A
Pallid Wave
on Shores of Night

# A Pallid Wave on Shores of Night

*by*

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Passport Levant
Bucharest ~ Orient
MMXI

*A Pallid Wave on Shores of Night*
was first published by Passport Levant in January, in the Winter of the Last Year

Frontispiece photography by Baron George Hoyningen-Huen
*Agneta Fischer*, 1928
Printed on a Baltic Night
Bucharest
MMXI

*For Anna*

"You great cities
Reared of stone
In the plains!
Speechless with dark brow
The homeless man
Follows the wind,
Bare trees by the hillside.
You far-flung fading rivers!
Fearful sunsets
In tempest clouds
Inspire mighty dread.
You dying nations!
Pallid wave
Breaking upon night's shore,
Falling stars."

~ *Georg Trakl,*
"Abendland III"

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# Moonpaths of the Departed

The eyes of the Baroness strained heavenward through closed lids as she turned the bone flute in long, pale fingers. Only her dignified and solemn aspect – straight black hair plunging down either side of a patrician face, like curtains flanking a mysterious stage; the veil of violet gauze deepening the shadows under the broad arches of her brows and in the hollows of her throat – only her elegance and quiet authority kept me seated. Out of respect for her I held the hands of the strangers on either side of me and did not break the spell of the séance. I glanced around the table. I saw no scorn or skepticism to answer mine, only anxious avidity or near-

sensual anticipation. Worldly and cynical as the other guests were, they were as transported as the Baroness herself by imminent contact with the spirit world.

The Baroness set down the fragmentary artifact and took the hands of those on her left and right, completing the circle. Was it Slovenian she spoke now? I couldn't tell, but the rhythm of her incantation worked on me. In the purple gloom, aided by the close air, I lapsed into a drowsy reverie.

If the Baroness had not insisted on my presence, I never would have taken part. She believed that this length of perforated thighbone was a spiritual link to the Stone Age people who had dwelled in the caves beneath the Castle, and she hoped that my expertise could somehow illuminate the "ritual music" which was played upon it. To my mind, if some primordial man had lent his breath to this object, as accompaniment to whatever rude triumph or dim pain or inconceivable ecstasy, the act did not constitute music, at least not as I understand it. And of course this supernatural exercise was ludicrous. But to express my true feelings would have been rude and may have endangered my commission.

When her chant was joined by the faint, ragged sound of an unseen flute, the others gasped, but I only grimaced. I had seen the facsimile flutes that were displayed alongside the true artifact in the Castle's exhibit room. Obviously a player was concealed behind the heavy velvet drapery, and we were being subjected to a variation on the Spiritualist trick of the "spirit-trumpet."

But I was committed, with no means of escape; so I indulged the chain of thoughts and associations that spun out from the lorn tones. The player had, at least, imagination. If troglodytic man had in fact ever played upon this bone flute, the result would surely have been as grotesque, as imbecilic and insistent, as monotonous. I reflected that if beauty in Art results from man's highest effort – the struggle to understand the universal principles revealed in the heart of nature – then the idiot flute-song was an expression of man at his basest and most benighted, a reminder of his most helpless inability or staunchest refusal to perceive the universal harmony.

Though we felt no draught, the candles flickered, evoking the fire around which the flute's makers had crouched. The Baroness began to speak, her voice low and flat.

"Members of the circle … Those who have gone long before … are here again. They speak without tongues in the language of the soul. O forbears, I hear your weary, wordless song … you travelers seeking refuge under stern northern skies … here everything was strange, the animals and plants, the stars themselves … you found cold shelter within the earth itself, sometimes so deep within … you found solitude … safety … and after hard seasons and much sorrow, you found pride … a sharp land had sharpened you … you new people of the sun's setting …" The Baroness went on, painting a picture of migratory Stone Age man in terms that

were evocative but hardly revelatory coming from a known authority on primitive European cultures.

She again addressed the dead directly: "O voyagers, now favor your children once more with your song, so that we might carry on your rites, that we might never forget the striving that brought us forth from the cradle to this land of trials and triumphs …" On cue, the flute let loose with a hectic call that raised my hackles. Then it broke into a sort of mad dance, as all the candles but one flickered and died. The Baroness began to sway to the uncouth cadence and was joined by the others. Their shadows lurched on black velvet. I was looking for an opportunity to discreetly extricate myself when I saw the pained grimace on the Baroness' face. I could just catch her words: " … why the cruel rites … they never brought anything our good and cruel Mother did not bring in season …"

Then the Polish artillery captain at the Baroness' left hand was up out of his seat and barking obscenities. The look of his protuberant red-rimmed eyes warned me that he was very close to lashing out bodily at the Swede seated across from him. In an instant, it seemed, some past slight between the two men had flared into aggression. The tension in the room spread swiftly, borne by the maddening flute-song.

The Swede stood and invited the Pole to back his churlish words with action, but still he held the hands to his left and right. Indeed, though its members were close to trading blows, the circle of the séance was still unbroken. Like bobbing candle-

shadows on the draped walls, anger leapt and danced on contorted faces. The Pole showered insults on the Swede, spittle flying from his lips; a rich Venetian widow in antique lace cackled derisively at the two of them, egging them on, while the Contessa to my right wept bitterly, histrionically imploring the men to cease. An inebriated Greek viscount brayed mad laughter; tears ran from the eyes of a Danish shipping magnate.

Then the last candle went out. I jumped from my seat and moved to protect the Contessa, should it prove necessary. I heard a babel of shouts, the table legs scraping across the floor, and a sound like a fist striking flesh – but the flute had at last stopped.

The curtains parted and a servant rushed in with lamp upraised. The Swede gripped the knife handle that protruded from his shoulder; the Polish captain slumped back in his seat with a vacant expression. The Contessa screamed. The rest looked at each other with dull, bewildered faces, like drunkards coming to after a bout of drinking; then they fled, leaving the pale and silent servants to tend to the stricken man. The Baroness herself stood aghast. She gathered the flute, now spotted with blood, into her wide sleeve.

The staff stanched the Swede's wound and removed him. I remained to offer help and to watch the perpetrator until the men-at-arms arrived. But the Pole was no further threat and sat mute, not seeming to understand where he was.

When at last the situation was in hand, I murmured a vague apology to the Baroness and moved to leave. She reached out, grabbed my arm, and said with an

unaccounted urgency, "You are still coming with me to the caves tomorrow, Doktor Von Webern?"

I have more than once regretted my decision to come to Castle Strmsko, but in the end I could not turn down a commission.

My first misgivings came at the end of the long and arduous journey through the mountains. I had not taken in much of the famed Carniolan scenery on the journey from Ljubljana, the emerald lakes and verdant marshes that Kokoschka had described … The fact is that my anxiousness had grown quite acute since I left Vienna, Wilhelmine, and my girls. I feared a return of my nervous illness and had terrible visions of myself relinquishing the commission and begging for passage home. Then Strmsko came into view.

The magnificent Renaissance-era Castle is uniquely situated: under the eaves of, and partially *inside,* an immense cave mouth that is the point of entry to one of the most profound systems of caves in Europe. Its history, as related to me by the driver, involves robber barons, the wrath of Holy Roman Emperors, and many a siege weathered in its mighty redoubt, surrounded as it is on three sides by solid rock and connected by secret shafts to a practically endless subterranean refuge. The edifice made a sublime and terrible impression, tucked in its lofty niche between soaring limestone cliffs and partially screened by a

waterfall whose waters are tinged green by certain unique mineral properties of the region.

Despite its somewhat severe and martial façade, it seemed to me a kind of dire fairy castle; for who but capricious spirits would build their fortress within such an infernal yawning gateway to the interior of the earth?

Dinner did not improve my mood. Here was a large and distinguished cohort, many of them noblemen and –women from every corner of Europe, as well as scholars and men of commerce, artists and musicians; all seated in an richly paneled sixteenth-century hall of rustic opulence, with massive carved oak beams suspending dazzling chandeliers. We were surrounded by priceless artworks ranging from Greek amphorae to Renaissance tapestries and even to canvases by Klimt, but the conversation was shallow and vapid, or else self-satisfied and smirking.

Only my inquiries about the Baron were met with uniform sincerity and politeness – all spoke respectfully of the man, who was not present.

Having escaped to the music library, I was unexpectedly greeted with a charming little performance of Wolf *lieder,* very ably sung by a young Swiss soprano and played by the Baroness herself. I could feel the tension of the day easing, leaving me gratefully transported by the music.

On display was a truly magnificent illuminated edition of Isaac's *Choralis Constantinus*. I would have suspected my hosts of mere flattery – also displayed

prominently was a copy of my own dissertation on Isaac, as well as the numbers of *Der Ruf* and *Der Blau Reiter* in which my songs appeared – but the Castle's collection also includes everything that Schönberg and Zemlinsky have published, and a surprising quantity of other new music. Kokoschka had assured me that Strmsko's commissions were legitimate (he himself had visited last fall) and that the acumen of the trustees was sharp and far-reaching, but I had not expected quite such an exhaustive collection.

As the small group gathered there dispersed, the Baroness bade me sit with her. After a time of listening to her melodic voice and gazing upon the noble planes of her face, I was able to wrest my attention from the musical treasures lining the walls and displayed beneath crystal panes.

A more gracious and sensitive hostess I could not have hoped for. Her lineage is Greek, but her family has held positions of power and influence here in the south of the Empire for centuries. Her education is extensive, her specialties history and archaeology (that she plays so beautifully yet regards music as a pastime is evidence of her substance). She was on Crete and aided in the excavations at Knossos, during which she showed prodigious insight that rivaled or surpassed that of Evans himself.

I learned from her that, geologically speaking, this is a region of "karst" geology, which refers to the bedrock's tendency to form sinkholes and caves.

"The caverns here rival any in Europe in size and extent. Really only the remoteness of our location keeps them from being the kind of destination for curiosity seekers that Postojna has become," she said.

"That sounds fascinating," I said, "for geologists – but for you as well? Forgive my ignorance, but there are no great temples, no Greek history down among the stalactites, are there?"

"No, there are not, but there are subtler monuments. I've become interested in the art of prehistoric man, and there are some unique examples in the caves below. I believe they are some of the earliest in Europe."

The Baroness was referring to the sort of thing that has been found in Spain and France, primitive images of animals and the like, thought to have been executed by Stone Age man. Her belief was that Strmsko's petroglyphs were different, however, that they revealed the nature of these unthinkably distant Europeans in a way that the others did not.

I asked how these paintings were different.

"I would be very grateful, Doktor, if you came with me to see for yourself – the fact is that your own expertise could be very illuminating to certain aspects of my research." Further inquiries were politely deferred. If anyone else had asked me to cut into my precious work-time, I would have refused, but the Baroness was persuasive.

A short time later, as I made to excuse myself, the Baroness invited me to the séance, saying that it was a different way, unscientific perhaps, of illuminating the mysteries of the caves. I was surprised that a person of her intellectual caliber went in for Spiritualism, but again I accepted. I reminded myself of what Wilhelmine always told me, to reserve judgment, to "try to get along once in a while."

Of the séance I have already told. I have inquired about the Swedish man, but none of the staff have helped with any information.

