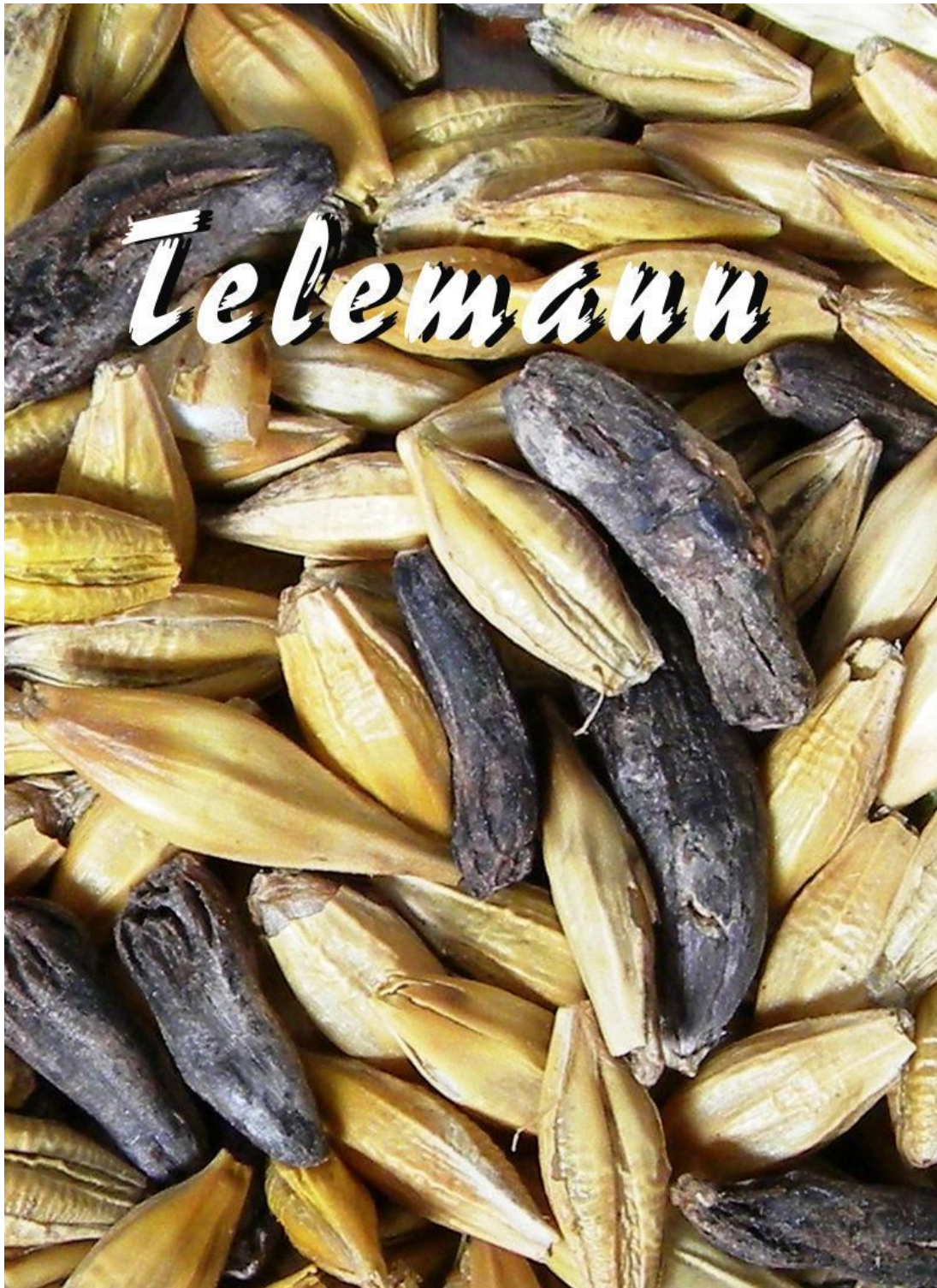




PART ONE.

1 Shriek

Mary asked in a voice as clear as love, as warm as breath: *"How does it start?"*

"With the snake," her twin sister Rose replied.

Mary squinched her nose. *"Or with the ghost; it all starts with the ghost. Doesn't it start with him?"*

"Ergot, then," Rose offered. Then, she added after a brief silence, *"Or the Elbe?"* she wondered aloud.

"Elbe," Mary repeated thoughtfully. Sounding confident she added: *"First the river, then the rye, then the ergot, then the ghost. Surely?"*

In absolute darkness, in the fulsomeness of the silence you could almost smell the rotting flesh.

"The shriek. That's the beginning of it all. And the end too," Mary resolutely declared.

"Alpha and omega. Prospect and retrospect? Expansion and contraction, certainly. What? Anyway, it starts with her son. It is Albrun's story," Rose reminded them.

"Then it starts with her. On the first day. Remember? Where were you, Rose?"

"What do you mean? I was with you. Like always. Just like always."

"I mean when you first heard about the catapults," Mary asked.

Ironsmith- hammered sparks, like bright sharp tears, echoed an improvised duet with the dull clanging noon church bell. The smell of wet spring: earth, dung, rye clung to the air. Horse-drawn wooden cart wheels scraping scored grey cobblestones. Women in long dresses in the market square; huddled in pairs they studiously bought bread, meat, potatoes and other root vegetables. Rude children in short pants threw pebbles at beggars; turning, running they laughed escaping with wicked delight. In dark lecture halls weighty words leached nature right out of young men. Sunday's pitiless sermons constricted the hearts of all Christian souls.

Springtime, surrounded by the florid outbreak of new life, Wittenberg was still dull, austere. For days the war was forgotten until the wind brought the stench of rotting flesh across the river, blanketing

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the city with death. Then, awake and asleep, beneath scented masks, the besieged residents suffered scornfully. Many believed Jewish ghosts caused the intermittent pestilence— their revenge against the cruel city. Some believed it was God's punishment called down by Luther's curse against the display of public lewdness: a woman, a beautiful woman, as *always*, was to blame. Others claimed it was because the duke was murdered. Irregardless, so long as there be bread, the mayor assured everyone, we will survive. Grateful this olfactory plague wasn't lethal, people just shrugged. They wore their masks while they ate, shat and fornicated. And really, the mayor resolved, I wish it was bad every day so we would have gotten used to the smell by now.

Bright green rye stood chest high like a loitering army surrounding Wittenberg when three things happened: The catapults appeared across the river and Ella left her riparian home wearing a white and yellow printed mask dripping of lilac scent that bore an elephant design. Softly, slowly on damp cobblestones to the bakery she steadily trod, resting at long intervals on short wooden benches all the way to the bookstore she went where relief found her. Sitting on the floor between dusty stacks of manuscripts and folios, beyond the stench, flipping through a large Turkish picture book, aloud she invented stories -- that was the best part.

"If you drew a pencil- thin moustache, you'd look just like our sister, Telemann said. Or was it Altmann?"

Puzzled, Mary looked at Rose looking back at her. Four identical raised eyebrows expressing matching matchless confusion. (Machinations.)

Just outside the bakery Ella had unwrapped a piece of still-warm strudel. Squeezing her nostrils shut forced the stench inside her open mouth just as hopeful eyes caught her attention. A young girl in a red mask took the strudel with thanks before running to meet her daddy at noon bell. Under a clear sky, below the big tree in the center of the market square, she bit, startled as she was by the clap of thunder overhead.

"What was her name?"

"I don't know. Do you know?" Mary asked

"No. Should we make up a name?" Rose wondered.

"No," Mary objected. *"No additions."*

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"You're not Duchess Mary. Anyway, that's stupid."

The shriek splits his dream apart again: the dream of the girl in the square, just at noon, with the red mask, just about to chew. Startled, naked and erect, springing off his cot onto the rough stone floor Albrun stood shivered in dark hot hell. The small boy squints toward the distant low glow: a false dawn he makes it maybe three hours ahead of schedule. Hand over his pounding heart, his shaky voice counts loudly:

"One... two... three,"

nearly four rapid heartbeats he counts the shriek's swiftly rising note, frantic like a panicked bird desperate for flight,

"One... two... three, four"

The shriek quavered, undulating, spinning like a collapsing top,

"One, two, three, four, five, six, ...seven..."

falling slowly, plaintively fading, echoing into eternal silence: the arc of a lifetime recapitulated. Did this harrowing, majestic sound belong to a soul captured or a soul finally freed?

'3:11- *Shriek*' Albrun notes in his ledger by a weak flickering lamp, wondering once more how to capture the sound. Was it really the sound of souls leaving bodies? Do mother and unborn baby share a single soul? Do unborn babies have only a *part* of a soul? There were no columns for apprehending souls.

In the fourth hour Albrun wiped sweat off his ruddy face when the oil lamp sputtered nearly out. The stone room blinked. With one heartbeat the silver clock and the scale are barely visible atop the cabinet, in the next they disappear. One moment flashes of light ripple the wet stone walls-- dancing beams of light not unlike a sunbeam skipping across a puddle in a field of tall rye. Queer suggestive shapes: a monster's head, the vibrating curves of lines too quick to comprehend. Then darkness, then more queer shapes, then darkness. Eyes opened wide, Albrun screams a note of rising panic, then a wavering note and finally a long fading note unto silence, readily believing the flashing lights on the walls cheered his performance. Rapidly blinking, watching with fascination, splintered, queer shapes bounced in his mind. They *were* there, the shapes, but never *really* there-- impossible to recall because never comprehended: both *real* and *unreal* all at the same time. '*Hell is the best place,*' Albrun grinned.

At four hours fifteen Albrun slipped off the high stool to trim the wick, only to stop short when the soft glow from the birthing chamber faded: a false dusk, arriving six hours late. Or fifteen hours

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early. Simone emerged like a ghost dejected from the darkness, a candle and paper held in her blood-stained hands. Collapsing on the wooden cot behind his desk, eyes closed to the darkness, she listened for the sound of nib scratching damp parchment, *'Masterstroke...'* she observed silently. Sighing long and loud, her blood-smeared right hand sinking to the floor, slowly sinking, blood dripping, dim flashes of fresh blood, sweat and water renewed the bloodstain mosaic on the apothecary stone floor -- a *"brocade in blood"* Simone once called it and Albrun remembered.

The lamp spit irregular shadows across his desk. Albrun sensed that Simone was inspecting his transcription but she was still prone, her eyes were still closed, when she asked in her low hoarse voice, her Dr. Marburg impersonation: *"Winkelmann, you can't be Lonicer."*

Albrun needlessly suppressed an astonished grin-- Simone could only see the back of his head from the cot. In his mind he silently corrected her, *'Barely Winkelmann now and better than Lonicer... soon...'* With an unsteady small hand by a weak flickering light carefully he penned one single row of numbers, knowing the last group would all be X's -- *not* zeroes: he had learned that mistake a long time before. Refusing to look at her or to rise to her challenge, absorbed in transcription, he wrote, triple-checking every number.

Albrun wiped the sweat off his steaming face. The heat was oppressive; you got used to the smell of sulfur but the air in hell was so hot and thick you could *feel* the clock thud, thud, like a clockwork broom beating a wet rug. Deflection. Redirection. Avoidance. Patience. *'Better is probable; taller for certain'* Albrun grinned, acknowledging his work stood on Lonicer's shoulders. The echo of water dripping from a distant tub encouraged him to finish and bathe, to sleep and to dream. *'Very close now...'* he thought. *'Very, very, very, very ...'*

Laying in darkness Simone stirred mumbling *"-ensions?"*

Silently Albrun muttered back: *'Let ...'*

"Let you finish," she sighed slowly sitting up, woken by something in the dark. Absentmindedly she adjusted the collar of her blouse streaked with Mrs. Schieffer, the young girl she met... Friday. Rubbing the girl's dried blood from her fingers, in her Simone's voice she coaxed: *"Fool your mother and Marburg,"* silently she added, *'But not me.'* When he didn't react, she spoke aloud, *"It's hurtful Albrun. Secrets between friends--"*

He resisted distraction for nearly two heartbeats. Frowning in the flickering lamp his ruddy face turned an alarming, otherworldly bright red. Strands of long hair wicked sweat down to his chin. Here is Albrun copying her numbers, Albrun organizing their results. *'Simone, my love,'* he thought but turning he caught the sparks of her eyes in the darkness. To himself he said, *'You have secrets too you don't share. Fair's fair.'* Now he did put down the quill, he allowed his mind to wander, to contemplate as always, the pebble in the horse's hoof that threw the rider that lost the battle that cost an empire.

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"I ... -tentions..."

He started, frowning. Did she say, *'tensions, in-tentions, a-tentions...?' Albrun replied, "A little more than rape but less than rapt."* Feeling uncommonly pleased with himself he hummed the shriek over and over, resuming his writing in a burst. He was nearly finished now. Really, he was just getting started--

"Don't do that," Mary commanded.

From the darkness upright and alert, in her Simone's voice came: *"Sometimes it's even worse when you do talk. You hide everything... important."* In her Marburg voice Simone chided, *"And you don't see anything. You can only imagine."*

'I write what you see' he silently concurred. Aloud he told her, *"It's the law. I suppose. At least it's the custom: no men at childbirth. Anyway, this is how we work,"* Albrun contentedly shrugged.

Over his shoulder, looking toward the lined pages lit by the smoking, flickering lamp barely illuminating his desk surrounded by darkness she acknowledged his wick needed trimming. His meticulousness she admired—in all the years she had only caught a single error: she had written 7 and he had written 1. Still, he wrote the number 4 two different ways for no reason. His penmanship was unpolished, lazy, varying. His writing was immature, small, and nearly perfect like Albrun himself she thought for the first time today, that is tomorrow.

Pointing his wilted quill at the lamp, still not looking at her, Albrun invited: *"Trim the wick please so we can finish."*

"Impossible," Simone intoned in her midwife voice. *"A nine-month-old baby's head cannot pass through an immature girl's pelvis. I should have started the treatment sooner... it was impossible from the start."* She thought to trim his wick. Yawning she spoke in her exhausted Simone voice, *"Albrun, its past midnight. And we're alone in hell again."* She knew that was a lie: young Mrs. Schieffer lay in the next room albeit freshly dead. *Newly* dead? *New and* dead—that seemed wrong: dead is forever.

Albrun wiped his face. *"The baby?"*

"The snake must be huge! You saw the size of the coil of skin. What does it eat? Do you know?" Simone shuttered. Fanning a folded piece of paper, she sank back onto the cot, humming herself asleep.

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"Was the snake real? Did Marburg really see it?" Mary asked.

"I'm not sure. Does she know, I wonder."

"Simone?"

"No. Ella, you silly sister!"

"I'm just as smart as you, Rose."

"Exactly."

Her ghostly-white-covered bosom rising and falling, the familiar scent of her: sweat and rusty blood-iron. Beautiful she was even in the dark-- he imagined he could see the faint band of freckles that dusted the bridge of her nose. Stiffening he lightly touched her blouse. Simone stirred half asleep, barely opening her eyes. In the dark her blood-stained fingers absentmindedly touched her long, still-tied hair.

"At least there was no pain. After." Simone stood, hands on round hips, her wan face flickering in the bright light of his freshly-trimmed lamp, her head, neck and shoulders casting long weaving shadows against the dark, sweating stone walls of hell.

Sensuously smoothly sliding tin against glass Albrun dipped nib into inkwell. Gazing up he noted a streak of blood across Simone's forehead just there, at her hairline. Smiling weakly, he nodded, *"Sorry. How quickly did the contractions start?"*

"Just a few heartbeats! I've seen it a hundred times--"

"One hundred twenty- seven times including tonight. Bleeding?"

"It's magical. Albrun, we make magic here. Right here in hell!" Watching him stare at his ledger Simone's tired eyes smiled. *"No. Not much bleeding. That was never her problem-- she was too dry... Poor girl."*

"Vomit?"

"After her dose: constant mild retching for 200 beats—about three minutes, a small amount of spittle only came up. She had only had some little broth in her. My God she was so, so tiny... so... tender."

"Contractions and vomiting together."

Simone pursed her frowning lips. Sticking it out she flicked her long slender tongue fulsomely licked her lips. *"Yes. Always. At least for first births. Can't be helped; we've tried wormwood, mint, balm, betony, white hellebore, cold water, hot water, lukewarm water, ale, honey, apple, rye bread, oil, fire, prayer. Even with a single grain there is vomiting the first time. Always. Always..."*

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Ledger closed, Albrun abruptly opened his journal-- now they were nearly home. Thinking about incense he asked, *"Mind?"*

"In the beginning Mrs. Schieffer... her name was Yvonne, dear child, she was silent, couldn't coax a word out of her. Just as bad as you. I tried humoring her in my broken Polish. They live in Poland, an estate near Wroclaw. Thirteen years old. She lived... Write her name down, Albrun: Yvonne. At her observation when I told Yvonne not to worry, she sobbed clutching her head... bowed. Her head was bowed. She never once looked at my eyes. Never. Not one time... Tonight, when the time came, when Yvonne began to scream in agony! Poor girl. It is a sin, Albrun, making a child pregnant, husband or not. It's murder. Two times! His duke needs to stop him."

"Did she?" Mary asked. "Really? Did she say that?"

Simone looked through a stray lock of hair. *"After the dose. After here retching, about a minute after her retching stopped, she became talkative, she stopped screaming, no pain, mostly not coherent. She sounded almost drunk, her speech slowed and was a little slurred. Only very little slurring only. Talkative. Not rational mostly. Combative? Fearful, certainly. Yvonne spoke of God and her son. Over and over: 'Bóg i mój syn.' And at the moment of her death, Albrun, Yvonne's face was calm. Really, radiant. She sang the shriek. She didn't scream it, right? Thank God. Thank Bóg."* Simone leaned forward touching his arm. *"We gave her peace, Albrun. She is at peace now. Yvonne and her boy are at peace. We did that for them."* Simone tugged on his sleeve biting her lip. *"Has anyone seen the snake?"*

Albrun wiped his face wondering about the unborn child: did it die at the same moment as the moth—as Yvonne? He thought to say, *"Thank Bóg and Lonicer,"* but instead he asked, *"Not rational or not coherent, which?"*

"She... Good. Albrun. Smart. Different amounts at different times I suppose..." Simone yawned, *"Are we finished? Can I bathe now, please good sir knight?"*

"Which dominated when?"

"Tomorrow," she said, lifting her candle.

"Today," Albrun corrected. *"One last thing."*

Catching Albrun's eyes stopped Simone. *"We'll keep this formula. Good for stopping pain in hopeless cases too,"* she thoughtfully nodded.

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'Good for saving lives. Good for ending lives,' Albrun inscribed in his largest Marburg script. Setting down his quill he read, then lifting the quill he circled with a deep sigh their conclusions from good measure. Flickering lights swirled on the wet walls, skipping across the damp stone floor. Now he closed his eyes to shriek quietly, respectfully. They listened to the last echo fade into darkness until they heard only the sound of water dripping from the distant communal bath. He wished he could understand what the water said too.

"No sense of urgency," Simone judged, reading his face.

"I know. You have to be really dying."

Simone sighed. *"Or be a great artist. The right tone, the perfect brush stroke,"* she suggested, walking away. Just as her swaying ghostly form vanished into the darkness Albrun heard, *"How about a parrot?"*

"A parrot! Genius!"

"Catch the snake and Marburg will get you a parrot," her tired voice echoed, making Albrun grin.

"He was always strange. Even before everything," Rose said.

"Sui generis," Mary quipped sagely. *"It's in his blood."*

"Everything else, I mean."

"You don't know what you mean. How can we? It's her story--"

"Simone's?"

"Stop."

Lit only by overlapping swaying circles of candlelight he cautiously eased his small pale frame into the hottest stone bath. Overwhelmed by the heat he instantly felt faint. Albrun stepped out nine times before he could finally fully submerge his body and beet- red face. Alone in a watery womb, eyes closed, he hummed the shriek: stridency, indecision, astonished capitulation and the long waning resignation-onto-silence. He understood of the four notes, he could only achieve with fidelity the last: the silence, and for only as long as he could hold his breath under absolutely still water. *'Hell is the best place,'* he thought.

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"What sound did Yvonne's baby make when it's soul left?" asked Rose.

Languidly, sensuously Simone released her long hair, undressing wearily, feeling satisfied and bone- sad. Fully stretching her tired arms and legs in the warm bath she smiled whispering Ella's refrain: *"This is the best part."*

Submerged he thought: *'Best way to die: completely engulfed in warmth, completely relaxed, complete peace. Perfection realized: here in hell as it is in heaven. Amen,'* he silently blasphemed.

'Where did it sleep? What did it eat? Did it go up to purgatory and heaven too? Even right now, slithering up and down the wet stone stairs in darkness and silence?' Simone shuttered, rubbing her warm washcloth across the nape of her neck wet and reddening, across her shiny shoulders.

Albrun's echoing call *"Was it a boy?"* was met with silence. Silence: the only part he could realize. For just eleven heartbeats, so far, the silence of death—the eternal silence. But what if the rest, the afterlife, was *real*? Not eternal silence but... what? Short of dying how could the truth be revealed?

"Marburg will perform the autopsy, then we'll know," Simone in her midwife voice informed. Rubbing her lavender-scented washcloth across Albrun's back and shoulders she hummed a lullaby. *"Tomorrow, if he can... today I mean."* Close to ecstasy at the feel of her hands on his naked body Albrun was grateful at only these moments for his ruddy complexion. *'Hell is the best place.'*

With candles held below their waists silently they climbed. Two damp naked feet ascending the slippery stone steps to heaven, two to purgatory, slowly and cautiously, avoiding sharp cracked edges. In the dancing candlelight, dressed in white linen bedclothes hugging their damp bodies, climbing with their backs bent forward they looked like penitent monks fleeing the tortures of hell.

Climbing Simone considered this slow, rising, vertical gambol she often made with Albrun trailing close. One step below Albrun experienced the exhilaration of walking behind the nearly nude figure of the most desired woman in Bad Döben: sweet recompense for the bastard. He reached out his

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free hand to almost touch Simone, reaching the palm of his hand ever-closer to her undulating above on the damp stairs. *'Hell is the best place,'* he knew.

Yawning Simone said, *"Watch out, we're coming to Styx. What are you doing?"*

"Can you shriek like them, the ones you've lost?"

"I can see your shadow. We lose them together, Albrun. And we save them together, too."

"I love you," Albrun whispered.

"What?"

"Did you try?"

Separating on the landing Simone kissed his cheek for the first time since Christmas. *"I used to think I was the weft and you and Marburg were the warp,"* she sighed.

"What do you mean?"

"A loom. You and Marburg were stationary and I moved between you two. But you are moving faster, I know that now. You are moving away, I'm sure of it," Simone softly spoke, her chin resting on his shoulder, her eyes searching the dark.

Pitch dark but for a candle, his mother gently snoring, Albrun lays on top of his wool blanket on the floor. He blows out the candle thinking of the last piece — the most difficult and important. Perhaps it will arrive with today's mail. Thinking of his father again he nods off muttering, *'A little more than rape but less than rapt'* like a shibboleth that slips him neatly back into dream.

The dull iron clang of the dull iron bell gave the wind voice. Echoing along stone walls and fences it rushes forever forward. A startled lizard darting atop a rock instantly is snared by a passing crow who alights a short wall to eat it. A slight boy with a red face and thin wrists hurls a stone that misses the crow landing near a group of classmates who strip off his pants. They punch and kick him and make him bleed from his nose. The three coins are lost he had been saving in anticipation of the summer fair. His mother had warned him not to carry the coins but he enjoyed hearing them jangle in his pocket walking. In dream Albrun blamed his mother. He could as fairly have blamed his absent father, the boys, the crow, the stone; himself, the lizard, the bell or the wind.

Blameless alone are the walls of stone. Stone walls made of words in bizarre tongues, words heard in echoes, words seen in flashing lights, words that set the very wet walls of hell on fire! Queer words made of fire and smoke and echoes. Billowing, folding inward, recursive, mirror in mirror in mirror unreachable, like rushing into a horizon forever receding ever- more quickly. Simone asks how he

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had finally gotten even; he finds the dark kernels with Hercules by his side. Albrun shrieked more than once, he was sure of it, but he couldn't hear himself for dreaming.

Her dark room smelled of fresh flowers. Simone slid naked between smooth bedsheets, falling fast asleep for hours until something moving in the dark roused her. Unlocking the door between their rooms Simone smelled his acrid cigar smoke. She slid into his bed.

"Don't touch me," Marburg drowsily muttered.

"I can read," she quietly exhaled. After a long silence, she whispered ironically: *"Or shriek?"*

"Sleep," Marburg mumbled.

"I thought..." Mary began to say.

"What?" Rose asked.

2 Formula

Albrun dreamt of the church clock: small and round, Swiss silver and chained just like his own. And then he dreamt again of the crashing branch that sounded like holy thunder. While from her bed beside him, silently Ella ascended to heaven when the sun rose. Waking mid-day, skyward Albrun followed her into the blessed cool air, into the realm of light where sun streaming through wavy window glass cast blurred rainbows, multi-colored curved caterpillars sliding across wood-paneled walls and blue-veined white marble floors.

Backward Albrun climbed, exceedingly slowly, eyes shut, his pale hands off the railing, humming backwards the soul-leaving-body phrase one time for each step, by necessity truncating the ultimate, eternal, silent note. Racing through heaven wearing a clean white linen shirt, white short pants and shoeless white socks he ignored a bright young maid's cheery "*Hallo Albrun!*" and a livid elderly guest's reprimand. Sprinting into the director's office without knocking Albrun stood in the splendid sunlit room squinting like a ruddy-faced mole above ground.

Doctor Marburg sat in his handsome mahogany wheelchair, his greying hair perfectly combed, his military pin centered on the right lapel of his blue-gray suit. With a cracked smile he said drolly, "*Albrun Winkelmann take caution,*" pointing at his raised bare foot, "*What you see before you are the wages of sin.*"

Unusually, Albrun advanced, tapped Marburg's big toe, then infinitely lightly he touched the top of the director's foot, causing him to wince with the expectation of pain. *'If he stopped drinking alcohol...'* Albrun thought but said, "*Très bien, la douleur bouge. Should be gone les quinze jours.*" Albrun made a small hop and took a low bow bringing one hand to the white marble floor. Upright he waltzed with an imaginary, taller partner in slow counter-clockwise spinning motions, wobbling like an errant top until he stood before the largest window his eyes ostentatiously shut to the manicured lawn, the sun and low clouds.

Marburg brought his hands together in a praying pose. He began again: "*Another good day Albrun, successful deliveries for two mothers. The third-- explain.*"

In his Marburg voice Albrun replied, "*Impossible. Geometry defeated us: a child cannot deliver a child. No amount of ergot can--*"

"*Allow a camel...*," Marburg nodded. "*I told the husband, the bastard... sorry, fool, she was much too young. Second-time in three years widower. To a child; revolting. I would have done the autopsy but,*" Without self-pity he stated the obvious, "*I cannot stand or walk.*"

Albrun thought: *'Mrs. Schieffer?'* but instead said, "*Baby. Dead. The.*"

Eyes rolled Marburg responded indulgently, "*In the morgue. Of course. The husband, widower, wants a quick funeral so he can return home. Post-haste. To choose another child bride, maybe, the b--.*"

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Pastor needs the baby's body for burial. Doctor Rosenthal in Leipzig, my old professor should be here in two days," Marburg hoped. "Rosenthal has performed Guillimeau's procedure. I hope Simone can assist him to learn; next time she might save the child?"

Albrun wanted to ask "Guillimeau?" Instead, he hummed a fragment of Simone's lullaby over and over. Over and over, he hummed the simple tune while Marburg watched until Albrun became aware that he was unsure how to stop. Withdrawing a coin from his pants pocket, flipping it in the air, letting it bounce off the shiny marble floor, together they watched it roll spinning to a loud vibrating silence near a wall under a short table. Then Albrun stopped humming.

"It's Wednesday, your fracture day I know, and you surely realize you are as regular as a clock in your irregularity. Annoying, but harmless I suppose. Maybe actually useful. Doctor Guillimeau. French. Abdominal surgical delivery. Calls it 'sectioning.' Always fatal for the mother, it can deliver a living child."

Albrun opened his eyes, failed to suppress a shudder, then thought against his will: *'Rosenthal is arriving from Leipzig because of a murder by intercourse, a second murder by intercourse. Because a rich Pole kills little girls for their dowry or for the pleasure of raping them, for the pure joy of depravity, perhaps for all of these reasons or for other reasons unknown.'* Albrun also tried and failed to suppress his inescapable verdict: *'An unpredictable, an utterly unforeseeable pebble.'*

"Formula? --" Marburg advanced the conversation, before suddenly contorting his face in intense shooting pain.

Implacably Albrun watched and thought: *'The same as it's been for the past forty-seven days. Still one grain per ten kilograms mother's weight which amounts to four grains for an average-sized mother, plus one grain for new mothers.'* Instead, he delivered his judgement like a sonorous Latin professor. "Immutatus," he replied, brushing a lock of brown hair from his eyes. *"This may be the ultima formulae."*

"This is the final formula," Simone insisted, her Marburg voice preceded her sudden, dazzling arrival. With her open arms standing in a shaft of sunlight, her red hair, green eyes and red dress transfixed man and boy. *"Has the snake been caught?"*

"I... I agree, we are very close--"

"We are there," Simone corrected the boy as she leaned over to talk quietly to Marburg. Albrun openly stared at the director's handsome medical diploma hanging pride of place on the wall opposite the long couch, centered and below inferior, smaller renderings of Jesus on the cross and Maurice, the Duke of Saxe-Lauenburg. He read the diploma date over and over, stretching and bending his neck fully from side to side, alternately lowering one ear then the other to touch each shoulder with exactly equal pressure.

"I showed Doctor Schröder the entire spa and the grounds. He was even more impressed with heaven than hell, especially the kitchen," she said. *"A passion for the French, he said Chef's Coq au vin rivaled the best he's ever eaten. Anywhere! Keep Chef happy. You should order more French wine."*

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"Yes, of course. I will. No doubt he was impressed also with his guide," Marburg smiled, appraising her from toe to top. "What else?"

"Reports of battles in the east-- the duke's campaign is gaining. But it's bad for business --"

"The ledger agrees but the journal—" Albrun interrupted in a bizarre high-pitched voice. He had thought to say 'We're not ready yet' but he surprised himself. He was changing; the quickening had begun. He needed to document it he thought.

"Simple speculation surrounding souls, spirits," she countered.

"I saw what you did there," Mary complained.

"Wednesday... God..."

"Mind," in his Marburg voice Albrun corrected her, "Ideas. Thought." For the first time in Marburg's presence Albrun challenged her: "Simone, are you ready right now to endorse this formula? To all mothers and midwives?" He took another small hop and bow that brought his other hand to the floor.

"What a strange boy you are... Everyday... now..." Suddenly she turned tapping Marburg's arm, "He's hiding something important; you do know that? Something brazen, you can bet... It may be evil... That's all I know." Looking at Albrun, Simone nearly shouted "Yes!" Then calmly, Simone repeated, "Yes. For the right births. To force contractions before the mother becomes too weak. To stop dangerous bleeding, of course. And then, like last night, to eliminate the pain of a hopeless delivery. Three grains for small, four grains for medium and five grains for large mothers, plus one grain for new mothers." She turned toward the boy. "What we did here will change child birthing throughout Christendom," she boasted. "Double?"

Squinting near the bottom of the diploma, Albrun shook his head yes but answered "No, left."

"Now you're just annoying. It's not clever, you know, you're like a backwards-- We have twice the number of successful childbirths!" she boasted, poking Marburg's arm gently with two fingers. "And that includes hopeless cases too like Yvonne last night. Albrun, you're a backwards parrot. Marburg, please buy Albrun a parrot. Maybe he'll stay for a parrot."

'The walls in Hell speak,' Albrun said to himself, nodding.

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Marburg asked, *"What do we do next? Where do you want to go? To school? My offer stands."*

Turning, catching Albrun with his tongue out before abruptly looking away from the diploma Simone felt the wind of onrushing fate. *"Something is coming soon,"* she softly spoke to Marburg. *"Something big, a long time in the works. Years, I think. Before either of us arrived? Maybe his vengeance?"*

"The walls in Hell speak," Albrun admitted aloud.

"What do you mean, Albrun?" Marburg asked.

"Intention. There is purpose. In the dancing lights. Intelligence. Something is speaking; I am sure of it."

Simone shook her head. *"More souls and spirits! Prove it. What do they say?"*

Then there was silence. At last Marburg spoke: *"Sounds like witchcraft, Albrun. Be careful. I can't always protect you. You shouldn't talk about this with anyone. Do you understand?"*

Albrun nodded. Simone began to speak but closed her lips.

"Yes?" Marburg continued, *"What do we do next?"*

With a deep sigh, with his eyes shut Albrun mentally drew a line through his speech-- he was disappointed that it fell on a Wednesday. In his Marburg voice he recited from memory: *"At least three things: Spread the knowledge of the proper use of ergot in childbirth to doctors and midwives; Harvest reliable and uniform ergot medicine and sell it, particularly in areas where rye doesn't grow; Offer our spa to people at the end of their lives as a place to die peacefully and painlessly--"*

"The church would never allow--" Marburg interrupted.

"The church o-beys the du-uke!" Albrun countered in a bright sing-song voice like a puppet playing a jester.

"That is good, Mary," Rose nodded appreciatively.

Marburg and Simone silently sat. Sitting silently, him with raised eyebrows and she with wide-eyes narrowing to slits focused on two mismatched rainbows which, with the passing of a cloud, grew brighter against the bookshelves. Marburg leaned back gasping; he bit his lip at the sudden shooting pain. He rocked his upper torso so slightly Simone and Albrun didn't notice. When the throbbing and the rainbows dimmed, he sputtered mechanically, *"Pre... limin... ary... re... port?"*

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“Un résumé approximatif; enough to see that we have succeeded. Simone and I are certain. The dosage is safe and effective we know, and our outcomes are much better than anywhere else. Tu le sais,” Albrun advised in his Albrun voice.

“Sometimes. When the throbbing is unbearable. You know. I use opium. You know, but then I’m unconscious or incoherent— once I woke up outside in the rain—you found me, Simone. Willow bark lessens the pain slightly, but only sometimes. Why? Henbane is useless. Hemlock makes it worse. When the pain is at its greatest... dear God I can’t even stand the touch of the lightest cloth. What do you think? Should I use ergot?”

“No,” Simone and Albrun snapped in unison.

“Why not?”

Albrun wanted to speak in a little petulant voice and so he did, adding an implausible laugh after the penultimate word: *“I’m not a... doc-tor.”*

Unblinking Marburg stared at the boy who in truth did look like a miniature surgeon in his clean white attire.

Blinking regularly, using his best Marburg voice, Albrun rendered his verdict. *“One grain. You can try only one single grain of ergot-- the smallest dose. The first time you will certainly vomit for a few minutes. You will experience convulsions or tremors lasting for perhaps an hour or even longer. You will likely become irrational,”* Albrun warned. *“You may have intense stomach cramps lasting a few minutes. You will sweat and you may pass out. Lonicer does not reference ergot as a treatment for gout; you would be using it to relieve pain only, if that is even possible. But even better, avoid peppery foods and avoid sweets, don’t get fat and stop drinking alcohol altogether. Forever. For your body, sir, alcohol is poison, you know that. Stop it! Double your water intake. Then double it again the following week. Flush the poisons out of your body with our water and document the results. Doctor? The duke would love to learn that our water is an effective treatment for the gout. Then don’t wait until the next attack but stay on your diet to prevent gout from returning. Arnica applied topically may help with the gout. Continuous circulation of water against the gout area is a treatment worth exploring. In principle blood-letting might help,”* he concluded with a foolish grin, drawing his index finger across his throat under his chin.

“Trite gesture, very common,” Marburg countered with calm authority as he launched into his speech that always started with the line: *“Living is more than merely breathing, my dear boy...”* Albrun sat silently, listening for any minor deviation from the script, knowing he and Simone were merely onlookers to Marburg’s longstanding soliloquy. In this case, Albrun thought, *deeply seated* was a more apt description.

Just as Marburg’s peroration rose to a crescendo of hoary rationalizations, he caught Albrun blinking alternately his left and right eyes. Stopping mid-sentence he admitted, *“You are young and healthy. Well, young. Young and crazy. But smart.”* He cautiously wheeled himself back to his desk and opened an envelope in order to appear busy. *“Make a list of what you need, how much time and money. The duke will want to know how much money this will make for his spa. And Winkelmann...”*

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Albrun, what are you up to? Can I know?"

Albrun hesitated. Parrot, snake and Simone came to his mind. *"I have a sick relative. I will tell you more as soon as I hear from them."*

"What relative?!" Simone wanted to know. *"I don't believe him. He's good at keeping secrets with his mouth shut, but he is a bad, he is an awful liar. Artless. Marburg, we are close now to Albrun's day ... Wait... Is it happening on my birthday? Albrun, you're not going to hurt anyone? Please, promise me that."*

'I love you,' he thought. *"I promise,"* he replied.

"Are you leaving us so soon?" Marburg asked fondly.

'I love you,' Albrun thought. *"I promise,"* he replied overcome with emotion, barely uttering: *"I promise things will be good."*

Ella set their pewter plates and forks down with an echoing clang on the stone floor in the warm deserted hallway of purgatory. She closed their door with an audible sigh of gladness. She stretched out on the white soft down cotton coverlet with a silver brocade in the shape of unicorns and fairies and ferns. She waited for Albrun, not with patience but in pleasure—the waiting was the best part she thought. The candle swayed, the light swept the dark stone room. Watching the light moving over the smooth stone walls reminded Ella always of dabbled sunlight: the light was the sun; the stones tree branches; the room a womb. But the womb was the world-- a horizontal world because horizontal is best. She stretched her arm lazily above her head to scratch a piece of soap with a fingernail. The sweet scent of lavender infused the world-- the smell was the best part.

She felt his fingers untie her shoes; the feel of them slipping off her feet was greeted with the deepest sigh. This is the best part.

"Once upon a time there was a comely lass," he began, catching his mother silently mouth 'comely lass.' As he rubbed the soles of her toeless feet she purred in contentment.

"And she fell in love with a handsome knight. And they had a magical baby boy with rosy red cheeks."

"Albrun!" she cried as if she had never heard the tale before. The story continued, the rubbing too; he contemplated the pebble suddenly strewn across his path. *'Leipzig giveth, Leipzig taketh away.'*

Before midnight bell there came two quiet knocks. *"Albrun, wake up. Mrs. Bauer. She's begun,"* Simone said in her hushed- midwife voice. *"Another night in hell. Third night in a row. Strange. Albrun? Albrun!?"*

By flickering candlelight, cautiously he descended one flight down the stone steps to the heat of hell. Already sweating, Albrun unlocked his medicine cabinet, four drawers full of labeled glass medicine

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jars arranged alphabetically from arnica to za'atar. There was even a jar for the letter 'X' with a label in the shape of a skull and crossbones that contained Albrun's unique mixture of bleach, crushed sea salt and oat bran. He had drawn an 'X' over the crossbones and had written above and below it in large block letters: *'Poison: Not for humans.'*

He trimmed the wick, lit his lamp and began writing for Marburg. He heard quiet comforting voices coming from the bathing room the midwives used for births.

"You're happy," Albrun said, patting sweat off his beet red cheeks when Simone appeared smiling.

"The baby just dropped. Her sister is with her; everything is going well."

"No ergot?"

"No, I will let you know if we need anything."

As she returned, he asked *"How about incense?"*

"What? Don't distract me, boy," Simone complained. But then she turned grinning at him: *"I'll light it only if you bring it to us,"* she challenged.

Albrun wound up his small clock, one of only two clocks in Bad Düben, setting it back down next to his scale on top of the cabinet. He made the first entries in the ledger for the night. Waiting he carefully penned lists relating to the sale and shipment of his ergot but he was continually distracted by the new pebble. Was it possible that Rosenthal had heard the name *'Altmann?'* after all they were both physicians in Leipzig, even if one was still only a phantom. For just a very little while longer.

At one hour fourteen his sight began to blur. Albrun gave up staring at the long columns of figures in his ledger, having determined a future path to pursue: their dose was on the low side of safe he was certain. He wondered again what the fatal amount of ergot really was-- if Lonicer had known he hadn't written it in *Kreuterbuch*. Lying face down on the cot Albrun inhaled Simone's sweat and dried blood feeling excited, fading between alert and groggy. He fell asleep wondering if there was a way to record smells: a dog and a parrot chimera...

"Wake up! Over and done without you. Mother and child are well, it was a girl, they carried them to heaven. Albrun...," Simone shook his shoulder. *"Wake up. Let's finish this; I want your help."*

Tonight there was little to write in the ledger or the journal. Simone had done little to assist in the delivery beyond reassuring the mother that everything was proceeding perfectly. This was a childbirth that would help substantiate the spa's good reputation, assuring continuing patronage, and was a birth that reinforced Simone and Albrun's belief in the benefit of the baths for childbirth. Mrs. Bauer had begun to relax in the warm bath less than twenty minutes when her contractions started. This was a birth Simone remarked that the mother could have done alone, squatting in a field.

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"Help me find the snake," Simone joked.

By routine Albrun replied gruffly, *"No."*

"Are you afraid?"

By routine Albrun raised his eyebrows.

"You are afraid!" Simone teased.

"You are afraid of the snake, not me. I have work," he argued, fanning his red face.

"And you are running out of time. Where are you going? Are you taking your mother?"

'How do you know these things?' he thought. Then he said aloud, "How do you know these things?"

Simone's eyes and mouth flew open. Stunned as if she had just shot her first bird after a season of trying, it took her time to recover. *"Why don't you tell me? If it's not evil? I can help. You know I taught you --"*

"No! It's impossible anyway. The old snake skin was who knows how old. The snake could be dead already. Or gone outside. If it's hiding in hell, we would never be able to find it anyway. It's not bothering anyone so leave it alone," he recited by rote and without conviction.

"There is much more. But you won't tell me now. But you will tell me soon. Because you need me. Because of Ells... So... Now..." in a sing-song voice she whispered, *"I'll tell you a secret."*

"You are a child. Sometimes," he acknowledged, getting excited.

"When you are ready to tell, I will help," she promised.

Albrun nodded seriously.

"I'll tell you a secret if you promise to help me catch the snake," she joked.

"What secret?"

"Whatever you want to know."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Anything?"

"Yes."

"You are married to a man in Wittenberg. Why are you living here," Albrun thought to say *"in Bad Döben,"* but at the last second changed it to: *"with Marburg?"*

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"That's unfair. You are cruel," Simone said, seemingly genuinely hurt.

"I'm sorry." Albrun guiltily replied. "Never mind, I'll help you look for the snake."

At the hot spring mid-way between Wittenberg and Leipzig in the fourteenth century C.E. the street village of Bad Düben was established by the short-lived Thüringen dynasty. At first only a stone church at one end and the stone spa at the other, over the past two centuries it had grown into a village lined with wood framed houses, shops, a tavern, an inn, a jail and a school. Surrounded by rye, wheat and barley fields, farm houses and barns, more than two hundred and fifty souls called Bad Düben their home.

Under the spa, made of stone, in the place the staff called hell but guests acclaimed, there were six individual bathing rooms, offering mineral waters from tepid to nearly scalding. There was also one large communal bathing room and a narrow hallway, part of which was used now by the boy Albrun Winkelmann for his apothecary. His office consisted of a small folding desk of his own design that slid under a cot when unused, a stool, a cabinet full of medicines chained to the wall, his clock, scale, glass, lamp, ledger and journal, pen, ink and inkwell.

Simone and Albrun searched every room in hell holding lamps and candles. They emptied every bathing tub, they shown their lights under every cot, in every recess and alcove, behind every tub, into every dark flickering corner. They lit shadows above every beam, shelf and doorway. They checked around every exposed pipe and Simone even had Albrun poke a wooden broom handle into crevices she imagined the snake called home. Simone shouted *"snake"* and Albrun came running to her but what she had discovered was a short length of old coiled hose. In the end they found spider webs, spiders and the skeletons of rodents but no snake.

"Now I ask you a question," Simone said in her Simone voice.

"You didn't answer mine."

"Now I ask you a question," Simone repeated, with the same tempo and emphasis, but this time sounding more like—well, he was unsure. "You told us there were at least three things to consider: ergot harvesting and sales, ergot training for midwives and, ghoulishly, turning the spa into a place for people to come to die. My question is: what is the fourth thing and are there more than four things?"

Albrun grinned. *"Two-- You will know soon. Probably. Maybe in a few days."*

"You are the child," she complained.

"That is the problem," he said very softly shocking himself. Unnoticeably blushing, inhaling deeply, he abruptly went to his desk to note each of his... what should he call them. 'Leaks?' These incidents were happening at a quickening pace. Initially he thought to use the ledger but he chose the journal instead. Albrun transcribed the date, time, what was leaked and to whom. This was concerning

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but not alarming. Clearly this was not self- sabotage like Marburg's gout. Maybe, Albrun wondered: could it be an example of a "Persian flaw" like Marburg had recently taught him about?

3 Rosenthal

Rosenthal arrived at noon, dropping the mail from Leipzig in Marburg's lap before Albrun could retrieve it from the hands of the Taxis postal agent who was something more than a friend of Albrun Winklemann. Fortunately, the parcel was not there and now he became concerned that it was lost, stolen or had never been sent. He wasn't ready yet to call the missing parcel another pebble, actually it would be more in the nature of a boulder if it failed to arrive, but it was becoming concerning. The late parcel, the leaks and now Rosenthal the pig. Altogether concerning but not yet alarming.

