity of subjective and objective, a concept practically at one with the classicist idea. A polarization results. Unity transcends into the fragmentary.⁴

Lewanski is unable to bridge the gap between his life and death, failing to add the experience of his death to his life. Lewanski attempts to find this transcendent unity, vainly chasing after chimeras that delude him into a false sense of certainty.

³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Alienated Masterpiece," *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor, trans. Duncan Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 316.

⁴ Adorno 316-317.

The novella's form parallels that of the sonata. Lange's book is organized around three separate concerts: the first, at the beginning of the work, in Frau Altenschul's salon; the second in the west wing of Charlottenburg Castle; and the third and final performance deep within the Führer's bunker. As in the traditional sonata form, Lange begins the work with a brief introduction—Liebermann's stroll through Berlin. The progression from exposition, to development, and finally to recapitulation culminates in the work's final section, its coda. As in Beethoven's sonatas, the final section is equal in weight to the previous sections. Completing the work's "musical argument," Schulze-Bethmann's stroll through Berlin parallels Lieberman's opening experience, emphasizing that, even in the absence of a utopian resolution, there is still hope of moving beyond the treacheries of life.

Critics have paid little attention to Lange's choice of three performances, and the opinions of those who have mentioned this feature range from claims that the work is, in fact, structured solely around the first and third concerts,⁵ or that the book offers a linear progression, climaxing in the one and only relevant performance—the *unerhörte Begebenheit* that is Lewanski's final concert.⁶ Yet the often unappreciated tripartite structure affords Lange the opportunity to follow in the literary footsteps of Thomas Mann and pattern his novella after the form of sonata.⁷ The persistent repetition of words, phrases, sentences, and entire paragraphs at key points in the work, as well as the deliberate restatement of

⁵ Manfred Durzak, "Opfer und Täter: Hartmut Langes Beitrag zur Holocaust-Literatur in seiner Novelle *Das Konzert*," *Der Dramatiker und Erzähler Hartmut Lange*, ed. Manfred Durzak (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003) 184.

⁶ Ralf Hertling, *Das literarische Werk Hartmut Langes* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1994) 184–193.

⁷ H.A. Basilius, "Thomas Mann's Use of Musical Structure and Technique in *Tonio Kröger*," *Germanic Review*, 19:4 (Dec. 1944) 284.

leitmotifs in the final third of the novella, suggests an intentional patterning of the work on this musical structure. Closer analysis of the late Beethoven further supports this claim: “The form is not achieved through developing variations from basic motifs,” writes Adorno, “but arises largely from sections imitative in themselves.”⁸ The repetitive elements of the work already noted fit Lange’s three-part structure well.

Lange’s contribution to Holocaust literature extends beyond unsettling inherited notions of guilt and suffering. The author attempts to explore a range of possible relationships to the suffering that resulted from the Holocaust, and to do so almost entirely from the Jewish perspective. In the fulfillment or failure of Lewanski’s task, the hopes of Frau Altenschul, Schulze-Bethmann, Max Liebermann, Herr Klevenow, and countless unnamed others among the dead will find validation or refutation. Consequently, the pianist finds himself torn by the conflicting desires and philosophies of those for whom the fulfillment of his art will serve as a resurrection. Each character has lived and died in a different way and at a different time. As a result, each has come to a unique conclusion concerning the nature and implications of his or her death.

Max Liebermann functions as Lewanski’s foil; the pianist’s highly sensitive state of mind is brought into sharp relief by the painter’s cool and detached ruminations, which are recorded at various junctures in the novella. Liebermann died at the age of eighty-eight, but, like Lewanski, is uncertain of his ability to find anything desirable in death. He has, however, reaped the fruits of full maturation as a painter, and has tasted the experiences and melancholy of an entire lifetime.

⁸ Adorno 310.

Lewanski, on the other hand, suffers despair because he has had only a hint of the rewards that life can offer. Murdered at twenty-eight, he is now trapped in a state of stagnation and does not know whether he can ever find in death the kind of fulfillment of which he was robbed with his life. He is haunted by his sudden and violent death, and fears that he may be doomed to spend an eternity unable ever to develop his skills to maturity.