I have begun sketching the work, a group of pieces for cello and piano. I have been asked to finish the piece and prepare it for a performance to take place before the end of my stay. I am unaccustomed to such pressure, and have no intention of rushing the music, but I will make the effort in good faith. My rooms are comfortable, the piano is excellent, and I am assured that all my needs will be met for the duration of my stay.

Now to work!

Just a brief note before my trip to the caves with the Baroness.

My nerves have eased and I made excellent progress with my sketches.

If one ventures into the halls of Strmsko one is bound to encounter some eccentric person or another, but within my chambers there is solitude and blessed silence. My windows look out from beneath the eaves of the great cavern over the

high mountain valley. Even if I had felt I could take time away from composing, incessant rain has kept me from exploring the surrounding peaks.

Everywhere in the Castle fires are kept roaring, so that the damp from the waterfall in front and the caverns behind is kept considerably under control. All the same, one can sense the cold depths below. The plaster sweats and the heavy oak doors swell and stick in their frames. Twilight comes early; the sun hides among the surrounding peaks and its diminished rays strike fleeting rainbows from the waterfall's mists.

I have found that the mournful aspects of the setting are in tune with some material already in my notebooks. I am developing it along lines that perhaps would not have presented themselves to me in the tumult of Vienna or in the pure air of the Preglhof.

In fact, composition has been going so well that I rather regret my promise to accompany the Baroness into the caves. But I shall try to make the best of it, knowing that I can look forward to returning to my work soon enough.

I don't know what day it is or how I came to be here in the Castle's empty infirmary. Scattered about me are sheets of paper with unfinished letters to Wilhelmine, to Schönberg and Berg and to my sisters, incoherent ravings and apologies and warnings … there is spilled ink on the nightstand and crumpled music paper

beneath the bed … I cannot get up to investigate, my legs are stiffened and the left one is splinted. My entire body is wracked with dreadful aches, worse than those I have felt in the depths of my nervous illness. No one has come to tell me what happened, the only answer to my calls comes from the nurse's assistant, who speaks no German. There are no windows.

I am afraid. Why did I come so far from home, so soon after I got well? Where is the Baroness, the only face I feel I know here … why do I trust her? Didn't she leave me somewhere?

Ah, what madness took me, and will it come again? I have found a letter to my dear departed mother!

It has come back to me: the memory of what went terribly wrong in the caverns, all that I saw and felt and the madness that took me and seems to hover over me still, despite the sedatives. I cling to the lessons of Dr. Adler's treatment and the well being it brought me after the last terrible year: the death of my nephew, the breakdown … But that hard-won wisdom is shaken profoundly by the ugly intimations I was given under the earth. The horror I felt there threatens to sweep away all my gains, and drives my thoughts before it like a black wind …

In the early morning hours the Baroness met me in the gloomy courtyard behind the Castle. She was attired in heavy canvas jacket and trousers and equipped

with electrified headlamps and other spelunking gear. I was amused to see yet another aspect of this fascinating woman, and to place myself in the hands of her expertise.

Though I am no mean mountaineer, the appeal of delving into a hole in the ground was never apparent to me. I have accompanied my father into mines in the course of his explorations and work, but those trips were brief and relieved by walks in the surrounding mountains.

The Baroness provided me with a helmet mounted with a headlamp, delivered a short lecture on safety measures, and then we set off.

Near the surface the going was easy. A walkway had been built for visitors, with electric lights strung above. Here the cavern was voluminous, like a great church or palace, with high ceilings from which the smallest sound echoed interminably. I remained silent, inhibited somehow from adding to the wash of sound that was an unseen presence walking with us.

After a few turnings the light seeping in from the day disappeared altogether. The electric bulbs could not completely dispel the darkness which hid everywhere among the fantastic folds and ripples of rock. Gradually the passage shrunk, pressed down from all sides by bulging limestone, until we had to duck to cross a kind of threshold. After a short time underground I had come to find that my ears were telling me more about the volumes and surfaces around me than they did in

the world above. I knew before we crossed the threshold that a great chamber opened beyond.

Here the electric lighting was more plentiful but less equal to the task of illuminating the vast space. Grotesque columns of stalagmites in irregular groups surrounded a wide central area. Like fountains of rock they surged up and sometimes met the stalactites that crashed motionlessly down from a dimly glimpsed ceiling. Myriad faces of rock reflected every sound – our hesitant steps, dripping water, seemingly the stirring air itself – in a shifting sea of echoes. A passage directly across from us led out of the chamber. Off to one side, a deeper blackness glimpsed through the stands of stone was an abyss that was as much felt as seen.

We paused at the center of this limestone cathedral. The Baroness said that plays and concerts were sometimes staged here, and that it was a popular destination for the tour groups that the Baron allowed into the caves. Once one left this chamber, there were no more lights, the going was rougher, and casual explorers rarely ventured much farther. I asked how far we were going.

"We'll be leaving the main path shortly and heading down." We moved toward the exit. Our monstrous shadows wrapped over boiling rock-forms as they moved with us. "It seems that a new fissure opened some years ago, or, I should say, reopened. These caves have been well-known for centuries, but until recently the galleries which hold the paintings were unknown."

I expressed surprise that these seemingly frozen landscapes were subject to change. "Oh yes," she said, "cave-ins, earth tremors or quakes … these are rare but they do happen. The earth down here is alive."

We exited the chamber and switched on our headlamps. I felt a tightening in my chest and wished fervently that I were exploring the mountains rather than creeping through these airless passages.

As we made our way forward we had frequently to duck, or turn sideways to fit through narrow passages, or climb up over large stones. The way was twisted, there were branchings, and I was utterly disoriented within minutes. My awareness shrunk down to the area revealed by my headlamp as it scanned the ground for safe footing or followed the Baroness' progress. Rock, smooth or rough, jagged or with forms like water, swelled out at us from every angle.

Soon the Baroness paused and took her bearings, then seemed to press her body into a pool of blackness in the wall. Before she disappeared completely to leave me in the trackless darkness, she turned to me and beckoned. "The way down. A tight fit here, I'm afraid." I too pressed myself through the narrow fissure. I had not imagined this sort of squirming about in the soil would be required, and was surprised that the Baroness was doing it without a thought.

The way forward was less a tunnel and more a series of gaps between masses of stone and sandy soil, often requiring progress on hands and knees. I can only

suppose the Baroness had not warned me of the wretched conditions because she did not want to dissuade me from coming. But there would have been no way to fully convey the horror of dragging oneself on one's belly through the cold blackness, as we had to do for a stretch that seemed endless but was probably only a few meters. Though I felt my heart beating in its cage, thudding against the cold rock to which my chest was pressed, I said nothing. And, as I struggled to bring rationality to bear, I saw that there literally was no turning around in this strait passage and the only way was forward.

What gave me the strength, or at least distraction enough, to continue, was the attempt to evaluate the experience and the emotions it engendered for artistic or musical correlatives. I have turned worse horrors than this into Art, or at least I have attempted to. I began to separate my consciousness from the figure that scrabbled through darkness.

I have had experiences in the Alps in which strenuous effort purges mental chatter and frees the mind for higher things; and there in the heights one can gaze upon wildflowers and other Alpine flora whose harmonious forms seem to unfold before one's eyes the secrets of Creation. But here the air was vile and there was nothing but blackness and dirt and stones that had been pushed down toward the fundament by everything that rises. The only things that lived and burrowed here were simple, ugly, crawling chthonic things, centipedes and worms, whose

forms spoke of lowly beginnings, not divine strivings. In my fatigue my consciousness floated out to some indeterminate point in space, to view the Baroness and myself, two tiny creeping figures burrowing endlessly through inexhaustible grim solidity, ants creeping along the paths of a twisted calligraphy that only God could read.

When the way widened and we could once again walk erect, it was like waking from a dream, and I responded to the Baroness' promptings with the slowness of a roused sleeper. I had to ask her to repeat herself.

"I said, we have arrived, Doktor. This is the first chamber of the gallery." She took a battery-powered electric lamp from her rucksack, switched it on, and set it where it shone upon the wall.

The light revealed crude depictions of animals, stags and wild cattle, rendered in ochres and dull yellows. As my eyes adjusted to the meager illumination I could also discern other forms: hand-prints in outline; a human figure holding a spear; and other less-defined shapes.

A slow, silent examination of the paintings allowed me time to recover myself. "Really remarkable," I said. "Was there some ritual purpose served by locating the paintings in such a remote place?"

"It's likely that it was not so remote at the time these were made. There was probably an entrance in the hillside that was covered over at some point. It is,

however, set apart from the dwelling-caves, and I have reason to believe that the pools gave this particular complex special significance. Please, come, I will show you the pools and then the other paintings."

A short time later we crouched on a sandy hump of earth in a large, low-ceilinged chamber and peered across the mirror-like surface of the water. Our lamps glared off its surface out to a meager distance, beyond which unrelieved blackness stretched on. The cave was filled by a silent expectancy far more profound and lugubrious than that of a calm bay or pond. A cold weight seemed to press the water's surface to an infinite flatness and stillness.

I turned to the Baroness, who herself was peering at the pool expectantly, to make some comment, anything to break the spell of the water. Then came a tiny splash, a flash of white out in the black pool at the edge of my vision.

My headlamp revealed nothing where the ropy twist of white had shown for a fraction of a second, only faint ripples radiating outward and disappearing. The Baroness laid her hand on my arm. I suppose I had jumped. "Oh Doktor, that is only an olm. I'm afraid I didn't think to warn you, there are so few animals down here – usually only a few beetles and the like – and they are all quite harmless. The olm is a sightless amphibian. Strange in appearance but also harmless."

My nerves were getting the better of me and it was showing. "Might we not see these other paintings of yours, Baroness? Surely the day is wearing on …"

"Certainly, it's this way. Watch your step," she said.

We skirted the pool and proceeded through a narrow passage for perhaps another forty meters, first sloping upward and then down again. The cavern widened and we were in another gallery filled with paintings.

Some handprints were there, and animals, but in configurations very different from those in the other gallery, and they were joined by abstract markings that were nothing like what I had seen in photographs of the caves of Spain or France. Some branched and ramified like the antler-racks of stags, some writhed like the tracks of termites in wood; some spread like the outlines of lichens upon bark or stone, but always with some detail or unnatural turn that indicated that there was a human intelligence behind their design. When animals were depicted, they were not the creatures of woodland and valley, but those of the cave-dark: beetles and worms, fish, centipedes with teeming legs, and, in a central position, a kind of serpentine, puny-legged lizard with a ragged crown at the back of its elongated head, looking like nothing so much as a heraldic dragon. This last creature was rendered in a unique pale hue. It was not a chalk-white, but a skillful rendering of a very pale, yet unmistakably slightly flushed human skin tone.

Beside me, the Baroness broke the silence softly. "Slovenes call the olm *človeška ribica*, 'human fish.' When seen in the light, their flesh is remarkably human-like in appearance."

"I see. Clearly, as you say, the works in this section are very different than the others. So will you tell me now what the significance is?" My examination of the bizarre depictions had done nothing to improve my disposition.