Doctor Rosenthal was a bald, rotund and abrasive man in his forties, full of himself, dominating, who wielded a thick walking stick like a cudgel. Rosenthal reacted to the sight of the wheelchair-bound Marburg with unconcealed delight; he treated Simone with undisguised coarseness; and he dismissed the boy Albrun with the wave of his thick, hairy hand. Within minutes of his arrival all three wished Rosenthal would quickly do his job and leave. However, the pig had other plans.

"She is ravishing, my boy, she must be your whore! She should be you know. What a beauty! And what a figure! Will you loan her to me for the night? Or, better, until you are able to properly use her again?" Rosenthal entreated.

Scowling, Marburg said, *"The sectioning. There is an urgency—"*

"Urgency? Nonsense. The bitch and her whelp are dead. It's not a surgeon but a butcher you need."

"Yes, but the church is waiting for the child's body for burial and the husband is waiting for them to be buried before he can go home to Poland. Please, Leon, do it now. A favor for me."

"I see, I see. I will cut the baby out this afternoon. Then this evening you will wine and dine me with Simone as our dinner guest. Just us three. After dinner you will discretely roll away and she spends the night with me. How does that sound?"

"Rosenthal, I was hoping you would teach Simone the sectioning technique. She is a very capable midwife."

"No women in the surgery."

"Albrun, the boy..."

"No children in the surgery."

"Alright, as you wish. Simone is not a whore; she is my associate. I can get you a whore—"

"Associate!" Rosenthal bellowed. *"Associate, I like that! Well, I want to associate myself with her too. Fair's fair?"*

"She's a married woman."

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"So much the better! The husband can watch and learn!" he roared.

"You do the surgery now. Right away, in the morgue, next to the ice house, at the back of the estate. This evening, we will serve you an astonishingly good dinner, prime rib roast, with French wine and with Simone. After the meal you will be presented with a choice of very commendable cognacs and cigars. For dessert I promise you a very compliant guest in your bed."

"Simone. I want Simone!"

"I understand," Marburg replied.

"Don't disappoint me Stanislaw. I want to continue recommending your spa to my wealthy clientele, you see."

"I'm not sure which of you is worse."

"He is, I assure you. My hands are tied. All you have to do is eat dinner, put up with his vulgarity and disappear. I have sent for a companion for Rosenthal, the redhead from the tavern. Then tomorrow he leaves and all is forgotten. Alright?"

"Do I have a choice?" Simone asked.

"No more than I do. Please wear your red dress."

"He was your professor!" she reminded him.

"I haven't seen him since his wife suddenly died last year. It seems he is associating with a baser crowd now," Marburg suggested.

"He is a pig. If he tries to grope me, I will stab him with my fork, I swear!"

The large dining room was empty save for Rosenthal, Simone and Marburg. The three sat in the center of the room surrounded by tables with chairs on top, served by an attentive staff.

"It was a boy then?" Simone confirmed.

"I don't want to talk about that at dinner. With a beautiful woman. Can I tell you that you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, or ever hope to see," Rosenthal gushed, while below the table he softly patted her leg.

"How is your meal, professor?" Marburg asked.

"Excellent, as you promised, my lad. I like a man who keeps his promises," he added, his eyes still fixed on Simone's face, his hand inching up her leg.

Simone shifted her position, brushed his hand away but she smiled and leaned forward towards Rosenthal, presenting him with an arousing view of her ample bosom.

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Rosenthal smiled with admiration saying, *"Take my practice in Leipzig, Marburg, and I will stay here in Bad Döben to be with Simone forever!"*

"I think her husband might have something to say ...," Marburg confusedly faltered.

"That's right. You're a married woman I understand. Who is the lucky man? He lives in Wittenberg?" Rosenthal asked, for the moment returning his attention to the food on his plate. He slashed and speared his food, swallowing large chunks of prime rib beef with little chewing.

"Yes," she replied.

"Do I know him? What is his name? What kind of a fool is he to allow himself to be away from you!" Rosenthal probed.

Marburg answered, *"Do you know the bookshop in Wittenberg? He is the owner."*

"Bookshop, yes... I have been to the bookshop. There is an old—is your husband a, well, is he rather an elderly gentleman, Simone? Is he?"

"Yes."

Rosenthal began to nod his head vigorously. *"Now I understand! Oh, my, Marburg, oh... my. My dearest Simone, may all your needs always be fulfilled! To the limit! Simone that I might be of some small, no rather of some large service to you is my only dream!"*

Simone smiled weakly. *"I am sure you are a very... generous...,"* she replied with revulsion.

"Yes!" Rosenthal agreed. *"My generosity is unrivalled! It is legendary! I have shared my generosity with many beautiful women, Simone, even with many women at once Simone, but, Simone, my dear, Simone I have never shared my generosity with a woman as extraordinarily beautiful as yourself. Simone, as God is my witness, you are the pinnacle of beauty, the very apex of man's desire!"*

"You are something of a poet."

"Not at all, not at all. I am a mortal man overwhelmed by your beauty. The sight of you could turn a swine into Cicero!"

"I see that," Simone agreed.

"And not only that," Marburg interjected, *"Rosenthal, Simone has the most extraordinary head for enterprise. She has singlehandedly—"*

"Her head, of course, her head—"

"Singlehandedly—"

"Her lips, so red and full. Are your nether lips red and full also Simone? May I enquire?"

"Professional curiosity, of course," Simone replied, blushing. *"As a physician your interest in human anatomy leads you to speculate about the size, shape and coloration of female genitalia, I am sure. In my capacity as a midwife, I have had the most intimate contact with the entire range of female*

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genitalia. I trust you have never witnessed the dilation of a woman's cervix and the corresponding elongation—"

"Is this fitting conversation for a dinner table?" Marburg interrupted.

They sat eating their meal until Rosenthal said, *"You are an extraordinary woman, Simone. I apologize if I have offended you. I beg you to allow me to show you my sincerest appreciation."*

Simone rose, *"Perhaps after dinner there can be a more intimate... conversation. One in which no... subject is left... unbreeched? Might it be possible for one to have such a conversation with you, perhaps in your room, perhaps at midnight?"* Simone walked out of the room slightly trembling but sadly composed. In her room undressing she uttered the phrase *'nether lips'* under her breath. Then she thought *'castration.'*

In his apothecary in hell Albrun worked by the bright light of two lamps, one ruddy cheek hovered barely inches above a page of news print, the glass jar labeled 'X' and two tiny paint brushes were beside him when Simone descended.

"Tell me," she challenged.

"Mrs....," he checked the open ledger, *"Berto—Bertomillo..."*

"Midwife?"

"Matilda."

Simone rolled her eyes. *"God help the mother and her child,"* she called back as she walked to the bathing room furthest from Matilda, the midwife she thought of as *'pig urine'* for her use of noxious ointments and spells. Far enough away, Simone hoped, to avoid hearing the chanting and screaming. She suddenly spun around.

"Albrun, the baby was a boy! The mother knew!"

"Or she guessed."

"Was it the ergot? She never said it was a boy until I gave her the medicine."

"She never said anything before the medicine, yes?"

Simone nodded and Albrun again wondered if mother and unborn baby had one soul or two.

Undressed Simone slipped into the warm tub for relief. *'This is the best part...'* Soaking, eyes closed, she allowed herself to drift. She could still taste the food and wine in her mouth. She smelled her lavender washcloth. She thought, *'All gifts from God, a smart man's mind, a beautiful woman's looks, what is the difference? Should a smart man hide his intelligence or a beautiful woman her good looks? What's the point? Castration...'*

Suddenly she sat up. *"Albrun--?"*

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"Yes," he replied from the dark.

"What's wrong?" she called. "Albrun? Are... you crying?"

"No."

"What? What are you crying about?"

"I didn't mean to be cruel."

Simone slid back down, allowing the water to rise to her chin. *"It's not your fault. I'm sorry I got angry at you."*

In a shaky, barely audible voice he told her, *"I love you, Simone."*

"I know you do. I love you too."

Late at night in bed Simone heard Marburg knock quietly at the door but she pretended to be asleep. It wouldn't be difficult, she thought, to convince herself that she was in fact asleep and dreaming right now. Or that she hated Marburg. Or that she pitied them both.

Next morning, in Marburg's office Rosenthal handed the director his bill. *"Dinner was wonderful and the girl you sent was a delight: young, very flexible, very accommodating-- I am well-sated. But you lied to me, Marburg and I won't forget that. There will have to be a reckoning one day. That is all I have to say."*

"I am not a pimp and Simone is not a whore." Marburg objected.

"Yes, you are, a devious, if ultimately adequate pimp. And all beautiful women are whores. That is why God made them."

Marburg told himself that if he could stand and walk, he would smash Rosenthal's face with his fist.

4 Palimpsest

He had almost despaired of receiving the parcel from Leipzig when it arrived; hiding it, Albrun's heart raced. Every waking hour of daylight not in hell he stole himself inside the enormous dusty attic above heaven full of wooden crates, an accommodating place for a snake he thought. Not trusting lamplight, he worked under the largest skylight, contending that if anything he ever created merited sunlight surely, *this* did.

Arranging crates to serve as a desk and chair, Albrun painstakingly transformed Marburg's diploma, bringing to life his phantom, letter by letter, number by number. Re-liquefying the ink was satisfying, painstaking, time-consuming. A single stubborn letter, like the 'w' in Stanislaw took him an entire day to eliminate without bruising or discoloring the underlying parchment fibers. It amused Albrun to muse that as Marburg dissolved, Altmann came into being, first as a ghost, a transparent, empty space on the parchment.

His initial idea was to add the new name and date after writing them down over and over onto a sheet of vellum until he made a perfect version, then trace it onto the diploma by affixing the vellum and diploma to the skylight. It would be impractical standing awkwardly on boxes he realized; impractical too would be to construct a Michelangelo scaffold to reach that high. He settled on the daring idea of writing the new script directly onto the parchment in one go as the original signer must have done. This unprecedented decision was not a leak but nonetheless warranted entry into his journal.

The final consideration was in whose script he should write? Having scrupulously avoided ever creating a handwriting style for himself, it tickled Albrun's sense of irony to use Marburg's hand to, in a sense, authorize his own erasure and replacement. Using Altmann's script seemed potentially and needlessly risky. He used Simone's hand.

After nearly a month of intermittent labor the day finally arrived. Albrun stared at the pristine diploma, his canvass, now ready for him to add the final brushstrokes that would complete his palimpsest. Nib dipped, breath held, he wrote with Simone's fluidity and grace, swaying as though he was following her up the stone stairs out of hell. Finished with his heart thumping, he dropped the quill. Immediately his broad smile faded when, mortified, he noted that he had written the date: 'March 4, 1604' using two different styles for the number '4'!

Albrun's emotions ran from blind anger at his own stupidity, resigned acceptance that he could and would fairly easily fix the mistake-- that is he would make a forgery of his own forgery all the way to the epiphany that this was an inspired mischance that truly made his first piece of public art his own. He needed to note this insight in his leak journal. He was developing working theories for his quickening: as the moment of the birth of the good doctor approached Albrun began to move forward like a runner who sways back and forth in order to launch himself. He also considered an alternate theory that the first shriek had set the balance wheel of his soul off kilter, rendering it defective.

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As Simone had prophesized on her birthday Albrun revealed his plans. She graciously received his gift of small, elegant white gloves with pearls he had sent for from Paris, she kissed his cheek bringing the moment at hand. Years of planning, scheming and working, of locating and dodging pebbles, of trudging in the rain through rye fields calf-deep in mud, of riding the old horse to Leipzig and back in the heat and the cold and the rain and snow, of staring- down doubtful bank officials, of squinting in the dark at columns of numbers until his eyes hurt, of measuring with mortar and pestle, lamps and magnifying glass and scale, of hearing the screams of living and dying women in his sleep, all led to this magic moment.

Simone stared at the framed diploma: *"Who is Doctor Albert Altmann?"* she asked.

"I am Altmann."

Simone pondered his reply. *"I thought you wanted to be Lonicer... Oh, I see it. You should call him Faustus then, no? Too obvious? You will be the 'winking-man,' the sly puppeteer operating your 'alter-man' marionette! Sent right from hell, fraudulently sent straight from hell... to... save mankind?!"*

Albrun Winkelmann could not stop grinning; his ruddy cheeks now glowed like rubies. *"Oh, my dear, dear Simone,"* he said, *"you are so, so close."*

"But why the bizarre ruse? If you want someone else to get the credit for our work, God knows why, let Marburg—"

Albrun stopped her. "Listen: I am giving a lecture series at the medical school at Wittenberg; four lectures spread over the academic calendar year. I need time to study at a great university library. I will have two students to help with my research, documentation, experiments and other tasks. I plan to publish the lectures with the title of Guide for the Use of Ergot in Childbirth, under the University of Wittenberg's imprimatur. Do you see that it can only be me, but it can't be me without a diploma? So I invented Altmann and have protected Bad Düben spa: Altmann is from Leipzig where all of the correspondences were post-marked and notarized. It will work but only with your help Simone. Most importantly, I need you to take care of my mother while I am away."

Astounded, Simone asked, *"When? For how long?"* Then she said, *"So all of our work will belong to Altmann who isn't real. Is that your plan?"*

"Altmann will meet a tragic end, I'm afraid, too soon, poor man, although fortunately I understand he has a will at his bank and I am for now his sole beneficiary. I want to add you, my mother and Marburg as beneficiaries. This bank account in Leipzig in Altmann's name is ready to receive book sale royalties now and our ergot sales once we are issued a permit," Albrun assured her. *"If my interests in ergot and medicine continue after the initial publication, I may even decide to earn my diploma, perhaps at Frankfort like Lonicer did, then I might consider myself a protégée of the late Magisters Altmann or Lonicer or both and practice and publish under the name Winkelmann."*

"But no more lectures I suppose, after Altmann dies. At least not without a disguise," Simone said incredulously, shaking her head in disbelief. *"Maybe you can adopt a limp?"* she offered. At one point in the conversation, she asked how Albrun planned to kill the good doctor, but in the end, she concluded stiffly: *"I want my name on our work too."*

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Simone seethed for days. When they worked together in hell, she was curt, even rude. She took every opportunity to correct him and she told him small meaningless lies. She demanded a second conversation.

"So my role in your plan is playing nursemaid to your mother?!"

"Not a nursemaid, a companion. You like my mother— "

"You think only of yourself. You are selfish and arrogant. You are a diminutive Rosenthal."

This last insult stung. He was quiet for some time struggling to keep from tearing. Simone saw that she had wounded him but she could not retreat.

Collecting himself Albrun began in a quiet shaky voice: *"I will be sixteen years old this fall. Lonicer received his degree from Frankfort when he was sixteen. I know more than anyone now about the benefits and the use of ergot in childbirth. I already know a hundred times more than Lonicer ever learned on the subject—that's how science works. My drawings are, are very slowly they are approaching Lonicer's perfection and my maths are much, much superior to his. But mostly it is a matter that Lonicer was a generalist and I am a specialist. I have detailed the results of two hundred sixty-two childbirths— one hundred ten with ergot. My use of mathematics has allowed me to develop a proven formula for when, how, how much and why to use ergot in childbirth deliveries. My patients suffer half the usual death rate. My knowledge should be saving the lives of countless souls today. But if it takes one more year—so, be it."*

Each time Albrun said 'I' and 'my' Simone clenched her teeth softly. When he finished, she stood over the boy and rebuked him in a voice he didn't recognize—part Marburg and part Simone, but a new Simone.

"Winkelmann, you would know less than nothing about childbirth without me. It's not you but we who know. You have never even seen a childbirth, not a single one! I know things you don't know yet, important things, things you may never learn without me. Remember, I bought you Lonicer's Kreuterbuch and it was me who encouraged your interest in medicinal plants and especially ergot because of Ella. You may love your mother, but you still are a selfish boy and an unfair friend. I am surprised and disappointed..."

Albrun sat mute, chastened, weakened but still resolute. This was an unforeseen boulder, in truth it was an obvious, potentially plan- undermining, palpable boulder. He thought it was unconscionable, really, how stupid he was to have not considered Simone's objections...

Very late, after a difficult delivery in which the child had died Simone collapsed on the cot, shut her eyes and cried. When Albrun asked her if she was ready, she answered him for the first time: *"Not tonight."*

Albrun watched with growing alarm.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"I'm taking my bath now." Simone took a candle moving like a slowly shifting ghost swallowed in hell.

Albrun climbed into his own bath-- a warm bath tonight. He floated with his head under the water, humming the notes of the haunting shriek, wishing he could bring the old Simone back. I can't lose her. Can't lose her... Just her first initial and last name ... if that was possible, he would insist.... She couldn't be at university but she would train the midwives-- even more immediately important work... They could sell ergot and live together, teach and save lives... Share their *joie de vivre* ... like laying down next to each other they would... talk quietly and tenderly, share things only they knew...

...The cabinet clock... how it looks like the clock in the rectory, small, Swiss, silver. Found the church clock. As a boy, a child. In a locked cabinet easy to open with a wire. The town bastard... found the church clock... The runt of a litter of one. Secretly adjusted minutes forward and back, the town's bastard reordering... all their lives. The church bell clanging on *Albrun Winkelmann's* command. The bastard regulating their work, play, eating, shitting, sleeping and fucking... Always out of alignment if only by a single Winkelmann minute... Until it snapped... One day the clock might altogether stop. Meanwhile, the ledger keeping track of time year after year...

Simone slipped into the bathing room. Albrun snapped awake and sat up sensing something was different.

"You never see me."

"You're... right there."

"You never see me."

"No one misses you!"

"Stand up."

"N-," he began, embarrassed.

"Stand up," she repeated, less forcefully.

Albrun slowly stood, trembling in the warmth of hell. His hands covered his genitals, shrunken from the warm bath water. Against his will his penis began to grow.

Simone knelt beside his bath. Albrun saw she was wearing the gloves he gave her, no just the one glove, on her left hand. Simone grasped his penis in her gloved hand, making it grow harder. She squeezed him firmly at first but as she recited her grasp became tighter and tighter:

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

*Her flaming red hair
Big round tits
Creamy thighs
Juicy ass
Kept him wake
Each night
Sweating crazy
With lust!*

*She was no whore
But he bent her over
Mounting her from behind
Her red nether lips
Dripping wet
Her tongue hanging out panting
Like a bitch in heat
When you became
My master!*

When she uttered “*bitch in heat*” Simone removed her hand and Albrun ejaculated on cue, whimpering as his erect penis bobbed in the air squirting his semen out in hopeless arcs that splashed into the warm water. Knees buckling, Albrun sank into the bath and noiselessly sobbed.

Simone removed the white glove from her hand and used it for a washcloth to scrub his neck and shoulders and back while she hummed Albrun a lullaby.

She was gone for a few days; even Marburg said he didn’t know where Simone was. Then she returned and acted as if she had never left. The first time she encountered Albrun she smiled and said in a cheerful voice, her old Simone voice he thought, “*Lovely day, Albrun!*”

They worked in hell as before although Albrun did not bathe when she did. Waiting in his office he created a new label for his ‘X’ jar which read: “POISON: FOR SNAKES ONLY.”

She called to Albrun from her bath and he stood outside her door.

“*Do you want to know what my plan is, Albrun? My secret plan? Do you?*”

“*Yes. Please.*”

“*Here is my plan, Albrun: I am going home to Wittenberg to live with my husband who loves me and who needs me. Your mother can live with Otto and me in our home— she will have her own nice room with a nice view. I will help Midwife Lena Simone Weber and Doctor Albert Altmann get their manuscript published and sold through our bookstore and through the printers and bookstores we trade with. Do you want to be part of my plan, Albrun?*”

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Yes. Please," he replied with joy and trepidation, in the moment refusing to analyze any of the mountain of pebbles she tossed at his feet.

When Simone told Marburg her plan he put his foot down, something he could now literally do, his gout having left just at the end of the fortnight Albrun had predicted.

"You can't go back to Wittenberg your husband be damned! I need you here and even more now that Albrun has to go to Tetero to take care of his cursed dying uncle."

"It will be for only a year, maybe less than that."

"Impossible. The place would fall to ruins without you. So would I," he conceded.

"I've made up my mind. Otto is old and I need to be with him. He is my husband."

"Impossible."

"You can't keep me against my will, you know."

"This is because of Rosenthal," he said.

"And you and I. I told Otto I would see him every few months. Do you know the last time I have seen him?"

"Visit him more often but live here. Please, I need you and have never loved... You are the most beautiful and intelligent, my God I..."

"No. I have to. He is old and I want to stay with him, to make sure he is alright. To bring my husband comfort, like any loving wife, Marburg. I'm not asking permission from you to be a loving wife. If you think you can stop me, you're wrong," she advised.

"When I return you can do anything you want," she whispered with a sigh after they made love. Marburg looked at her beautiful face lit by moonlight and pretended to not understand.

Acquiescing to the ancient imperative this time Simone recited her line as prescribed, like an incantation or formula: *"When I come back... I will be ... your whore."*

Walking beside the retired Taxis mail horse, reins dangling at her side, Albrun knew he should be searching for pebbles. Still the sun on his face encouraged his mind to wander. How many times had she walked the twenty-five-mile dirt road between Leipzig and Bad Döben, Bad Döben and Leipzig? Did she understand that this nearly straight and level road, long imprinted in her soul, was not a line at all but a circle? That each roundtrip she made was really a single turn of the great wheel of her life?

How many turns had she made in her long career? Did she know that this much-truncated trip today would likely be her last? How could she know, no one knows their last meal, their last shit, their

last f--. Does anyone even know their last breath? Did the women and girls know the moment their soul escaped—was their haunting shriek the proof? Albrun had an epiphany: his ledger was the husk, his journal the seed. This revelation changes everything he thought, this changes the upcoming work at Wittenberg: the first three lectures will be, as promised, about the husk. The final lecture, Albrun understood in a flash, would need to be about the seed.

End of summer, wet and cool, flies buzzed around both their faces. They slowly walked through mile upon mile of rye, wheat and barley fields planted on both sides, right up to the dirt road scored with wagon wheel tracks gouged deep by heavy rain. Planted fields, trees, then open fields, a farm house, a brook, a small wooden bridge—just a few wooden planks nailed together. Flies creeping around the horse's huge black watery eyes, she tosses her brown head in vain trying to shake them off, trying to get them to stop biting her sensitive skin. The horse walks, Albrun nods to another traveler on the road; more time and distance consumed traveling at the pace of a walking horse.

Albrun watched the rye growing right up, tall as a man, taller than himself, with long spikes full of seeds. Over the years he had stopped more than a hundred times to draw the stages of the rye plant's growth, using Lonicer's flawless renderings as guides. He had gathered the spikes covered in the blackish/purple seeds whenever he saw them. In a clearing near the rundown bridge and a toppled barn he made small fires to burn the ergot-infected plants after first harvesting the best ergot seeds, canvass bags full of ergot seeds he strapped to Hercules. How many times had he watched the bags rocking to the motion of the horse's hips under sun and clouds as she made another turn of her great wheel?

(Cogs in a wheel—like clockwork mechanisms)

Retrieval day—twenty-four jars of perfect ergot seeds, by his rough reckoning enough ergot to treat ten-thousand mothers or enough to kill every soul in Bad Düben more than once.

The private carriage ride to Wittenberg felt like a dream come true, the culmination of his plans, the beginning of the greatest adventure of his young life. All his plans. And Simone too. From this moment forward I am the master of my own destiny, I stand or fall by my own abilities, especially by my own cunning. He didn't look back at the spa as the carriage turned onto the road in the rain, forward, always forward from here. He had his diploma and his jars of ergot, his journal, his ledger, his clock, his scale, his glass, his wit and possibly Simone.

Simone looked back. Before leaving Simone had pretended to Marburg that her move to Wittenberg would not really change their lives that much—after all he had made her promise to return every three months for a fortnight. She made *him* promise that he wouldn't come to Wittenberg as that would upset Otto, but if there was an emergency he could write her and she would reply the following day and be back at the spa the day after at the latest. She told Marburg the rule: *"I will be your Simone at the spa but always Mrs. Lena Weber in Wittenberg."*

Marburg reminisced how they built- up the spa together and she reminded him to be generous with the staff. She gave Marburg a copy of her two-page guide to using ergot that she had explained to Grace, the young midwife who replaced her. Simone repeated the warning to them: ergot is a powerful poison, easily capable of maiming or killing in dosages greater than her recommendations.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Ella looked back crying. Bad Düben was the only town she had ever known and the spa had been her home since Albrun's birth. Her hair, grey and thinning was belied by her smooth and clear face, she looked like a woman younger than thirty.

"What am I going to do in Wittenberg? I won't know a soul."

"You know me and Albrun, and you will like my husband Otto," Simone reassured.

"But what am I going to do?"

"You can rest, mother. You can walk less," Albrun told her.

Ella resisted, *"Oh, you know with your doctoring my feet don't hurt at all anymore! And everyone has to work, it's what the Bible says, that's what the pastor says. Will you rub my feet every night Albrun when we get to Wittenberg?"*

"Every night. But when I can't then Simone promises she will rub your feet for me."

Ella looked doubtful.

Simone shifted to their bench putting her arm around Ella's shoulder. *"I will rub your feet and we will bake bread together and we will all be happy, I promise. You will help me take care of my Otto, my husband, he is getting old now. You can help me cook and clean, talk, be our friend. I'll be working in the bookstore too, so I need your help at home."*

"Oh, yes then he would be less lonely. Old people are lonely. Everyone needs a friend."

Simone's eyes welled.

Albrun said, *"I'm your friend, too!"*

"Don't be silly, you are my son. Simone is my friend. She brings my tea every single day—even Sunday and we talk. We have secrets! Are secrets bad?"

"And sometimes we eat our meals together. We see each other a few times every day. In Wittenberg we will see each other much more because we will live together in the same house."

"That will be nice. Sometimes my noon tea is late."

"Yes, sometimes you don't get it until dinner, because of Albrun, he makes me late," Simone joked, wiping away tears.

Albrun raised his eyebrows.

"Really?" Ella asked.

"Really. Just a few weeks ago he kept me for hours looking for a snake in hell."

"Really?"

"Albrun is afraid of snakes, did you know that?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"No! Are you afraid of snakes Albrun?"

"Terrified," he replied.

"I didn't know that."

The carriage rode along the dirt road, the driver seemingly rolling the wheels into every rut, the carriage tilted and swayed. They heard the rain beating against the carriage roof.

"Poor driver," his mother fretted.

The sky darkened quickly.

"Albrun: Have you ever seen a snake?" his mother asked.

Albrun said to Simone, *"We agreed to be honest with each other from now on."*

"Did you find the snake?" Ella asked Simone.

"Tell her Albrun."

"Yes," he said.

"Honest," Simone observed.

Albrun found it awkward to talk past his mother so he shifted to the empty bench across from the women.

His mother asked, *"Who is your best friend, Albrun? Do you have one? Will you miss him?"*

Albrun looked at Simone.

"You'll miss him, won't you Albrun?"

"I miss her a lot," he admitted in a choked voice. Simone's eyes began to well again.

"It's a girl! You have a girlfriend? Why didn't you tell me, Albrun? Do I know her?"

Simone said, *"I'll miss the spa. I would have worked there just for the baths. The work we did made it important. If we do nothing else in our lives, Albrun we have done more good than most people."*

"What did you do?" Ella asked her son.

"Tell her."

"Albrun and I saved many lives of young women and girls and their babies. And those babies will grow and have babies of their own. Soon we will save hundreds more lives every year, won't we Albrun? Albrun's plan worked, and he couldn't have done it without a midwife like me."

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"You are a very good midwife. Why did you become a midwife?" Ella asked.

"Because I lost my child at her birth."

"And I learned all about ergot because you lost your family and your toes."

"That was the worst day! Dear god please never a day like that again! Everyone I loved died in terrible pain! I was eleven. I thought I would die. So much pain I couldn't even cry! My toes rotted and fell away one by one! Ever since then I limped and was in pain. But now, because of you Albrun, I hardly limp at all and my feet don't hurt at all! You should be a doctor!"

"Massaging your feet with arnica and willow bark tea made you so much better," he agreed.

"Even though I limped your father loved me anyway, Albrun. You know that. It's what you can't see that counts. Sometimes. Who you are inside. You know that."

'More than rape, but less than rapt,' he thought but now it seemed more than hollow but less than clever. "He had to go away," Albrun concluded.

"My husband went to war and was killed when I was pregnant. Otto married me to take care of me and my child. I was very young too. Otto is a wonderful, kind, loving man. I am blessed by God to have him. I am glad to be able to make it up to him—to be a good wife for him."

Simone shifted to Albrun's bench.

"I kept it all a secret to impress you. Protect you. I wasn't sure if you would try to stop me."

"I know," Simone said. "Ella, why don't you lie down and take a nap?"

"I'm too excited to sleep!" she said.

"It had to be a secret."

"I know."

"I was stupid, not cruel," Albrun said.

"You were inexperienced. I was cruel," Simone admitted, taking his hand, searching his eyes.

"You could never be cruel to anyone. Was she cruel to you?" Ella asked.

"Yes, but she couldn't help it. And it was my fault too. I was stupid."

"You could never be stupid, Albrun," his mother declared.

The gentle swaying of the carriage and the patter of rain on the roof acted like a calming bath and after a while Ella yawned, stretched out on the bench and shut her eyes.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Albrun is my friend, and I did a terrible thing to him," Simone said in a whisper.

"Best friend?" Ella asked.

Simone thought for a moment. *"Yes."*

"Did Simone hurt you, did she say she was sorry, did you forgive her?"

Simone said, *"I'm sorry."*

"I know. It was wrong because you did it out of anger, not love. I was wrong out of ignorance and pride, and mostly love. To impress you and make you love me. I forgive you, Simone," Albrun replied.

"How did you impress Simone?"

"In many ways," she replied.

"How?"

"He is smart and determined. He is good at planning. And he is kind and brave. Forgiving."

"What are you going to do in Wittenberg, Albrun?"

"I told you: I am going to school, one of the world's great universities."

"You should be proud of your son, Ella."

"Oh, I am! You are going to school to become a doctor like Doctor Marburg?"

"That's right," Albrun agreed.

"I saw a famous doctor from Leipzig!" Ella exclaimed.

"Oh?" Albrun said.

"Yes, Rosen... Rosen..."

"Rosenthal," Simone suggested.

"Yes! He is a very great man. Albrun will be a great doctor like him!"

"Yes," Simone said.

The rain poured sheets and the sky turned black, cold and windy. Albrun moved next to his mother and put their blanket over their shoulders. Rain leaked into the carriage on her bench so Simone moved too, joining them to share their blanket.

Ella asked, *"Are you good at planning Albrun?"*

"I thought so. But I have met my match."

"Who?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Albrun looked past his mother and caught Simone's eyes, *"The snake."*

"Now you are teasing me. You know I don't like that Albrun," Ella scolded.

"I'm sorry," he said, moving back to the empty bench away from the damp.

"You are making me dizzy," Ella said yawning. *"How much longer?"*

"We are almost home," Simone replied.

"Home," Ella repeated. *"Will we have baths?"*

"Not like at the spa," Albrun admitted.

"I like the baths at the spa," Ella said. *"Made my feet feel better before you made the pain go away."*

"We can visit the spa whenever we want, Ella."

Ella thought. *"Why did you come to Bad Döben? Why is your husband in Wittenberg and you live at the spa?"*

"You know. Otto and I visited and I thought that I could save many mothers and babies there and help make the spa better so we all agreed that I would stay to help Doctor Marburg and go home to visit Otto."

"Oh?"

As the carriage rolled onto the cobblestone streets of Wittenberg Albrun recounted yesterday's walk. *"I said goodbye to the horse. We went for a nice walk."*

"Hercules? How is the old girl?"

"Hercules is a boy's name!" Ella objected.

5 Wittenburg

Leaves fell through the brisk autumn air, pebbles cascaded too and so persistently in Wittenberg Professor Albert Altmann was forced to break routine with Albrun Winkelmann's routine-breaking-Wednesday's- routine. He spent almost all of his daylight hours sheltered in his small office but he occasionally had to sweep away administrative pebbles, and he did so with aplomb. In early days dealing with the bank Altmann was curt, here at university he discovered he was good at playing an arrogant man—that it came to him naturally.

In early days the most challenging pebbles came in the shape of the duke and the dogs. Altmann's efforts to obtain a license to sell ergot medicine seemed to be at a standstill. He secretly borrowed some of Otto's old clothes to throw the dogs off his scent. If that didn't work, he thought, there was ergot, jars of ergot...

If she ever thought like that *her* first pebbles were carriages and tea cups, but she never thought like that, not back at the spa where Simone was queen, well, consort, and certainly not now in Wittenberg where Lena's illusions of her marriage and herself shattered even before she had set down her bags.

"He must be at the bookstore," Lena assured Albrun's mother, using her key to unlock the door to their home. There was a foul smell of rot and decay and... worse. Ella leaned inside the doorway out of the rain and cheerfully said, *"Oh, my. We have a lot of work to do here!"*

"Otto? It's Lena. Are you here?"

"You are Simone. Who is Lena?"

With rising apprehension Lena moved through the house opening curtains and windows to the overcast brisk afternoon autumn air. In the kitchen she found spoiled food, a full chamber pot and mouse droppings; in the upstairs bedroom she found her husband, his bed clothes hiked about his waist, his face down against the floor next to their bed.

"Otto!" she cried, rushing to his side.

Otto stirred, trying to roll over onto his back. His face was ashen; his whiskers had not been shaved in weeks; crusts of saliva were caked in the corners of his mouth; his hair was a matted mess; his teeth were an alarming yellow; he had a deep bruise on one cheek and he smelled like stinking cabbage. Blinking and crying he asked, *"Am I awake? Are you really here Lena, my love?"*

Sobbing, Lena put her arms around her husband and pulled him to her chest to cradle and rock him like a baby. *"I am here Otto. I am so sorry!"*

"I... am so... ashamed..." he professed, closing his eyes, hiding.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

At that moment Lena thought, *'I would sooner have Rosenthal take me on the floor in the dining room at the spa in front of all of the staff and guests. That would be less of a disgrace...'*

"As God is my witness," she swore rocking him, "I will never leave you again. Please, please forgive me. I didn't know... I didn't know...", Lena cried.

Otto had taught Lena a cruel lesson: left alone, a proud, competent old man can dissolve into a helpless dotard during the nine months between Christmas and fall. Ella thought it was Simone who had taught the cruel lesson to Otto.

Having spotted someone in Wittenberg who knew him from the spa, Professor Altmann now crept out of his university office only after dark; unseen Altmann crept to Otto's home nightly. Ella whispered to her son as he rubbed her feet, *"There is terrible sadness here. I want to go home. Please, Albrun, can we go back home? Please, I beg you. I want to stay with you Albrun? Where do you live?"*

Altmann bought a pair of spectacles that seemed to cover half his face-- large round ones with a thick frame that improved his reading speed and duration. He thought the glasses made him look older too and when he spoke Altmann kept his voice in its lowest register. But those were parlor tricks— like forging documents, or reading sealed letters, or picking locks, or spying unobserved from the shadows. What gave Altmann gravitas beyond his sixteen years, he thought, was the life-saving knowledge only he and Simone, no Lena, had and most importantly his experience of awe. Altmann had pierced metaphysics when he heard the sound of souls in flight. He intended to follow that sound, those souls, to God or wherever they led.

"Here is the list," Altmann instructed his research assistants at their first meeting. They were both taller and older than him so that together they filled his small office. *"Start with numbers one and two, get them done and bring your results to me here, every day at noon bell. I'm looking for comprehensiveness; speed is of secondary importance for now. You will search each medical book's table of contents, index and bibliography. Follow and transcribe the most important citations: the relevant authors, titles and page numbers for notable quotes regarding ergot or child birth. Go to the library and sort out this work between yourselves. Understand?"*

Altmann, his glasses perched on his forehead, sat at his desk, a proper one, if not so handsome as Marburg's with his name written on the diploma hanging on the wall behind and above. Oscar, the thinner, younger assistant asked, *"Every day? Sunday too, Professor Altmann?"*

"Not Sunday," he shook his head. *"Don't think about our work on Sunday. Be in church. Imagine dying and meeting God, if you want to. What would that be like? What would you ask him? Does he use a clock?"*

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

On Sunday Otto, Ella and Lena slowly walked, arm in arm in arm in sunshine to the Castle church. Otto looked much better, his face was clean and shaven, his thin hair was combed. The purple bruise on his cheek had faded but when he smiled his missing and yellow teeth frightened her. Days after their arrival it still shocked Lena how much he had aged since Christmas.

Otto tearfully thanked God for bringing Lena back to him to stay and he prayed that the dizziness that afflicted him when he bent over would go away, or at least lessen, even for Lena's sake. Ella asked God to allow her and her son to return to Bad Döben. Lena asked God for forgiveness for abandoning her husband, for allowing him to decline almost unto death. She asked God to forgive her for abusing Albrun. She promised God she would ... *try to be good.*

Lena considered the three men: Otto her husband nearly died while she was pursuing a romance with Marburg and saving lives with Albrun. Altmann. If my first husband had not been killed, I would have never have met any of these men. If I hadn't become pregnant, I would not have married Otto. If I wasn't beautiful Marburg would not have pursued me. If I hadn't lost my child I would not have become a midwife and I would never have noticed Albrun. Or did he recruit me?

Lena understood fate determined she would always be defined by men who fenced the boundaries she ranged within, that their plans were what she would acquiesce to, alter or resist. Everyone had to serve someone or something, she thought, but who do I want to serve? God, Otto, Marburg, Altmann, Albrun, someone or something else or myself? But what self is there outside of life with others? A cloistered was unappealing.

After church they walked slowly to Otto's closed bookstore. It had been in disarray since winter when Otto had forgotten to fill a recurring order of books for classes at university. The administration took their business to the new bookstore off of Judenstrasse. Otto hired a man called Adam in spring to run the store but he kept unreliable hours and pilfered money and books until Otto dismissed him.

Organizing daily citations usually took Altmann a few hours. He read the quotes and sorted them into six categories, three categories each for ergot and midwifery: wrong, right and unproven, then he summarized his conclusions quoting the most important citations. When he read his summaries of the previous day's research every noon in his office Oscar was always ready to join the discussion while Helmut made far fewer but often shrewder comments. The professor was well- pleased with his assistants and he promised them a night at the tavern when their work was completed.

Altmann spent his first nights sneaking out of his office after dark to explore by lamplight the deserted university hallways and unlocked areas. Then he made his way to the basement to exit at the rear of the main building by a door that he could easily unlock from the outside and was protected from view by bushes. In the dark he crept six blocks to Otto, Lena and Ella's home where he rubbed his mother's feet and slept on a blanket on the floor in her bedroom, then he rose before dawn to scurry back to his office by retracing his steps, all the while hiding from the dogs.

"Tell me," Lena whispered to Altmann.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"You tell me first," he responded in a hushed voice.

They sat across from each other at the cleared table, in the spotless kitchen, with its smell of fresh-cut flowers and baked bread. This was their new nightly ritual after Otto and Ella had gone to their beds.

"Otto," she sighed, looking tired, *"likes your mother more than me."*

"Impossible."

"He does! I can't blame him," Lena affirmed. *"He's teaching her to read. She bakes bread for him. They go on daily walks to the market, to share a beer, enjoying Wittenberg's gemütlich charm together. She taught him how to rub her feet with your salve. Pretty soon neither of them will need me—or you. Otto doesn't even want me to touch him, I think..."* she quietly sobbed.

Altmann wanted to put his hand on her shoulder. Blinking, he said instead, *"I understand."*

Lena looked at him, wiping her tears. She sat up smartly, *"At the spa I managed everything—I was respected, I had authority, I saved lives. Here in Wittenberg, I need a chaperone to go anywhere and Otto and Ella are too busy with each other to help. You are in your office all day and travel like a ghost at night. I have to hire a carriage to go to the bookshop and back— twice a day to be here for lunch. I spent more money on carriages than I made selling books today."*

"Do you have a plan? Do you need to eat lunch here?" Altmann asked.

"I thought of a plan for you."

"What?"

"There is a music department at university, a famous one. Find someone to transcribe your soul-leaving-body notes on paper and have them play them for you."

Altmann grinned. *"Wonderful! ...If it's possible... A chorus... Then everyone at the last lecture can know!"*

"And be transported," Lena spoke in a husky, barely audible whisper.

"What?" Altmann asked.

"I'm not a bad person" Lena whispered.

"What?"

"Do you still love me, Albrun?"

"I... I can't help it."

Lena moved next to him, she kissed Altmann's cheek and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Who do you miss most? Otto or Marburg?" he asked her.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Lena involuntary breathed sharply in crying silently her cheek on his shoulder and her hand across her mouth.

From Otto's table Altmann took a cooked sausage, cutting halfway into it lengthwise. With a tweezer he inserted exactly fifty grains of ergot inside. He rolled the sausage tight in a piece of cloth and put it in his shirt pocket. He would undertake his rite of passage to manhood: he would hunt the dogs at dawn.

The leader was the biggest dog, a mutt, part Rottweiler he guessed, part Shepard; his ribs showed and he had a mean black face. *That* was the dog Altmann was most afraid of. Altmann took to carrying a stick on his nightly travels to scare the pack away. That worked but still they growled and barked and brought with them the risk of discovery. So Altmann killed their leader first.

The dog pack's membership varied—some nights he counted four dogs and some nights five clustering around their fierce leader.

Altmann tossed the sausage. The leader caught it midair, inhaling it without chewing. Then he ran headlong into a wall, fell to one side, whimpered feebly, convulsed, vomited and died in about two hundred heartbeats-- about four minutes Altmann reckoned, accounting for his very fast heart rate. The rest of the pack scattered.

Altmann dragged the dog carcass by its tail seven blocks, stopping to rest after every block, leaving it behind the morgue. Next morning Altmann told Oscar to ask a surgeon at the morgue to weigh the dead dog. Next night Altmann repeated the process using twenty-five grains on a mutt that was also part Shepard. Over a period of a few nights Altmann determined six grains per ten kilograms was the fatal dosage for dogs and, he suspected, for humans too. He had eliminated the threat of the pack of dogs with a clear conscience; what had Lena said about herself? He agreed that he too wasn't a bad person.

Lena spent the first weeks and all of her coins to make the bookshop clean and tidy and well-stocked again; she put fresh cut flowers in the display windows along with attractively- arranged copies of the first part of the new book only just published for the first time in German: *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. She wrote letters to her best customers as far away as Leipzig and Potsdam to announce she was again managing the bookstore in Wittenberg and that the store had copies of the new novel everyone wanted. Lena also discretely reminded special clients that her private readings were again available upon request. What *exciting* new stories she wished to share with them, she wrote.

Lena had begun private readings as a way to amuse Otto. She read to him erotic literature, ribald stories from the ancients to Chaucer and Boccaccio. Otto often asked her to re-read certain passages to get himself ready; Lena sometimes wondered if Otto was more excited by the author's words than by her own body!

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

It was a professor at university who first gave Lena the idea of offering her reading services to bookshop clients. When he came to collect his copy of *The Decameron* Lena engaged him in playful conversation. He said, *"If only my wife lived with me in Wittenberg. She would be scandalized, I am certain!"*

Lena licked her lips slowly and she slyly smiled. She joked, *"Herr Professor, you could read the book to me! Or, better yet, what if I read select passages to you?"* Over time Lena developed a small, discrete clientele of older men who visited in her apartment above the store to lie on her couch under a light blue blanket while she lit patchouli incense and read to them from a chair on the opposite side of the room dressed in a red dress with a revealing neckline. She never discussed payment but she did point out the basket with the cloth by the door. If they didn't tip or if they tipped too small, they only ever enjoyed one visit.

Lena discovered her clients belonged to two groups: businessmen who liked stories about licentious wealthy women who seduced their gardeners and scholars who preferred stories of innocent young girls being ravaged by beasts. Lena enjoyed constructing original passages for both genres, successfully honing her stories based on her client's reactions. The pinnacle of her craft, she ruefully admitted, was her performance on Albrun in his bath.

A man in his thirties with a casual demeanor, slightly stooped shoulders, thinning hair, dressed in a long grey coat wearing a badge of office arrived unannounced at Altmann's office door.

"I'm Gottlieb, from the mayor's office. I'm here about your request for a license to sell medicine in Wittenberg. Can we speak now?"

Altmann dismissed his assistants; Gottlieb sat. *"Professor, there is interest in your description of the ability of ergot to save lives."*

"Saving mothers and babies who would otherwise perish at childbirth. I have the results..."
Altmann reached toward his desk drawer.

"Where did you study ergot?"

"In Paris, with Professor Guillimeau," Altmann said.

"Who?"

"Professor Jacques Guillimeau, the renowned French surgeon."

"Paris est belle," Gottlieb replied.

"As-tu déjà été à Paris?" Altmann asked.

"Not yet. Was Guillimeau the first to detect ergot's effectiveness in childbirth?"

"No. Lonicer referenced its use for childbirth, based on his knowledge of the work of others, mainly German midwives."

"Who is Lonicer?"

"Professor Adam Lonicer, from Frankfort. Foremost illustrator, compiler and general authority on medicinal plants and herbs."

"Lonicer... I don't know him."

"I would expect not: Lonicer died before you were born!"