Max Liebermann—the only character based on a historical figure—died in his sleep in his home on Pariser Platz in 1935, two years after Hitler's *Machtergreifung*. He was, by this time, no stranger to the new regime's anti-Semitic agenda, and had withdrawn from public life as a result. The day after the *Bücherverbrennung* in May of 1933, he resigned from the Prussian Academy of the Arts, noting, "During my life, I have tried to serve German art with all my power. It is my conviction that art has nothing to do with either politics or ancestry; I can therefore no longer belong to the Prussian Academy of the Arts, since my perspective no longer has any validity in this regard."⁹ History confirmed the justification for his disgust. However, Max Liebermann had probably not imagined the extent to which the Nazis would ultimately implement their grandiose ideology. Having enjoyed everything that a full life has to offer, Liebermann would have found the horrors suffered by the Jews under the Nazi regime simply "beyond his comprehension."

Lange uses this ignorance to his advantage: without having experienced the immediate sense of horror felt by those less fortunate than he, Liebermann can consider everything from a deceptively removed standpoint. Although he has

⁹ Max Liebermann, *Centralvereins-Zeitung*, 11 May 1933.

experienced persecution under the Third Reich, he receives the accounts of the killings secondhand. He is nonetheless given the respect due to someone of his stature and age, and plays a mediating and calming role amid a tension-fraught crowd. The paternal image he maintains in his companions' presence never wavers. He comforts Frau Alteschul in times of grief, calming her when Lewanski's artistic obsessions cause him to withdraw from all public engagements; he inspires Lewanski to think that he may be able to make up in death for what he lost in life, and encourages his continued development as an artist in the face of Schulze-Bethmann's persistent pessimism.

His calm, reserved veneer hides an uncertainty that he rarely betrays. Although he unwaveringly supports Frau Alteschul's efforts to retrieve the beauty of life in death, he harbors some doubts. His sympathies lie, to some degree, with Schulze-Bethmann, although the latter's philosophical outlook deeply disturbs Frau Alteschul, who feels it directly contradicts her own agenda. Schulze-Bethmann's relationship with his murderer, which he makes no attempt to hide or excuse, causes a scandal in this small circle, strengthening everyone's already expressed ill will toward the writer. But Liebermann is detached from the rush of emotion that sways his murdered friends, encouraging tolerance for divergent viewpoints: "I would nevertheless be sorry if Schulze-Bethmann were to be thoroughly misunderstood simply because he is capable of confronting life's abysses more magnanimously than others." Liebermann continues his defense, subtly suggesting, in a moment of unprecedented candor, the validity of Schulze-Bethmann's perspective: "Why should we hold onto that feature of the living, whose intolerance knows no bounds?" (69). This suggestion is later recapitulated by Schulze-Bethmann after Lewanski's

disappearance: “[I]t is pointless to hold on to that distinction that we made in life, namely between good and evil” (96). As the novella progresses, Liebermann’s sympathies gradually grow larger and become more apparent.

In the wake of Lewanski’s final concert, Liebermann succumbs to this hidden inclination. He is preoccupied with preparing himself for the coming confrontation: “He had no intention of agreeing with everything Frau Altenschul said concerning her indignation toward Schulze-Bethmann” (92). Usually the first guest to arrive at Frau Altenschul’s salon, he cannot help lingering before that ominous mound of earth, reflecting on the dismal circumstances in which he now finds himself. For the first time, the reader gains insight into the tortured memories that vex the painter; reflecting on the death of his wife, Martha, who elected to kill herself with an overdose of Veronal in 1943 rather than risk being sent to Theresienstadt, Liebermann is overcome by a burst of melancholy: “I myself was fortunate, but the same cannot be said of my wife, Martha” (93). In Frau Altenschul’s presence he has become more reserved, and less a source of comfort. Liebermann only “quietly protests” against her suggestion that she give up her efforts to find something worthwhile in death and move away (94). He avoids her glance, and wishes to convey the impression that he is neither capable of commenting on the tension-fraught interaction between Frau Altenschul and Schulze-Bethmann, nor called on to do so. He uncharacteristically fails to stay behind and comfort Frau Altenschul.

This subtle change of heart finds a tragic parallel in the tortured pianist. Like Liebermann, Lewanski finds himself caught in the middle of a silent struggle between Frau Altenschul and Schulze-Bethmann. Unlike the accomplished painter, he cannot strive for detachment because of his own untimely death. Hoping that he

might be able to rescind the violent loss of his life, he allows himself to be taken under Frau Altenschul's wing. Her warm, caring attitude is initially a welcome relief from the bitter memory of his humiliating end, and offers a needed respite from Schulze-Bethmann's harsh and caustic attitude. Indeed, his vehement and ultimately violent refusal to receive his murderer finds a welcome parallel in Frau Altenschul. "The delicate Jewish lady so devoted to the beautiful things in life" offers Lewanski the opportunity to escape his murderer, both physically and psychologically (7).