"Of course, Doktor. You have seen the flute, at the séance. Again I must apologize for the other guests, there is no excuse for the way they comported themselves – "

Here I tried to interrupt her, to say that all had been forgiven, but she went on: "I say that there is no excuse, but the fact is that I have to believe there is power in that flute, and it was my fault to invoke it as I did. But as I said, the flute was found here, the oldest anyone has seen, as well as fragments of wood whose shape suggests a log drum, the sort that are used by still-extant Stone Age peoples like those in Australia and South Asia. Herr Doktor, I think the non-figurative elements of these paintings may be a kind of depiction of music, if not a system of notation. What if I could show that, thousands of years before man wrote, he composed music? You may be right to scoff, but this is why I brought you here, and I would consider it a personal favor if you would examine the evidence closely and give me your professional judgment."

Nothing I had seen or heard during the séance or after had inclined me to believe that ancient man had it in his power to truly create music. And now that I had spent time in their sunless abodes, I was less inclined than ever to believe

that their noisemaking was to modern music as the infant's babble is to adult speech. Rather, I took as a guide the evidence of my senses, which told me I was in a loathsome place, whether it had been shelter or no, and that those who inhabited these caves necessarily partook of the dank and dark and evil; and, as such, whatever sounds they produced upon their crude instruments were merely the cries of animals, and likely functioned as incitements to violence or celebrations of sacrifice.

But I agreed. What else could I do?

After warning me away from a treacherous spot where the floor sloped away suddenly, the Baroness drew my attention to some particularly regular grid-like markings near the edge of the main body of the paintings. I removed the heavy headlamp, set up one of the electric lamps and began dutifully to sketch in my notebook.

The Baroness had ensured that I was as comfortable as I could be, seated on an empty wooden crate left behind from a previous visit; then she excused herself to look in on the site of some nearby excavations, saying she would be in earshot should I need her. In solitude I was able to become absorbed in my notes.

To my eye, the scratchings could have been accidental, or they could have referred to some organization of sound or of anything else. At first I didn't much care. If I used my imagination I could perhaps see some vague parallels between this "ur-notation" and some of the earliest and rudest medieval systems, or those

of the early Greeks. I would stop short of positively identifying the markings as music, but perhaps the speculation would be enough to satisfy her.

As I sketched the grids, my eye was continually drawn away by the swooping lines and crackling clouds that surrounded them. It was a kind of blessing that I could see only that which the narrow compass of my light-beam showed me; this was an aid to concentration and kept my mind off the profound, unrelieved lightlessness around me. But my eye was continually drawn by the snaking lines and twisted wedges of color toward the edge of the lamp's light, beyond which the white image of the cave-salamander glowed faintly.

I pondered the sketches I had made and hummed under my breath a possible interpretation of its "music." It was a bit like sitting down at the piano and sight-reading the cracks in the plaster. The sound of my voice in the dark was unpleasant, like a lunatic maundering to himself in a cell. My eye followed the patterns mindlessly and it occurred to me what a preposterous and dangerous situation I was in. Here, how many hundreds of meters into the earth, beneath tons of rock, in the company of an eccentric noblewoman who I had known for a few days – where was the Baroness, anyway? – and engaged in a most asinine, pseudo-scientific pursuit. The quality of the air, as I took notice of it, seemed to thin appreciably with every breath I took. The cold crept up my cuffs and over my collar. I found myself wiping my hands on my trousers, unable to get rid of a gritty sensation that

coated them. I resented the inescapable aromas of clay and of obscure molds that filled my nostrils. It was in this state of increased agitation that I realized there was something familiar about the tune I was humming. It had an unmistakable similarity to the lurid tune of the spurious ghost-flute at the séance.

I leaned toward the wall to see whether the ugly tune could actually have been written there. The crate on which I was seated crumpled with a dry *crack* and sent me sprawling.

The fall precipitated me down the treacherous slope into a pool of water that lay hidden at the foot of the wall. In my attempt to check my fall I severely bumped my head and painfully hyperextended my shoulder. My lamps clattered to the rocky floor. I lay half in and half out of the icy pool, dazed and unable to move, and watched the light of the damaged portable lamps slowly fade. The light failed completely but I did not understand for a moment that its afterimage was still in my eyes, relieving the darkness slightly. Then that phantom light too was gone and I was adrift in an unprecedented, living blackness that seemed to mold to my eyes and even to my hands and to smother them with insensibility.

I would not shout for help, not yet. I placed my hand in the freezing water in order to right myself. A slimy form that seemed colder than the water itself moved in coils over my hand. I jerked the hand away, lost my balance and toppled face-first into the pool. The ridged and infinitely repulsive form of an olm brushed against

my eyelid. In that submerged instant, in that blind gulf at the bottom of a blind gulf, my mind's eye saw a squad of the undulant monsters approaching through the pitch-black water, their vestigial limbs and fringed gills waving malevolently, flying like evil pennants with the purposeful motion of the serpentine bodies.

It was then that I lost my senses. Somehow my body, injured though it was, propelled itself out of the muck and through the caves. I have a fragmentary impression of tumult in the blackness as I caromed off walls and hauled myself from the floor again and again; flight from the creatures in the slime was all that mattered. All at once my footing failed me and I slid down an incline, fully expecting to drop out of existence into a nameless crevasse; instead I came to rest in a tight pocket of stone that embraced me like a grave.

The sound of my ragged breathing filled my ears in the enclosed space along with something else. I couldn't tell if it was my whimpering of the sound of the Baroness calling for me. I tried to control my panting, as I had in that moment a terror of being detected. I had become sure in my mania that the Baroness had plotted the evil that befell me, had lured me here and that she commanded the olms by arcane means.

I huddled in that cold wet enclosure and hid myself from the only soul who could have helped me. I clamped my eyes closed on the void, so at least phantom afterimages would play before my vision, and drew myself inward. I vented my

frustrated rage and fear in silent curses on this subterranean realm and the twisted things that survived here. I tried to console myself with thoughts of the pure air and angelic plant-forms of the Alps. I retreated from externality with all my might, as though I could fall through myself into a high meadow on the Hochschwab, there to exist bodiless forever, gazing on the wonder of God's unity expressed in a wildflower or an edelweiss …

I heard the faint echoes of the Baroness's voice and I blocked my ears. In the dead air of the caverns, sound itself was an affront, even her sonorous voice became a grotesque clanking thing.

Borne by mounting waves of panic with no outlet, I fixed upon morbid and nihilistic ideas, one after the other. I thought that, after this dead air and these cold echoes, I would never again be able to hear any sound with pleasure; so, without mental reference to pitch or timbre, I began compulsively to invent music without tones, thought-structures made up of abstract durations, articulations, and rhythms counted in purest silence …

The dank immovability of the tons of soil and rock under which I was buried had infected me with hopeless inertia. Here beneath the earth there was no differentiation, there were no lines or shapes, nothing but compression of that which once lived, the accumulated putrefaction of plant and animal, the grains of mighty rock weathered away, succumbed to the action of encroaching entropy …

I suppressed a sob. I was wrapped in cold and despair in the bowels of the earth, I had given up when Wilhelmine and the girls waited for me, so many miles away …

I crossed into a zone of terrible hallucination or vivid dream. In the blackness behind my eyes I saw the dwellers in the cavern cowering around smoky fires and grubbed for vermin. They fearfully worshipped a pale matriarch who hollowed bones as she lolled in the pool of the white lizards and emerged only into the moonlight to keen her hideous song and plot treacheries against their neighbors, their enemies …

The Baron has just left my bedside. He showed me a manuscript in my own hand which I do not recall writing – three small pieces for cello and piano. I fear that I will not be allowed to leave the Castle until I perform the piece for his guests.

I took the man treating me to be the Castle's doctor. He examined me carefully but answered my questions diffidently. It was only after my condition improved that he revealed his true identity.

"Herr Doktor, please accept my sincerest apologies, and those of the Baroness. I was very unhappy to hear that you had been injured in the caves. It's rare that anything like this happens. The Baroness has been down to her sites hundreds of times without incident. I will spare no effort or expense to see that you are fully recovered in the shortest time possible."

I politely thanked him for his concern and indicated that I wanted only to regain enough strength to return to Vienna so that I would no longer be a burden on his household. I apologized for my stupidity in becoming lost in the caverns.

"But it was more than that, I understand? As your physician I interviewed the Baroness thoroughly, and had a look at the writings you produced in your delirium. If I may be indelicate, you had a breakdown in the caves, did you not?"

I informed my host that I had indeed recently been cured of a nervous disorder but that my health would no longer be his concern once I was strong enough to depart. I sat up in bed but could not conceal the grimace of pain that my injuries caused me.

"Herr Doktor," the Baron said, "your upset would be understandable, if I didn't know that you are a true artist. You live for your Art. What happened to you was trying, but you survived, then penned this brilliant work. Indeed, you should be proud. Doesn't all art come out of trouble? The movements in Vienna, the music of your teacher Schönberg – these have fascinated me for some time. The Empire is fading away, we are seeing our fathers' world come down around our ears, and no one knows what is next. Artists like you try to alert the world to the multiplying dimensions within, the mysteries, the glory, the growing horror … my guests need to hear these new truths, Herr Doktor."

In that clean, mellowly lit room, with a worldly and well-born man praising my overlooked work, I should have been comforted, but I was confused and frightened.

I had trouble focusing on his words. Why was he cajoling me so? I had no memory of my rescue from beneath the earth, no memory of composing the piece. I feared for my sanity. I felt in danger of falling off the edge of the world again, where I could do nothing for my family or for Schönberg, nothing to carry out my soul's sworn duty to worship and propagate beauty.

My feelings must have shown on my face. The Baron's eyes flashed beneath lowered brows and he went on.

"Herr Doktor, I know this all must seem strange to you, and I will tell you why I am so adamant. Men like myself are still necessary in Europe. Governments change, commerce takes its due, but without those of us whose understanding of this continent is both overarching and particular, without the time-honored understandings between us, Europe would be no better than a scattering of tribes in the jungle. We allow the bringing together of the things that truly matter. Ideas are symbols and they are power. I do not wish to aggrandize myself when I tell you that my business, my very nature, is to understand and wield power. It is not necessary that I agree with every idea but all must fall beneath my gaze or I abdicate my responsibility and deny my nature. And you know that your ideas are genuinely new. I understand artists, and I see the doubt in you, the self-doubt. I can do nothing to change that for you. But I must ask what I can offer to persuade you to fulfill your commission completely, to perform the piece and share your strange new tidings with my guests?"

How could I, in clear conscience, present as my own a piece of music that for all practical purposes was the work of a madman? I told the Baron that I was not sure I could stay to perform the piece, out of concern for my health and the well-being of my family. Trying to change the subject, I inquired whether word of my accident had been sent to my wife.

"No, it has not. It could … but I should think that such a communication is for you to initiate. It could cause severe distress indeed should one of my envoys appear unannounced at your home to convey news of your imposture." The Baron's manner had changed. For a moment I imagined there was an unpleasant meaning behind his words, but I could scarcely credit the idea.

"No," I replied, "I trust that you and your agents could handle the news appropriately – if you should have the opportunity to get a message out …"

"And would it meet with your approval if my messengers also paid a visit to Schönberg? I am sure your master would be interested to know that his most avid pupil had so narrowly avoided disaster?"

Had I slipped back into madness, was the man threatening those most dear to me? I needed time to think. The Baron's eyes glared out at me from beneath lowering, craggy brows, seeming to suppress my will and powers of reason.