Gottlieb laughed. *"Well, that explains it! If German midwives know about ergot why is your work important?"*

"For two related reasons. The first is we have had three wet summers in a row and ergot poisoning has increased again. More people died and were maimed this year than in any other year in living memory. Farmers and millers are severely fined if they produce ergot-infected grain. So, there is a fear of ergot and difficulty buying it for medical purpose. Secondly, what I have accomplished is to prove the safe method of using ergot that doubles the number of successful childbirths."

"I see. Does ergot always stop bleeding?"

"It staunches dangerous bleeding in child delivery, yes. Remarkably fast and effective."

"If a patient were to experience a deep slashing wound, would ergot stop his bleeding?"

Altmann raised his eyebrows studying Gottlieb's friendly, unassuming expression. *"I have no experience using ergot outside of childbirth, I'm afraid."*

Gottlieb nodded. *"But would you expect that ergot would be effective on men, too?"*

Altmann laughed, *"Bring me a man experiencing a difficult childbirth and we can both find out!"*

Gottlieb chuckled, nodded and replied, *"Touché. You note there are undesired effects—"*

"Vomiting, convulsions, tremors. Nearly always present, often severe but never fatal in the recommended dosage."

"What is the recommended dosage?" Gottlieb asked, withdrawing a small notebook and pencil from his coat pocket.

"One grain per twenty kilograms of the mother's weight plus one grain for first-time mothers. In other words, four grains for an average weight mother plus one grain for new mothers."

"What is a lethal dose?"

"Perhaps six grains per ten kilograms."

"Perhaps?"

"We have experimented with lethal dosages only on dogs, you see. At six grains per ten kilograms dogs die quickly."

"Painlessly?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Mostly, yes. Ergot has a remarkable ability to relieve pain."

"I see. Are there any other bad effects?"

Altmann stiffened. *"Yes."*

"Yes? What are they?"

"Delirium. Sometimes severe, sometimes lasting for ten hours or longer."

"Ergot is a poison, yes?"

"All medicine is poison in the wrong dosage."

"Indeed. Where did you procure your ergot?"

"In Paris? At the clinic."

"Where did the clinic get their ergot?"

"I don't know."

"Ergot grows on rye, yes?"

"Yes. And other grains like wheat and barley. We have used rye ergot for our work. Cool and wet summers promotes the fungal growth of ergot on grains."

"We are in the middle of rye country here in Wittenberg."

"Yes."

"How much ergot do you have for sale?"

"I have... enough for thousands of childbirth deliveries."

"Where do you store it?"

Altmann slid open a low desk drawer and removed a jar of ergot grains. Holding the amber-colored glass jar up high he said, *"This is enough ergot medicine for perhaps five-hundred births."* With his other hand Altmann slid a piece of paper off his desk onto his lap where he secretly sketched Gottlieb's badge with a pencil using his left hand.

"Is this from Paris?"

Altmann hesitated. *"I don't mean to be rude but—"*

"If we issue you a license to sell ergot, will you be able to supply it?"

"Yes."

"How much ergot can you supply?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Depending on favorable weather, and depending on the demand, there is no reason to think I couldn't supply enough ergot for every woman in Germany who needs it for childbirth."

"And if the weather is unfavorable?"

"I haven't tried to calculate... I suppose if the demand is there, if even one season out of eight was favorable, I suppose that would allow me to harvest enough ergot."

"One year of feast followed by seven years of famine," Gottlieb quipped. "I see. How long does stored ergot last? Does it lose potency over time?"

"I... I don't know. The ergot grains last at least three years..."

"May I have a sample of your ergot? Perhaps a few hundred grains?"

"Why?"

"To test it."

"How?"

"How much will you charge for a jar of ergot grain?"

"Sixty silver thalers."

"For ergot that grows on other people's land that grows on rye plants that you will harvest without permission from the farmers and without payment to them. Is that right?"

"Exactly. We locate the ergot outbreaks, find the best ergot, we remove the seed pods from the spikes and we remove impurities. Then we dry the pods, crush them and bottle the uniform grains. We also destroy by fire all of the ergot-infected plants we encounter. In this manner we perform two good deeds at the same time: we create quality medicine and we reduce the threat of accidental ergot poisoning."

Gottlieb rose, extending his hand. "I think I can get your license if you give me the sample now. If our tests prove favorable, I think I can promise you a large order for your ergot. Agreed?"

"An order from the city? Or from the duke--?"

"I don't mean to be rude, Herr Professor," Gottlieb said with a short bow of his head. With his hand still extended he asked again, "Do we have an understanding?"

"Tell me," Lena whispered at Otto's dining table with the sweet smell of freshly-baked apple strudel in the air.

"Something important: there is a new player. His name is Gottlieb, from the mayor's office but I suspect he works for the duke too," Altmann said, as he unfolded his drawing of the badge with the duke's crest. "They will issue me a license to sell ergot in Wittenberg but they may want to buy the ergot, maybe all the ergot we can deliver. Perhaps for war."

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"What?!"

"Gottlieb asked if the ergot would stop the bleeding of a deep slashing wound. Do you think it would?"

"I—I don't know, I suppose?" Lena wondered.

"I've been thinking: What if an army wanted to attack a city. What if they slipped someone unseen into town— "

"Someone just like you," Lena whispered.

"— and poisoned their well with ergot and waited for the townsfolk to drink the water and become delirious— "

"Or die— "

"Or die, or be maimed and then the army would just walk into town unopposed."

"I'm not evil, I've done bad but..." Lena muttered under her breath.

"I killed four wild dogs with ergot here in Wittenberg," Altmann revealed.

"What?!"

"Now I know the lethal dose. Do you want to know it too, Lena? You should know it: Six grains per ten kilograms for dogs. For men too, I suspect."

"This was my salvation..."

They looked into each other's eyes. Altmann blinked.

"If Gottlieb bought all of the ergot I have in Wittenberg we would get fourteen-hundred and forty silver thalers. You could buy a carriage and a horse."

"For what does it profit a man...? Will you lose your soul, Faustus pursuing souls? Will you?" Lena asked seriously. *"Will I let you, could I stop you, would I try to?"* she wondered.

"If our work saves lives of men wounded in battle... We can be proud of that," he reasoned. *"A hammer is a tool or a weapon..."*, he continued, suspiciously sounding to both of them like Marburg reciting his soliloquy.

"This is how it happens," Lena knew.

6 Lena

They were inseparable: Mr. Weber and Mrs. Winkelmann as they playfully called each other. *"Your breakfast is ready Mr. Weber." "Mrs. Winkelmann you are a wonder! This is the most delicious oatmeal I've ever eaten! Is it apple and cinnamon, and nutmeg too?"* So close they became so rapidly Lena was dumbfounded.

"Tell me," Altmann whispered.

"Otto and Ella want us to visit them," Lena informed.

"What?"

"They want to live alone together. They want us to visit but not live in their home!"

"Oh. Well, I can sleep in my office, under the desk. Oscar and Helmut could bring me food, I suppose. Et vous?"

"You can stay with me at night in my apartment above the bookstore if you want my company--. So, we can make plans," she blushed. *"I need your help organizing the midwives. There is a couch for you and a bed for me. That would be alright for me. Et toi?"*

Without thinking Altmann quickly kissed Lena's cheek, surprising them both. They stared bewildered at each other for a moment before they giggled like children.

By mid-October the day of Professor Altmann's first lecture approached according to the schedule he presented to university:

Lecture 1 – History of the Medicinal Use of Ergot (November 4)

Lecture 2 – The Dangers and Safe Usages of Ergot (January 8)

Lecture 3 – Ergot in Child Birthing (March 12)

Lecture 4 – Ergot's Effects on the Mind (May 16)

Altmann read his lecture through to his assistants, timing his delivery to take precisely one hour by the university's clock which he discovered lost one second every nineteen days. When he finished reading, nine seconds too soon, they discussed the speech with Altmann making minor changes. Sitting on the desk he smiled down at his associates. *"This is the foundation lecture you understand,"* the professor explained. *"It is the first lecture, the only one that looks backward, that only summarizes other people's work. The only lecture based entirely on your research in the library-- this is your lecture!"* Oscar and Helmut looked at each other and back to Altmann smiling.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"You both have done excellent work, and while I didn't want to say this before, this is the least important lecture. Going forward what we do will comprise our own original contributions to medicine. Are you ready?"

Oscar looked disappointed; Helmut understood. *"For the next lecture, lecture number two, on the dangers and usages of ergot I want one of you to be my liaison with Gottlieb at the mayor's office here in Wittenberg. He should have information regarding the use of ergot that we will need for this lecture. Secondly, we need to contact the administrators of Wittenberg and other cities in Germany and other cities in the mail system to document their regulation of medicines, apothecaries and ergot. Additionally, research the administration of medical practice in Europe in the library. Let me know by tomorrow how you plan to tackle these assignments which must be completed in sixty days from today. Questions?"*

The carriage was late; Lena was standing by the front door in her coat when Otto slid off his chair in the kitchen and slumped to the floor. Ella screamed. Lena rushed and knelt next to her husband. His eyes were rolled back, he was continually convulsing, his partially-digested food poured from his mouth like a slimy rope across his chest onto the wood floor. *"I know what this is,"* Lena said.

"We need Albrun!" Ella shouted. *"Where is Albrun, he can save Otto!"*

Lena looked at the pink teacup next to Otto's plate, *"I know what is happening!"* Lena repeated out loud. *"Ella, take the pitcher and go fill it with fresh water! Hurry Ella!"* Lena ordered. She held Otto with one hand at the back of his neck and with her other hand she inserted two fingers into his mouth all the way back to his throat to make him gag more food into his mouth that she scooped out onto his shirt. When Ella returned Otto was groggy, he stared into Lena's eyes, *"So beautiful... It is ... beautiful. Can you see it ... Lena... my... love?"*

Lena poured a glass of water in his mouth and she opened his trousers. *"Get an empty jar,"* she ordered. Lena held Otto's penis, inserting its head in the mouth of the jar. *"You can pee now Otto. Please pee now, sweetheart."* Instantly his urine came out in a weak steady stream, he peed for a long time, almost filling the jar. Lena handed Ella the warm jar, *"Spill this outside and bring the jar back."*

Glass after glass of water Lena poured into Otto's mouth, some water he swallowed and some ran down his shirt. Two jars of warm urine Ella tossed on the grass that sparkled like winter frost by the light of the pale moon. *"Can you walk Otto? Can we make you comfortable in bed?"* Lena asked. They undressed him and cleaned the vomit from his face and body and laid him on his back. He wore a slight smile and he looked contented. There was a twinkle in his eyes like he had drunk too much schappes.

"Is Otto going to die now?" Ella asked, tears running down her face.

Lena suppressed a smile. *"No, Ella, he will be alright in the morning. Hold his hands and make sure he isn't too hot or cold. Give him as much water as he will drink. Do you want me to stay with him tonight to make sure he pees in the jar? Or can you do that for him?"*

"Hold his... in the jar? Won't he be upset?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"He will be upset if he pees on himself and in his bed, don't you think? This happened because Otto drank your medicine, Ella. You must never let this happen again, Ella. From now on I will watch you drink all of your tea, alright?"

"I don't want it anymore."

Lena thought for a few seconds. *"Alright, let's stop and see what happens. Maybe you don't need your medicine any longer."*

Altmann and Lena walked away from Otto's house in silence on this first cold night of autumn. In her apartment above the bookshop Lena lit the lamps, cleaned herself, put on bed clothes and made up the couch for him, replacing the pale blue light cotton cover with a warm plaid woolen blanket. But just as he began to sit down on the couch Lena grabbed his arm, pulled him upright and walked with him to bed.

"You can have this side," she said.

He lay down on top of the blankets with his clothes still on and she slipped under the sheets.

"Tell me," he said.

"What?"

"Otto."

"Yes," she sighed. *"I have a secret."*

"Tell me."

"You have secrets," she countered.

"Yes."

"I have a secret. Actually, a number of secrets. You need to know. But if I tell you I think you will be angry with me."

There was a long silence.

"Albrun?" she said at last.

"Yes?"

"Did you hear me?"

"Of course I did. I have a secret I am afraid to tell you too," he admitted.

"What should we do?" Lena asked.

"I don't know."

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

There was another long silence. Then Altmann leapt out of bed, pulled the covers down and pulled Lena upright by both arms. *"Get up! Get dressed. Wear warm clothes. Wear all black. We are going out. Hurry!"*

They travelled by stealth at night through the cobblestone streets of Wittenberg with only Altmann knowing where they were or why. The cold air was a thrilling; they saw in the pale moonlight their breath, two white clouds that merged then fast faded away. Her heart pounding Lena began to ask but Altmann put his finger to her lips. When he turned away, he put the finger to his own lips and kissed. He motioned for her to stay when he raced under a window lit with a lamp on the sill then he waved her forward.

The night was gray, the sky was gray, the buildings were gray, the street was gray. Lena felt like she was passing through a charcoal drawing on gray paper. Eyes wide extracting details, tasting delicious danger. Altmann led her by the hand, determined, in charge. He suddenly stopped, turned her toward him and standing on his toes he kissed her full on the lips. Then he spun around and ran off leaving her behind.

Lena ran after Altmann, trying to keep up, worried that her heels were sending telltale signals against the nighttime stones. She lost sight of him but kept running. She was alive! Where was he? Where was *she*?! From out of the shadows, he grabbed her and pulled her down. They crouched in an alley behind crates. They waited. It was colder now that they stopped running. They both shivered counting heartbeats; he waited for four and a half minutes and she for five minutes fifteen.

He saw it first. Altmann unwrapped a cooked sausage, handing it to Lena he gestured at the small yellow dog sniffing trash. She made an inquiring face. He nodded assent. She stood slowly and slowly she walked. The dog saw her. Taking a few steps backward, it ducked its head down, bared its teeth and growled lowly. Lena kept walking. Altmann thought, *'Toss it. Toss it now!'*

Lena walked up to just a few feet from the dog and she knelt, offering the sausage at the end of her outstretched arm. *'Toss it!'* Altmann shouted to himself. *'Please...'*

The dog growled louder. Lena whispered, *"I won't bite."* The dog looked puzzled. Then it raised its head and walked gingerly to her. When she felt the grip of its teeth on the sausage she let go, but not before.

Lena lay under the sheets while Altmann undressed in front of her. In the flickering candlelight she watched his erect penis. He slid naked between the sheets. Lena pulled her nightshirt off over her head. She spread her legs wide and guided him inside. He thrust with speed and urgency. *"Slow,"* she whispered nuzzling her nose against his neck. She reached behind him squeezing his buttock with both her hands, varying his speed and angle, teaching him. *"Make it last,"* Lena coaxed in her low hoarse Simone voice. Moments later, while he ejaculated inside of her warmth, he cried out the shriek, shocking himself and Lena. *"What a strange... man you are professor,"* she said.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Dawn found them asleep. Altmann woke first and looked at Lena's beautiful face, her freckles, her long, thick red hair spread across the pillow and sheets, her large breasts rising above her ribs like desserts. He begged, *"Can we...?"*

Lena smiled. Reaching under the sheets, *"Oh my,"* she said. *"What do we have here?"*

The noon bell found them still in bed, disheveled, delighted with each other. *"I never..."* he said.

Yawning she replied with mock-seriousness *"Tell me."*

He jumped on top of her again.

"Wait—wait!" Lena laughed, pushing him away. *"I'm hungry. What about university, professor? And I have to open the bookstore... eventually! A girl has to live!"*

Professor Altmann walked to his office in daylight; pebbles and leaks can be damned. Under a light rain he called, *"Fine day!"* to strangers under their umbrellas hurrying past. Inside, dripping wet he nodded at students and staff. In that moment he realized that his first leak, when he confirmed her suspicions about needing her help with his mother, that first leak allowed him to tell Simone he loved her. He realized that last night was the true proof, the culmination of his transformation that began with that whispered declaration. It was Lena, not his forged diploma, not his murder of dogs, but last night in bed with Lena that turned Albrun into Altmann. He walked through university with the assurance of a man.

Helmut was leaning on his office door. *"I found a book in the library."*

"How very unusual, my boy: A book in a library? Tell me more."

Helmut looked at the professor with an amused expression. *"We've looked for two days for anything about the oversight of doctors and apothecaries without luck. Not a single thing. They may be public records that are stored in administration offices? But I found something this morning that I thought you would find interesting,"* he said, handing Altmann a sheet of paper.

The prosperity of a state can be calculated by its land, armies, navy, commerce but people are the real source of prosperity because without them the land would be fallow and there would be no armies or navies or commerce or state. If the prosperity of the state is measured in its people, then the prosperity, health and well-being of the least among them is principal. For nothing thrives in sickness and in poverty, neither a person nor a state.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Who?" Altmann asked.

"Professor Jorge Ramos. He is on the faculty here, in the department of history. Or rather, someone named I. Ramos, who wrote the introduction to his book: Political History of Iberia."

"Is that all? Was there anything else of interest in the book?"

"The only copy in the library is the Portuguese first edition, chained. I don't read Portuguese—do you?"

"No. How did you get this?" Altmann asked.

"The introduction only is written in Latin."

"Is the entire introduction worth reading?"

"I don't know. I wasn't sure if this was what you wanted so I stopped reading after this first paragraph."

Helmut led the professor to the book-- the first time Altmann had ever been in the great library in daylight. He tried to take it all in discreetly but the presence of so massive a collection of books, walls and rows of books, was overwhelming. His head spun round with joy.

Drawing up a chair the professor read. Something here spoke to him, to his personal sense of aggrievement, but more than that, to a sense of a higher purpose. Knowledge in the pursuit of *justice*. Finishing the introduction he casually flipped through the book, pausing at the numerous tables of numbers.

On the final page there appeared a large ink stain, too wide and rectangular to be accidental he gauged, not a casual mishap, he was sure. This was an attempt to hide. But why not just tear the whole page out, he wondered, there was nothing else on either side of the page but only the ink stain. Altmann held the page up, trying to discern what was hidden beneath the stain.

By their second night together they had already established their routine: Lena and Altmann, or rather Lena and Albrun as she called him in her bed, first made love and then talked.

Rolling apart they both said together, *"Tell me."* They laughed and kissed.

"You go first," Altmann said.

"I can tell you now because I am less afraid of you hating me," she said, her hand resting on his thigh. *"Two years ago, when you tried to crush a single ergot grain and failed, I succeeded."*

Altmann sat up. *"What? How?!"*

"Lay back down so I know you won't get angry," she insisted, reaching under the sheets toward his member.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"You soaked ergot grains in water for, what, more than a year- "

"Sixteen months, before I gave up," he professed.

"It only takes nine months."

"No, it doesn't- "

"Yes, it does! But not soaking in water."

"In what then?!" he exclaimed, "Tell me already."

"I'll give you a hint: Matilda."

"The pig urine midwife? No—not pig urine!"

"No, my urine," she blushed. "It was soft enough to crush in your mortar into a coarse reddish powder, I used your scalpel and glass to divide the powder into four parts. I have quarter-grain doses of ergot," she boasted.

"You are a genius!" Altmann shouted "Eureka! How do you administer--"

Lena broadly smiled. "You will love this," she continued. "I dust the quarter-grain powder onto a dollop of honey, and cap it with another dollop. Once when you and Hercules went where you won't tell me, somewhere on the road to Leipzig, I spent two days crushing and preparing hundreds of quarter-doses."

"Why?"

"For your mother," she said, lightly brushing his penis with the back of her hand. "I have a ledger too, you didn't know that, Albrun. I know exactly when Ella's feet stopped hurting her, to the day. It was more than a year after you began to massage her feet with arnica and willow bark, but only a few days after her ergot. Your massaging relieved her stiffness but my ergot eliminated her pain. But at a price," she concluded seriously.

Overwhelmed, Altmann could only stare slack-jawed.

"I am surprised that you, of all people, haven't noticed, Albrun, that Ella is different now."

"Different—?"

"Her mind, Albrun. Her mind is lazy now. She forgets things. She lives in a world of her own. But she is happy, peaceful and without pain. Was I wrong to do this?"

"I—think, wait, does she know?"

"Yes, I told her to keep it a secret but she knows. Or at least she knows when she hasn't forgotten."

"What is her dose?"

"One quarter-grain every day, Sundays too."

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"How long has this been going on?" he asked with rising resentment.

Lena lightly stroked his member. "Since her pain stopped, more than a year now, last spring. But she ended the treatment two days ago."

"Why?"

"Because she was forgetful and accidentally allowed Otto to drink her tea. He got sick, just like Ella did the first time. And Albrun, and this is most important: they both said the first experience was beautiful, magical. I believe it created for them, or revealed to them something magical in their minds. Maybe something like what happens to the dying women when their souls escape?"

7 Lecture 1

"Wonderful, magical; I can still sometimes feel it. In my hands, behind my eyes," Otto blissfully smiled. "Heaven is this," rubbing his hands softly together, "There is no dying."

Altmann and Lena looked at each other. Lena nodded, tears welling in her eyes.

"What did you see, hear, feel?" Altmann asked.

"I saw Lena's voice a... pulsing, a web of rainbows and heard her green eyes. There is a chorus in your eyes Lena, my love. I know now. No difference."

"Do you understand what Otto means, mother?"

"Oh, yes Albrun. We make up stories. Stories are real too because there are stories inside of stories... forever," Ella explained.

"Should I try?" Altmann asked.

"When you are ready you are already," Otto serenely stated.

Gottlieb appeared, carelessly leaning on Altmann's doorframe. *"Herr Professor, a word?"*

Looked up from his papers, Altmann removed his glasses pointing to a chair.

"Your assistant is persistent."

"That's his job," Altmann replied, *"We work on a demanding schedule."*

Gottlieb smiled. *"Your lectures?"*

"Of course."

"Well, here is the thing: If our investigations were to prove the effectiveness of," he lowered his voice, *"medicine,"* he resumed in a normal voice, *"then we wouldn't necessarily want that widely known, you understand. You are a smart man."*

Altmann closed his eyes briefly. *"If there was a state, let's call it 'X' and they had an army, and they discovered a secret that gave their army advantages—"*

"An admirable illustration of my point," Gottlieb agreed smiling and shaking his head. In a low voice he explained, *"Now here is the thing: I can tell you that we have not determined that advantage with regard to,"* again he lowered his voice, *"healing most wounds."*

"I am surprised," Altmann replied. *"What wounds does it help to heal?"*

Gottlieb paused and sat up a little straighter, *"None, really, because the bleeding it stops are stomach wounds still the patient dies."*

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"Thank you. Can I see your documentation?" the professor asked.

"I'm afraid not."

"Can I truly write that the medicine may help stop bleeding in men too?"

"Yes, I think that is alright for you to write as long as you keep the attribution and the details secret. For now, at least."

"Agreed," Altmann said gladly.

"However," Gottlieb began his closing remarks, "There may be other uses for your medicine and we wish to support your ongoing research." Reaching into his coat pocket Gottlieb withdrew and handed a check to the professor. "Six-hundred silver thalers for ten jars of your medicine, a check drawn against a bank account here in Wittenberg. The fewer questions you ask now, the more appreciative we will be later. Ultimately, I think we may be able to be more forthcoming. But that is not a promise." Rising he extended his hand. "Do we have an understanding, professor? When will you deliver the jars to me?"

In bed Lena said, "Don Quixote is very good. The author is wicked, devious. Cunning, like you. Do you want me to read it to you?"

"What is it about?"

"It's a story of love and madness. Let's read it together? Have you ever read a book, Albrun?"

He looked skeptically.

"I mean a story. Not Lonicer's guide to medicinal plants."

"Is there any other book?" he yawned again. "Does the Bible count? I read a little of that."

"How much?" she asked.

"Well, it's been a long time... I remember the beginning was confusing until I understood it was a poetry. But the next part about only four people on Earth and one brother killing the other and then the killer moved to another town full of people... that's when I stopped. It was silly and I was bored..."

Lena laughed. "And that is the story of your life." She read aloud:

'Somewhere in la Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing.'

She hadn't read more than a page when Altmann began to snore.

"Wake up," she ordered, prodding him.

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"I heard what you read;" lying, wiping his eyes with his fists.

Lena laughed. *"Alright. What is the name of the snake?"*

"What snake? Which snake?" he yawned crawling out of bed. *"Alright, I want to read something to you."*

By candlelight they climbed downstairs; Altmann searched the bookshelves. *"Here it is,"* he slid his back down the wall, sitting on the floor with the lamp beside him. *"Listen to this:*

The prosperity of a state can be calculated by its land, armies, navy, commerce but people are the real source of prosperity because without them the land would be fallow and there would be no armies or navies or commerce or state. If the prosperity of the state is measured in its people, then the prosperity, health and well-being of the least among them is principal. For nothing thrives in sickness and in poverty, not a person nor a state.

"What is the title?" Lena asked.

"Political History of— "

"Iberia by Jorge Ramos. I know the author quite well, a dear man. He is a regular client. You know he teaches at university? We have sold many copies of his book."

"Health and well-being. The state is the state of its people's health and well-being. That makes sense to me. Our work promotes this goal," Altmann affirmed. *"For the living and for the dying... if there is dying..."* He turned to the last page. *"Do you see this? It's blank."*

"So?"

"And look here," he pointed to the beginning of the book. *"There is an introductory essay in Latin written by I. Ramos. The part I read to you is from the introduction. Do you know who wrote that?"*

"No. Perhaps Jorge has a son or brother? I can ask him the next time he comes to the store. I've seen him in the market with a young lady, maybe his daughter. They look very alike, very brown."

"Portuguese," he noted.

Lena woke before dawn, surprised to see Altmann drawing her face in charcoal by candlelight. He drew her portrait as Quixote's Dulcinea with dark skin, long wild dark hair, a torn and tattered blouse, wearing an alluring smile. Behind her he drew Hercules and a mature rye plant with a single ergot seed. It was so flattering a likeness Lena put the picture in the display window next to copies of *Don Quixote*.

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"Once there lived in Wittenberg a professor, one of those types that kept a wire and a pick, although not a greyhound..." Altmann advised in a hushed voice, removing those tools from his breast pocket. Oscar and Helmut shielded their professor. It surprised him that it was so difficult to open—it took him fifty-one heartbeats, he had projected it would take half that time. Altmann slipped the book into his satchel and tossed it over his shoulder, holding the drawstring in his fist on top of his heart.

They calmly strolled the library. The professor suddenly stopped— *"What day is it?"*

"It's October—" Oscar began.

"Not date, day."

"It's Wednesday Herr Professor," Helmut answered with a smile in anticipation of something amusing, having learned to recognize his professor's verbal brushstrokes.

Altmann laughed. *"So be it. So be it so. So... gentlemen, scholars and friends. What do we make of this moment?"*

"Wednesday?" Oscar asked.

"No."

They leisurely walked past rows of tables of students studying toward the first window; it didn't look promising-- the sun was not on their side.

Helmut said, *"What do we make of ... theft?"*

Altmann took his professor's cap off his head, handing it to his assistant. *"Admirable beginning, Herr Professor Helmut."*

Helmut donned the cap. *"What do we make of theft... of a book... from a library? The purposeful..."* he flagged.

Oscar grabbed the cap and put it on his own head. *"What do we make of trying to chain up knowledge?"*

"Optimum responsum," Altmann congratulated him, patting Oscar's back. *"Continue..."* he suggested as they turned a corner, in pursuit of the sun.

"It is impossible, no, it is unwise..."?

"Too true. More?" Altmann prodded as they approached the next row of windows.

"An idea, an important idea," Helmut began, *"Has wings, it has a life of its own. It can never be chained. It is as an uncaged bird in flight."*

"Pulchra sententia pulchre articulate," poet Helmut!"

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She taught him how to please her with his mouth. When the lesson ended, they were both exhausted and immediately fell asleep. In the middle of the night Altmann woke Lena up.

"Tell me," He whispered.

"Nothing," she mumbled eyes closed.

"Then ask me."

"Tell me," She mumbled eyes barely opening.

"I know what your friend Jorge was hiding."

Lena stirred, partly sitting up with her neck against the pillow resting against the headboard, eyes open. *"What?"*

"I know what Jorge was hiding in his book at university. If it was Jorge who hid it."

"What is it?"

"A Latin quote, but it is not attributed."

"What is the quote?" she asked, now awake.

"Anticipate charity by preventing poverty."

"Why would he hide that? It sounds like the other quote you read to me. From the introduction."

"I don't know. I've asked Oscar and Helmut to find out who is the author of the quote. I gave them one day off from their regular assignments. I offered them a prize of any book in the store. If there is a winner, of course, don't let him know about us."

"Why not ask Professor Ramos?"

"Because I suspect he was the one who hid it."

"Why?"

"That is the mystery I am trying to solve."

"Because you are bored?" Lena suggested. "Not enough work to do preparing for your first lecture in a few days?" she laughed. "Well, you can always help me dust the bookshelves."

"Or go back to the spa and find the snake?"

"Oh, I know where the snake is," she slyly suggested, crawling under the sheets. "He's hard to miss."

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This, he thought, will have to be a triumph of style over substance. At the bookshop Lena made his cheeks white with *blanchet*; at the medical school's lecture hall Oscar and Helmut darkened the room by smothering the candles in every- other lamp. The setting was already mysterious and dramatic when Professor Altmann made his appearance. He walked to the lectern at the center of the stage, stepping up on the box hidden behind it. Wearing his professorial cap but not his glasses, with his eyes shut he remained freakishly motionless, like a lizard sunning itself on a rock.

The audience, some four dozen students, faculty and guests who filled about half of the room, grew restless as the minutes passed while the professor remained absolutely immobile. There was some tittering, then louder conversation; someone called out for Altmann to stop playing. Just as his assistants began to panic Altmann opened his eyes wide and shouted "*Listen!*" One second later the university's bell tolled.

When the last peal faded to silence, with a broad smile Altmann stepped away from the lectern. Walking to the front of the stage he stood stock still. The diminutive professor closed his eyes again and began to recite his entire hour- long speech from memory:

"A parlor trick, please forgive me, but one that illustrates the central argument of this the first lecture: There is no medicine, there is no science, there is no truth without a clock and a scale. You can read every medical book in this great university's great library, but you don't have to, because my associates," he pointed eyes shut at Oscar and Helmut in the front row, *"have already relieved you of that task of sifting through superstition, inaccuracy, dissembling, contradiction looking for one tiny grain of verified truth. No, can I name it for what it is? Quackery. Sheer pig-headed, lazy, dangerous, nation-diminishing quackery.*

The only book, the single book here that you can entirely trust is Adam Lonicer's Kreuterbuch. It says what it knows is true and it says what it suspects may be true. And with regard to what Lonicer says about ergot I have proven that his reports and suspicions are accurate. Now, how is this so? And why raise Lonicer above Hippocrates or Galen? Only because he was a genius from Frankfort?" here he had allotted a ten second pause for cheers and laughter that his audience more than filled, "*No!*" he silenced them, "*No, because I have proven how ergot works as medicine with a clock and a scale.*"

For precisely one-hour, eyes shut Professor Altmann oraculated, cajoled, informed, ridiculed and humored. His audience was captured by his breadth of knowledge, his erudition, his sheer impudence and his bizarre style. He cited example after example of how the common wisdom about ergot was wrong, primitive and dangerous. After what seemed to his audience like a surprisingly brief speech he concluded:

"This was the first of my four lectures in this series on ergot here at Wittenberg's college of medicine this school year. The least important of the four lectures, actually. This lecture looked back at our infancy and childhood as medical practitioners. The next two lectures will tell you the truth of what we know today about medicinal ergot, in detail, while the final lecture will tell you what we think may be discovered in the future. I hope you will join me to learn how you can help to immediately save many hundreds of lives in Germany each year with safe and effective ergot medicine."

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With that Altmann returned to the lectern, stood on the box and closed his eyes. Two seconds later the bell tolled the lecture's end. Some members of the audience rushed toward Altmann, who still stood behind the lectern eyes closed. Helmut and Oscar blocked their paths, persuading them to speak with the professor tomorrow in his office. With his eyes still closed Altmann clearly heard the comments: *"Clown, fool and genius."* After two hundred heartbeats Altmann heard only indistinguishable voices from the hallway. Just as he was about to open his eyes, he heard a familiar voice in the room.

"Remarkable performance Alb—ert. Never saw anything like it. Bravo!"

Opening his eyes, seeing Marburg, Altmann fainted crumbling to the wooden floor.

Marburg sat on the floor with Altmann's head in his lap. Helmut tearfully hugged Altmann's clock while Oscar walked circles around the three men. After a few minutes Altmann blinked his eyes opened.

"Marburg..." Altmann gasped, tears smearing his white makeup, revealing in stripes his wet red cheeks. He looked up with wild eyes at Marburg who softly stroked his hair, *"That's all right, Alb-ert. Everything is all right. You were brilliant my boy. Not even a Wednesday! Absolutely brilliant! I am so proud of you! When word gets out you will surely need a bigger room!"*

They sat sipping celebratory beers at the tavern in a quiet corner away from the boisterous crowd. Altmann seemed better, Oscar and Helmut were relieved and Marburg's conversation was relaxed but guarded.

"How are you going to better that performance, my boy?" asked Marburg, tapping his shoulder affectionately.

"I was off by one second, at the end, well, maybe by a little less?" Altmann replied with an wicked grin.

Oscar and Helmut rocked in their chairs, they laughed uproariously, slapping and punching each other's arms, legs and backs. Marburg laughed shaking his head. *"There is no one else in the whole world like you, you know that... Albert?"*

Marburg walked Altmann home under a cold, clear evening sky. Altmann explained that Otto now lived with Ella and he lived with Lena, that is Simone. Altmann explained his new persona, his forged diploma and all the effort he took to keep Marburg and the spa safe.

Marburg digested the information, nodding continuously as they walked, occasionally sighing loudly and shaking his head in wonder. They walked in silence for a few minutes while he collected his thoughts. *"I understand that you lied to me to protect me and the spa. I'm only going to say this to you*

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one time, Albrun and then I'm done with it: I am not angry with you for what you did but I am truthfully disappointed that you thought so little of my intelligence. That you thought you could ride off in the same carriage with Simone... and I wouldn't think you two were leaving together to be together. I have always understood that I am not as smart as you or Simone that much is certain, but I'm not altogether a simpleton. I have been at university, in war and at the duke's court. I have treated many patients successfully. I have even spoken before large audiences. I know something of the world. That is all, I'm done with it now."

Altmann nodded. *"I am sorry. I never wanted to hurt you..."* He turned to Marburg and reaching his arms around his waist, the boy pressed his face into the man's chest.

"Stop it," he said with kindness, patting Albrun's hair. *"Stop. It's over. I am done with it. Let's talk about your future. And mine. And Simone's."*

When they entered the bookstore together Lena's jaw dropped. She froze, unsure of what to say or do, how to act or feel. Marburg kissed her cheek, *"Simone, I have missed you every day and night,"* he whispered in her ear. Stepping back, holding her at arm's length, looking into her eyes he said, *"Simone, Albrun's was truly the performance of a lifetime! My god, it was, it was —"* he looked to Altmann.

"Perfectly adequate in every respect," Albrun concluded. They three laughed until they had to catch their breath.

8 Revelation

"You know what you promised," Marburg quietly reminded.

"And you promised not to come to Witten—," Lena snapped back.

"I came for the lecture. I have something more than a passing interest in ergot, you know? I was not coming to see you, hard as it is! I have a room at the inn and I planned; I plan to be back in Bad Döben tomorrow. We found the snake by the way Simone. Also, I stopped Rosenthal from attending your lecture tonight Albrun. I paid two whores to keep him in his room, even told them to hide his boots if they had to," Marburg laughed thinking sadly how he had become Rosenthal's ready pimp.

"Redheads?" she asked.

"N-No... No," Marburg smiled.

Lena looked at Albrun and blushed; she wished she could tell if he were blushing.

"You didn't know it was me before the lecture?" Altmann asked.

"How could I? You're not, you weren't Altmann or a professor. I thought you were with Simone but..."

"Where was the snake?" Lena interjected.

"Well, that's my secret. You two have had your share of secrets. Fairs fair?" Marburg asked.

"Why is Rosenthal here? For my lecture? That's a surprise. What does he care about ergot—?"

"He was returning from a wedding in Potsdam. Pure chance we ran into each other at the inn. I tried to keep him ignorant of the lecture but he found out. Then I bought him the whores. I'm not sure he would have recognized you anyway."

"How did you miss that pebble?" she smirked at Albrun, sticking out her tongue. "He's huge!" she shouted, pirouetting with glee, clapping her hands she sang: "Marburg saved the day! Marburg saved the day!"

The men stared at her and then at each other, smiling.

"I don't know if he paid any attention to me at the spa." Altmann said. "What do you think Lena?"

"Is it Lena? Of course," Marburg said.

"How did you do it?" he asked.

"What, timing the lecture with the tower bells?" Altmann replied.

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"Tell me everything!" Lena insisted.

"He stood motionless like a clockwork... man... a broken clockwork man until he suddenly wakes up and shouts 'Listen!' and the bells toll. To the second!"

"That's right," Altmann smiled widely. *"Perfect timing on the first tolling. Slightly off—"*

"And the second time, at the end he did the same thing, he goes back to the lectern, shuts his eyes and, again the bells toll—"

"About one second, no I'd say a half-second late," he admitted, his face radiant with joy.

"How can you live with yourself? What shame! What dishonor! A full half-second?!" Lena pouted, shaking her head. *"Well, I think that's it. Time for you to retire, old man! I've heard bee-keeping is an interesting hobby. Or snake hunting?"* she said, squinting at Marburg.

Altmann's eyes began to well with tears. Lena rushed up to him and cupped his face in her hands. *"What?"*

He refused to look up. His shoulders shook. Marburg approached and put his arm around the boy. *"Can you tell us?"*

Altmann said in a tight hoarse voice, *"I killed a girl. A little girl..."*

Downstairs in the bookshop they sat in the little kitchen, even smaller than Altmann's office, sipping at mugs of scalding hot black tea. No one spoke for many minutes. Finally, he cleared his throat.

"When I was nine—no, when I was six, I started to change the time on the clock in the rectory. The small Swiss clock they use to keep the time for ringing the tower bell. I started changing it pretty often. Sometimes every day for weeks at a time. Changing the time forward and backward. Sometimes by one minute, never more than fourteen."

"Why?" Marburg asked.

"Because you could? It was something you could control?" Lena suggested.

"Yes. Mostly because it gave me control over—them. Everyone in town. They were all enemies. They made fun of me..." he looked like he was about to cry again.

Lena leaned bringing him to her. They both felt his damp cheek pressed into the softness of her breasts. *"What happened?"* she asked, feeling to him just like she had hummed the words.

"The summer I was nine—neither of you had come to the spa yet, in the summer one day I set the clock to eleven minutes late. It was eleven minutes late that noon. At the noon bell I saw a girl walk under the big tree near the well. I found out her father—" he choked. Lena pressed his cheek more tightly to her breasts. *"Her father told her to meet him under the tree at noon bell. She was there only a few seconds when the big branch fell on her! Oh, God, it crushed her!"* he screamed and sobbed. *"I heard... the crack... and turned and saw her crushed... dead... Because of me!"*

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"No, no, not at all! It was the tree's fault, blame God, don't blame yourself," Marburg told him.

"Don't blame yourself for an accident," Lena counselled. "You couldn't have known... You have helped me to save so many girls... so many women and children..."

Altmann was exhausted. He said he would sleep on the floor and Marburg could use the couch. Lena wouldn't hear of it; she forced them to both sleep on the floor at the foot of her bed. Alone Lena tossed unable to sleep. She gathered up her blanket and pillow and arranged herself between the sleeping men on the floor. She lay on her side with one arm on Albrun's shoulder. Sometime during the night when Marburg rolled over, his arm draped over her shoulder. Half-asleep his hand found her breast and tenderly squeezed it. They both stirred. He withdrew his arm quickly. They settled again, falling back asleep. Lena reached over and returned his hand to her breast and her arm to Albrun's shoulder.

Altmann had already returned in darkness to university when Lena and Marburg woke at dawn. He drew her to him as they lay on their blankets on the floor. They kissed, he moved his hands across her body, reminding himself of every part of her luxuriance. Aroused he moaned, *"Come up to bed,"* pulling her up with him.

"Marburg: stop! Please stop. I can't... not here. I will be yours at the spa, I swear it. I swear it. I know I don't always keep my promises but I swear it to you. I will visit you at the spa, soon. Please trust me. Not here, not here... It's not fair to Albrun. This is his home now."

Helmut and Oscar came to his office at noon bell. It had been a busy morning for the professor-- he had never had so many visitors. It seemed like every member of the faculty wanted to meet. To a man they were visibly taken aback by the appearance of this ruddy-faced young man with glasses but they pretended not to notice when they congratulated him on his inspired lecture.

Altmann rose and greeted his assistants with a smile, embracing them. Sitting Altmann put his feet up on his desk and leaned back with hands clasped behind his neck. They thought he looked sad.

"Ask me," he said.

"What?" Oscar asked.

"All of your questions. Or tell me your thoughts."

Oscar asked, *"Who is Marburg?"*

"He is a doctor. Not like me. He works with patients. I work with the numbers about patients. He is like a father to me. I am a bastard. He is my father. I love him."

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

There was a long pause. Oscar was about to ask another question when Helmut tapped Oscar's foot with his shoe and slightly shook his head. *"What do we do next professor?"* Helmut gently asked.

Altmann closed his eyes. *"Five things, write them down, please. One-- Find me a student or faculty member from the music school who has perfect pitch who can travel to Bad Döben for a fortnight, perhaps longer, and can transcribe music, or sounds, well a shriek. I'll pay him one silver thaler per week. He will get food and lodging in a grand spa and access to the bathes. In fact, he will spend most of his time in the bathes, I hope. Two-- finish sending your letters to the city administrators, I especially want to get information quickly about their apothecaries and apothecary guilds. Three—find out how we can conduct experiments on mice. Where is our laboratory? Where are the mice and cages? Four-- keep looking for the author of the Latin quote. Five-- claim your books—each of you deserve a book from the bookstore, the old bookstore. I am told that Don Quixote is a good story but pick whatever interests you."*

They hadn't made love since Marburg left. *"Tell me,"* Lena asked Albrun in bed.

"Are you going back to the spa soon? Maybe for Christmas? When you do, I thought you could travel with a musician."

"Are you alright, Albrun?" she asked, resting her head on his chest, feeling his heartbeat in her ear.

"Read me more of the book. I promise I will try to stay awake. Is there really a snake in the story or were you just teasing me?"

"Let's get up, go outside. Let's find the dog, it's a cold night. I have some biscuits... and a bit of bacon. Is it a boy or a girl? Should we give it a name?"

Altmann skulked longer and longer in the dark halls of the deserted university at night, delaying his return to Lena, hoping she would be asleep. He chose a locked door at random and picked it. He held his candle in the air as the flickering details rapidly congealed into an organized picture. Another office, larger than his own, a large wooden cross, another shelf of books, another desk, another diploma. *'Egon Heisenberg, Doctor of Religion, University of Freiburg, 1588.'*

Is this, he thought, staring at the diploma, at the end of a life, is this what the world will remember of the man? And for how long will they remember him? And the school too? Will the school fade from all human memory, surely it would someday. The man, the school, himself, gone in an instant, wiped from the record. Ground, crushed into dust by the fall of a tree branch. Unless you are *that* one. Aristotle, Cesar, Christ, Luther... Lonicer? Would Lonicer be forgotten too? Certainly, Lonicer's acolyte Winkelmann, or was it Altmann will be quickly forgotten, if ever he was widely known.

Will Quixote be remembered? Will the world remember someone who never lived, remember a lie, really. The world will remember a fiction longer than the truth. What makes a person real anyway?

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A man I will never meet who lives a five-minute walk from where I now stand will never exist for me while Quixote, the mention of whose name seemingly makes me snore-- *he* exists!

What will be the sum of *my* life? The lives we have already saved, the lives we will save, the lives Gottlieb saves and the lives Gottlieb will likely take with our medicine? God, Altmann thought, must have an enormous ledger with many, many columns or else he must have a great sense of humor. Or both?

"Do this experiment, we'll call it 'alpha'" the professor instructed. "Put eleven mice in eleven numbered cages, labeled zero through ten. Mouse zero is the control mouse, give him no medicine. We'll call all of the control mice 'Egon'—maybe Heisenberg will stay famous a little longer that way. Give mouse one a quarter-grain of ergot and time his death. When it dies give mouse two half of a quarter grain. Keep doing this until you find the amount of ergot that isn't fatal for mice. Weigh the mice at death. Report your conclusions to me. This is not going to be a perfect experiment due to the inconsistent distribution of the ergot powder in the substrate. I will work on this problem which admittedly may be unsolvable within our time restrictions."

Altmann walked to his mother and Otto's house on a bitterly cold day in November. *"How do you feel, mother?"*

"I feel fine. This house is warm and cozy. We are quite happy, Mr. Weber and I. We suit each other," she laughed, squinching her face. *"It was a blessing we came to Wittenberg, Albrun."*

"Lena, I mean Simone told me you stopped taking your medicine. Is that right? But Otto still massages your feet every day?"

Ella looked at Otto and asked him to get her a glass of water. When he was gone Ella leaned close to her son and whispered, *"My feet began to hurt a few days after I stopped taking the medicine. I didn't mind a little pain but Otto saw me limping and he thought it was his fault—that he wasn't massaging my feet right. So, I started taking the medicine again for his sake. And now there is no pain again."*

Otto returned with her drink. *"When you stopped taking the medicine, was that for—how many days?"* Altmann asked.