Frau Altenschul's approach borders repression. Her habit of fretting over every little wrinkle on her forehead and keeping track of every New Year further suggests a refusal to acknowledge her death. Her insistence on ignoring the knocking and ringing of the uniformed men, indeed, her refusal to allow them to enter her realm—the salon—must no doubt be attractive to the tortured artist. Liebermann provides Lewanski with a succinct summary of the motivations driving his friend in death:

"I want to spare you the explanation ... of that disgust Frau Altenschul felt at being tossed unclothed into a ditch, possibly amid laughter. Dying is the final and most sublime form of our existence, and you can imagine how much effort Frau Altenschul, so devoted to the beautiful things in life, has had to expend on forgetting her wretched end" (69).

Almost everything she undertakes in death is an attempt to blot out the memory of her dreadful end. Her focus falls on the arts, the beautiful things in life. "A Guimard cabinet would make her happy, so too a set of Sèvres porcelain," remarks the narrator, "and if it had been her wish to redeem a pianist in a fashion suited to him, she could see nothing in this ambition for which she deserved be mocked" (95).

Indeed, for Lewanski's purposes, Frau Altenschul's hopes work quite well.

But like Liebermann, Lewanski fails to find comfort in this optimism. Despite his emotional bond with Frau Altenschul, whose distaste for Schulze-Bethmann he knows well, Lewanski feels compelled to meet with him to discuss the writer's perplexing remarks regarding the late Beethoven. By the time of the proposed meeting, Lewanski no doubt knows that Schulze-Bethmann is responsible for the unwanted visitation by the uniformed man. His curiosity does not dispel his distaste; it is to Frau Altenschul that he remains loyal until his final performance, and it is only thanks to her efforts that he wants to find redemption.

These efforts stand in direct opposition to those of Schulze-Bethmann, whose cynical attitude never fails to stir controversy. He wishes to accept his death with no trace of nostalgia for the life he has been forced to leave unfinished. Whereas Liebermann yearns for the anguish and uncertainty necessary to unleash the creative power of art, and Frau Altenschul hopes to recover the beautiful things in life stolen from her in so untimely a fashion, Schulze-Bethmann wishes to escape that sense of incompleteness so painfully felt by the rest of his murdered companions. And, unlike his other creative counterparts, Schulze-Bethmann makes no mention of his identity as an artist. The only trace of his former craft left with him in death is his consistent cynicism: "He had written novellas of merit, fierce satires, and was universally unloved, among the dead as well, although one could not help admiring his ingenuity, of which he often, and at times inappropriately, made use" (27). This reference to inappropriate use hints not only at his tendency to look at the negative sides of life but also at his insistence on doing away with those distinctions made by the living that in death can only cause trouble. His ironic attitude emerges in his

casual association with his murderer, which he feels no need to justify and in which he indeed unapologetically engages before his horrified associates.

Yet, despite this cynicism, Schulze-Bethmann offers a glimmer of hope—in defiance of the book’s disastrous climax. Strolling through the botanical gardens with his murderer, Herr Klevenow, the writer becomes annoyed by his companion’s refusal to walk beside him:

You killed, to be sure, and whoever kills incurs guilt. But guilt is a great opportunity—for atonement, sir. One who does not want to atone for his guilt is despicable. But you are so remorseful... At the sight of a blooming chestnut tree you really might allow yourself to set aside all of this brooding (100).

These words of solace, however, are never offered to Klevenow, but are left unspoken. They remain in the realm of thought. The hope for a solution through Lewanski has been disappointed, and even Schulze-Bethmann’s uncharacteristic optimism remains hidden from all but the reader. But the possibility of a solution is nonetheless offered. Lange projects his message onto Schulze-Bethmann, a novella writer like himself: the thought that somehow we must advance beyond the mechanical division of the world into guilty and innocent, good and evil, light and shadow. Lange offers no solution, but wishes to agitate the reader, and leaves the question open: “How is this malice to be overcome without, afterward, the individual himself becoming its very instrument?”¹⁰

¹⁰ Durzak 190.

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