I asked the Baron if I might give him my answer in the morning. His gaze bored into me for several uncomfortable moments more.

"Certainly you may. Let me know as soon as you decide. The Baroness would be disappointed indeed if she heard that you could not carry through."

I had made the decision to leave the Castle as soon as possible. The music written in my hand was strange and sinister, and the threat behind the Baron's words had grown in my mind.

On my way out of the infirmary I paused in the darkened reception area. I heard voices outside – the Baron and Baroness talking in low tones.

"I do hope we can find something to do with him," said the Baroness.

"There will be something," said the Baron. "His music is new. Clearly the kind of thing that will enthrall an influential handful and draw catcalls from the rest. He is tenacious but so fragile, all those failed conducting engagements …"

"He's a nervous case. But there is real beauty in his work. And the new piece is something else entirely … even without the dose, I think he would have offered us something of use."

"If he can be worked with, with or without the dose, we will work with him. His is the kind of avant-gardism that looks within, it's unlikely that if he has followers they will be the sort to take to the streets or sing his songs as anthems. And if they do, well, that is also useful."

"Darling, do not use him too harshly. All that grief and regret in his music – it's beautiful in its way and I think it will please the ancestors. His dirges are like theirs, in their way."

"As you say, Europa. Well, we will see tomorrow. Notes on the page can't tell us if his work is capable of affecting people."

"You think he will say yes?"

"If not I will have to make my inducements more explicit."

As I backed into my room, fearful of detection but doubly convinced that I had to escape as soon as possible, I blundered into a table lamp. It broke on the carpet and the sound of voices outside ceased. I retreated here to bed to await another chance to escape.

The "doses" they mentioned help explain the strange music executed in my hand. I wouldn't have generated such grotesquerie if I were in my right mind, and it seems that I wasn't …

The sound of footsteps from within the walls –

I will record what happened that last night at the Castle, though I will subsequently destroy this document, or cause it to become lost – no one will believe its contents and I would not persuade them to.

I came to my senses slumped in an armchair in a sort of small tent or pavilion. The Baroness was standing over me, as were the nurse and two men-at-arms. She was holding music – copies of the strange pieces I had written in my insensible state.

"Herr Doktor. How are you feeling? You should be much better shortly, I think in time to perform. I am so sorry it came to this, but it is nearly at an end and then you will be free to leave. Here is the music, I have checked the copying myself, everything is in order."

I felt the fading effects of whatever drug they had used, and they were not altogether unpleasant. To think that I would be called upon to perform a sham piece with no rehearsal – this sort of thing was the stuff of my nightmares. But in my half-drugged state, as the red velvet draperies stirred, a crowd murmured, and the Baroness' beauty was quickened by expectation, I felt inclined to play, if that was all it took to secure my freedom. How could this audience be worse than the clods in Danzig and Stettin for whom I conducted mindless operettas?

I stood, as steadily as possible, took the music from the Baroness and offered her my arm. Her smile was like moonlight on the waves. "Do you think I shall be capable of playing my parts, Baroness?" I asked as we parted the curtains and walked together into the cavern's echoing cathedral chamber. "I daresay you know the music better than I at this point."

"I think you shall. I think the state in which you created the pieces is not so far below the surface as you believe. You think you don't remember, but memory is like any other sense, it has its deceptions."

Another performance was still in progress. The young Swiss soprano, singing something I didn't recognize. I looked over the music but it was difficult to keep my eyes off the crowd gathered among the columns of living stone.

Even in Vienna a more cosmopolitan crowd would have been hard to find. Some faces I recognized from the Castle's dining rooms and salons, but there were a great many that I did not. Some were in uniform, most in evening wear; there were priests and dandies and a few bohemian types in slovenly dress openly passing a wine bottle. A handful were costumed, in gay or macabre garb, for what costume ball I did not know. There seemed to be a contingent of the local villagers as well, conversing in Slovenian. I recognized a group of German businessmen, very rich men enjoying their cigars in seats near the front. Slavic and Mediterranean and Nordic features were present along with others that defied easy classification. Countrymen were sometimes seated together in groups, sometimes apart. Couples shared looks and caresses. Men, women, young and old were represented, though older men were predominant. All were taking in with avid eyes the performers and each other.

"What kind of place is the Castle, Baroness? Who are these people?" I whispered.

"These people are our guests, Herr Doktor, and the Castle is our home. I don't know what you heard last night, but my husband and I believe in the idea of a nation beyond nations. We surround ourselves with all of Europe's people when we can. Some love music or art, some come to talk business, others love only luxury. We believe their presence makes us stronger."

But there was no time to penetrate beyond the face of her answer. The music finished and was met with an enthusiastic ovation. The Baroness and I stepped upon the low riser and were greeted with polite applause in our turn. The cello was a fine instrument, and I found that my hands were acquainted with it, though I had no clear memory of having played it. The Baron appeared, and addressed the audience.

"Beloved guests and friends, I now present to you a new piece composed for the occasion by our very esteemed guest, the Viennese composer and Professor of Music, Doktor Anton Von Webern." Here another polite round of applause. I cleaned my glasses and again beheld the crowd. Distractions had been put aside and all eyes were upon the Baron. Some expressions were rapt and affectionate; some were strained and nervous.

"The form this music takes may come as a surprise to some of you. I would remind you that we come together to enrich ourselves and each other with the new experiences we share. As citizens of the Continent, we occupy a unique position

at the head of a dark world, leading the way forward with the torch of enlightenment. Inspiration sometimes comes in flashes, like the lightning, and we must have the strength to change on those occasions when genius shows us a new way forward. Our forefathers, without a doubt, had that strength. But let me put no further burden on the performers. I now present to you, Doktor Anton Von Webern's Three Pieces for Cello and Piano."

All that remained was to make this strange music beautiful if I could. The expressive demands of the piano parts were formidable but the sensitivity of the Baroness' playing was a marvel. Though unaccustomed to performing my own music on cello, I found that my modest technique was equal to the demands placed upon it. The music unfolded its colors and gestures deliberately. The mood was wary; there was something in it of mourning for my mother, as in all my music since the event, imbuing the colors with a tinge of gray and making the airy rhythms brittle and evanescent.

The piece ended after about a minute and three quarters and I turned the page. I heard murmurs of surprise from the crowd and then, scattered through the chamber, grumbles of disapproval and stifled laughter. I betrayed little emotion on my face; I have heard much worse in Vienna.

We began the second piece. A clotted texture was woven by sustained dissonances in the piano's left hand and muted glissandi from the cello. The palette

was unrelievedly dark. Then an uncouth rumble arose from the profoundest notes of the piano and built threateningly. They rang out atop one another in a tightly complaining mass. I bowed ghastly harmonics in a rapid tremolo. Soon there was no shape to the music; the piano's blocks of sound became the airless fabric of the piece. All ten of the Baroness' fingers plied unheard-of chords of claustrophobic hemitones; the cello picked a twisting path with whining harmonics, as if tunneling through a solid mass. Portrayals of horror in music were nothing new but this was a refutation of movement and freedom in music, the abolition of the line and the abandonment of development.

The piece came to a stop with a demented *trugfortschreitung*, but not before I realized that some in the audience were loudly expressing their disdain. Some had risen from their seats to shout at the stage; others rose in defense of what they had heard. I do not know whether the wine that had been consumed was a factor, or whether the parties' feelings for music truly ran so deep, but not a few of them seemed ready to go to blows. The Baron appeared on the riser.

"Dear guests, please! Give the performers the respect they deserve. You may not agree with their ideas but there is no call to dishonor the ideals of civilized intercourse over a matter of taste. It would be disagreeable if we did not allow the Doktor's piece to play out."

The Baron's presence – his glare as much as his words – persuaded the combatants to take their seats again.

As strange as I had found the music to be, I had not been prepared for the reaction and could not help but feel affronted. While the murmurs died down I looked over at the Baroness. Her eyes were on the keyboard but an unmistakable smile of satisfaction played about her lips.

A moment of silence, a breath, and then we began the final piece.

No tonal center anchored the tapestry that the piano and cello weaved; something in the lingering tones seemed to superimpose a dawn in the forest upon empty night streets in Vienna and cramped, Spartan quarters in Prague. But then the score demanded of the cello a tune alien and uncongenial, lopsided and vulgar, like something a child might thoughtlessly hum while absorbed in mindless play. It was the flute's tune from the séance. The piano probed the lurching spin of the tune for meaning, then began a sardonic commentary, before giving up and setting up a percussive rudimentary dance.

I looked out from the stage. The crowd in the great echoing cave had been exasperated by the music of the opening section. When the vacant flute tune began, scorn, confusion, fear or anger ran through the crowd in waves. The reaction of one listener provoked the next to the opposite reaction. Those who had been on

the verge of fighting were now over the brink. Punches were thrown as hazy echoes blurred in the cold air.

The echo of the appalling tune seemed to take on a new timbre – then I realized that the bone flute had joined. The Baron stepped upon the riser and sounded the flute with all he had. A fat, well-dressed man who had been trying to shout us down noticed the Baron; his flushed and angry face suddenly broke open in a howl of laughter. The participation of the man of power had changed the musical travesty into a hilarious jest. The man and his row-mates set up a stomping, clapping accompaniment to the cracked and fearful racket. Some were too far gone in their rage to be assuaged by the appearance of the master, however, and they pummeled each other with renewed gusto; others danced lasciviously. Seats were overturned and pie-eyed drunken revelers blundered into angry knots of combatants. For a moment I feared the retribution of my hosts should I desert the stage; but they were utterly absorbed in the music and the tumult and trouble it caused the assembled throng. I turned another page of music and saw that the repeats had been replaced by weird diagrams and scribbled, undulating lines like those on the cave wall. Seeing that the master and mistress of the Castle were insensible of my presence, I looked for my moment to move off the back of the stage, in hope that I could circle around unnoticed by the wild crowd and make my escape.

As I made my move the electric lights were extinguished. Darkness swallowed the revel in an instant. But the duo onstage hardly faltered. The bawling of the crowd transformed in unison like the utterance of a single-minded beast with hundreds of throats: first to an astonished gasp, then a wail of fear, then an unholy amalgam of raging bellow and hysteric cackle. I dropped to my knees, suddenly acutely conscious of my proximity to the yawning gulf to the rear of the stage. But to move away from it was to move closer to the raging crowd.

Before the lights went out I had been facing the little pavilion erected for the performers; so I continued on what I hoped was the same course. Running footsteps slammed past my head and fled on. I blundered on hands and knees into the heavy velvet of the pavilion. I ducked within, felt my way to the smoking stand, and took a handful of matches. Soft sounds of movement and the wordless voices of a man and a woman came from the nearby couch.

I set off in a direction I thought would allow me to make a circuit around the chamber. The terrible cacophony filled my ears. Lusty voices had joined in to chant wordlessly with the song of the flute. I tried to circle the stalagmite blocking my path and I was soon completely disoriented. Soon I felt a draught of dank cold that warned me I was edging closer to the abyss.

I tried to strike a match on the ground. I scrabbled abjectly, unable to find a surface that served.

A shouting, chanting group drew near. They sounded drunk. I crept sidewise, avoiding their advance, ever vigilant should I come too near the chasm. They moved off, one of them singing the Marseillaise to the flute's depraved tune.