"Two or three, I think."

"I want to ask you about your mind. Do you mind?" he joked. *"Does your mind feel different when you take your medicine compared to when you didn't? Can you tell if there is any difference?"*

"I can tell," Otto stated.

"What is the difference?"

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"Before I took Mrs. Winkelmann's medicine I thought everyone and everything was apart, separate, distinct. Now I know we are all connected—you, your mother, this table, a fish being caught right now in a sea I have never heard of and God," Otto intoned with a smile. *"Today, tomorrow, yesterday, the Earth and the moon and the sun."*

"Amen," Ella spoke.

"Would you like to try it again? The second time you may not vomit or convulse as much but there will still be tremors and delirium."

Otto thought. *"What is delirium? Do you mean confused?"*

"Yes, confused, distracted, completely out of sorts in your mind," Altmann explained.

"Yes, I think so. It was... it makes me happy. Do you think that would be alright Mrs. Winkelmann? Out of sorts? No, in sorts with your mind."

He was summoned to the office of the head of the medical school. Dean Vogel seemed too sullen to be an administrator and too obtuse to be a scholar. Altmann guessed he reached his position from patronage, like Marburg had.

"We met on your arrival," Vogel reminded Altmann.

"Yes."

"Are you finding our campus..." he reached for a word just out of his grasp...

"Accommodating? Very much so. Even better than I had hoped. And my assistants are both exemplary."

"Exemplary, I am glad. Let me come straight to the point. Since your lecture, which I am sorry I missed, since then I have heard strange and disturbing stories about, well, about you."

"I am not surprised. I have frequently been told that I am sui generis."

"What?"

"Unique."

"Some think you are insane, or a witch."

"But not an insane witch, I hope?" Altmann joked.

"What? Are you making fun of me?"

"No, no sir. I apologize. Is there something you need me to do, or not do? It is not my intention to cause trouble for you."

"You have already caused me trouble."

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They sat in awkward silence staring at each other. The bell tolled one.

"Did you... somehow... control the... tower bell? Do you control it still?"

Albrun froze. Taking a deep breath he replied, *"No, sir. Not at all. I adjusted my lecture to the bell. N- Not the other way-round."*

"What?"

"No sir I did not, I do not control the bell, I swear to God."

They sat in another long silence.

"Alright. That is all. For now," Vogel dismissed the young professor.

Their routine had changed; now they talked first in bed. First and last and they didn't speak about it.

"Tell me," Lena sighed.

"The Dean said the faculty thinks I am insane or a witch but probably not both."

Lena burst out laughing. She reached for his chest, lightly touching his bare skin with her fingertips. *"Albrun, what's wrong? Did you stop loving me? Wanting me? Because of Marburg?"*

"Should I encourage Otto to use your medicine again, so I can observe his reaction? His mind's reaction?"

"Tell me what's wrong. I miss you. I need your touch."

"It's embarrassing," he admitted, not looking at her.

"You can tell me. I love you and want us to be happy again. I was happy. Weren't you?"

His eyes filled with tears. Lena reached out to comfort him. Suddenly she withdrew rolling away in sadness.

9 Voyage

There were two apothecaries in Wittenberg and they called each other quacks. After meeting them Altmann found their judgements to be entirely unsound, except for their appraisals of each other. A promising start, the professor thought on a bleak early December morning. One month from his second lecture he had received replies so far from only three cities: Antwerp, Frankfort and Copenhagen.

Antwerp's reply was that there was once an apothecary guild in their city but it seemed to have gone dormant. Their apothecaries *were* required to register with the office of the mayor but they were not supervised. It was thought unlikely they supplied ergot.

Lonicer's hometown Frankfort, dear to Altmann's imagination, was a city four-hundred fifty miles away, much further than he had ever travelled in a straight line. Frankfort had an ongoing and robust Guild of Apothecaries with a seal, a list of approved medicines and even a price guide. Ergot was on the list and was sold by the seed pod, not by the grain.

Copenhagen was the real surprise. A doctor in the city who was interested in ergot wanted to meet to discuss his own use of ergot in treating migraines. His treatments were partially effective but extremely risky. He had lost a patient from violent seizures, an elderly man. He lamented his inability to procure doses smaller than a single grain. They agreed to meet halfway at Rostock the week before Christmas. Altmann would trade some quarter-grain ergot for access to Doctor Guildenstern's research notes and a summary of his findings.

He had never worked directly with a human patient before or beside Lena during a procedure. She was now his colleague, not a lover, a friend, the wife of the subject, a literate, intelligent elderly man with rotting teeth experimenting with ergot.

"I'll start the clock now," Altmann announced. Otto swallowed the quarter-grain ergot tea slowly and reclined in his bed, smiling. Ella and Lena sat on chairs next to him, ready to intercede. Altmann paced the floor by the foot of the bed, ledger and pencil at hand.

"I will ask you questions at regular intervals Otto, but please feel free to tell us what you feel and see and hear, whatever, whenever you experience it. And please let us know if you experience any discomfort or pain. Alright?" Altmann began.

"Yes. I understand. I am relaxed. I don't feel anything unusual yet."

Just after the five-minute mark Otto sat up and said he felt nauseous. He vomited a small amount of the clear broth he had for lunch one hour earlier.

"My hands are trembling now," he realized, holding them up for the others to see. *"It isn't unpleasant, just a bit strange..."*

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At ten minutes Otto's eyes were closed and he seemed to be asleep. His breathing was regular and he didn't appear to be in any discomfort. *"Otto, can you hear me? It's been ten minutes. What are you feeling now?"* Altmann asked.

Otto mumbled something incoherent. Lena whispered in his ear, *"Can you hear me?"*

"Yes..."

"What do you see?" Lena asked in a soothing voice.

"I see... darkness. Maybe some small flecks of light near the edge of my eyes."

"What do you hear?" Lena asked.

"You," he laughed.

Altmann said, *"Otto, it's been fifteen minutes. Are you alright? What do you see?"*

Otto moved his lips but there was no speech, no sound.

Ella said, *"Otto—are you here?"*

Otto turned to her and opened his eyes. He moved his lips but again there was no sound. Altmann noted that his pupils were larger.

At twenty minutes Otto began to convulse. He tried to move out of bed but the women held him down by his shoulders. He whimpered for a minute, in mild distress.

Lena asked, *"Otto, what's happening? Are you alright? What do you see?"*

His convulsions slowed, then they stopped. He rolled from side to side before settling onto his right side, with his knees brought upward towards his chest. With his eyes closed he repeated a word they had trouble interpreting.

"What is he saying?" Altmann asked.

Lena brought her ear right next to his lips. *"Over—something."* She listened. *"Over—I can't quite, over—with a 'w.' Over-win? There is a 't' sound. Overwinter? I think..."*

"Overwinter," Otto clearly spoke. *"No death. Overwinter. This side, that side same side... over...winter."* He opened his eyes and sat upright with the women's help. *"Here. Hello."* He looked at Ella and said, *"Hel-lo."*

Altmann whispered *"Twenty-five minutes. Otto, what do you see?"*

"Rainbows all." He looked toward Altmann and pointed at him. *"Round light, the sun,"* he giggled. He turned to Lena, *"You wide river rainbow."* He looked at his hands, *"Rainbow hands,"* he giggled like a child. He moved his hands together and apart, laughing.

"What do you hear?" Lena asked.

"Loooo..." he cooed.

"What?" Lena asked.

"Let up," he said.

They helped him to his feet.

"Don't let go of him!" Altmann warned.

"Are you alright Mr. Weber? Do you need something?" Ella asked.

"Do you see—," he swung his arm vaguely. *"Do you?"*

"What?" Lena asked. *"What do you see?"*

Altmann whispered, *"Thirty minutes."*

Otto began to move his knees up and down as if he was walking. *"There!"* he exclaimed.

"What? Tell us!" Lena implored.

"There here inside out. Oh, wonderful."

The women eased him down so he could sit on the bed.

"Overwinter over... winter over!" he exclaimed. *"Here light! Oh, wonderful. Every color clear, every rainbow sound ..."* Otto shuttered. The women eased him back; Ella placed a pillow under his head. *"To lips are loud! Boo-hoo! Can do it! Watch!"*

"What are you doing?" Altmann asked.

"Watch."

"Tell me, please," Lena implored.

"Flying on water, not swimming... sound of river of light ... in sound. Falling... Easy ... Better..."

He smiled with joy. Lena saw that he was urinating. *"He is peeing,"* she noted, putting a towel under him.

"Thirty-five minutes," Altmann informed.

"Walk the valley shadow of walk no shadow light. Kloo!" Otto rolled on his side and drew his knees up. He was silent.

"Let him sleep now," Ella said, lightly stroking his face.

They watched him fall asleep and snore.

"Forty minutes," Altmann noted.

"Forty-five minutes."

Otto rolled to his other side and snored.

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"Fifty minutes."

Otto sleep for five hours and nine minutes. When he awoke he rubbed his eyes. *"My head hurts,"* he complained. *"But not too bad."*

Lena asked, *"Are you alright?"*

"Fline, fine," he smiled. He looked for Ella and took her hand.

"Can you tell us what happened, Otto?" Altmann asked in a soft voice.

Otto spoke as if he was dreaming. *"There is word world worry wonderful. You know then to."*

"What do you mean?" Lena asked.

"What you want. And you," he pointed at Altmann.

"What do we want?" Lena asked.

"You know," he replied.

"Tell us," Lena demanded.

"Can't couldn't wouldn't," he offered.

"What did you see?" Altmann asked.

"Everything it is."

"What is 'Overwinter.'?" Lena asked.

"Where you live."

"Where do you live?" Altmann asked.

Otto paused and thought. He shrugged and smiled.

Next day Otto told Mrs. Winkelmann, *"I don't have to do that again."*

"I know," she said and hugged him. *"You are hungry Mr. Weber? I bet you are!"*

Oscar and Helmut went to the bookstore together. They stared at the window display of *Don Quixote* books and especially the provocative portrait of Dulcinea. The hair on the back of Helmut's neck stood up.

"Doesn't that look like professor's rye drawings?" he asked Oscar.

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"He doesn't use charcoal. Or draw people." He leaned his face against the glass. "Could be Lonicer's or Altmann's, I guess. Anyway, it's the woman I'm interested in!" he insisted.

Entering, they spotted Lena writing, leaning on the counter wearing a horizontally- striped blouse that accentuated her bust. Helmut whispered, *"Well, there's your chance!"*

Oscar approached and gulped. He opened his mouth but didn't speak. Lena smiled, *"Are you whispering? Should I get closer?"*

Helmut pushed past his mute friend. *"Excuse him, I mean us. We are here because Professor Altmann said we could each choose a book and he would pay for them?"*

"I've been expecting you!" she said with a broad smile showing her perfect smile. *"Look around and take anything you like,"* she offered, pushing a lock of her red hair away from her eyes. *"If you have any questions, I'm here for you!"*

They slowly browsed the racks of books, over and over, barely reading the titles on the spines, furtively gazing at *Lena who enjoyed the attention, put some zest into her plans*. From time-to-time Lena turned her profile while she wrote. When she did look up, they both quickly looked away. She smiled, humming a jaunty tune.

"Miss—" Oscar began.

"Mrs. Weber. But call me Lena. What's your name?"

"I-I'm Oscar. He's Helmut."

"So very pleased to meet you both, Oscar and Helmut. How may I help you?"

"M—I mean Lena, Professor Altmann suggested Don Quixote. Can you tell me, have you read it? Is it good? What's it about?"

"I'm still reading it, yes, I can highly recommend the book! Do you like romantic adventures with beautiful brazen women?" she asked, moving from behind the counter.

"I want that!" Oscar agreed loudly.

Handing him a copy, Lena laughed and set her sights on Helmut who stood slightly trembling. *"And you! What do you want?"* she asked with an engaging smile.

"I—I ... w-wonder what other books—"

"That are thrilling?" she inquired.

Helmut solemnly nodded.

"Well, let's see what I can find for you, Helmut!" she considered, walking slowly past, lightly brushing against him. They watched her climb up the stairs then return with a copy of *The Decameron*. *"This is a special book. We don't display it. I think you will love this. And when you read it, you can think about—someone special!"*

To his assistants Altmann read the text of his second lecture, a work much in progress. They agreed that it was informative, engaging and... very weak tea compared to his first lecture.

"I've been warned to not be—" Altmann searched for the right word.

"You!" Oscar offered. They laughed.

"Me. That's right. They told me not to be me! In fact, I all but promised to never be me again."

"And you are going to obey?" Oscar asked.

"Yes, of course. We all have to choose our battles. My battle is to get four ergot lectures printed under Wittenberg's imprimatur. I will be as docile as a lamb. Anyway, if I didn't make my point about treating medicine as science in the first lecture, I'm not sure what else I could add."

"Living proof," Helmut suggested.

"How?" Altmann asked.

"Show the audience how ergot poisoning has dismembered people. Show the victims' wounds. That would be salutary."

"Shocking, more like! Certainly not the stuff of lambs..." Oscar countered.

"No. Helmut's right. You're both right... But it would be difficult and unfair to parade victims... I need to draw the wounds. Very large drawings, visible in detail from the stage for the audience to clearly see the ravages of ergot poisoning. I know a place, it used to be a Benedictine monastery in Löbnitz where they treat ergot victims. Hard by Bad Düben."

"Tell me," he asked, seated at the bookshop's small kitchen table.

"I'm going to close the store for a fortnight at Christmas."

"To go to Bad Düben?"

"Yes."

"Alright. I hope you have a happy Christmas there. Send Marburg my greetings on the season."

"Tell me," she asked.

"I will be away until just before Christmas. Löbnitz then Rostock. Research for the lectures. I suppose this is the last time we'll see each other before the New Year?"

They looked away from each other.

"I found a musician. Well Helmut found—"

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"I like them. They took their books, you know. I'm organizing midwife guilds and ergot training classes for the New Year. I could use help. Could you loan me Oscar or Helmut from time to time?"

"You left them with a strong impression; they both mention you often. I could offer working with you as a reward."

Lena noticed him drum his fingers on the table, she didn't remember ever seeing him do that before.

"The musician?"

"Yes, Werner. I told him to come here to make the arrangements to travel with you. I will pay his expenses and give him a stipend. Is that alright with you?"

"When you try ergot I will stay with you, keep you safe. I will document your experience. In the new year, before your final lecture," she promised.

"Do you love Marburg?"

"I love... everyone. Do you hate me?"

"I don't... hate anyone," he lied.

The professor and his assistants huddled in his office for their last meeting before Altmann left for Löbnitz. *"Tell me."*

"We have an idea about the drawings professor, how to make them larger," Oscar said with a big smile. He took one of Altmann's ink drawings on velum and held it near the face of a lit lamp. Helmut held a dark cloth that covered the other three sides and the top of the lamp. Swaying on the adjacent wall was an image of the ergot plant."

Oscar explained, "It's twice the size—"

"—But half the clarity—" Altmann observed.

"We think we can correct that with a lens," Oscar said, reaching to the table for Altmann's glasses. "See?" he asked, showing that a portion of the cast image was both large and clear.

"Excellent! But it's upside-down." Altmann observed.

"Just like a telescope. We will need two lens to correct the orientation, or put the picture in upside-down. So, if you draw the ergot wounds in ink on velum, like this one, and draw them small enough, we can cast the images to large sheets of paper where you can trace them!" Oscar declared.

"How small?" Altmann wondered.

"The diameter of a telescope lens?" Helmut suggested.

"That would be difficult, so small..." Altmann replied.

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"Easier than painting angels on pinheads?" Oscar quipped.

"Let me consider it. In the meantime, pursue your lamp project, use the money in the desk. I will leave you the key to the office while I am away. What's next?"

Helmut said: "There are more responses about apothecaries and guilds. About a third—"

"Summarize your findings, from all of the respondents and note interesting facts before I leave tomorrow noon, and I'll read it in Löbnitz. Next?"

Helmut proceeded, "A mouse can ingest one-sixteenth of a quarter-grain of ergot without dying. But the mouse does go crazy, won't eat—"

"Alright, please summarize the alpha experiment results and I will also read them in Löbnitz. Let Egon loose in a field. Please start the beta experiments. I will read that when I come back. Next?"

After dusk Altmann performed his nightly tour of university's deserted halls. Stepping outside he didn't intend to visit the bookstore but he needed to breathe fresh air. He walked less than one block in shadows before he heard his name.

"Herr Professor, a word?" Gottlieb greeted him with a smile and a handshake.

"Are you following me?" Altmann asked.

"No. Should I be?" he joked. *"Let's have a drink-- I have news."*

In the tavern Gottlieb watched Altmann's face closely as they drank beers. *"You look tired, professor. Are you feeling alright?"*

"I'm fine. We are very busy. I'll be travelling and then the lecture is a week after New Year's."

"I plan to attend your lecture—from what I have heard—"

"Yes, yes, I am a clown, a fool, a genius, insane or a witch."

Gottlieb laughed. He leaned in closer to Altmann whispering, *"Here is the thing: It's not just stomachs but other organs, too. It stops bleeding in livers and lungs, but again, it does not heal the patient. There is vomiting, tremors, delusions and great pain relief in every case."*

"Will I ever see the reports?"

"I told you, I can't promise but I think that may be possible in the future. Now here's the thing: We will need more of your medicine soon. Over winter."

"Did you say-- overwinter?"

"Yes, during the winter we will need the ergot."

"Why."

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Gottlieb made a face of incomprehension. *"Herr Professor, I don't mean to be rude..."*

Altmann was chilled within the first few minutes unable to get his feet or hands warm for the entire five-hour carriage ride to Löbnitz. The driver delivered him at the clinic in dizzy and feverish. He slept and fasted for the next day while the director recruited patients. Occasionally he woke to read and re-read notes for his second lecture unable to understand.

The following morning Altmann was surprised how many poor souls consented to have their torture preserved in ink. Waited on a hard chair, staring at a patch of curved peeling yellow paint on the wall, he struggled to form any other coherent image other than the view of the curve of Lena's buttock where it met her upper thigh beside her flower.

The first patient was losing three fingers on his right hand. The stumps still oozed a foul-smelling puss. The remaining fingers, his thumb and index, were bent at alarming painful angles. Embarrassed, Altmann drew his wounds in minute detail, then thanked him without looking at his face.

The next patient was a girl whose toes were still attached but they were horribly scabbed and encrusted with white scales that flaked off with every painful movement. Altmann thought it would be a blessing when they dropped off, as had his mother's.

Then a man appeared, his left palm a sinister dark purple with gashes and torn skin, the other hand with all four fingers the same dark purple from the tips halfway to the palm as if he had dipped them in a paint can.

A woman came who missing her ear, just a bruised gaping hole in the side of her head. A young couple came in together crying. She slid his pants down to reveal a penis eaten away down to his scrotum. *"We never had a chance to have children!"* she wailed.

On and on for more than an hour Altmann drew their torment in miniature, his glasses hovering inches above the vellum discs. The final drawings were useless because his eyesight was blurred and the pen shook in his hands. Still, he made the effort for the sake of the victims. Each one he dismissed with a respectful *"Thank you,"* and a short bow of his head without ever looking in their eyes.

After he and Oscar finished their work at university Helmut walked alone past the bookstore in the opposite direction from his lodgings. Every night the bookshop was dark, but when there was moon- enough he would stand with his face pressed against the display window staring at the portrait. He convinced himself that his professor had made the drawing and not just because of the rye plant. He convinced himself that it was his professor who had captured the tilt of Lena's head, the fire in her eyes, the promise of unquenchable desire in her shameless smile. When it was cold enough, he scratched his anonymous love in the frost with his fingernail.

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Tonight, Helmut saw a light upstairs. He stopped walking and watched from a distance. Then the light travelled below through the bookstore window. Hurriedly he approached and loudly knocked. Lena came to the door. *"Who is it? What do you want?"*

"It's me, Helmut, Professor Altmann's assistant. I have a question and a favor to ask."

"Now?" she said, opening the door enough for Helmut to see she was wearing a robe, her face was flushed. *"What question? Hurry, it's cold."*

"Do you know who wrote the line 'Anticipate charity by eliminating poverty'?" he asked. He thought he saw someone moving on the steps.

"No. What is the favor?" she said, her teeth chattering.

"Can you ask your customers?"

"I know" said a man's voice from inside.

10 Elster

Tired and humorless Altmann opened his office door. Oscar was seated in his usual chair but Helmut, wearing a bemused expression, sat in the professor's seat, his feet up on the desk, Altmann's cap on his head.

"Tell me," Altmann ordered stiffly.

"I have solved the mystery of the quote's author. Actually, Lena and I solved it together... last night," he beamed.

Altmann shooed him out of his chair. *"Who, then?"*

"Maimonides, the Jewish philosopher from Cordoba!" Helmut exclaimed.

They paused. Oscar speculated, *"So Ramos included the quote from a Jewish philosopher—"*

"An unattributed quote, --" Helmut added.

"And only in the Portuguese first edition," Altmann concluded. "And then he presumably defaced the copy in the library to hide it. Why?" Altmann wondered. "Did you say the bookshop manager knew the answer?"

"No. I was walking past and saw the light on and I thought to ask. But someone else was there who knew!"

"Who?"

"I don't know. I only heard his voice. He sounded old."

"At the bookshop at night? Was it her husband? She's married, isn't she?" Oscar asked. "Have you checked in the library? Have you found Maimonides' book? Are you sure the quote came from Maimonides? Why did Ramos deface his own book? Is Ramos a secret Jew? In Wittenberg!"

Standing Altmann slowly opened his travel bag, laying out his miniature drawings, slowly, one at a time, onto white papers, lined up across his desk. Silently they leaning over, hovering their faces very close to the diminutive drawings, wonders of detail and scale. The horrors they stared intently at, each more pitiable. Oscar shook his head and tittered; Helmut removed the cap and wrung it trying not to cry.

"This, my friends," Altmann intoned in a scarcely audible voice, "This is not the wages of sin. This is the price of ignorance."

"The price of negligence," Helmut corrected. "Prevent suffering by eliminating harm," he now freely wept. "The well-being of the least among us..."

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As quiet as death, as silent as snow. Deer stand motionless for days, huddled in the forest, blankets forming across their shoulders and backs, turning them as white as the ground and the aspen trees and the sky. Clouds of white vapor rise from their breath. Swirling, mixing with falling snow, forming white ghosts that drift with the wind and vanish. Deer standing silently drinking from the Elbe as they have always done, before man and time.

Snow blanketed the bodies of villagers and soldiers and livestock lying on the ground. In a few more hours the dead would disappear utterly. Then, over winter, perhaps, there would be nothing to prove they ever existed.

War came to Elster New Year's Day in a surprise raid two days after an unnoticed nocturnal incursion by a lone man. The ferry, an old wooden barge twenty by fifteen feet with a new wooden railing bobbed against the fast current, slapping the water at irregular intervals as the chain slowly pulled them across the river just before dawn. Captain and soldiers crouched or sat on the wet wooden deck. The barge slapped the water as they inched forward; the pulley creaked; the soldiers glumly waited.

They were mostly boys on their first campaign. They had fought for weeks losing friends when they overran the castle twelve miles away three days earlier. That was their first heady taste of victory. Some of the soldiers celebrated by getting drunk, by paying for women or raping girls and women, still others were happy just to fall asleep in safety. Now dawn illuminated their gray faces dripping wet with river spray, eyes closed, their faces set grim, a few muttered prayers.

Just as the sun peeked out above the hills, a large raven with iridescent streaks on top of its head landed on the barge's railing. "*Bad omen,*" one of the soldiers pronounced. Bent on scarring it away a crouching soldier quickly stood and leaned toward the bird just as the barge pitched causing his leg to buckle. In an instant he slid face-first under the railing into the freezing-cold Elbe. When they heard his shield scrape underneath them, several of his comrades called out before the captain hissed, "*Shut up idiots!*" because he didn't know the town was already dead.

When Ella left Otto said to Albrun, "*We are happy living as man and wife, your mother and me. When I die, I want to make sure she is provided for. If we married, she would have our house and Lena could have the bookshop.*"

After a few heartbeats Altmann replied, "*I am happy for you both. If Lena has no objection I don't either. In fact, I think it is a wonderful plan.*"

"*After New Year's then, after your lecture, if Lena agrees, we will divorce. I will have a will made. Ella and I will be married at the Castle church. Will you come?*"

"*Of course.*"

"*If you're not too busy...*"

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"I will come to my own mother's wedding! Otto, she deserves you, she is fortunate to have found you, someone she can love."

"There is nothing more important than love. Do you know that Albrun?"

"Yes."

Otto held him by his wrist and looked into his eyes. *"Do you know that Albrun? How could you know? You are always alone."*

"I have been... with... Lena, do you know?"

Otto frowned. *"When you are with her, or with your friends, or doing your important work you are alone. I saw that. You begin and end with you: a blind bright ball of light."*

Altmann considered countering *"Marburg,"* but instead he asked, *"Do you ever go to the bookshop at night, Otto?"*

This time he dressed properly. For his trip north to Rostock Altmann wore two pairs of socks, a new pair of woolen gloves and he wrapped himself inside a thick woolen blanket. He made sure that the tiny coal brazier was lit before the carriage departed Wittenberg. After a few minutes rolling he sweated like he used to back in hell when he loved Simone. Two days up, one day in Rostock and two days back—he hoped meeting Doctor Guildenstern from Copenhagen would be worth his time.

Altmann rose early, ate breakfast and waited and waited at the inn. When noon bell rang, he stood, cursed under his breath and was about to pack and hire a carriage when Guildenstern sidled in alongside a young woman with long blonde hair. She kissed his cheek and went upstairs.

"You must be Altmann, yes?" he spoke unapologetically, on the contrary he insisted *"We are going to do something remarkable: We will both speak only truth—no lies, no exaggerations. Agreed?"* he extended his hand. Altmann evaluated the man's appearance: thirty, tall, average weight, an unremarkable nose, pale blue eyes, long blond hair tied in a ponytail, wearing expensive disheveled clothes and highly-polished muddy boots. *"Yes,"* Altmann readily agreed with a handshake and a grin.

"We've been riding for two days. Let's walk," Guildenstern directed. It was a bright, windless afternoon but cold. Guildenstern kept in the sun leading them through the snow-covered street towards the dock. *"I'm going to tell you who I am and what I want, and you will do the same, agreed?"* he asked all the while turning his head from side to side, taking in the buildings, trees, horses and people.

"I'm a son of a wealthy Danish family, a near-do-well for his first twenty- some years, who a few years ago opened a medical practice in Copenhagen treating wealthy client's ailments: lumbago, gout, fatigue, fever, dizziness, nausea, loose bowels, headaches, croup, joint pain. A patient told me when he was stationed in the Far East he was successfully treated with ergot for severe migraines. I checked Lonicer's Kreuterbuch, you are familiar of course, discovered the long history of ergot's uses, tried it with patients with success but also with one fatality—an old man. I need your quarter-grains and I want to

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learn everything you know about ergot. In return you can read all my notes on using ergot with migraine patients. I will give you a written summary of my findings and will answer all of your questions honestly and fully."

They strode onto the beach near the water, their boots sinking through the crisp snow down to firm sand. Watching small birds chased by waves Guildenstern reached into a coat pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, unfolding it he found a handful of walnuts. He offered them to Altmann, *"My sister puts food and other things in my coat pockets. It's a game we've played since childhood. Once I found a live lizard!"*

Altmann smiled taking a few nuts. They walked and chewed, looking at the sea, feeling the power of the rolling waves spit stinging spray on their faces. *"I am the bastard son of a cleaning woman,"* he began, *"who, with my midwife colleague, have determined the exact conditions, times and dosages for using ergot in child birth. We have doubled, actually doubled the number of successful child births at our clinic which serves an international clientele. Today I am less than one month from delivering the second of four lectures at University of Wittenberg on the medical use of ergot. This lecture is on the general use that is the non-child birthing use of ergot. I am greatly in need of your findings regarding ergot's ability to relieve pain. I have brought you twenty-five quarter-grains, all the quarter-grains I can spare for now. I can also give you high-quality full grains if you need them. I can tell you now to make your own quarter-grains. I will answer all of your questions about our use of rye ergot honestly and fully. I expected you this morning and am prepared to spend the rest of the day and night with you."*

"Have you lost patients using ergot?" Guildenstern asked, suddenly speaking somberly.

"Many. And we have lost many more without ergot. But, and in the name of frankness, and at the risk of losing your trust so soon, I can report that something... otherworldly occurs at their moment of their death. When delivering women and girls who have taken our ergot die— they shriek."

"Of co--"

"They shriek the same shriek. At the exact moment of their death, they shriek the same four notes. I suspect it is the sound of their souls leaving their bodies."

Guildenstern stopped to look into Altmann's eyes. *"Are you a very religious man?"*

"Not really. I rely on science, like Lonicer."

Guildenstern smiled and let out a long exhalation. *"Are you a drinking man?"* he asked hopefully. *"Have you tasted Akvavit?"*

Margarethe greeted them at their door. She looked to be about Altmann's age, pale, with an honest expression and bluer eyes than Guildenstern.

"Margarethe, this is Professor Altmann—"

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"Albert—"

"I like Altmann. Can I call you Altmann for now?"

"He has heard the sound of their souls leaving the bodies of dying women and girls. Because of ergot. Many times—"

"The same sound?"

"Where is the Akvavit? Do you believe in ghosts, Altmann?" Guildenstern asked, searching his travel bag. After a moment's silence he stopped riffling and saw Altmann staring sadly at him. Guildenstern approached saying in a low voice, *"I'm sorry. I sometimes play the fool. It's one of my few charms. I believe you. I believe you have heard something mysterious, something worth investigating."*

Margarethe said, *"Both of you tell a success story. Altmann, you start."*

"Well, here's a happy story. The patient was very young, fourteen, very slight. After she lost her water, she struggled for hours unable to deliver. She was exhausted to the point of unconsciousness. She took three grains of ergot and within seconds," here he paused and looked at Guildenstern, *"I do mean seconds, in this case seventeen seconds, her contractions started and she delivered a healthy baby girl. A normal weight baby. Mother and daughter were happy and strong, and they are both alive today."*

Margarethe said, *"You save lives. You are a hero."* She took a small sip of liquor.

At first Altmann thought she might be joking but he saw she admired him; he took a small sip too.

"Now you," she said.

Guildenstern swallowed his liquor and coughed. *"Patient displays incapacitating migraine headaches for days, unable to move, unable to see light or hear sounds without pain. Eating is impossible, drinking and urinating are tortures. One grain of ergot is administered. Soon the patient vomits, his head hurts worse, his body convulses, tremors in the extremities, shortly the pain disappears and the drunkenness—"*

"It's not drunkenness—" Altmann challenged.

"I know it's not. Vociferous delusions? Gregarious babbling? What do you call it?" Guildenstern asked.

"Delirium. From the Latin—"

"From the Latin 'delirare' to deviate from the norm," Margarethe answered; after taking another small sip she licked her lips and smiled.

"Did I mention that our youngest, Margarethe is the genius of our family?" Guildenstern boasted.

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Altmann let out a sigh, glad that he had a ruddy complexion for the first time since leaving hell. *"Do you know who wrote, 'Anticipate charity by preventing poverty'?"*

"No," she replied. *"Where is your clinic?"*

Altmann paused for less than a full heartbeat. *"I say it is in Paris, with Dr. Guillimeau."*

"Is it true?" Guildenstern asked.

"Yes, it's true that I say it."

"In Paris?" Guildenstern repeated.

"Yes."

"With Guillimeau? Do you know I heard Guillimeau speak two years ago in Berlin? Pioneering surgeon, a genius with a wooden personality. Are you good at lecturing?"

"I have only given one lecture. It was a modest success. No, I can't lie, we promised not to lie or exaggerate or minimize. It was very controversial, it changed a few of the audience's behaviors, it got everyone's attention. No one fell asleep," Altmann smiled in recollection.

"He smiles!" Guildenstern praised, raising his glass.

"Its 'insouciant,' that's the word you're looking for. I was watching you sizing me up just now. It's a carefully-crafted façade of indifference that I cultivate."

Altmann laughed. Later on, during his carriage ride home he thought, *"Yes, that was the moment when I knew we were friends."* *"Is that true?"*

She nodded her head knowingly. Taking another small sip, she asked, *"What is it like to hold a baby while the cord is attached? Knowing you have carried a new soul into the world? A soul who otherwise would have perished!"*

Altmann lowered his head, *"I have never done that. I have never seen a child birth."*

There was a long silence. Margarethe alternately glanced between Altmann and her Akvavit. Guildenstern cocked his head to one side looking puzzled.

"We worked as a team, my colleague Lena, well Simone and I. Simone delivered the babies and I gave her the medicines, analyzed her information, helped to formulate the dosage. We each had our own roles and rooms in hell. Forget that! We had separate rooms. Together we worked for years to find the formula."

"It's perverse, you know," Guildenstern remarked. *"Tell someone to forget Paris and they can think of nothing but Paris. Is it Lena or--"*

"Tell me about hell, Altmann. Please," Margarethe coaxed.

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"I can show you," he said, surprising himself. "In my room— wait..."

Altmann returned with his four useless miniatures, the ones he had left in his travel bag, the ones he drew through tears with shaky hands. He put them on the table and stepped back. *"These are the drawings I made after I couldn't draw any longer. Because the patients deserved it,"* he said, his eyes welling.

Guildenstern and his sister bent lower. Margarethe took a picture and held it up close to a lamp. All three came close. *These are—"* Guildenstern faltered. *"Terrifying, like Bosch with detailed... wounds..."* Margarethe said, *"You can feel the pain, the misery, the sorrow... oh, Altmann the sorrow."*

They bundled- up to walk to the dock to see the aurora. Shimmering, wavering streaks of white and green and red filled the star-studded sky all the way down to their own reflection in the sea.

"It will be Christmas soon," Guildenstern said. He turned to Altmann, *"Lonicer couldn't draw those pictures. He was the consummate, he was the unparalleled draftsman. Never bested."*

"But you are an artist, Albert. You show things that can't be seen by anyone else," Margarethe said taking his hand.

Walking back to the inn the colored dancing lights reflected off the white snow surrounding them, dancing on the ground, on the tall white trees, in the sky, everywhere. Guildenstern said, *"You are not what you seem, that much is clear. Even to a blind man. I am what I seem. Perhaps Margarethe is too. I am the reformed, well, reforming wastrel. Margarethe is a loving sister and daughter. But you Altmann, you are sui generis. I fear that probing might harm you. Even looking too closely might cause you to slip off the knife's edge you walk on. But I want you to know you can tell me anything and I will keep your trust and will try to help you so long as you are honorable."*

When they reached the top of the stairs Margarethe took his arm. *"I want to talk with Albert in his room. Go to sleep, brother."*

"We are going to make love without sex," she promised. She had him sit on the edge of the bed while she climbed on the bed behind him. She reached around to the front of his shirt, unbuttoning it. She removed his shirt and began to massage his neck and shoulders. He felt instant healing— seventeen heartbeats faster than ergot.

"When was the last time someone touched you like this, Albert?" she asked.

"Please... my name is Albrun," he whispered transported, calmed.

"Albrun. So, its Albrun: a magician. But Albrun, you hear the mother's screams but you never hold their babies? Why? Poor Albrun. Magic for others only."

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Margarethe massaged his upper torso. Then she removed his trousers and laid him down. She massaged his legs then turned him. She massaged the back of his legs and his buttocks. She laid her body face down on his body and her legs on his legs. She drew the blanket over them.

"Tell me the story of your life," she spoke softly, her lips pressed to his skin.

He shuttered.

"Tell me a secret no one else in the world knows. About you. Who you really are. Inside."

"I... It's all a secret. I am a secret."

"What part is real? Do you love anyone? Would you, would you, sacrifice your life for someone else?"

"I—I love Lena... and... sometimes... I hate her. I love my mother... I love Marburg. I do love Marburg. I think I love you, Margarethe."

"Already?"

"Already. And Guildenstern, too."

Remaining connected together and motionless they fell asleep.

Altmann stood beside them at their carriage. *"I am grateful beyond words,"* he said, kissed their cheeks. Helping Margarethe into the carriage he then leaned against the lowered window.

"I will be at your lecture, Altmann. That I wouldn't miss for the world," Guildenstern said looking into Altmann's eyes.

"I'm going too, even if I have to dress like a boy," Margarethe said, holding a miniature wrapped in cloth with both hands in her lap.

"I'd like to see that," Altmann hoped.

Guildenstern said, *"You know our brother Peter is a student of history at your university? But he has been in Elsinore since the royal wedding in the fall. He's a courtier, a schoolmate of the Prince Hamlet."* As the carriage moved Guildenstern called, *"Altmann, you should know: it's not Paris—Guillimeau's clinic is in Orleans."*

11 Lecture 2

Werner was bright, eager enough but he looked troubled, uneasy. He was in his thirties, stocky, medium height with short brown hair and brown eyes set in a moon face. On the carriage ride when Lena asked if he felt alright, he laughed, “Everyone asks me that.” Lena explained his assignment, reminding him twice her name was Simone at the spa.

“It was my idea to transcribe it, but I don’t understand if a shriek, if it is made of notes...?”

“In principle any sound can be transcribed into notes. It may be a complex structure with harmonics and variations. But if the human ear can hear it, the human hand can write it, the human eye can read it. I’m excited to try,” Werner admitted.

“Do you have a family? It’s Christmas.”

“Not really. I’m glad to be with you and going to the spa. Everyone says it is a wonderful place. The hot baths, the wonderful food...”

There was a snow-white vase with a single red rose waiting for Simone. At night, after dinner, in his bed when Marburg first entered her, she wondered where he found the rose over winter. He was gentle, slow, caring in his lovemaking, making sure she was happy. They hadn’t said a word in bed, instead when they rested, he kissed her incessantly, her lips, her cheeks, her ears, her neck, her breasts, her arms until she pushed him onto his back, straddled him, grabbed his head with both hands and rode him in a frenzy like he was a galloping horse until she climaxed. Marburg whispered “*I love you Simone,*” his lips pressed to her ear.

“What do you want?”

“I want this night to last forever, Simone.”

“I can’t get the picture of you out of my mind. Like a wanton—”

“Slut?” she chirped, raising her eyebrows. She wondered if she should buy a dark wig for Wittenberg.

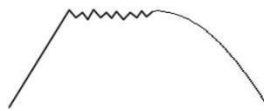
He wondered why she didn’t say “*whore,*” and whether that was a good sign.

Simone was disappointed the spa was running so well without her, even with a full house of guests for the holidays. The staff was happy and resourceful. Young Grace managed the birthing in hell

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like an old matron, insisting that the rules were followed by everyone; without asking Marburg first, she even forced Matilde to quiet her chanting so the guests couldn't hear.

First thing Christmas morning Werner heard. He was prepared-- Simone had warned him the mother was dying. Nevertheless, he was startled, terrified in fact when the haunting echoing shriek pierced through him. Rapidly collecting himself, Werner noted there were three distinct phases or phrases: the sharp rising attack he called fear, the sustaining middle quavering plateau he thought of as chaos and the long slow decay he deemed resignation. Before he tried to map the shriek onto a musical staff he sketched the sound-form in his notebook:



After dark on the night before his lecture Altmann nervously roamed the deserted university hallways. Students and faculty would be returning tomorrow from Christmas. He was surprised to hear voices in the dark leading to a classroom. Crouching in the hallway, the back of his head pressed against the cold stone wall, by the sputtering light of a lamp resting on the floor at their feet Altmann saw two figures sitting beside each other.

"...credible. Unusual claims require at least a usual measure of proof, don't you think? If you tell me a woman or a cat is cooking supper I can go to the kitchen and see for myself. If you tell me it is a ghost, what would I see? Nothing. Your proof fails," she said.

"Or you would see the ghost, as I did. Twice at the castle with two guards, once with the prince and three times traveling here with Poul -- he saw the ghost first each time! But the proof is the vision I had of you. Or do you think I am lying about that too?" he replied.

"You're not lying. You may be deluded, out of grief. Your mind is tricking--"

"The spirit that I have seen, May be a devil, and the devil hath power, T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps, Out of my weakness and my melancholy, As he is very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to damn me."

"What-?"

"Prince Hamlet was skeptical. But very soon he discovered that the ghost was very real. I listened and watched him and during his last days sometimes even from afar and I remember it all, every word of it."

"Your dead friend?"

"The ghost's son, the prince, my best friend."

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"Who told him to kill his uncle, the king of Denmark?"

"Yes. There is no reason to believe me—I wouldn't have believed you if you told me that tale either. I'd have told you ghosts weren't real, too."

Altmann stood alone off-stage as the lecture hall filled. He was distracted by the ghost story, especially the eloquence and sincerity with which the mysterious couple spoke. Did she say 'not credible' or 'incredible?' Guildenstern said their brother was friends with the Danish prince. But if ghosts were real then the rest, the after-dying, over-winter he wondered, is not silence at all but some other kind of... *living*, another life *after* death?

Professor Altmann's second lecture took place in the same lecture hall as his first but this time it was completely filled with excited people. Oscar and Helmut again blew out every-other lamp, creating an enigmatic atmosphere. But this time Altmann waited for the bell to chime four before making his entrance, and this time he wore his glasses but he again hid his ruddy complexion under *blanchet*. By the flickering light of an oil lamp at the lectern he exclaimed: *"Watch!"*

Instantly a large circle of light as tall as a man appeared on a sheet that covered part of the wall behind him. A second after that the blank round light was filled with his drawing of a man's mutilated hand, most of two fingers raggedly torn away, the remaining fingers horribly bent, swollen and discolored. The entire audience gasped, having never seen *any* image projected before, nor any image so gruesome.

"This is not the wages of sin. This is the price of... negligence," Altmann shouted, frightening some members of his audience. Then, over the next few minutes Altmann remained silent as one alarming picture after another appeared. When all of the pictures had been shown and the projection lamp was extinguished, he continued in his Altmann voice.

"Good evening gentlemen. This is my second of four lectures about medicinal ergot. This lecture in about the dangers and benefits of ergot for treating ailments common to both men and women. The following lecture will be about the great successes we have had using ergot in child delivery. I have been advised to be concise and avoid theatrics so concise I shall be."

His audience chuckled.

"And I shall be as undramatic as watching drying paint."

His audience laughed out loud. A familiar voice he could not place called out, *"Then you're off to a poor start, Herr Professor!"*

Altmann laughed with his audience in acknowledgment. *"Alright. Let's start with the dangers..."* He cited the fatal dose three times in a row for the sake of safety. He acknowledged that people who ingest even the proper dose of ergot experience nausea, vomiting, convulsions, tremors and delirium. He reminded the audience of the drawings they had just seen and explained the beneficial relationship between harvesting ergot for medicinal usage while destroying infected plants.

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He summarized his finding that the state of the oversight of apothecaries and the administration of drugs generally and of ergot specifically in central Europe was haphazard and dangerous. Only Frankfort, Adam Lonicer's home Altmann reminded his audience, to their approval, properly regulated medicinal drug distribution.

When he moved to the benefits of ergot, he spoke off the cuff for the only time retelling the first sentence he heard from the unknown woman the previous evening: *"Unusual claims require at least a usual measure of proof. These are my proofs regarding the benefits of medicinal ergot."*

Over the next three-quarters of an hour Altmann made his case that, when used properly ergot was safe and efficacious in stopping bleeding in men and women, for treating migraines and to manage recurring and long-term pain. *"To my knowledge,"* he spoke ironically, *"Ergot is the only medicine known to relieve the pain caused by itself!"* He cited his own research with dogs and mice, the experience of a patient he referred to as 'Mrs. E.', he alluded to but did not reference by name Gottlieb's promising findings and he discussed at length and with great specificity Danish Doctor Guildenstern's forthcoming paper involving his pioneering research on the use of ergot to treat migraines.

Altmann's conclusion was the model of succinctness: *"There you have it. Ergot works as medicine for male and female patients, more research is needed on ergot's effect on the mind but there is no question of ergot's power to reduce or eliminate pain, even the pain of death, and as you will hear in my third lecture we have actually doubled, that is right-- doubled the number of successful childbirths through the use of ergot medicine."* When he concluded there was vigorous applause.

The dean was first to approach Altmann standing beside the lectern. *"Those... pictures, Altmann, was that necessary? Shocking. And how was that... done?"* Dean Vogel asked.

"I hope you found the lecture informative, sir. Possibly even memorable? My associates," he looked for Oscar and Helmut without success, *"Invented a projecting lamp—quite useful for teaching at university don't you think?"*

"You stated the pictures showed negligence. Whose?" the Dean asked.

"Well, certainly the negligence of whoever harvested the ergot seeds and whoever milled them," Altmann replied.

"I see. Well, Altmann, well... we will have to talk about your remaining lectures," he shook his head. Still muttering he turned away.

Immediately Gottlieb took the Dean's place. *"Congratulations Herr Professor. Astonishing presentation! We appreciate that you stayed within the bounds of our understanding. At a later date we will need to discuss how you showed your pictures."* Gottlieb leaned in and spoke under his breath, *"Here is the thing: Your comment about negligence will be noticed. Careful where you tread. Biting hands, you know..."* he left the thought to linger for a moment. *"Herr Professor, what is your interest in a specific quote from a book in the library?"* Gottlieb asked but departed before Altmann could reply.