I attempted another match. Finally it caught.

The flare of ignition nearly blinded me, so that I almost doubted I had seen the fish-pale limbs that flashed away from the flame and ran toward the cold draught of the abyss. I dropped the match. I am certain that the corona I thought I saw trailing from its head was only an afterimage.

The dropped match landed on red velvet pooled on the floor and caught. I must have circled back to the little pavilion unknowingly when I avoided the drunken group. I lit another match from the growing flame and moved off as quickly as I dared.

I set off away from the chasm and skirted the edge of the main floor. The chaos there was unabated. A few chairs had been set aflame, and the little pavilion was now burning steadily and brightly. The Baron's guests wept or roared, pleaded for help or mocked the abject pleas, in a babel of languages. Some had made for the exit as I was doing. Others headed in the opposite direction, toward the deeper caves. Some gathered around the low stage and still others could be seen by the light of the burning pavilion, gathering at the edge of the rift.

I had almost made my escape; I stood at the low arch beyond which the dim lights of the Castle showed the way out. But the fires within drew the eye inexorably.

The flame of the burning pavilion mounted to the ceiling, licking the molten forms of stalactites. A capering figure with flute upraised could be glimpsed at the center of a writhing throng of celebrants. The sound of a piano pummeled indiscriminately by many hands echoed and echoed again, until the reverberations seemed to precede the struck notes. And through the throng passed impossibly white man-shapes with quicksilver movements and animal postures.

I hastened out of the cave mouth and past the antique artillery pieces that I thought could have so easily been wheeled around and brought to bear on the cavern mouth; but the muzzles had had been spiked a hundred years ago, the shot was rusted, and I would not have known how to load, prime, and fire them in any case.

The environs were sparsely peopled. No one paid me any attention. In moments I was out of the gate and walking the moonlit road toward town; the next morning I was on my way to Ljubljana for the train to Vienna.

I have been watching my back the whole way, and have not been able to gather my wits enough to read or write music or do anything but make these notes which no one will ever read. I will try to forget this nightmare; I must not assign any meaning to my experience beyond the madness of my hosts and my own folly. I

worked so hard with Dr. Adler to conquer my illness, to accept responsibility and stop blaming a malign destiny for my failures. The implications of this strange interlude might paralyze me, if I permitted it, but I will not. I will do all in my power to put it behind me and cling to my wellness, to protect my family and pursue my art.

The year is half gone now, but I swear that, whatever happens, I shall make the most of what remains. I can sense that 1914 will be a momentous year for me.

# The *Kuutar* Concerto

*"Europa['s name] ...means 'she of the wide eyes' or 'she of the broad countenance'...*

*"Her mother was called Telephaessa, 'the far-shining,' or Argiope, 'the white-faced'. In other words, the face of both mother and daughter was that of the moon... It was told that Zeus beheld Europa as she was picking flowers by the seashore. He came to her in the shape of a bull, and ravished her. [...] The beast must have had a peculiar power*

*of enchantment, for Europa set herself on its back and allowed herself to be carried over the sea."*

~ Károly Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*

*"In the 1940s there was a great auto da fé at Ainola. My husband collected a number of manuscripts in a laundry basket and burned them on the open fire... I did not have the strength to be present and left the room. I therefore do not know what he threw on to the fire. But after this my husband became calmer and gradually lighter in mood."*

~ Aino Sibelius

Sibelius rummaged in his coat pockets for a cigar and found instead a half-empty bottle of whiskey. He cast it down to shatter upon the steps. A silent void in the crowd opened around the little scene, spreading with the alcohol stink. The great man stood tottering slowly like a statue on an undermined plinth, not meeting any eye, momentarily unmoored in his drunken shame.

There was no repairing the situation with his wife, at least not now, not after what had happened on the podium. In his drunkenness Sibelius had thought the concert was a rehearsal. A few bars into his *Second* he silenced the orchestra with

a gesture and lit into the first cello. But for Sibelius' thick, hectoring voice and its echoes, University Hall lay in shocked silence.

But as stomach-turning as the realization of his blunder had been, more troubling was the déjà vu. When had something like this happened to him before? When had he stood shamed and alone before shocked faces, with only a pile of ashes before him?

The embarrassed audience dispersed, all whispers and averted faces. Sibelius shook his great shaven head once forcefully, as if to dislodge the unanswerable question. Though the concert had finished without further incident, Aino refused to speak to him; in any case she was to return home tonight while he would remain in Helsinki and embark for Copenhagen in the morning. Sibelius sailed silently to the street, looking for another drink.

The capital received its hero into a chill, clear night. A northern sky revealed its wealth of stars by slow degrees.

Out of habit, Sibelius turned toward the Hotel Kämp; then he paused and reversed course toward Punavuori. No need to embarrass his friends or provide ammunition to his enemies so soon after the incident. Nowhere in Helsinki, nowhere in Finland could he be nameless, but at least in Punavuori he could walk and drink among the nameless.

The great man's flushed gaze ranged out from below a stormy brow. In passing faces he found the flashes of recognition and evanescent thrill that greeted him everywhere in Helsinki. He had found that encounters with his fame turned the thoughts of strangers inevitably toward themselves. They grew distant-eyed while shaking his hand, as they envisioned telling their friends of the encounter or imagined how the great man's genius illuminated, reflected, and ultimately shared so much with their own lives. Sibelius had mused that this reaction covered over the ordinary person's unacknowledged feeling of inadequacy; tonight, in his wrath, he allowed his estimation of the worth of these ordinary people to shine forth nakedly from his ice-gray eyes.

Darkness fell. A chill wind blew off the North Sea. The streetlamps bore coronae in the crystalline air; the dark spaces between them grew as he penetrated deeper into Punavuori. Before the cold air could clear his mind, he swerved into a tavern.

In which tavern, after which glass did the man with the spectacles appear before him, unsuccessfully attempting to make himself understood over the din?

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, I think I have something of yours, sir," said the man.

The man was only slightly disheveled, his well-made clothes ratty. The iron-gray bristles of his chops were stiff and had an oily sheen in the yellow light. There was something familiar in the narrow, scholarly face.

"Have we met, sir?" asked Sibelius.

"Indeed we have. In Vienna, in your student days. I am Donnerer, the violin tutor." The revelation did not have the effect the man seemed to have hoped for.

"I worked with Goldmark," prompted Donnerer.

"Well sir, it is pleasant to meet you once again," said Sibelius without a smile. Goldmark had indeed employed colleagues to coach his students from time to time. This Donnerer could have been one of them. "But what could you have kept of mine for thirty years? Are you sure you're mot mistaken?"

"Oh no, Herr Sibelius, I'm not mistaken. And please, allow me to pour you a glass."

Donnerer produced a bottle, and for the first of many times, Sibelius allowed him to pour.

Donnerer's bottle had been emptied. Admirers among the students, laborers, and minor clerks who filled the low room had sent Sibelius several rounds more. Some dared approach his booth to pay him tribute, to wonder at his august profile looming out of the stale smoke of their habitual den. His air was reserved and regal but his association with Donnerer and his cronies, and his avid consumption, marked him as a man of the people. Donnerer was hailed as a friend by a motley assortment of threadbare musical types and flashy roughnecks. Sibelius smoked good

West Indian cigars that he bought from Markku, the leader of the roughnecks. Each time the great man blew great plumes into the hazy air he felt a little of the shame leave him, felt the warmth in his gut rise up like a secret dawn to replace it.

Sibelius did not notice when Donnerer got up from the table and a dark-haired woman appeared in his place, but in moments he and the woman were leaning in across the scarred table, jousting in mock-debate and contriving sly flatteries. Sibelius had not been angling for such a detour tonight; he was almost an old man now, the flame of his guilty desires was waning, but it seemed his fame and the legend of his prowess had not ceased to grow.

"But Mister Sibelius, surely you don't mean to say that *all* policemen in America ride upon horseback?"

"No, my dear, no, but those who do are rarely if ever seen in a saloon."

Bodies flowed in from the street and filled the room's spaces. Rumpled clothes wrapped around stale bodies were surmounted by red, grinning faces. It was amusing for the great man to deploy his urbanity in such a low place. If his heedless drinking compromised his suavity, no one was acute or unkind enough to call attention to the fact.

Donnerer had his arm around Markku's shoulder. The old violin instructor had produced a flask bearing an oak tree emblem and was sharing its contents

generously. The table drank heartily to Finland, with more restraint to Parliament, and finally to Sibelius himself.

To be the center of attention was not unaccustomed for the great man. He may have imagined that he was even when he was not. Though intermittently wary of committing another embarrassment, Sibelius was glad for uncritical company and especially glad to defer the reckoning with Aino and with his conscience, and he did not object when the roomful of red-faced drunkards attempted to sing *Finlandia* in his honor (though he did not join in). This performance was followed by *Maamme*, then *Sotilaspoika*, then by a number of progressively coarser drinking songs.

Donnerer's flask was seemingly inexhaustible. Sometimes Miss Tulilintu, the dark-haired woman, poured from it as well, or discreetly refilled it from a vessel of her own. The sagging rafters rang with jaunty blasphemies. The drinkers drank like it was payday, though the look of many of them suggested no honest occupation.

Sibelius was magnificently drunk; he exalted in the indiscriminate attention from men and women he would never have to face again. He passed the time it took him to empty a glass pretending to listen to Miss Tulilintu or Donnerer, waiting his turn to retail a witticism of his own. Red or yellowish or pink or pasty faces floated out of the smoke and split with idiot grins, or twisted in rage or mock-rage,

then gaped with braying laughter; their features spun out of focus and rematerialized where those of other unnamed persons had been.

Sibelius found himself on the street. An unruly cohort had overspilled the barroom. The levity of the night had been damaged somehow, but as Sibelius struggled to light a cigar the nature of the transgression kept slipping from his mind – had he really seen Miss Tulilintu pour a gray powder into the flask from which she offered Sibelius drinks of powerful whiskey?

Men slipped on the ice, or pushed each other down; some continued singing, or drank from purloined bottles, or shouted at the proprietor and the constable who had come to his aid. Passersby crossed the street. It was as if the entire barroom had relocated to the sidewalk. Then the *crack* of a pistol rang out in the icy air and the constable collapsed on the pavement.

Bar-goers scattered in a wave that almost knocked Sibelius down. Markku hissed and beckoned to him urgently from a narrow alleyway. Sibelius followed, with Donnerer and the others close behind.

They ran headlong through darkness, slipping on slick paving stones, catching themselves on the tightly enclosing alley walls. There were shouts and a police whistle from the street behind. Sibelius' ears rang still with the pistol-shot. Defiantly drunk, he knew that by slipping through to another busy street he could fade into the night with no further consequences. In narrow slices of sky, the moon hung low and orange.

After several turnings Sibelius stumbled into a courtyard behind Markku. It was tiny and heavily shadowed. In the center was a frozen fountain, its motionless waters mounting in cataracting heaps that shone white-blue and perfectly poised, as if they had frozen in an instant.

The great man was winded. He moved aside to catch his breath as the others filed in. Markku had assumed a listening attitude and was moving around the courtyard, peering up. One of Donnerer's cronies began to crack jokes and drew a bottle from his jacket. Markku silenced the men with a hiss.

"We are guilty of nothing," said the man, "we need only tell the constables what we saw and that is that."

"That course of action might have been advisable for you back in the street, but no longer. Do as you wish, but you should follow me if you value your freedom," said Markku.

The thief grabbed a set of iron rungs, mounted quickly to the rooftops, and vaulted out of sight. The police whistles were moving closer. Sibelius and the others followed.

Markku had crossed the roof and climbed over its far edge. A brick wall ran out perpendicularly from the building. The top was wide enough for a man to walk on, but no more, and it was slicked with a crown of crackling ice. Markku set off across it and the others followed. The drunkards' struggle to retain their balance

on the high wall was apparent in their stooped, near-crawling postures and in their low oaths and prayers.

A courtyard glimpsed on the left hand was dark. Shapes of rubbish heaps could be guessed at in the gloom. The courtyard on the right backed onto a cheap dancehall or beer garden; patrons clustered under lanterns around the back doors or staggered into the courtyard for air, to relieve themselves or for other purposes. Broken music came in gusts whenever the doors swung open.

It was a rakish tune from the time of the Civil War, one that carried a cargo of nostalgia for men of a certain age; the melody was steeped in the feel of shared sacrifice and victory bravely foretold. The old Finn in front of Sibelius, a teacher of the trumpet from Turku, hummed the tune as he crept along.

The icy air and the danger of the parapet perfected Sibelius' intoxication. As he crept he began to sing the words that he did not know he knew, words that he had never sung before.

The others joined in, one by one, in comically hushed tones, even that old foreigner Donnerer. The old trumpet teacher cut a little caper. The man's unwonted grace made Sibelius laugh. He felt like he was a boy. He swung his arms and marched his feet in a lampoon of discipline as he crept along the wall-top; the others saw him and did little steps of their own. At the head of the column of fools even Markku could be seen stepping in time to the tune. Above them hung

the imperfect disc of a nearly full moon, now pulsatingly yellow and wreathed in the steam of their fugitive exhalations.

If a reveler in the courtyard below had chanced to look up, he would have seen the ridiculous silhouettes of the marching night-thieves topping the wall, capering before an impassive audience of a thousand stars.

"Do you remember the old seer in the whorehouse in the Schrankgasse?" asked Donnerer. The fugitive company leant against the casks in the dank taproom of a beer hall on Kankurinkatu.

Sibelius stiffened and shot Donnerer a wrathful glance. He gestured for discretion in the direction of Miss Tulilintu, who had without explanation rejoined them and was engaged in conversation with Markku. "I'm sure I don't, Donnerer. And if I did, we were young then, weren't we? And entitled to our share of folly?"

"Maestro, I mean to imply nothing – after all I was there also." Donnerer drank. "I shall refresh your memory. He was one of the mystics that you found in Vienna in those days, from Carniola or somewhere. Lured the patrons in, saying he was a fortuneteller, but it was more like some Symbolist performance, or a weird sermon …"

Sibelius focused on Donnerer with some effort. "You mean the man with the doves in the cage of rusty barbed wire – yes! I know who you mean." He leaned

forward unsteadily on the rough bench of unfinished planks. "A gloomy bearded man in a gloomy chamber with covered windows–"

"Stinking candles, baubles everywhere. Monkey skulls, lizards pickled in jars. And strange junk, electric light-bulbs, broken photographic plates. Yes, he put on quite a show, all his rubbish about the return of the gods …"

"Yes, yes, I remember him, but why do you ask?"

"I told you I had something of yours – what's left of the piece you wrote after we went to see the mystic that night in Schrankgasse." Donnerer was quite drunk, slurring and swaying where he sat. "The others laughed at the old seer, or passed out, but you got a look in your eye. Then suddenly you couldn't wait to get out of his rooms. And no wonder, with *her* waiting for you down the hall. And then a day later you emerged with that marvelous piece." Donnerer chuckled. "I don't wonder that she was an inspiration. God, how does a woman like that end up in such a place?"

Sibelius was quiet. He stared down at the packed dirt floor and swigged sour beer. The memory, the face that should be there, didn't come. Instead, other faces, other bouts of guilt, floated up out of the years. Which hurt his wife more, the betrayals she only suspected, or the public demonstrations of his weakness like the one today at the University Hall? Aino said that Sibelius always put their family in danger for no reason. She didn't realize how dangerous life itself sometimes felt for him.

Donnerer roused from a nod, and continued as if in mid-thought, "Such a shame you burned it up … some of your finest work – at the time, I mean. Such a shame …"

Sibelius ignored Donnerer. He felt simultaneously invincible, and as if he had already destroyed himself tonight. He rubbed his brow and studied the reflections in a puddle of rancid beer. The dancing ghost-light of a gas jet upon the curdled film distorted Donnerer's nodding profile and changed him into some strange eagle-headed personage.

Sibelius rose and strode steadily to Markku and Miss Tulilintu. "Excuse me, sir. Madam – there is an urgent matter about which I must consult with you at once. In private, please."

In a room warmed against the cold outside, hung with wine-blues and redolent of pine, Sibelius saw completed pages spilling off the escritoire, saw long white legs folded in the sea-light; he felt the beckoning and mocking gaze of dark eyes set wide on a delicate face.

The night with her seemed to stretch on forever, a lost interval between unknown days. His soul took sustenance from her embraces, even as he burned for the perfection of his music's argument. The draughts that she gave him sharpened his drunkenness into a state more acute than sobriety. The seer's fraudulent

words had planted in his mind the germ of a momentous idea. Music poured out of his pride and genius, in defiance of fate and of those who held fate's reins …

The seer said the gods of Antiquity had never left the earth, and had taken as their new domain the forsaken things of modernity. He said that Zeus, or Ukko, if you preferred to call him by that name, and his brothers and sisters and wives and children had taken refuge under the eaves of the factory buildings, in forgotten cobblestone alleys and on deserted railroad sidings; that they spoke to men through the sobs of refugees and the wind whistling through power lines; and that even now they prepared for a grand thrust up through the corrupted dreams of the poets and painters and back into the deepest hearts of men. But, he had warned his tiny, half-attentive audience, the caprices and passions of these old spirits had been changed by exile in the empty spaces of science and industry.

When Sibelius first heard these words he was young and unknown. His home lay in the hinterlands of Europe, far from the German centers of the music world. He had begun to study the strange and beautiful runes of the *Kalevala*; their stories held all that was unique about his subjugated nation, as well as a strong measure of beautiful and savage truth. To tread the ground of myth, however, after Wagner's masterpieces, to retail the myths of far Finland to a jaded Decadent Europe, did not seem to be the way to make his name. But the temptation to throw the old

gods into the same city streets through which he staggered and dreamed was, to a young genius with a head full of red wine, irresistible.

Drunk with power as he moved gods around the stage of his imagination, Sibelius dreamed grand dreams. He wanted his music to do something for his nation. He knew he was a drunk from the hinterlands lying in the arms of a bought woman, but he also knew that he was great, and that this *Kuutar* Concerto stood as a promontory on the shores of a vast land that was his to explore and conquer.

In time Sibelius completed his work. He rose naked from his chair and sang the themes to her, told her in spilling words of his dreams and the victories they foretold.

She had not laughed at him then, nor did she now. Even one such as she was in awe of his gift. She told him that it would please her when he brought this work, this tribute, into the world. Then she beckoned him to her bed once more.

In the acutest, most secret moments that followed, she vouchsafed him certain knowledges regarding the victories that would be his. He would forget them in his waking hours, but the certainty would linger.

The lock lay in pieces in the entryway. In the University's basement rehearsal hall, an orchestra of drunkards and thieves set bottles on empty seats and took up stolen instruments.

Donnerer placed music on the stands and staggered toward the podium. "Maestro, it's magnificent! You haven't written anything so … redolent since Vienna! It is as if the *Kuutar* had never been immolated!"

Sibelius ignored him. He was deep in conversation with Miss Tulilintu. In the rear of the hall Markku and his cronies slumped in the audience's seats with some of Miss Tulilintu's girls. Markku was free with his bottle and his hands but still kept out a wary eye.

"Hey! Where is our concert, lushes? We secured the hall, now you owe us music!" he shouted.

"Momentarily, you philistines! Great art takes time!" Donnerer retorted. He rummaged through a ruptured cabinet for beaters for the kettledrum. "Ah, now our ensemble is complete! Maestro!"

Sibelius took an epic and ostentatious swig from the flask he carried with him to the podium. Before him was the score he had written in a few hours in Miss Tulilintu's rooms, in a reverie of the past. The ragged pages were wine-stained and burned with cigar ash. He recognized his own hand, but just barely – how steady it was! For a long moment he ran his eye over the staves, oblivious to the hectoring crew of ruffians. At first he was so overcome with nostalgia that he almost wept; then he was carried away by the strange currents that were notated on the page. The emotions sobered him somewhat; to banish the feeling, he took another heroic swig and raised the baton.

The ragtag forces bit into the first chords with gusto; then a sinuous theme in a sidestepping rhythm set a shadowy stage. The oboe (played by a young man with yellow teeth who never said a word except when he was cadging tobacco) put forth a declaiming theme of keening nasal accents in the high end of its register. The intonation and precision of the players left much to be desired, but the power of their interpretation partook of the inevitability and ecstasy of intoxication, on wine, on music. After all, play like demons they must; here, like a meteor landed in their midst, was the master of Finnish music. And the maestro was as drunk as they were, if not more so.

By dint of his prodigious will, Sibelius guided the unseemly cohort through the overripe discursions, the presumptuous mystifications of his Concerto. Though the ink was barely dry he did not remember the piece; however, the resurrected Vienna period of his style was as familiar as an old lover met again after an inconceivable interval. Only Donnerer, at first violin, really knew the piece; he had, with incredible rapidity, copied out the parts. The rest of larcenous ensemble danced along the thread of the unfamiliar music like slinkers on an icy walltop, the inevitable unreeling of its dark beauty guiding them unerringly.

Great drops fell from Sibelius' face onto the pages as he shepherded the scoundrel band through the quicksilver shape of the first movement. His eyes flicked ahead vertiginously, exploring the coming terrain; with the effort the great

man's consciousness was coming unmoored from his physical shell, and the last thing he saw before slipping into an insensible trance was the inexplicable sight of a smiling Miss Tulilintu pouring a measure of gray powder into Sibelius' bottle.

The music was mystical and many-souled, the emotions it engendered blossomed darkly in his heart and in those of the players; its inexorable flowing carried his ensorcelled imagination into the past …

Home from the mad nights at the Schrankgasse but not yet recovered, Sibelius held his brow in trembling fingers and read his mail. Bills from tailors and wine-sellers, another love letter from Aino …

The *Kuutar* manuscript sat on his desk. Why had he imagined that he could make his name with something like this? Even if the difficulties in performance could be surmounted, the essential strangeness of the piece remained. It was certain that, outside fevered dreams, nothing like it had ever been heard in Vienna; perhaps nothing ever would. Sibelius opened another letter.

This one was from Kajanus; Sibelius read with mounting amazement. His *Kullervo* symphony had been accepted and would premiere in Helsinki as soon as it was ready.