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Guildenstern approached with Margarethe dressed as a young man, her long blonde hair hidden inside the back of her shirt, a thin mustache drawn above her lip! Margarethe shook his hand forcefully in both of her own, *"Congratulations! Commendable job, old man!"* she loudly intoned in a deep voice with a sly smile. *"This Danish doctor whose work you spent so much of your presentation discussing? Doctor Guildenstern, is it? Must be another genius like yourself!"* she proclaimed.

Marburg, Guildenstern, Margarethe and Altmann sat drinking beer in the tavern. Having discreetly transformed herself back into a woman Margarethe sat next to Altmann holding and periodically squeezing his hand under the table.

"Just as startling as your first lecture, Albert, and more immediately useful, can we agree? The pictures, my god, the pictures..." Marburg praised.

"Devastating," Guildenstern concurred, his pale blue eyes shining.

"Unforgettable! Brilliant! Both the method and the content," she acknowledged with another squeeze of his hand. *"Sui generis!"* she declared, raising a glass. *"Bravo,"* she shouted to the entire tavern.

Altmann lovingly smiled at Margarethe. Looking around the table he said, *"I am so happy. It is so good to have friends..."*

A loud cheer erupted in the room followed by boisterous singing. *"I want to tell you all something important,"* he shouted above the din. *"Can we go to my office, please?"*

They found Oscar re-wrapping one of Helmut's fingers after cleaning away the blood and ooze. From the moment she appeared in the doorway Oscar could not take his gaze away from Margarethe. After watching Oscar's fumbling attempts Doctor Marburg tended to Helmut's injured fingers.

"The lamp projector. It got too hot. The little cage we made to hold the pictures fell apart," Helmut sheepishly explained with a grin.

"He held each picture against the metal frame, burning his fingers," Oscar acknowledged. *"One picture with his right hand, the next with his left."*

"Knowledge can't be caged, even if it's sometimes a bird with singed wingtips," Helmut smiled proudly raising his four wrapped digits.

Altmann pushed past Marburg, wrapping his arms around Helmut.

They moved his desk against the wall under his diploma and spread his blanket on the floor, arranging themselves sitting in a tight circle with Margarethe beside Altmann.

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"I don't want to have to lie to friends anymore or spend so much effort keeping my stories straight. Not between us. My six friends, including Simone at Bad Duben." He looked at Helmut, "By Simone I mean Lena. But my lying also protects you. So, I want to give each of you the chance right now to leave the room and be protected by your ignorance or stay and learn the truth and be at risk by your association with me, an impostor."

No one moved. Marburg stared at the diploma. Oscar stared at Margarethe who stared at Altmann.

"Marburg and Simone know everything, well... I have no secrets to keep from them. Well..." Altmann rubbed his eyes with his palms and began again. Using his thumb he pointed over his shoulder. *"I made that. It is a copy of Marburg's genuine diploma. I invented Altmann. My real name is Albrun Winkelmann. I made up Albert Altmann to come to Wittenberg to give my lectures, to publish my book, to save the lives of woman and babies. I am a lie but our work, Simone's work really, that is the truth. Doctor Marburg will tell you: our ergot formula for child birth works like magic."*

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"I feel like I'm falling apart. Like your picture frame?" Altmann joked, looking appreciatively at Helmut. "It's too hot for me to handle alone anymore. I need more fingers. It's very tricky making a marionette juggle. I need my friends to help me hold me together," Altmann admitted. He looked around the circle. "Marburg and Simone I have known for years, Oscar and Helmut for months, Guildenstern and Margarethe for weeks. I love and trust you all," he declared.

"I am afraid of Gottlieb. He bought my conscience with six hundred silver thalers, still mostly unspent, the rest went mostly to a musician at the spa in Bad Duben. When you told me at Rostock you would only help me if I was honorable, Guildenstern I said nothing. I am trying to earn your trust now by exposing and explaining my dishonor. I allowed myself to believe Gottlieb was interested in ergot for healing his troops in the face of my compelling doubts. I need to find a way to not sell him any more ergot but without exposing my alter-man."

"Dr. Faustus," Guildenstern asked seriously, "Have you already sold your soul?"

"Did you?" Margarethe asked.

Altmann shook his head. "But I pledge to earn it back. I can earn it back with good deeds, can't I? Maybe the lives I have helped to save..."

Margarethe squeezed his hand.

"I was in war," Marburg spoke staring into his memory, "I have seen men do terrible things... I did terrible things."

Altmann struggled to organize his thoughts. "Guildenstern, my brother. What do you know about the royal murders in Elsinore?"

"What murders? When?"

"A wise person, a woman of intelligence and eloquence. Like Margarethe. Like Lena. She said last night, 'Unusual claims require at least a usual measure of proof.' Here is my measure my brother," Altmann gently squeezed Margarethe's hand, "I believe there has been a Danish regicide and worse, and it happened on the day we met in Rostock. Where is your brother?"

"Peter? At Elsinore, with the prince and their schoolmates. But he could be traveling too? Our parents were not home for Christmas this year. Margarethe and I have been traveling together," Guildenstern explained.

"Here is the thing:" Altmann began then flinched, briefly letting go of her hand. "If what I overheard last night at university is true then the King of Denmark was murdered by a ghost."

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"Another soul in flight?" Margarethe asked.

After a pause Marburg said, *"Werner the musician has heard the shriek. The shriek of the souls in flight, if Albrun's, Altmann's hunch is correct. Werner is working on transcribing it in musical notation. He needs to hear it again to be certain."*

"Gottlieb and a ghost. Also, two lectures this spring," Oscar quipped.

"You have just one more lecture to deliver, Albrun Albert Altmann Winkelmann, only the last. And we will help you with that. You will need to try ergot yourself to understand and explain how it works on minds," Margarethe explained, *"and we will be with you in our home in Copenhagen when you take your ergot..."*

"Adventure--" Altmann offered grinning.

"Voyage of discovery," Margarethe counselled.

"Margarethe..." Guildenstern began but her clearly- feigned wide- eyed expression of toleration silenced him.

"You don't mean..." Marburg said.

Helmut asked in a barely hopeful voice *"Nothing would make me happier, truly, but... it's not possible? Is it?"*

"Did his audiences think his first two lectures were possible?" Guildenstern asked with a laugh, standing and stretching. *"Why not? What is the worst--?"*

"Ban the lecture, suppress the findings. Ignore the formula. Confiscate the ergot. Terminate Altmann's tenure. Discover Albrun's deceit. Put him in prison. Something malicious Guildenstern, something terrible. I know what men with power do." Marburg replied.

"Lena Simone Lena will give the third lecture. The audience will be as startled by her as they were by your bells and pictures. If she is half as brilliant and beautiful as you claim she will captivate them," Margarethe assured. *"I wouldn't miss it for the world. And I will have to dress the part,"* she squeezed Altmann's hand hard. Looking at her calm face he was afraid to ask.

"Gottlieb follows me at night, now he is asking about the quote from the library book. I don't want to talk about it ever again, except to say now that it was a diversion we dropped when our serious work intervened. The less contact any of us have with Gottlieb the better. I do not trust him. I think he is evil."

Altmann paced the corridor for three hundred heartbeats, more or less. Returning to the blanket in his office he grasped Margarethe's hand. *"Of course, Margarethe's right. It is Lena's lecture,*

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of course the midwife has to give the child birth lecture. She will be brilliant. I wouldn't miss it for the world," he stated squeezing her hand. "I'll go to Copenhagen soon, if the invitation stands. Oscar and Helmut, will you help Lena prepare her lecture, help her to organize the midwives in Wittenberg and... beyond?"

When they were alone Marburg said, *"We both love Simone and she loves us both."*

"I know," Altmann replied.

"What should we do?"

"I don't know..." Altmann confessed.

"I would marry her but she wants freedom. Maybe when she's older... For now, Simone is with me in Bad Döben and Lena is in Wittenberg with you. Soon."

"When?"

"She plans to return here in a few days to organize the Wittenberg midwives."

Gottlieb appeared at his office door. *"Herr Professor."*

"Yes."

"May I intrude?" Seating himself Gottlieb spoke in a whisper. "This is the thing: We need to buy your inventory of... medicine. All of it. We can't allow you to sell it to... any other..."

"I would destroy it first," Altmann advised.

Gottlieb nodded. *"What's the point of teaching its benefits without available medicine? We can revoke your license to sell. We could even terminate--"*

"Me?"

Gottlieb breathed a deep sigh. *"Let's not be hasty or rash. I will inform my superiors of your objection."* He left but a few minutes later he opened the door and poked his head in long enough to remind the professor about biting hands.

Their dog kept him from getting close enough to eavesdrop outdoors. Still, Altmann learned where they lived and their names: Horatio and Inez. Inez he easily discovered was the daughter of the historian Jorge Ramos as they were the only brown people in Wittenberg. She was the *'I. Ramos,'* he felt certain, who had penned the provocative Latin preface to her father's book.

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Creeping though the streets at night Altmann was tempted to visit the bookstore. Instead, he made due with reports from Helmut and Oscar about Lena's progress establishing the first midwives' guilds in Germany.

It is geography, he thought, geography that can save them. Lena is mine and Simone is his. Easy premise to test, he thought. *'Test it now'* he said out loud at the midnight bell after a fitful hour rolling on the blanket under his desk.

Beneath a waxing moon he crept, looking behind not for dogs but for Gottlieb. The pack dogs, all but one, were dead he knew better than anyone. Gottlieb would be more difficult to kill, he thought, but not much more so. Still Gottlieb was only the duke's dog. Which new, perhaps fiercer or more cunning dog would the duke send after Gottlieb? Would he be able to recognize the new dog's scent before it was too late?

The door rattling woke Lena. *"Who's there?"*

There was silence, then the reply came from below. *"Altmann."*

"Albrun?" she asked again, cautiously getting out of bed. Lena walked down the steps to the little kitchen where he stood. Looking malevolent Altmann suddenly barked at her: *"She was no whore."*

"What--?"

"She was no whore," he repeated almost shouting as he unhooked his belt, dropping his trousers.

"Albrun—," she started, alarmed.

"Altmann," he insisted. *"Say it. Say she was no whore!"* Altmann ordered.

"She was no whore?"

He pushed her over the small table. *"But he bent her over..."* Altmann lifted the back of Lena's nightgown and pulled down her underwear.

"No! Albrun--" Lena's words spoke fiery resistance.

"Say it bitch!"

"No!"

"You have to say it," he pleaded in his Albrun voice.

"M-mounting her..." she spoke.

"From behind! Say it right!"

"Mounting her from behind," she groaned.

"Her red nether lips," Altmann moved his erection to her entrance.

"Dripping wet," she whispered.

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"Louder!"

"Dripping wet," she spit on her hand too late and shrieked as he thrust the length of his penis inside.

"Her tongue hanging out panting." He grabbed her breasts from behind and squeezed them as hard as he could. *"Stick out your tongue!"*

She closed her eyes and stuck her tongue out sobbing and shaking with pain.

"Say the rest!" he shouted, continuing to thrust his full length in and out of her in a frenzied motion like a clockwork dog.

"Like a ... bitch in heat," she murmured.

"Please, now!" Albrun whined.

"Like a bitch in heat!" she moaned loudly enough to make him climax inside her.

"Finish it, please..." Albrun begged.

"When you became... my master," she choked, her face pressed hard against the table.

When his penis slipped out of her Altmann guiltily gathered his trousers and dressed. Between sobs Lena called Albrun *"Beast."* *"A man,"* Altmann said.

13 Copenhagen

He had never been to Copenhagen, or any other part of Denmark or anywhere outside German lands. Altmann was lost, in and out. At sixteen he had already accomplished more than anyone he knew, but he knew so few people, and none of them well, especially not himself. "Himself" was pathetic, really, which *self* was him? The planning had been everything, easy, rewarding, enjoyable and safe; he wished he was still in Bad Düben. What was really a joke he thought, walking through the city covered in snow, was pebbles. How could he have ever believed in pebbles? Yet how could he have created Altmann without that belief?

The Guildenstern estate was a famous landmark in the capital city-- everyone knew where it was. Still Altmann trudged through the snow and fog unable to find it as if he was stuck in a dream where you never reach your destination. He felt no fear, just a mild apprehension that this dream would never end or worse, he *would* find the mansion and then have to pretend to them he was honorable.

A servant asked him to wait just inside the door. Through steaming glasses Altmann appraised the foyer and long hallway, peering into the corner of rooms. The furniture was handsome, not opulent like the spa's main lobby, but massive and possibly two-hundred-year's old like the house itself. He swayed and thought about allowing himself to collapse on the floor calling for help. Margarethe ran down the steps.

Throwing her arms around Altmann she worried aloud, "*We don't know where our brother Peter is.*" They held each other.

Altmann swayed lightheaded. Grabbing Margarethe's arms near her shoulders he regained his balance. She removed his glasses and thought she had never seen such a lifeless expression anywhere. "*Are you hungry, tired? You look all- in.*" Leading Altmann to a chair she spoke encouragingly, "*We will help each other.*" Seating him she took a step back, "*It's Albrun, isn't it?*"

Together they sat upstairs in the bookstore, addressing large brown envelopes, each one containing twenty copies of the two-sided *Guide to using Ergot in Childbirth* by Midwife Lena Simone Weber in German, Dutch, French, Italian and Danish. Oscar said, "*When the cats away.*"

"*Egon will play. Eh?*" Helmut rhymed. "*But which of them is the cat?*"

"*I don't know,*" Oscar replied.

Lena called from the kitchen table below, "*We are talking about one second, do you understand that?*"

"*Yes,*" Helmut replied.

"*No,*" Oscar said, "*It might be less than a full second. There is precedent,*" he quipped.

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"Stage presence," she forcefully continued. "I have practice reading to men— "

"Groups of men?" Helmut rebutted.

"Helmut," she said stopping short. Exhaling she followed, "You are lucky you are too handsome for me to part with."

They grinned at each other, folded, stuffed and wrote.

"Gentlemen, I'll say, 'cucullus non facit monachum' but if you insist on judging me by my cover would it surprise you to learn that I have been called moderately 'attractive?'"

"Good, mixing Latin and..." Oscar began.

"What?" Lena asked.

"Brains and beauty, erudition and humor," Helmut replied.

"No, Oscar, what were you going to say?"

"Stage presence," he had the presence to answer.

Lena gave him a sideways glance from below and smiled. *"Did you both read the third draft? What do you think?"*

Helmut replied, *"I thought the second draft was fine. You tell an astonishing story of scientific medical success cogently, even inserting a little humor, mostly speaking dispassionately, until you suddenly shout your claim of doubling--,"*

"What would professor do?" Oscar interrupted. "You need to show them a new mother and her baby alive only because of ergot."

Lena considered. *"How new?"*

"A few hours- old would be good," Helmut said. "What would need to happen for that?"

"Well," Lena said, "If I were a magician like Albrun, at just the exact moment in my speech the bell would toll and the baby would squirt out of the mother and into my arms with a long cord tied in a bow!"

"The bow is problematic," Oscar dryly concluded. "You deliver babies at church hospital, just next door to university. Or you used to? But what if there was a delivery earlier in the day that required ergot? Would it be too cold on a late afternoon in mid-March to bundle the mother and baby up and carry them to the lecture hall?"

"A picture might be better than risking their health?" Helmut considered.

Guilkenstern sat by the fire in *Royal Tavern* near castle Elsinore. With a poker he tended the fire and drew curved shapes in the ash. From his seat looking straight up, he had a view of the underside of

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the mandibles of a row of animal heads secured above the mantle: a boar, a stag and an elk. Earlier in the day something caught his attention and when he looked up, he saw the underside of a mouse's head and whiskers peak out of the boar's mouth. In a few hours he would wander to the inn to ask if anyone new had arrived. To every new person he met he asked *"Do you know my brother Peter Guildenstern, from Copenhagen, a courtier of the late Prince Hamlet, a fellow-student of the prince at Wittenberg?"*

Tomorrow Guildenstern would sit in the castle speaking to strangers, waiting for the clerk to offer them news about their petition for information while his brother Max asked about Peter at the inn and tavern. Together the brothers had bribed guards and minor officials but had learned nothing other than the rumor they had heard on their first day that Peter and his friend Rosenkrantz had sailed with the prince to England.

A seedy man drew Guildenstern outside to a promised secret tryst with a guard who knew things but took him instead to a young girl, perhaps ten years old who lay naked on a filthy mattress in a slowly collapsing shed. The man threatened to beat the girl if Guildenstern didn't pay so he threw copper coins on the ground and ran back to the tavern, slipping in the snow and falling hard on his side.

The castle looked the same of course, large stones covered in snow, but the guards wore the blue color of Norway and not the red and white of Denmark and the flag in the parapet too was blue. Otherwise, everyone thought life went on just as before the fall of the house of Hamlet. When they realized there was not going to be war, people remarked how gracious King Fortinbras had been to stage a fine funeral for the queen and the prince and how solemn and respectful was the service.

Rosenkrantz's father hired an agent named Andersen who whispered every day to the brothers that news would be shortly forthcoming, and he reminded them to tell him whatever they learned. Andersen seemed intelligent and trust-worthy but his efforts produced nothing.

Guildenstern asked his older brother Max, *"England? Together? Or should just one of us go? What do you think?"*

Max shrugged, holding his beer glass with both hands. Guildenstern thought his brother's lined grey face and receding hairline made him look just like their father when they were boys.

"How long should we wait here? Peter may be in trouble," Guildenstern said.

"A week? Then we pay Andersen too?" Max suggested.

"Then? England?"

"I suppose then back home to get instructions from father," Max said.

"Margarethe."

He needed to melt into the hottest bath at the spa to disappear forever down the drain to live with the snake, the souls of dead women and babies and a ghost. Margarethe offered his first sauna. They sweated wrapped in towels, she lost in thought, and he lost, still not melting, not completely, still

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tethered to life except, surprisingly, briefly, intermittently, when Altmann was not even Albrun, not even human, not even.

"The tradition is to throw off your towel and roll in the snow. I'll do it if you will," she vowed.

"Alright."

"The shock will do us both good," she suggested.

"Alright," he agreed.

The four sat at one end of the enormous dining table, like a tree that had fallen over. He allowed Margarethe to prepare his dinner plate: vegetables and grains, no meats, a tiny piece of fish, no desert, no wine just mineral water. Margarethe introduced him as 'Professor Altmann' and poked at his knee under the table while they ate in silence. Her parents looked grave. Her father said little and seemed always on the verge of starting an important conversation. Her mother barely opened her mouth to eat and never to speak.

She looked a smaller, younger version of her mother, which of course she was. At this rate he wondered if a Margarethe the ninety-ninth would fit inside the locket he wore around his neck, Simone's sixteenth birthday present, where quarter- grains in tiny crystalized honey balls tinkled. Rolling in bed he could sometimes hear the ergot jingle against the concave silver walls, walls still waiting for tiny portraits. He thought from memory he could draw his mother and Marburg or Lena and Simone. Or Lena and Margarethe, or Margarethe and Lena.

After supper Margarethe massaged him in his bed.

"Now you massage me," she instructed.

"Fairs fair," he replied. He found it gave him comfort to massage Margarethe's back and shoulders; perhaps more comfort in the giving than in the receiving he reflected.

"You are healing us both," she sighed with a joyful tingling shutter.

Does night follow day or was it the other way-round he wondered. They took long, mostly silent walks in the woods while it snowed, trudging through snow, through thigh- high drifts taking turns stepping into each other's footsteps, watching hawks above the tree line glide against the clouds. Recalling slogging through mud half as deep in the late summer rye fields between Bad Düben and Leipzig, Leipzig and Bad Düben he said, *"We have a horse."*

"Oh?"

"Her name is Hercules. She was a mail horse. She's retired now. That's when she came to us at the spa in Bad Düben. Simone's idea. For guests with small children. She walks in slow circles with children on her back. Doesn't even need a lead."

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"A male horse," she asked with a grin. "Retired as a male, later to become a female called Hercules?" she joked. They trod on and on, and up a hill on a curving path they trod past a small frozen waterfall its cascade down a rock wall stopped by winter. "Did you name her?"

"No. A young girl did, a patient. She was very sick. They carried her outside because she kept asking to... see... the horse. She touched her hand to her side and felt her muscles ripple. She said she must be... as strong as..." Albrun couldn't continue.

"What happened..."

He sank into the snow. *"Why does it have to be this way!"* arms extended he shouted his fury at the endless grey sky. Margarethe knelt behind him in the snow and wrapped her arms around his shaking body. In a moment, from a great distance they heard a hawk's call. Margarethe cupped her hands before her mouth and sent out a long trilling reply. They listened closely to the freezing air but there was only silence.

"I know the silence," he said. "That part I know."

Supper with her parents was a misery; she was ready to make progress. After dinner they met in Margarethe's room, her walls were painted a pale blue, more like Guildenstern's than the dark blue of her own eyes he thought. There were four paintings on the four walls, three of them landscapes without people or animals. Trees, mountains, rivers, the sky, snow and clouds. A single tiny arched line on the edge of a cloud that might have been a bird's wings. On the fourth wall a larger picture had been replaced with his own small round drawing—that was the only person, or part of a person pictured on her bedroom walls: an ergot victim's obscenely disfigured hand.

In a corner Margarethe's writing desk overflowing with open books stacked one on top of another in places three- deep. Lifting a top book, he read aloud an underlined passage, Herodotus' praise of Themistocles: *"I cannot fiddle, but I can make a great state from a little city."*

"You could fiddle if you put your mind to it. You can move a mountain."

"Or turn back time..." he breathed sharply.

"I will help you solve your problem and you will help me solve ours. That's how this works. Your problem is documenting ergot's effects on your mind. Our problem is finding Peter. We will make our plans together."

"I know someone who may know where your brother is," he offered.

"From the ghost couple. What is his name?"

"Horatio. A friend of the prince. He was there when the royal family was killed."

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"Peter has mentioned Horatio. One of his Danish classmates. A good friend. He is in Wittenburg?" she wondered.

"I think he may be reticent to talk about the regicide. Or the ghost."

"Separate interviews?" Margarethe suggested.

"Separate questioners?" he wondered aloud.

"Tonight, I want you to lay down in my bed, face down, with your shirt off. I want to use your back as a writing desk."

"Alright."

"Do you want to know what I'm writing?"

"Yes."

"A play with a happy ending."

"Good."

"Do you want to know what it's about?"

"A lecture?"

"Good! It all hinges on Gottlieb. Can you contact him?"

"I wanted to kill him."

"Well, not until after the performance, and then only if he performs badly! Can you contact him?"

"Yes."

"Can you bribe him to make two short announcements at Lena's lecture, at the beginning and the end?"

"I don't give him money, he gives me ..."

"Bribe him with something he wants."

"Ergot? No, I swore..."

"Not ergot. The Danish succession story."

"Would he care?"

"Denmark is Germany's neighbor. Wouldn't the dukes and barons in Germany want to know the truth about the sudden and violent collapse of their northern neighbor's kingdom?"

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"Who would believe it? Do you believe it?"

"I believe the king died. I believe there is some mystery surrounding the murders of the royal family. I believe Gottlieb would think it's worth the small price of reciting two lines in a play to find out something he can use."

"But do you believe it?"

"Proof. You told us about proof. Let's look for proof and suspend judgement. Horatio's word is true so far— Claudius is dead and Fortinbras is king."

She hummed occasionally, writing in her journal pressed against the skin of his back, idly scratching the pale skin of her desktop lightly. He liked the feeling: the sensation of her fingernails, hearing her humming, her sense of purpose. When he felt her press hard against her journal, he pretended he could read the words she wrote right through the papers, transferred onto his skin like a tattoo or a forgery. *"You spelled that wrong,"* he corrected her.

"Thanks," she chirped like a tit, dutifully pretending to erase her mistake.

Turning his head all the way right, he could see their reflection in the tall mirror leaning against the wall—she sprawled out across the bed studiously writing and he the compliant prone figure supporting her endeavor. He stared at the reflection memorizing details, the way she brushed her hair out of her eyes with the flat end of her pencil and how she dropped her chin to the small of his back to pause eyes comically- wide in thought.

Turning his opposite cheek to the blanket he stared for a long moment at his small framed drawing surrounded by the shadow of the larger picture it replaced. When he stared long enough the frame seemed to move, to wobble slightly.

"Was the old picture a mountain?"

"Four-thousand, three hundred and twenty-one heartbeats," she giggled. She caught Albrun's grin. Or was it Altmann's she wondered.

"He smiles!" she spoke in the exact tone as Guildenstern had when they first met in Rostock.

Instantly his smile collapsed.

"Oh, no. I saw it!" she exclaimed, poking his side with the flat end of her pencil.

"Stop it," he complained, suppressing joy. *"Stop it or I'll tear-up your play, I will!"* he mock-threatened.

"Philistine!" she countered, returning to work. She wrote in a flood of ideas that swept obstacles away as soon as they appeared.

"Is that good?" she asked, still writing.

"What?"

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"Four thousand heartbeats. Is that good?"

"I don't know," he replied.

Margarethe stopped writing and looked down at the side of his face pressed against her sheets. *"Is that good, Albrun?"* she repeated.

"I don't know."

After a moment she began to write again. *"Can people change? Altmann?"* she asked ironically.

"Yes. Marburg stopped drinking alcohol and hasn't had the gout since."

That night, alone in bed Margarethe wondered what had been in Marburg's glass at the tavern.

Her father handed Margarethe a letter from his sons. They were heading north to find the castle guards Bernardo and Marcellus. Bernardo's mother had sworn to them in Elsinore that the guards knew the truth, that they knew Horatio and they knew Peter Guildenstern and Theo Rosencrantz too. Travelling in winter will be difficult and slow they wrote and they expected to be unable to communicate for at least a week. In closing they told their father to ask Margarethe where Peter's maths tutor was born.

"Gilleleje. In February," her father shuddered.

"If they are gone for February, let's say the whole month, four weeks," Margarethe told Altmann, *"Lena's lecture is on March twelfth. The play could still work."*

"Tonight, I write the letter to Lena. I will again require your service as my writing desk and perhaps more," she teased.

"If you require my spine only. I am. Your man," he agreed, silently adding, *'I don't use it.'*

She had him lie in the opposite direction tonight with his feet towards the headboard. Margarethe experimented writing on his back settling on the thickness of four sheets of paper. After writing the date she paused to consider her words thinking aloud: *"Dear Lena, as I lay writing on Albrun's back--. No, as I lay in my bed using Altmann as my desk again--. Dear Lena, attached please find the play. Hope you perform it. Love, Margarethe. P.S. the professor says hello."*

"Third one," he murmured.

"Lena, I hope I am not amiss—"

"Amiss. I like amiss."

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"Lena, the challenge as I see it, is for you to begin your lecture before the audience can object. I think the enclosed play achieves this purpose through misdirection. Please reply to let me know you have received my missive—"

"Missive, I like missive."

"Shut up. I hope this is just the beginning of our friendship. I have heard so much about you and I am genuinely excited to be collaborating with another—"

"Another. I like another."

Margarethe jabbed the flat end of her pencil hard into his side.

"Ow! That really hurt!" he cried; raising up on one elbow he scattered the papers off her desk.

"Sorry," she grinned watching him rub.

14 *The Gård*

"You know... I never liked you!" Guildenstern screamed at his brother when their prone bodies lifted high into the air and then slammed back down onto the ice.

"Same... for... me!" Max gasped.

"Whose idea was this?!" Guildenstern shouted.

They were dragged downhill bundled on a sledge pulled by a horse and rider. In their wake a second, rider-less horse tied to the back of the sledge trotted down the slope on the flattened snow rushing towards them. At the bottom of the hill the driver turned around in his saddle and laughed loudly at his cargo.

Every couple of hours the driver, a stocky man of indeterminate age with long dark hair switched the horses' positions, cursed, spit, peed and took a long swig of ale from his brown leather flask. Snowing the whole time, they travelled this way for two days along a path covered in virgin snow they only temporarily despoiled. To their left an unending forest dotted with the occasional clearing and farm house and to their right the sea spread out from some yards below them all the way to the distant horizon.

Laying as they did on their backs the snow fell on their faces, freezing their eyelashes shut until they broke the ice with their gloved fists and could see the dull sky again. Gray sky mostly with occasional patches of blue. Clouds mostly, mostly thick enough to hide the sun. The brothers' bodies were warm beneath the heavy blankets, but their faces were cold and they were tired of being constantly jostled awake and having to bend their necks forward to see anything but sky. They were cramped and anxious; every time the sledge skidded to the right Max was sure they would both slide into the North Sea and sink to the bottom trussed up in their blankets, lashed to the sledge forever in their waterlogged grave. It reminded Max of a poem but he couldn't remember which. Perhaps it was about a mermaid?

From spring through the fall, the trip from Elsinore to Gilleleje might take only one long or two easy days following this coastal path. Now, in the dead of winter, with deep snow and ice on the path, with fallen trees to portage over and around, with a day lost to a blinding snowstorm and another to their driver's incontinence, the brothers were hoping to arrive in the godforsaken village in five days.

Every evening, they stopped at farms familiar to their driver and slept in barns on beds of fresh straw, wrapping themselves in clean blankets, listening to the snorts and sounds of cows and horses, pigs and chickens. They were served passable stew for supper and hot porridge for breakfast at the cost of one copper coin per man per night for room and board. At one farm they declined the offer to share for a pretty girl with a lazy eye for one extra copper coin each. Guildenstern had left a copper coin for the girl in the morning on his neatly folded blanket, expecting she would never get to keep it.

Today they stopped hours before dusk when the driver said he didn't like how one of his horses was walking. Huddled in the barn through gaps in the wooden slat walls they watched the sun rapidly

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sink behind the trees. As soon as dark fell they heard wolves close by baying at the early moon. Guildenstern had a bad feeling he was afraid speak aloud.

"Max. Do you think Peter is alive?"

"Of course. Sure. Why wouldn't he be? There was no war, no fighting."

"Max, the last time we spoke he called me a wastrel and I called him a scoundrel."

"You were both right." Yawning Max rolled over to face his brother. *"You used to be a wastrel..."*

Waiting for breakfast the brothers split firewood to warm themselves and to stretch, their sore backs especially, before another day of torture. Guildenstern wondered if it would be better to walk the remaining few miles but he wasn't sure either of them were up to the effort. Besides, the driver promised they would arrive in Gilleleje before noon.

This was Gilleleje? A few farms leading to a dock with one fishing boat, a bleak storehouse and a store. The brothers knocked at the storehouse door but no one answered. They banged at the store's rough wooden door until a woman, still asleep it seemed, came to the door but didn't opening it.

"What?"

"Is this Gilleleje?" Max asked incredulously.

The woman sniffed. They heard her cough up phlegm and spit it out. *"No, goddam Paris."*

Guildenstern laughed. *"Can we come in?"*

"Later..." she said and scuffled away.

"Wait! Is there an inn...?"

"The Gård," she answered through the door.

"What?" Max asked.

"The Gård."

"The farm? Which farm?" Max asked.

Standing at the door rubbing their arms and stamping their feet, with their breath streaming into the frosty morning air they saw a man lumbering in the snow pulling a goat toward the dock. When they asked him for directions to *The Gård*, he said *"Go to the end of your rope and you are there!"* But he pointed toward a path through the trees.

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The virgin trail was marked by snow-covered standing stones leading to a clearing in the woods where an ancient massive Viking longhouse big enough for a hundred men stood overlooking the sea. What is the protocol, Guildenstern wondered? Do you just knock on the door of a longhouse? *"If only we had an army,"* he opined, *"then we could attack and overrun them."*

Max shouted at the door: *"We are looking for Bernardo. Is he there? Can we enter?"*

They listened for a response. *"That was a cow, mooing,"* Guildenstern said.

"Yes." Max kicked at the heavy wooden door. Then he pulled at the large wooden handle and the door swung open. *"We're in,"* he laconically observed.

They walked inside the longhouse on a wooden floor covered with straw between roped pens. On the left were six cows and three horses were to the right. Parting a wall of blankets suspended by rope they walked into a startling sight. One step through the curtain the barn became a huge playground.

"I always liked you," Guildenstern said.

"Me too."

The entire longhouse was a large open area with narrow roped and blanketed corridors left and right where people slept. At the far end was the kitchen, also narrow, that ran the width of the longhouse. In the center was a large dining table surrounded by empty space. Designed for one hundred soldiers it now housed less than fifty men, women and children, three horses and six cows. People sat in circles scattered around the room, some people were laying down, and some children chased a ball. Reading and writing was being taught in one of the circles. In another they told stories. Sometimes drunken men and women had to be sternly reminded of the rule but otherwise a serene calm prevailed over winter at The Gård.

Guildenstern approached the first person he encountered with a sense of awe, like they had stumbled on an as yet undiscovered ancient Danish tribe. *"Do we get to name them?"* Guildenstern asked Max.

"What would you call them?" Max answered.

"Hello. We are looking for Bernardo," Guildenstern said to the stranger, a young man wearing only a towel around his waist.

"Good luck," he happily replied and drifted away.

Guildenstern and Max looked at each other. *"Are you thinking what--,"* Guildenstern asked his brother.

"Margarethe," Max replied, walking into the path of the next person floating past. *"Hello. We are new. Can you help us?"*

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"Go to the kitchen, they'll sort you out," the girl replied.

"I'm cook, she's chef," Toby hollered when they approached within earshot.

Max was about to speak but instead he closed his mouth and shook his head. Turning to Guildenstern he said laughing, *"Your turn."*

'I never liked you,' he thought. "Can you tell me kind sir?"

"Chef!" he shouted.

Guildenstern jumped back, almost tripping. *"Chef! Oh, great chief!"* he bowed.

Max said, *"Are you the cook or the chef?"*

A woman they hadn't noticed sitting at the table stood up. She had short-cropped grey hair and a world-weary smile. *"He's a nitwit but I can't keep my hands off him."*

"Maybe because he's a nitwit?" Guildenstern suggested.

Ellen smiled knowingly. *"OK. One rule only: don't hurt anybody on purpose."*

"We're looking for someone named Bernardo, he may be new here too?" Max asked.

"Sure, I know him. I think he's out hunting, they will be back before dark."

"Thank you. Can we help you? Do you want some money?" Guildenstern asked.

"First night is free. After that you pitch in. You both can read I'll bet. You can teach, or go fishing, you can do anything helpful or useful. Help prepare and serve the food. Spread the muck. Tend the livestock. If you're still here in spring you'll help us plant, tend the hives, make the Mjød," Ellen advised.

"He's a doctor," Max said to his surprise.

"You're welcome to ask if anyone needs a doctor. There is a cow that can't use one leg."

"I'll look at the cow," Guildenstern promised.

Max and Guildenstern walked back toward the barn. Along the way they saw a bottle on the floor with glasses next to it. *"Mjød,"* someone acknowledged, pointing. *"Best in the world,"* he nodded.

They raised their glasses.

"To Peter and his safety," Guildenstern proposed.

"Here, here. And to "The Gård."

"Astounding," Guildenstern agreed.

"Are you tempted?" Max asked.

"A little, yes."

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"What do you think of the Mjød?" Max asked.

"It's no Akvavit."

"Thank god!" Max proclaimed.

They walked through the curtain, crouched and watched the cows. The limping cow had a bone fracture above its ankle. The wound was already clean but wasn't covered. Guildenstern wrapped it tightly with a cloth he found.

"Do you want more Mjød?" Max asked.

"Yeah, I think if I start drinking, I'll never stop, like them," Guildenstern said.

"Over- winter," Max observed. *"A damn good way to over- winter."*

Sipping *Mjød* slowly they sat on the floor. Guildenstern watched a young boy tapping the wooden floor planks, moving a few feet he tapping some more. The boy put his nose right on the floor boards, waving his hands. His curiosity piqued, Guildenstern crawled up to the boy.

"What are you doing?"

The boy looked up with brown eyes. *"Do you want to know something?"*

"Sure."

"Do you know there is a magical board?"

"Magical? How?" Guildenstern asked.

The boy stood up and held a marble in his outstretched palm. *"There is one board. Can you guess which board goes downhill all the way from there,"* he pointed to the nearby curtain, *"to there,"* he pointed toward the kitchen more than a hundred feet away. *"Here, try it,"* he said handing the marble to Guildenstern.

He placed the marble on a board at random and gave it a small push. It rolled for a few yards and then stopped. Guildenstern picked the marble up and returned to the curtain. Picking another board, he rolled the marble again. This time it went only half so far.

"Impossible!" said Guildenstern.

"It's a bet! What will you bet me?"

"What do you have?" Guildenstern asked.

"I'll bet my marble. What do you have?"

Guildenstern reached into his coat pockets and removed all of the small folded pieces of cloth his sister had hidden. One by one he lay them out on the floor until they totaled seven. *"Pick one, but don't open it unless you win. Alright?"*

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"What's in them?" the boy asked.

"I don't know. Maybe some food? Maybe a treasure?"

The boy agreed and pointed to one. Guildenstern returned the others to his pockets. The boy held out his hand to lead the man to the magical board. *"Is this the one?"* he teased Guildenstern. *"No, maybe this one?"* Finally, he chose a board that looked like its neighbors and placed the marble on it. He gave it a gentle push. They both watched the marble roll and roll, picking up speed, then slowing, then almost... stopping... before it again moved forward with hesitation. They walked behind the marble as it continued its journey toward the far kitchen at the opposite end of the longhouse.

"Impossible!" Guildenstern warned as it reached half-way. *"Never make it to the end. See, it's slowing down..."*

"Watch," the boy said grinning.

Sure enough, the marble picked up more and more speed, as they walked faster to keep up.

"Now the last hill, then its smooth sailing!" the boy predicted.

The marble rolled all the way to the end of the longhouse floor until it was stopped by the kitchen's half-wall.

"I won!" the boy shouted with glee running back to reveal his prize. He opened the folded cloth. *"What is it?"* he asked with a tone of reverence and mystery. He shook the painted walnut shell and could hear a dull sound inside.

"That," Guildenstern replied, *"Is something really special. My sister told me to only open it when I needed help. I don't know what's inside, she glued the shell closed."*

"Should I open it now?"

"You can if you want to. It's yours now," Guildenstern answered.

"Would it be alright if I waited until I needed help?"

Supper bell rang. People slowly emerged from the sleeping areas and everyone began to wash and get ready to eat. The food line never seemed to get very long as people came for food when others were finished eating. Even the children were patient in line. Tonight, chef served venison stew with rice, onions and garlic. Max and Guildenstern thought it was more than passable, very tasty it was in fact, and they both went back for seconds.

"A really good piece of rye would complete the feast," Max said to his brother in a low voice.

A few minutes later a boy handed him a thick slice of fresh rye bread to sop up his stew.

They looked at each other, afraid to move or talk for fear of awakening from a dream.

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From a distance they spotted Bernardo, a man they had never before seen and had never even heard a description of because he was the only man striding. When they approached, he was very wary, he almost seemed to panic. *"I don't belong here,"* he confessed quietly sitting on a blanket in a tight triangle with the Guildensterns.

"Peter, our brother. Please tell us what you know," Max begged.

Bernardo drew up his shoulders and inhaled. *"Its bad news. I heard he and Rosenkrantz were killed in England."*

"B-but you're not sure?" Guildenstern asked.

"I heard it from Horatio. I believe it's true. I am sorry. I didn't know him but I know the prince liked your brother Peter."

"Why was he killed? Rosenkrantz as well?" Max asked.

"I don't know. Yes, Rosenkrantz too. In England. Horatio knows."

"What about Marcellus?"

"He lives on his parent's farm a few miles from here."

"Does he know more about Peter?"

"I doubt it, but you're welcome to ask. He'll tell you what I said: Ask Horatio."

"Do you believe the ghost story?" Guildenstern asked Bernardo.

Bernardo lowered his voice and tucked his chin. *"We saw the ghost first, before Horatio or the prince even."*

"What was he like?" Max asked in wonder.

"He was King Hamlet's ghost. A glowing fog. He didn't speak to us but he spoke to his son Hamlet."

"What did he say?" Max asked.

"Revenge. He told Prince Hamlet to kill King Claudius who killed him, stole his wife and kingdom."

Guildenstern said, *"You make it sound--"*

Deliberately and quietly, he said, *"I don't care if you believe me; it's better for me if you don't. If you have the time, stay near me and Marcellus."*

"Why?" Guildenstern asked with some trepidation.

"The ghost still visits us."

"When?!"

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"Hard to say. Only when me and Marcellus are together. But the first few days after the prince died, in December last, while we traveled, we saw him. And one time since we arrived here in Gilleleje. Others here saw the ghost, too. Ask Ellen."

"Are you afraid," Max asked.

"Of the ghost? We thought maybe he meant the throne should be returned to a Dane. But no, wonder more than fear. Marcellus too," Bernardo replied.

"But you're afraid?" Guildenstern asked.

Bernardo shook his head. "We left right after the assembly that swore allegiance to King Fortinbras, that's when Horatio left too, to go back to school," he said. "They didn't want the ghost story spread. We figured we could be in danger. So, we ran. Marcellus told me about The Gård years ago. He said if I ever needed a place to hide, this was it."

"Is Ellen their leader?" Max asked.

"Not their leader. She is their God!" he pronounced.

"And you don't belong here?" Max asked.

"Not over- winter," Bernardo replied.

15 Lecture 3

The venue was university's main lecture hall with over two hundred seats—twice the size of the medical school's lecture hall. The room was filled an hour before the lecture began, latecomers who were not faculty or staff stood against the walls. For this third lecture Oscar and Helmut did not dim the lights.

Precisely five minutes before four o'clock Professor Altmann took the stage, in whiteface and without glasses. He stood on the box behind the lectern shuffling pages. Without looking up he loudly declared *"By M. Guildenstern."* He looked out at Margarethe in the audience and smiled.

"Gentlemen tonight you will be astounded!" he proclaimed with confidence.

"Unlike your first two boring lectures, eh, Herr Professor!" a familiar voice shouted back.

Altmann laughed with the audience. *"In substance and in style this the shortest lecture outshines the previous two combined! Here is the amazing truth: My colleague midwife Lena Simone Weber and I have developed the formula for ergot that actually doubles, doubles the number of successful childbirths.* Stepping away from the lectern he strode to a large sheet covering a portion of the rear wall. *"Here is the formula. Memorize it!"* he barked the order. Before he could pull the cord a man wearing a badge of office came to the front of the stage.

"Herr Professor, forgive me. From the mayor's office. What you feared has happened, you are needed immediately!" Gottlieb loudly exclaimed with a short bow.

"Medical emergency, difficult childbirth just next door. My colleagues are prepared to take over here..." Altmann said, disappearing into the wings.

Instantly Lena, dressed in a dark blouse and a long dark skirt appeared by the sheet and pulled the cord revealing a bright eight-foot high multi-colored illustration lit from the rear by the projecting lamp. Here were the silhouettes of three women: a small, average and a large figure with the numbers three, four and five above their heads. The words 'Plus One for First- Time Mothers' appeared in a row just below the numbers.

While the audience stared in awe at the dazzling colors Lena sidled to the lectern, pushed away Altmann's box with her foot and loudly repeated, *"Here is the amazing truth: My colleague Professor Albert Altmann and I have developed the formula for ergot that actually doubles, let me repeat doubles the number of successful childbirths! Here is the formula. Memorize the number of ergot grains you should instruct midwives to use! The average size mother gets four grains of ergot plus one for new mothers."*

"Just this second..." Lena paused and waited for a few seconds, growing concerned. Then, mercifully the tower bell began to toll four, *"Just this second,"* she smiled broadly at the audience as the last peal faded, *"Professor Altmann is down the hall instructing midwife Naomi Schroeder to induce labor contractions for her patient with five grains of our rye ergot medicine. The patient, a daughter of our*

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country, has been struggling for more than eleven hours, unable to deliver her baby. Before this lecture is over you will see that baby here on this stage!" she exclaimed to the murmuring audience.

"But quickening birth is only one of ergot's almost miraculous properties, gentlemen. This ergot formula displayed before you also staunches dangerous bleeding in birthing mothers as well. And all mothers who use ergot at childbirth have no pain. Let me repeat that, no pain."

"Excuse me—" Dean Vogel said, standing up from his seat in the front row. Immediately Max and Guildenstern, sitting on either side of the man stood and grabbed the Dean by his upper arms lifting him just off the ground they walked him briskly out of the room saying, "Yes sir, just a little further ..."

Without missing a beat Lena looked at Margarethe in the audience who had four fingers raised. Lena continued, *"It has been exactly four minutes since the ergot was administered to the patient. After eleven hours of struggle the mother has lost all her strength. She is beyond the point of being able to deliver the baby without ergot medicine. Without ergot she and the baby will surely die as do many pregnant women and their babies in Germany who needlessly die every year in childbirth. This needless pain and suffering will end now! You gentlemen will spread this knowledge as will the members of the Wittenberg Midwives' Guild—the first midwives' guild in Germany!"*

From the dining hall a chorus of women's voices could be heard cheering loudly. Oscar began to hand out to the audience midwife Lena Simone Weber's two-sided broadsheet entitled *Guide to Using Ergot in Childbirth*. Doctor Marburg entered the rear of lecture hall out of breath. "Great news!" he declared. "The baby is crowning! The delivery is succeeding!" he shouted running back out. "Terrific," a familiar voice in the audience shouted. "Success!" another familiar voice rang out from the opposite side of the hall. The members of the audience didn't know which way to turn amid the palpably rising excitement.

Glancing at Margarethe Lena continued, *"It is now at exactly seven minutes since the ergot was administered. Remember this patient had tried without success to deliver for more than eleven hours. Seven minutes ago, the ergot was administered, the mother began contractions immediately and now, seven minutes later the top of the baby's head is visible! This is the how ergot works!"*

The giant drawing somehow vanished in the blink of an eye and was replaced with another—this time it was a brightly colored chart listing ergot's three benefits: Instantly Induces Contractions, Staunches Dangerous Bleeding and Eliminates Pain. Lena pointed at the new drawing and spoke: *"Can you imagine what it must be like to lie down and suffer in agony for hours, even for an entire day, your own life slowly bleeding away, knowing you and your baby will die on the very day of their birth?"* Lena implored. *"To be young and healthy yet to die needlessly at the very moment your life should be filled with joy and hope for the future? That ends tonight, here in Wittenberg, not in Frankfurt, not in Berlin, not in Paris..."* she paused to allow the scattered applause to grow into widespread approval. Later, when she remembered the lecture, this was the moment she always said, this was the moment she knew she had them. With her arms extended she roared into their ovation, *"Vita impleatur gaudio et spe futurorum!"*

With confidence Lena walked from behind the lectern to the front of the stage. Margarethe thought she detected swagger in Lena's stride but she had to admit, her heart pounding, she was by

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now far from an impartial observer. *"This is our army,"* Lena declared, *"These are our soldiers,"* she pointed to the rear of the hall where seven midwives dressed in identical white smocks covering their dresses marched in, past the rows of viewers and arrayed themselves along the front edge of the stage below Lena. *"The members of the Wittenberg Midwives Guild, your partners in protecting the new mothers and their babies, protecting our future in Germany!"*

A few familiar members scattered in the audience rose and loudly clapped. Then more followed their lead until everyone felt obligated to at least stand. Almost the only person in the room still seated was a radiantly- smiling blonde haired girl with a pencil thin mustache and a small silver Swiss clock.

"It's a boy!" someone shouted from outside the lecture hall. Still standing, members of the audience turned with astonishment and began to congratulate each other. Professor Albert Altmann walked back into the hall carrying in his arms a crying baby boy wrapped in a white cloth.

Altmann carefully handed the baby to the first midwife who passed him up to Lena stooping to receive him. Standing erect and proud Lena hugged the child to her breast. She looked out across the room trying to speak her final lines but was overcome with emotion. Margarethe shook her head slowly, lowly saying: *"No more words."*

It took some minutes before everyone sat back down, time for them to wipe their eyes, to whisper their thoughts and shake hands with neighbors. The audience seated, Margarethe stood as Gottlieb approached the midwives and handed one a framed document. Turning to the audience, himself full of emotion, he boomed: *"This is an official proclamation from the mayor's office, recognizing the Wittenberg Midwives Guild as the first midwife's guild in Germany! Please join us now in the dining hall to celebrate all of the midwives' accomplishments!"*

Lena stopped Vogel at the dining hall entrance. Hugging him she thanked the Dean for arranging the mayor's official citation. *"How did you do it sir? Is the mayor here? Will you introduce me to him? What an honor!"* she spoke, fawning over the confused man. His weak resistance crumbled when Gottlieb forcefully shook his hand, followed by Doctor Marburg and then by Doctor Guildenstern. Lena kissed Vogel's cheek and led him by the arm into the dining hall, brushing her hip against him regularly as they walked with short slow paces. She touched her glass to his and together they drank a toast to his triumphant medical college.

It was unplanned but Altmann, Marburg, Guildenstern, Max, Helmut and Gottlieb said very little during the celebration, enjoying their supporting roles. Lena, Margarethe and the midwives were the stars that shown that evening in the large dining hall filled with admirers. Everyone wanted to meet them, well, truthfully, every man wanted to be near Lena. The male members of their theatre troop happily fêted their lead actor and playwright- sans-moustache, who was once again a girl. The men refreshed their drinks and handed them small plates of food throughout the night. Helmut hovered around Lena so persistently she threatened not altogether in jest to bite him the next time he came near.

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Oscar alone spoke at length with each of the midwives, asking them about their practice, their experiences with ergot and their triumphs. Nearly every midwife said her greatest joy came from being able to save a mother and her child, patients who would have surely otherwise perished without ergot. One older midwife admitted ergot made her feel she was almost like god granting life; Oscar was moved to initiate a short dance with her, humming the tune himself because there was no music.

"To Lena Simone Weber," midwife Naomi Schroeder raised her glass. *"The inventor of the ergot formula, the savior of countless lives, the organizer of the first midwife's guild in Germany! The genius of Wittenberg!"* she exclaimed to roaring applause.

"How does it feel?" Margarethe asked Altmann.

"Fairs fair," he happily answered. Margarethe ran her fingers through his hair, gently scratching his scalp. When Lena looked he smiled raising his glass.

A student approached Margarethe with a sly smile. She found him charming, or at least amusing even before he spoke to her in his tone like that of a wise jester. He had waited until she caught his eye before he smiled broadly, opened his large brown eyes and mouth widely, tilted his head back and threw his arms in the air.

"Are you ... having a fit, sir?" Margarethe teased.

"You!" He pointed at her as he neared, *"You are the 'play-wright' of 'to-night'?"* he accused, adjusting his cadence so the words made an obvious rhyme.

"Margarethe Guildenstern ... sir..?" she smiled.

He walked right up to her and whispered, *"Are we still in the play? Has it ended yet?"*

Margarethe's loud burst of laughter caught Lena's attention; drawing her swarm of admirers in tow she drew nearer.

"You are... a student here?" Margarethe asked.

"I am Cormorant the scribe," he replied.

"A contraction derived from the Latin 'corvus marinus' or 'sea raven,'" she explicated.

"Exactly!" he replied, his eyes shining. *"You wrote the Latin phrase, what was it, 'Vita impleatur gaudio—'"*

"--Et spe futurorum!" Lena interjected. *"Life should be filled with joy and hope for the future. I wrote that,"* she lied.

Cormorant reached for Lena's hand and lightly brushed it with his lips. Margarethe noted that he had not done that to her. *"Enchanted,"* he spoke to Lena. But then he surprised everyone by

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gracefully releasing her hand, turning back to the playwright. *"Was that even a baby?"* he asked Margarethe quietly. Before she could reply he spun on his heels back to Lena, *"And are you a ventriloquist?"* he asked loudly with a broad grin.

'I hadn't thought of that', Margarethe admitted to herself. *"Mr. Cormorant?"* she asked, bringing him back, *"Why 'cormorant'?"*

"I come from a short line of cormorants," he boasted. *"I am not so much a fish out of water as I am a bird who was built to swim."*

"You've practiced those lines," Lena observed.

"And I deliver them with aplomb, yes?" he retorted to general amusement. Margarethe was sure he had practiced the retort.

More seriously he added, *"But not with your..."*

"Yes?" Lena coaxed, leaning close.

"Power," he said, suddenly somber, turning toward Margarethe.

Margarethe looked into his eyes and nodded her appreciation of his apprehension.

Sitting together at last Lena kissed her cheek. *"What do you call the play?"* Margarethe put a finger to her lips realizing she hadn't thought of a title. *"The Mousetrap?"* she offered, happily. Lena laughed so loudly those nearby thought she might be drunk. Margarethe watched Lena closely, narrowly marveling at her beauty, her poise and erudition.

"I will help organize a midwives' guild in Copenhagen," Margarethe promised, *"With your help, Lena. When we are ready will you come and stay with us?"*

"I want another night like this in Copenhagen! Are you up to writing another play for me?" Lena asked hopefully.

"Another?" Margarethe repeated. *"Well, ..."*

"This was the best day of my life. And yours too?" Lena asked.

"Yes," she smiled, thinking of Peter. *"Better than your wedding day?"*

"Yes" Lena replied solemnly, thinking about both of them.

"Well," Margarethe continued. *"Next time I want at least one costume change."*

"Of course," Lena agreed.

"And one makeup change, too."

"For Albrun?" Lena asked.

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"I had almost written it. The professor was going to become another character before returning back into Altmann at the end. Two makeup changes," Margarethe explained.

"As who?"

"I never figured out his role or his lines but I had his name. Sui—"

"Generis," Lena finished her thought for her.

They surveyed the thinning room sipping wine, as twin conquering heroes.

"Why did you lie to the cormorant?" Margarethe asked.

"I didn't lie—"

"You told him—"

"It's not a lie when you are flirting. You can say anything. It's a game of wit not of honesty, don't you know that?" Lena said.

Margaret said, *"When you release the words, especially in a crowd, you don't know where they will fly. Maybe right into a rider's face, knocking him off his horse."*

Lena watched Margarethe. *"And your silence? What dangers are there in that? The opposite of hubris isn't lethargy, you know."*

"Like a loom," Margarethe said, *"Who is the weft?"*

"I feel bad about not finishing my lines," Lena commented.

"No! No, I meant to tell you about that! You were right! One single word more would have broken the spell, would have been too much. It would have broken the spell you wove." Margarethe countered.

Lena thought about that. *"I wonder if your arrogance will be your undoing,"* she advised. *"Not undoing, but limiting."*

"My arrogance! What arrogance?"

"That's my point," Lena answered. She leaned in close and said, *"Look around you. I can have any man in this room kiss my rosy red nether lips, tonight, in ten minutes, in my bed, no exaggeration."*

'And not a few of the women,' Margarethe thought blushing. *"You're drunk!"* Margarethe playfully scolded. She was tempted to tell Lena she had written the play on Albrun's bare back in her bed. *'To speak or stay silent, either way, only God can foretell the results, all we can do is guess,'* she thought.

Then, noticing Albrun Lena thought, *'Perhaps not all.'*

"Any man?" Margarethe asked, surprising herself.

"Yes, of course."

"My brothers too?" Margarethe said, pretending disinterest.

"Both at the same time!" Lena boasted with a wicked smile.

"Max is married!" Margarethe challenged.

Lena looked at her, shaking her head. *"You know nothing. How will you write?"*

"Gottlieb?"

"He would bark on command and lick—"

"Dean Vogel?"

"Watch." She waited for the Dean to look at her; she only had to wait a few seconds. Lena bent her finger, commanding his presence.

"Will you, Dean, kiss my rosy red... cheek?" she asked, offering him the side of her face.

"Delighted, Mrs., uh, Miss---"

"Kiss-- now!" she ordered.

He happily and dutifully kissed her cheek.

"Thank you. That's all--," she haughtily dismissed the Dean who stumbled away happy and confused.

"You're shameless!" Margarethe scolded.

"And you, playwright," Lena said. Grasping Margarethe's chin Lena kissed her full on her barely parting lips.

It took her a few seconds for Margarethe to recover. *"The cormorant?"* she weakly asked.

Lena smiled. *"I would rather be under his spell!"*

"I've never been to a wedding before," Altmann confided to his mother. *"Have you?"*

"Your father said we would marry," she answered.

"Are you sad, mother?"

Ella patted Albrun's hand. *"Do you love Simone?"*

"She loves me. She said she loves everyone," Altmann replied. *"Or was that, Lena?"*

"I don't understand that. Do you?" she asked her son.

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Marburg kissed Altmann's mother. *"You are a beautiful bride Ella,"* he spoke sincerely. She looked lovely, her head was covered in a ring of tiny pink flowers, her unlined face and her clear bright eyes shone.

Otto and Ella stood before the minister in the Castle church on the sunny, unseasonably warm late March afternoon. Altmann and Marburg were the witnesses. *"Do you take this man?"* he asked. *"I do,"* Ella replied.

"Do you take this woman?"

"I do," Otto replied. Even as he spoke, he couldn't stop thinking that of the three other men present, only the minister hadn't cuckolded him. And really, could he even be sure of the minister, a young man with blue eyes, a clear complexion and long fingers?

Marburg handed Otto the ring.

Gottlieb arrived at the professor's office early April. This time he didn't knock but walked in and sat down like a colleague.

'Partial co-conspirator?' Altmann mused. *"Tell me."*

"This is the thing: Soon everyone will be talking about it. 'Elster'," Gottlieb replied.

"Which is?"

"We need to talk, professor. Tonight? After dark. At the bookstore. Ms. Lena should know this, too."

16 Reckoning

Neither of them trusted Gottlieb. The three sat downstairs at the small table in the small kitchen. Altmann recalled the last time Lena and he were at this table together. *On the table.* They never talk about that night. Albrun was sure it was rape but Lena would describe it differently if he asked her. She *hoped* he would ask her...

"The snow is rapidly melting at Elster, fifteen miles east. The first bodies of the villagers we killed—"

"Who killed?" Altmann and Lena spoke together.

"Here is what I think happened. I'm not lying to you now; I don't even have to tell you this. But you deserve to know. There was a raid planned to test the ergot. They counted thirty-two people in the village, some horses and cows. They counted out the ergot grains at a low dose. I've heard two different doses, both low, well below fatal. But that doesn't matter at all because somehow someone lost the correct amount and they poured your entire jar into the well!"

"How many..." Altmann asked.

"Everyone. All the livestock too. I don't think it's even safe to live there anymore. The soldiers stationed there who burn the bodies when the melting snow reveals them will only drink from the Elbe or snowmelt. They poured red dye in the well water and nailed boards across the top."

Albrun and Lena stared at each other.

Gottlieb cursed. "It's not my fault. Who could have ever thought anyone would be so cruel? To kill an entire village of farmers and fishermen like that? All the women and children too? This was the end of the feud between the duke and the baron," Gottlieb explained. "The duke won. He would have prevailed eventually but your ergot made it fast and easy for him. And cheap," he added.

"And death for... the... women and children," Lena mumbled.

Altmann asked, *"Did the duke approve this? Do you know for certain? Can you prove it to me?"*

Lena looked at Altmann, *"Soon the number we killed will surpass—"*

Albrun embraced Lena. *"No, we won't let that happen."*

"You told me this would happen..." she said.

When they pulled the frozen bodies out of the snow and left them in the sun to thaw and then burned, the soldiers watched fingers and toes turn deep blue. The smell of roasted rotting flesh billowed in waves as each corpse was tossed into the roaring fire.

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Altmann surveyed the snow-covered village, thinking of a vulture before an orgy of carrion. Smokeless chimneys but the perpetual roaring fire in a clearing. The duke's soldiers dragged the bodies into the fire as they were revealed by the melting snow. Altmann knelt in the snow and looked for a long time at the bodies and contorted faces of men, women and children he killed. Gottlieb hovered silently behind the professor.

On the carriage ride back to Wittenberg Altmann said, *"Elster and the duke. Prove it."*

Gottlieb nodded.

"After we settle this, we have other business," the professor spoke.

Gottlieb nodded again.

It turns out it is easy to kill a creature of habit and get away with it, even a duke. Find his vulnerability. The duke had a sweet tooth; Gottlieb knew his favorite bakery; Professor Altmann regularly sold and purchased medication from apothecaries across Central Europe and Lena was a winsome diversion.

"Fairs fair," Albrun said to Lena as he kissed her forehead. He reached his hand between her thighs and softly stroked her wet rosy red nether lips and its most sensitive bud like she had taught. Her legs parted wide and her breathing became deep and rapid, her lush red hair spilled back and forth across the sheets like a fuming tide.

A letter from Marburg arrived for Lena which in part she shared with Albrun:

My Dearest Simone,

You and Albrun should know that the musician Werner now says he needs to hear the scream a third time, perhaps a fourth time or more. He keeps talking about the problems of 'harmonics and variations.' In the meantime, he has gotten quite fat and has taken the redhead from the tavern as his girlfriend. She now lives with Werner in his room at the spa. They are very much in love! He calls her his muse. You can advise Albrun that if he wants to, he can eliminate Werner's salary—at this point Werner would pay me to allow him to stay at the spa—his heaven. He brightens up the place, he is a joy to be around, a complete transformation from when he arrived at Christmas. I tell the guests our water is the cause of his improvement!

I hope you will visit soon as we last agreed.

With all my love,

Marburg

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One- month before his final lecture Altmann was ready for ergot. Lena would stay with him in the Guildensterns' house in Copenhagen.

Helmut and Oscar happily agreed to manage the bookshop in her absence. Half the week Helmut worked there and it was Oscar's turn during the other half. Lena had told them about her special clients the older gentlemen for whom she held discrete private readings. She told them to say Lena would be back by mid-May with an exciting new story to share. Helmut asked Oscar if he should ask Lena if she would read to him too, for a fee of course.

When they weren't in the bookshop, and frequently when they were, Helmut and Oscar worked on their project: perfecting their projection lamp. Some professors at university not willing to be completely overshadowed by Altmann wanted to rent it for *their* lectures.

Before they left, Albrun and Lena visited Otto and Ella. They seemed happy together, happier than they had been on their wedding day. *"Mr. Weber, he is a kind man. Again,"* Ella quietly confided to her son.

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Well," she made sure Otto couldn't hear, *"It wasn't his fault. But at night he would get... agitated, angry."*

"At you? Why?"

"He couldn't help himself," she acknowledged.

"Did he hurt you?" Albrun asked.

"Not really. It wasn't him. And it's all over now. Please don't worry. We are very happy again!" she brightly replied.

"Tell me."

"I gave him my medicine and he is happy again!"

"Does he know?"

"Oh, no! I don't know if he would approve."

"Then you are going to need twice the—"

"Oh, no, not at all. One day I give Mr. Weber the medicine and the next day I take it. It's on the calendar on the wall—a little O and a little E. It works wonderfully well for both of us: I don't have any pain and he is so cheerful. And, Albrun, I'm embarrassed to say this but," she noticeably blushed, *"He is very frisky in bed now. Every night!"*

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On the carriage ride to Copenhagen after he told Lena she said: *"Add aphrodisiac to the list of ergot's benefits. I bet Lonicer never suspected! I love science! Does it warrant a fifth lecture?"*

"Who should give it, you or me?"

"How about both of us, together?" she suggested with a sly grin, climbing onto his lap. *"That would be memorable! And we won't need Margarethe to write it,"* she cooed, unbuckling his belt.

"On the other hand, she might have some new ideas..." he joked. Lena reached into his pants and squeezed his member hard. *"Ow! That really hurt,"* he said, trying not to alarm the driver.

"Oh, poor baby."

Just then, at that moment, jostling along on the road, for the first time Albrun thought of killing Marburg. It could be done he knew.

After dinner Albrun, Lena, Margarethe and Guildenstern settled into soft chairs to sip and discuss their plans. Guildenstern handed Albrun a chart indicating the results he had achieved with Albrun's that is Lena's that is Simone's quarter-grains.

"It's safe, thanks to you too and God I haven't lost another patient to ergot," he raised his glass to Lena and Albrun.

Margarethe had cut her hair short after the lecture. Now it was tied in a short ponytail just like Guildenstern's. Tonight she wore dark trousers and a white shirt -- the same shades as her brother's. Leaning next to Lena, in a slightly slurred voice Margarethe eagerly recited the line: *"Now that Albrun's back again I want to use Albrun's back again."*

Lena took a small sip of cognac. Licking her lips she replied accommodatingly: *"That's fine. I mostly use his front."*

Max's arrival immediately reignited an unfinished argument, or so it seemed to Albrun that night, recalling the comedy in bed. In Albrun's retelling all Max had said was *"Hello"* before Guildenstern lit into him. *"No,"* Lena countered, it was Max who started it. But they both agreed on the first memorable insult.

Max had said, *"Intelligent? I have seen carp—"*

"Whenever you look in the mirror," Guildenstern countered.

Margarethe, a little tipsy added fuel.

"So, which one of you geniuses," Margarethe began, recounting for her guest's benefit, *"Decided to travel as cargo on a sledge during a blizzard?"*

"He did," they both said pointing at each other laughing.

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"You talked to Sven first," Guildenstern blamed his brother.

"Who is Sven? The driver?" Lena innocently asked.

"Sven Sven.-- I swear to God!" Max said laughing.

"What?" Altmann asked.

"That's what he told us: Sven Sven, Sven son of Sven, Sven squared," Guildenstern shouted, giggling until he lost his breath.

"So Sven Sven lashed you both--" Lena started.

"To a sledge in the dead of winter--" Margarethe added.

"In a blizzard and he dragged us skidding up the coast and bouncing down every hill—" Max continued.

Guildenstern, just barely catching his breath sputtered, *"From Elsinore to Gilleleje, which, I can report, observations to the contrary notwithstanding, is not Paris. And my back still hurts,"*

Everyone laughed. Then Max added, *"It may not be Paris but... it is a bit of heaven, isn't it?"*

"I've been meaning to ask you, why are you called Guildenstern? You're not the eldest, Max is. And your father is still alive," Albrun asked Guildenstern.

All three Guildensterns smiled. Margarethe said, *"It's either an honor—"*

"It is an honor," Guildenstern sternly interjected.

"Or—more likely it's because father could never remember his name!" she said rolling out of her chair onto the floor laughing uncontrollably.

"I shall thrash you to within an inch of your life!" Guildenstern threatened his sister rolling and kicking and shrieking with glee.

"But 'The Gård,' Guildenstern. 'The Gård,'" Max reminisced.

"They gave him a good piece of rye."

Max stared at his brother, then Guildenstern looked serious. *"You have never seen anything like it friends,"* he looked around the room. *"I don't expect to see anything like it again in this world..."*

"We healed a cow." Max said.

"We? We! What did you do?" Guildenstern asked incredulously.

"I stood guard," Max laughed so hard he also fell to the floor next to his sister.

"You fell in love," Guildenstern corrected him gently. *"For the first time. Isn't that right Max?"*

Max grew somber and silent. No one moved. *"I did,"* he finally admitted in a voice so low.

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Margarethe sat up and looked at her brother closely. She took his hand. *"For the first time, Max?"*

"Helene? We were young. She married me for my name and I married her for her beauty. We live in the same house but we don't... we have separate lives," he sadly spoke.

"What happened at 'The Gård'?" Altmann asked Max.

"The first night I was asleep and I awoke and there was a woman lying with me. We didn't say a word to each other. It was dark. We held each other. After a while we kissed, and well..."

"He fell in love," Guildenstern said in a voice not much louder than a whisper. *"That's why we stayed four days. We had already heard the news about Peter but Max..."*

"I didn't want to leave her," Max said.

"What happened?" Lena asked.

"One night I looked for her..." Max said and stopped.

There was a long silence. Eventually everyone looked to Guildenstern. He sat down on the floor next to Max and put his hand on his big brother's shoulder. *"She was with another man."*

The room was quiet except for the clock.

"Tell them what she said about Sven Sven," Guildenstern coaxed.

Max stirred, smiling he said, *"Sven Sven is a scoundrel. He has three wives on three farms along the coast. He brings passengers to each farm and charges them a copper coin at each of his homes for food and lodging. In the winter he was mightily glad—"*

"To find a couple of rich fools!" Guildenstern said. *"Tell them the rest."*

"There is a carriage that goes inland between Elsinore and Gilleleje, in two days, even in winter," Max told them. *"We took it to get back to Elsinore."*

"What the guard said, was it true? About Peter—" Altmann asked.

Guildenstern sadly nodded. *"Our English agent said Peter and Rosenkrantz were killed the day they arrived at the royal court."*

"Why?" Lena asked.

Guildenstern shrugged, *"Bernardo and Marcellus said Horatio knows."*

Silence cloaked the room. After a spell Guildenstern casually spoke: *"We met God at 'The Gård.' Did you know God is a woman? Makes sense really."* He sat on the floor smiling. *"And a damn fine cook."*

"I thought she was the chef," Max said.

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The wood crackled loudly, spitting a large red-hot ember onto the hearth. Max flicked it back into the fire with two fingertips.

Guildenstern broke the silence again. *"That we are here now is a miracle, you know. Did you know that--,"* he sat upright, shifting his legs but not moving the back of Margrethe's head off of his calves, *"A smudge on an apricot cravat—"*

"Is that an apricot smudge or—" Margarethe teased.

"A sartorial repair at a party, led me to Rosenkrantz's dressing room. I glanced down on his desk while I was knotting one of his cravats and I see the word ERGOT bold as brass."

"A miracle," Lena agreed. *"Actually, good enterprise. That was my idea, wasn't it Albrun?"*

"So, its Albrun again?" Margarethe wondered out loud.

"I think it was the snake," Altmann replied coolly, sipping schnaps.

Max asked the Germans, *"Can we agreed that Akvavit--,"*

"Is an acquired taste, yes," Guildenstern agreed and Margarethe nodded.

"I think Max is snoring," Guildenstern said.

Lena proposed, *"We can go to bed or play a game. One of us tells another's future. We go 'round 'til everyone's future is told."*

"I'll tell your future," Margarethe offered. She sat thinking, sipping her Akvavit.

"Is Margarethe or Altmann smarter?" Guildenstern asked.

"Lena," Altmann said.

"The snake," Lena replied.

Max said, *"Margarethe is smarter, Altmann is more clever. No. Altmann is... Margarethe is more—"*

"Literary," Altmann suggested.

Margarethe nodded.

Margarethe began. *"So, this is the epic story—"*

"What happened to the Italian poem?" Lena wondered aloud.

"Lena is, or was..."

"Is" Lena stated.

"A..."

"Slut?" Max innocently asked.

Lena hooted, Margarethe shrieked and Guildenstern beamed.

"I love my family!" Altmann shouted.

"A short tale to tell. Lena's beauty and cunning are legendary. She has infamous affairs across the world. No mortal man can match her. But the Cormorant, he is neither mortal nor a man. He rescues her from the tower where she was imprisoned for performing a noble deed. She loves the Cormorant and many others discretely and happily in a house by the sea where her friends are always welcome and treated to such wonderful food and wine and stories!"

"I'll tell Max's future," Altmann offered. "Max is—"

"I want to tell," Lena interrupted.

"No! I will tell my big brother's future, if you don't mind," Guildenstern clowned. *"Max is going to have the best future of all because he will be in love with a woman and they will stay young together. Max will meet her at the Gård. They will know from the moment they looked into each other's eyes. God will marry them and raise a feast to remember and they will be happy forever. There is no doubt, this prophesy is a certainty!"*

"Hurrah!" Lena and Margarethe cheered and Altmann raised his glass.

"I'll tell Altmann's future," Max said. *"Altmann is not like other people. His future is as cloudy as his past. He is haunted. When he takes ergot, well... don't expect him to act like all the others."*

17 Horatio

Gottlieb never wanted to try; Lena wondered Gottlieb should be Egon so Max could try but she didn't trust him. Gottlieb who Altmann once could have killed without regrets proved indispensable. He singlehandedly stopped an inquiry started at Wittenberg about Professor Albert Altmann's tenure as a student at University of Leipzig by informing all parties that Altmann and his work was protected by the new duke. Gottlieb also arranged to have Horatio summoned to the courthouse for an official inquiry shortly after Altmann returned to Wittenberg.

'Pebbles,' Altmann shuttered.

"This official inquiry into the recent invasion of Denmark by Norway and the subsequent unification of the two Nordic lands under the control of King Fortinbras commences now," Gottlieb spoke to Horatio. *"With your hand on the Bible, do you swear to answer all of our questions truthfully?"*

"Yes," Horatio replied.

Gottlieb, Altmann and Guildenstern studied Horatio. He was in his twenties, blond, tall, fit, with an angular nose and keen eyes.

"What happened in Elsinore castle last December?" Gottlieb asked.

"The King, Queen and Prince were murdered."

"By who? Why were they murdered?"

"The King was killed by the prince; the Queen was accidentally killed by drinking poison meant to kill the prince, the prince was wounded in a swordfight with a poisoned rapier by a courtier named Laertes."

"Why?" Gottlieb reiterated.

"Revenge. The prince had mistakenly killed Laertes' father whose death led to Laertes' sister Ophelia's drowning."

"Why did the prince kill the King?" Altmann asked.

"Revenge. Claudius killed his own brother King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet's father," Horatio stated uneasily.

"Why did the prince wait until his uncle became King and had married the prince's mother to murder him? Did he kill the king for the regicide or for the marriage?" Altmann inquired.

"B-both? I—I'm not sure—"

"You are under oath to speak the truth," Gottlieb reminded him.

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"I am not a liar," Horatio replied defiantly.

"Then answer," Altmann encouraged.

"To kill a king... That is... a heavy deed," Horatio replied quietly.

"So, it took the prince months to summons his courage to kill the King?" Gottlieb suggested.

"Yes-- yes."

"Because the Prince was weak? Irresolute?" Altmann proposed.

"N-Not weak. Irresolute? He was... not sure," Horatio replied.

"Not sure of what?" Altmann pressed.

"Not sure Claudius had killed King Hamlet," Horatio confessed, feeling the sand shift away.

"But something happened to convince the prince? What happened?" Altmann finally shot his arrow.

"The prince heard that... I told the prince my friend about... Two guards, Bernardo and Marcellus told me they saw..." Horatio faltered.

"Saw? What?" Altmann asked.

"You won't believe me," Horatio all but whispered.

"Tell me."

"A ghost. The ghost of dead King Hamlet told his son Prince Hamlet to murder King Claudius. There you have it. Believe me or not," Horatio uttered his confession with a deep sigh.

"To recapitulate. You were standing at the tower of the castle Elsinore, in the dead of winter, in the dead of night when the dead king of Denmark's ghost appeared to you and two guards."

"Yes."

"Do you fellows often see ghosts?" Altmann teased.

Near the end of the interview Guildenstern spoke for the first time. *"Horatio, what happened to your two schoolmates? Do you know?"*

"Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern?"

"Yes. Do you know where they are now?" Guildenstern asked gloomily.

"Dead. They were murdered on the prince's directive. Upon their arrival at the royal court in England they were executed."

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"Are you certain?" Altmann asked.

Horatio nodded.

"But why were they killed?" Guildenstern needed to know.

"They were part of the plot to have the prince sent to England to be murdered by the English crown. When the prince discovered the trap, he sprung it on the plotters."

"How do you know?" Guildenstern whispered desperately.

"Prince Hamlet told me," Horatio stated. "O, 'tis most sweet, When in one line two crafts directly meet."

"What?" cried Guildenstern.

Surprised, Horatio replied quietly, *"Hamlet was... he was pleased they got their comeuppance. He was... you have to understand, I loved the prince. He was a noble person driven by revenge..."*

"How exactly did Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern get discovered?" Gottlieb asked.

"They carried Hamlet's death warrant to the English king. Hamlet found the note. Then he forged another ordering their deaths. Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern were hoisted on their own petard."

Horatio was dismissed by Gottlieb with a warning to remain silent about their inquiry. Altmann put his hand on Guildenstern's shoulder. *"I am sorry my brother. Is it possible that Peter would have willingly—?"*

"Peter was a scoundrel. Adrift. No moral compass. Maybe if he had lived longer..." Guildenstern wondered, tears streaming down his face.

"He might have become a reformed scoundrel like his brother the reformed wastrel?" Altmann consoled.

"Do you believe there was a ghost?"

"I believe Horatio believes it. I hope it's true. I want to find out," Altmann confirmed.

18 Voyages

He chose Wednesday, maybe making him more-- *bendable*, better able to, follow the shriek to its source, perhaps meet the ghost. Doctor Guildenstern gave Altmann his tea at midnight. Twice the clock crossed that meaningless boundary line before Altmann fell asleep-- the official end of the experiment. Altmann understood the experiment would never end, not while he was awake or asleep, alive or after.

17 seconds: *"Flying. No effort no... control. Hearing light sen...sation. Color of music of color of.... Continuous... change... Overwinter."*

42 seconds: *"Sun of night."*

4 hours, 4 minutes: *"Abuses me to damn." or "Abuses me to damn me."*

10 hours, 10 minutes:

27 hours, 19 minutes: *"Sleep."*

"... you awake?"

"Back among the living? You drank the tea almost thirty hours ago."

"But why didn't he vom--"

"Everything... alive."

"What did he—"

"Overwinter."

"He said it again—"

"Oh God..."

"Don't look Guilden—"

"You have to eat."

"Food."

"He said food!"

"You've been to the mountaintop, my brother. What did you see," Guildenstern asked.

Albrun contentedly ate a slice of rye with butter and honey. *"Overwinter. Not God."*

"Good...", Guildenstern approved, transcribing.

"You might," Albrun added.

"Me? God? What??"

"Altmann ... Albrun?" Margrethe asked.

"Are you alright?" Guildenstern asked.

He nodded.

"What is overwinter?" Guildenstern asked. *"Albrun, answer me."*

"Sun of night."

"God is the sun of day, is the devil the sun of night?" Guildenstern asked.

"Albrun— "

"Altmann? — "

"— sleeps sitting up."

"He hears—"

"Paradox is a window."

"Alright," Guildenstern affirmed.

"Not a door."

"What is a door?" Guildenstern asked.

"Ergot."

"I'm next!" Margrethe reminded them. *"Where are you going? I'm going with you!"* she exclaimed.

"Chamber pot."

"Oh."

"Bath."

"Alright— "

"She was no whore," he said to her with his erection pointing, pretending to unbuckle an invisible belt dropping his nonexistent trousers to the wooden floor with a clank.

Her eyes wide she looked closely into Albrun's face. *"She was no whore,"* Lena repeated, spitting on her palm.

"He wakes, eats, passes waste, bathes and has sex, eats a honeydrop. He is on an ongoing voyage of discovery with brief daily calls to port for provisions," Guildenstern glanced furtively at Lena. *"I am documenting it and I don't know how to stop it or if we should. He has lucid moments, when he eats. Sometimes for a few minutes. Then he sits for hours hardly moving, or he walks in a dangerous daze; his talk is irrational, nonsensical—"*

"Because he is in another world and what he says may be rational there," Margarethe proposed.

"He is beyond rational," Lena spoke. *"His lovemaking is primal."*

"How do you mean," Guildenstern asked.

Lena blushed. *"In bed he is all animal, all instinct and urgency. No... inhibitions. Astonishing!"*

"I'm next," Margarethe gulped.

"My patients call it bliss, serenity. Is that what you feel?" Guildenstern asked.

"Luxurious roar of life ejaculating."

"Right-- now?" Margrethe asked sheepishly.

He nodded.

Lena said, *"Albrun, you, you ejaculated when you woke up after your first voyage. You, you stroked your penis—"*

He nodded.

"Souls."

"The souls of the girls in hell?" Lena asked. *"Albrun? The shrieks? Albrun for God's sake!"*

"Keep track--"

"Iridescent feather."

"What?" He said, *'iridescent feather—'*

Lena stood, *"He may not be able to write or deliver the lecture. We have to at least consider that. The most important things now are the child birthing book and the midwives' guilds. We can postpone the final lecture; it doesn't belong in a book about childbirth anyway."*

"Are you going to stay here to be his, well...," Margarethe asked.

"Friend?"

"Do you remember pebbles?" Lena asked.

"Yes."

"Is a grain of ergot a pebble?" she asked.

"Ultimate."

"How? Why? Doesn't that make them dangerous?" Lena probed.

"Lifts the veil. Destroys illusion."

"What is behind the veil?" Margarethe asked.

"All there is."

"Including illusion?" Guildenstern asked.

"Paradox," he said, *"Words are insufficient. Music. Song of souls."*

"Poetry," Margarethe said.

"The sound of souls escaping?" Lena hopefully asked.

"Overwinter? Explain overwinter?" Guildenstern demanded again.

"You are there."

"What is it?"

"Salvation."

"Explain."

"Air for us, water for fish. No one alone."

"Did you find the shriek and follow it to God?" Margarethe asked.

"You know revelation."

"An epiphany—"

"Make it."

"How?"

"Ergot."

"What does it reveal?"

"Stories."

"Dangerous?"

"No death."

"But there is!"

"Overwinter."

"Every grain of love," he said.

"Yes?"

"Symphony of light."

"Aurora," Margarethe guessed.

"Ergot."

"Together?" Margarethe guessed again.

"Sun of night."

"Like the sun at night?" she asked. *"The moon?"*

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Each time his inextinguishable voyage dimmed Altmann ingested another quarter-grain honeydrop. Altmann echoing Winkelmann echoing Lonicer, just as children echo parents. As ghosts echo themselves.

'There once lived in Copenhagen, a town whose name I will never forget, a man with quarter grains of ergot, enough for his four friends. Four friends he loves... so much. Friends who try to understand and love him.'

"But not a greyhound...", he spoke aloud with his kind eyes fixed on his brother's face.

"Lena, Margarethe, I think... I think he's back!"

He reached under his shirt, grasping the chain, shaking the locket so the others might hear the tiny tinkling specks of ergot dance against silver. Or thought they heard.

"I'm next," Margarethe reminded. *"Tonight. Lena, I want you to be with me, just Lena. You and Max will watch him."*

"And hope he doesn't need Lena."

"Tonight's the midwives' guild meeting," Lena reminded them.

"Tomorrow night, then!"

On a massive wooden bench at the pond Margarethe whispered, *"An arresting lecture. Exactly one hour of Albrun ejaculating! Painful for him and embarrassing for the audience!"* she blushed.

"Were you embarrassed?" Lena asked.

"Weren't you?" Margarethe exclaimed.

Looking away Lena hummed, smiling. How to play this scene in a manner deserving of an epic poem reference. *"Oraculating. With pictures?"* she floated.

"And bells," Margarethe added and then she kissed Lena softly. *"I want you to stay with me on my first voyage. I want to experience my bliss with you. Only instinct and urgency. No inhibitions."*

A buzzing bee settling on Margarethe's arm, brushing her fine downy patina of hairs. She brushed it away.

"You were blushing, don't pretend," Margarethe teased. *"When he... you said..."*

Two more bees landed next to Margarethe. They frantically circled, tasting the spot on the bench where the groundskeeper had set a jar of hummingbird nectar down long enough to adjust his bootstrap. The bees were soon joined by more bees dancing and circling around the invisible spot. Barely consciously Margarethe brushed her hand at them.

"Are you a virgin?"

"Well... there was a boy once..."

"What did you do?"

"I, I let him, I held his... Altmann is my brother!"

"The young stableboy watches you."

"Yes."

A few scouts detached spinning around dizzily before alighted a vine a few feet away. The bees climbed in a neat rising spiral up the feeder pole. Half way to the top the perfect pattern of the vines was interrupted. It deviating into a small loop when a fox pulled on the vine accidentally while snapping at a taunting hummingbird.

Lena looked down at his narrow back, *'The desk doesn't talk'* she thought.

"No," he agreed.

"These three birthmarks look like Orion's belt," Lena spoke.

"It all hinges on Werner. This is a musical," Margarethe informed.

Lena nodded.

"The dim lights and the incense signals the start of the seduction. The bells chime. The chorus sings the three notes as the last bell falls, the sounds blend to silence and. The orange moon—the sun of night, cast huge but dimly against the rear wall. There will be natural sounds throughout: birdsong and flowing water. The occasional hint of thunder from timpani. A hint of flute. Just hints of musical instruments you're not even sure you are hearing. Altmann appears... in a white robe with flowers in his hair... a saint without a cross. In whiteface without glasses. He sits on a cushion on the floor at the front of the stage."

"What is my part?"

"You are the star; that's my remit. More powerful and memorable than lecture three. Sensual, not logical. Not equal to, but better than a man. Next, I come on stage possibly in black, maybe multi-colored, maybe a mirror..."

Shyly Margarethe said: *"Through the wall. I heard you two. You used his front again."*

"Repeatedly and with good effect," Lena shamelessly agreed smiling brightly.

"Is the difference between a slut and a whore that the slut has sex for free?" Margarethe surprised herself by asking,

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"No," Lena replied.

"What is the difference?"

"The slut chooses the man while the man chooses the whore."

Margarethe asked: *"Is that the only difference? Are all women who choose men sluts?"*

"No."

"Explain," Margarethe insisted.

"That's a long conversation," Lena admitted.

"We have time. I want to write your story," Margarethe confessed. *"An epic poem. In Italian."*

"On Albrun's back?" she joked. *"He experiences."* Lena advised.

Margarethe took Lena's chin in her hand and kissed her fast and hard on her parted lips. When the kiss ended, they stared at each other a bit shaken. *"Do you know Italian?"*

"No," Margarethe admitted, *"I'll have to learn..."*

"Guildenstern, you are Egon. The control," Lena said.

"Who made you Ellen?" Guildenstern pretending umbrage added, *"Under my own roof!"*

Margarethe teased, *"No magic for you brother. Lena, will you be next, after me?"*

"Yes," she replied thinking about Altmann and Elster.

"Max will be Egon," Guildenstern proposed.

"Is it safe?" Lena asked. *"No other patient has experienced anything like this. Altmann is sui generis. But is it safe--?"*

"You called him Altmann," Guildenstern noted.

Margarethe looked to her brother, then to Lena. *"I... I think that's his name... now—"*

A letter from Marburg arrived.

Dear Margarethe,

How is Albrun? Has he tried the medicine yet?

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I am writing to you because you were our last playwright and I suspect our next. In any event, please share this message with Albrun, Simone and your brother. To put it succinctly the musician Werner's muse has left him and he despairs of finishing his assignment. He is having a crisis of confidence accompanied by daily headaches. I told him about ergot, how it relieves migraine and he wants to try it. Oscar and Helmut think it's a good idea. Maybe it is a requirement, maybe ergot will open his soul and allow him to complete his task? Nurse and I will supervise. Should I allow this?

Only a few weeks from the lecture, that is performance. Eagerly awaiting my lines!

With Admiration and Affection,

Marburg

Guildenstern asked, *"Do we need a new plan? Something simple. For example: Altmann writes his report and reads it at his lecture like any normal professor would. It's highly speculative anyway; it's years—"*

"Possibly months," Margarethe contradicted.

"At least months too soon for a knowledgeable lecture on voyages. No bells and pictures this time and no actors. No drama and no chance of angering authority."

Lena said, *"I like drama. And actors."*

"So do I," Margarethe concurred.

They looked at Altmann gazing into space. *"Alt- Albrun!?"* Margarethe nudged him with her elbow.

"Alright."

"What?" Margarethe asked.

"Work on your drama. Margarethe can read the lecture as Altmann otherwise," he concluded.

When Guildenstern asked: *"Werner and ergot?"* everyone nodded. Guildenstern turned to his sister, *"Is it Albrun again?"* he asked.

Margarethe lightly tapped her clenched fist against her lips.

A mystical experience, an epiphany. Sexual climax. Ecstatic joy and love. Margarethe suggested it was having sex with God or the moon, sometimes God on the moon. Lena proposed it was having all

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your dreams come true at once eternally. Guildenstern said it's living- immortally. Max said he should describe the sensations exactly how he felt them and if that failed say it was overwinter: the absolute surrender to love. Walking outdoors with Margarethe Albrun said, *"A short lecture. One sentence: Overwinter is eternal bliss you reach at death or before with ergot."*

A letter addressed from a Mr. Janus in Potsdam arrived for Altmann:

Professor,

I trust you will divine. I am still in W. I intercepted a correspondence from cities W. to L. concerning A.A. You are safe for now. I received a reply from city L. concerning J.R. Your suspicion was correct. I can contact O. and H. and am eager to help with the fourth. I have been tasked with writing a report on the tragedy at E. and to interview the Dane H. There is more.

Faithfully,

G.

Albrun loved to watch her writing at both her desks. Silently slipping behind Margarethe, looking over her shoulder he read *Red*:

*Let the color be praised!
Reimagined my youth
Overwhelmed overturning:
My new truth.*

*Let the color be banished!
Honesty demands
No life of integrity
In a conquered land.*

He kissed the top of her head.

"Feels like walking face first into cob webs."

"What do you mean?" Lena asked, lying beside her, smoothly stroking Margarethe's leg.

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Margarethe reached out her hand softly pinching one of Lena's large nipples. *"It's all an approximation; we make up stories to fill in the gaps, to change the story, to make it fit. Life is an approximation; ergot is truth."*

"Would you do it again?" Lena asked.

"Ergot— Probably. Sex with you— Definity! Repeatedly and with good effect! You're blushing! The slut blushes!" Margarethe shouted joyfully.

Lena looked sour.

Margarethe sat up. The nipples on her small breasts pouted. *"Sorry. I have learned so much. I will..."*

"What?"

"I know why Altmann came back."

"From Overwinter."

"Love. He wants to be with his family here. He felt out of balance. It's not his time. He wants to stay here awhile longer. Protect us too. More opportunities for love."

"You? Were you tempted to stay?"

"Yes, of course. I want to share paradise with you."

Margarethe forcefully inserted two fingers saying, *"I cannot fiddle..."* Lena breathed a sharp intake of air, spreading her thighs wide, leaning back against the bedsheets.

"This joy. Just like this," Margarethe stroked and rubbed her most sensitive spot. *"Just like this. Eternal. Paradise."*

Lena rocked in ecstasy, moaning and writhing, sinking her own fingers into Margarethe's shoulder. She grabbed Margarethe's head moaning, *"Kiss me there!"*

Margarethe slid down spreading the petals of Lena's sex, licking and sucking the nectar of her flower. She probed Lena's openings with her tongue. Lena shrieked like a bird desperate for flight, her voice quavered as wave after wave of lust washed over before she finally sighed loudly letting the sound drift away like water receding after a flood.

Margarethe straddled Lena's chest.

"Are you altered," Guildenstern asked his sister. *"Like Altmann?"*

"Altered. But not like Altmann—like me."

Guildenstern searched Margarethe's face.

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"I will write the last lecture, all of it. We will need to talk to all the mothers to understand how they are altered too. Were any scorched by the light? I'll use your notes and Altmann's too. But, brother, the lecture we publish will not be the performance Lena gives."