Sibelius leapt from his seat and clutched himself with joy. He had not expected an acceptance so soon, but his path was clear now; he must return to Helsinki as

soon as possible. The path he had started down in the whore's room was a dead end; the acceptance of *Kullervo* showed that the public was still hungry to hear myths retold, and were happy to leave the modern world outside the concert hall.

He shuffled Aino's letter into a pile with the others. Then he removed the anomalous manuscript from its folio, placed it in a steel wastebasket, and, with some ceremony, burned it to ashes. Sibelius then donned his coat and hat and set off one last time for the Schrankgasse.

Sibelius looked up from the swimming pages of the score. The thieves' orchestra stared back at him as discordant notes died away. He had lost the thread, the enterprise had foundered. His concentration had wavered and now the consensus no longer held, and the spell of the music had evaporated.

Sibelius, that old and great man, bellowed his rage at the now-silent derelict orchestra. He cast the flask at Donnerer's head but missed. He lifted the podium and heaved it at the cellos, sending them scattering in a clatter of abandoned instruments. He sent a chair through a glass display case, swearing incoherently in his madness.

Markku and his men started from their seats and made for the exits, but not without gathering up some of the more portable instruments from the ruptured lockers. The two trombones, gloriously drunk, crouched in a corner to take in the show, laughing and sharing a bottle.

Sibelius raged and swung music stands at those who were slow to flee. Soon the auditorium was empty. Shaking with anger and shame, Sibelius lit a match and held it to the manuscript.

Donnerer appeared at his elbow. "Maestro, would you deprive the world of another inspired work? Why, because you are ashamed? No one will believe those fools if they dare tell the tale."

"Who are you? Who is she?" Sibelius turned to Tulilintu, who stood silently looking on. "What did you pour in my bottle – what are you doing to me?"

"Sibelius, you created something strange and beautiful in the time you spent with me," said Miss Tulilintu. He could see nothing outside the circle of matchlight. "It meant something to you, it will mean something to those who hear it." She moved close to him, touched his arm; he could see nothing beyond her wide, dark eyes. "All those years ago, you told the whore Europa of the dreams that flowed into your music, how the exiled spirits toiled like a dark engine at its core. Jean, it was you who went on to yoke your genius to your folk stories, your museum pieces. You moved your little country with your music, but you could have done much more."

"Don't you belittle me! I've done more for my nation than thirty German geniuses have done for theirs!" He shook his head, tried to gather his fleeing thoughts. "I was a fool then. I thought the seer's talk showed a way to escape the grip of style, to find something deeper – these spirits that men have worshipped

since they were bloody beasts. But those gods are just stories men tell to win power over one another, they only mask the true power." Sibelius hung his monumental head. "There is more power in a meadow at noon, in a flock of geese, than in any sky-god's thunderbolts. Power that does not demand worship or respect, or ask us to be better, or tempt us to be worse." Sibelius touched the match to the pages. "It only confirms us."

When Sibelius came to, the fire had caught and spread. It engulfed the wooden chairs and fallen instruments, it scorched the paneling and licked up the dusty maroon curtains toward the ceiling. The way to the alley entrance used by the thieves was blocked by flame.

"Maestro, now!" Donnerer beckoned from the shadows at stage left just as the fire brigade piled down a staircase at stage right. They saw Sibelius and shouted for him to stop.

Sibelius, gasping and reeling with nausea and smoke, followed the old man, but when he reached the street, Donnerer was gone.

The great man lay still and silent in the shadows of the railroad cutting. The sharp stones cut into his flesh and the cold stiffened his joints. He heard the police range close by again and again; perhaps they were finally moving on and he would be alone again.

Dawn approached. The cold bit painfully; it had almost sent him out of hiding to surrender to the police, but something more than a desire to evade punishment kept him hidden. After the night he had endured, Sibelius wasn't sure he could maintain his composure in front of any inhabitant of the wider world.

Unable to be still any longer, Sibelius pushed himself up and immediately was stricken with a vicious pang of vertigo and a thunderbolt of pain, as if a claw dug into his ear. He gasped and swayed in place, unwilling to let his head move lest the contents slosh out onto the rocks. He lamented quietly and rhythmically to himself as the pain subsided, shocked at the tenderness of his organism. At last he could lower his body back to where it had lain and wait for more strength to accrue to him.

Stars burned steadily in the invisible vault that leapt on all sides to overtop the dark hulks of warehouses and silos. A sea tang winged silently down slopes of air to reach him in his hiding place. A ration of judgment enough remained to him that he kept himself awake, lest he should sleep and freeze to death.

To succumb, to cease, to leave it to the nameless millions to ride the rolling world into its eventualities, for good or ill … He would miss the effort of living, he missed it immediately though he only toyed with the thought of oblivion. What was it to live? What was it to make music? Was it still the thing he had done when he was a boy, conducting the birds and the tall grasses on the banks of the stream?

That image was blurred and worn with retelling but it had gradually reacquired truth; the folly of that boy, thinking he could marshal the staggering forces implicit in a quiet afternoon, was bottomlessly deep, but it was, like all folly, shot through with truth. Music was a game they played with the truth, it was the tail of a kite, it was a shadow of an ever-changing ultimate that somehow held its shape in the mind, or seemed to; it was a high folly like no other and could therefore drive men and women mad with desire or sorrow.

"Maestro! There you are." It was Donnerer, standing just across the tracks. Miss Tulilintu held his arm. "You must get inside. Pardon me for saying so, but this is no weather for an old man." Tulilintu laughed gently with a sound like a breaker's freight of foam subsiding into the sand.

"For God's sake, help me or leave me alone," said Sibelius.

"We have tried to do the former, now we will do the latter. We wanted only to say goodbye," said Tulilintu.

"How did you try to help me?" A train's whistle echoed in the crisp air.

"It might be more accurate to say that by refusing our help the first time, you helped yourself," answered Donnerer. "In any case, you did not need much help. Yours is an inestimable gift. Even we cannot say how such a thing comes into the world. So when we found ourselves here we thought we would try again to enlist your aid. But you refused to pay tribute the first time because your vision was too

small; and now you think your vision is too great. But nothing you can do will harm us. And even in your obstinacy, your work has done much to whet men's appetites for the old mysteries of blood and earth. So you have bought yourself no victory, but a curse. It will be regretted." The train's whistle came again, closer this time; its approach could be heard, Sibelius felt its vibrations through the broken stones.

"Jean," said Tulilintu, "we asked you for tributes but instead you made sacrifices. Did you imagine that burning your work would hurt us? This act of brazen will before the gods has sealed your fate. I say to you now that you will again look upon your music, turned to ashes."

The looming lantern of the locomotive's single eye came around the bend. Sibelius backed away from the tracks, still watching the pair that stood watching him sardonically with eyes shining against a backdrop of stars.

The train was upon them. Donnerer and Tulilintu stepped back across the tracks, mere inches ahead of its steel mass. Sibelius heard a crystalline laugh over the engine's roar and looked up to glimpse an olive-skinned woman clad only in antique robes, her wide and beautiful face thrown back to the moon, astride the rushing locomotive. The tender, its side emblazoned with the device of a many-colored bull, flashed by; then numerous freight cars of every description, labeled in blackletter with the names of Continental firms.

The last car clanged past. Donnerer and Tulilintu were gone. Sibelius lay listening to the dumb music in the faint ringing of the rails. The blindly scattered stars looked down on Sibelius where he lay, at Europe's rim. The rationale, the unity underlying their arrayal, was nowhere apparent.

# Symphony of Sirens

It is necessary to preface this transcript of the interrogation of the prisoner Aleksandr Vasil'evich Mosolov because of the unusual nature of some of the prisoner's statements. That this material consists of delusions and lies is apparent; it has been preserved in the record in detail in order to demonstrate the prisoner's mental state and because it may be found to contain clues to the nature of his counterrevolutionary activities.

The purpose of the present interrogation, after the prisoner had already been thoroughly interrogated and sentenced to eight years at labor for subversive activities,

was to gain intelligence regarding the incidents during his transfer by air to the Norillag camps. (Prisoner Mosolov was transported by air rather than by the usual means due to a special directive from the Moscow directorate. He was the only prisoner aboard a flight carrying camp personnel and supplies. I was personally charged with conducting him to his destination.)

A brief synopsis of the events, which are covered in detail in the aviation report, follows: about six hours into the flight, the plane experienced engine problems which resulted in a mid-air stall. The efforts of the flight crew were unfruitful; finally, when the plane had descended to about five hundred meters, the engines re-started and the flight continued. An inspection upon arrival pointed to the strong probability of sabotage; furthermore, it was determined that a passenger could have accessed the affected systems.

These conclusions might have been enough to merit prisoner Mosolov's immediate retrial and re-sentencing, but for my personal testimony that he had been shackled in his seat for the entire flight, and was asleep or unconscious during the incident.

I stand by my testimony and I am confident that my record of service to my agency and to the Soviet people will vouch for my Revolutionary consciousness and my veracity. It is my firm belief that the cause of this incident will be uncovered, its perpetrators punished, and that the present report will be valuable to those efforts.

QUESTION: Where were you in the period before the departure from Moscow?

ANSWER: I couldn't say, exactly. Maybe you know the place? A basement, I think … Cold …

Q: You were in custody since your sentencing?

A: Yes. I was.

Q: And were you contacted in that time by anyone?

A: I was not.

Q: When did you become aware that you would be transported to your place of incarceration by air instead of rail?

A: When you arrived and told me, I suppose.

Q: And subsequent to that time, you spoke to no one? No one approached you in the car or at the airfield?

A: You were there. Did they?

Q: Please answer the question.

A: No one approached me. No one spoke to me, not even you.

Q: Did you conceive of a plan to disable the aircraft before departure, or did you seize an opportunity?

A: Officer, I respect you too much to expect that you believe I could have done anything like that.

Q: Answer the question.

A: I did not conceive of any plan, nor did I do anything else to hasten my death aboard that plane.

Q: I will remind you that a truthful answer here may mitigate the consequences of anything you may be found to have done.

A: I did not plan anything, I did not do anything. No one talked to me and later I was asleep, I was …

Q: Please continue.

A: I was asleep.

Q: I see. I am under no obligation to tell you, but I've stated in my report that you were asleep or unconscious and shackled during the entire time before the stall. Your testimony here will be helpful in uncovering what happened.

A: So this really is an investigation, not just a … formality?

Q: What do you mean?

A: I'm punished already. I thought you had made up your minds about the plane, and I honestly thought … I wasn't sure why you were bothering to talk to me at all.

Q: Justice will be served in the name of the Soviet People, Citizen Mosolov. Now … tell me what you remember about embarking and taking off.

A: It was my first time on a plane. I thought they would be larger … There isn't much more. I was handcuffed when you and the others brought me aboard.

You belted me into my seat and shackled my ankles, which, I agree with you, is a most relevant piece of evidence.

Q: You did not remain shackled for the entire flight. It did last for eleven hours, after all.

A: Yes, you were merciful and let me up eventually. But I was shackled before and during the incident.

Q: What do you remember about it?

A: I was … not conscious. You told me what had happened when I awoke. You and all the others were very agitated. You spoke for the first time, you were actually quite excited. I was charmed …

Q: I would remind the prisoner that as a female citizen of the Soviet Union I am entitled to the same respect and treatment that a male officer would be. As I told you, it looked for a moment as if we would all die. How is it that you did not wake? The sensation of losing all that altitude was extremely unpleasant.