Guildenstern nodded, trying to comprehend. *"Scorched by the sun of night?"*

"What?"

"What is overwinter?"

"Whatever you need. Love, hope, food, sex, everything that sustains you. Where you retreat to be safe and to heal."

"Over-wintering," he confirmed. *"Do you love me... will I love... differently?"*

"Nightmares are to dreams what weeds are to gardens," she spoke her words like smoke.

"Dandelion wine."

She licked her lips slowly like she had just sipped Akvavit. *"Ergot,"* she intoned.

"What is the sun of night?"

"The moon?" his sister guessed.

Lena said, *"I am worried about Gottlieb's threats."*

"Gottlieb was a liar," Guildenstern countered.

"Do you believe Gottlieb?" Lena asked.

"He can reach beyond the grave. Anyone can," Altmann replied.

"His soul is rotted: He would try harder than most. Vengeance is all he has left. He has no heart, perhaps he never had one," Margarethe offered.

"Another ghost? What about the ghost of King Hamlet? Altmann! Brother, are you here?" Guildenstern asked.

"This is Altmann. He fades in and out between worlds. You have to watch him when he gets like this. He is a danger to himself," Lena cautioned in her midwife's voice realizing in that moment she could never voyage for who would look after Albrun when she was away? She announced, *"I am Egon."*

Guildenstern kissed her cheek.

19 Lecture 4

A snaking line of men outdoors chatted in the warm fading mid- May light. An enterprising boy with a dog sold candied apples on a stick for one copper coin out of a brown wooden box. Those who had previously seen one of Professor Altmann's lectures enjoyed prestige. *"Magician,"* was a commonly-heard refrain. *"Red-haired woman"* was spoken reverentially in low voices by hopeful young men and silently hoped by their elders. Uncommonly for Wittenberg it was hope not duty that commanded the day.

The room grew dark. The smell of patchouli drifted across the stage empty even of a lectern. Old Chancellor Lodi sitting in the front row next to Dean Vogel tapped his colleague's knee. *"It's that smell,"* Lodi whispered to the Dean as the last lamps were extinguished, *'I know that smell'* he thought, feeling a rare stirring in his loins.

The reverberating ring of the fourth bell had almost faded to silence when from the wings Doctor Guildenstern's voice boomed across the empty stage, *"Good afternoon gentlemen. Thank you for coming. Tonight's lecture is on ergot and the mind. Imagine an infant who grew to maturity somehow in complete isolation, on a deserted island let's pretend. She knew nothing of the real Christian God or any of the pretended mythical Gods. From the natural world—"* now timpani rolled and thundered and a huge bright flickering image of lightning flashed across the entire rear wall of the deserted stage, *"From the natural world,"* Helmut repeated in a booming voice above the din, *"she experienced the sense of awe!"*

Thunder and lightning transfixed the audience who only gradually became aware of a barely stirring prone figure lying on the floor at the back of the stage. *"When a patient ingests one quarter of a grain of rye ergot their mind experiences something otherworldly,"* Marburg's Marburg voice boomed, then repeated: *"When a patient otherworldly one quarter of a grain of ergot rye their experiences mind something ingests."*

A spotlight cast a swirling kaleidoscope of multi-colored flowing patterns of light onto Lena's prostrate body covered in a sheer white bodysuit. As the chorus sung the chilling strident rising note she suddenly sat, then leapt to her feet. Lena struck a determined pose revealing the outline of her back and buttocks and legs covered in cascades of moving light and sound.

The chorus changed their chant after four of Werner's heartbeats. Lena quavered in confusion. While voices rapidly rose and fell in pitch and volume Lena ran and leaped about the entire stage in erratic, vaguely circular movements, narrowly revealing portions of her face and breasts, her arms and legs and back covered in rapidly-shifting colors and patterns of light that followed her across the stage.

Then the chorus moved to the third note, the longest audible note, the somber, plaintive long-descent to silence accompanied by Lena slowing, faltering, spinning until she collapsed laying again as she had in the beginning-- an inert lump on the stage floor barely illuminated by colored lights like a weak aurora slowly fading to darkness.

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Darkness and a profound prolonged moment of total silence followed. Too long a silence for some in the audience who stirred uneasily. Very gradually the sound of rain became apparent accompanied by the intermittent sounds of timpani and flute played so quietly and infrequently and without tempo or melody no one was really sure they were hearing them at all. Occasional specks and coherent light in the shape of webs flashed randomly on the rear wall.

Margarethe as Altmann explained, her powerful disembodied voice carrying to the back. *"Our imaginary isolated person experiences more than just the awe of nature when she uses ergot. She experiences with ergot the connectedness, the wholeness, the short dance of a lifetime that echoes for eternity beyond death, the universal love of God."* A reproduction of da Vinci's drawing of a nude man inscribed in both a circle and square appeared on the rear wall. *"One of our patients said: 'Now I know we are all connected—you, your mother, this table, a fish being caught right now in a sea I have never heard of and God... Today, tomorrow, yesterday, the Earth and the moon and the sun.'"*

"Amen," the chorus sang. The sound of rain faded and stopped. The da Vinci image disappeared.

A soft spotlight followed Margarethe dressed as Altmann all in white across the stage. With reddened cheeks and glasses, she professorially addressed the audience from memory. *"Another said of their ergot experience, 'An ergot voyage is an endless epiphany.'"*

Projected now was a drawing of stars, pinpricks of light on the dark wall in the form of Orion's belt. The chorus quietly chanted *"Alnitak, Alnilam, Mintaka"* over and over. *"We are in the stars. We are light. So are you, and you and you... Bliss, yes. The luxurious roar of life when you have sexual climax. It never-ending."*

The picture changed to two hands superimposed resting palms up. *"We can tell you that all patients report the ergot experience as positive and beneficial in their mind."*

The picture disappeared and the chant grew louder.

"Everyone we have talked with have said that ergot is a voyage of discovery where you can see sound and hear light."

A new picture appeared, an arresting drawing in Lonicer's style of an eye and ear superimposed on each other. *"Gentlemen we do not understand what this means or how ergot transforms our patient's minds. We suspect that the transformation is if not permanent than it is both obvious in the short term and subtle and very long-lasting."*

This is only the beginning of our voyage of understanding ergot voyages of understanding. Gentlemen, thank you for your attention," the speaker concluded and took a low bow before leaving the stage deserted. The lamps were all slowly lit as the audience comprehended that in fact the lecture was over, having lasted quite close to seven minutes.

"You've gone too far! God is not an ergot-- delusion! Infamous! Blaspheming! Martin Luther curses you!" someone shouted at the empty stage.

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The words, *'bizarre;'* *'unforgettable;'* and *'more,'* were heard scattered around the hall. A few said, *"I want ergot!"* many more whispered, *"I want the dancer!"*

Near the back of the room Cormorant stood. Slowly and rhythmically, he clapped his hands. He clapped solo for more than a few claps until others slowly responded. In the end perhaps half of the audience stood, clapped and cheered. The rest sat stunned, appalled and angry.

Cormorant slipped behind stage. Approached Altmann he abruptly recognized Margarethe. He clapped his hand to his mouth shaking his head in wonder. When he was certain she was watching him, he grinned in bewilderment, patting his own arms and chest and head, pretending he was making certain he was not dreaming. Or still in a play.

From the wings joyfully Altmann watched the performance. *"Bravo!"* he cried at the end. He hugged Lena and Margarethe together. *"Now we celebrate!"* Lena said walking away in her sheer suit aware everyone was watching.

Margarethe said to Altmann in a low voice, *"Now we publish and plot the professor's tragic demise. So sad really. I liked him a lot,"* she chuckled, patting his back and then her own.

Cormorant approached, *"I want to understand what you are playing at and I want to try ergot. I'm a skeptic-- make me a believer,"* he challenged them.

"Al—Altmann?" Margarethe asked.

"Al—Alright."

"Al—Lena?..." Margarethe called, her deep blue eyes sweeping across the crowd.

Werner conducted in a fugue. A short thick candle in his gloved left hand illuminating his composition and gestures: his silent instructions to the singers and musicians. He signaled the start much earlier than scripted and he slowed down and extended some sections, sometimes to a crawl. When each slide changed, he signaled the next movement by taking one step forward and back, legs and arms moving fluidly like a stork dancing in mud. He joined in singing the stars' names in a clear, sonorous voice and he loudly poured water during the lightning slide. When it was all over, he stumbled to a chair and sat, stared up at the dark ceiling, smiling broadly as orchestra members kissed his cheek and patted his shoulders. Altmann whispered next to his ear, *"Mag-nif-i-cent!"*

The Dean of the Divinity School organized faculty chairs from multiple departments to confront the Chancellor. In the meeting they declared Altmann anathema who could never receive the university's imprimatur due to his subversive views. Chancellor Lodi said they were wrong about Altmann's views and in any event his hands were tied: the new duke approved of Altmann's book which he was certain would make the nation stronger. Everyone agreed that Altmann must leave his last

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lecture out of the child birthing book. The lone dissenter was Professor Heisenberg from the school of Divinity who thought if what Altmann said about Overwinter was true it confirmed scripture and was a comfort to Christians.

When Lodi visited to tell Lena the good news, she insisted that he never pay for her private readings again and that he would visit her upstairs again soon when she wasn't so busy, it had been... so... long... she reminded him with her wicked smile. When he wondered if he could see her dance like they had seen at the lecture she told him she would be delighted and that she had something even more stimulating for his eyes alone!

June 1609 in Wittenberg was the happiest month of Altmann's short life and Albrun's too. Their triumphant lecture series behind, he spent days creating miniature drawings for Helmut and Oscar's projecting lamp and taking voyages only on Wednesdays. How differently and better had his plan unfolded. "*His plan*" was wrong of course, only the first, the least important lecture was really *his*, and for half of the lectures, the final two, he was on the stage only a total of a few minutes.

So much better than he had planned. At the spa he imagined it was would be he and Lena against the world; having a group of cherished friends and comrades was unforeseen and unforeseeable. Until he took his first voyage the power of ergot was as incomprehensible to him as the flashing lights in hell. But, Elster. And the duke. Albrun foresaw Elster, right from the beginning, even *before* the beginning. Still the same poison that killed Elster was balm for his soul: Ergot truly was a cure for itself. Max told Altmann the God of *The Gård* had only one rule: '*Don't hurt anyone on purpose. Including yourself.*' Albrun felt his soul was intact. He was ready to molt again, probably for the last time.

Cormorant the scribe copied the chapters the professor wrote and mailed them to Margarethe to edit. At night Albrun had Lena to himself, to listen to her plots and sub-plots, always more twisting preposterous prognostications, to read with and to make love to. Sex was vague in the dreams he conjured in the hot bathes. In reality Lena was a miracle when he allowed Simone to vanish like an illusion.

In good weather on Wednesday evenings folks of all ages made a bonfire in a muddy field a mile west of town to drink ergot tea and sing and dance and drink spirits and make love in the forest until dawn. Helmut and Oscar were the stars of bonfire night. They sold quarter- grain ergot *honeydrops* for a copper coin and they gave penniless souls a free honeydrop and a copper coin. Altmann and Cormorant joined the festivities most months near full moon with Lena chaperoning.

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After the men drank their tea Cormorant asked: "*Son of night, S-O-N, right?*"

"*No. It's S-U-N, isn't it?*" Lena argued.

They three sat on the ground sharing a blanket near the roaring fire, their backs against a log. Lena between them held her head on Altmann's chest, the worn tweed of his coat tickling the bridge of her nose. She held Cormorant's hand in his lap under the blanket.

"*Altmann—*" she prompted him in a muffled voice.

"*It's Telemann now, yes?*" Cormorant corrected. "*Or... waiting ... death ...*"

"*Forgery...*," Altmann muffled.

"*I saw a fox just now... Did you...*" Lena yawned.

"*Something... in... his,*" said Cormorant.

Clouds drifted across the pale moon casting moving shadows everywhere. The wind blew the sound of music and dancing away there came the hoot of an owl. Dogs barked nearby. The smell of food on fire.

"*Mouth...*," Cormorant sighed.

"*My boys,*" Lena sighed.

"*When will you... try—*"

"*No hurry,*" she confessed.

"*Gottlieb's curse,*" said Cormorant.

"*Elster...*" Altmann muttered.

In late August the German edition galley of *Guide for the Use of Ergot in Childbirth* by Prof. A. Altmann and Midwife L.S. Weber came from the printer in Berlin. Margarethe combined the first, second and fourth lectures into a short preface, really she reduced the fourth lecture into two cryptic sentences about the startling effects of ergot on the mind.

After Altmann, Helmut and Oscar approved the galley Lena invited Chancellor Lodi to the second floor of the bookshop for a special private reading and to obtain his agreement to place the university's imprimatur on the book cover. After briefly scanning it, Lodi signed the paper and eagerly took his seat on her blue-covered couch. Lena dimmed the lights, lit incense and opened her robe for him revealing her sheer white bodysuit.

The lecture at University of Copenhagen in September it was decided would be Professor Altmann's swansong. Margarethe would reprise her role as Professor Altmann, again wearing glasses

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and rouge. Again, Albrun would attend as a member of the audience, a witness to the young professor's final lecture as it would later be sadly remembered by the audience of midwives, students and faculty.

Margarethe-as-Altmann thanked the Chair of the Medical school for graciously inviting him to speak and gave him an autographed copy of his own just-published book. *"My colleagues, these are exciting times,"* she began, *"Medicine is becoming science, ergot is saving babies and mother's lives. A woman delivered a lecture at University of Wittenberg for the first time ever this spring!"* For nearly an hour she summarized Altmann and Lena's findings, repeating the sentence three separate times: *"If the mother is too weak or the bleeding won't stop use four grains for an average sized mother plus one grain if it's her first birth. Be ready: the contractions will begin instantly!"* Everyone received a copy of Lena's two-sided guide for midwives in Danish. About a dozen books were sold at the lecture—a very good start she thought.

During the gathering a man approached and after some fumbling, asked, *"I saw you speak in January in Wittenberg, professor, most enlightening, if terrifying. I still have nightmares... But I don't mean to be rude, you look different now."*

"Different?"

"Well, you sound different too."

"The acoustics of the rooms perhaps?" she suggested.

He shrugged and asked him to sign a copy of her book.

20 Telemann

Helmut and Oscar were allowed to occupy his university office even after Professor Altmann left. They had two mostly-reliable lamps they rented to professors wanting to enliven their own lectures and reputations. With the money they commissioned their former professor to create drawings to specifications, miniature round ink on velum slides. Helmut said he would pay Albrun to reproduce his drawing of Lena from the bookshop window for him onto a slide. Albrun kindly declined so Helmut hired a student from the drawing school but the image he produced had no fire.

"It would be ironic," Oscar quipped, "If the lasting legacy of our work was not ergot but our magic lanterns?!"

Altmann's mail was directed to his bank in Leipzig and from there it was forwarded to the bookstore in Wittenberg. Ergot orders, book orders and speaking invitations made up all of the mail.

Altmann complained, *"If this keeps up, we will have to change—"*

"I read the plan," Lena replied.

"Tell me."

"I was going to show you tonight in bed. The letter came today."

Dearest Lena and Telemann,

How is the book being received? So exciting! And I hid a message in it.

In the attached page I've outlined how to manage ergot and book sales, the short of it is it all happens in L. We need to speak in person very soon for reasons that are obvious. I will see you tomorrow, the day after you read this. On my way to you both! So excited!

A bird in flight,

Margarethe

"If you go back to being Albrun, then Marburg, Lena and the spa are in danger," Margarethe stated.

"And Hercules."

"Of course, the female mail horse. Ex. You can't be Altmann once he's dead. Who are you?" Margarethe asked.

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"And the snake."

"Telemann pay attention!"

"You already told us this."

"Telemann," she said.

"Alright," Telemann replied.

"Do you want to know who he is?"

"Yes. Again."

"Are you awake?" she asked with consternation.

"Of course. I'm taking it all in as you re-arrange my life. I quite enjoy it. A relief! But if it starts to fail, well then, it's mutiny," he replied.

Margarethe moved her face right up to his and narrowing her eyes she asked, *"Who do you suspect?"*

Telemann looked into space thinking, *"Well let's see. I never liked Max—"*

"Or Guildenstern. Strange family. Macabre really, I mean the parents alone..." she whispered.

Margarethe waited. When he didn't react, she raised her fist threateningly. *"Then you say..."*

"And the sister. Have you met the sister?"

She patted his head and offered him a nut.

Helmut sat alone in the tavern at his usual table in the back drinking beers wondering what he could possibly do. Months earlier the whores had stopped soliciting the love-struck puppy. When a new girl approached him for the first time in summer she took pity on his love-lost countenance and offered him for free. He smiled and handed her a silver thaler and dove back into glasses.

"You are Helmut Frenzel?" a young man standing at his table inquired.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I am Dieter, a student from the art college. May I join you?" he asked sitting. *"I saw what Klaus was drawing for you. It's the lady from the bookshop, Ms. Lena, isn't it?"*

"Yes."

"I want to show you something. From the lecture. Drawn from my memory," he said handing Helmut a small pad of papers. The top sheet was a simple line drawing in dark pencil, the outline of a standing nude woman from behind comprised of only a couple dozen mostly long, bold strokes.

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"This is good," Helmut appraised the drawing, so different from Lonicer and Altmann's perfection, more of a suggestion, *"But the shape of her breasts is not rounded or full enough. Slightly too high, there should be a subtle dip or downward pull. It's time you know..."*

"You know the model well," Dieter said with envy.

"I see her in my dreams," Helmut sadly admitted.

They sat quietly for a minute. Helmut wondered if Dieter could afford a drink. *"Do you want a beer?"* he asked.

"Yes, thank you very much."

Before his beer came Dieter picked up his pad, sliding next to Helmut he sat. *"Now watch this,"* he said. He held the pad at the top with his thumb and forefinger and with his other thumb at the bottom he allowed the pages to rapidly flip from the bottom page back to the top. They both watched the nude slowly move full-circle from her back to her right side to her front to her left side and back again to her rear. Helmut's eyes grew wide.

"Do that again!" he ordered. They both watched the moving pictures a second, third and fourth time. Helmut was sure the drawings could be reproduced ink on velum to scale but he wondered how could they be flipped at the projecting lamp. *"You earned that beer, my boy!"* he cheerfully announced, patting the art student's back. *"Sell me the pad, please."*

When he left the tavern his first instinct was to see if Oscar was in their office at university to show him. Something made him change his mind. At home he undressed and brought the pad to bed. He flipped the pages with one hand and stroked his penis with his other. After three viewings he climaxed with a muffled gasp.

During the night Helmut awoke. He lit his lamp on his small desk and swept everything else on it to the floor. Bending over he picked up a clean sheet of paper from the mess and folded it in half. He tore the page neatly along the fold and looked for a pencil and scissor.

When noon bell tolled and neither Oscar nor Helmut had arrived at the bookstore Lena wondered which of them, she would playfully scold. She thought it was Helmut's turn. *'That boy...'* she thought with a smile.

Oscar found Helmut's body. His hands were clasped around a nearly empty jar of honeydrops, the top portion of his severed penis was in the jar too. A brown stream of blood ran from between his thighs across the bed forming a puddle on the wooden floor.

There were two pieces of paper on his desk. Trembling Oscar lifted a silver thaler off of the first page. He read Helmut's apology to his landlady for the mess he had left. Oscar lifted a small drawing pad off of the second note, a letter to Helmut's bank informing them that the barer of the note, his best

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friend Oscar, should empty and close his account. It was hoped that his money would go to the ergot clinic near Bad Döben for the treatment of the patients there.

They waited for Guildenstern and Max to arrive from Copenhagen. In the chapel at Castle Church the friends listened to the pastor recite the funeral service. When they were invited to say a few words, Margarethe, unable to keep from crying, rose and read her poem:

Red

*Let the color be praised!
Reimagined my youth
Overwhelmed overturning:
My new truth.*

*Let the color be banished!
Honesty demands
No life of integrity
In a conquered land.*

No one else needed to speak after the poem was read, not even Lena dressed in black towards whom no one could look. Altmann held her hand into the cold early December air. Behind them two by two they walked to the grave: Margrethe and Guildenstern, Marburg with his arm draped over Oscar's heaving shoulders and Gottlieb walking beside Cormorant, all eyes to the ground. Only Max in the rear walked alone, head up, watching a distant hawk soar above the tree line.

"Friends, my new friends, my dear friends," Cormorant spoke. Gathered at the inn he looked around the table at the sad faces. *"Among you I knew Helmut least, hardly at all. From what I saw and heard he was a man loyal beyond reason. He had a love too large for this world."*

Cormorant walked behind Altmann's chair, resting his hands on his shoulders. *"You are on a journey together..."* he began. Then, in a quieter, even more somber voice he started over. *"You dear, dear people. You are on a voyage to where I cannot imagine or go. I am now saying farewell, I cannot join you. I doubt the resilience of my own heart,"* he paused looking toward Margarethe. *"I am eternally grateful you shared your friendship and ergot with me. If our paths cross in the future, I promise I will be faithful."* Cormorant then went round the circle kissing each of their cheeks and he left.

"Me as well. I am done, too... At least for now..." Oscar spoke looking down at the table. Then he inched his face upward at Altmann like a student seeking permission. Altmann smiled and nodded.

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"I am going back to The Gård, to over- winter," Max announced. "Oscar, you are welcome to come with me. It is a good place for healing, for starting over. I will share my ergot and they will share their ghost stories. I'll fish and hunt deer through the snow. On clear nights I will stand in the snow under the moon and howl until I can't. On a lucky night I will wake up with a woman next to me."

"I have to bring Helmut's gift to the clinic and then I want to visit his family..."

"Tell them?" Lena spoke for the first time today.

Oscar looked at her beautiful face wet with tears. *"I will tell them Helmut died of a broken heart. That he loved a beautiful woman who could not see him through her crowd of admirers."*

"Evil," Lena said.

"No. Reckless," Oscar countered. He wept, *"And Helmut was so gentle... And you never thanked him."*

"For what?"

"You never read the poem he wrote in the frost on the shop window, staring at your portrait. He wrote it in reverse so you could read it from inside. Nights there was frost he stood in the cold and wrote his love poem to you. You never even saw it did you?"

"No!" Lena cried. *"What did it say? Dear God..."* she wept.

"Helmut's death may temper you; time will do it eventually," Altmann spoke. *"Ergot will change you when you are ready. Helmut, Helmut was... Write his name down: Helmut Frenzel lived."*

"Yvonne," Lena softly cried thinking maybe the two will meet in Overwinter.

Altmann clasped Lena's face, moving his eyes inches away from hers. *"Helmut asked me to make a drawing of you for him and I said no. Everyone knew he was infatuated but we all thought he would grow out of it with his first girlfriend."*

"Like you did," Lena said.

"No. I have always loved you, even when I hated you. You are my overwinter."

They held each other tightly.

"Helmut insisted on taking every Egon outside to safety, himself. He took them each time to a field and waited to make sure each one vanished safely into the woods. I saw him kiss an Egon once when he packed it in their little travel pouch, the one he sewed from your old scarf."

Lena sobbed in his arms.

"He never hurt a mouse. In the lab Oscar held the knife, Helmut the pen," Altmann said, softly stroking her hair.

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"Like me and you," Lena squeezed him even more tightly, feeling his heart pound against her skin. "He burned his flesh for you Albrun. He loved you more than I can love." She cried so hard she had to gasp for breath. She spit out her words between gulps of air. "Helmut... loved... a mouse... more... than I... I can love!"

"You are being watched," Gottlieb told Altmann in shadows near the dock under a light snowfall.

"I know."

"You do?"

"She is hard to miss: dark, short, young. How do you know?"

"I have spies watching you," Gottlieb admitted, "For your protection."

Altmann nodded. *"Do you know who she is?"*

"Yes, her name is Inez Ramos, she is the daughter of Professor Ramos," Gottlieb answered. "The author of the book you —"

"And do you know why she is spying on me?"

"No. Do you know?" Gottlieb wondered.

"Yes. When we interviewed her husband Horatio—you know they are married? — I slipped a note in his coat pocket," Altmann revealed.

"What did it say?"

"I believe you."

Gottlieb frowned. *"What are you playing at? Here is the thing: They followed you the tavern last night and they watched you drinking with Margarethe. She looks like a man but this is too risky. And the girl Inez is... well... she was very... playful under the table!"*

"How do you mean?" Altmann asked.

"She was very... affectionate towards her husband. Under the table. If you get my meaning. And very playful towards her dog, batting and poking him with her foot. I thought he would bite her!"

"You saw all of this?" Altmann said. "How you spend your time."

"My eyes and ears have saved your skin more than once Herr Professor," Gottlieb reminded him sternly. "Here is the thing: the duke read my report about Elster and he is satisfied to allow the story of a village that died of a mysterious plague, although he knows the truth. Some are already blaming it on the Jews, as if there were... any... The duke has stationed men around the dead village so no one will enter for a year. The soldiers work the barge now-- they charge the same rate as before. All the bodies,

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the livestock too have been burned and the ashes buried away from the Elbe. The duke swears he wants nothing to do with ergot for war, but he doesn't want others to get it either. He asked me where you keep it and I told him the truth that I don't know. For your sake never tell me. I never mentioned Bad Döben to him, or our friends. He of course knows of Altmann and Lena. The duke read my report about our interview with Horatio and he had the story published in the Wittenberg broadsheet. Did you read it?"

"Yes. Why publish it?" Altmann asked.

"The duke thinks if he stirs the pot things will work to his advantage. I think he is young and is trying to make a mark for himself, establish new resources in and outside his land. He thinks I am a resourceful agent in Wittenberg. He is intelligent and not impulsive like the last duke, his older brother. He must know more than he tells me."

"Outside his land?"

"I cannot comment," Gottlieb replied.

At dawn on the first Wednesday after New Year Marburg left the spa riding Hercules slowly south toward Leipzig. At the same time Guildenstern climbed on a horse in Leipzig leading him north at a walking pace north towards Bad Döben. There was less than a foot of snow on the ground and even less snow on the road so with luck they planned to meet by noon.

Although he enjoyed riding in his youth, Guildenstern hadn't been on a horse in years. Marburg had last been on horseback for less than an hour in a military parade two years earlier. Today he packed his uniform and service pistol for the first time since then too, but this time in defense of one of Margarethe's schemes, one in which he arrested her brother. He couldn't remember what the charge was. At some point in the planning, the idea was that he would seize Guildenstern for imbecility until Max pointed out that was no crime. Settling into the rhythm of Hercules' swaying back, he began to look all around, craning his neck to the rear, scanning the landscape covered in white, looking for tracks.

Guildenstern passed a man and woman in a cart, waving to them when their paths crossed but they looked away, stoic and silent. The sky was bright and clear and it seemed likely there would be snow melt in the afternoon. He led his horse into the path the driver's carriage wheels had left; made wider and deeper by a board they were unknowingly dragging behind them. Guildenstern took long turns looking over his shoulders until his neck got sore. He dismounted a few times to stretch. After sixteen miles he arrived at the broken bridge Altmann promised.

He tied Hercules hidden in the woods. Toward the bridge Guildenstern walked, careful not to slip into the freezing stream. Just across the broken bridge he saw the toppled barn ahead where the ergot jars were buried. Looking around he quickly squatted next to a tree and waited, still scanning the woods in all directions. Reaching into his coat pocket he pulled out a small bundle. Unwrapping it he found a date, a shelled walnut, a honeydrop, a cube of rye bread, a cube of spiced dried beef, a single

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dice and a folded note. Unfolding the note he read: *'This note certifies the bearer is an imbecile. Please be kind to the man. His family loves him anyway.'*

They chose January 16, 1610 at one- sixteen to kill Professor Albert Altmann. He had been hiking alone in the dead of winter, in a snowstorm, God knows why, when he slipped at Roskilde Fjord. Margarethe thought the absurdity of the story would promote its dissemination.

The following weekend Margarethe hosted a combined wake for Altmann and coming-out party for her new discovery Telemann. When the first guests arrived, Margarethe ate a honeydrop. A string trio playing softly in the background performed Werner's incendiary twenty-second long piece every time the loud clock in the hallway chimed the hour. Then Margarethe rushed to the center of whatever room she was in, fell to the floor and rose like a bouncing ball, springing and spinning alarmingly before sinking like a bird crashing to earth, all shuttered eyelids and splayed limbs to a mixture of polite applause and real consternation.

Telemann, she declared, was the young artist commissioned to draw the senior Guildenstern's likenesses, very new, very much in demand, a non-conformist certainly; Margarethe used the word 'genius' many times but a close listener might be forgiven for remaining unclear who she was referring to, her prodigy or herself. Telemann displayed his likeness of Lena as Quixote's Dulcinea, that Lena had exiled. *"Done in a single sitting by candlelight in the model's bed after midnight, but more conventional times and venues are ex- ex- extant,"* Margarethe assured their guests with an unnatural, disquieting expression.

"He died in his sleep," Ella to Lena softly spoke, lightly stoking her hand.

Looking up from their tea in the small kitchen in the bookstore, brushing a lock of hair away from her eyes she shook her head.

"Yes, he did," Ella insisted.

"It doesn't make me feel better if you lie," Lena said.

"I don't lie. Except when you told me to. Otto died in our bed last night. I touched him cold this morning. Cold."

"Otto...?"

"We need to plan his funeral," Ella explained.

Again, they sat in the chapel listening to the same pastor give the same speech about eternal life in Christ. It was a smaller gathering this time, only Altmann, Ella and Lena. Altmann thought of over-winter, Lena was ashamed and Ella seemed... content.

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"Don't worry about me. I am happy. Otto made me a wife, I was a good wife even if for a short time. I have been a mother and a wife, a friend and a worker. I pray to God every day. I have done what woman was sent to Earth to do. I am at peace," Ella asserted.

"Three deaths this winter," Altmann considered on their walk home from Ella's house, *not* Otto's house any longer he noted. *"So far..."*

"Three?" Lena queried.

"Helmut, Altmann and Otto," he replied.

"I am walking with a ghost," Lena quipped. *"By and by, Mr. Ghost. Do you know King Hamlet?"*

A few days after Otto's funeral Gottlieb arrived at the bookstore before dawn with news.

"Here is the thing: The girl Inez, she is still searching for you. She followed you here from university at dusk two nights ago. I tried to stop you. I threw a rock at your feet for God's sake! Didn't you hear it?! Inez and Horatio got married and she is pregnant and will have their baby this summer. She is looking for a nursemaid, I need to find someone to keep their eyes and ears open in their house for me. The duke thinks Inez may be a spy but from which court he can only guess."

"You?" Altmann asked.

"Spies? Portugal for her; Norway for Horatio? I know Horatio sent a message to Fortinbras in Elsinore after our interview but I don't know what was in it." Gottlieb replied adding, *"It's dangerous for her to be nosing around, asking questions. The truth of what happened in Elster is spreading, most likely from drunken soldiers."*

"What the duke wants," Altmann countered. *"Do you think they are spies?"*

Gottlieb shrugged and sneezed.

"Maybe she is just looking for the author of the note," Lena suggested.

"When do you go back to Copenhagen?" Gottlieb asked.

"In a few days. Altmann, I mean Telemann, has a commission to draw portraits," Lena replied.

"One thing more: the Chancellor was quietly dismissed because of your lecture, well because of Lena's nude dance. Shocking, they all thought, voluptuous nakedness, blasphemy they called it. Luther is spitting in all our faces. The stain will never be effaced they said, no amount of scrubbing will lift it. Should never have been allowed in Martin Luther's town. The dancer should be stoned to death they said. Lena, you should be careful, hire a guard when you are out. You had better empty your office after

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dark tonight Altmann, you won't be allowed in. Take your diploma. I took the two projecting lamps and the pictures. Where is the ergot?"

TELEMANN BURNS THE DIPLOMA.

21 Ghost

Inez and Lena became friends on her second visit to the bookstore. Inez visited often, sometimes she brought snacks and Lena served hot drinks. Lena's enthusiasm for *Don Quixote* inspired Inez to buy a Spanish copy and she read it. While they sat upstairs, Ella, Inez's new chaperone contentedly sat and rocked in the kitchen bellow, sipping hot drinks, periodically reminding herself that she had to call Simone Lena, '*Simone is Lena, Simone is Lena*' she said over and over like a silent prayer, but sometimes she recited '*Lena is Simone.*' Arranging the cups and saucers on their shelves she found it hard to forget that she had been at the bookstore over the seasons.

Inez said: "*Quixote becomes sane as Panza goes crazy.*"

"I'm *not* crazy," Ella chirped merrily from the kitchen.

Inez giggled, explaining, "*She is a dear.*"

Lena smiled. "*But for Quixote, with sanity comes loss of innocence. But Sancho's spirit soars when he abandons reason.*"

"*Is Cervantes saying reason is the cause of unhappiness? That we all need illusion to survive, to be happy?*" Inez asked.

"I know where —" Ella said, rising.

"*Quixote's madness causes pain and suffering to himself and to others; it is amusing but ultimately it isn't just a story of innocent mischief. There is a price to pay for every indulgence of our desires.*" Lena contented. "*Can I help you, Ella?*"

Inez replied, "*And a price for neglecting our desires too?*" Inez concluded, "*But, ultimately, there is nothing neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.*"

"I haven't heard that before. Is that from a book?" Lena asked her new friend.

"Yes, but it hasn't been written yet."

"What is it called?"

"*Son of Knight,*" Ella said.

Traveling from Copenhagen by carriage to *The Gård* hauling thirty pounds of good soft cheese and one hundred pounds of rye flour, Max brought a forty- foot boat mast in two sections, paints, brushes and drop cloths. And ergot.

"I'm surprised, well not entirely," Ellen said hugging him.

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"I missed The Gård. When I am home, I tried to bring my mind back here. I did it with this," he said lifting the small chain around his neck, revealing the glimpse of a vial under his shirt. *"Do you know about ergot?"* he asked.

"Poison. Don't get it much up here thank God. Too cold and windy by the sea, not much rye."

"Your mead calms everyone down over- winter, under your supervision, and everyone loves you."

"I am fair," she acknowledged.

"That's how she got my leg tore off!" Toby shouted from under a blanket from under the kitchen table.

"How is Toby?" Max asked.

"The same, a proper nitwit and I love him day and night," Ellen said.

Max reflected with a grin that it couldn't have been Toby's middle leg.

For Max's welcome home supper Ellen and Toby served a potato, cheese and wild mushrooms casserole that inspired the children's artwork for days. It was not just the children who painted golden globes of melting hot cheese. Everyone picked up a brush on occasion after they decided where the pole would lay, along the east or west side of the longhouse. Ellen flipped the silver thaler Max handed her and everyone was satisfied with the results when the west won.

"How would you describe what your mead does?" Max asked Ellen.

"Makes us happy mostly. Silly, sometimes sadder. Slower, but winter slows everything down. Mead is to over- winter what honey is to bread," Ellen said.

"Ergot does that too but stronger and you hear and see things those around you can't. You know the world is connected in a huge web. Then after a day or two your old self starts to return but it knows something new it can't forget."

"It's safe? Do you swear it? You've taken it?"

"Twice under Guildenstern's supervision. He made sure I didn't fall or hurt myself. Some people stand and wander erratically, trip and hurt themselves, like being drunk. He cleaned me up when I vomited. Everyone vomits the first time. Well, all but one. Most people vomit every time. If you have a clear broth a few hours before then your vomit is clear and only a small amount comes up."

"Who knows about this here?" Ellen asked pointing at his vial.

"Only you and me," Max replied.

"How much do you have?"

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"Twenty-one doses," Max revealed, "How many—"

"Right now, with you, we are..." Ellen rolled her eyes up counting. "Thirty-three. Four young children, five older." She looked Max in the eyes. "You are a troublemaker."

"No, no. I promise, no one will know. I leave it up to you to decide. I trust your judgement more than my own," he confessed. "Much more."

"You are still a troublemaker. But it's a worthy consideration."

"God-like, I'd say."

Every morning when they crawled out of sleep, as soon as the kitchen lamps were lit, even before they ate, the children found their paints and brushes. They were well on their way to covering the entire pole when Ellen said, *"This is so much fun! Please save some room for everyone to paint."* The children's drawings became tamed over time; planning became evident and then they developed technique. All of the children and adults painted over their own drawings, some daily.

Men and women spent days sitting along both sides of the pole. Sometimes they were inspired to paint, sometimes they sat and looked for the new pictures. Some of the pictures told stories: people outdoors with animals or animals acting like people. One man worked on a painting of a woman's face on the side of the log facing into the room, laying on a blanket on his stomach and chest while he worked. For weeks he drew the face with a pencil. Just when it seemed he was ready to start to paint he stared at the drawing for an entire day or more before wiping the drawing off the pole and began over again to perfect her face on the smooth curved surface. While he worked he thought about the fact his picture might be seen upside down forever-- the pole might be rolled the wrong way and then never planted outside. Or worse, it might be rolled and hidden against the floor.

About one third of the circumference of the pole, the part that rested on the tarp remained unpainted. What should we do, they wondered. Ellen said, *"What if we keep painting this side a while longer?"*

Someone asked, *"When we roll it, should we move it to the other side of the house?"*

Everyone shook their heads. *"We like it here,"* they all agreed.

Ellen said, *"I can't make this decision. Either you withdraw your offer or we will have to meet as a group to decide."*

"I understand," Max acknowledged thinking that even God has her limits.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Sven Sven offered Max the pretty girl with the lazy eye to sleep with and to marry if he wanted her. *"You can cover her eye with a patch if it bothers you. You won't see her eye in the dark and in the day there's still a lot of her worth looking at. She is a sweet girl, young, strong, healthy and unplucked. She will make you a loyal companion,"* he suggested, *"You could do much worse. And not just on a cold night like tonight."*

"Are you, her father?" Max asked.

Sven shrugged. *"Maybe. Does that matter?"* he laughed.

"Can she read?"

"I don't know. We don't have any books," he answered.

"What do you call her?"

"You are interested—I can tell! Who can blame you—you with your big pole!" he shouted.

Max said, *"You are a scoundrel, a thief—"*

"I won't have that! Not a thief! I took your money and brought you here like I promised. I gave you clean beds and hot food, well warm. Besides, don't hold that against the girl. Are you going to follow you heart... well maybe a bit lower?!" Sven grinned knowingly.

Max shook his head.

"If you don't take her tonight and treat her right—"

"What?"

"Somebody else will take her in the night, lazy eye and all. Then who knows. He might not be a gentleman like you," Sven reasoned.

Max asked God's advice.

Ellen said, *"You want a woman, right? Just to sleep with or to marry? To make your babies?"*

"I want a companion, that's true enough," Max replied.

"For the night or life?"

"I already have a wife who I don't love nor does she love me. Start with the night," Max answered truthfully.

Ellen frowned. *"Let's say you take her tonight. What if she has your baby? Would you give her money to sooth your conscience, like rich men do?"*

"Yes, I suppose," Max admitted.

"Then you have your answer."

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Smelling like strawberries she came to his bed in the night. Pressing against him she whispered, *"If you tell me, you love me Max, I will believe you."*

Max left after breakfast to reach Bernardo and Marcellus' home a few miles east of *The Gård*. The snow had stopped falling the previous day. Today was nice with bright sunshine and no wind. After trudging through foot-deep snow for a few minutes Max began to sweat. Eva was able to follow in his footsteps after she asked him to take shorter strides. They arrived before noon.

Bernardo lived with Marcellus, they worked together, cooked and ate together, they even saw the ghost together six times since leaving Elsinore castle. Marcellus was better at guessing when the ghost would appear—he had a sense about it.

"I wanted to take a walk--," Max began.

"We welcome the company!" Marcellus declared.

They sat at a distance from the fire. The log house had a single room at ground level and a third of a loft above. The room was clean and neat; the pots and dishes were already put away. Clothes and socks hung drying on thin ropes above the hearth.

Bernardo set the kettle down and handed her a cup of tea. *"Who are you?"* he asked.

"Eva. I am with Max." she added proudly.

"Lucky Max," Bernardo said with a friendly wink.

"How is Guildenstern?" Marcellus asked.

"He lives in Leipzig, he is fine. Have you seen the ghost again?"

"Not since you were here last. Feels like he could be coming again soon," Marcellus replied.

"You can tell?"

"Like guessing when the snowfall will stop."

"He's good at that," Bernardo affirmed. *"But on the anniversary of the king's death, on the tenth of August you can count on seeing King Hamlet's ghost, then,"* Bernardo spoke and they both nodded.

"Where?" Eva asked.

"Wherever Bernardo and I am. We were at The Gård last year when the king came." Marcellus explained.

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Telemann drew flattering charcoal portraits of both elder Guildensterns in one afternoon. The next day he drew a large landscape of the three with Margarethe, rigid and expressionless in the center holding their hands—everyone said this one was the most arresting of the three commissioned works.

Overwinter Telemann drew ink on velum pictures at miniature scale; dozens of pictures he drew with his nose hovering inches above the desk. Pictures of the people he loved, of faces he had seen in crowds, of Helmut and Horatio, of people working and dancing, of trees and flowers, fields and streams and mountains and visions he had seen during ergot voyages. He wished he had paid closer attention to the lamp projector. Wishing he had a construction drawing Telemann mailed a letter to the only address he knew where Oscar had intended to go: the ergot clinic in Löbnitz.

The old monastery's stone buildings, were gray and weathered like a landscape painted in dust. Oscar arrived at the Löbnitz ergot sanatorium at mid-day expecting to leave the following morning. The director greeted him with the words, *"We need help, our doctor has left to get treatment for his own failing health."*

On the first day he rolled up his sleeves and by the end of the week Oscar was in charge of the medical treatment of patients whose pain he relieved using the same poison that maimed and pained them.

As if in a dream he could never fully awaken from, Oscar thought throughout the day: *'Will this be the last time I see this person, those shoes, this plate, that cat, my hands? What if I die suddenly right now, in mid-thought—?'* He fed an old man who had no fingers pea soup, raising the wooden spoon with his trembling hands thinking, *'This may be the last taste he will ever have...'*

"You've changed," Telemann said to his young benefactor, she who had named him, had given him his new calling.

Margarethe sat unresponsive staring into space.

"Is it the ergot or... something else? Are you... thinking in there?" he asked uneasily. *"How many times have you—"*

"One," she replied unblinking. The next day she added, *"You can only do something one time. Next time it's another you."*

Telemann thought he should stop at dusk to allow his eyes to rest but instead he worked even longer into the night afraid he would lose his sight before he had drawn everything important. He compromised: one day he wore a patch over his right eye and the next day over his left.

"Which is best?" he asked Margarethe, motioning towards his most recent drawings separated by day.

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"Your third eye, Egon," she cryptically answered without looking at any of them.

From the corner of her eye Lena watched Inez scan the shelf that held the copies of his book; Lena caught Inez's smile whenever she noted a copy had been sold. After months of visits, as her belly grew bigger, Inez resolved to buy a copy of her father's *Political History of Iberia*, come what may. If confronted by Lena, she wasn't sure what she would tell her friend. Would she admit she was the author's daughter? Would she tell Lena about the note? Or would she tell the fantastical tale of a royal Danish ghost's revenge?

Max brought Eva and a large piece of good rye bread and of soft cheese back to Marcellus and Bernardo's house on the anniversary of King Hamlet's murder. The four sat outside under a crescent-shaped moon.

"When will he come?" Eva asked.

"Soon, after midnight," Marcellus replied.

"What will he do?" she wondered.

"Fly at us," Bernardo replied.

"How do you mean?" Max asked.

"Like a wild bird, flapping and screaming in silence," Marcellus explained.

"Why?" Eva asked.

Marcellus shrugged. *"He's unhappy, afraid... lost? The ghost only spoke to his son Prince Hamlet and now his son is dead too. Because of him, you could say."*

"Do you know Horatio?" Bernardo asked.

"No. My brother Peter was his schoolmate and Guildenstern met him once. Why?"

"Horatio knows. He knows everything," Bernardo contended. *"He is a scholar. And he loved Prince Hamlet with all his heart."*

Eva took Max's hand in hers. *"Tell us about the king and the prince, please,"* she implored.

"I'd rather hear you speak, Eva. We hardly ever hear a woman's voice," Bernardo replied.

"What do you want me to say?"

"Tell us about yourself. Tell us your story," Marcellus suggested.

Eva bit her lip and thought. *"I grew up on a farm not too far from here. Three farms in fact, all along the coast with three different views of the sea and three mothers and Sven. I'm not sure if he is my father but he is kind and takes care of me like a father. You could say I am an orphan with three*

families," she giggled. *"We celebrate Christmas three times a year!"* she boasted. *"I get to open presents in three different houses! One year, when I was seven, I got a yellow puppy for Christmas. I called him Slyngel because he would chew on my shoes, steal food from the table, a real rascal. I got so angry once that I hit him. I did, I swear it, and God forgive me. I cried when he yelped and ran away. But he forgave me and he understood,"* she nodded solemnly.

It was quiet. Max squeezed her hand. They were all tired; they hoped the ghost would come soon.

"Slyngel got old and he died almost two years ago. I still miss him, especially at night. Sometimes I stroke a pillow in bed and talk to it as if... I've been lonely since... Sven said I need a husband and become a wife and mother. He said he found two gentlemen—"

"A good girl like you. A pretty girl too," Bernardo said, his voice trailing away into the silent night. Marcellus blew smoke from his pipe and watched it float towards the moon. Max stared at the side of Eva's face lit by moonlight. Her lazy eye looked normal. *'Maybe it's the other eye that's too fast,'* he imagined himself admitting out loud.

Then, in the blink of the eye the ghost appeared: a swirl of shapes in white and green coalesced into the translucent form of the old king. His bearded face was grey, tired and lined, his eyes were wide and wild and his mouth moved without speech. The ghost spun round looking from face to face, seemingly seeking someone out. He settled his gaze on Eva before Max stood and stepped in front of her. Eva, standing behind Max put her arms around his waist and peered around his shoulder. *"We see you great King Hamlet,"* she spoke in a loud voice. *"What do you need?"*

The ghost rose to his full height and with outstretched arms he seemed to fall backward and fade into the night.

"If you looked any happier," Guildenstern told Gottlieb, *"I'd say you were drunk. I know you don't use ergot."*

Gottlieb grinned, standing in the doorway of Guildenstern's office in Leipzig. *"Herr Doctor, you have been spending too much time peddling your medicine,"* he joked.

The men shook hands and sat. *"Since you are here should I assume there's a problem?"* Guildenstern asked.

"Indeed, there is," Gottlieb replied, pulling a long face. *"You won't like it, but here it is: The duke wants the ergot. Right now. All of it. He's closing down your Leipzig enterprise, confiscating the ergot. You can continue to sell the book and keep all of your profits. I tried to talk him into allowing some small sales for medical purposes in Leipzig but he is adamant."*

"Why?"

"Why? Why? You know about Elster. The duke fears another Elster, another village destroyed by ergot," Gottlieb incredulously replied.

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"The duke's men destroyed Elster and now the duke wants more ergot, no, all of the ergot? Madness," Guildenstern replied. "Impossible."

"You don't have a choice. I am here to take away your ergot supply and I need you to take me to the rest."

"What—rest?"

Gottlieb looked cross. *"Herr Doctor, you should know when to play the fool and when to be serious. This is the time to be serious, for the sake of you and your family."*

"My family! What are you talking about?"

"Your bother Peter plotted to murder King Fortinbras so Fortinbras had him put to death by the English crown."

"That's a lie! You were there; you heard Horatio's—"

"The duke has read my official transcript of the interview. Your brother Max leads a group of rebels in Gilleleje who follow the dead King Hamlet's ghost in Norway, or do you still insist on calling it Denmark?"

"They're not rebels! They are children, families, children—"

"Your sister has publicly declared against King Fortinbras—"

"That's another lie!" Guildenstern shouted.

Gottlieb opened a small notebook and read, *"According to Minister Gerhard von Kleist on December 12, 1609 in the Castle Church in Wittenberg Margarethe Guildenstern of Copenhagen spoke the following words from the pulpit, "Let the color be banished! Honesty demands. No life of integrity. In a conquered land."*

"She was speaking of Lena, her red hair, you know that. That's the red she wanted banished. It has nothing to do with politics, and anyway, Danish is red, Norwegian is blue. You were there at Helmut's funeral. What kind of man are you?" Guildenstern angrily demanded.

"A survivor. You would do well to—"

"I would do well to kick you in your back side you snake!" he shouted, standing.

Gottlieb also stood, tapping his badge of office he coolly stated, *"Give me your ergot now, all of it, or you and your family will face justice."*

"Face lies..."

"Face certain torture and death," Gottlieb concluded with a shrug. "The duke does not countenance attempted regicide and rebellion against a neighboring kingdom he is not at war with. It sets a bad example. I have men waiting outside to arrest you now. Is the ergot really worth the lives of your family? Don't be an imbecile Guildenstern."

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Gottlieb waited in the shadows for her late-night visitor to leave before knocking on the bookshop door. A flustered- looking Lena let him in.

"Don't get dressed on my account," he slyly said.

"What do you want?" Lena asked, tying her robe tightly, brushing her disheveled hair away from her eyes.

"We need to talk. Guildenstern was arrested in Leipzig. The duke is demanding all of the ergot right now. All of it, especially the large cache. Do you know where it is? You need to contact Altmann and Margarethe, get them to come back. We need a plan."

Lena shakily sat at the small kitchen table, holding her head in her hands. *"Why is the duke... what does he want the ergot for?"*

Gottlieb shrugged. *"He says its defensive; to protect other villages but I have my doubts. And there's more: He is discussing plans to blame the Jews for Elster if he doesn't get all of the ergot."*

"What Jews? There are no Jews—"

"One just left."

"How—"

"I know things. It's my job to know what's going on in Wittenberg. The professor and his daughter and even her infant would surely be stripped naked, beaten and hanged by mobs. Hanged on the Judensau wall. Wouldn't be the first time. Horatio too if he tried to protect them."

The letter arrived at their house in Copenhagen addressed to Telemann:

Dear A & M,

G in W says G in L is in trouble. He says you must come at once.

Love,

L

Margarethe read the note dozens of times searching for a hidden meaning. Albrun read the envelope once and explained the message.

"This is Lena's hand. She thinks your brother is in trouble but she doesn't trust Gottlieb."

"Explain," Margarethe asked.

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"Look at the return address: 41 4 Castle Road, Wittenberg. My mother's house is 412 Castle Road."

"A mistake?" Margarethe offered.

"Look at the fours."

Margarethe smiled, *"Well I'll..."*, she turned to Albrun, *"I always liked her."*

22 Gottlieb

"It came to her in a dream," Altmann said in a deadly tone, "since you asked." He walked around the heavy wooden table Gottlieb was strapped tightly to. The leather harnesses dug into his sweaty skin. "Now, whether it was a waking dream or a sleeping dream, that is, ergot-induced or not, I really cannot say. Nor, possibly, could she."

"You are both insane," Gottlieb yelled.

"And you are entirely at our mercy."

"What do you want?"

"Truth."

"About what?" Gottlieb asked, raising his head, straining his neck to maintain sight of Altmann circling slowly his prone body.

"Everything. Starting with Elster. Whose idea was Elster? Yours or the late duke's?"

"The duke thought it was a good idea. Test the ergot, see if it could render the villagers... unable to fight."

"So, it was your idea?"

"Yes," Gottlieb admitted. "But not to kill them. That was an accident. I told you."

"So, we killed the wrong man. We should have killed you," Altmann replied.

"Look in the mirror. You might not have known but you suspected—"

"Yes, I feared, yes. But you—"

"An accident," Gottlieb forcefully reiterated.

"I don't believe you. But you might be telling the truth. How do we know? So, here is the thing: I will give you a quarter grain of ergot and ask you again on the other side. Agreed?"

"No!"

"You have no choice. Today or tomorrow, you will be hungry and thirsty."

"They will find me," Gottlieb threatened.

"Who?!"

"The duke's men. My men. When they discover me missing, they will search for me."

"Where will they search?" Albrun asked.

"Everywhere!"

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"Everywhere?! On the moon? Under the sea?"

"You are insane!"

"Where?!" Albrun roared.

"Everywhere in the dukedom. Everywhere in Germany, if they have to for God's sake!"

"Then they will never find you, alive or dead," Albrun pronounced.

"Are you reading from the bitch's script?" Gottlieb yelled.

"I'm following the general contours, with some improvisations," Altmann admitted. *"And so are you,"* he added with satisfaction. *"Do you want to know how this ends?"*

"Where are the lamps?" Margarethe shouted from outside the room.

"Ask the Jewess," Gottlieb shouted back.

"I don't like him here," Margarethe said.

"It was your idea. Why?"

"I want to kill him. It's too tempting to have him down in the cellar. At any moment I could just walk down the steps and slit his throat with my bodkin..."

"No, you won't. Not if our brother is alive."

"Ask the Jewess about the lamps? Inez Ramos?"

"Horatio's wife. They live in Faxe, a day's ride from here," Telemann observed.

"Why would she know..."

"Why ergot? If you wanted to kill a whole village you could poison the well with arsenic. It's been done. What makes ergot special is the possibility of rendering an entire village incapacitated, not dead," Albrun began again a few hours later. *"Why did you kill them? Are you incompetent or are you evil?"*

"I've told you. It was a mistake. They lost the packet of grains and dumped the whole jar down the well instead," Gottlieb swore, eyes bulging, his prone body against his bonds.

"Who exactly lost the packet?"

"I don't know. Whoever the captain gave it to, I suppose."

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"Who was the captain?"

"I don't know."

"Who did you give the jar of ergot to? What is his name?"

"I- I can't remember."

"You took a jar of ergot from my office and you forgot who you gave it to?" Albrun shook his head. *"Gottlieb, that is ridiculous. You've had months to make up a good story..."*

"It's true— "

"And this is what you have: I forgot?"

"It's true."

"Gottlieb, you are many things but not an idiot. We are done. After you take the ergot, we will begin again."

"No! Wait."

"What?"

"I have to... urinate. Defecate."

"Do it in your clothes. Sleep in your filth."

"Altmann—why are you doing this? I saved your life."

"Gottlieb, I think you are the most evil—"

"No! I saved you!"

"Who did you give the ergot to? A soldier? A colleague in the mayor's office, someone at court?"

"I- I- don't remember..."

"Sleep might jog your memory. Ergot will surely change your mind."

In the morning Altmann was surprised that Gottlieb hadn't soiled himself. *"You must be thirsty?"* he asked.

"Here it is: I will trade you Guildenstern's life for my own. It is in my power."

"Where is he?"

"I won't tell you that. But if you let me write a letter to the duke, I can arrange a meeting where we can trade Guildenstern for me. Agreed?"

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"Perhaps. But you are going to take the ergot and I am going to get the truth about Elster."

"Is Elster more important than Guildenstern? To you or to her?"

"To both of us," Margarethe called from outside the room.

"I don't believe you!" Gottlieb shouted back at her, spittle spraying from his dry gray lips.

Altmann brought him a chamber pot, paper, pen and ink. Freeing Gottlieb's left arm, he exited the room, locking the door from the outside. *"You can untie yourself now and use the pot. Write your letter to the duke. We will of course read it closely. Shout when you are done and ready for your food and water and ergot."*

"I won't take the ergot. I will starve first. If I die you won't learn anything about Elster and Guildenstern will die. Your brother will die, Margarethe—another dead brother!" he shouted at the door.

"Then I will render you unconscious and force the ergot down your throat. Gottlieb: you will take the ergot that much is certain," Altmann contended.

"Is this all still going according to her plan?" Gottlieb exclaimed.

"Yes, we are still following the general contours—"

"With some modifications," Margarethe, her back against the locked door acknowledged with a whisper and a nod.

"I can imagine trading Guildenstern for Gottlieb, of course, although the exact manner of transfer is not yet clear to me, and I can imagine not trading which would result in both their... but what I can't glean yet is how to get Guildenstern back while ensuring Gottlieb dies. Preferably painfully and with his understanding that we killed him. That's what I am working on now," Margarethe pondered in a hushed voice at the kitchen table peeling potatoes.

"This may not be a spatial but a temporal problem," Albrun suggested.

"Neatly put; I concur. Slow poison? An assassin waiting in Wittenberg—perhaps a woman with red hair? An important consideration: what danger is there for our troupe inside and beyond Germany? An incriminating forged letter conveniently discovered by an agent of the duke? We have a sample of Gottlieb's script. A hot death by slow drowning in hell?"

"We might be able to produce a snake. Even for effect," Altmann suggested.

Together they carefully read Gottlieb's letter to the duke over and over. *"You said you hid a message in our book. What was it?"* Altmann asked.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Not telling. You and Lena have to find it yourselves. I will give you a hint: it will take both of you together to find it. You said Marburg found the snake at the spa. Where?"

"He didn't tell us. At least not me."

"You said Marburg stopped drinking alcohol. What was in his cup at the tavern in Wittenberg after the lecture?"

"Tea? Water?" Altmann guessed.

"Alright. This is what we must reckon with: One, Gottlieb may have told the duke or one of his men about you and your associates which seems likely; two, he may have written it down and left it in a manner to be revealed at his death or incapacitation which seems less likely; three, he may communicate this information immediately upon his release which seems most likely. We have to make sure that the duke either doesn't hear of, or doesn't blame us, or is in fact grateful to us for Gottlieb's death."

"How could he not hear—?"

"I don't know... Gottlieb is released and he is last seen standing on board a ship bound for China. I don't know... yet. We have time to figure this out."

"I'm worried about the way the ergot is affecting your mind," Altmann said.

"Why?" Margarethe replied.

"The answer to Gottlieb's demise is right under your nose. It's been there this whole time."

"Explain..."

"Maybe you should stop—"

Margarethe looked around the room.

"I already hid your pencils!" he admitted.

Laughing, Margarethe replied: *"Alright, genius. Enlighten me."*

"Horatio is the answer!"

"Explain?" she asked with a quizzical smile.

"You read my notes of Horatio's interview. 'Hoisted by his own petard'."

It was a warm day; they rode with the carriage windows open. Albrun and Margarethe sat on one seat, Gottlieb, his hands shackled in his lap, sat facing them on the other.

"Did I tell you anything interesting?" Gottlieb asked with a wry smile. They remained silent. "Did you learn anything new?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

After an hour Gottlieb was sweating. *"Please, I need to know. Did I tell you anything? Did the ergot—"*

When they were a couple hours on the road Gottlieb said, *"Only I can save you. I can save your family, Margarethe. I can save Ramos and Inez, Horatio and their baby. Please understand this is not an idle threat..."*

When they arrived at Roskilde fjord they walked together to the rope bridge. They waited in silence for movement on the other side.

"You will regret this, you two, even if I won't be here to see it, I'll have my revenge. If you want to save the Jewess and her family, if you want to keep the members of your troupe alive, if you want to save the lives of everyone at the Gård this is your last chance," Gottlieb promised, his head vigorously shaking approval. *"The children, think of the poor, dead children,"* he gasped, tears running down his face.

The guards brought Guildenstern into view. Margarethe waved. Altmann removed a letter from his shirt.

"Gottlieb, listen: This is a sealed letter for the duke. The captain on the other side is waiting for this letter. Do not open it. Go now and may God grant you your just reward."

Gottlieb took the letter in his shackled hands and started with shaky legs to cross the bridge. He turned and called back, *"Remember. Think of me when they all die."* Guildenstern approached from the other side. When the two met near the middle of the bridge Gottlieb stared at Guildenstern who passed him with his head turned away, toward the rock cliff.

Stepping onto the wooden landing Margarethe and Altmann rushed to embrace him. On the far side of the long rope bridge, yards before its end, Gottlieb stopped walking. Waiting he faced the captain and his men. He didn't recognize the captain's face. He opened the letter: the paper inside was blank. Gottlieb turned the blank page over and over in a panic. He watched the note sail off the bridge. Turning, he raced from the guards who fired a volley of shots, striking his back, neck and head. Face down on the wooden planks, one cheek pressed into a rusty nail, his blood dripped between the boards into the air below, falling in droplets, red rain dropped down, far down into the river.

Inez and Ella were late to market. When they arrived at the bookstore another woman was working.

"Frau Lena? She has a private reading now. She won't be back in the shop until tomorrow morning."

"What is that?" Inez asked.

"She reads books in private."

"But with someone else?"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Telemann arrived in Wittenberg mid-October, one night before Horatio's university graduation feast. Neither Telemann nor Altmann had been invited but he wanted to meet Horatio's family.

"Why?" Lena asked.

Telemann shrugged. *"To come from the shadows."*

"You love the shadows," she reminded him.

"Not as much anymore," he squinted.

"It's an insane risk. What will you gain? Everyone at university saw Altmann."

"Most people saw Margarethe, not me. Besides, Telemann can adopt a limp."

Dressed in Altmann's cap and gown, his head lowered, Telemann entered the dining hall half full of students and faculty surrounding Horatio's family: his wife, infant daughter, father-in-law and their German Shepard. He noted that the dog blocked the path of people approaching Inez holding their daughter in her arms. Telemann made his way to an empty chair at the long dining table and engaged students in conversation, while keeping Horatio's family in view. He furtively watched as first Horatio, then Inez and finally her father Jorge Ramos became aware of him.

Professor Ramos brought his chair up to Telemann, interrupting his conversation.

"Excuse me. You are Altmann?" Ramos inquired.

Telemann stood, raised his steaming glasses above his eyes and blinked.

"Welcome! Do you know why we are celebrating?" Ramos asked, looking down at the young man.

"Yes."

"Do you know my son-in-law...?"

"Yes."

"So, you've met!"

"Yes."

"How did you meet? Here at university?"

"In my official capacity."

"Official?" Ramos inquired. *"Do you work for the duke?"*

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"As do we all," Telemann barely smiled. "In truth I am a man who wears two hats: a professor and an agent of the crown. Tonight, I am the former, as you can see. May I ask you a question?"

Jorge nodded.

"About your history."

"Do you mean my history of Iberia?" the professor asked smiling broadly.

"Magisterial. Inventive. Courageous. With a highly-provocative preface. But, no I am referring to your personal history."

Jorge's smile faded. Telemann watched him glance towards Inez and Horatio. The dog made a long whining sound.

"Your father's family is from Lisbon, from all the way back to the siege," Telemann continued.

"Further," Jorge replied.

"But your mother—"

"She too was born in Lisbon. Have you been?"

"Where was her mother from?"

Uneasily Ramos admitted, *"She was born in... Russia."*

"Intriguing," Telemann coolly spoke.

Inez, with their daughter in her arms approached her father and Altmann. Their dog nervously circled around them.

"What a joy it is to meet you and your lovely child at last," Telemann declared.

'Unctuous' Inez thought glowered at Altmann, furtively glancing at her father who shockingly looked defeated. *"I believe you are Herr Altmann?"*

He made a small bow and reached to kiss Inez's hand but the dog maneuvered between them and uttered a barely audible growl. Telemann instantly withdrew his hand.

"Congratulations to you both."

Inez nodded. *"I believe you know my husband."*

"I just told your father... yes."

Inez looked toward Jorge who continued to avoid her glance.

"I also know Frau Lena the bookshop owner," Telemann added leaning back.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Inez's jaw dropped. The dog brushing her leg allowing her to look down long enough to regain her composure. Professor Ramos, now completely deflated, sank slowly into his chair. Telemann waited in silence.

"H- How do you know her?" Inez finally asked.

"We've known each other for years. I recently ordered a copy of your father's book from her."

"I believe there are two copies on her shelf," Inez contradicted him.

"Are there? Portuguese first editions?"

"N- No. Do you know... Portuguese?" she weakly asked.

"The original Portuguese edition is unique isn't that right Professor?"

"Is it? I don't recall." The dog made a plaintive sound.

"On the last page there is a Latin quote. Do you remember it now?"

Jorge slouched in his chair looked up at Telemann. *"Yes. It reads: 'Anticipate charity by preventing poverty.'"*

"An admonition. Yes? A rebuke of the Iberian church and crown?"

"Not just Iberian," Jorge quietly conceded.

"I see. A general, a universal reproach? Who did you quote? — the line is unattributed."

Jorge stood and touched his granddaughter's cheek as she slept in his daughter's arms. She was a strange and lovely child with her dark skin and a light down of his blonde hair. *"Do you know?"* he whispered still looking at the child.

"I believe it was from the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides," Telemann whispered back.

Jorge let out a long exhalation. Inez put one arm on her father's shoulder as Horatio joined them.

"The man of the hour!" Telemann exclaimed.

"You mean the liar and fool?" Horatio retorted.

"Not at all. Quite the contrary in my actual opinion. I was telling your father-in-law that I am a man who is not always allowed to control his own actions; I am, to put it crudely, sometimes something of a puppet. I am sometimes like an actor whose primary audience is the director. You see, when we met at the courthouse I was acting as an agent of the crown, following strict instructions. My role today is that of a professor, and as such I have greater latitude."

"I thought you arrogant and offensive," Horatio stated.

"And ineffective." Inez added.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Telemann smiled. *"I played my role perfectly, then!"* He held out his hand to Jorge and spoke lowly, *"Forgive me. You have nothing to fear from me."* They shook hands looking into each other's eyes.

"The report you gave the Norwegian king makes for compelling reading. I have heard it is extraordinary in both style and substance. I will be sending you a ream of Herr Zimmerman's finest parchment as a graduation present. If you would commit your story to paper, I can promise you at least one avid reader. Will you write it?"

"Yes," Horatio replied looking at Inez. *"I promise one day I will."*

Telemann now looked at Horatio and Inez and spoke in a voice so low that they both leaned in to hear. *"I have a secret that is important to your family-"* he glanced at the four of them, including their dog and continued, *"I will tell it to you now. Then I will ask you a question Horatio. You are free to not answer of course. And I know you will not lie."*

After a short deep silence Telemann said in a whisper, *"The guards still see King Hamlet."*

Horatio stared blankly into space. Inez asked, *"When? Where?"*

"No. Now I ask you the question," Telemann whispered in a creaky voice. *"Although I think you've just answered it. You still see him too, yes?"*

Horatio looked at Inez and answered, *"Yes."*

"Good. We will talk about this later, I hope. I also want to discuss a case that you might find interesting-"

"We are moving to Denmark very soon," Horatio interrupted.

Telemann bowed discreetly before drifting away. But when the party ended the dog growled when Telemann returned. He smiled as he approached Inez as close as the dog allowed. *"Did you come to feel that you were tilting at windmills in your search for the note's author? I will tell you who the author is if you answer just one question."*

Inez held her daughter to her breasts and nodded mutely.

Smiling at the dog he asked, *"What were you doing to your dog and to your man under the table in the tavern?"*

Telemann saw Inez's cheeks blush deeply.

"What a memorable reply!" Telemann exclaimed staring for a long time, memorizing her flushed face knowing he would draw it. As she turned to leave, he concluded, *"Inez. Do you know I wrote the note?"*

The next time that Inez and Lena met it was raining. Inez and Ella went to market without the infant.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Do you know my father, Professor Ramos?"

"Of course, he is a well-known scholar. We have sold many copies of his Political History of Iberia."

"How long have you known that I am his daughter?"

"I... I assumed. There are not many people in Wittenberg who look like the two of you."

"Look?"

"Dark."

"Do you know him personally?"

"How do you mean?" Lena asked.

"Have you met him? Does he buy books here?" Before she could stop herself, Inez added, *"Do you give him 'private readings?'"*

"I don't know what you have heard. I think you should go now."

"I thought I would buy a copy of his book today."

"I'm sorry, we are sold out."

"That's strange. Disappointing."

They stared into each other's eyes. Inez thought she detected distain and she hoped Lena saw disappointment. Finally, Lena broke the silence. *"You might be able to find a copy at the new bookshop on Judenstrasse."*

23 Penance

"It's the same thing, Max. You have proposed—"

"No. Once I am divorced and we are married, then we can make love and lots of babies."

"But God knows what's in your heart," Eva tried to persuade.

"I think she does," Max agreed. He wrapped his arms around her and hoisted her in the air, spinning her, making her dizzy, making her shriek with delight.

"We saved her life and her family. She'll never know," Telemann told Lena. He sat drawing Inez's face full-size, ink on paper. *"She will live a long life, see her children marry and have children. Because of us."*

"All the mothers and babies we saved and will save," Lena reminded him.

"That was you. This one," he gazed at Inez's striking dark face, *"This one is me."*

"It was your curiosity that nearly ruined them."

"I know that. That's why saving them is important. Restores the balance."

"Absolution. Drawing Inez—"

"Penance. She is my last, I think." Telemann set the pen down, spinning in his seat towards Lena. He ran his hands through his hair and laughed sadly. *"Yesterday I tried to brush a gnat away but it was a wisp floating in my eye. I see it now whenever the light is bright and there is no motion. I had eye strain for several days. Now I feel dizzy when I stand quickly. My focus takes effort, even with these new glasses. I can't focus like before. I just guess now."*

"Ergot poisoning?"

"I don't think so. No. It was reading and writing in hell. That took a toll on my eyes. But I don't regret anything."

"You see less clearly with your eyes now. But before you only saw an approximation and now you see more of approximation. Yes? Just like all of us in time," Lena consoled. *"The world dimmed your sight but ergot has opened your mind. What about your heart? Where is your heart?"*

Telemann closed his eyes and seemed to drift away again to the other world, overwinter, home.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Lena knelt cradling his head on her bosom. *"Stop for a while. Close your eyes and rest,"* Lena advised. *"For a whole day, two days, I'll put a bandage over your eyes and we will lie in bed and I will read to you and we will make love. Like we used to. Doesn't that sound nice?"* she purred.

"I am afraid to. I think one time I will open them and there will be only smears of light, like the walls in hell. Then no light at all."

"I am so sorry...," Lena hugged him.

"It's penance. Its justice. I didn't mean to kill the girl in Bad Duben, or destroy Elster, but we did mean to kill the duke-- the wrong man. It's balance. I think it's fair. More than fair."

"Gottlieb wasn't the new duke's man, was he?" she asked.

"No. I think this duke was Gottlieb's creature from the start. Gottlieb created him."

"With our help. Because we were stupid," Lena acknowledged.

"Greedy. Not for money but to prove our worth," he said.

"To save lives!" she swore.

"That too."

Oscar woke before dawn, ate a small breakfast and walked through the male and female wards, tending the oozing fingers and toes, washing and dressing wounds, quenching pain until it was nearly dark. Then he went back to his dirty torn mattress with stripes. Every day he did this Sundays too. He lost track of the days. Only the yellow sun and the purple wounds and the black ergot grains counted. Counted grains counted; they counted the most.

Visiting for the first time with the requested jars of ergot Marburg cried, *"Oh my God, dear Oscar, what has become of you?"* Marburg wept. *"Oscar? Helmut's death was never your fault. Helmut loved you."*

Oscar looked through Marburg as he passed to the next bedridden soul. Marburg confronted the director. *"Look at him. He's a ghost. Why don't you help him?"*

"I tried. I told him he must take a day away. At least take one day a week for himself. I even told him to take the horse cart to visit your spa. To soak in your baths. Eat a grand meal. Sleep in a soft bed. He ignores me. He hasn't said more than three sentences since he arrived. I think he wants to die here. Soon. He eats less than a rabbit. What can we do?"

"Maybe if I bring him a woman?"

"Try that. Try anything. Knock him over the head and carry him to your spa. He is surely going to die. I think he wants to die, I really do," the director repeated hopelessly. *"He has seen so much misery. It has extinguished his soul. There is no one to replace him when he is ..."*

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"I will find a... doctor... hell, I will work here. Yes, I will. I promise I will treat your patients. For Oscar. And for Helmut, God bless their souls."

"That would be a blessing."

24 Mail

They performed two daily routines except for Sundays when there was no mail and Wednesdays when Telemann voyaged. They gathered in the dining room around the great horizontal tree slab after the Taxis mail agent's noon delivery and again after dinner by the fireplace in the study to drink and tell stories. *"Facts in sunshine, fiction by firelight,"* Lena quipped. Knowingly Telemann, Margarethe and Max grinned.

Telemann looked ashen and tired— the color drained from his cheeks; being the recipient of his vitality Lena was in full flower; Margarethe and Guildenstern now were spitting-images of each other; and irregularly they were joined by Max, tall and tanned. Lena always got the most mail-- announcements, inquiries, requests for her broadsheet, requests for ergot, for money and guidance from new midwife guilds as far away as Budapest and Lisbon. Running her fingers over the exotic stamps her face was radiant. *"We did it, Faustus, we really did!"* she fawned, pressing her hand to his heart, kissing his pale cheeks. *"I love you Albrun Winkelmann. God knows we did the right thing. There are babies in... Dresden ... Poland... Austria...Holland sucking on their momma's breasts tonight who would have never been born but for the magic we made in hell!"*

Guildenstern sold the books and the ergot and he kept the accounts; he reported the increasing requests for Altmann's lectures as word of the late professor's performances rippled faster and further than the news of his strange and untimely fall. Then Margarethe would swoon, *"Why did he have to go out on the ice, alone, in a storm? Oh, dear God, why did you take him so soon?!"* each time prompting Guildenstern to wag his finger to say, *'You are tempting fate little sister.'*

It took Max four months to end his marriage and settle accounts. *The Gård* was two days north of the mail so Max sat without ever receiving a letter. Margarethe decided to write him from cities a few days away and from as far flung as the mail system's outermost edges. She addressed parcels to MAYOR spelled in the language of the destination cities. Inside each was a sealed envelope addressed in Danish to Genius #2, a note of instruction in the unknown correspondent's presumed tongue, a silver coin and a walnut. She also commandeered an irregular communication with a strange bird in Bristol, across the English Channel, far beyond the Taxis mail service. He was a ridiculous liar who wrote in broken English, sometimes in childish verses. Margarethe loved toying with him, forcing him to invent ever-more outrageous lies, but in his most recent letter, which suspiciously arrived too quickly to have been sent from the hinterlands, he wrote two things that made Margarethe suddenly wonder which of them was the mouse. He wrote *"1 Can, Knot, Fiddle,"* the first line of a bizarre list of random items presented without explanation. She began her search for a hidden message.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Then Marburg's letter arrived.

My Dear Friends,

Sad news.

I am sworn by my oath to keep the duke's secrets. Bad Duben is at war. If you receive this letter, it is only because Hercules and I made it safely to Wittenberg to post it before Wittenberg is attacked. It's a war between the duke and his cousin Albrecht from the south. The new duke is destroying all his enemies, one after another. Here is a pogrom without Jews. Christians are being accused of being secret Jews and of poisoning wells. Half the people say Gottlieb was killed by Jews and the other half say he *was* a Jew. They all say Gottlieb killed the late duke, and that there is proof. The ferry at Elster is reported damaged. Rosenthal is rumored dead in Leipzig. There have been skirmishes in the woods surrounding the spa. The road is unsafe. There are wolves in the street at night. The church and the spa are occupied by the Albrecht's men and all the guests and staff have fled for safety. Nurse intends to stay, she is hard-working and brave, I fear for her life, she is a blessed soul. Werner will stay to help her and promises to make their escape before it's too late. Klemperer the blacksmith was killed and his horses were stolen. Women and girls were raped. Buildings are burned. I can smell crops burning as I write. Food is hoarded; no food can be found. New taxes are levied. Men and boys are being pressed into service. I was seconded as surgeon to regiment headquarters and I drafted Hercules so at least the old girl won't starve. Clinic is desperate; we will go there next with scraps left from the larder and medicine. Where are the lamps? I could use a drink. I beg for your prayers. Until we meet again, if God allows it.

With all my love,

Marburg

PS Simone I have loved you only. Albrun try to protect Simone and yourself. I am so proud of you, my only son.

Even Lena sat stunned. Margrethe hurriedly scratched a list: Elbe, lamps, Gottlieb, ergot, money, diploma. Telemann looked sad. Guildenstern tilted his head. Max said, *"Poor bastard. I hope it's a short war."*

Margarethe looked at Telemann's shut eyes. *"Are you with us, brother?"*

"Elbe," he said clearly.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"That's right. Give him a nut. Next?"

"Wait--" Lena spoke.

"Ella," he replied.

"Where are the lamps?" Guildenstern asked.

They all looked at each other. *"No one knows, right?"* Margarethe said. *"Gottlieb told us to ask the Jewess. In--"* she stopped speaking. She picked up her pencil and wrote at the bottom of her list *"Jews."*

"He would have taken all of the ergot, surely?" Guildenstern asked Lena.

"Yes. He would have left only the quarter- grains for nurse. The jars from the spa he will hide at Löbnitz with the rest. That's where Oscar went. Oscar knows--"

"No, he doesn't," Margarethe interjected. *"If Gottlieb took the lamps he wouldn't have told --"*

"The Elbe separates the duke and his cousin's main forces," Max spoke slowly over her. *"If the ferries are destroyed there could be months of small raids across the river to destroy crops. No harvest means... starvation--"*

"For years," Telemann corrected him. There was silence until he added, *"No rye; no more ergot; no new ergot victims."*

"Some choice! Starvation!" Max grunted and Guildenstern shuttered.

"The midwives get some of our money. What should we do with the rest?" Margarethe asked.

"Buy food for the clinic," Max said. *"But getting it to them..."*

"Bring carts to the clinic with food and supplies. Rescue Marburg and Ella and the ergot," Lena hoped.

"Hercules," Telemann added.

"I will go," Max declared, thinking of Eva.

"So will I," Margarethe affirmed.

"You will not!" Max thundered. *"Not you and not Lena. Not to war. That is final!"* the palm of his hand slammed the table once, reverberating into their ears their first echo of battle.

END PART ONE.

PART TWO.

25 War

Grey. Grey wet. Shiny. Mica? Flecks dots grains. He squinted his eyes closed tight. Then opened wide. His head throbbed. Shut. Open. Distant sounds. Shouting. Then the world rushed in like water into a shipwreck carrying the smell of death gunpowder smoke.

Grey. Grey and soft. A piece of cloth. A shirt sleeve. A—

Morning? Wet. Rain?

Remembering. He was alive. He dismounted and walked ahead taking the right path whistling softly but smartly, watching her from the corner of his eye. She hesitated. Every instinct told her to go left like every time before. But she followed him right. Good girl, Hercules. Was that today? Where is she? When did she eat? Remembering. Is. Living.

Line. Lines. Wider. Flat. Round. Ish. Plump. Wet soft and grey. Flecks shine slime, mica sprinkle salt sand muscle bone. Metacarpal. Hand. Part. Not me. Hand. Grey. Mess. Bugle. Shouting. *“Re-treat!”* Second- treat? Where are you girl?

Hand. Not me. Shouting. A volley of musket fire. A woman. Scream. Shriek. Someone walking right over. A soldier?

“Where I am,” Marburg said lying on the ground.

“Where you fell,” an old soldier croaked, gesturing toward the setting sun.

“Horse. Cart?”

Another soldier joined the first, squatting before the fire, roasting their meat.

“My. Horse?”

The first soldier shrugged. *“One horse is as good as another,”* he croaked.

“Cart?”

“Down the ravine maybe. Or in the mud.”

“Who fight. For?” Marburg asked, struggling to sit up.

“What day is it?” the second soldier clowned.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Today," Marburg answered.

"Who do you fight for?" the first soldier asked turning the makeshift spit.

They shared the horse meat. He tasted blood. When he drank water, he tasted blood. The soldiers fell asleep. Marburg shifted painfully to sit upright leaning against something hard and stared at them sleeping, his head buzzing, his body wet, his thoughts of smothering between Lena's breasts.

Just before dawn Marburg stood on shaky legs stumbling slowly through bodies. Men and women. Horses. Broken carts. Burning huts. Grey soldiers staggering forming two lines. Rations. Sex. *'I'm officer,'* silently he protested. Wander. Yonder. Forest. West. Löbnitz. Distant clearing. Soldiers shoot standing man. Aimed at rabbit too weak to pull. Let pistol slip. Tore jacket shirt. Wound. Chest. *"Fatal,"* he affirmed.

Warm. Horsetail patch. Shade. Sit. Alone. Die. Now. *"Lena,"* he called to the horsetails.

Under the same dappled sunshine, sitting on a striped cotton blanket under an aspen, she sat writing and minding Telemann while he voyaged— their Wednesday ritual in good weather on the grounds of the Guildenstern estate. She was startled when he snapped to attention.

"Marburg is in overwinter; he calls your name," he told Lena lovingly.

"No! You can't be certain — Albrun... No!"

The ergot clinic at Löbnitz formerly was Benedictine. A Spanish priest founded the monastery in the fourteenth century. The three battered grey and yellow stone buildings maintained a secret after Luther the clinic director knew and so did his cat. In the former rectory a hidden door at the back of a clothes closet opened to reveal a shrine. A lovely marble statue of the virgin mother holding the infant Jesus stood, inscribed with the words *Maryen la divina*. When he had the need, the director asked a young girl, a patient or a relative of a patient to make a small crown of forget-me-nots that he placed atop Maryen's head. Stepping back looking at her glowing angelic face he gratefully cried. His cat liked to curl up around her feet and feel the cool marble of Maryen's flowing robes.

"Max—"

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Quiet Margarethe. I've had enough. More than enough. And stop wasting money on your letters. It's... offensive now that we're preparing for war. I'm ashamed of you."

"You- are... right. Alright. I- I have stopped."

"Good."

"Max..."

"Yes..."

"Will you listen?"

"What?"

"A plan—"

"Margarethe do you know how your voyages have changed you?"

"How?"

"You are haughty now."

"I was always haughty," she grinned with downcast eyes, making him melt. Hugging she asked him earnestly, *"How have voyages changed you, Max?"*

"I'm not afraid."

She squeezed him as hard as she could.

"You were always arrogant. Now you are haughty," he insisted.

"You are right, Max. You are always right," she squeezed him tight.

Oscar begins to heal when he goes to the shrine to retrieve a jar of ergot for the clinic. voyages in the shrine with Maryan and the cat.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Lena said, *"Killing Gottlieb might cause a thousand deaths."* Telemann wondered how much Gottlieb was worth.

Lena sold the bookshop in Wittenberg and moved with Albrun to Guildenstern's home in Copenhagen.

Lena hires Horatio.

Guildenstern corresponds with Cormorant in Dublin. Had a mail address in Dublin and a pub. His correspondences were always months late suggesting that he was traveling continuously as a scribe. Guildenstern road to him in months later got a reply to his query about what Guildenstern should do to promote the Midwives Guild Cormorant said he should pan a letter to the Copenhagen newspaper and indicating his support and encouraging other doctors in Norway to do the same.

"You cannot bring your money or your ergot to The Gard—"

"You brought ergot—"

"I will break your bone if I have to, to stop you, any of you, the womenfolk too!"

26 The Battle of Löbnitz

The Rucksack War:

"That never happened."

The stench of rotting flesh from the south blows across the river, settling on the city like snow it clings to it like bad repute. Some days Wittenberg seemed almost normal, but then the wind shifted. Grippled in a siege of stench the residents were forced to wear masks in many colors indoors and out, even for Sunday services and at school. It was a plague they called it, sent by Jewish ghosts.

The day of the first catapult Ella left. Walking to the bookstore she found relief from the stench so she stayed. All day she flipped through a large Turkish book full of pictures. Sitting on the floor between stacks of books she recited aloud a story of her own invention. Each day she flipped through the book a different way telling the story differently. That was the best part.

"If you drew a pencil- thin moustache, you'd look just like our sister," Telemann said. Or Altmann? Stealthily walking they carried rucksacks of rye flour on their backs. A quarter moon threw shadows at the dirt road. *"Are there Jews in overwinter?"* Guildenstern whispered. *"Stop, quiet. I heard something move,"* Max whispered. Ducking under fir branches they crouched in darkness. *"What is Sun of Night?"* Guildenstern whispered. Max stared at him with a sinister expression. They were still for a long, long while. Telleman whispered, *"We are near the clinic now."* The ground trembled; they all felt it.

The director's cat jumped straight in the air from a sound sleep. She sunk her front claws into the floor and stretched the muscles in her back. Silently she padded to his bed. From the floor she leapt landing right between his legs, curling into a ball.

In the morning, the director told Oscar about the shrine. *"I need to rest. You will have to get the ergot."* Oscar opened the bedroom door in the old rectory. The wallpaper was faded and torn; many pictures of Jesus were pinned. He walked right up to each picture. Every one was the same. Oscar pushed and the hidden door slipped open easily. The divine Mary stood in front of the wooden crates of ergot jars. Oscar knelt close to Mary's face. Looking at her smooth face, her flawless beauty he retrieved an ergot jar.

After he closed the door, the cat howled from inside. Oscar paused feeling lightheaded when he slid the door back open.

Max pushed through the underbrush. *"It's a horse. Skinny. Scabby too."*

Oscar sat down before Mary and Jesus. His face relaxed and his heart slowed.

Telleman heard her whinny, low and husky.

Oscar prayed for forgiveness.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

"Hercules?"

He pulled his vial from around his neck.

Trudging through the forest before her, the men carried their rucksacks of rye and her livery. Hercules followed without a lead, a light blanket on her back covering her sores. When they stopped to hide, she stood stock still, her head bent chewing grass or weeds.

Branches rustled in a light breeze. Max thought he heard water. He signaled for them to duck behind trees. It was too dark to move safely. Underfoot was mossy. Max squatted and drew up a hand of pine needles. Holding it to his nose he breathed in, then more deeply. He saw something move.

Still squatting Max swiveled indicating to them they should stay. Then he began to slowly crawl forward, feeling the ground before him, unable to see. There was terror in his soul but not fear. He saw something flashed by a stray beam of moon. A man. Has to be a soldier's sword.

Uncertainty reigned whether the duke destroyed the ferry at Wittenberg and Albrecht the one at Elster or if was it the other way- round. Certainly, it was the Jews people thought.

Margarethe thought about the Jews incessantly, the second key to the riddle. It was war so she and Lena slept together every night. Lena had said, *"You were my first, too."* Caressing Margarethe's lean buttocks she suddenly thought of Horatio.

Telemann sat on the same chair and stared at the same strip of yellow peeling paint. It didn't look like the curve of Lena's tenderness.

"God is overwinter. Overwinter is God" Oscar told Telemann.

"Helmut loves you," he replied.

Guildenstern, Max and Telemann at the ferry at Rostock. People sleeping on the beach, all the inn rooms and stables were full of people leaving war.

TELEMANN (Third Draft)

Max meets Helen's cousin at the ferry, he says the ferry at Elster is destroyed, he came from Coswig. Wittenberg has a curfew at dusk. Carriages are heading north, none returning south of the Elbe.

They sleep on beach.

They brought flour to the clinic. Find the ergot in the hidden shrine. Find Hercules. Telemann gets color back away from Lena and close to Oscar.

27 The Battle of Bad Duben

The Class War: fighting in heaven, purgatory and hell.

28 The Battle of Wittenberg

The Catapult War: (Ella defends the bookstore.)

29 Norway

LENA HIRES HORATIO AND GOES TO FORTINBRAS' COURT. (why?)

Margarethe and Cormorant?

The Gard.

Telemann Goes to Norway (Denmark) to be with Bernardo and Marcellus. He uses ergot continuously.

Meets Felix and Astrid

Goes to court? Learns who his father was.

Albrun's father was Danish, a Knight of the Order of the Elephant. The Order of the Elephant (Danish: Elefantordenen) is Denmark's highest-ranked chivalric order. It is awarded primarily to Danish and foreign nobility, as well as foreign heads of state, particularly during state visits. However, it's also been bestowed upon Danish and foreign commoners who have made themselves particularly deserving of the honor.

IS ROSENTHAL A GOOD GUY?

THE CORMORANT IS FORTINBRAS' MAN.

SIMONE AND FORTINBRAS.

HELMUT ACCIDENTALLY BREAKS A VINE-CONNECTION TO ANOTHER PLANT AND RECREATES A DIFFERENT ONE TO REPLACE IT.

30 King Hamlet

The Ghost annual celebration at *The Gård* / Telemann uses ergot / Meets the ghost / Regains his sight /
Becomes a Dane

He draws Inez's blushing face from memory.

But it is actually quite difficult to say whether a lasting change in mood or outlook was a result of the drug—a biochemical effect—or the trip itself, the experiential effect.

They say things like “that was more real than real.”

Re-create the [prelapsarian](#) experience w/o the drug.

Nightmares are to dreams what weeds are to gardens.

**THE GHOST WARNS THEM OF GOTTLIEB'S IMMANENT
ATTACK, GIVES ALBRUN HIS SIGHT BACK.**

Quantum entanglement

They relied on these symbols not only for writing but also to tell fortunes, cast spells, and provide protection. Early Germanic tribes of northern Europe were first to develop runes, but the Scandinavians soon adopted the symbols for their own use.

**It's what you don't know about me that counts he wants to say to
Simone. Simone was used to these obscurities and she always**

had an appropriate retort. Sometimes she would say Winkelmann hears and feels a tapping in his left ear it's like in a pattern it's almost like a language he tries to figure what it might mean. It proceeds the auditory and visual hallucinations.

Winkelmann is the agent that brings ergot to the ghost and frees him.
(Winkelmann is an honorary Dane.)

NOTES:

- ~~1. Born a bastard to simple-minded cleaning woman at the spa who lost her toes and mind to ergot~~
- ~~2. Albrun is a German name that means magical elf~~
- ~~3. Secretly changes the clock at the abbey~~
- ~~4. Manages Apothecary at the spa~~
- ~~5. Documents the use ergot for childbirth~~
- ~~6. Once per month for 3 days he goes to Leipzig to study, correspond and draw the rye.~~
- ~~7. Creates Altmann identity~~
- ~~8. Applies to teach at Wittenberg~~
- ~~9. Researches ergot in Wittenberg library~~
- ~~10. Researches Jorge in Wittenberg library~~
- ~~11. Overhears Horatio tell Inez the ghost story~~
- ~~12. Interviews Horatio~~
- ~~13. Meets Horatio at his graduation~~
14. Telleman Goes to Norway (Denmark) to be with Bernardo and Marcellus
15. Meets Felix and Astrid
16. Goes to court?
17. Finds Marcellus' community in the north woods, learns about the Ghost annual celebration, **first uses ergot** at his Hygge
- 18. Returns on the anniversary to witness ghost w/ ergot connects with ghost / begins ghost's healing process**

19. Becomes a Dane

The ghost started to turn fear away when he met Joana at their Hygge

The ghost is akin to someone in Bardo but instead of 49 days it's been years.

Winkelmann influences "sex on stairs" scene in Horatio?

https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/ethnobotany/Mind_and_Spirit/ergot.shtml

"I never lied to Horatio," Inez objected.

"You never told him the truth," averred Winkelmann.

The death scream, starling murmurations, Lena's dance, ergot experience.