A: (No answer.)

Q: How was it that you did not wake up? Had you been drugged before departure? Were you drunk?

A: I was most definitely not drunk. As you know if you have had the misfortune of reading my record, I have made certain errors in the past with regard to alcohol which I have since corrected.

Q: I am aware of your past crimes. I am also aware of your contributions to society. It is my hope that you will resume productive artistic activities when your rehabilitation is complete.

A: You know my music? You must mean *Zavod*. I will say in my defense that I cannot be held responsible for the reaction to my music in other, less enlightened countries.

Q: Yes, I am familiar with that work, but also your piano works and the *Four Newspaper Announcements*. I'm sure you wouldn't suggest that those of us who serve the People in the NKVD are entirely devoid of culture?

A: I would not. You are familiar with those works. Do you like them?

Q: I do. The sonatas are melancholy and strange, but beautiful.

A: Aren't you concerned about the taints of structuralism and urbanism that I'm told infect my work?

Q: I see your work's flaws and I see its merits. What happened up there? Your face was troubled as you slept.

A: Was it? I must have been dreaming.

Q: Prisoner Mosolov, I will invite you once more to reveal anything at all regarding your experiences during the flight and during the plunge. When I leave, my first task will be to advise my superiors whether I think additional or more vigorous interrogation is required.

A: You remind me of the kind of girls I met in Paris or Berlin, before the war. Your poise, your eyes, so wide and deep. You know my music but you may not know I was awarded the order of the Red Banner two times?

Q: Is that all you have to tell me? Are you sure you are finished?

A: I had a vision.

Q: Please elaborate.

A: I was scared. I was sick after we took off. I was exhausted but I don't know how I fell asleep. My dreams have not been pleasant. The sound of the engines in my ears was like an occupying force. I could not comfort myself with music, even inside my head, because of the din.

Then I awoke and you were gone. It took me a moment to realize that the sound of the engines was also gone, and the sound that had replaced it was the wind.

It had been raining when we left Moscow but now we were above the clouds and the sun was shining fiercely off the cloud tops. I have never seen anything like it, and I have been to the Alps. I looked down and watched the clouds change in the wind. The white was so pure. They were like hills, mountains of white cloud, changing shape so slowly. I thought, how far from them we must be, they seem motionless. Then I put my face close to the window and peered around. I looked at the wing. The propeller was not moving. I thought it was an illusion. I looked

up. A shred of could vapor hung there, not moving except to twist its shape, like a puff of smoke. The plane hung still in the sky.

Q: This was your dream?

A: It was the beginning … and I said vision, not dream. It was not reality, because I was no longer shackled. I was very frightened, I felt vertigo – I suppose I should have felt as if we would drop through the sky at any moment, but the sensation of hanging there above so much emptiness was terrifying in itself. The plane seemed so fragile, the steel and aluminum seemed negligible and pathetic.

Q: You say you were unshackled?

A: Yes, I discovered as much when I turned to shout for help. I was unfettered, and you were all gone. I went about the cabin, and even to the cockpit – no one.

People who have been in some dangerous or inexplicable situation say, "I thought I was dead." I have thought so, in the war. Or, "I thought I had gone mad." In fact, those were the exact thoughts that went through my head: *this is the kind of situation where people think they are dead, or crazy.* But what I actually felt – I felt glad for the solitude. For the silence. I felt glad for the time before the interval ended, the time before I was thrust back into my reality.

I got up. I sat in a different seat, I looked out at the clouds. I strained my eyes trying to encompass the infinite transformations. The light of the day shifted, warm

colors bloomed. I wept to watch it from my secret spot, wondered how such endlessness could be real. I fell asleep.

Q: You fell asleep in your … vision?

A: The view was beautiful, but it was all a bit the same after a while. When I awoke, there were fires on the clouds.

Q: I see.

A: Yes. All was silent except for the wind. I peered and peered, thinking maybe I was now on a mountaintop and looking down on campfires. But the positions of the fires shifted slowly over time, and they were sometimes obscured by a wisp of cloud that passed in front of them. I don't know how many hours it took, but one of the fires drew closer, and I saw tiny figures moving around it.

Q: Would you like to conclude our conversation now? I think I have enough information to make my recommendation.

A: Damn it, stay and listen. I'll tell you whatever will rationalize it for you, just please listen. I'll tell you that I wished the plane would crash on takeoff, that I looked over Moscow to the West as we climbed and cursed Europe and everything she had ever given me and then taken away … I saw it was in her nature to build on the ruins of others, that her sophistication was empty, that I no longer cared whether we reconciled our way of life with hers. In my career I have been

congratulated by the Germans, the French, for going further in my music than anyone had dared, but all I could hear then was laughter.

When we climbed into the clouds and the sight of all that country rolling west was erased by white, I was thankful for the oblivion and wished I could stay there forever.

Q: So is this vision of yours just a wish?

A: Maybe. There is no sadder thing than a wish.

Q: How did this dream of yours end?

A: Wait, I haven't told you about the men on the clouds. For hours I watched the fires and the shapes that squatted or danced around them. The clouds must have been rising, because the fires got closer, finally close enough that some of the men saw the plane. They began to manipulate the fire and the cloud itself somehow, fanning it and such, so that they edged close enough to the wing to climb aboard. I could see no details of their faces or bodies, but there was something unthreatening in their movements and gestures. So I opened the hatch and let them in.

Q: Extraordinary.

A: They were small men, and their skin was blackened, I suppose from exposure to the sun. I could not understand their talk. They explored the plane with vague interest for a few minutes, then gestured to me to come back outside with them. I tried to decline, but they were quite insistent. I emerged into the moonlight

and clung nervously to the fuselage. Though the sound of the wind was a constant presence, I could not feel more than a mild breeze. I suppose at that altitude it should have immediately torn me from where I stood and flung me into the sky, but it did not. Soon I overcame my fear and walked from wingtip to wingtip. The little men nodded approvingly. Their fire still drifted nearby. They beckoned me to go to it with them. I was very nervous about stepping away from the plane, but I very carefully set my foot down on a surface that seemed it would support my weight.

Q: The cloud.

A: Yes, the cloud. I walked on a cloud. Still I hesitated to go far from the plane, in case I should lose my way in the billows. Back around their fire, the little men produced a large, dead bird, a goose I think, and cut it open with some ceremony. They did not eat it, however. They seemed to examine its entrails, and plucked out certain bones and hefted them in the breeze as if to evaluate their properties.

The scene reminded me of the rustics I had visited in Turkmenistan. I was studying their ancient musics and collecting tunes. One night they allowed me to be present at a secret feast, but only after I promised not to report the rites to the local Soviet. I supposed I am breaking that promise now – I do hope you will not set out for Turkmenistan to find them. They slew a goat on a hilltop and examined the remains for omens before feasting on it. I never found out what they read that

night. I later wondered why people who led such an ancient way of life needed prophecy; weren't the days much the same, the seasons and the years? Had the entrails foretold them that they would be absorbed into the Soviet Union? Was it all just an excuse to muck about in the guts of the slain? But the music was very moving and I used much of it.

The night on the cloud seemed to have lasted for a very long time when one of the blackened men, smaller and more stooped than the rest, took me by the arm. We mounted up the side of the vast cloudbank that overhung the fire and the plane. This old one had influence over the cloud's shape, and we were allowed easy passage, up and up. Never have I seen the moon so potent and luminous, with every detail of its wide face etched with a piercing clarity. The cloudbank, under the elder's influence, had formed a stupendous spire, in defiance of winds that should have rent it apart. We were borne aloft until I could make out the curvature of the earth's surface hidden beneath the limitless mantle of white.

As we ascended my sight seemed to undergo changes in the crystal and freezing air. In the east, I could see beyond night's domain to where the dawn still hid behind Asia's extent. Up there, her light looked raw and unformed, without the usual rosy promise, but with an unwholesome malleability that promised not renewal but a heedless effacing dominion of the new. I turned my back on the coming catastrophe of the day and looked toward Moscow, and beyond, toward

the Europe to which I thought I had said my farewells. There I could see, with my strange sight, the cities huddled like watchfires on the eve of a battle, carousing in their fear and staining the night a wretched orange.

Q: What did it sound like up there?

A: You know music – are you old enough to remember the piece that turned all of Baku into an orchestra? Ship's horns, factory whistles-

Q: Sirens.

A: Choirs, artillery batteries, the entire city and its garrison scored and conducted by Avraamov, in uniform, waving two flaming torches from the top of a tower in the center of town. I am told it sounded like the echoes of a church bell inside an aircraft hangar, but infinitely extended in time, as if an organist had fallen asleep with his feet on the pedals. But more glorious. I wasn't there but I can easily imagine the sound, now. In the whole time up there, the wind never ceased its wail and it modulated only to add to the fundamental, it was only and always more and more sound, an inexhaustible, tormented and exultant shout with the earth as its lungs …

Do you have any more questions?

Q: Mosolov. How did your vision end?

A: We descended again to the fire. The others had molested the plane. The carcass of one of the engines lay opened. They sifted through its parts with disdain

and dropped them through the clouds, where I suppose they rained unseen on the steppes. They no longer seemed interested in me, so I backed away quietly. I was tired, and mistrustful of a bed on the clouds, so I climbed back in the plane and, as uncomfortable as it was, settled in my seat and slept. I awoke to shouting, screaming, laughter. I had an unpleasant sensation in my stomach but no memory of the fall. Then you told me we had nearly died. You talked a bit more, then you remembered yourself and you were professional again.

And now I fear from your look that we are close to the end of another conversation.

Q: Mosolov, thank you for the story. I don't think you meant to, but you helped. But something you said disturbed me. I resist the notion that you really regret your education or your renown. Do you truly feel that Europe somehow tricked you, then declined to follow you into the unknown? Do you think that our Union will fail to embrace, and surpass, all the petty squabbling avant-gardes? Europe is an idea – or at least it was. But the Soviet Union, the *future*, is a greater one. It truly takes the old ideas farther than anyone has dared. And I think you recognize – ideas are far more powerful things than men or women, than you or I.

A: If you're right … if I could come along … but it's too late for me.

Q: You can be rehabilitated – you will.

A: It would not be gallant for me to disagree with a woman such as yourself. My most esteemed comrade, please accept my gratitude for your understanding. I place myself with trust in your hands.

## ADDENDUM

Mosolov's story could not help but be judged subversive in tone, and his nonsense about the plane engine was highly suspicious. But, in the event, a harsh winter and troubles with supply lines to the Norillag camps resulted in certain administrative discontinuities which brought any further proceedings against Mosolov to an end.

In the event, the intervention eight months later of Myaskovsky and Glier, respected Soviet composers and Mosolov's former teachers, caused the prisoner's sentence to be commuted to four years of internal exile.

I will note here that since his release, Mosolov has been a good Soviet citizen who has committed himself to finding inspiration in the farflung Eastern republics of the mighty Soviet Union, and no longer needs look for inspiration to the Europe he had so loved in his youth.

I, Evropa Dmitrievna Gromoverjec, representing the NKVD and the People of the Soviet Union, do testify to the veracity of this transcript.

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